
Education Committee

HB 2496

Brief Description: Strengthening school district plans for recognition, screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students.

Sponsors: Representatives Santos, Harris, Senn, Kagi, Wylie, Slatter and Pollet; by request of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop an online one-hour training module for school staff on the recognition, screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students.
- Requires each educational service district to identify a regional mental health coordinator and prescribes duties for that position.

Hearing Date: 1/16/18

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

In addition to its constitutional charge of supervising all matter pertaining to public schools, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and its office has numerous and broad responsibilities prescribed in statute related to Washington's 295 school districts and 1.1 million public school students.

According to the Washington State Department of Health (DOH), suicide is the second leading cause of death for Washington youth between the ages of 10 and 24. Information from the DOH also indicates that, on average, each week in Washington two youths commit suicide and 17 youths are hospitalized because of suicide attempts.

Legislation adopted in 2014 (chapter 103, Laws of 2014, enacted as Substitute Senate Bill 6431) directed the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to work with state agency

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and community partners to assist schools in implementing youth suicide prevention activities.

Examples of these prevention activities include:

- training for school employees, parents, community members, and students in recognizing and responding to the signs of suicide;
- partnering with local coalitions of community members interested in preventing youth suicide; and
- responding to communities determined to be in crisis after a suicide or attempted suicide to prevent further instances of suicide.

Additionally, individuals certified by the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) as a school nurse, school social worker, school psychologist, or school counselor must complete a training program of at least three-hours in duration on youth suicide screening and referral as a condition of certification. The standards for the minimum content of the training program are adopted by the PESB in consultation with the OSPI and the DOH.

At the regional level, each of Washington's nine educational service districts (ESD) is required 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.

Regarding local obligations, school districts must adopt a plan for the recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students, including indicators of possible substance abuse, violence, youth suicide, and sexual abuse. This plan must be provided to all district staff on an annual basis, and must satisfy numerous minimum content requirements, including addressing:

- identification of training opportunities in recognition, screening, and referral that may be available for staff;
- how staff should respond to suspicions, concerns, or warning signs of emotional or behavioral distress in students;
- protocols and procedures for communication with parents; and
- how the district will provide support to students and staff after an incident violence, youth suicide, or allegations of sexual abuse.

Summary of Bill:

Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the OSPI must develop and make available an online a one-hour training module for school staff on recognition, screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students to assist school districts in meeting the staff training component in locally adopted plans for the recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students.

The one-hour online training module does not replace the requirement for school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses to complete an approved three-hour suicide prevention training program, and school staff may complete the three-hour suicide prevention program training in lieu of the one-hour online module.

Staff training provisions in requirements governing school district plans for the recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students (district plans) are

modified to reference the OSPI's one-hour online training module in materials that identify training opportunities that may be available to staff.

Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, each ESD must identify a regional mental health coordinator. The mental health coordinators is responsible for:

- coordinating the ESD's training obligations for youth suicide screening and referral, and for the recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students;
- providing technical assistance and training to school districts to complete, maintain, and update their district plans;
- tracking school districts' completion of the minimum requirements for district plans; and
- reporting to the SPI by June 30 of each year.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.