



**Alaska Association of Student Governments**

**Resolution #12**

**Educating School Staff on Identifying Mental Health Issues**

**Submitted by: Kylie Orlando, Olivia Skan, and Jasmine Wolfe**

**October 13, 2023**

**Be it Resolved by the Alaska Association of Student Governments that:** Members of AASG will support school staff in receiving continuous mandatory training to identify and address mental health issues.

1. **Whereas**, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Children’s Hospital Association and the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry declared an emergency in child and adolescent mental health;<sup>3</sup>
2. **Whereas**, between 2016 and 2019, Alaska’s annual suicide rate for adolescents was three times higher than the national average;<sup>6</sup>
3. **Whereas**, as of 2019, 19.7% of Alaska youth attempted suicide, and this percentage continues to rise every year;<sup>8</sup>
4. **Whereas**, of the students in general education classes, 1 in 6 have a diagnosable mental health disorder;<sup>5</sup>
5. **Whereas**, many students have mental health difficulties that do not rise to the extent of a diagnosis;<sup>2</sup>
6. **Whereas**, 88 percent of public schools in the United States did not feel that they could adequately supply students with mental health services. The main restriction being insufficient mental health professional staff necessary to manage school caseloads and access to licensed mental health professionals;<sup>4</sup>

7. **Whereas**, There are not nearly enough school psychologists, counselors, and social workers to assist teachers with these students. The numbers of these professionals in schools fall well below levels recommended by their national associations;<sup>2</sup>
8. **Whereas**, Jen Vorse Wilka, president of YouthTruth, says, “Feeling depressed, stressed, or anxious is now the No. 1 obstacle to students’ learning;”<sup>2</sup>
9. **Whereas**, Educators are often the first to notice mental health problems in children and young adults;<sup>1</sup>
10. **Whereas**, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration recommends that educators take mental health awareness training to learn more about mental health; <sup>1</sup>
11. **Whereas**, the statewide suicide prevention council states that suicide can be prevented through increased awareness and education; <sup>9</sup>
12. **Whereas**, “According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), schools are uniquely positioned to identify, intervene and even prevent certain mental health-related issues in children;” <sup>3</sup>
13. **Whereas**, an effective training program would allow teachers to: “Recognize when young people are at risk for, or are experiencing, mental health problems;” <sup>1</sup>
14. **Whereas**, if educators had appropriate training they would be able to support school systems;<sup>7</sup>
15. **Whereas**, the Sitka High School Student Council believes that there needs to be training for educators that addresses what to do to identify and intervene in mental health issues before it reaches the stage of acceptance of suicide as a solution to students’ distress;
16. **Whereas**, educators in the state of Alaska are only required to do one of the following courses every five years: Suicide Awareness, Suicide Prevention, Suicide Intervention, Responding to Suicide - Postvention Guidelines; <sup>7</sup>
17. **Whereas**, training needs to be continuous to be effective;<sup>13</sup>
18. **Whereas**, time should be provided to educators to complete this training, as it is critical to the health and safety of students;<sup>14</sup>
19. **Whereas**, the Alaska Board of Education states that a 4 year period is sufficient between updating the information in the “Promoting Wellness to Prevent Suicide Act” in Alaska; <sup>9</sup>
20. **Whereas**, the Sitka High School Student Council believes that training should be completed annually, along with a biannual review by a professional to determine the time relevancy of the training;
21. **Whereas**, a provided one-day training period to complete the program is optimal;<sup>15</sup>
22. **Whereas**, in order for the training to be effective, educators need to be willing to participate;<sup>11</sup>
23. **Whereas**, 93% of educators reported a high level of concerns for student mental health needs;<sup>12</sup>
24. **Whereas**, 85% of educators expressed a desire for additional mental health training;<sup>12</sup>
25. **Whereas**, educator at Sitka High School, Frederique Charbonneau, who has been teaching for 20 years, states, “I agree...that we do not have enough training on mental

health issues. Doing one part of mental health training every five years is not effective...I believe that this training will be more effective and engaging than the one we already have because we care about this topic;”

26. **Whereas**, Effective teachers form authentic, caring relationships with their students;<sup>10</sup>

27. **Whereas**, if 1 in 6 youth in Alaska are suffering and educators can do something to prevent that, we should make this our first priority.

**Therefore, be it resolved** that the Alaska Association of Student Governments: will support efforts made throughout our state to allow school staff to receive mandatory training to identify and address certain issues in students.

**Action Statement:** If passed by the General Assembly of AASG, this resolution will be brought before the Sitka School District School Board, as well as the State Board of Education, House Education Committee, and the Senate Education Committee for their consideration.

#### Sources

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<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health-awareness-training>.

The resolution passes with noted opposition

Passed by the Fall 2023 General Assembly of AASG hosted by West Valley High School

*Danika Hamm*

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