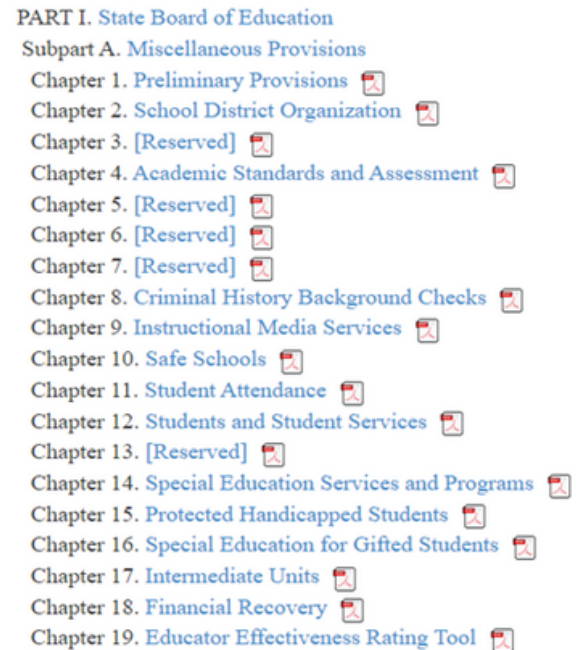





















# PA School Code and Recent Acts Associated with School Mental Health: A Brief Guide for Aspiring Educators

## What is the Pennsylvania School Code?

The Pennsylvania School Code – Title 22 Education of 1949 (PA School Code) is the official codification of the rules and regulations of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. These are the expectations for the public-school system, and in some instances charter and cyber charter schools, as well as outlines certain provisions that are applicable to private and parochial schools. The PA School Code is comprised of 23 different “Parts”, with some Parts comprised of “Subparts” as well as “Chapters”. To illustrate, here is a screen shot of Part I of PA School Code from the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s website (2023), pictured to the right.



PART I. State Board of Education  
Subpart A. Miscellaneous Provisions

- Chapter 1. Preliminary Provisions 
- Chapter 2. School District Organization 
- Chapter 3. [Reserved] 
- Chapter 4. Academic Standards and Assessment 
- Chapter 5. [Reserved] 
- Chapter 6. [Reserved] 
- Chapter 7. [Reserved] 
- Chapter 8. Criminal History Background Checks 
- Chapter 9. Instructional Media Services 
- Chapter 10. Safe Schools 
- Chapter 11. Student Attendance 
- Chapter 12. Students and Student Services 
- Chapter 13. [Reserved] 
- Chapter 14. Special Education Services and Programs 
- Chapter 15. Protected Handicapped Students 
- Chapter 16. Special Education for Gifted Students 
- Chapter 17. Intermediate Units 
- Chapter 18. Financial Recovery 
- Chapter 19. Educator Effectiveness Rating Tool 

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## **What is a Legislative Act as it Relates to the Pennsylvania School Code?**

An “Act” is a legislative action taken by the State of Pennsylvania that establishes an amendment to the PA School Code of 1949. Simply speaking, once approved through the legislative process, an amendment changes the requirements in the PA School Code. More specifically, an amendment alters existent language associated with requirements, deletes existent requirements, and/or adds additional (new) requirements. Once an Act is passed through the legislative process, it becomes a formal component-part of the PA School Code.

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## **What are the Key Acts Associated with School Mental Health?**

There have been four important Acts approved by the Pennsylvania legislature in the relatively recent past: Act 71 (2014), Act 44 (2018), Act 18 (2019), and Act 55 (2022). The passage of these acts occurred as a result of increasing concerns regarding the mental health of school-age youth. These Acts, when viewed together, have direct implications for how schools operate which provides the context for classroom-based practice by teachers. These four Acts are briefly highlighted for your convenience in the forthcoming sections of this resource. As an aspiring educator, you are encouraged to familiarize yourself with these Acts in order to best position yourself to understand how what you do in the classroom with students fits in to the larger context of educational practice within the State of Pennsylvania.

## Key Pennsylvania Legislative Highlights Related to School Mental Health:

### Act 55 (2022)

- Survey of school mental health services.
- Training and professional development requirements for current and future school personnel.
- Threat assessment training, education, and awareness requirements.
- School Safety and Security Committee (SSSC) membership and requirements for School Safety and Security Coordinators.
- New formula –based grant programs for School Safety and Security and School Mental Health.

### Act 18 (2019)

- Model Trauma Informed Plan (SCSS)
- Training on Trauma-Informed Approaches
- Encourage Trauma-Informed Approaches

### Act 44 (2018)

- School Safety and Security Coordinator
- Safe2Say Something
- School safety grants
- School safety assessment criteria

### Act 71 (2014)

- Suicide prevention policies and procedures
- Training for staff grades 6-12, 4 hours every 5 years
- Student education

### **Act 55 ... some details:**

- Signed in to law by the Governor on July 8, 2022
- Highlights additional and/or new school safety and security requirements for schools as well as introduces the funded school mental health internship program for school counseling, psychology and social work.

### **Act 55 Covers:**

- Membership of the School Safety and Security Committee (SSSC)
- New requirements for School Safety and Security Coordinators
- Survey of school mental health services
- New, formula-based grant programs for School Safety and Security and School Mental Health
- New School-based Mental Health Internship Grant Program within the PA Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA)
- Training and professional development requirements for current and future school personnel
- Threat assessment training, education, and awareness requirements.

## **Targets/Subjects of training/Professional development requirements for current school employees include:**

- Situational Awareness
- Trauma-informed Approaches
- Behavioral Health Awareness
- Suicide and Bullying Awareness
- Substance Use Awareness
- Emergency Training Drills
- Threat Assessments

## **Specific details associated with Threat Assessments include:**

- All school entities must annually facilitate opportunities for members of Threat Assessment Team to complete group or individualized training
- School entities must also annually ensure that students, school employees, and parents/guardians are informed of the existence and purpose of the school entity's Threat Assessment Team(s)

## **Educator preparatory programs implications:**

- Approved educator preparatory programs (e.g., Commonwealth University) and alternative programs must include a minimum of three semester hours or equivalent of instruction incorporating the targets/subjects of training for current school employees listed above
- Requirements take effect for candidates who begin a Pennsylvania educator preparation program or alternate program after July 1, 2025

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### **Act 18 ... some details:**

- Signed in to law by the Governor on June 28, 2019
- Highlights training on trauma-informed approaches in alignment with guidance for School Safety and Security Committees on threat assessments and model trauma-informed plans for schools

### **Act 18 covers:**

- School Director Training Programs
- Continuing Professional Development
- Trauma-Informed Education
- Post-baccalaureate Certification
- PA School Leadership Standards
- School Safety and Security Committee
- Trauma-Informed Approaches
- Duties of the Pennsylvania Department of Education
- Powers and Duties of the Council of Basic Education and Council of Higher Education

## **Professional Development Requirements in Schools:**

- Recognition of the signs of trauma in students
- Best practices for schools and classrooms regarding trauma-informed approaches, including utilization of multitiered systems of support
- Recognition of the signs of the impact of secondary trauma on school employees and appropriate resources for school employees who are experiencing secondary trauma.
- The school entity's policies regarding trauma-informed approaches
- The school entity's policies regarding connecting students with appropriate services

## **Act 44 ... some details:**

- Signed into law by the Governor on June 22, 2018

## **Act 44 specifically requires schools to:**

- Appoint School Safety and Security Coordinators
- Establish mandatory school safety training for school employees
- Establish standards for school police, school resource officers and security guards
- Conduct a physical safety assessment as well as a Student Assistance Program and Behavioral Health Assessment of school operations
- Implement Safe2Say Something

## **School Safety and Security Committee Physical Assessment must consist of an evaluation of the school's structural facilities and surrounding property including:**

- Review of existing safety and security plans
- Review of existing plans for crisis response and mitigation
- Analysis of crime and prevention policy and practices, including environmental design
- Discussions with local law enforcement
- Analysis of school agreements with local law enforcements

## **Student Assistance and Behavioral Health Assessment must consist of an analysis of school climate including:**

- The availability of student assistance programs and behavioral health professionals to aid the school entity
- A review of recommendations by behavioral and physical health professionals and consideration of their recommendations.

## **Safe2Say Something is a youth violence prevention program run by the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General. The highlights of Safe2Say Something are:**

- It is a 24/7 anonymous tip line for school safety
- Information received is forwarded to the affected school entity and local law enforcement
- School entities must develop procedures for assessing and responding to reports

## **Act 71 ... some details:**

- Signed into law by the Governor on June 26, 2014 and was effective immediately

### **Requires schools to:**

- Adopt a youth suicide awareness and prevention policy
- Provide ongoing professional development in youth suicide awareness and prevention for professional educators in buildings serving students in grades 6-12 (minimally 4 hours every 5-years)
- Act 71 requires schools to provide educational programming for all students on suicide prevention and awareness and encourages that programming to be age appropriate

### **Act 71 required PDE to develop a model youth suicide prevention policy to provide guidance to schools that included the following features:**

- A statement on youth suicide awareness and prevention
- Protocols for administering youth suicide awareness and prevention education to staff and students
- Methods of prevention including procedures for early identification and referral of students at risk of suicide
- Methods of intervention including procedures that address an emotional or mental health safety plan for students identified as being at increased risk of suicide
- Methods of responding to a student or staff suicide or suicide attempt
- Reporting procedures
- Recommended resources on youth suicide awareness and prevention programs, including current contact information for such programs