

An Act relative to the promotion of mental health education

What problem does this bill address?

Sufficient health literacy, defined as the ability to understand and communicate information related to one’s health needs, is linked to a student’s overall behavioral, mental and physical health. Poor health literacy can often lead to decreased use of health services and higher rates of illness.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the subsequent return to in-person learning has fractured an already struggling behavioral health system for children and families. Even before the pandemic, research suggests that students of color often face higher stigma in regards to seeking help, which leads to lower rates of diagnosis and treatment. The need for mental health and substance use services is dire and the need to instill and teach health literacy to our students so they know how to access services is absolutely critical.

What difference will this bill make?

Consistent with current efforts to integrate physical and mental health care, this bill will update the physical education mandate to make mental health education required learning in all Massachusetts public and private schools, in grade K-12. While the bill will not mandate a specific curriculum or curriculum content, it takes a holistic approach on mental health and provides opportunities for students to “recognize multiple dimensions of health by including mental health, the relationship of physical and mental health, so as to enhance student understanding, attitudes, and behaviors that promote health, well-being, and human dignity,”

The bill would not mandate a specific curriculum or curriculum content. The CMHC urges the use of a cross-subject, evidence-informed approach that raises awareness and provides students with developmentally appropriate knowledge and tools.

Why is this bill needed now?

Studies indicate students learning health literacy leads to earlier intervention and better health outcomes. As schools try to prepare students for the world outside the classroom, having a strong understanding of physical and mental health will only help them to live happy and healthy lives.