

By Senator Rodriguez

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

WHEREAS, students with disabilities are an integral part of

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

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

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

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

45
46 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

47
48 Section 1. This act may be cited as the "Disability
49 Awareness and Inclusion Education Act."

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

52 1003.4299 Disability Awareness and Inclusion Education
53 Program.—

54 (1) LEGISLATIVE INTENT.—It is the intent of the Legislature
55 to promote empathy, acceptance, and inclusion among all students
56 by integrating disability awareness education in this state's K-
57 12 public school curriculum. The Legislature finds that early
58 education about disabilities fosters compassion, reduces stigma,

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59 and contributes to positive school climates.

60 (2) PROGRAM CREATION AND GOALS.—

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

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

65 1. Increase awareness of visible and invisible
66 disabilities;

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

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

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

73 (3) CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK.—

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

79 (b) Instruction may include:

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

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

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

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

90 (4) IMPLEMENTATION AND TRAINING.—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

114 (6) FUNDING.—Subject to legislative appropriation, the
115 department may award grants to school districts to support
116 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.