



## **SB 531 (Rubio) Student Mental Health Education**

### **Bill Summary**

SB 531 will help empower young Californians and destigmatize mental health challenges by requiring all California students in grades 1-12 be provided with an age-appropriate mental health education.

### **Existing Law**

Section 51210 of the Education Code describes the required course of study for grades 1-6, and includes health instruction. Section 51925 of the Education Code describes the required course of study for grades 7-12, and requires schools to include instruction about mental health in their health education courses. The mental health instruction for grades 7-12 includes promoting mental health wellness and protective factors, defining signs and symptoms of common mental health challenges, evidence-based and culturally responsive practices that are proven to help overcome mental health challenges, the connection and importance of mental health to overall health and academic success, and stigma surrounding mental health challenges and what can be done to overcome stigma, increase awareness, and promote acceptance.

### **Background**

From the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the pervasiveness of social media, and the rise in school threats, to the current fears and traumas California students are experiencing because of recent wildfires and changes in federal immigration policy, today's students are confronted by an unprecedented scope of mental health challenges.

Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14.<sup>1</sup> Worldwide, mental health challenges are among the leading causes of illness and disability among young people, and in California, about one-third of adolescents have experienced serious psychological distress.<sup>2</sup>

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, anxiety problems, behavior disorders, and depressions are the most commonly diagnosed mental disorders in children – and among children ages 3-17 with a current mental health condition, only 53% received treatment or counseling from a mental health professional in the past year. There are gaps in treatment to support youth: 20% of adolescents ages 12-17 report having unmet mental health care needs, and 40% of high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in the past year. 20% of high school students reported seriously considering attempting suicide in the past year.<sup>3</sup>

Health literacy, including mental health literacy, can serve as both a risk and protective factor for health and well-being.<sup>4</sup> Mental health education is critical to building knowledge and skills to increase awareness, tackle stigma, and encourage help-seeking behavior. Young people spend the majority of their time in schools, and education systems are well-positioned to play an integral role in fostering positive youth development. Schools can help cultivate non-stigmatizing, safe, and supportive environments where youth are informed and able to seek needed mental health care.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report\\_1973/ShortReport-1973.html](https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report_1973/ShortReport-1973.html)

<sup>2</sup> <https://edsources.org/2023/how-our-schools-can-address-californias-youth-mental-health-crisis-now/688676>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/children-mental-health/data-research/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/health-literacy>



## **Details of the Bill**

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SB 531 will ensure that students receive age-appropriate mental health education in elementary, middle, and high schools by amending existing law to include age-appropriate mental health education within the existing requirement that health instruction be taught in grades 1-6, and by requiring that mental health education be taught in grades 7-12.

## **Support**

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- California Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (Co-Sponsor)
- California Alliance of Child and Family Services (Co-Sponsor)
- National Center for Youth Law (Co-Sponsor)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) (Co-Sponsor)
- The Children's Partnership (Co-Sponsor)
- Occupational Therapy Association of California

## **For More Information**

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Jennifer Romero, Legislative Aide

Senator Susan Rubio, District 22

Office: 916-651-4022

[Jennifer.Romero@sen.ca.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Romero@sen.ca.gov)