

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 28, 2020

8:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair
Representative Grier Hopkins
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky
Representative DeLena Johnson
Representative Mike Prax

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Chris Tuck

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 181

"An Act relating to mental health education."

- MOVED CSHB 181(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 155

"An Act relating to eligibility for the Alaska performance scholarship program."

- MOVED CSHB 155(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 136

"An Act relating to public school funding for social and emotional learning; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 260

"An Act relating to the state education policy."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 181

SHORT TITLE: PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

SPONSOR (s) : REPRESENTATIVE (s) CLAMAN

01/21/20	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/20
01/21/20	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/21/20	(H)	EDC, FIN
02/17/20	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/17/20	(H)	Heard & Held
02/17/20	(H)	MINUTE (EDC)
02/19/20	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/19/20	(H)	Heard & Held
02/19/20	(H)	MINUTE (EDC)
02/28/20	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 155

SHORT TITLE: AK PERFORMANCE SCHOLARSHIP; ELIGIBILITY

SPONSOR (s) : REPRESENTATIVE (s) STORY

05/09/19	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
05/09/19	(H)	EDC, FIN
05/10/19	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
05/10/19	(H)	Heard & Held
05/10/19	(H)	MINUTE (EDC)
02/19/20	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/19/20	(H)	Heard & Held
02/19/20	(H)	MINUTE (EDC)
02/28/20	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 136

SHORT TITLE: PUBLIC SCHOOLS: SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL LEARNING

SPONSOR (s) : REPRESENTATIVE (s) HOPKINS

04/16/19	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/16/19	(H)	EDC, FIN
05/08/19	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
05/08/19	(H)	Heard & Held
05/08/19	(H)	MINUTE (EDC)
02/28/20	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 260

SHORT TITLE: STATE EDUCATION POLICY: EARLY CHILDHOOD

SPONSOR (s) : REPRESENTATIVE (s) TARR

02/19/20	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/19/20	(H)	EDC, HSS
02/28/20	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

ALYSA WOODEN, Program Coordinator
Division of Behavioral Health
Department of Health and Social Services
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on HB 181.

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Division Operations Manager
Student Learning Division
Department of Education & Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the presentation of HB 155.

TANIA CLUCAS, Staff
Representative Grier Hopkins
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HB 136 on behalf of prime sponsor.

JANET DAVIS, SEL Lead and Coordinator of SEL Positive Behaviors for Secondary
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 136.

KATIE BOTZ
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 136.

ALYSYN THIBAUT, Teacher
Bartlett High School
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 136.

ABBY O'NEILL, Teacher
Fire Lake Elementary School
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 136.

HEATHER COULEAHN, Social and Emotional Learning Coordinator
Association of Alaska School Boards
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 136.

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced HB 260 as prime sponsor.

TREVOR STORRS, President and CEO
Alaska Children's Trust
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 260.

TIM PARKER, President
NEA-Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 260.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:03:52 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Representatives Hopkins, Zulkosky, Prax, Story, and Drummond were present at the call to order. Representative Johnson arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 181-PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

[8:04:56 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 181 "An Act relating to mental health education."

[8:05:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY moved to adopt Amendment 1, labeled 31-LS1146\A.1, Caouette, 2/18/20, which read as follows:

Page 1, line 7, following "organizations":
Insert "and regional tribal health organizations"

[8:06:01 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND objected for the purposes of discussion of the proposed amendment.

[8:06:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY explained that the previous version of HB 181 provided for collaboration with only one regional tribal health organization - Southcentral Foundation - and this amendment allows for participation and consultation by any regional tribal health organization authorized under the Alaska Tribal Health Compact.

[8:07:33 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND removed her objection to the proposed amendment.

[8:07:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX objected in order to ask whether the proposed amendment affects tribal sovereignty.

[8:08:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY answered in detail that the proposed amendment has no effect on the legal status of any entity and would serve to broaden the available consultants who are already doing work in the field of mental health.

[8:08:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether this amendment should be broadened to include other state agencies who deal with the effects of mental health issues such as the Department of Corrections or other law enforcement agencies.

[8:09:34 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND answered that HB 181 would be instructive to DEED and the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development to develop standards for mental health curriculum and allowed that there exist downstream impacts of mental health education. She expressed her hope that the implementation of HB 181 would prevent individuals from contacting law enforcement due to mental health issues.

[8:10:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether law enforcement agencies would be alerted to the passage of HB 181 and consulted for input on the development of standards.

[8:10:35 AM](#)

ALYSA WOODEN, Program Coordinator, Division of Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), noted that DEED would be the appropriate entity to answer; however, DHSS is a partner in consultation regarding mental health with DEED.

[8:11:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX removed his objection to the proposed amendment.

[8:12:19 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND stated that, seeing no further objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[8:12:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY moved to adopt Amendment 2, labeled 31-LS1146\A.2 Caouette 2/24/20 which read as follows:

Page 2, following line 18:

Insert a new bill section to read:

"* **Sec. 4.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to read:

TRANSITION. The state Board of Education and Early Development shall develop the mental health guidelines required by AS 14.30.360(b), as amended by sec. 3 of this Act, within two years after the effective date of this Act."

[8:12:36 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND objected for the purposes of discussion of the proposed amendment.

[8:12:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY explained that the proposed amendment takes into consideration that the standards for voluntary educational programs are out of date and would codify a deadline of two years after the effective date for DEED to accomplish the development of guidelines set out in HB 181. She also explained

that the proposed amendment should reduce the financial considerations for a contractor named in the associated fiscal note.

[8:13:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND removed her objection to the proposed amendment. There being no further objection, Amendment 2 was adopted.

[8:14:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON related conversations that she has had with teachers regarding HB 181, who have alerted her to their concern of an increased workload on already overburdened teachers. She added that other concerns reported to her by teachers is that they lack training in mental health and that implementation of HB 181 will come at the expense of other educational programs.

[8:15:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX echoed Representative Johnson's experience of being contacted by teachers who expressed concern over implementation of HB 181 due to increased workload.

[8:15:47 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY expressed concern that the effects of HB 181, if passed, would result in an unfunded mandate, though she acknowledged that mental health is already burdensome on students, teachers, and schools. She expressed concern also that DEED would be burdened to assist districts in the development of mental health curricula; however, she opined that the extent of existing mental health issues among students is already akin to an unfunded mandate.

[8:17:25 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked whether the fiscal note HB181-EED-SSA-2-14-20 would allocate resources to DEED, or if the funds would be used to hire much-needed counselors.

[8:17:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN answered that the fiscal note is not associated with hiring counselors in any schools and is directed

to hire one contractor to assist in development of the standards and stakeholder engagement, including travel costs. He stated that, as prime sponsor, the fiscal note was unexpected and gave him pause to consider whether a consultant and travel expenses were genuinely necessary for the implementation of the proposed legislation.

[8:19:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY followed up by further expressing her concern that counselors would be required to aid in the implementation of the guidelines and, while she had considered adding an amendment to include incremental funding to provide counselors, she elected to not in the interest of keeping HB 181 on track for passage. She stated her support for updating health standards and to include mental health as a part of the health curriculum.

[8:20:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY stated her support of the proposed legislation especially considering the framework for health standards was last updated in excess of 20 years prior. She reiterated her concern regarding the validity of a wholesale update to the standards as required in order to implement HB 181. She requested that the committee to keep in mind that the health education standards remain voluntary as proposed in HB 181. She recalled prior public testimony from students which she suggested demonstrated a widespread need for students to advocate for themselves and their peers and stated her belief that HB 181 would be an appropriate vehicle to address some of the serious mental health issues students in Alaska face. She encouraged the passage of HB 181.

[8:23:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked what the ramifications would be should HB 181 be held in committee until the next meeting.

[8:23:22 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND expressed her intention to move the bill out of the House Education Standing Committee, and following that, HB 181 would be taken into consideration by the House Finance Committee, where it would undergo additional scrutiny. She commented that are challenges when considering multiple bills

currently proposed by the legislature that will affect funding of education in Alaska.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Representative Claman if HB 181 passed as amended whether DEED would have two years to submit standards to districts for their voluntary implementation.

[8:24:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN stated that DEED and its board would have up to two years to complete the development of the standards and could - at its own discretion - complete the work sooner.

[8:25:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY moved to report HB 181 as amended out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

[8:25:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON objected, restating her earlier reservation of increased burdens for teachers and districts.

[8:26:11 AM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Zulkosky, Hopkins, Story, and Drummond voted in favor of moving HB 181 as amended out of committee. Representatives Prax and Johnson voted against it. Therefore, CSHB 181(EDC) was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee by a vote of 4-2.

[8:26:51 AM](#)

The committee took an at ease from 8:26 a.m. to 8:29 a.m.

HB 155-AK PERFORMANCE SCHOLARSHIP; ELIGIBILITY

[8:29:14 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 155 "An Act relating to eligibility for the Alaska performance scholarship program."

[8:29:46 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY noted that the intent of the proposed HB 155 is to change the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS) eligibility requirements to allow Career Technical Education (CTE) courses be substituted for other requirements. She stated that the APS is a financial aid vehicle for students in Alaska. She said that the bill would increase the pool of eligible applicants for the APS.

[8:30:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked for an explanation of what language is proposed to be replaced.

[8:30:57 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY stated that it is her intent to explain the amendment coincidental to the motion to amend the bill.

[8:31:22 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY moved to adopt Amendment 1, labeled 31-LS0145\M.1, Caouette, 2/21/20, which read as follows:

Page 1, line 14:
Delete "or"
Insert "[OR]"

Page 2, line 5, following "cluster":
Insert "; or
(C) three years of mathematics, four years of language arts, three years of science, four years of social studies, one year of which may be career and technical education, and two years of a foreign language or an Alaska Native language"

[8:31:32 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND objected for the purposes of discussion of the proposed amendment.

[8:31:37 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY explained that Representative Tuck recommended an amendment to broaden the eligibility requirements to include a third option.

[8:32:25 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY called attention to the chart included in the committee packet, entitled "ALASKA PERFORMANCE SCHOLARSHIP." She explained that the proposed amendment would add an option "C", which expands eligibility so that students could retain foreign language for credit and substitute one credit CTE for social studies.

[8:34:16 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked to confirm that the amendment would add an option "C" and that the "Social Studies & Language Curriculum" is the curriculum option for APS applicants that would be affected by the amendment.

[8:34:39 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY confirmed and added that Department of Education & Early Development (DEED_ suggested that it is likely that the APS application would be updated with a third column depicting the option C for applicants.

[8:35:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON stated her understanding that the APS was established in order to optimize students' chances for success after graduation and asked if the proposed bill would retain the quality of that intent.

[8:35:29 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY explained that there has been a historical perception that CTE is not academically rigorous, and the evolution of CTE has allowed for cultivation of highly technical and marketable skills, including the rising educators curriculum - which is currently not recognized as meeting the requirements for students to apply for APS. She added that, in addition to required curriculum, APS applicants are also obligated to obtain minimum score requirements on standardized tests and to maintain certain Grade Point Average (GPA) in order to qualify for the scholarship.

[8:38:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked whether the intent of the proposed bill is to increase the pool of eligible applicants for the APS. She asked how many additional students are estimated to apply for the APS should this legislation become enacted.

[8:38:39 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY noted that DEED had previously presented statistics reflecting a decline in APS applicants despite the higher graduation and postsecondary success of APS recipients. She recalled that DEED did not project a significant increase in APS applicants should this legislation pass. She expressed her hope that more students would apply for APS with the increase in eligibility options and that those students could go on to fill jobs in Alaska which are currently experiencing worker shortages.

[8:40:06 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND referred to the fiscal note analysis contained in HB155-EED-ACPE-2-10-20 which states that it is not anticipated at this time that the proposed change would be sufficient to impact the annual appropriation needed to fund APS awards. She recalled earlier testimony which claimed an overall decline in APS applicants and that no additional funds would be required for ACPE to administer the changes under the proposed legislation.

[8:41:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether the APS could fund two-year postsecondary programs.

[8:42:22 AM](#)

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Division Operations Manager, Student Learning Division, Department of Education & Early Development (DEED), indicated that APS could be used for both two- and four-year postsecondary degree programs.

[8:43:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX related his personal experience of a CTE style shop class which led him to secure a high paying job after graduation.

[8:44:23 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND removed her objection to the proposed amendment. There being no further objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[8:44:48 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY moved to report HB 155 as amended out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

[8:45:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX objected to the motion, indicating that he supports the proposed bill as amended but is objecting for the purpose of encouraging his receipt of additional information.

[8:45:39 AM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Johnson, Zulkosky, Hopkins, Story, and Drummond voted in favor of the motion to report HB 155, as amended, out of the House Education Standing Committee. Representative Prax voted against it. Therefore, CSHB 155(EDC) was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee by a vote of 5-1.

[8:46:36 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:46 to 8:49 a.m.

HB 136-PUBLIC SCHOOLS: SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL LEARNING

[8:49:21 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 136 "An Act relating to public school funding for social and emotional learning; and providing for an effective date."

[8:49:35 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 136, Version 31-LS0827\U, Caouette, 2/17/20, as a work draft.

[8:49:54 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND objected for the purposes of discussion of the proposed committee substitute.

[8:50:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS, prime sponsor of HB 136 re-introduced HB 136 to the committee and explained that the proposed committee substitute contains substantive changes, following stakeholder engagement and feedback. He explained that the bill is instructive to the Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) to develop social and emotional learning (SEL) standards that would go into effect July 2021. He described SEL as a set of "soft skills" for students to become better prepared to learn and which aid students in dealing with trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that may interfere with effective academic instruction in other areas. He noted that several districts throughout the state have developed and implemented SEL curricula. He suggested that SEL transcends partisanship and is relevant in rural as well as urban school settings.

[8:54:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS recalled that Alaska's Education Challenge contains recommendations for inclusion of SEL and recalled also a study presented to the committee by Mark Foster examining gauges of success in life after school, with SEL and emotional intelligence distinguished as the best indicators of success. He recalled previous testimony and materials distributed by the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) identifying SEL as a top priority. Representative Hopkins identified a variety of witnesses from multiple organizations available in the audience to address any questions.

[8:57:15 AM](#)

TANIA CLUCAS, Staff to Representative Grier Hopkins, presented HB 136 on behalf of the prime sponsor. She spoke about the proposed committee substitute before the committee. She gave an anecdotal retrospective on the concept of SEL and emotional intelligence and its growing prominence in society and the workforce.

[8:59:11 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked for an explanation of the proposed committee substitute.

8:59:14 AM

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS explained that the previous proposed version of HB 136, which does not take into consideration the committee substitute, requires school districts to allocate one-half of 1 percent of the Base Student Allocation (BSA) to be committed to SEL, despite no corresponding increase in funding, prompting feedback from stakeholders voicing their concern of the possibility of an unfunded mandate. He explained that the proposed committee substitute instructs DEED to develop a standard of SEL for districts to implement as they deem appropriate for the needs of their schools and students and resources available.

9:00:26 AM

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND removed her objection to the motion to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 136, Version 31-LS 0827\U, Caouette, 2/17/20, as a work draft. There being no further objection, Version U was before the committee.

9:01:11 AM

JANET DAVIS, SEL Lead and Coordinator of SEL Positive Behaviors for Secondary, Anchorage School District, testified in support of HB 136. She paraphrased from her written testimony, which read as follows [original punctuation included]:

I have been involved in Social emotional learning (SEL) for the last 17 years; however, ASD has been implementing SEL for over 20 years. In 2006, ASD was the district in the US to adopt our SEL Standards. We have also participated in SEL work nationally through the Collaborating Districts Initiative for the last 9 years.

SEL involves teaching skills that students and adults need to be successful not only at school, but also at home, in the community and in the workplace. This includes but is not limited to being self and socially aware, having the ability to manage yourself both independently and while interacting with others, listening to perspectives of others, using positive communication, being aware of cultural issues and differences, setting and achieving goals, and taking

personal responsibility for learning. We implement SEL through climate, direct instruction and infusion into academics. I will speak to the first two.

SEL is implemented in our schools by creating a safe and respectful learning environment where students feel connected to the school, adults and peers. Some examples of the work we in to build a positive climate in the schools include teachers greeting students as they enter class, creating social contracts for how we treat each other, and establishing reset zones or places where students can go when they demonstrate challenging behaviors to work on replacement behaviors and to have restorative conversations so they can interact in a productive way with peers and adults, and get back to learning. A safe and respectful climate is essential for teaching and learning.

We use evidenced-based programs such as Second Step, Connected and Respected and Lions Quest to deliberately teach the SEL skills students need to be successful learners. In ASD, all elementary and middle school students receive instruction in SEL skills and some students who demonstrate challenging behaviors or may be experiencing trauma receive additional small group or individualized SEL skills instruction to help them interact with peers and adults, or to cope during the school day.

Once the skills our taught to students, it is important for student to have the opportunity to practice these skills while learning other content areas and throughout their day. Adults are an important part of the equation. Through our professional learning, we give the opportunity or adults to enhance their SEL skills so that they are good models for students.

MS. DAVIS added that when SEL is integrated into climate and skills are taught directly, office discipline referrals and suspensions decrease while student and family connectedness is increased. She explained that, following implementation of SEL climate and skills, students require the opportunity to practice those skills.

[9:04:56 AM](#)

MS. DAVIS indicated that, through professional development, teachers are trained to infuse SEL throughout the academic day. She emphasized that adults who are proficient in SEL skills can model positive behaviors to students.

[9:06:50 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY recalled having attended a workshop led by Ms. Davis addressing aggressors, victims, and bystanders training, and asked whether that workshop was based on SEL curriculum.

[9:07:13 AM](#)

MS. DAVIS confirmed that the workshop was an evidence based SEL workshop deployed at the time in middle schools and noted that currently, the workshop in use is called Lion's Quest. She noted that materials from the aggressors, victims, and bystanders' course is still incorporated in their workshops and training. She pointed out that she has observed students who receive direct SEL training in elementary schools enter middle school more prepared to put those skills into practice or are prepared to reinforce skills that they may be lacking.

[9:08:02 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked whether the SEL in ASD is system-wide and has consistent terminology for students.

[9:08:17 AM](#)

MS. DAVIS confirmed "second step" and "connected and respected" are two distinct curricula for direct instruction to elementary students, and the terminology is consistent between the two. She referenced ASD's five-year plan to train teachers using the Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, Participation, and Success (CHAMPS) approach for teacher training. She stated that deployment of this program has resulted in reports of observed reduction in disruptive behavior by students and increased instructional time as a result.

[9:09:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether the SEL curriculum at ASD originated from the district or from the individual schools.

[9:09:51 AM](#)

MS. DAVIS indicated that ASD had observed over 30 years of individual schools', teachers', and administrators' adoption of effective SEL curricula, and ASD superintendents advocated that the district research and implement standards in SEL to broaden the positive outcomes that were experienced in "pockets of excellence" in the district; therefore, it originated from both.

[9:11:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether ASD has universal standards for SEL programs.

[9:11:32 AM](#)

MS. DAVIS explained that in 2006, ASD adopted 15 standards for SEL.

[9:11:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether the standards applied to every school in ASD.

[9:11:55 AM](#)

MS. DAVIS indicated that all ASD schools are encouraged to apply the standards.

[9:12:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether individual schools have "latitude" in the activities selected to meet the standards.

[9:12:36 AM](#)

MS. DAVIS explained by describing ASD's five-year plan which contained several options for SEL deployment, and schools have selected and implemented SEL based on "guided choices." She noted that academic freedom exists when teachers teach.

[9:14:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND [opened public testimony on HB 136].

[9:14:23 AM](#)

KATIE BOTZ indicated that she had submitted written testimony in support of HB 136. She related her experience as a school bus driver having observed students who appeared to be in emotional and family crises. She acknowledged that the State of Alaska has financial shortages and difficult choices ahead but urged the committee to hold harmless students in Alaska. She urged the passage of HB 136 despite fiscal challenges.

[9:17:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND expressed her gratitude for Ms. Botz offering her perspective as a bus driver, which is a vocation that has direct contact with students and that she had added value to the discussion.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND [closed public testimony on HB 136].

[9:18:24 AM](#)

ALYSYN THIBAUT, Teacher, Bartlett High School, testified in support of HB 136. She explained that her students, upon learning of her plans to offer testimony to the legislature, reacted with enthusiasm. She shared an anecdote from November of 2019, when a student had committed suicide. She said it was the fourth instance of suicide among that graduating class. She explained her observation of grief among the students. She indicated that SEL awareness among students allowed them to acknowledge and adapt to their grief. She lauded the students of that graduating class as some of the highest quality performing students that she has encountered in her career.

[9:22:33 AM](#)

MS. THIBAUT suggested that SEL is not "in addition" to other education, and that the use of SEL is essential for students to be able to learn. She asserted that Alaska is rife with childhood trauma. She alluded to research which reveals that childhood trauma impacts an individual's DNA and interferes with students' ability to learn. She suggested that SEL aids in assisting children in managing trauma so that they may overcome cycles of homelessness, addiction, violence, and mental illness so that additional social services and resources are not as necessary later in their lives.

[9:25:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX requested to meet with Ms. Thibault following adjournment to discuss the research surrounding the impacts of trauma on DNA.

[9:25:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON acknowledged that impacts of trauma exist in students and that teachers are obligated to address those issues. She asked, considering one-half of 1 percent dedicated to SEL, in what areas would Ms. Thibault prioritize the use of funds.

[9:27:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS clarified that the one-half of 1 percent provision has been removed from the proposed bill, and that the version being considered pertains to DEED's standards development.

[9:27:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON referenced accompanying fiscal notes that demonstrate a cost.

[9:27:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS indicated that fiscal notes shall be revisited and forthcoming at the next hearing of HB 136.

[9:28:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND suggested that the one-half of 1 percent was developed and included initially to reflect the number of resources currently spent on SEL.

[9:28:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS added that the [now removed] language mandating one-half of 1 percent of BSA allocation be spent on SEL was drafted with the intent to compel all districts to participate in SEL, although subsequent to stakeholder engagement it was removed from HB 136 to allow districts autonomy in deploying SEL more according to their individual needs and existing available resources.

[9:28:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY expressed her appreciation for Ms. Thibault having shared the experience of emotion and vulnerability, and suggested that even lawmakers would benefit from SEL, and thanked her for her leadership.

[9:30:04 AM](#)

ABBY O'NEILL, Teacher, Fire Lake Elementary School, testified in support of HB 136. She described how SEL is fully integrated into her elementary classroom and gave examples of typical daily SEL activities. She explained that SEL is most effective when it is developmentally appropriate for age range. She recalled the November 2018 earthquake as a stark example of the importance of addressing and handling trauma before students are ready to learn. She explained that in her experience in the classroom, there is an expectation that she possesses SEL skillsets, which she has pursued at her own expense and effort and suggested that not all teachers are so equipped.

[9:33:25 AM](#)

MS. O'NEILL recalled the [2018 earthquake] event, and how it became necessary to address the effect on the children before resuming academic teaching. She compared the way the earthquake was addressed akin to how she functions in the classroom with students every day, despite not being trained as a counselor or social worker. She suggested that reaching students with trauma using SEL methods not only advances their academic potential, but also provides healthy adult relationships to aid students in healing trauma. She explained that her experience in using SEL in her teaching methods reduces the burdens that naturally occur while teaching children.

MS. O'NEILL shared a personal anecdote of a difficult experience with a first-grade student who exhibited behaviors such as trashing classrooms to the extent of requiring evacuation, destroying bulletin boards, and physical aggression with her and other staff. She credited her training in SEL with enabling her to foster a calm, safe, and loving environment. She also credited SEL with having contributed to the other students' compassion and patience in their interactions with the disruptive student. She advocated that all teachers should receive training in SEL.

[9:37:30 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether Ms. O'Niell was in the classroom at Fire Lake Elementary School on the day [in November 2018] that the earthquake struck.

[9:37:43 AM](#)

MS. O'NEILL shared that, due to the time of the day, class was not yet in session; however, she and her own children were in her classroom. She stated that the school was "red-tagged" and required an immediate infusion of over \$1.5 million to re-open after the earthquake. She explained that there are still students displaced while repairs are taking place to schools in her region.

[9:38:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX expressed his support for the concepts of SEL; however, he expressed his reticence that directives could result in resistance or rebellion to the standards. He asked whether Ms. O'Neill had perceived any resistance to the directive to include SEL standards at the classroom level.

[9:39:55 AM](#)

MS. O'NEILL imparted her personal experience that contention and resistance tends to occur when academic freedom of teachers is infringed. She suggested that the SEL standards allowed her adequate, and occasionally more than adequate, academic freedom to function in the classroom according to the immediate needs of the students. She acknowledged having observed some resistance among colleagues who are critical of the SEL standards but suggested the level of success of those classrooms had suffered as a result, and that [ASD] leadership would be the appropriate entity to evaluate and intervene on classrooms that are lacking.

[9:42:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked whether the "instruction" in the proposed bill would be instruction for the teachers or for the students.

[9:42:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS answered that the instruction would be for students and he compared SEL standards to others such as reading or math standards. He added that the standards would

allow academic freedom in how they are implemented in each classroom.

[9:43:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON expressed that she agrees that SEL skills are important and possibly essential, and should be taught to teachers, she entreated that teachers should not endure additional burdens in learning and implementing the standards.

[9:43:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS indicated that the testimony from Ms. O'Neill and Ms. Thibault was invited so that teacher and classroom perspectives were taken into consideration for the proposed bill. He noted that SEL is taking place at a variety of schools and districts throughout the state, and he suggested that SEL standards had been requested by teachers as a vehicle to impel the incorporation for SEL in all Alaska schools. He recalled earlier testimony which described "pockets of excellence" that evidenced the need for SEL to the ASD.

[9:45:27 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY commented that she intends to inquire of the University of Alaska as to whether it incorporates SEL into its teacher training, and to what extent.

[9:45:51 AM](#)

MS. O'NEILL opined that both management and SEL training are lacking and encouraged Representative Story to pursue additional information from the University.

[9:46:12 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND drew attention to the committee packet which contains Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District's SEL standards, entitled "Early Learning Guide," and requested that other districts which have standards available otherwise might be useful to the committee for reference.

[9:47:04 AM](#)

HEATHER COULEAHN, Social and Emotional Learning Coordinator, Association of Alaska School Boards, testified in support of HB 136. She encouraged the committee to review standards available

in the committee packet and any others they may be able to identify throughout Alaska. She suggested that reviewing the standards will contribute to understanding the specific skills and how they may be incorporated into classrooms in a highly adaptive, customized, community-based approach.

[9:48:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND re-opened public testimony on HB 136.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that HB 136 would be held over.

HB 260-STATE EDUCATION POLICY: EARLY CHILDHOOD

[9:49:17 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 260 "An Act relating to the state education policy."

[9:49:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HB 260 as prime sponsor. She expressed her strong interest in education policy, having been an educator for over 20 years. She stated recognition that teachers are overburdened yet key sources of information and allies to overcoming societal problems with families and communities. She asked the committee to consider existing research on the "school to prison pipeline." She summarized her research demonstrating a relationship between punitive suspension and expulsion policies in public schools being related to individuals' participation in the criminal justice system. She stated that her research on this phenomenon led her to learn about "restorative practices." She noted that the preparation of this proposed legislation took into consideration timing of other laws and acts being heard, passed and implemented, as well as her understanding of the burdens upon public school systems in Alaska. She listed communities from which stakeholders participated and contributed to the development of the proposed legislation: Anchorage, Palmer, Wasilla, Fairbanks, Valdez, Homer, Sitka, Juneau, Bethel, Chevak, Chignik, and Kwethluk.

[9:52:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR stated that educators from these locations met throughout four summits, and together developed a consensus

regarding restorative practices, what trauma-informed policies consist of; identification of resources to implement trauma-informed policies, including educator training resources that may be necessary for implementing restorative practices. She indicated that, after much work among these stakeholders, they fully endorsed the proposed legislation in HB 260.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR expressed that, while the language of HB 260 is brief, the intent is impactful and would be the first legislation that would acknowledge trauma-informed schools in Alaska's public education policy. She echoed testimony from previous witnesses that was reminiscent of her own difficult experiences as a teacher. She drew attention to handouts containing information on harm reported to children level at 40 percent, and which depicts cost impacts of trauma to public resources. She urged consideration of HB 260 as a needed change to Alaska's public education policy.

[9:55:19 AM](#)

TREVOR STORRS, President and CEO, Alaska Children's Trust, testified in support of HB 260. He stated that Alaska Children's Trust (AST) mission is the prevention of child abuse and neglect. He explained ACEs are differentiated from normal, manageable stress in that they disrupt normal brain development and can lead to lifelong social, emotional, and cognitive impairment. He noted that children who suffer from ACEs are more likely to have poor social performance, not graduate, exhibit high absenteeism, and exhibit behavioral challenges in the school environment. He asserted that HB 260 is evidence-based and would bring trauma informed care to students and would lead to increased SEL to meet more students' needs in the classroom.

[9:58:54 AM](#)

TIM PARKER, President, NEA-Alaska, testified in support of HB 260. He described HB 260 as a policy change that reflects the priority identified in Alaska's Education Challenge - to cultivate safety and well-being. He related that student safety and well-being has always been a high priority among educators, and that as of late, it has emerged as a top priority.

MR. PARKER referred to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs pyramid which depicts safety as a most basic psychological need and Bloom's Taxonomy, both of which teachers learn and understand as a part of their training. He suggested that for teachers to teach and

for students to learn, Maslow's must be taken into consideration, and trauma identified and addressed.

[10:01:41 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND reasoned that three of the four bills presented to the committee were closely related.

[10:02:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX echoed Co-Chair Drummond's observation that the bills presented were related.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that HB 260 would be held over.

[10:03:33 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:03 a.m.