

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6141

As Reported by House Committee On: Education

Title: An act relating to strengthening school district plans for recognition, screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students.

Brief Description: Strengthening school district plans for recognition, screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators McCoy, Wellman, Van De Wege, Keiser, Hasegawa and Kuderer; by request of Superintendent of Public Instruction).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/20/18, 2/22/18 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop an online one-hour training module for school staff on the recognition, screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 18 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Stonier, Vice Chair; Harris, Ranking Minority Member; Muri, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Caldier, Hargrove, Johnson, Kilduff, Lovick, McCaslin, Ortiz-Self, Senn, Slatter, Steele, Stokesbary and Valdez.

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

In addition to its constitutional charge of supervising all matter pertaining to public schools, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and its office has numerous and broad

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responsibilities prescribed in statute related to Washington's 295 school districts and 1.1 million public school students.

According to the Washington State Department of Health (DOH), suicide is the second leading cause of death for Washington youth between the ages of 10 and 24. Information from the DOH also indicates that, on average, each week in Washington two youths die of suicide and 17 youths are hospitalized because of suicide attempts.

Legislation adopted in 2014 (Chapter 103, Laws of 2014, enacted as Substitute Senate Bill 6431) directed the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to work with state agencies and community partners to assist schools in implementing youth suicide prevention activities. Examples of these prevention activities include:

- training for school employees, parents, community members, and students in recognizing and responding to the signs of suicide;
- partnering with local coalitions of community members interested in preventing youth suicide; and
- responding to communities determined to be in crisis after a suicide or attempted suicide to prevent further instances of suicide.

Additionally, individuals certified by the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) as a school nurse, school social worker, school psychologist, or school counselor must complete a training program of at least three-hours in duration on youth suicide screening and referral as a condition of certification. The standards for the minimum content of the training program are adopted by the PESB in consultation with the OSPI and the DOH.

At the regional level, each of Washington's nine educational service districts is required to develop and maintain the capacity to offer training for educators and other school district staff on youth suicide screening and referral, and on recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students.

Regarding local obligations, school districts must adopt a plan for the recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students, including indicators of possible substance abuse, violence, youth suicide, and sexual abuse. This plan must be provided to all district staff on an annual basis, and must satisfy numerous minimum content requirements, including addressing:

- identification of training opportunities in recognition, screening, and referral that may be available for staff;
- how staff should respond to suspicions, concerns, or warning signs of emotional or behavioral distress in students;
- protocols and procedures for communication with parents; and
- how the district will provide support to students and staff after an incident of violence, youth suicide, or allegations of sexual abuse.

Summary of Bill:

Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the OSPI must develop and make available an online a one-hour training module for school staff on recognition, screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students to assist school districts in meeting the staff training component in locally adopted plans for the recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students.

The one-hour online training module does not replace the requirement for school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses to complete an approved three-hour suicide prevention training program, and school staff may complete the three-hour suicide prevention program training in lieu of the one-hour online module.

Staff training provisions in requirements governing school district plans for the recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students are modified to reference the OSPI's one-hour online training module in materials that identify training opportunities that may be available to staff.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill is the result of discussions regarding social and emotional learning provisions for students. Teachers should be able to recognize indicators of student distress and to point students to the help they might need. News reports from last week's school shooting in Florida indicated that the person who attacked the school provided indicators of distress, but that they were not acted upon. Hopefully, this bill will help to avoid the egregious situation that occurred in Florida last week.

On average, two students die each week in Washington by suicide. Current law requires schools to provide staff training related to student distress. This bill will help schools by creating an online module that they can use in providing the required staff training.

This bill is as timely as recent headlines, not just because of recent events in Florida, but because student suicides are on the increase. Instead of getting help, some students are suspended. The mental health needs of students are not being appropriately addressed. One student in five gets the help they need. Schools are a portal in identifying students and getting them the help they need.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator McCoy, prime sponsor; Seth Dawson, Washington State Psychiatric Association and Washington Association for Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention; and Camille Goldy, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.