

## Appendix I - NY Issue Brief: Mental Health Education in Schools

Lack of knowledge coupled with stigma deters many people from taking full advantage of today's treatment options in a timely manner. In fact, almost 2 out of every 3 adults that need mental health services do not receive them and 50% of those that do delay getting treatment for an average of 10 years. This is very serious and disturbing since untreated mental illness tends only to become more severe over time and, in extreme cases, too often ends in suicide completion or self-injury. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in 12 high school students have attempted suicide. Over 90% of youth who die by suicide completion were suffering from depression or another diagnosable and treatable mental illness at the time of their death. We do young people a disservice by remaining silent about mental health conditions like depression, eating disorders, and PTSD.

Unfortunately, there is little teaching or discussion of mental health in most public school health classes in New York. We believe that New York lawmakers hold the key that is needed for this to change. Without legislative intervention and a clear policy direction from lawmakers on this issue, there is little hope of breaking the silence. This is because the subject of mental illness is still an uncomfortable subject to discuss for many in our society. Teachers can be equally uncomfortable or uncertain as to the boundaries around what they can and cannot teach. This leads to a "when in doubt leave it out" mentality and causes confusion about the schools proper role in teaching such subjects. MHANYS supports amendments to the law that will help clarify the schools role and will free teachers to instruct on the subject with the full imprimatur of the State.

MHANYS seeks legislation that would allow maximum flexibility in the way each school or school district addresses the change in the statute. Our objective is to clarify that mental health is as integral to one's overall well-being as is physical health, and as such, should be reflected in the law guiding health instruction.

By ensuring that young people are educated about mental health, we increase the likelihood that they will be able to more effectively recognize signs in themselves and others, including family members, and get the right help. Further, as we begin to teach the facts about mental health and openly discuss the issues from a health perspective, we will begin to lessen the stigma surrounding mental illnesses. Young people and their families would feel more comfortable seeking help, academic performance for all students would be enhanced, and ultimately lives can be saved. As New York works to restructure and integrate systems of health and mental health care, shouldn't we also be preparing our citizens of tomorrow to think differently about the role that mental health plays in their lives?

Mental health, as we understand it in 2016, is an integral part of our overall health and can no longer be ignored in New York's public education law. If we ignore it, then we fail to adequately prepare consumers of the future to be informed and active participants in the very systems we are building today. We possess the knowledge and tools necessary to increase awareness in young people about mental health, how to recognize signs and symptoms in themselves and others and how to get help. Why in the world would we withhold this lifesaving information from our youth?

**Recommendation:** Support S.6046(Marcellino)/A.3887-A(Nolan), which relates to clarifying that health education includes mental health as part of the school health curriculum.