

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
87R19747 JES-D

C.S.S.B. 776
By: Lucio
Education
4/20/2021
Committee Report (Substituted)

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Throughout Texas, many organizations, including the Special Olympics, provide students with special needs the opportunity to participate in sports activities with their peers. However, these events are generally limited to a few occurrences each year, and do not provide the type of long-term opportunities for building athletic skills, teamwork, and other character traits that traditional interscholastic sports programs do. Without such a program, special education students will miss many of the opportunities afforded to other student athletes with whom they attend school.

S.B. 776 provides equal opportunity for students with special needs to participate in sports seasons by directing the University Interscholastic League (UIL) to develop an inclusive sports program for students with disabilities. This program will be modeled off of existing UIL sports programs, and resemble them to the extent feasible while still maintaining its mission of serving students with special needs. By establishing an adaptive sports program similar to the program already in place, S.B. 776 will provide equal opportunity for students with special needs to enjoy all the benefits of athletic competition.

(Original Author's / Sponsor's Statement of Intent)

C.S.S.B. 776 amends current law relating to the creation of an inclusive sports program by the University Interscholastic League to provide students with intellectual disabilities access to team sports.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the University Interscholastic League in SECTION 2 (Section 33.097, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Provides that this Act may be cited as Zariah's Law.

SECTION 2. Amends Subchapter D, Chapter 33, Education Code, by adding Section 33.097, as follows:

Sec. 33.097. INCLUSIVE SPORTS PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES. (a) Requires the University Interscholastic League (UIL) to ensure students with intellectual disabilities have an opportunity to participate in team athletic activities by establishing and maintaining an inclusive sports program.

(b) Requires UIL to adopt rules as necessary to establish, maintain, and expand the inclusive sports program. Requires that the rules accommodate inclusive team sports offered through the program at participating public middle schools, junior high schools, and high schools in the state; establish eligibility requirements for participation in each inclusive team sport offered through the program; identify best practices for school districts to incorporate inclusive sports; and require the program to incorporate activities that promote bullying prevention, moral intelligence, character development, leadership development, physical fitness, and positive school culture.

(c) Requires UIL, in adopting the rules under Subsection (b), to consider and incorporate as appropriate:

(1) federal guidance regarding providing access to extracurricular athletics for students with intellectual disabilities;

(2) guidance available from nationally recognized organizations that promote inclusion and acceptance among students with and without intellectual disabilities;

(3) information regarding inclusive sports programs that have been successfully implemented in this state, in other states, and by nonprofit organizations;

(4) input from school districts and the Texas Education Agency; and

(5) guidance provided by impacted stakeholders, including by parents of or persons standing in parental relation to students with intellectual disabilities.

(d) Authorizes UIL to appoint a person to provide guidance on behalf of impacted stakeholders for purposes of Subsection (c)(5).

(e) Requires UIL, in maintaining the inclusive sports program, to the greatest extent possible, to require:

(1) students who participate in the inclusive sports program to be subject to the same rules and requirements as students who participate in other athletic programs offered by UIL, including:

(A) grade and disciplinary requirements under Section 33.081(c) (relating to suspensions for grades lower than the equivalent of 70 on a scale of 100); and

(B) requirements related to student safety in athletic activities under Chapter 33 (Service Programs and Extracurricular Activities) and Chapter 38 (Health and Safety); and

(2) team sports provided through the inclusive sports program to be organized similarly to other athletic programs offered by UIL, including with respect to team practices, seasonal play, and local and statewide competitions.

(f) Authorizes UIL or a partner affiliated with UIL, in addition to using funds available or appropriated for the purpose, to seek and accept gifts, grants, or donations of money from public and private sources for the purpose of establishing or expanding the inclusive sports program.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2021.