

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1363

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to policies and resources to address secondary traumatic stress in the K-12 workforce.

Brief Description: Addressing secondary trauma in the K-12 workforce.

Sponsors: Representatives Ortiz-Self, Callan, Davis, Ramos, Simmons, Berg, Morgan, Bergquist, Harris-Talley and Pollet.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/2/21, 2/9/21 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to publish on its website links to resources, self-assessments, and best practices for educators and local policymakers to prevent and address secondary traumatic stress in the workforce.
- Directs the Washington State School Directors' Association to develop or revise, and periodically update, a model policy and procedure to prevent and address secondary traumatic stress in the workforce that includes specified elements, for example, establishing a district-wide workforce mental health committee.
- Requires school districts to adopt, by the beginning of the 2021-22 school year, policies and procedures related to secondary traumatic stress that incorporate specified elements.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Berg, Bergquist, Callan, Ortiz-Self and Stonier.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin and Steele.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Ybarra, Ranking Minority Member; McEntire and Rude.

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

Secondary Traumatic Stress. The United States Department of Health and Human Services defines secondary traumatic stress disorder, or compassion fatigue, as a natural, but disruptive by-product of working with people who have been traumatized. Evidence of secondary traumatic stress can be difficult to recognize in oneself or even in others. Symptoms often include a combination of cognitive, behavioral, emotional, spiritual, and physical features, such as feelings of isolation, anxiety, dissociation, physical ailments, and sleep disturbances. Secondary traumatic stress is preventable and treatable, however, if unaddressed, the symptoms can result in problems with mental and physical health, strained personal relationships, and poor work performance.

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. In addition to its constitutional charge of supervising all matters pertaining to public schools, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and its office has numerous and broad responsibilities prescribed in statute. Among these duties are the development and publication of best practices and other resources on a variety of topics.

Washington State School Directors' Association. Established by statute, the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) is the state agency that provides advice and assistance to local school boards. The WSSDA is charged with coordinating policymaking, control, and management of the state's school districts. Among other actions, the WSSDA develops model policies and procedures, often in response to legislative directives, that school districts may adopt.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Resources. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must publish on its website links to resources, self-assessments, and best practices for educators and local policymakers to prevent and address secondary traumatic stress in the workforce. The OSPI must collaborate with the WSSDA, the educational service districts, and the School

Employees' Benefits Board and provide links to any resources on secondary traumatic stress available through these organizations.

Model Policy and Procedure. The WSSDA must develop or revise, and periodically update, a model policy and procedure to prevent and address secondary traumatic stress in the workforce. The model policy and procedure must include the following elements: (1) a commitment to support mental health in the workplace; (2) promotion of a positive workplace climate with a focus on diversity and inclusion; (3) establishment of a district-wide workforce mental health committee with specified functions, for example sharing resources and reporting to the school board once per year; (4) regular assessment of policy implementation; and (5) provision of appropriate resources and training to schools and staff for continuous improvement. The model policy and procedure must be posted publicly on the WSSDA website by August 1, 2021. Updates to the model policy and procedure must be posted publicly within a reasonable time of development.

School District Policies and Procedures. By the beginning of the 2021-22 school year, each school district must adopt, or amend if necessary, policies and procedures that, at a minimum, incorporate all the elements required for the model secondary traumatic stress policy and procedure. School districts must periodically review their policies and procedures for consistency with updated versions of the model policy and procedure.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill makes the following changes to the original bill: (1) permits the WSSDA to revise, rather than only develop, a model policy and procedure to prevent and address secondary traumatic stress in the workforce; and (2) requires the WSSDA to periodically update the policy and procedure.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) When someone experiences trauma, it does not just go away, it gets compounded by every other traumatic event that the person experiences themselves or secondhand. Teachers and other school staff hear, and carry with them, the stories of their students—every grief, grievance, and hurt. This is called secondary traumatic stress.

Preventing and responding to educator secondary trauma is vitally important. Dealing daily

with the effects of trauma on students and staff, in addition to their own experiences over the past year, can significantly impact the effectiveness of the workforce. There is increased expectation for schools to be comprehensive social service agencies as well as educational institutions.

Educators are experiencing high rates of mental health issues from students and are not adequately prepared for the effect this has on their own mental health. Teachers and other school staff are often the first to recognize the mental and behavioral health needs of their students. If staff do not take care of themselves first, they will not be able to assist others.

Some teachers are terrified to return to the classroom. This workforce is very important and on the road to burnout as more and more expectations are put on them. Teachers, administrators, and paraeducators need to be supported or they will leave the profession. There is already a shortage.

Learning about traumatic experiences of students or interactions with threatening parents can be vicarious triggers for the school staff who experienced trauma growing up. Staff are also concerned about the constant reduction in the workforce due to budget shortfalls. Some school staff are charged with reaching out to students who have been flagged because they looked up or discussed suicide. If these staff are unable to contact the students, even via their emergency contact numbers, the staff will be distressed.

This bill will help every educator from teachers to bus drivers to superintendents. The bill will allow more effective support of staff with awareness and access to resources. The OSPI is the logical agency to host the self-assessment and other resources. If school districts have a WSSDA model to adopt, it will help their staff and students because the environment will change in the school buildings.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Ortiz-Self, prime sponsor; Camille Goldy, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Avanti Bergquist, Washington State School Directors' Association; Joni Sherman and Jeff Causey, Washington School Counselors Association; and Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.