

June 8, 2023

The Honorable Al Muratsuchi
Chair, Assembly Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, 1020 N Street, Room 159
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Senate Bill 509 (Portantino) K-12 Behavioral Health Training - SUPPORT

Dear Chair Muratsuchi:

Common Sense strongly supports your SB 509, which will require the California Department of Education (CDE) to ensure that 75 percent of classified and certificated employees on school campuses complete an evidence-based behavioral health training program. This instruction will guide school staff on how to provide referrals to mental health services, substance use disorder services, or other support to individuals in the early stages of developing a mental illness or substance use disorder.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports the percentage of children aged 3-17 who suffer from depression and anxiety has steadily risen this century. The CDC also estimates that approximately 4.5 million children in that age range have been diagnosed with a mental health or substance use disorder. The CA Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission released a report in November of 2020 that details what one educator described as the “crisis filled lives” of children and youth. They found that one in three California high school students report feeling chronically sad and hopeless – and more than half of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students have reported suicidal thoughts.

Under existing law, CDE is required to identify an evidence-based mental health training program for local educational agencies to use to train teachers and other school personnel who have direct contact with pupils. However, schools are not mandated to require such training for their staff. Evidence-based education about mental health is one of the best ways to increase awareness, empower students to seek help, and reduce the stigma associated with mental health challenges. Schools are ideally positioned to be centers of mental health education, healing, and support. As children and youth spend more hours at school than at home, the public education system is the most efficient and effective setting for providing universal mental health education to children and youth.

Common Sense strongly supports policies and programs that ensure California children and teens have access to behavioral and mental health resources. For the above reasons, we thank you for authoring SB 509 and respectfully share our support.

Sincerely,



Kami Peer
CA Policy Manager, Common Sense Media