

SENATE BILL NO. 521

INTRODUCED BY C. POPE

A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT DIRECTING THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AND THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION TO DEVELOP A PLAN TO EXPAND MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION INTO ALL SCHOOLS IN THE STATE; PROVIDING MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS IN THE PROGRAM PLAN; REQUIRING INTERIM REPORTS; AND PROVIDING AN IMMEDIATE EFFECTIVE DATE."

WHEREAS, the PAX Good Behavior Game curriculum has a 30-year track record in Montana, demonstrating measurable and significant benefits to school-age students in reducing anxiety, lowering violence and substance abuse, improving civic engagement and leadership, and preparing Montana students for challenges and for opportunities for personal and professional development; and

WHEREAS, the PAX Good Behavior Game serves as a preventative health care initiative capable of reducing future demand for state mental health services; and

WHEREAS, promoting mental well-being and reducing substance use disorder in our communities reduces crime and violence and the subsequent state expense to adjudicate and house those criminal elements; and

WHEREAS, expanding the PAX Good Behavior Game promotes civic engagement and establishes a path to prevention and wellness that alleviates the state's burdened health care and criminal justice systems.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

NEW SECTION. Section 1. Direction to department of public health and human services and office of public instruction. (1) The department of public health and human services in collaboration with the office of public instruction shall develop a plan to expand the suicide prevention grants provided for in 53-21-1111 into a universal program available in all public schools in the state. The program plan must include:

(a) program curriculum;

(b) how the program will:

(i) provide financial and technical support to schools;

(ii) collect data;

(iii) measure program success;

(iv) target specific areas of mental health, including bullying, suicide, and substance use; and

(v) leverage the classroom experience of teachers;

(c) estimated cost projections;

(d) a plan for implementation of the program;

(e) requested support from the legislature to implement the program, through legislation, appropriation, or other legislative action; and

(f) other information the department or office of public instruction consider necessary to establish and implement the program.

(2) (a) By September 1, 2025, and January 1, 2026, the department of public health and human services and the office of public instruction shall jointly report to the education interim committee and the children, families, health, and human services interim committee on their progress toward the development of the program.

(b) By May 1, 2026, the department of public health and human services and the office of public instruction shall jointly submit the program plan pursuant to subsection (1) and report to the education interim committee and the children, families, health, and human services interim committee on their progress toward the development of the program.

NEW SECTION. **Section 2. Notification to tribal governments.** The secretary of state shall send a copy of [this act] to each federally recognized tribal government in Montana.

NEW SECTION. **Section 3. Effective date.** [This act] is effective upon passage and approval.

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