By:  Lucio, et al. S.B. No. 776

(Dominguez, Martinez, Lucio III, Guillen, et al.)

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the creation of an inclusive sports program by the University Interscholastic League to provide students with intellectual disabilities access to team sports.

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

SECTION 1.  This Act may be cited as Zariah's Law.

SECTION 2.  Subchapter D, Chapter 33, Education Code, is amended by adding Section 33.097 to read as follows:

Sec. 33.097.  INCLUSIVE SPORTS PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES. (a) The University Interscholastic League shall ensure students with intellectual disabilities have an opportunity to participate in team athletic activities by establishing and maintaining an inclusive sports program.

(b)  The University Interscholastic League shall adopt rules as necessary to establish, maintain, and expand the inclusive sports program. The rules must:

(1)  accommodate inclusive team sports offered through the program at participating public middle schools, junior high schools, and high schools in the state;

(2)  establish eligibility requirements for participation in each inclusive team sport offered through the program;

(3)  identify best practices for school districts to incorporate inclusive sports; and

(4)  require the program to incorporate activities that promote:

(A)  bullying prevention;

(B)  moral intelligence;

(C)  character development;

(D)  leadership development;

(E)  physical fitness; and

(F)  positive school culture.

(c)  In adopting the rules under Subsection (b), the University Interscholastic League shall consider and incorporate as appropriate:

(1)  federal guidance regarding providing access to extracurricular athletics for students with intellectual disabilities;

(2)  guidance available from nationally recognized organizations that promote inclusion and acceptance among students with and without intellectual disabilities;

(3)  information regarding inclusive sports programs that have been successfully implemented in this state, in other states, and by nonprofit organizations;

(4)  input from school districts and the agency; and

(5)  guidance provided by impacted stakeholders, including by parents of or persons standing in parental relation to students with intellectual disabilities.

(d)  The University Interscholastic League may appoint a person to provide guidance on behalf of impacted stakeholders for purposes of Subsection (c)(5).

(e)  In maintaining the inclusive sports program, the University Interscholastic League shall, to the greatest extent possible, require:

(1)  students who participate in the inclusive sports program to be subject to the same rules and requirements as students who participate in other athletic programs offered by the league, including:

(A)  grade and disciplinary requirements under Section 33.081(c); and

(B)  requirements related to student safety in athletic activities under this chapter and Chapter 38; and

(2)  team sports provided through the inclusive sports program to be organized similarly to other athletic programs offered by the league, including with respect to team practices, seasonal play, and local and statewide competitions.

(f)  In addition to using funds available or appropriated for the purpose, the University Interscholastic League or a partner affiliated with the league may seek and accept gifts, grants, or donations of money from public and private sources for the purpose of establishing or expanding the inclusive sports program.

SECTION 3.  This Act takes effect September 1, 2021.