

An Act relative to the promotion of mental health education
[H.497/S.240](#) (Representatives Higgins and Kilcoyne/Senator Collins)

What problem does this bill address?

All K-12 public schools in Massachusetts are required to offer physical health education to their students, but they are *not* required to offer mental health education. **Mental health education programs are effective in improving students' knowledge about mental health, addressing stigma, and increasing willingness to ask for help if needed.** Students are more likely to receive mental health education in our Commonwealth if their district has more resources or if their district has leadership committed to advancing student mental health.

What difference will this bill make?

This bill requires that **physical and mental health education be required subjects for all students in Massachusetts K-12 schools.** It recognizes the multiple dimensions of health and the relationship between physical and mental health.

The bill does not mandate any particular curricula or resources. This is important because schools vary tremendously across geography, demographics, language, school culture, etc. This gives schools flexibility to determine the instruction that is most culturally responsive.

The mental health education requirement will enhance student understanding, attitudes, and behaviors that promote overall health, wellbeing, and human dignity.

Why is this bill needed now?

The MA Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved an updated [Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Framework \(CHPE\)](#) in September 2023, which includes mental and emotional health, as well as substance use education and prevention. Schools now have much better guidance on what to teach their students and when.

However, the Framework is not required, so not all schools will provide this critical information to their students. **This bill ensures a more equitable approach, that is, that ALL students are provided with mental health education.**

There is also **more capacity than ever to support schools in offering mental health education to their students** through the MA Department of Early and Secondary Education (DESE), the BIRCh Project's School-Based Behavioral Health Technical Assistance Center, and the [Mental Health Resources](#) page on the MA Association for Mental Health's website.