

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR

HB 260

State Education Policy on Child Development and Adversity

Sponsor Statement 2.24.20

Nearly two-thirds of adults surveyed in Alaska report having experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACEs include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, physical and emotional neglect, and household dysfunction. Experiences in the first years of life may influence the biology of the human body in ways that, in turn, influence the person's physical and mental health over their lifetime. There is a strong correlation between the number of ACEs and a person's risk for disease and negative health behaviors, including suicide attempts, cancer, ischemic heart disease, diabetes, smoking, substance abuse, depression, obesity, unplanned pregnancies, workplace absenteeism, lower educational achievement, and lower wages.

The Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse have estimated the direct and indirect cost to the state of ACEs in six categories (adult Medicaid, current smoking, diabetes, binge drinking, arthritis, and obesity) to be approximately \$774 million annually¹. Life expectancy of a person with six or more ACEs is reduced by 20 years. Early childhood offers a unique window of opportunity to prevent and mitigate the effects of ACEs on a child's brain and body.

It is more effective and less costly to positively influence the architecture of a young child's developing brain than to later attempt to correct poor learning, health, and behaviors. Early intervention and investment in early childhood and effective, trauma-informed services and systems for people throughout the course of life are important strategies to achieve a lasting foundation for a more prosperous and sustainable state through investing in human capital.

House Bill 260 adds to state education policy that “it is the policy of the state to acknowledge and take into account the principles of early childhood and youth brain development and, whenever possible, consider the concepts of early adversity, toxic stress, childhood trauma, and the promotion of resilience through protective relationships, supports, self-regulation, and services.” HB 260 creates consistent policy with the Departments of Education and Health and Social Services (AS 47.050.060) and addresses an area of public policy where we’ve been penny wise and pound foolish.

¹ <http://dhss.alaska.gov/abada/ace-ak/Documents/ACEsEconomicCosts-AK.pdf>