**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 59‑29‑57 SO AS TO REQUIRE INSTRUCTION ON DIVERSITY AWARENESS IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH TWELFTH GRADE, TO PROVIDE GUIDELINES FOR THIS INSTRUCTION, AND TO PROVIDE THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION SHALL INCORPORATE THIS DIVERSITY AWARENESS INSTRUCTION INTO THE SOUTH CAROLINA ACADEMIC STANDARDS OF INSTRUCTION FOR KINDERGARTEN THROUGH TWELFTH GRADE BEGINNING WITH THE 2016‑2017 SCHOOL YEAR.

Whereas, the General Assembly finds that bridging societal divides in the Palmetto State involves ingraining awareness of the value of diversity among people at an early age, before attitudes to the contrary are formed and become an entrenched way of thinking; and

Whereas, the General Assembly finds that each public school in this State should be a learning community where students and staff create a culture of respect, based on equity and inclusion, and where differences are valued and are seen as an asset, not as a liability; and

Whereas, the General Assembly finds that students and school personnel should be able to engage in the education process free from unlawful discrimination or harassment on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, age, marital status, pregnancy, physical or mental disability, medical condition, veteran status, gender, or sexual orientation at any school in this State; and

Whereas, the General Assembly finds that to achieve these goals, a curriculum should be offered at age‑appropriate levels for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Article 1, Chapter 29, Title 59 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 59‑29‑57. (A) The State Board of Education shall develop or adopt curricula, materials, and guidelines for local school boards to use in implementing a program of instruction on diversity awareness in kindergarten through twelfth grade in this State.

(B) The diversity awareness program must include, but not be limited to, instruction in:

(1) developing an understanding of the diversity within our student populations;

(2) breaking down stereotypes in hopes of reducing prejudice on school campuses;

(3) learning to accept fellow students as unique individuals; and

(4) accepting and respecting the differences of all students while celebrating the many similarities that they share.

(C) The State Board of Education shall incorporate the elements of the diversity awareness program into the South Carolina Academic Standards of Instruction for kindergarten through twelfth grade.”

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor and is applicable beginning with the 2016‑2017 school year.

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