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SENATE BILL NO. 818

Offered January 11, 2023

Prefiled December 20, 2022

A *BILL to amend and reenact § 22.1-207 of the Code of Virginia, relating to public elementary and secondary schools; programs of instruction; mental health education; curriculum guidelines; instruction required.*

Patrons—Spruill, Deeds and Locke; Delegates: Glass, Herring and Kory

Referred to Committee on Education and Health

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

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

§ 22.1-207. Physical and health education.

A. 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 *at each grade level an additional age-appropriate program or course of instruction on mental health and the relationship of physical and mental health* so as to enhance student understanding, awareness, attitudes, and behavior that promote *mental health, well-being, and human dignity.*

B. *The Board shall develop and submit to the State Board of Health for approval mental health curriculum guidelines for an age-appropriate, sequential mental health curriculum for each grade level, kindergarten through grade 12. In developing such mental health curriculum guidelines, the Board may consult with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services or other mental health experts. Such mental health curriculum guidelines shall include instruction on the following topics:*

- 1. Understanding general themes of mental health and wellness;*
- 2. Recognizing signs and symptoms of common mental health challenges;*
- 3. Promoting mental health wellness and healthy strategies for coping with stress and negative feelings;*
- 4. Seeking assistance from an adult or mental health professional, including information on services offered within the school or the local school division;*
- 5. Promoting awareness of the prevalence of mental health challenges and the importance of overcoming common stigmas surrounding such mental health challenges;*
- 6. Understanding the importance of mental health to the student's overall well-being, including physical health and academic success; and*

Such health instruction may include an 7. Understanding age-appropriate program of instruction at such grade levels as the Board deems appropriate on the connection between mental health and substance use disorders and 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.

C. *Each local school board shall adopt and implement policies requiring age-appropriate, sequential mental health instruction be provided at each public school once at each grade level, kindergarten through grade 12. Such policies shall require any mental health instruction offered to be consistent with the mental health curriculum guidelines for the applicable grade level developed by the Board pursuant to subsection B.*

D. *The Board shall not be required to evaluate student achievement concerning the mental health curriculum guidelines or instruction in the Standards of Learning assessments required by § 22.1-253.13:3.*

2. That the Board of Education shall review and update the health Standards of Learning for students in each grade level, kindergarten through grade 12, to include instruction on the mental health curriculum guidelines developed pursuant to § 22.1-207 of the Code of Virginia, as amended by this act, by the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year.

INTRODUCED

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