# Superintendent’s Memo #153-20


**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education**

DATE: June 26, 2020

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: Mental Health Awareness Training

The 2020 General Assembly enacted [HB 74](https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+ful+CHAP0471+pdf) (Kory) and [SB619](https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+ful+CHAP0472) (Deeds), which requires each local school board to *“adopt and implement policies that require each teacher and other relevant personnel, as determined by the school board, employed on a full-time basis, to complete a mental health awareness training or similar program at least once.”* Each school board is required to provide such training to their personnel and may contract with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), a community services board, a behavioral health authority, a nonprofit organization, or other certified trainer to do so. The bill also specifies that the training may be provided via an online module.

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) encourages school divisions to initiate planning for the implementation of this legislation in conjunction with their recovery efforts following COVID-19 school closures. The following considerations are offered to assist school divisions in the planning process.

### Identification of Personnel to be Trained

All full-time teaching staff are required to complete the mental health awareness training at least once. In addition, school divisions must identify other relevant personnel, employed on a full-time basis that will also be required to complete such training. Those may include, but are not limited to, school administrators, school nurses, instructional specialists, front office staff, coaches, school security officers, and paraprofessionals. By increasing the mental health literacy of school staff, divisions increase the chances that students will receive early intervention, which typically results in better academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes.

### Identification of Training Options

School boards may identify one or more options for meeting the training requirements. School divisions may work with their school-based mental health providers (such as school psychologists, school social workers, or school counselors) to design and implement a mental health awareness training. School divisions may also develop or make available online modules designed to meet this training requirement. In addition, school divisions may contract with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), a community services board, a behavioral health authority, a nonprofit organization, or other certified trainer to provide the mental health awareness training, or develop an online module.

### Recommended Training Components

School divisions choosing to develop and implement their own training on mental health awareness are encouraged to consider the components of mental health literacy when designing their training.It is recommended that the mental health awareness training provided to school staff cover, at minimum, the first three components of mental health literacy identified below.

1. **Mental Health Knowledge:** Learning about the signs and symptoms of mental health concerns and the appropriate treatments.
2. **Mental Health Promotion:** Promoting positive mental health in the classroom and school-wide.
3. **Providing Support:** Identifying students in need of support and linking them to appropriate services and supporting students with mental health problems at school.
4. **Reducing Stigma** (optional):Improving attitudes about mental health and mental illness across students and school staff and providing support in ways that do not increase stigma.

### Mental Health Awareness Training Resources

The Mental Health Technology and Transfer Center (MHTTC) has developed [Supporting Student Mental Health: Resources to Prepare Educators](https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/mhttc-network-coordinating-office/supporting-student-mental-health), which identifies several trainings and resources to increase educator mental health literacy, including online courses, websites, and workshops. School divisions should determine training options based on local resources and the minimal content recommendations. Some of the trainings highlighted in the resource that include at least the recommended minimal three content areas are:

* [Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA)](https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/population-focused-modules/youth/) (eight hours). The goals of YMHFA are to increase mental health awareness, reduce stigma around mental health, help people at risk of self-harm or suicide, and refer them to helping professionals. Local Community Services Boards (CSB) offer YMHFA free of charge to Virginia schools.
* [NAMI Ending the Silence for School Staff](https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-Programs/NAMI-Ending-the-Silence) (one hour). The presentation for school staff is designed to be conducted by both a leader and a young adult with a mental health condition who details their experience. The presentation includes information about signs and symptoms, approaching students, and working with families, while allowing time for questions and dialogue. Your [local NAMI affiliate](https://www.nami.org/Find-Your-Local-NAMI) offers this presentation free of charge to schools.
* [Kognito At-Risk for Educators](https://kognito.com/products) (one hour). The virtual format allows for role-play simulations developed for elementary, middle, and high school educators that aim to increase knowledge about children’s mental health. The platform is customizable to include a local list of mental health resources. There is a charge for this platform.
* [Classroom Mental Health](https://classroommentalhealth.org/) (varies). This website aims to be a guide for teachers starting from when they notice mental health concerns or are approached by a student for support. The site addresses common concerns (e.g., Can I help? Should I help?) and provides resources for improving classroom atmosphere and exercises for teachers. This website is free.

Questions regarding mental health awareness training may be directed to Martha Montgomery, School Psychology Specialist, by email at Martha.Montgomery@doe.virginia.gov, or by telephone at (804) 692-0396.

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