

By Senator Rodriguez

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A bill to be entitled

An act relating to disability awareness and inclusion education; providing a short title; creating s. 1003.4299, F.S.; providing legislative intent; authorizing the Department of Education to create the Disability Awareness and Inclusion Education Program; providing the goals of the program; authorizing the department, in consultation with certain advocates, educators, and experts, to develop and make available disability awareness instruction; specifying goals and grade-level expectations; providing for phased implementation of the program; authorizing the department to provide professional development opportunities; authorizing training sessions; providing requirements for the training sessions; authorizing the department to collaborate with advocacy organizations and other entities; authorizing the department to award grants, subject to legislative appropriation; authorizing the department to provide program guidelines to school districts by a specified date; authorizing schools to collect and report certain data to the department; providing an effective date.

WHEREAS, approximately one in seven children in the United States receives services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and

WHEREAS, students with disabilities are an integral part of

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our school communities, yet many of their peers and educators have limited opportunities to learn about disability awareness, inclusion, and accessibility, and

WHEREAS, research demonstrates that early, age-appropriate disability awareness education fosters empathy, reduces bullying, and promotes acceptance and inclusion in school environments, and

WHEREAS, the Legislature recognizes the importance of providing students with knowledge and experiences that prepare them to be compassionate, inclusive, and responsible citizens, and

WHEREAS, schools play a vital role in promoting understanding, respect, and positive attitudes toward people of all abilities, thereby strengthening the social fabric of our communities, NOW, THEREFORE,

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. This act may be cited as the "Disability Awareness and Inclusion Education Act."

Section 2. Section 1003.4299, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

1003.4299 Disability Awareness and Inclusion Education Program.—

(1) LEGISLATIVE INTENT.—It is the intent of the Legislature to promote empathy, acceptance, and inclusion among all students by integrating disability awareness education in this state's K-12 public school curriculum. The Legislature finds that early education about disabilities fosters compassion, reduces stigma,

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and contributes to positive school climates.

(2) PROGRAM CREATION AND GOALS.—

(a) The Department of Education may create the Disability Awareness and Inclusion Education Program.

(b) The Disability Awareness and Inclusion Education Program shall:

1. Increase awareness of visible and invisible disabilities;

2. Promote empathy through storytelling, simulations, and interactive learning;

3. Encourage inclusion by reducing stigma and fostering friendship and belonging; and

4. Inspire student advocacy and leadership to support peers with disabilities.

(3) CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK.—

(a) The department, in consultation with disability advocates, educators, and subject-matter experts, may develop and make available age-appropriate curriculum standards and instructional materials for implementation in kindergarten through grade 12.

(b) Instruction may include:

1. For kindergarten through grade 5, at least one lesson per month emphasizing kindness, empathy, and understanding of disabilities through stories and simple activities.

2. For grades 6 through 8, at least two lessons per month incorporating hands-on activities, such as simulations, as well as group projects and lessons on accessibility and disability history.

3. For grades 9 through 12, a 4- to 6-week annual program

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addressing disability rights, advocacy, media representation,
and community service projects.

(4) IMPLEMENTATION AND TRAINING.—

(a) The program may be implemented in three phases:

1. Phase 1 may include pilot implementation in selected
schools for one year.

2. Phase 2 may begin the second year of the program and
shall include districtwide expansion.

3. Phase 3 may begin the fourth year of the program and
include statewide expansion.

(b) The department may provide guidance and professional
development opportunities for teachers and parents involved in
supporting disability awareness education.

(c) Training sessions may be conducted at least twice per
year, either in person or virtually, and may include:

1. Evidence-based strategies to promote inclusion, empathy,
and understanding of disabilities;

2. Tools to support students with disabilities in academic
and social settings; and

3. Methods to enhance home-school collaboration and
reinforce inclusive practices across environments.

(5) COLLABORATION.—The department may collaborate with
disability advocacy organizations, parent training and
information centers, and universities with expertise in
inclusive education to develop, implement, and evaluate
curriculum and training materials.

(6) FUNDING.—Subject to legislative appropriation, the
department may award grants to school districts to support
implementation of this program, including the development of

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117 instructional materials and professional development activities.

118 (7) IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE.—The department may establish
119 program guidelines and make them available to school districts
120 no later than January 1, 2027.

121 (8) PROGRAM EVALUATION.—Participating schools may collect
122 and report data to the department on student empathy surveys,
123 teacher and parent observations, and indicators of school
124 climate, including measures of inclusion and bullying. The
125 department may use this information to guide program improvement
126 and statewide rollout.

127 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.