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Senate of Pennsylvania Session of 2021 - 2022 Regular Session

MEMORANDUM

Posted: December 18, 2020 09:19 AM

From: [Senator Judith L. Schwank](#)

To: All Senate members

Subject: Mental Health Day for Students

In the near future, I will be introducing legislation that would allow two mental health day per semester as an excused absence. As is the custom, a parental note would be required for the missed day not to be counted as a pattern of truancy.

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America found that one in eight children are affected by anxiety, yet 80 percent of those with a diagnosable anxiety disorder do not receive treatment. By going without counseling, medication, and other helpful tools for treating anxiety, children are likely to experience long-reaching issues. Anxiety disorders have been on the rise in K-12 children since at least the 1950s and studies show that numbers are expected to continue rising in the coming years.

There are already a number of studies which have explored the impact of COVID-19 on student education and well-being. One study reported that approximately 25% of their sample reported experiencing anxiety symptoms, which were positively correlated with increased concerns about academic delays, economic effects of the pandemic, and impacts on daily life.

Among the many student surveys administered worldwide, one survey by YoungMinds revealed that 83% of young respondents agreed that the pandemic worsened their pre-existing mental health conditions, mainly due to school closures, loss of routine, and restricted social connections.

Due to the increase of academic stressors in a population with heightened pre-existing stress levels and a potentially reduced ability to rely on typical coping strategies – such as family who themselves may be experiencing heightened distress – the COVID-19 pandemic has placed an unprecedented mental health burden among students. This urgently requires further examination and immediate intervention.

Last year, Utah changed its definition of valid excuses for absences to include mental health issues. This past summer, Oregon enacted a law, driven by a group of high school student activists, that allows students to take days off for mental health. Colorado also enacted similar legislation. Students in other states, including Florida and Washington, are attempting to get similar laws passed.

This was brought to my attention by a high school student in my district that is very passionate about the mental well-being of students throughout the Commonwealth.

Please join me in cosponsoring this important piece of legislation.



Introduced as [SB506](#)