

# FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BILL ANALYSIS

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**BILL #:** [HB 423](#)

**TITLE:** Student Elopement

**SPONSOR(S):** Eskamani and Tramont

**COMPANION BILL:** [SB 494](#) (Arrington)

**LINKED BILLS:** None

**RELATED BILLS:** None

## Committee References

[Student Academic Success](#)

15 Y, 0 N



[Education & Employment](#)

16 Y, 0 N

## 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 must create and annually update the elopement plan, provide the plan annually to the district school board, respond to elopement incidents, notify parents if a student elopes, and train school personnel on elopement procedures.

The bill requires the SAFE Team, in coordination with the student's parent, to create a student-specific elopement quick reference guide for students at risk of elopement. The quick reference guide must include identifying information, a current photograph, communication abilities, relevant behavioral or medical considerations, any GPS technology that could be used to help locate the student, and potential locations the student may go. The elopement quick reference 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.

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## 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 parent or guardian if a student with disabilities elopes.
- Procedures for conducting an immediate, coordinated on-campus search and contacting emergency services only when the student is reasonably believed, based on verified information or direct observation, to have left school grounds and to be at risk of harm.

The bill requires the school principal and an assistant principal to serve on the SAFE Team and the school principal must appoint at least three other members to serve on the team, including the school resource officer. 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 elopement quick reference 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.

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- 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.

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 an 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 section [393.063, F.S.](#)

The bill defines "elopement" to mean when a student with autism or another disability, who has a documented history of elopement or an identified safety risk related to elopement, leaves a safe or designated area, the supervision of school staff, or school grounds without authorization or awareness of potential risk. The term may include wandering, walking away, running away, or otherwise departing an assigned location unsupervised or unnoticed. This term only applies when the behavior is connected to the student's disability-related needs and poses a safety concern. The term does not include intentional class skipping or other nondisability-related absences. (Section [1](#)).

The effective date of the bill is July 1, 2026. (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](#)**

Elopement, also called wandering, is the tendency for an individual to leave the safety of a responsible person's care or a safe area, which may result in potential harm or injury.<sup>1</sup> This might include running off from adults at

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<sup>1</sup> 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](https://www.cdc.gov/child-development/disability-safety/wandering.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandsafety/wandering.html) (last visited Feb. 24, 2026).

school or in the community, leaving the classroom without permission, or exiting the home when the family is not aware. While such behavior is considered common and short-lived in toddlers, it may persist or re-emerge in some children with autism.<sup>2</sup> Studies have shown that 25 to 50 percent of children with autism have attempted to elope. Wandering behaviors may occur quickly, even under supervision, and can expose children to dangerous situations such as traffic, drowning, or becoming trapped in unsafe environments.<sup>3</sup>

Currently, there are no state or federal requirements for public schools to adopt student elopement plans; however, some schools may have voluntarily implemented such plans.

Elopement Action Plan for Schools

Elopement poses safety concerns for both students and school personnel when a student leaves a classroom, common area, or school campus without supervision. In response to these risks, Pathfinders for Autism has identified establishing school elopement plans as a recommended approach.<sup>4</sup>

Beginning in the 2023-2024 school year, the School District of Broward County required each public school to develop and implement a student elopement plan. District guidance includes school-specific search procedures coordinated with law enforcement, protocols for off-campus events, submission of plans to an emergency management platform, and staff training. For students identified as being at risk of elopement, schools are required to develop individualized prevention, response, and recovery procedures, as well as a quick-reference document created in collaboration with the student’s family.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, in 2018, the Rochester City School Board adopted a policy addressing student wandering and elopement that requires annual, building-based staff training prior to the start of each school year. The policy, most recently updated in 2024, establishes procedures for staff notification, immediate notification of emergency services and parents or guardians, coordination with law enforcement, and explicit staff assignments for building and grounds searches. The policy also requires the availability of recent student photographs and basic identification information for students with a documented history of wandering or elopement.<sup>6</sup>

While not requiring the development of school elopement plans, legislation enacted in Maryland in 2025, commonly referred to as “ACE Law,” requires same-day notification to parents or guardians when a student elopes or attempts to elope from school.<sup>7</sup>

Students with Disabilities

All students who are between the ages of three and 21, and have a disability have the right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE).<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> National Autism Association, *About Autism & Wandering*, <https://nationalautismassociation.org/resources/wandering/> (last visited Feb. 24, 2026).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* and American Association of Pediatrics, *Wandering a major problem among child with autism, What you can do*, (2020) available at [14737.pdf \(silverchair-cdn.com\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> 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 Feb. 24, 2026).

<sup>5</sup> Broward County Public Schools, *Elopement Plan*; on file with the Education and Employment Committee.

<sup>6</sup> Rochester City School Board Policy Manual, *Wandering and Elopement Policy*, (Aug. 2024), available at <https://resources.finalseite.net/images/v1762544225/rcsdk12org/nrcqymv4ncf12ynm0xo7/4240WanderingandElopementPolicyCLEANCOPY8-22-24.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> MD. CODE ANN., Education § 7-11A (2025).

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

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

Accommodations are important for students with disabilities. Students use accommodations to increase, maintain, or improve academic performance.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

**BILL HISTORY**

<b>COMMITTEE REFERENCE</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>STAFF DIRECTOR/ POLICY CHIEF</b>	<b>ANALYSIS PREPARED BY</b>
<a href="#">Student Academic Success Subcommittee</a>	15 Y, 0 N	2/5/2026	Sanchez	Dixon
<a href="#">Education &amp; Employment Committee</a>	16 Y, 0 N	2/24/2026	Hassell	Dixon

<sup>10</sup> 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>.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 40.