

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
87R6909 JES-D

S.B. 776
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Education
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Throughout Texas, many organizations, including the Special Olympics, provide students with special needs the opportunity to participate in sports activities with their peers. However, these events are generally limited to a few occurrences each year, and do not provide the type of long-term opportunities for building athletic skills, teamwork, and other character traits that traditional interscholastic sports programs do. Without such a program, special education students will miss many of the opportunities afforded to other student athletes with whom they attend school.

S.B. 776 provides equal opportunity for students with special needs to participate in sports seasons by directing the University Interscholastic League (UIL) to develop an inclusive sports program for students with disabilities. This program will be modeled off of existing UIL sports programs, and resemble them to the extent feasible while still maintaining its mission of serving students with special needs. By establishing an adaptive sports program similar to the program already in place, S.B. 776 will provide equal opportunity for students with special needs to enjoy all the benefits of athletic competition.

As proposed, S.B. 776 amends current law relating to the creation of an adaptive sports program by the University Interscholastic League to provide students with disabilities access to team sports.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the University Interscholastic League in SECTION 2 (Section 33.097, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Provides that this Act may be cited as Zariah's Law.

SECTION 2. Amends Subchapter D, Chapter 33, Education Code, by adding Section 33.097, as follows:

Sec. 33.097. ADAPTIVE SPORTS PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. (a) Requires the University Interscholastic League (UIL) to ensure students with disabilities have an opportunity to participate in team athletic activities by establishing an adaptive sports program. Requires UIL, in establishing the adaptive sports program, to consider and incorporate as appropriate federal guidance regarding providing access to extracurricular athletics for students with disabilities, guidance available from nationally recognized organizations that provide or promote adaptive athletics, information regarding adaptive sports programs that have been successfully implemented in other states or by nonprofit organizations, and input from school districts and the Texas Education Agency.

(b) Requires UIL, in establishing the adaptive sports program, to the greatest extent possible, to require:

(1) students who participate in the program to be subject to the same rules and requirements as students who participate in other athletic programs offered by UIL, including:

(A) grade and disciplinary requirements under Section 33.081(c) (relating to suspensions for grades lower than the equivalent of 70 on a scale of 100); and

(B) requirements related to student safety in athletic activities under Chapter 33 (Service Programs and Extracurricular Activities) and Chapter 38 (Health and Safety); and

(2) team sports provided through the program to be organized similarly to other athletic programs offered by UIL, including with respect to team practices, seasonal play, and local and statewide competitions.

(c) Authorizes UIL, in addition to using funds appropriated for the purpose, to seek and accept gifts, grants, or donations of money from public and private sources for the purpose of establishing or expanding the adaptive sports program.

(d) Requires UIL to adopt rules as necessary to establish, maintain, and expand the adaptive sports program. Requires that the rules require that team sports offered through the program be available to students at public middle schools, junior high schools, and high schools in the state; establish eligibility requirements for participation in each team sport offered through the program; and identify best practices for school districts to incorporate adaptive sports.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2021.