

HCS HB 1583 -- BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

SPONSOR: Allen

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with Amendments" by the Standing Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education by a vote of 9 to 4. Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Select Committee on Education by a vote of 10 to 0.

This bill modifies provisions relating to student safety.

SCHOOL DISTRICT ANTI-BULLYING POLICIES

This act modifies the requirements for school anti-bullying policies. The definition of "bullying" is modified to include intimidation, unwanted aggressive behavior, or harassment that substantially interferes with the educational performance, opportunities, or benefits of any student without exception, or that substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the school. Bullying by students is prohibited on school property, at school functions, or on school buses. Cyber-bullying is defined in the act. This act requires that anti-bullying policies treat all students equally. Each school district's anti-bullying policy must be included in the student handbook, as specified in the bill. Any school district may subject a student to discipline for cyber-bullying. The district will have jurisdiction to prohibit cyber-bullying that originates off the school's campus if it was reasonably foreseeable that the electronic communication would reach the school's campus or there is a sufficient nexus between the electronic communication and the school, as described in the act. A district may contact law enforcement and take other appropriate actions to protect students and clarify district expectations.

Each district must annually review its anti-bullying policy and revise as necessary. Each district must report the number of confirmed reported bullying incidents in the district and each school to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The department must post this information on its website but must not release any confidential information.

YOUTH SUICIDE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION (SECTION 170.047, RSMo)

This bill allows, beginning in the 2017-18 school year, any licensed educator to annually complete up to two hours of training or professional development in youth suicide awareness and prevention as part of the professional development hours required for State Board of Education certification.

The bill requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to develop guidelines suitable for this training.

By July 1, 2018, each district must adopt a policy, which must address strategies that can help identify students who are at possible risk of suicide.

MODEL POLICY (SECTION 170.048)

By July 1, 2017, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education must develop a model policy that districts may adopt. By July 1, 2021, and at least every three years after, DESE must request information and seek feedback from districts on their experience with the policy for youth suicide awareness and prevention and review this information.

This bill is similar to HB 458 (2015).

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the bill will be beneficial to all school children as bullying policies reduce occurrences of bullying to create a more cohesive environment for students.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Allen; Scott Kimble, Missouri Council Of School Administrators; Gifted Association Of Missouri; Missouri Children's Leadership Council; Missouri Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence; and AFT Missouri.

OPPOSERS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.