



We exist to educate and empower parents in Utah to advocate for their children.

2-14-22

Dear Senate Education Committee Members:

We are asking you to oppose SB171 Behavior Health Curriculum Program for the following reasons:

This program could trigger children and cause a mental or behavioral health episode.

Teaching a mental and behavioral health curriculum could be devastating to children who have experienced trauma in the past or may be suffering from mental health issues. If children are in therapy at the time the curriculum is taught, it could interfere with their treatment or cause an episode. It is foreseeable that a child could experience an anxiety attack, a depressive episode or a panic attack during the teaching of this curriculum. Not only would this function not help the child, but it could actually harm the child by triggering mental or behavioral health episode.

Teachers are not trained mental health providers and should not be diagnosing or treating.

Teachers are not trained, licensed, insured mental health providers. They are not equipped to handle mental health episodes that could be triggered by this program. Although they could “read the script” of what the program directs them to teach, they are not skilled in the area of mental health to recognize the harmful effects that could result from this, address outbursts that may occur or answer deep questions regarding a child’s own mental or behavioral health. In effect, this curriculum has teachers conducting group therapy sessions of 20 or 30 children. Further, this could lead to a teacher “diagnosing” a child with a particular mental illness and that child being profiled as having some mental or behavioral health issue that may or may not be present. The teacher could also be “treating” this child in that they focus certain lessons on that child or give particular assignments to that child according to the teacher’s supposed diagnosis. All of this is completely inappropriate in a school setting and should be left to the trained, licensed, mental health professionals.



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There could be liability for the teacher and the school.

Licensed, trained mental health providers are equipped to take a child through their mental or behavioral health issues and to handle child-specific concerns. In administering this program, there is a large potential for a child to experience a mental or behavioral health issue that could harm that child or other children physically or emotionally. The school could be liable if anything was done incorrectly or "off script" with the program. This is way beyond the competency level of teachers in a room of 30 children and amounts to negligence (at worst) and could amount to practicing medicine without a license. The school and even the teacher could be liable for any harm done to a child through this program.

This could place an unnecessary burden on teachers.

Teachers are already struggling to teach the core subjects. Piling on their already enormous burden is unacceptable. If adopted by a school district, this program could necessitate training for the teachers to be prepared to administer this program in their classrooms, will take essential class time away from students already behind grade level in core subjects and, effectively, turns the classroom into group therapy. Also, as stated above, this program could render teachers liable for any mental or behavioral health episodes caused or triggered by this program. Teachers can be best supported by parents and families teaching their children about mental and behavioral health and by parents and families getting their children any help they need in these areas.

This program is redundant.

The content that is outlined to be taught in this program is already being taught in schools currently. Health classes address substance abuse and mental health issues and already cover much (if not all) of what is listed to be taught through this program. Schools are teaching social and emotional learning lessons that also address each of the items listed in this proposed bill.

We ask that you oppose SB171.

Sincerely,

The Parents of Utah Parents United

