

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SHB 2239

As Passed House:
February 12, 2024

Title: An act relating to supporting student well-being through instruction in social-emotional skills.

Brief Description: Supporting student well-being through instruction in social-emotional skills.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Timmons, Eslick, Callan, Ramel, Reeves, Reed, Doglio, Leavitt and Davis).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/25/24, 1/29/24 [DPS];

Appropriations: 2/3/24, 2/5/24 [DP2S(w/o sub ED)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/12/24, 60-35.

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Encourages school districts and public schools to provide instruction on skills that promote social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health and wellness.
- Directs, subject to appropriation, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to annually distribute funding to support this instruction and to submit an outcomes report.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Shavers, Vice Chair; Bergquist, Eslick, Harris, Nance, Ortiz-Self, Pollet, Stonier and Timmons.

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

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Rude, Ranking Minority Member; McEntire, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Couture and Steele.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative McClintock.

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Education. Signed by 19 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Berg, Callan, Chopp, Davis, Fitzgibbon, Lekanoff, Pollet, Riccelli, Ryu, Senn, Simmons, Slatter, Springer, Stonier and Tharinger.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Couture, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dye, Rude, Sandlin, Schmick, Stokesbary and Wilcox.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Corry, Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Connors, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Harris.

Staff: Jordan Clarke (786-7123).

Background:

Social-Emotional Learning Standards and Instruction.

Legislation enacted in 2019 directed the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to adopt social-emotional learning standards and benchmarks by January 1, 2020, and to revise the social-emotional learning standards and benchmarks as appropriate.

There are six state social-emotional learning standards related to: self-awareness, self-management, self-efficacy, social awareness, social management, and social engagement.

The OSPI is also required to align the programs it oversees with the state social-emotional learning standards and integrate these standards where appropriate.

Public schools must provide instruction in social-emotional learning that is consistent with the state learning standards and benchmarks to students in kindergarten through third grade. Social-emotional learning is not required for students in higher grades.

Youth Suicide Prevention Activities.

The OSPI must work with state and community partners to assist schools in implementing

youth suicide prevention activities, for example:

- training for staff, parents, community members, and students in recognizing and responding to the signs of suicide;
- partnering with local coalitions of community members interested in preventing youth suicide; and
- responding to communities determined to be in crisis after a suicide or attempted suicide to prevent further instances of suicide.

The OSPI, working with state and community partners, must prioritize funding appropriated for these activities to communities identified as the highest risk.

Summary of Second Substitute Bill:

Encouraged Social-Emotional Learning Instruction.

Every school district and public school is encouraged to provide instruction on skills that promote social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health and wellness inclusive of self-awareness, self-management, self-efficacy, social awareness, social management, and social engagement consistent with state social emotional learning standards and benchmarks. It is recommended that any curriculum used to provide this instruction be research-based or evidence-based; developmentally appropriate, linguistically responsive, and culturally sustaining; incorporate elements of universal design; and promote and support student learning, mental health, and well-being.

School districts and public schools are encouraged to coordinate actions to implement this instruction with related efforts.

Funding for Instruction in Social-Emotional Learning.

Subject to appropriation, between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2029, the OSPI must annually distribute funding to school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools for the purpose of supporting instruction in social-emotional learning that is consistent with the state learning standards and benchmarks. The process for distributing funding must be streamlined for the effective delivery of resources to rural and small school districts.

The OSPI must work with state agencies, including the Governor's Interagency Coordinating Council on Health Disparities, and community partners and must prioritize funding as follows:

- first to the highest poverty school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools that are not providing social-emotional learning instruction consistent with the state standards and benchmarks; and
- second to school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools in communities identified as highest risk for purposes of youth suicide prevention activity funding and that provide instruction in social-emotional learning as a component of primary prevention activities.

Recipients of the funding must provide the instruction as recommended above and must report to the OSPI their perspectives on any student outcomes that were impacted by increasing social-emotional learning instruction.

By October 15, 2029, the OSPI must submit to the Legislature a report indicating the recipients of the funding, what each recipient used the funding for, and perspectives on impacted student outcomes.

Youth Suicide Prevention Activities.

Requirements directing the OSPI to work with state agency and community partners to assist schools in implementing youth suicide prevention activities are modified as follows: (1) prevention experts in the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery in the Health Care Authority and the Governor's Interagency Coordinating Council on Health Disparities are explicitly included as partners; and (2) the OSPI is encouraged to work with the agency and community partners to promote the funding available for these activities.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Education):

(In support) Everyone recognizes that there is a youth mental health crisis. In addition to providing mental health care, mental health issues need to be prevented. There is no simple answer to addressing youth mental health, but this bill adds to the tools that are already out there. We need to save lives by helping people manage their emotions.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) needs to be equitable, culturally responsive, universally designed, and implemented in partnership with communities. Thoughtful work went into creating the social emotional learning standards and framework. The bill centers the importance of aligning the instruction to the SEL framework.

The work of SEL is an essential upstream component that helps students in the classroom to build and maintain health relationships. If students had SEL skills, they would be better able to deal with school and home life. Instruction in these skills is also important when providing more intensive supports to students. Not having the skills and support contributes to worsening mental health.

School districts have enough mandates, so this bill is an encouragement with funding to support SEL instruction. This instruction prevents bullying. The bill will help improve

students' emotional intelligence. Having mental health therapists at schools is also important.

Students' anxiety and depression can impact their schooling and lives. Some people are able to build these skills with providers outside the school system. Implementing these skills in schools will improve student resiliency and help to prevent substance use. Many children of color do not have the opportunity to focus on their mental health. If building SEL skills was incorporated into the education system, it would help prevent the intergenerational trauma of ignoring mental health.

(Opposed) Schools are not proficient at teaching anything. Around 50 percent of students are proficient in English, and that is the highest proficiency rating of all subjects. The schools created a crisis in education when they shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic. If schools teach SEL at the same failure rate as they teach academics, it could be a disaster. It would be better to teach these skills in the community.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) Investing in social-emotional learning for students is one of the best investments the state can make. There was a cost benefit analysis done a number of years ago that showed that for every dollar invested in social-emotional learning, there will be \$11 in benefits. These are the skills that help people manage and regulate emotions, communicate with others, and solve problems. All of these skills result in tremendous outcomes for students and for the community, leading to reduced rates of depression and anxiety and improvements in school climate and academic performance. This is one of the investments that should be done to address the ongoing mental health crisis for children and adults.

Nothing is more heartbreaking than hearing stories of youth in crisis and young people dying by suicide. Over half of Washington's adolescents experience anxiety and depression. According to a report by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, suicide rates have increased by 600 percent between 2013 and 2021. These numbers are terrifying, but can be reduced by focusing on prevention and promoting mental well-being when children are in school. Developing strong social-emotional skills helps reduce anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, and bullying, and can improve academic performance. Youth-led panels on behavioral health have shown that young people want social and emotional skills taught at their schools and mental health resources on campuses.

The pandemic created a developmental delay for students who had a lack of socialization and activities during those years. One of the biggest challenges for young teenagers is the gap between their need for peer approval and their skills necessary to get peer approval. Children who develop these skills also develop positive changes in their brain circuitry that last a lifetime. This is the most important time the state can provide instruction to help children's brain development and social development, and this bill would support that

development.

(Opposed) The state has poured a substantial number of resources into social and emotional learning and mental health resources in public schools. Over the last several years, more funds and resources have been allocated to social-emotional learning and similar programs. The youth mental health crisis has not improved and has instead gotten much worse. Most facets of social-emotional learning are contributing to children having more anxiety, feeling worthless, not wanting to engage in academic and social activities, and even feeling suicidal. The Legislature should take a step back to evaluate if doubling down on social-emotional learning programs is the answer to helping students. Over 60,000 students have unenrolled in public schools across the state since the pandemic. Many parents have removed their children from public schools due to social-emotional learning, and this bill will be another reason for parents to pull their children out of public schools.

Persons Testifying (Education): (In support) Representative Joe Timmons, prime sponsor; Takiyah Ward; Sarah Butcher; Brooke Lewis, National Alliance on Mental Illness; and Cora Hoyt.

(Opposed) Kim Slinger.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): (In support) James Clark, National Parents Organization; Melanie Smith, Committee for Children; and Anna Nepomuceno, National Alliance on Mental Illness Washington.

(Opposed) Julie Barrett, Conservative Ladies of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Education): Martin Shain; Charlotte Plouse; Marin Marks, Washington School Counselor Association; Nigar Suleman, Washington State Parent Teacher Association; Anna Nepomuceno and Meral Kandymova, National Alliance on Mental Illness Washington; Patti Julagay, Conservative Ladies of Washington; Susanna Jones; and Eric Pratt.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Appropriations): None.