

From: pastorino@gci.net
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: Support for HB25
Date: Sunday, April 11, 2021 2:29:27 PM

I am a retired educator and school counselor, and I support HB25— and the creation of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) standards. Thank you so much for considering this bill. It is the first step. In my experience the integration of SEL as part of an integrated curriculum is key to student and staff success. Identifying the baseline standards while allowing for building and culturally-relevant flexibility is best practice and will support those who are implementing SEL into their practices.

At the elementary school from which I retired in Anchorage, we integrated SEL practices into our building over a four-year period. This required consensus and buy in, and it was successful beyond my expectations or my imagination. During those 4 years, five concepts/principles emerged that are backed by research and support the implementation of SEL: 1) **Anything that does not build relationships with students is ineffective** (curriculum, programs, interactions). The lack of focus on relationships undermines the development of empathy and creates barriers to healthy relationships. 2) **Conflict is normal and necessary.** Developmentally, we must allow and assist children to learn how to get their own needs met, teach them the difference between needs and wants and how to solve their own problems effectively. 3) **All children in our culture have experienced trauma, and trauma affects the brain; trauma is healed in relationship.** (All teachers/staff and students experience secondary trauma). 4) **Brain education for not only staff but also for students is critical.** This is key for effective classroom management techniques, as techniques are grounded in the understanding of how the brain works. The technique used will depend upon the brain state the child is in. 5) **Many of the unique needs of special needs students are addressed with integrated SEL.**

Also, research supports that (SEL) has a positive impact not only on school climate but also academic success. SEL skills impact how well-equipped children will be to meet the demands of the classroom, engage fully in learning, and benefit from instruction. Specifically, students with SEL instruction had: 1) **improved academic performance:** achievement scores an average of 11 percentile point higher than students who did not receive SEL instruction; 2) **improved attitudes and behaviors:** were more motivated to learn, had a deeper commitment to school, spent more time on schoolwork, and had better classroom behavior; 3) **fewer negative behaviors:** decreased disruptive classroom behavior, noncompliance, aggression, delinquent acts, and disciplinary referrals; and 4) **reduced emotional distress:** fewer reports of student depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal. [Duriak, Weissberg et al.'s meta-analysis of 213 rigorous studies of SEL in school]. In our building we had less suspensions and expulsions and increased mediations, which addressed the underlying problems and allowed relationships to be mended and learning to resume.

My personal experience was that students were generally happier and more engaged, knowing there was a process in place for them to resolve their conflicts, circles to address various issues (bullying, brain differences--FASD, ADHD, etc.); and teachers had more time for instruction, less stress, increased motivation, and more effective working relationships. When you have a building that normalizes conflict and supports one another rather than judging or blaming, more teaching and learning naturally happens. I was honored to work in that small neighborhood school on the East side of Anchorage and to have ended my career with hope and gratitude for the amazing teachers and staff, students, and parents I was privileged to work with. This was the impact SEL integration had on me. It is life-long.

Thank you for participating on this very important committee and advocating for our children and their families as well as for educators. I truly appreciate you and your commitment.
Barbara Pastorino, Juneau, retired educator.

From: [Katie Botz](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: written testimony for HB25
Date: Tuesday, March 30, 2021 10:41:49 AM

Greetings madam co-chairs and members of the House Education. My name is Katie Botz and I am speaking on behalf of myself.

I am in FULL support of H25: Public Schools: Social/Emotional Learning. I'd also like to thank Representative Hopkins for sponsoring this bill.

At the age of 12, I was sexually abused repeatedly in my hometown of Kodiak. I also lost a very close grandmother that very same school year, which would be sixth grade. Back then, sexual abuse was taboo to talk about; therefore, I wasn't allowed to speak about my abuse during school hours. There wasn't even a counselor for me to confide to. My sixth-grade teacher saw that I was struggling both academically, as well as personal and asked if I would join her for lunch one day. All that I could mention during the lunch meeting was about the loss of my grandmother. Not about going to court. Not about crying myself to sleep at night, and not about being sexually abused in my home. I recall being very closed off because I wasn't able to be as engaged as my teacher was expecting. All I wanted to do was to play with a paper-maché mummy that I made during history class.

I struggled academically through my sixth, seventh, and eighth grades to the point where my eighth-grade teachers requested a meeting with my parents and me to talk about holding me back a year. My father explained to the teacher(s) that I was struggling personally and was able to prove that I deserved a lesson-learned about my academics by working extra hard the rest of the year to avoid being held back a year. I did the work and was able to enter High School with my class.

Trauma, no matter at what age hurts the individual in more ways than words can explain on paper. It does affect a person's mental, emotional, and social aspects to an individual core being, especially when encountered trauma at a young age. I wished that HB25 was already implemented 20 years ago to help me get through my academic-learning career much easier. For the remaining half of my k-12 education, I was shut off and didn't know the following: how to properly cope with my mental thoughts and emotions, nor how to work with people properly again. Instead, I became very distant and hid any and all of my trauma emotions by trying to be so involved with Student Government and other activities in the school system. There are hundreds if not thousands of students around the state who struggles with personal trauma and could use social and emotional learning in the school system to help them grow their personality, thoughts, and emotions for when they get to the workplace.

As an adult, I am appalled yet thankful for not being fired from First Student. I mentioned that because I was up for termination at one point due to the fact that I never was taught the proper coping, emotional, and social skills while attending school during nor after my abuse, and became extremely difficult in the workplace. I couldn't work with any males, particularly. I would constantly try to get them in trouble when getting myself in trouble. I would be angry constantly every day at work.

I'm sharing this with you because I don't want our children to go down the path that I went

down. I want our children to have a better outcome especially after going through trauma while attending school. I understand that reading, writing, and math are important, but it doesn't make up a person when it comes down to the workplace as an adult; therefore, in an essence, we are failing our students if we refuse to address the emotional and social aspect of a person's health. We can do better. We must do better. We have the highest sexual assault rate as well as the highest suicide rate in the nation, and we must address these issues - even if it is in a school setting. Not every child who goes through trauma has the resources to get proper help outside the school setting. The school system can give the missing resources that are needed to help them.

Thank you for reading this written testimony,
Katie Botz
Juneau