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S.B. No. 776

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

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

3                   (A) bullying prevention;

4                   (B) moral intelligence;

5                   (C) character development;

6                   (D) leadership development;

7                   (E) physical fitness; and

8                   (F) positive school culture.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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