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SENATE BILL NO. 586

Offered January 10, 2024

Prefiled January 10, 2024

A *BILL to amend and reenact §§ 22.1-276.01, 22.1-277, and 22.1-279.6 of the Code of Virginia, relating to public elementary and secondary schools; student discipline; evidence-based restorative disciplinary practices.*

 Patron—Pekarsky

Referred to Committee on Education and Health

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 22.1-276.01, 22.1-277, and 22.1-279.6 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 22.1-276.01. Definitions.

A. For the purposes of this article, unless the context requires a different meaning:

"Alternative education program" includes night school, adult education, or any other education program designed to offer instruction to students for whom the regular program of instruction may be inappropriate.

"Bullying" means any aggressive and unwanted behavior that is intended to harm, intimidate, or humiliate the victim; involves a real or perceived power imbalance between the aggressor or aggressors and victim; and is repeated over time or causes severe emotional trauma. "Bullying" includes cyber bullying. "Bullying" does not include ordinary teasing, horseplay, argument, or peer conflict.

"Disruptive behavior" means a violation of school board regulations governing student conduct that interrupts or obstructs the learning environment.

"Dress or grooming code" means any practice, policy, or portion of a code of student conduct adopted by a school board that governs or restricts the attire, appearance, or grooming, including hairstyle, of any enrolled student.

"Exclusion" means a Virginia school board's denial of school admission to a student who has been expelled or has been placed on a long-term suspension of more than 30 calendar days by another school board or a private school, either in Virginia or another state, or for whom admission has been withdrawn by a private school in Virginia or another state.

"Expulsion" means any disciplinary action imposed by a school board or a committee thereof, as provided in school board policy, whereby a student is not permitted to attend school within the school division and is ineligible for readmission for 365 calendar days after the date of the expulsion.

"Long-term suspension" means any disciplinary action whereby a student is not permitted to attend school for 11 to 45 school days.

"Restorative disciplinary practice" includes community conferencing, community service, mentoring, a peer jury, peer mediation, positive behavioral interventions and supports, a restorative circle, and the Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports.

"Short-term suspension" means any disciplinary action whereby a student is not permitted to attend school for a period not to exceed 10 school days.

B. For the purposes of §§ 22.1-277.04, 22.1-277.05, 22.1-277.2, and 22.1-277.2:1, "superintendent's designee" means a (i) trained hearing officer or (ii) professional employee within the administrative offices of the school division who reports directly to the division superintendent and who is not a school-based instructional or administrative employee.

§ 22.1-277. Suspensions and expulsions of students generally.

A. Students may be suspended or expelled from attendance at school for sufficient cause; however, in no cases may sufficient cause for suspensions include only instances of truancy.

B. Except as provided in subsection C or § 22.1-277.07 or 22.1-277.08, no student ~~in~~:

1. In preschool through grade three shall be suspended for more than three school days or expelled from attendance at school, unless (i) the offense involves physical harm or credible threat of physical harm to others or (ii) the local school board or the division superintendent or his designee finds that aggravating circumstances exist, as defined by the Department; or

2. Shall be suspended, expelled, or excluded from attendance at school without consideration of first implementing at least one evidence-based restorative disciplinary practice.

C. Any student for whom the division superintendent of the school division in which such student is enrolled has received a report pursuant to § 16.1-305.1 of an adjudication of delinquency or a conviction for an offense listed in subsection G of § 16.1-260 may be suspended or expelled from school

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59 attendance pursuant to this article.

60 D. The authority provided in § 22.1-276.2 for teachers to remove students from their classes in
61 certain instances of disruptive behavior shall not be interpreted to affect the operation of § 22.1-277.04,
62 22.1-277.05, or 22.1-277.06.

63 E. Notwithstanding the provisions of § 22.1-277.08, no school board shall be required to suspend or
64 expel any student who holds a valid written certification for the use of cannabis oil issued by a
65 practitioner in accordance with § 4.1-1601 for the possession or use of such oil in accordance with the
66 student's individualized health plan and in compliance with a policy adopted by the school board.

67 **§ 22.1-279.6. Board of Education guidelines and model policies for codes of student conduct;**
68 **school board regulations.**

69 A. The Board of Education shall establish guidelines and develop model policies for codes of student
70 conduct to aid local school boards in the implementation of such policies. The guidelines and model
71 policies shall include (i) criteria for the removal of a student from a class, the use of suspension,
72 expulsion, and exclusion as disciplinary measures, the grounds for suspension and expulsion and
73 exclusion, and the procedures to be followed in such cases, including proceedings for such suspension,
74 expulsion, and exclusion decisions and all applicable appeals processes; (ii) standards, consistent with
75 state, federal and case laws, for school board policies on alcohol and drugs, gang-related activity,
76 hazing, vandalism, trespassing, threats, search and seizure, disciplining of students with disabilities,
77 intentional injury of others, self-defense, bullying, the use of electronic means for purposes of bullying,
78 harassment, and intimidation, and dissemination of such policies to students, their parents, and school
79 personnel; (iii) standards for in-service training of school personnel in and examples of the appropriate
80 management of student conduct and student offenses in violation of school board policies; (iv) standards
81 for dress or grooming codes; and (v) standards for reducing bias and harassment in the enforcement of
82 any code of student conduct.

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

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

91 B. School boards shall adopt and revise, as required by § 22.1-253.13:7 and in accordance with the
92 requirements of this section, regulations on codes of student conduct that are consistent with, but may be
93 more stringent than, the guidelines of the Board. School boards shall include in the regulations on codes
94 of student conduct procedures for suspension, expulsion, and exclusion decisions and shall biennially
95 review the model student conduct code to incorporate discipline options and alternatives, *including*
96 *evidence-based restorative disciplinary practices*, to preserve a safe, nondisruptive environment for
97 effective teaching and learning.

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

103 D. Each school board shall include in its code of student conduct policies and procedures that
104 include a prohibition against bullying. Such policies and procedures shall (i) be consistent with the
105 standards for school board policies on bullying and the use of electronic means for purposes of bullying
106 developed by the Board pursuant to subsection A and (ii) direct the principal or his designee to notify
107 the parent of any student involved in an alleged incident of bullying within 24 hours of learning of the
108 allegation of bullying.

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

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

116 F. Nothing in this section shall be construed to require any school board to adopt policies requiring
117 or encouraging any drug testing in schools. However, a school board may, in its discretion, require or
118 encourage drug testing in accordance with the Board of Education's guidelines and model student
119 conduct policies required by subsection A and the Board's guidelines for student searches required by
120 § 22.1-279.7.

121 G. The Board of Education shall establish standards to ensure compliance with the federal Improving
122 America's Schools Act of 1994 (Part F-Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994), as amended, in accordance with
123 § 22.1-277.07.

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

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

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