

1 H.817  
2 Introduced by Representatives Berbeco of Winooski, Bos-Lun of Westminster,  
3 Holcombe of Norwich, and McFaun of Barre Town  
4 Referred to Committee on  
5 Date:  
6 Subject: Health; mental health; education; peer supports; literacy  
7 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes a mental health  
8 and substance use disorder literacy curriculum for schools. This bill further  
9 proposes to establish a pilot peer-to-peer mental health support program in  
10 schools.

11 An act relating to mental health support and substance use disorder  
12 prevention in schools

13 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

14 \* \* \* Mental Health and Substance Misuse Literacy \* \* \*

15 Sec. 1. 16 V.S.A. § 914 is added to read:

16 **§ 914. MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE LITERACY**

17 (a) Each supervisory union or school district shall select a curriculum to  
18 increase awareness about mental health and substance misuse challenges  
19 facing youth throughout the State. Each selected curriculum shall include  
20 information on:

1                             (1) the connection and importance of mental health to an individual's  
2                             physical health and overall well-being;  
3                             (2) resources and tools for maintaining mental wellness, including  
4                             evidence-based practices used to overcome mental health and substance misuse  
5                             challenges;  
6                             (3) signs and symptoms of common mental health and substance misuse  
7                             challenges and strategies for responding to those signs and symptoms;  
8                             (4) the prevalence of mental health and substance misuse challenges  
9                             across all populations;  
10                            (5) common mental health and substance misuse conditions and  
11                             evidence-based treatments for common conditions; and  
12                            (6) how to seek assistance or support for a mental health or substance  
13                             misuse challenge in school and the community at large.  
14                             (b) The Department of Mental Health shall post guidance for identifying  
15                             evidence-informed curricula and best practices that supervisory unions and  
16                             school districts may use in selecting a curriculum pursuant to this section.  
17                             (c) Each supervisory union or school district shall make its selected  
18                             curriculum available to parents and guardians and shall share the curriculum  
19                             with any organizations serving youth in the community.

# 1 \* \* \* Peer-to-Peer Mental Health Support in Schools \* \* \*

## Sec. 2. PEER-TO-PEER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT PROGRAM

3 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly to:

4                   (1) define best practices and develop statewide standards for youth peer-

5                   to-peer support programs; and

6                   (2) strengthen protective factors among Vermont youth and prevent

7                   future mental health challenges and substance misuse.

15 (c) The Department shall:

16                   (1) execute a subcontract for youth outreach;

17                   (2) host at least two listening sessions to engage children and youth;

18                   (3) convene an advisory board to inform the design of the peer-to-peer

19                   pilot program established by this section;

1                   (4) develop a request for proposals on or before January 1, 2027, to  
2                   identify secondary schools in Vermont for participation in the peer-to-peer  
3                   pilot program established by this section; and  
4                   (5) accept grant applications for the peer-to-peer program established by  
5                   this section on a rolling basis beginning on February 1, 2027.  
6                   (d) In awarding grants pursuant to this section, the Department shall give  
7                   priority to applications submitted by a public or an approved independent  
8                   school that:  
9                   (1) propose using the grant for a peer-to-peer mental health program  
10                   with a suicide prevention component; or  
11                   (2) are located in an area of the State that has had high rates of suicide  
12                   or has experienced a recent traumatic event.  
13                   (e) School employees assisting with a peer-to-peer mental health support  
14                   program that is awarded a grant pursuant to this section shall receive training  
15                   in the following:  
16                   (1) empathetic listening;  
17                   (2) enhancing protective mental health factors;  
18                   (3) recognizing and appropriately responding to risk factors and warning  
19                   signs associated with mental health and substance misuse challenges, including  
20                   co-occurring challenges;

1                   (4) connecting students with professional mental health services and  
2                   recovery supports, as necessary; and

3                   (5) any other areas included in the National Model Standards for Peer  
4                   Support Certification of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services  
5                   Administration.

6                   (f) On or before January 1, 2030, the Department of Mental Health, in  
7                   collaboration with the Agency of Education, shall submit a report to the House  
8                   Committee on Health Care and to the Senate Committee on Health and  
9                   Welfare evaluating the efficacy of the program, including:

10                  (1) student participation in the program;  
11                  (2) the efficacy of the training provided to participating certified peer  
12                  support specialists and school employees assisting with the program;  
13                  (3) the percentage of students participating in the program who reported  
14                  improved mental health outcomes; and

15                  (4) the number of participating students connected with professional  
16                  mental health services due to program participation.

17                  \* \* \* Effective Date \* \* \*

18                  Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

19                  This act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.