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HOUSE BILL NO. 224

Offered January 10, 2024

Prefiled January 4, 2024

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 22.1-207 and 22.1-298.6 of the Code of Virginia, relating to public schools; mental health awareness training and instruction; requirements.

Patrons—Henson, Askew, Bennett-Parker, Clark, Cohen, Convirs-Fowler, Cousins, Hope, Maldonado, Martinez, Price, Shin, Tran and Willett; Senators: Salim and Bagby

Referred to Committee on Education

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 22.1-207 and 22.1-298.6 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 22.1-207. Physical and health education.

Physical and health education shall be emphasized throughout the public school curriculum by lessons, drills, and physical exercises, and all pupils in the public elementary, middle, and high schools shall receive as part of the educational program such health instruction and physical training as shall be prescribed by the Board of Education and approved by the State Board of Health. Such health instruction shall incorporate standards that recognize the multiple dimensions of health by including mental health and the relationship of physical and mental health so as to enhance student understanding, attitudes, and behavior that promote health, well-being, and human dignity. Such health instruction may include an age-appropriate program of instruction on the safe use of and risks of abuse of prescription drugs that is consistent with curriculum guidelines developed by the Board and approved by the State Board of Health. *Such health instruction shall include, at such grade levels as the Board deems appropriate, an age-appropriate program of instruction on suicide prevention and awareness, consistent with curriculum guidelines developed by the Board and approved by the State Board of Health, that shall include instruction on (i) the importance of safe and healthy choices in relation to mental health wellness, (ii) healthy coping strategies focused on building resiliency, and (iii) seeking help when a student is or knows of someone who is experiencing thoughts or ideations of suicide or self-harm, including strategies for seeking help and encouraging friends to seek help if they need it, and information on how to engage school resources.*

§ 22.1-298.6. Mental health awareness training.

A. Each school board shall adopt and implement policies that require each teacher and other relevant personnel, as determined by the school board, employed on a full-time basis, to complete a mental health awareness training or similar program at least once. *Any such mental health awareness training or similar program shall address the needs of youth populations that are at a high risk of experiencing mental health challenges and disorders, including youth who (i) are bereaved by suicide; (ii) have mental or physical disabilities or chronic health conditions, including substance use disorders; (iii) are experiencing homelessness or housing instability; (iv) are in foster care or other situations that may result in instability in a youth's custodial or living situation; or (v) identify as LGBTQ+.*

B. Each school board shall provide required personnel the training required by subsection A and may contract with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, a community services board, a behavioral health authority, a nonprofit organization, or other certified trainer as defined in § 37.2-312.2 to provide such training. Such training may be provided via an online module.

2. That the Board of Education shall develop and the State Board of Health shall approve curriculum guidelines for a program of instruction on suicide prevention and awareness in accordance with the provisions of § 22.1-207 of the Code of Virginia, as amended by this act.

INTRODUCED

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