
Education Committee

HB 1834

Brief Description: Concerning student excused absences for mental health reasons.

Sponsors: Representatives Callan, Rude, Johnson, J., Davis, Macri, Ramos, Rule, Santos, Senn, Paul, Simmons, Bergquist, Thai, Stonier, Riccelli, Frame and Harris-Talley.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires that the rules of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) categorize a student absence from school for a mental health reason as an excused absence due to illness, health condition, or medical appointment.
- Directs the SPI to develop, in consultation with a student advisory group, guidelines to implement the student absence rules.

Hearing Date: 1/20/22

Staff: Megan Wargacki

Background:

Student Absence from School Definition and Excused Absence Categories. State statute directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to adopt rules establishing a standard definition of student absence from school. In adopting the definition, the SPI must review current practices in Washington school districts, definitions used in other states, and national standards or definitions. The SPI must also consult with the Graduation: A Team Effort Partnership Advisory Committee (GATE Committee, formerly known as the Building Bridges Work Group).

By rule, the SPI has established 13 categories for which student absences from school must be excused, including because of illness, health condition or medical appointment for the student or person for whom the student is legally responsible. The rule also permits school districts to

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define additional categories for excused absences and gives the school principal or designee the authority to determine if an absence meets the state categories and the school district policy for an excused absence.

Graduation: A Team Effort Partnership Advisory Committee. The GATE Committee includes representatives of state and local agencies and organizations and others, who work with youth who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of school. The GATE Committee identifies and makes recommendations to the Legislature for the reduction of fiscal, legal, and regulatory barriers that prevent coordination of program resources across agencies at the state and local level; develops and tracks performance measures and benchmarks for each partner agency or organization; and identifies research-based and emerging best practices regarding drop-out prevention, intervention, and retrieval programs.

Legislative Youth Advisory Council. The Legislative Youth Advisory Council (LYAC) was established to examine issues of importance to youth, for example, emotional and physical health, education, and strategies to increase youth participation in government. The Office of the Lieutenant Governor supervises the LYAC and selects its 22 plus members. Among other things, the LYAC advises the Legislature on proposed and pending legislation on matters relating to youth and annually reports to the Legislature on its activities.

Summary of Bill:

By the beginning of the 2022-23 school year, the rules of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) must categorize a student absence from school for a mental health reason as an excused absence due to illness, health condition, or medical appointment. Prior to filing public notice of the proposed rules, the SPI must consult with a student advisory group, as described below, in addition to the Graduation: A Team Effort Partnership Advisory Committee.

The SPI must also develop and publish guidelines for public schools to implement the definition of student absence from school. The SPI must consider including guidance for schools to integrate their responses to student excused absences for physical and mental health into their support systems for student well-being.

In developing the guidelines, the SPI must consult with a student advisory group whose members are directly impacted by student absence rules and policies and who represent the diversity of the public school population, including diversity in gender identity, family income, race and ethnicity, and geography, among other characteristics. The student advisory group must also include a member of the Legislative Youth Advisory Council appointed by the Lieutenant Governor.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 11, 2022.

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