

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6243

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As of February 3, 2016

**Title:** An act relating to a training program for educators and parents to develop students' social and emotional skills to help prevent youth suicide.

**Brief Description:** Concerning a training program for educators and parents to develop students' social and emotional skills to help prevent youth suicide.

**Sponsors:** Senators Litzow, Fain, McAuliffe, Dammeier, Rivers, O'Ban, Bailey, Hill, Warnick, Becker, Hewitt, Keiser, Carlyle, Darneille, Rolfes, Conway and Mullet.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/01/16.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

**Staff:** Ailey Kato (786-7434)

**Background:** Educational Service Districts (ESDs) are regional agencies intended to provide cooperative and informational services to local school districts and assist the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education. Washington has nine ESDs. ESDs receive funding from the state, federal and private grants, service fees, agency contracts, and cooperatives.

Current law requires ESDs to develop and maintain the capacity to offer training for educators and other school district staff on youth suicide screening and referral, and on recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students, including but not limited to indicators of possible substance abuse, violence, and youth suicide. An ESD may demonstrate capacity by employing staff with sufficient expertise to offer the training or by contracting with individuals or organizations to offer the training. Training may be offered on a fee-for-service basis, or at no cost to school districts or educators if funds are appropriated specifically for this purpose or made available through grants or other sources.

Individuals certified by the Professional Educator Standards Board as a school nurse, school social worker, school psychologist, or school counselor must complete a training program on youth suicide screening and referral as a condition of certification. The training program must be at least three hours in length.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

Forefront at the University of Washington (UW) is a collaboration of the UW School of Social Work, UW Communication, the UW School of Nursing, and the UW College of Education. Its mission is to advance innovative approaches to suicide prevention through policy change, professional training, campus and school-based interventions, media outreach, support for persons affected by suicide, and program evaluation.

**Summary of Bill:** The ESDs must work with Forefront to develop a two-day youth suicide prevention training program for middle and high school administrators, teachers, counselors, psychologists, social workers, and parents or guardians. The training program must address the following:

- developmentally appropriate, evidence-based curriculum and programs;
- parent and peer education;
- strategies for creating school environments with a focus on social and emotional needs; and
- basic training for teachers and students in how to recognize and support a student who may be struggling.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Mental health issues can impact students of any background. There are far too many students in middle and high school having suicidal thoughts or attempting suicide. Suicide is a public health crisis that connects all people, and everyone has a role to play in suicide prevention. Middle and high schools should play a big role in suicide prevention. School staff interact with students and can see when students are at risk of suicide. Forefront's training gives teachers confidence, skills, and concrete tools to respond to youth contemplating suicide. It is difficult for students to ask for help when they are depressed. Students often seek advice from classmates, but they would be better helped by well-equipped adults. Forefront's model asks schools to send a team of people to be trained, not just school counselors, which expands the support network. Parents can become well-equipped with one hour of training. The need and desire for training is palpable. Programs addressing mental health should be part of a coordinated system. This bill builds off of the work of the Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup. This bill continues work started in previous legislation requiring certain school staff to be trained and schools to have response plans in place. This bill builds capacity within the ESDs to support schools who want to take a proactive approach to preventing suicide. Onsite technical assistance at the school level is a critical part of the training in this bill.

OTHER: The two-day training program has a lot of associated costs for districts and schools. A training two days in length may not be necessary. The bill should be amended to provide resources to ESDs and school districts.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Jolene McCaw, citizen; Tammy Bahr, citizen; Sarah Butcher, Washington State PTA; Lou Ella McGaughey, teacher and counselor; Michael Edmonson, student; Geoffrey Patterson, The Northwest School and Forefront; Matt Taylor, Forefront; Kelly Moore, Director of Student Support Services Eastside Preparatory School; Lauren Davis, Forefront; Alexandra Szablya, Forefront.

OTHER: Jennifer Barron, Forefront; Jerry Bender, Association of Washington School Principal.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.