

Increased Mental Health Focus in the Required Curriculum

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Mental health education and awareness is increasingly being made part of the general education curriculum in school districts throughout the country as teachers, administrators and school boards begin to recognize the importance of a strong mental health focus.

State legislatures in New York and Virginia recently added [mental health education as part of the required curriculum](#) in an effort to decrease stigma surrounding mental illness, increase awareness of the intersection of mental and physical health and address school safety issues. These initiatives recognize that emotional and social growth can be stifled by mental health disorders, which could impact academic progress and workforce readiness and leave students unprepared for life after graduation.

Embedding tools to cultivate positive mental health outcomes in the K-12 curriculum is essential to maximize positive outcomes for students. Research on these initiatives increasingly supports the position that students are generally more successful when they are taught coping strategies, resilience, self-awareness and self-regulation. That success is broader than the academic progress measured by grades and standardized test scores.

School-based mental health services have been shown to improve outcomes for students, and those outcomes extend beyond academics into adulthood. Mental health education extends beyond clinical intervention, which is recognizable in general education approaches to mental health education.

Some students with mental health issues are considered students with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). With a growing understanding about mental health and learning, reliance on academic progress as a measure of educational progress to determine special education eligibility and the provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) may be insufficient. Educators as well as hearing officers have begun to recognize that students learn better and are capable of making greater developmental progress when curriculum addresses social and emotional learning in addition to cognitive learning, leading to mental health education becoming part and parcel of a FAPE.

Even if you're unable to attend, the attorneys in [Barley Snyder's Education Practice Group](#) are available to answer your questions regarding the development of present levels, measurable IEP goals and objectives and determining appropriate progress for students with a disability related to mental health.