



National Alliance on Mental Illness

# nami | New York State

## 2015 Legislative Action Agenda Mental Health Education in Schools

Education, early recognition and intervention as well as working on prevention are keys to minimizing mental health issues that are common in adolescents and hopefully, eradicating the long-term disabilities caused by mental illness.

It is vital that New York's education system does a better job of creating a true comprehension of mental illness and mental health issues. Proper mental health is crucial to overall wellbeing, which is why it is necessary that mental health is incorporated into existing health education curriculums. Administrators, teachers and students must be given the tools to identify the potential warning signs of mental illnesses which are prevalent in children and adolescents. **The early signs of serious and persistent mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder start to become identifiable in late adolescents and clinical depression (especially in girls) can become prevalent at the onset of puberty. School staff and students must be able to recognize the warning signs of potential mental illness as well as understand the importance of early intervention.** Schools must also be given the tools to demonstrate the harmful and potential long-term mental health effects of body image issues, eating disorders, substance abuse and bullying.

The integration of mental health into our educational curriculums is long overdue. **The early recognition that mental health education provides can prevent our children from suffering the most debilitating long-term effects of serious and persistent mental illnesses.** Integrating the proper supports can also lead to a better awareness of body image issues and a reduction in harassment and bullying both of which can contribute to an already high suicide rate in adolescents.

Incorporating mental health education and addressing the myths that exist about mental illness will also create broader understanding of psychiatric diseases, which will contribute to the destigmatization of those who are living with a mental illness. Disseminating accurate information to schools and to the community will increase the likelihood that children and teens struggling with symptoms are not viewed negatively by the peers, which can reduce torment. If we can do that, we increase the odds that youth will accept treatment, thus leading to the improved outcomes generated by early intervention.

- 50% of mental illnesses develop by age 14, 75% by age 24.
- 70-80% of children living with mental illness do not receive needed treatment. This leads to decreased performance in schools.
- 2.2 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 have experienced a major depressive episode in the past year, and nearly 60% of them did not receive any treatment.
- The dropout rate for children with severe emotional health and mental health issues is twice that of other students.

NAMI-NYS has partnered with three other organizations, the Mental Health Association in New York State, Families Together in New York State, and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to promote the passage of [S5359-A/A7727-A](#) (in 2013-14 session): **legislation that would formally introduce mental health education into our state's health education curriculum. This important step would significantly raise awareness of mental health issues.**

**NAMI-NYS urges New York to incorporate mental health education in our schools.**