

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY



PA 14-232—sHB 5564

Education Committee

Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

AN ACT CONCERNING THE REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF SAFE SCHOOL CLIMATE PLANS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND A STUDENT SAFETY HOTLINE FEASIBILITY STUDY

SUMMARY: This act requires the State Department of Education (SDE) to approve or reject a local or regional board of education's safe school climate plan within 30 days of receiving it and, in the event it is rejected, creates specific follow-up steps for both SDE and the board. Under the act, only boards that have not previously had plans approved must submit them.

It also (1) adds specific requirements to safe school climate surveys and (2) requires the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) to conduct a feasibility study for a student safety hotline.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§§ 2 & 3 — SAFE SCHOOL CLIMATE PLAN

By law, each board of education must submit a safe school climate plan to SDE. The plan must (1) address bullying in the school district, (2) permit parents and students to file complaints and require complaint investigations, (3) develop a prevention and intervention strategy, and (4) take numerous other steps related to bullying and bullying prevention.

Prior law required boards of education to approve the plan and submit it to SDE by January 1, 2012. The act instead requires boards that have not previously developed, submitted, and had plans approved by SDE to submit plans for approval by September 1, 2014.

The act requires SDE to review each such safe school climate plan for compliance with statutory requirements (see BACKGROUND). If SDE rejects the plan, it must provide the board of education with a notice that includes the reasons for rejection. SDE must act on the plan within 30 days.

If the plan is rejected, the local board must redevelop and resubmit it within 30 days after receipt of the rejection notice. SDE has 30 days to either approve or reject the resubmitted plan. If it rejects it, SDE must again provide a rejection notice and the board has 30 days to adopt the SDE-developed model safe school climate plan.

The act requires the board to make the plan available on the school district's and individual school's website 30 days after SDE approval, rather than 30 days after board approval.

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§ 4 — SCHOOL CLIMATE ASSESSMENT SURVEYS

By law, boards of education must use surveys to collect information on bullying prevention and intervention in school as part of their assessment of school climate. The act specifies that districts must (1) use a survey that contains uniform grade-level appropriate questions to collect student perspectives and opinions about their school climate and (2) allow students to anonymously complete and submit the assessments and surveys.

§1 — STUDENT SAFETY HOTLINE FEASIBILITY STUDY

The act requires DESPP to study the feasibility of establishing a student safety hotline and submit the study's results by January 1, 2015 to the Education Committee.

The study must include an analysis of:

1. the feasibility of establishing a student safety hotline to receive anonymous phone calls and text messages about the school safety concerns of K-12 students and provide assistance and referrals to the students,
2. the relevant referral areas and appropriate entities and agencies to receive the referrals,
3. student safety hotline operator training,
4. existing student safety hotlines in other states,
5. legal issues that might be associated with administering a student safety hotline, and
6. any other relevant topics or issues associated with such a hotline.

BACKGROUND

Safe School Plans

By law, school districts must develop safe school climate plans that include specific elements (CGS § 10-222d (b)).

Among other things, the plans must:

1. prohibit bullying, including cyberbullying, both in and outside of school;
2. establish certain deadlines for (a) filing reports of, investigating, and holding meetings with involved parents regarding, bullying incidents and (b) notifying parents of actions taken to prevent further incidents;
3. require any school employee who witnesses bullying or receives a report of bullying to notify either the school climate specialist or the principal;
4. require the specialist, rather than any school administrator, to investigate, or supervise an investigation of, the report; and
5. develop plans addressing what the school will do to protect a targeted student from further bullying.

OLR Tracking: JM:KM:PF:am