

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON
SENATE DISTRICT G

Sponsor Statement: Senate Bill 41 Mental Health Education

SB 41 represents a critical step toward addressing the mental health needs of our youth. This bill recognizes the importance of mental health education as an essential component of a comprehensive K-12 curriculum and aims to create a balanced approach to health instruction by placing mental health education on par with physical health education.

SB 41 directs the Board of Education & Early Development to develop guidelines for mental health instruction in consultation with the Department of Health, the Department of Family and Community Services, regional tribal health organizations, and national and state mental health organizations. This ensures that the curriculum reflects a wide array of perspectives and expertise, supporting appropriate education.

Parents play a central role in their child's education. To honor this, the bill includes provisions requiring schools to notify parents or guardians no less than two weeks before any class or program introduces mental health instruction. This transparency reinforces trust between families and schools while giving parents the opportunity to engage in their child's education.

By amending the existing health education curriculum statutes, Senate Bill 41 ensures that mental health is treated with equal importance as physical health in K-12 education across the state. The state Board of Education will be tasked with establishing clear and developmentally appropriate guidelines for mental health instruction, ensuring that this vital topic is integrated thoroughly.

To maintain accountability, SB 41 requires the Board of Education to submit a report to the Legislature within two years of the Act's effective date. This report will outline the guidelines for mental health education and detail the process used to develop them. This provision ensures that the Legislature remains informed about the progress and implementation of the curriculum guidelines.

This bill allows for a two-year transition period to develop and implement these mental health education guidelines. This timeline reflects a deliberate and thorough process, providing the necessary time for consultation, development, and preparation for effective integration into the school curriculum.

Senate Bill 41 is a forward-thinking measure designed to equip Alaska's students with the knowledge and tools they need to understand and maintain their mental health better. Through collaboration and holding our education system accountable, this legislation aims to build a foundation for healthier, more resilient future generations. I urge my colleagues to support this essential initiative.

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