

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Education Pre-K -12

BILL: SB 540

INTRODUCER: Senators Collins and Burgess

SUBJECT: Disability History and Awareness Instruction

DATE: March 28, 2025

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Brick	Bouck	ED	Pre-meeting
2.			AED	
3.			RC	

I. Summary:

SB 540 creates the "Evin B. Hartsell Act" to require instruction in disability history and awareness during a two-week period in October in all K-12 public schools.

The bill specifies grade-specific instructional requirements, including, for:

- Grades K-3, bullying prevention discussions and activities demonstrating physical disabilities.
- Grades 4-6, education on autism spectrum disorder with experiential learning activities.
- Grades 7-9, instruction on hearing impairments with activities simulating hearing loss.
- Grades 10-12, education on learning and intellectual disabilities with interactive activities.

The bill authorizes district school boards to consult with the Evin B. Hartsell Foundation to develop curricula.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.

II. Present Situation:

Disability History and Awareness Instruction

Each district school board may provide disability history and awareness instruction in all K-12 public schools in the district during the first two weeks in October each year. District school boards that provide this instruction must designate these two weeks as “Disability History and Awareness Weeks.”¹

¹ Section 1003.4205(1), F.S.

Content and Scope of Instruction

During this two-week period, students may be provided intensive instruction to expand their knowledge, understanding, and awareness of individuals with disabilities, the history of disability, and the disability rights movement. Disability history may include the events and timelines of the development and evolution of services to, and the civil rights of, individuals with disabilities. Disability history may also include the contributions of specific individuals with disabilities, including the contributions of acknowledged national leaders.²

The instruction may be integrated into the existing school curriculum in ways including, but not limited to, supplementing lesson plans, holding school assemblies, or providing other school-related activities. The instruction may be delivered by qualified school personnel or by knowledgeable guest speakers, with a particular focus on including individuals with disabilities.³

Goals and Intended Outcomes

The goals of disability history and awareness instruction include:⁴

- Better treatment for individuals with disabilities, especially for youth in school, and increased attention to preventing the bullying or harassment of students with disabilities.
- Encouragement to individuals with disabilities to develop increased self-esteem, resulting in more individuals with disabilities gaining pride in being an individual with a disability, obtaining postsecondary education, entering the workforce, and contributing to their communities.
- Reaffirmation of the local, state, and federal commitment to the full inclusion in society of, and the equal opportunity for, all individuals with disabilities.

Evin B. Hartsell Foundation

The Evin B. Hartsell Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting disability awareness, education, and advocacy. The foundation's mission is to inspire the world to understand and appreciate the true value of people with disabilities, just like Evin did.⁵

The foundation offers educational initiatives aimed at increasing public understanding of disability history. The foundation also develops curriculum materials and educator training resources to support disability awareness instruction in schools.⁶

In collaboration with the University of South Florida, the foundation established the Evin B. Hartsell Endowed Memorial Scholarship, which supports students participating in the Interdisciplinary Training Program of the Florida Center for Inclusive Communities. This scholarship prioritizes students pursuing degrees in social work, psychology, or counseling, with

² Section 1003.4205(2)(a), F.S.

³ Section 1003.4205(2)(b), F.S.

⁴ Section 1003.4205(3), F.S.

⁵ Evin B. Hartsell Foundation, *About*, <https://evinbhartsell.com/about/> (last visited Mar. 19, 2025).

⁶ Evin B. Hartsell Foundation, *Education and Awareness*, <https://evinbhartsell.com/education-awareness/> (last visited Mar. 19, 2025).

preference given to individuals with disabilities, U.S. military veterans, and students with a GPA of 3.0 or higher.⁷

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

SB 540 designates the act as the "Evin B. Hartsell Act" and amends s. 1003.4205, F.S., to require instruction in disability history and awareness during a two-week period in October in all K-12 public schools.

The bill specifies grade-specific instructional requirements, including for:

- Grades K-3, bullying prevention discussions and activities demonstrating physical disabilities.
- Grades 4-6, education on autism spectrum disorder with experiential learning activities.
- Grades 7-9, instruction on hearing impairments with activities simulating hearing loss.
- Grades 10-12, education on learning and intellectual disabilities with interactive activities.

Instruction for Grades K-3

The bill requires instruction for grades K-3 to include conversations on bullying and activities to teach about physical disabilities. The required conversations on bullying may address:

- What students should do if they are being bullied;
- What students should do if they see someone being bullied;
- Why bullying is not the victim's fault;
- What different types of bullying look like;
- The possibility that a friend could be a bully; or
- The school's antibullying policy.

The bill requires activities to teach about physical disabilities, which may include:

- Having students take turns using a wheelchair;
- Having students try to complete tasks using only one hand; or
- Having students try to complete tasks with a blindfold while other students act as guides.

Instruction for Grades 4-6

The bill requires instruction for grades 4-6 to include information about autism spectrum disorder and activities that demonstrate what life with an autism spectrum disorder is like. Such activities may include requiring students to attempt to communicate with one another without speaking.

Instruction for Grades 7-9

The bill requires instruction for grades 7-9 to include information about hearing impairments and activities that demonstrate what life with hearing impairment is like. Such activities may include:

⁷ University of South Florida, *Evin B. Hartsell Foundation Gift Establishes Endowed Memorial Scholarship*, Dec. 14, 2021, <https://www.usf.edu/cbcs/news/2021/hartsell-gift.aspx> (last visited Mar. 19, 2025).

- Requiring students to wear earplugs and attempt to listen as the teacher reads aloud while noise plays in the background; or
- Requiring students to attempt to read one another's lips.

Instruction for Grades 10-12

The bill requires instruction for grades 10-12 to include information on learning and intellectual disabilities and activities that demonstrate what life with a learning or intellectual disability is like. Such activities may include requiring students to read sentences written backwards.

Consultation with the Evin B. Hartsell Foundation

The bill authorizes district school boards to consult with the Evin B. Hartsell Foundation to further develop the required curriculum.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.

IV. Constitutional Issues:**A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 1003.4205 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
