



Recommendations for Mental Health Instruction in Schools

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Chapter 390 of the Laws of 2016, which amends Section 804 of Article 17 of the New York State Education Law, requires schools to begin providing instruction in mental health on or after the statute's effective date of July 1, 2018. The Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) recommends that curricula and lesson plans developed in accordance with the new law, and the legislative intent of the law, should:

- Assume a public health approach to teaching about mental health geared toward providing students with life-long skills and resources that transcend a young person's present role as a student. Such curricula should strive to equip students with knowledge about mental health so as to maximize each student's own mental wellness and the mental wellness of others, and instill an awareness of when and how to access treatment or other services as needed for oneself and others.
- The primary mental health educator(s) tasked with providing instruction about mental health should have a minimum of knowledge, education, and training in mental health consistent with the curriculum elements outlined in this guidance document.
- In addition to instruction provided by the primary mental health educator(s), curricula and lesson plans should draw upon and involve the participation of mental health experts, advocates, providers and recipients (past and/or present) of mental health services from the general community outside the school itself.
- **Not** have as learning objectives teaching students to diagnose, treat or otherwise provide counseling to people with mental illness.

9 CORE CURRICULUM ELEMENTS

Core elements in school mental health curricula should include:

1. The concept of wellness (e.g., 8 dimensions of wellness) including self-care and personal responsibility for one's own mental health and wellness.
2. The concept of mental health as an integral part of health.
3. The recognition of the signs and symptoms of developing mental health problems.
4. Instruction in the awareness and management of mental health crises such as the risk of suicide, self-harm and other mental health crises.
5. The relationship between mental health, substance use and other negative coping behaviors.
6. The negative impact of stigma and cultural attitudes toward mental illness on treatment seeking behavior and as a contributing factor in discrimination against people with mental illnesses.
7. The concept of recovery from mental illness.
8. The implications of risk factors, protective factors and resiliency on wellness, mental health and recovery.
9. Instruction in identifying appropriate professionals, services and family/social supports for treating and maintaining recovery from mental illness.