

# Support Senate Bill to Expand Behavioral Health Training for Educators in Secondary Schools

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## About the Bill

This legislation would establish an optional behavioral health “train-the-trainer” program for educators, administrators, and non-certified school personnel in the state of Colorado. School personnel who choose to enroll in these programs would receive evidence-based instruction aimed at improving school culture, creating a safe and secure environment for all students, and providing behavioral health trainings to teens. This legislation calls on Colorado’s Department of Education to select an evidence-based program(s) that trains educators on:

- Identifying behavioral and mental health challenges and substance use disorders;
- Improving youth behavioral and mental health challenges, as well as social and emotional health;
- Suicide prevention;
- Bullying prevention;
- Encouraging positive bystander behavior and providing best practices for non-escalation situations;
- De-escalation of crisis situations; and
- Identifying resources for behavioral, mental health, and substance use disorder treatment.

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*I really enjoyed the teen Mental Health First Aid presentations. They really impacted me and educated me on the topics. This year, I have been hit with the reality of these issues in our community. It was a huge wakeup call and I was unaware of how serious this issue was. After listening to these presentations, I can now recognize the warning signs and how to deal with them. I now feel like I can help a friend in need or even realize when I need to seek help for myself.*

*-Riley, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade*

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## Why We Need this Legislation

Teachers, administrators, and school personnel are on the frontlines of the growing mental health crisis in our schools.

- The need for mental health education is growing in Colorado, which has rates of mental illness and suicide that are higher than the national average. Prevention, early intervention, and stigma reduction are key factors in improving mental health and wellness.<sup>1</sup>
- America’s teen suicide rate is increasing. In Colorado, suicide was the leading cause of death among youth ages 10 – 18 between 2013 and 2017.<sup>2</sup>
- A report published by the United Health Foundation found that half of children aged 3 to 17 in Colorado do not receive the mental health counseling that they need.<sup>3</sup>

## The Opportunity

This legislation will provide funding to expand professional development opportunities via the Colorado Department of Education for school personnel related to youth behavioral and mental health issues. This bipartisan bill will establish a network of qualified trainers in schools across the state. These trainers will be able to instruct students in the skills they need to assist other students facing behavioral health or substance use issues and provide them with the tools and resources necessary to address this challenge.

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<sup>1</sup> 2020-2025 MHFACO Growth Plan, Prepared by The Bridgespan Group, July 2019

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics (2018)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.america'shealthrankings.org/explore/health-of-women-and-children/measure/teen\\_suicide/state/CO](https://www.america'shealthrankings.org/explore/health-of-women-and-children/measure/teen_suicide/state/CO)

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*Teen Mental Health First Aid has had a good impact on me and a lot of us. It helped me realize there is good in this world and you shouldn't be afraid to reach out and talk to others. The stories of others that I have heard and how they got better helped me keep pushing and get to where I am today. I wasn't in a good place and I felt that I needed to keep it to myself, but then I decided to open up to trustworthy friends and get better. I'm still not in a good place, but I know better than to give up but really push through and get better.*

*- Amerli, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade*

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## **Examples of Education-Focused Behavioral Health and Substance Use Trainings**

### ***Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA)***

Youth Mental Health First Aid is designed to teach parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, and other caring citizens how to help an adolescent who is experiencing a mental health or addiction challenge or is in crisis. It is designed for adults who regularly interact with young people. The course introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a 5-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA)***

This in-person training teaches high school students about common mental health challenges and what they can do to support their own mental health or help a friend who is struggling. It equips young people with the knowledge and skills they need to foster their own wellness and to support each other. Mental Health First Aid has teamed up with Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation to bring this program to the United States.<sup>5</sup> In 2020, tMHFA was piloted in 43 Colorado schools (including one school district in Colorado – Re-1 Valley School District in northeast Colorado, in partnership with Centennial Mental Health Center).

To be eligible to provide tMHFA, **sites are required to train at least 10 percent of their adult staff in Youth Mental Health First Aid**, making the passage of this bill a critical first step in preparing Colorado's schools for the roll out of tMHFA in 2021.

*Please support Senate Bill to **Expand Behavioral Health Training for Educators in Secondary Schools** and help educators access mental health training opportunities to equip teens with skills to identify resources and better support their peers.*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/population-focused-modules/youth/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/population-focused-modules/teens/>