

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
87R5041 BDP-D

S.B. 980
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Education
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Prior to COVID-19, suicide was the second leading cause of death for children ages 10-14 in the United States and in Texas. COVID-19 isolation and disruptions to students have exacerbated concerns about proactively addressing mental health among students. To mitigate unnecessary and progressive displays of mental health struggles leading to suicide, it is imperative that elementary schools are equipped to address mental health concerns in students in their earliest stages of development.

S.B. 980 seeks to create an elective program that provides elementary schools with tailored assistance in accessing public and private mental health resources, recommendations for best practices, and assistance with implementing best practices on-campus. The program would be specifically designed to prevent suicide among elementary school students.

As proposed, S.B. 980 amends current law relating to a suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention program for certain public elementary school campuses.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the commissioner of education in SECTION 1 (Section 38.3515, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter G, Chapter 38, Education Code, by adding Section 38.3515, as follows:

Sec. 38.3515. SUICIDE PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, AND POSTVENTION PROGRAM. (a) Defines "postvention."

(b) Requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA), to the extent funds are appropriated to TEA for that purpose, to establish a suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention program for optional implementation at an elementary school campus of a school district described by Subsection (c).

(c) Authorizes a school district to implement the program established under this section at a campus of the district if the district or campus has:

(1) experienced suicide loss among elementary school students enrolled in the district; or

(2) a reasonable concern regarding the risk of suicide among elementary school students enrolled in the district.

(d) Authorizes TEA to prioritize school districts described by Subsection (c)(1).

(e) Requires TEA, for each elementary school campus at which the program is implemented, to:

(1) conduct:

(A) an eligibility assessment of whether a district that implements the program meets the criteria provided under Subsection (c); and

(B) a needs-based assessment to identify individual needs of each campus in the program;

(2) provide, in coordination with the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), comprehensive Suicide Safer Early Intervention and Prevention systems for each campus in the program;

(3) provide recommendations for research-based best practices for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention policies;

(4) develop a method for eligible districts to request the assistance of public and private community-based mental health resources;

(5) ensure that informational materials distributed by an eligible district are age-appropriate and evidence-based; and

(6) at the request of an eligible district, provide support to the campus in the program, including by:

(A) identifying the individual needs of the campus through the assessment conducted under Subdivision (1)(B);

(B) implementing research-based best practices for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention; and

(C) working with mental health professionals, school counselors, teachers, nurses, administrators, and other staff, as well as law enforcement officers and social workers who regularly interact with students, to prevent suicide among students enrolled at the campus.

(f) Requires each school district that implements the program under this section to provide written notice to a parent or guardian of each student enrolled at a campus in the program. Sets forth certain information required to be included in the written notice.

(g) Requires TEA, in consultation with HHSC, in developing the program under this section, to make the considerations described by Section 38.351(f) (relating to certain considerations while developing best practice-based programs).

(h) Requires a district that implements the program, in addition to the policies and procedures developed by a school district under Section 38.351(i) (relating to policies and procedures for certain mental health promotion and intervention areas), to develop practices and procedures concerning suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention that:

(1) include a procedure for providing notice to a parent or guardian of a student regarding a recommendation for early mental health intervention regarding the student within a reasonable amount of time after the identification of early warning signs of risk for suicide, including:

(A) declining academic performance;

(B) depression;

- (C) anxiety;
- (D) isolation;
- (E) unexplained changes in sleep or eating habits; and
- (F) destructive behavior toward self and others;

(2) include a procedure for providing notice of a student identified as at risk of attempting suicide, including a student who is or may be the victim of or who engages in bullying, to a parent or guardian of the student within a reasonable amount of time after the identification of early warning signs, including the signs listed in Subdivision (1);

(3) designate at least one person to act as a liaison officer in the district for the purposes of identifying students in need of suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention;

(4) provide information concerning available counseling alternatives to parents and guardians of district students to consider when a student is identified as possibly in need of suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention; and

(5) include procedures to support the return of a student to regular school attendance following hospitalization or residential treatment for a mental health condition or substance abuse.

(i) Requires that the practices and procedures developed under Subsection (h) be included in the annual student handbook and the district improvement plan under Section 11.252 (District-Level Planning and Decision-Making).

(j) Provides that TEA is authorized to accept donations for purposes of this section from sources without a conflict of interest and is prohibited from accepting donations for purposes of this section from an anonymous source.

(k) Provides that nothing in this section is intended to interfere with the rights of parents or guardians and the decision-making regarding the best interest of the child. Provides that practices and procedures developed in accordance with this section are intended to notify a parent or guardian of a need for suicide prevention, intervention, or postvention so that a parent or guardian may take appropriate action.

(l) Provides that nothing in this section authorizes a school district employee to recommend prescription medication for a student or to interfere with medical decisions to be made by the student's parent or guardian.

(m) Requires the commissioner of education to adopt rules to administer this section.

(n) Provides that this section expires September 1, 2025.

SECTION 2. Provides that this Act applies beginning with the 2021-2022 school year.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2021.