

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 1999 SESSION

CHAPTER 425

An Act to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 22.1-272.1, relating to suicide prevention in public schools.

[S 1250]

Approved March 25, 1999

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 22.1-272.1 as follows:

§ 22.1-272.1. Responsibility to contact parent of student at imminent risk of suicide; notice to be given to social services if parental abuse or neglect; Board of Education, in cooperation with the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services and the Department of Health, to develop guidelines for parental contact.

A. Any person licensed as administrative or instructional personnel by the Board of Education and employed by a local school board who, in the scope of his employment, has reason to believe, as a result of direct communication from a student, that such student is at imminent risk of suicide, shall, as soon as practicable, contact at least one of such student's parents to ask whether such parent is aware of the student's mental state and whether the parent wishes to obtain or has already obtained counseling for such student. Such contact shall be made in accordance with the provisions of the guidelines required by subsection C.

B. If the student has indicated that the reason for being at imminent risk of suicide relates to parental abuse or neglect, this contact shall not be made with the parent. Instead, the person shall, as soon as practicable, notify the local department of social services of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or the state Department of Social Services' toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline, as required by § 63.1-248.3. When giving this notice to the local or state department, the person shall stress the need to take immediate action to protect the child from harm.

C. The Board of Education, in cooperation with the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services and the Department of Health, shall develop guidelines for making the contact required by subsection A. These guidelines shall include, but need not be limited to, (i) criteria to assess the suicide risks of students, (ii) characteristics to identify potentially suicidal students, (iii) appropriate responses to students expressing suicidal intentions, (iv) available and appropriate community services for students expressing suicidal intentions, (v) suicide prevention strategies which may be implemented by local schools for students expressing suicidal intentions, (vi) criteria for notification of and discussions with parents of students expressing suicidal intentions, (vii) criteria for as-soon-as-practicable contact with the parents, (viii) appropriate sensitivity to religious beliefs, and (ix) legal requirements and criteria for notification of public service agencies, including, but not limited to, the local or state social services and mental health agencies. These guidelines may include case studies and problem-solving exercises and may be designed as materials for in-service training programs for licensed administrative and instructional personnel.

2. That the Board of Education, in cooperation with the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services and the Department of Health, shall develop, publish and distribute the guidelines required by § 22.1-272.1 to the local school divisions by October 1, 1999.

3. That, notwithstanding the effective date of this act, no person shall be required to comply with the parental contact requirements set forth in § 22.1-272.1 until the guidelines of the Board of Education are developed, published, and distributed to the local school divisions.