MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE REGULAR SESSION 2021

By: Representative Paden

To: Education

HOUSE BILL NO. 701

AN ACT TO REQUIRE PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO INCLUDE INSTRUCTION IN MENTAL ILLNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH IN THE HEALTH EDUCATION COMPONENT OF THE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL HEALTH EDUCATION PROGRAM; TO DESCRIBE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE MENTAL HEALTH INSTRUCTION; TO REQUIRE IN-SERVICE TRAINING ON MENTAL ILLNESS FOR LICENSED SCHOOL EMPLOYEES; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. (1) Beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, the health education component of the Comprehensive School Health Education Program must include instruction in mental illness and mental health. The Office of Comprehensive School Health Education shall identify the elementary grade level that is most appropriate for incorporating the mental illness and mental health instruction into health education and shall require age-appropriate mental illness and mental health instruction to be included in the curriculum for that grade and all higher grade levels. The mental illness and mental health instruction must be taught during the minimum instructional time required under Section 37-13-134(1) to be dedicated to health education instruction.

(2) The mental illness and mental health instruction must include, at a minimum, the following objectives for students:

(a) Understanding mental health problems and gaining an awareness of the myths and realities of mental illness;

(b) Destigmatizing mental illness and improving attitudes toward seeking help for mental health problems;

(c) Recognizing signs and symptoms of mental illness;

(d) Employing positive coping techniques to address stress that does not rise to a level requiring professional treatment but if left unattended, may lead to mental illness; and

(e) Utilizing professional resources available to students to address mental health issues affecting a student or member of a student's family, including telephone numbers of assistance hotlines and Internet websites of mental health agencies that serve the region in which a school is located.

(3) The State Department of Education shall require each local school district to conduct in-service training on mental illness for all licensed school district employees. The department, in conjunction with the State Department of Mental Health, shall develop the content and materials for the training which, at a minimum, must include recognizing signs and symptoms of mental illness in students.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2021.