

HB 1715 -- CHILDHOOD HERO ACT

SPONSOR: Byrnes

This bill creates the "Missouri Childhood Hero Act" and requires that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education develop a model policy that each school district must adopt by the 2024-25 school year to address bullying and school discipline. The policy must include specific elements as outlined in the bill, including a restriction on zero-tolerance disciplinary policies for any student that is a victim of bullying or is defending a victim of bullying.

The bill requires that the policy outline annual mandatory training for district employees and volunteers that includes training in the defense of justification, as well as age appropriate training for students that provides education and information regarding the school's antibullying policy as specified in the bill.

The school district administration is required to implement programs and instruct school counselors, school social workers, licensed social workers, mental health professionals, and school psychologists to educate students who are victims of bullying on techniques to overcome bullying's negative effects.

The techniques shall include but are not limited to:

- (1) Cultivating the student's self-worth and self-esteem;
- (2) Teaching the student assertive and effective self-defense;
- (3) Helping the student develop social skills;
- (4) Encouraging the student to develop an internal locus of control; or
- 5) Teaching the pupil nonconfrontational methods for avoiding conflict.

This bill requires school administration to report monthly to the school board all acts of bullying, discipline for bullying, as well as all other disciplinary referrals. School boards must review the monthly report in a closed meeting and address concerns related to reported incidents within 30 days. Each school district must establish criteria that annually acknowledges any student in the district who has taken positive steps to resolve a conflict through a nonphysical confrontation and designate the student as a Missouri Childhood Hero.

The bill provides immunity from liability for school district employees and volunteers who intervene in an incident of school violence, violent behavior, or criminal actions against any pupil that is a victim of bullying; specifically the bill outlines that such employee follow the proper procedure and act in good faith to intervene under the defense of justification provided under Chapter 563, RSMo.

This bill is similar to HB 1087 (2023).