

SUBJECT: Expanding public school bullying and cyberbullying prevention policies

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 11 ayes — Dutton, Allen, Allison, K. Bell, Bernal, Buckley, Huberty, K. King, Meza, Talarico, VanDeaver

0 nays

2 absent — Lozano, M. González

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 29 — 30-1 (Birdwell), on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: No public hearing.

BACKGROUND: Education Code sec. 37.0832 governs bullying prevention policies and procedures. The board of trustees of each school district is required to adopt a policy, including any necessary procedures, concerning bullying and specifies certain requirements for such procedures.

Interested parties note that bullying and cyberbullying in public schools is a serious problem that can lead to increased risk of depression, anxiety, sleep difficulties, lower academic achievement, dropping out of school, and suicidal ideation for the children and teenagers affected. Some have called for stronger bullying prevention policies focused on preventing any type of bullying in public schools in order to address the potentially fatal consequences of bullying.

DIGEST: CSSB 2050 would require that the Texas Education Agency (TEA) adopt minimum standards for a school district's policy concerning bullying with which the district would have to comply. The standards would have to:

- include an emphasis on bullying prevention by focusing on school climate and building healthy relationships between students and staff;

- require each district campus to establish a committee to address bullying by focusing on prevention efforts and health and wellness initiatives;
- require students at each grade level to meet periodically for instruction on building relationships and preventing bullying, including cyberbullying;
- include an emphasis on increasing student reporting of bullying incidents to school employees by increasing awareness about district reporting procedures and by providing for anonymous reporting;
- require districts to collect information annually through student surveys on bullying, including cyberbullying, and use the survey results to develop action plans to address student concerns; and
- require districts to develop a rubric or checklist to assess an incident of bullying and to determine the district's response to the incident.

The bill also would add to the requirements for a bullying prevention policy a requirement that the policy would prevent and mediate bullying incidents between students that interfered with a student's educational opportunities or that substantially disrupted the orderly operation of a classroom, school, or school-sponsored or school-related activity.

The commissioner of education would have to require each school district and open-enrollment charter school to annually report through the Public Education Information Management System the number of reported incidents of bullying that had occurred at each campus. The district or school would have to specify the number of incidents of bullying that included cyberbullying.

The bill would apply beginning with the 2021-2022 school year

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2021.