
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Benjamin Allen, Chair

2017 - 2018 Regular

Bill No: AB 2639 **Hearing Date:** June 27, 2018
Author: Berman
Version: June 18, 2018
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Jennifer Chase

Subject: Pupil suicide prevention policies: reviews:updates.

SUMMARY

This bill requires schools that serve students in grades 7 through 12 to review and, if necessary, update their policy on pupil suicide prevention at least every 5 years.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Requires that the governing board or body of a local educational agencies (LEA), defined as a county offices of education (COE), school district, the state special schools, or charter schools, which serve students in grades 7 to 12 to adopt, before the beginning of the 2017–18 school year, a policy on student suicide prevention for students in those grades. (Education Code § 215)
- 2) Requires the policy to specifically address the needs of high-risk groups, including, but not limited to the following:
 - a) Youth bereaved by suicide.
 - b) Youth with disabilities, mental illness or substance abuse disorders.
 - c) Youth experiencing homelessness or in out-of-home settings, such as foster care.
 - d) Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth. (EC § 215)
- 3) Requires that the materials approved by the LEA for training include how to identify appropriate mental health services and when and how to refer youth and their families to those services. (EC § 215)

ANALYSIS

This bill requires the governing board or body of an LEA that serves in grades 7 through 12 to review its policy on pupil suicide prevention every five years and, if necessary, update the policy. This bill also permits LEAs to update the policy more frequently than every five years.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) **Need for the bill.** According to the author, “ The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that suicide among adolescents and young adults is on the rise, and is now the second leading cause of death among youth and young adults 10 to 24 years of age. As children and teens spend a significant amount of their young lives in school, the personnel who interact with them on a daily basis are in a prime position to recognize the warning signs of suicide and make the appropriate referrals for help. In a national survey conducted by the Jason Foundation, pupils reported that the number one person they would turn to for helping a friend who might be suicidal was a teacher.”

“It is imperative that when a young person comes to school staff for help, that person has the knowledge, tools, and resources to respond. However, research on teacher and school staff preparedness has identified a lack of experience, training, and confidence to appropriately address mental health issues and suicide ideation among pupils. Further, the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, authored by the United States Surgeon General and the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, states that teachers and school counselors, among others who are on the front lines of suicide prevention, should be trained on suicide prevention.”

“In order to ensure that adopted policies on pupil suicide prevention remain relevant and address youth suicide prevention, legislation is needed to specify that local educational agencies should review its policy on pupil suicide prevention and, if necessary, update its policy. This bill builds upon the existing requirement for local educational agencies to adopt a policy on pupil suicide prevention and ensures that those policies remain relevant and continue to address youth suicide prevention.”

- 2) **Youth suicide.** Suicide is considered a major, preventable public health problem and according to the Centers on Disease Control (CDC) is the second leading cause of death among teens 15-19 nationwide. A national study conducted by the Jason Foundation found that the number one person a student would contact to help a friend who might be suicidal was a teacher. When a young person comes to a teacher for help, it is vital that he or she has the knowledge, skills, and resources to respond appropriately. Additionally, according to the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health, which compiles and reports data from state agency sources:

- In 2013-15, nearly 20 percent of California public school students in grades 9, 11, and 26 percent of nontraditional students reported seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.
- Reported suicidal ideation is higher among female students and among students from multiracial, American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander backgrounds.
- The proportion of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students who seriously considered attempting suicide was nearly 50 percent, more than three times higher than the estimate for their straight peers (16 percent).

- In 2015, 495 California youth ages 5-24 were known to have committed suicide.
 - The state's youth suicide rate in 2013-15 was 7.9 per 100,000 youth ages 15-24, slightly higher than previous years, but substantially lower than the national average of 11.7 per 100,000.
 - In 2015, males accounted for more than 75 percent of youth suicides in California (354 of 452). Statewide and nationally, many more male youth (ages 15-24) than female youth commit suicide.
 - In 2014, there were 3,575 hospitalizations for non-fatal self-inflicted injuries among children and youth ages 5-20 in California. While the statewide rate of self-inflicted injury hospitalizations has fluctuated over the past two decades, rates have risen in recent years, from a 22-year low of 34.3 per 100,000 in 2008 to 43.1 per 100,000 in 2014.
 - In 2014, 61 percent of hospitalizations for self-inflicted injuries in California involved youth ages 16-20.
- 3) **Fiscal impact.** The fiscal effect/impact is unknown since this bill differs substantially from the prior version that was analyzed by the Assembly Appropriations Committee.
- 4) **Prior Legislation.** AB 2246 (O'Donnell, Chapter 642, Statutes of 2016) required that local education agencies that serve students in grades 7-12 adopt a policy for student suicide prevention.

SUPPORT

Equality California (Co-Sponsor)
The Trevor Project (Co-Sponsor)
California School Boards Association
California State PTA
SacLegal

OPPOSITION

None received

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