

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5688

As of February 11, 2015

Title: An act relating to providing students with skills that promote mental health and well-being and increase academic performance.

Brief Description: Providing students with skills that promote mental health and well-being and increase academic performance.

Sponsors: Senators Litzow, Rolfes, McAuliffe, Fain, Hill, Kohl-Welles, Mullet, Billig, Darneille, Jayapal and Frockt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/05/15.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Ailey Kato (786-7434)

Background: Learning Standards. As required by state law, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) develops the state's learning standards for students and oversees the assessment of the learning standards for state and federal accountability purposes. OSPI refers to these learning standards as Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs), which define what all students should know and be able to do at each grade level. There are EALRs for a number of content areas, including health and fitness. The health and fitness EALRs establish the concepts and skills necessary for safe and healthy living.

Early Learning and Development Guidelines. In 2010 the Department of Early Learning, OSPI, and Thrive by Five Washington reviewed and revised the early learning and development benchmarks, which they published as the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines. These guidelines include information about social and emotional development for parents, teachers, and other adults that support children in grades K–3.

Educational Service Districts (ESDs). ESDs are regional agencies intended to provide cooperative and informational services to local school districts, assist the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and the State Board of Education in the performance of their respective statutory or constitutional duties, and provide services to school districts to assure equal educational opportunities. Washington has nine ESDs. ESDs receive funding from the state, federal and private grants, service fees, agency contracts, and cooperatives.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Current law provides that ESDs must develop and maintain the capacity to offer training for educators and other school district staff on youth suicide screening and referral, and on recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students. An ESD may demonstrate capacity by employing staff with sufficient expertise to offer the training or by contracting with individuals or organizations to offer the training.

Training may be offered on a fee-for-service basis, or at no cost to school districts or educators if funds are appropriated specifically for this purpose or made available through grants or other sources.

Summary of Bill: Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks. The SPI must convene a workgroup to recommend comprehensive social emotional learning benchmarks for grades kindergarten through high school that build upon what is being done in early learning.

These benchmarks must include, at every grade level, competencies for at least the following:

- Self management – regulating one's emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; achieving personal and academic goals; and expressing emotions appropriately;
- Self awareness – accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence;
- Social awareness – being able to empathize with others; appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; effectively using family, school, and community resources;
- Relationship skills – interacting cooperatively with others; resisting inappropriate social pressure; dealing effectively with interpersonal conflict; seeking help when needed; and
- Responsible decisionmaking – making decisions based on factors such as ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences; applying decisionmaking skills to daily situations.

Guidance. The workgroup must develop guidance for schools, school districts, and educators in promoting social emotional learning that:

- is culturally competent;
- is linguistically appropriate;
- provides a positive learning environment for students;
- is inclusive of parental involvement;
- promotes school safety and a positive school climate;
- includes best practices in assisting students through school transitions between elementary, middle, and high school; and
- incorporates best practices to address the mental health continuum of children, from mental well-being and mental health to mental illness, and acknowledges research around adverse childhood experiences.

The workgroup must develop technical advice on how social emotional learning fits within existing teacher and principal evaluations particularly as it relates to school safety and school climate.

The workgroup must develop an implementation plan that provides a framework for incorporating social emotional learning and is aligned with other Washington State education initiatives including college and career readiness, STEM education, twenty-first century skills, and the Washington State learning standards.

Survey. To inform the workgroup, OSPI must conduct a survey of schools to ascertain how many schools in the state are implementing a social emotional learning program and to understand individual districts' capacity to implement social emotional learning.

Workgroup Composition. The workgroup must include persons with expertise in social emotional learning, child development, job readiness, and mental health. It must include one representative from the following groups:

- the Department of Early Learning;
- the Student Support Services department within OSPI;
- the Teaching and Learning department within OSPI;
- the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee;
- the Office of the Education Ombuds;
- higher education faculty members with expertise in social and emotional learning;
- currently employed K–12 educators;
- currently employed K–12 administrators;
- mental health counselors; and
- school parent organizations.

The workgroup must consult with school districts; ESDs; school administrators; principals; teachers; paraeducators; school counselors; community organizations serving youth; a statewide organization with a focus on social emotional learning; federally recognized tribes; the state's four ethnic commissions representing African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islander Americans; and community organizations representing communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities, parents and students, and homeless children and youth.

Report. By October 1, 2016, the workgroup must submit a report to the education committees of the Legislature, the Governor, and the SPI that includes its recommendations for benchmarks, guidance, technical advice, and an implementation plan. OSPI must make the report available to school districts by including it on the website.

ESDs. Each ESD must develop and maintain the capacity to serve as a convener, trainer, and mentor for educators and other school district staff on social emotional learning. An ESD may demonstrate capacity by employing staff with sufficient expertise to offer the training or by contracting with individuals or organizations to offer the training.

Training must be offered at no cost to school districts or educators if funds are appropriated specifically for this purpose or made available through grants or other sources.

Action Plans. School districts may use funding provided for basic education to develop and update school-specific action plans to implement multi-tiered systems of support frameworks and curriculum aligned with the frameworks. These action plans, once implemented, are

intended to systemically improve schools' learning climate, student engagement, and academic performance, increase students' mental health and well-being, and reduce student discipline actions. Plans may vary by school. The multi-tiered systems of support frameworks may include positive behavior interventions and supports and social emotional learning in elementary schools.

District-developed action plans must be submitted to OSPI on an annual basis and OSPI must make these plans available on its website.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Social emotional skills have a significant impact on student achievement, outcomes, and success in life. The opportunity and achievement gaps cannot be closed unless the engagement gap is closed. Social emotional learning teaches children how to interact, communicate, and problem solve. There is research that social emotional learning benefits students. Cognitive development cannot be separated from social emotional development. Executive functioning and self-regulation skills depend on three types of brain functioning, which are working memory, mental flexibility, and self-control. Children are not born with these skills but have the potential to develop them. These skills are tied to academic achievement. Education should focus on the whole child. But social emotional skills are often neglected. One example of a social emotional skill is self-talk, which teaches students how to encourage themselves and talk themselves down if they are frustrated. Social emotional learning can save lives. This type of learning may have prevented the school shooting in Marysville. Social emotional skills can increase a student's confidence, resilience, and wellbeing. The only hesitation is whether these benchmarks should be implemented throughout the education system. This bill is not a mandate for schools to teach these skills. Many schools already teach these skills, but this bill would provide more guidance. School psychologists and school social workers should be added to the workgroup and consulting list in the bill. The Positive Behavioral Interventions & Support (PBIS) framework and social emotional learning are similar but different; however, they can be implemented together. The implementation plan described in the bill is critical for being able to implement the social emotional benchmarks. Professional development should also be part of the implementation plan.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Litzow, prime sponsor; Randy Dorn, Superintendent of Public Instruction; Pamela Kilborn-Miller, Compassionate Schools Development Group, Managing Director; Gregory Benner, University of WA Tacoma, Center for Strong Schools; Carrie Suchy, WA State Assn. of School Psychologists; Kristi Shafer, WA State Parent Teacher Assn.; Melanie Smith, Dr. Lyscha Marcynyszyn, Committee for Children; Jill Ramsey, Counselor, Midway Elementary School; Jeannie Largerg, Sumner School District; Sarah Butcher, Social Emotional Learning for WA; Christie Perkins, NW PBIS Network; Lyon Terry, 2015 WA State Teacher of the Year; Carrie Syvertsen, WA Assn. of School Social

Workers; Jerry Bender, Assn. of WA School Principals; Judah Meyering, Hope Klingenstein, Olive Campbell, Brynn Brady, Youth Ambassadors.