

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILL ANALYSIS

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BILL #: [CS/HB 345](#)

TITLE: Student Elopement

SPONSOR(S): Eskamani and Tramont

COMPANION BILL: [SB 460](#) (Arrington)

LINKED BILLS: None

RELATED BILLS: None

Committee References

[Student Academic Success](#)

16 Y, 0 N, As CS



[Education & Employment](#)

SUMMARY

Effect of the Bill:

The bill requires each public school to create a School Staff Assistance for Emergencies (SAFE) Team and a school elopement plan. The SAFE Team, including the principal and assistant principal, must create and annually update the school elopement plan, annually provide the elopement plan to the district school board, respond to elopements, and train school staff on the elopement plan.

The bill requires the SAFE Team, in coordination with the student's parents to create a student-specific elopement guide for students at risk, which includes identifying information, communication abilities, relevant behavioral or medical considerations, and potential locations the student may go. The guide must be shared with the student's parent and relevant school personnel.

Fiscal or Economic Impact:

School districts may incur costs to establish and maintain SAFE Teams and school elopement plans and to provide ongoing training to staff. These costs are indeterminate and may vary by district.

[JUMP TO](#)

[SUMMARY](#)

[ANALYSIS](#)

[RELEVANT INFORMATION](#)

[BILL HISTORY](#)

ANALYSIS

EFFECT OF THE BILL:

To ensure the safety of students with disabilities at risk of [elopement](#), the bill requires each public school to create a School Staff Assistance for Emergencies (SAFE) Team and a school [elopement plan](#). The plan must include procedures for immediately contacting the student's parents if a student with disabilities elopes. The school principal and assistant principal must serve on the SAFE Team and the school principal must appoint at least five other members to serve on the team. The SAFE Team must:

- Create and annually update the school elopement plan and respond to all elopements.
- Provide training to all school personnel to familiarize such personnel with the school elopement plan and all necessary procedures.

The bill requires a student-specific elopement quick reference guide for a student with disabilities who is prone to elopement. The guide must be created by the SAFE Team, in coordination with the student's parent, and must include:

- The student's identifying information.
- A current photograph of the student.
- The student's level of communication.
- A list of the student's interests, behaviors, preferences, and aversions.
- Any health considerations for the student.
- A list of any GPS technology that could be used to help locate the student.
- A list of possible locations where the student may go when eloping.

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DATE: 3/26/2025

The bill requires the SAFE Team to distribute the student's elopement quick reference guide to the student's parent and all relevant school personnel.

The bill requires each public school to annually provide its elopement plan to the district school board.

The bill defines "disability", for a student in kindergarten through grade 12, to mean autism spectrum disorder, as defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, published by the American Psychiatric Association, or an intellectual disability, as defined in s. 393.063.

The bill defines "elopement" to mean when a student with disabilities wanders away, walks away, runs away, escapes, or otherwise leaves the supervision of school staff or leaves school grounds unsupervised or unnoticed before the end of his or her scheduled school day. (Section [1](#)).

The effective date of the bill is July 1, 2025. (Section [2](#)).

RULEMAKING:

This bill authorizes the State Board of Education to adopt rules to administer requirements of the school elopement plans.

Lawmaking is a legislative power; however, the Legislature may delegate a portion of such power to executive branch agencies to create rules that have the force of law. To exercise this delegated power, an agency must have a grant of rulemaking authority and a law to implement.

FISCAL OR ECONOMIC IMPACT:

LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

The bill has an indeterminate fiscal impact on local government expenditures, as school districts may incur costs associated with establishing and maintaining SAFE Teams, developing school elopement plans, and providing ongoing staff training. These costs may vary by districts.

RELEVANT INFORMATION

SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

Elopement

Wandering, also called elopement, is an important safety issue that affects some people with disabilities, their families, and the community.¹ Elopement is the tendency for an individual to leave the safety of a responsible person's care or safe area, which may result in potential harm or injury. This might include running off from adults at school or in the community, leaving the classroom without permission, or exiting the house when the family is not aware. This behavior is considered common and short-lived in toddlers but may persist or re-emerge in those with autism.² Studies have shown that 25 to 50 percent of children with autism have attempted to elope.³

Currently, there are no state or federal requirements for student elopement plans, although some schools may have established plans.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Disability and Safety: Information on Wandering (Elopement)*, https://www.cdc.gov/child-development/disability-safety/wandering.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandsafety/wandering.html (last visited Mar. 16, 2025).

² National Autism Association, *About Autism & Wandering*, <https://nationalautismassociation.org/resources/wandering/> (last visited Mar. 16, 2025).

³ American Association of Pediatrics, *Wandering a major problem among child with autism, What you can do*, (2020) available at [14737.pdf \(silverchair-cdn.com\)](https://www.aapublications.org/14737.pdf).

Elopement Action Plan for Schools

Safety is a concern with wandering and elopement behaviors. Safety of the student who is trying to flee an area, a classroom, a crowded lunchroom or even a school building, as well as the safety of the staff working with that student. Often these behaviors aren't addressed early enough, and they become a pattern for a student. Even worse, the natural response to run after the student to stop them from eloping might be an unintentional reinforcement for this unsafe behavior.⁴ To address the safety issue, the Pathfinders for Autism recommends each school establish an elopement plan.⁵

In September of 2018, the Rochester City School Board adopted a Wander and Elopement Policy (policy) requiring annual training for staff prior to students' arrival on the first day of each school year. The school board policy provides:⁶

- An explanation of any physical modifications to the building that may discourage wandering and/or elopement.
- A protocol for notifying staff.
- Procedures and staff assignments for immediately notifying 911, parents/family, and the central office.
- Protocols for communicating with law enforcement, including practices and procedures for accessing and disseminating any available video footage, floor plans, and maps of the school grounds and immediate surrounding areas.
- The school-wide communication and alert system.
- Explicit staff assignments for building and grounds searches.
- A protocol for assuring the availability of recent photographs of the student.
- A protocol for ensuring that students with a history of wandering or elopement incidents carry basic identification at all times.

Students with Disabilities

All students who are between the ages of three and 21, and have a disability⁷ have the right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE).⁸ Federal and state law requires students identified as having a disability and needing exceptional student education services or accommodations, to be provided a FAPE as outlined in an individualized educational plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan.⁹

Accommodations are important for students with disabilities. Students use accommodations to increase, maintain, or improve academic performance.¹⁰ There are several types of accommodations that are available and specific to a student's need, such as increasing or decreasing opportunity for movement, as some students may need to move in the classroom without disrupting others, while other students may need to be kept from wandering.¹¹

⁴ Pathfinders for Autism, PFA Tips: *Wandering and Elopement at School*,

<https://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/safety/elope-at-school/#:~:text=An%20elopement%20plan%20might%20state%20steps%20to%20include%3A,go%20to%20the%20front%20doors%20of%20the%20building> (last visited Mar. 16, 2025).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Rochester City School Board Policy Manual, *Wandering and Elopement Policy*, (Sept. 2018), available at

<https://www.rcsdk12.org/cms/lib/NY01001156/Centricity/Domain/22/Proposed%20Wandering%20and%20Elopement%20Policy%20-%20April%202018.pdf>.

⁷ Disabilities that qualify a student as an exceptional student include an intellectual disability; an autism spectrum disorder; a speech impairment; a language impairment; an orthopedic impairment; another health impairment; traumatic brain injury; a visual impairment; an emotional or behavioral disability; a specific learning disability, including, but not limited to, dyslexia, dyscalculia, or developmental aphasia; deafness, hard of hearing, or dual sensory impairment; or developmental delays from birth through five years old or if the student is hospitalized or homebound. S. [1003.01\(9\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

⁸ 20 U.S.C. s. 1412(a)(1); [s. 1003.5716, F.S.](#)

⁹ 34 C.F.R. s. 104.33; 34 C.F.R.; 300.101; 34 C.F.R. 300.112; section [1003.57, F.S.](#); rules 6A-6.0331 and 6A-6.030152, F.A.C.

¹⁰ Florida Department of Education, *Accommodations, Assisting Students with Disabilities*, at 2, available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7690/urlt/0070069-accomm-educator.pdf>.

¹¹ *Id.* at 40.

BILL HISTORY

COMMITTEE REFERENCE	ACTION	DATE	STAFF DIRECTOR/ POLICY CHIEF	ANALYSIS PREPARED BY
Student Academic Success Subcommittee	16 Y, 0 N, As CS	3/25/2025	Sanchez	Dixon
THE CHANGES ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Added the requirement that the school elopement plan must include procedures for immediately contacting the student's parent if the student elopes.Removed specified requirements for developing a school elopement plan, including a search grid of the school and surrounding area, elopement notification procedures, a coordinated response plan, and contact information for School Staff Assistance for Emergencies (SAFE) Team members			
Education & Employment Committee				

THIS BILL ANALYSIS HAS BEEN UPDATED TO INCORPORATE ALL OF THE CHANGES DESCRIBED ABOVE.
