

CHAPTER 310

AN ACT concerning instruction in suicide prevention for public school pupils and teaching staff members and supplementing chapter 6 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

C.18A:6-111 Findings, declarations relative to instruction in suicide prevention in public schools.

1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

a. Suicide is a leading cause of death for young people in this State. According to the Center for Health Statistics in the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, between 1999 and 2001 more than 1,500 young people ages 13 to 18 made suicide attempts which resulted in hospitalization. More than 50 of these attempts were fatal. When young people up to 24 years of age are added to the equation, the number of attempted suicides rises to 3,000 and the number of fatalities rises to nearly 200.

b. A suicide can devastate a community. According to the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), suicide severely impacts the families and friends left behind, who often wrongly live with extreme shame and guilt over not having prevented the death of their loved one. Moreover, many attempts which do not result in death nonetheless end in serious injury to the victims and lifelong trauma to their families and those who know them.

c. A person who is considering suicide may exhibit behavioral warning signs. If someone notices the warning signs of suicide, it may be possible to avert a tragedy. With the possible exception of a parent, no one is better situated than a teacher to detect these signs and to initiate appropriate steps to prevent a suicide attempt. Proper training for teaching staff members can thus save pupils' lives and save the families and friends of would-be victims the trauma of a suicide or suicide attempt. Moreover, early identification of depression and other problems may help to reduce the number of young people who commit or attempt to commit suicide once they have left school and entered adulthood.

d. It is therefore appropriate for the Legislature to require: the State Board of Education to require instruction in suicide prevention as part of any continuing education which public school teaching staff members must complete to maintain their certification; and inclusion of suicide prevention awareness in the Core Curriculum Content Standards in Comprehensive Health and Physical Education.

C.18A:6-112 Instruction in suicide prevention for public school teaching staff.

2. The State Board of Education, in consultation with the New Jersey Youth Suicide Prevention Advisory Council established in the Department of Human Services pursuant to P.L.2003, c.214 (C.30:9A-22 et seq.), shall, as part of the professional development requirement established by the State board for public school teaching staff members, require each public school teaching staff member to complete at least two hours of instruction in suicide prevention, to be provided by a licensed health care professional with training and experience in mental health issues, in each professional development period.

C.18A:6-113 Provision for instruction in suicide prevention in school curriculum.

3. Within 180 days of the effective date of this act, the State Board of Education shall revise the Core Curriculum Content Standards in Comprehensive Health and Physical Education to provide for instruction in suicide prevention in an appropriate place in the curriculum of elementary school, middle school, and high school pupils.

4. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved January 11, 2006.