

# SB 224 (Portantino) Pupil instruction: mental health education

## PROBLEM

Approximately 75% of mental illness [manifests between the ages of 10 and 24](#). Since adolescents visit the doctor less often than any other age group, early warning signs of mental health needs can go undetected.

Youth mental health is suffering in the era of COVID. In a June 2020 CDC study, 1 in 4 youth ages 18 to 24 said they had seriously considered suicide in the past 30 days — more than twice as the rate of any other age group.

California is failing on children's mental health and preventive care: According to the most recent Commonwealth Fund [Scorecard on State Health System Performance](#), our state ranks 48th in the nation for providing children with needed mental health care.

## BACKGROUND

Education about mental health is one of the best ways to increase awareness, empower students to seek help, and reduce the stigma associated with mental health challenges. Schools are ideally positioned to be centers of mental health education, healing, and support. As children and youth spend more hours at school than at home, the public education system is the most efficient and effective setting for providing universal mental health education to children and youth.

Historically, health education in subjects such as alcohol, tobacco and drugs, the early detection of certain cancers, and HIV have become required because they were recognized as public health crises. The mental health of our children and youth has reached a crisis point. California must make educating its youth about mental health a top priority.

## SUMMARY

This bill ensures that pupils between grades 1 and 12 receive mental health education from a qualified instructor at least one time during elementary school, one time during middle school, and one time during high school. As a result, students will receive instruction on mental health at least three separate times during their schooling.

## EXISTING LAW

Existing law requires, during the next revision of the publication “Health Framework for California Public Schools,” the Instructional Quality Commission to consider developing, and recommending for adoption by the State Board of Education, a distinct category on mental health instruction to educate pupils about all aspects of mental health. While the 2019 draft health framework, which was adopted by the State Board of Education in May 2019, includes sections on mental, emotional, and social wellness, there is limited curriculum within the proposed Framework and what is included by no means encompasses all of the topics found in statute. California [Education Code Section 51210](#) does require “health instruction in the principles and practices of individual, family, and community health” in grades one through six. However, mental health is not specifically addressed in the law. Furthermore, given the fact that there is no state-mandated health education course at the middle or high school level in California, a vast majority of California students do not receive any instruction in mental health.

## SUPPORT

CA Youth Empowerment Network (co-sponsor)  
CA Alliance of Child and Family Services (co-sponsor)  
CA Association of Student Councils (co-sponsor)  
The Children's Partnership (co-sponsor)  
National Alliance on Mental Illness (co-sponsor)  
National Center for Youth Law (co-sponsor)