



To: NJSIAA Executive Committee  
From: Tony Maselli, Chief Operating Officer  
Date: September 13, 2023  
RE: Mental Health Awareness Initiative

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## **Background**

The NJSIAA Sports Medical Advisory Committee (SMAC) is aware of the increasing concerns regarding student-athlete mental health – these concerns are well documented and prevalent in all types of communities. The committee spent a lot of time last school year discussing the importance that NJSIAA coaches be given the resources to assist their student-athletes when necessary. I would like to thank Dr. Chris Mendler, Chair, for his time researching and reviewing the different options that are available.

## **Proposal**

The committee recommends that a behavioral health awareness curriculum be included as a coaching certification requirement. The committee also recommends the “be nice.” online program to meet this requirement. The “be nice.” program is based in Michigan and is designed for high school coaches. The course is an online, asynchronous 30-minute program – coaches can take the online course at their convenience.

The course is free to the coach and its goal is to provide a foundational level of awareness, it is not designed to be a more involved behavioral health first aid program. The awareness program is solely designed to help coaches recognize a student-athlete in need and how to refer them to appropriate school and/or local resources.

There will be a two-year phase in for this certification requirement – all certified NJSIAA coaches will be required to complete the program by the end of the 2024-2025 school year. The course will be a one-time requirement and will remain available for new coaches hired in the future. NJSIAA will cover the cost of this program, which has been presented to the NJSIAA Finance Committee.