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HOUSE BILL NO. 1124

Offered January 12, 2022

A BILL to amend and reenact § 22.1-279.6 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the Board of Education; school boards; codes of student conduct; contents.

Patron—Anderson

Referred to Committee on Education

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 22.1-279.6 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 22.1-279.6. Board guidelines and model policies for codes of student conduct; school board regulations.

A. The Board of Education shall establish guidelines and develop model policies for codes of student conduct to aid local school boards in the implementation of such policies. The guidelines and model policies shall include (i) criteria for the removal of a student from a class, the use of suspension, expulsion, and exclusion as disciplinary measures, the grounds for suspension and expulsion and exclusion, and the procedures to be followed in such cases, including proceedings for such suspension, expulsion, and exclusion decisions and all applicable appeals processes; (ii) standards, consistent with state, federal and case laws, for school board policies on alcohol and drugs, gang-related activity, hazing, vandalism, trespassing, threats, search and seizure, disciplining of students with disabilities, intentional injury of others, self-defense, bullying, the use of electronic means for purposes of bullying, harassment, and intimidation, and dissemination of such policies to students, their parents, and school personnel; (iii) standards for in-service training of school personnel in and examples of the appropriate management of student conduct and student offenses in violation of school board policies; (iv) standards for dress or grooming codes; and (v) ~~standards for reducing bias and harassment in the enforcement of a requirement that any code of student conduct is enforced and any student behavioral intervention or disciplinary method or measure is utilized in a fair, proportional, unbiased, and neutral manner, for the sole purpose of maintaining safe learning environments, and with full and sole consideration of the student's behavior and with no consideration of any individual immutable characteristic of the student such as the student's sex or race.~~

In accordance with the most recent enunciation of constitutional principles by the Supreme Court of the United States of America, the Board's standards for school board policies on alcohol and drugs and search and seizure shall include guidance for procedures relating to voluntary and mandatory drug testing in schools, including which groups may be tested, use of test results, confidentiality of test information, privacy considerations, consent to the testing, need to know, and release of the test results to the appropriate school authority.

In the case of suspension and expulsion, the procedures set forth in this article shall be the minimum procedures that the school board may prescribe.

B. School boards shall adopt and revise, as required by § 22.1-253.13:7 and in accordance with the requirements of this section, regulations on codes of student conduct that are consistent with, but may be more stringent than, the guidelines of the Board. *In ensuring that its regulations on codes of student conduct are consistent with the requirements set forth in the Board's model policies and codes of student conduct pursuant to clause (v) of subsection A, each school board shall establish and continuously maintain a system of fair, proportional, unbiased, and neutral student behavioral intervention and discipline and no school board shall establish or maintain any system of student behavioral intervention or discipline, including positive behavioral interventions and supports or any substantially similar disciplinary method, that targets or differentiates student behavioral interventions or disciplinary methods or measures based on any factor other than the student's behavior.* School boards shall include in the regulations on codes of student conduct procedures for suspension, expulsion, and exclusion decisions and shall biennially review the model student conduct code to incorporate discipline options and alternatives to preserve a safe, nondisruptive environment for effective teaching and learning.

C. Each school board shall include in its code of student conduct prohibitions against hazing and profane or obscene language or conduct. School boards shall also cite in their codes of student conduct the provisions of § 18.2-56, which defines and prohibits hazing and imposes a Class 1 misdemeanor penalty for violations, that is, confinement in jail for not more than 12 months and a fine of not more than \$2,500, either or both.

D. Each school board shall include in its code of student conduct policies and procedures that include a prohibition against bullying. Such policies and procedures shall (i) be consistent with the

INTRODUCED

HB1124

59 standards for school board policies on bullying and the use of electronic means for purposes of bullying
60 developed by the Board pursuant to subsection A and (ii) direct the principal to notify the parent of any
61 student involved in an alleged incident of bullying of the status of any investigation within five school
62 days of the allegation of bullying.

63 Such policies and procedures shall not be interpreted to infringe upon the First Amendment rights of
64 students and are not intended to prohibit expression of religious, philosophical, or political views,
65 provided that such expression does not cause an actual, material disruption of the work of the school.

66 E. A school board may regulate the use or possession of beepers or other portable communications
67 devices and laser pointers by students on school property or attending school functions or activities and
68 establish disciplinary procedures pursuant to this article to which students violating such regulations will
69 be subject.

70 F. Nothing in this section shall be construed to require any school board to adopt policies requiring
71 or encouraging any drug testing in schools. However, a school board may, in its discretion, require or
72 encourage drug testing in accordance with the Board of Education's guidelines and model student
73 conduct policies required by subsection A and the Board's guidelines for student searches required by
74 § 22.1-279.7.

75 G. The Board of Education shall establish standards to ensure compliance with the federal Improving
76 America's Schools Act of 1994 (Part F-Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994), as amended, in accordance with
77 § 22.1-277.07.

78 This subsection shall not be construed to diminish the authority of the Board of Education or to
79 diminish the Governor's authority to coordinate and provide policy direction on official communications
80 between the Commonwealth and the United States government.

81 H. Each school board shall include in its code of student conduct a prohibition on possessing any
82 tobacco product or nicotine vapor product, as those terms are defined in § 18.2-371.2, on a school bus,
83 on school property, or at an on-site or off-site school-sponsored activity.

84 I. Any school board may include in its code of student conduct a dress or grooming code. Any dress
85 or grooming code included in a school board's code of student conduct or otherwise adopted by a school
86 board shall (i) permit any student to wear any religiously and ethnically specific or significant head
87 covering or hairstyle, including hijabs, yarmulkes, headwraps, braids, locs, and cornrows; (ii) maintain
88 gender neutrality by subjecting any student to the same set of rules and standards regardless of gender;
89 (iii) not have a disparate impact on students of a particular gender; (iv) be clear, specific, and objective
90 in defining terms, if used; (v) prohibit any school board employee from enforcing the dress or grooming
91 code by direct physical contact with a student or a student's attire; and (vi) prohibit any school board
92 employee from requiring a student to undress in front of any other individual, including the enforcing
93 school board employee, to comply with the dress or grooming code.