

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 2, 2020

8:05 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

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 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
02/28/20	(H)	Heard & Held
02/28/20	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/02/20	(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
02/28/20	(H)	Heard & Held
02/28/20	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/02/20	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE GRIER HOPKINS

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced HB 136 as prime sponsor.

TANIA CLUCAS, Staff

Representative Grier Hopkins

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 136 on behalf of Representative Hopkins, prime sponsor.

ERIN HARDIN, Special Assistant/Legislative Liaison

Office of the Commissioner

Department of Education & Early Development

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided information during the hearing on HB 136.

TAMERA WAN WYHE, Division Director

Department of Education & Early Development

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided information during the hearing on HB 136.

DAVID NEES

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 136.

NATALI JONES, School Counselor

Kenai Peninsula Borough School District

Homer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 136.

HERMAN MORGAN  
Aniak, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to HB 136.

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 260 as prime sponsor.

KATIE BOTZ  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 260.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:05:59 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. Representatives Hopkins, Tuck, Zulkosky, Prax, Story, and Drummond were present at the call to order. Representative Johnson arrived as the meeting was in progress.

#### **HB 136-PUBLIC SCHOOLS: SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

[Contains discussion of SB 6 and HB 181.]

[8:06:43 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND** announced that the first 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." [Before the committee, adopted as a working document on 2/28/20, was a proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 136, Version 31-LS 0827\U, Caouette, 2/17/20 ("Version U").]

[8:07:08 AM](#)

**REPRESENTATIVE GRIER HOPKINS**, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HB 136 as prime sponsor. He recalled several previous meetings' testimony centered on Social/Emotional Learning (SEL) and its importance to all grade levels in Alaska. He endorsed public education's role in teaching the "whole student" beyond maximizing test scores, to help prepare students for success in life.

[8:08:00 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at ease.

[8:08:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS noted that a fiscal note for HB 136 would be forthcoming.

[8:09:02 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at ease.

[8:09:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS postulated that should a fiscal note require a cost for implementation of the proposed bill, he would expect it to be comparable to that of HB 181 providing for a gathering of stakeholders and he does not anticipate any ongoing costs. He explained Collaborative Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a private contractor working with districts throughout the nation on implementing SEL curricula that includes self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management, and relationship skills. He differentiated SEL curricula from standard education by describing SEL as an overall approach to teaching in the classroom.

[8:11:04 AM](#)

TANIA CLUCAS, Staff, Representative Grier Hopkins, Alaska State Legislature, presented HB 136 on behalf of Representative Hopkins, prime sponsor. She added that SEL is already taking place in Kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12), and HB 136 would provide an acknowledgment of the work already being done throughout the state and provide for standardization of SEL.

[8:11:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS referred to the State of Alaska early learning guidelines, which contain some nexus of SEL in Alaska, although he noted that in the intervening years since the development of the guidelines, much research has taken place, and HB 136 would extend SEL into all grade levels and not be confined to Pre-K.

[8:12:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS referred to the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) School District Pre-K through second grade SEL guidelines, which he lauded as exemplary standards that depict what SEL standards are, including key concepts and tactics to deploy SEL at various levels, from the student, to the classroom, to the school, to the district. He exemplified the Mat-Su standard of self-awareness; at third- to fifth-grade level a student must have the ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior, accurately assessing one's own strengths and limitations, and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism. He then explained that the school's role would be to develop the approach to implementing the standard. He explained that this example is a bottom-up approach wherein the role of the school is in the closest position to understanding the individual's needs.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS indicated that there are several schools that have worked with CASEL to implement standards with great success. He noted that Alaska's Education Challenge (AEC) identified overall goals which include "To Cultivate Safety and Well-Being" among students, which is the goal area in which SEL would apply. He drew this correlation to demonstrate alignment of goals with prior administrations, the current administration, the Department of Education & Early Development (DEED), and HB 136 and other proposed legislation.

[8:15:05 AM](#)

MS. CLUCAS indicated that the AEC contains an entire chapter on SEL which further underscored the point that SEL is already taking place throughout Alaska and suggested that HB 136 would not obligate an entire novel undertaking but instead enact standards for activities already taking place.

[8:15:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS exemplified that the AEC safety and well-being goal compels that culturally relevant standards should be implemented, which aligns community and family relevance to SEL by school district. He highlighted in the committee packet a presentation to the House Education Standing Committee from April 2019, entitled "K-12 Investing in Effective Measures by Mark Foster." He highlighted page 3 of the presentation section on caveats and limitations that caution the reader that standardized testing for student success is singular and

summative, and that "'Standards Based Tests are only modestly correlated with success in life' (Raj Chetty)." He emphasized the third caveat in the presentation, "'Social skills tend to be better predictors of success in life' (Kirabo Jackson, Raj Chetty)," and SEL sets the foundation for teaching skills that lead to student life success beyond test scores. He drew attention to pages 38-39 in the presentation and recalled that during the April 2019 presentation to the committee, Mr. Foster repeatedly emphasized that while core academics are very important and relevant to education, the key determinants of positive adult outcomes are SEL skills.

[8:19:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS referred to a publication by the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), entitled "Transforming Schools: A Framework for Trauma-Engaged Practice in Alaska" which outlines approaches that may be taken to implement SEL and positive outcomes of including SEL in schools in Alaska. He highlighted that tenets of SEL include self-awareness, self-management, and co-regulation.

[8:20:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS revealed that during research in preparation for HB 136, he claimed further justification for SEL in schools correlated with success later in life. He noted that research has shown that prospective employers seek workers skilled in the following areas: speaking, knowing how to learn, working with others, positive attitude, able to work as part of a team, respect for others, willingness to learn and understand rewards, responsibility, and self-discipline.

[8:21:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS drew attention to the additional committee packet items demonstrating research documenting positive outcomes for students with well-developed SEL skills, including the documents, entitled "Transforming Students' Lives with Social and Emotional Learning" and "Social and Emotional Skills Well-being, connectedness and success." He noted that extensive research exists and consistently indicates positive outcomes when SEL is taught and learned. He complimented SEL programs currently incorporated into districts in Mat-Su, Anchorage, and Juneau, with success. He recalled previous testimony from Anchorage School District (ASD) staff which detailed "pockets of excellence" emerging in discrete settings.

He recalled that ASD incorporated district standards for SEL to replicate pockets of excellence throughout the district. Mr. Hopkins concluded that the statewide standards proposed in HB 136 would apply to all schools and proposed that more positive student outcomes would be achieved as a result. He emphasized that culturally relevant SEL should be considered.

[8:23:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS again referenced the study included in the committee packet, conducted by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, entitled "Transforming Students' Lives with Social and Emotional Learning," which exemplified Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) as an example of SEL methodology, among others. He concluded by recalling the summation at the end of the Yale study, "keeping SEL separate from academics is a disservice to educators, students, and families. The time has come to ensure that all children and adults develop skills to maximize their full potential - academically, socially, and emotionally." He spoke about ongoing efforts for professional development and emphasized that SEL is most effective when incorporated throughout all academic areas. He offered that the committee consider an unattributed quote: "If a child cannot read, we teach him to read. If a child does not know how to do a math problem, we teach that child how to do a math problem. If a child does not know how to behave, we punish him."

[8:26:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX inquired whether this bill is the first instance of implementing a measurable standard. He expressed concern whether a standard would be the appropriate means or whether to allow work that is already taking place to continue.

[8:28:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS answered that SEL standards are not measurable quantitatively; rather, qualitatively as outlined in the Mat-Su standards included in the committee packet. He noted that Mat-Su standards consist of objectives, activities, and examples; individual schools and districts would retain autonomy in how they meet those standards.

[8:29:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX provided an example of the standard of measurement of air quality, which he explained was contentious.

[8:30:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS noted that math, science, and reading standards exist in Alaska, and that SEL standards would be developed in a manner that is not prescriptive.

[8:30:49 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY postulated that increased skills in self-regulation - including regulating fear, anger, and loss - may result in a decrease in domestic violence, cases of Child In Need of Aid (ChINA) may be reduced, and extolled the wider benefits of restorative practices. She asked whether the University of Alaska (UA) is teaching SEL to education program students, and whether teaching of SEL is occurring on a national level at colleges and universities. She asked how many of the 53 school districts in Alaska are currently engaged with SEL.

[8:32:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS indicated that he has not identified whether UA is providing instruction on SEL in its education program and has not aggregated data either from districts in Alaska or nationally, and he stated his intent to conduct additional research into those three topics. He suggested that the standards proposed in HB 136 would likely provide a vehicle for reporting on the data that Representative Story sought regarding SEL practices in the 53 districts in Alaska.

[8:34:33 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked whether DEED may understand district level SEL activities, so that it may be able to predict the impacts and increase in workload, including professional development. She added that implementation would come with direct costs. She said it seems that resources are important for "making this thing happen," and there is small fiscal note attached to the bill.

[8:35:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS allowed that cost is a major consideration, which is "why we stepped back from our bill last year that required school districts to spend a certain amount of money on [creating standards for] social/emotional learning to creating standards and the rationale to exclude the mandate that

...." He related that smaller schools had opposed that bill because of the tightness of their budgets; some of the larger school districts had been okay with it, because they could more easily "shift money around," and "most of them were already spending that one half of 1 percent of their state money on social/emotional learning." He added that the resistance to the previous bill has been supplanted by one of support for HB 136.

[8:36:47 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY added that funding to these and other important educational programs should be maintained and increased. She noted that there have been advancements and increased awareness in brain science, and these should be incorporated into education.

[8:37:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS expressed his agreement.

[8:37:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK indicated that standards such as math and science are measurable based on testing. He asked whether the standards for SEL would be measured in behavioral outcomes and how that would relate to instruction.

[8:38:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS referred to Mat-Su standards as a working example of how SEL measurements might be accomplished, consisting of a model of a set goal and reported outcomes, analogous to a student's understanding a multiplication table.

[8:39:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked where in the proposed language this point was made clear. He suggested a contradiction between the proposed language regarding "instruction" and student outcomes described. He questioned adopting regulations as compared with legislating standards as a point of discussion. He questioned whether the proposed legislation would result in autonomy for districts in implementing SEL, including culturally relevant SEL, and indicated his understanding that SEL was explicitly connected with student outcomes. He sought further discussion to ensure that the bill would achieve the results as discussed. He suggested the possibility that the mandate of instructional

standards could result in increased autonomy for districts. He inquired whether SEL would be required.

[8:42:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS affirmed that the standards would be required to be adopted.

[8:42:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked to clarify whether the standards should be adopted by each district or by the board.

[8:42:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS explained that the board would adopt the standards, which districts would then deploy on a mandatory basis.

[8:43:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK drew attention to line 7 of the bill and indicated that, as drafted, it is not a clear directive to any entity other than the board. He suggested that language be included to direct districts or other responsible parties to adhere to a mandate.

[8:44:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS indicated that he would follow up with the board and DEED to ascertain their interpretation of the language, which had been drafted in consultation with Legislative Legal Services.

[8:44:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS recalled Representative Tuck's earlier question about the distinction between the mandate for instruction and for student outcomes. He indicated that his intent in drafting the bill pertained more to student outcomes, and he would follow up likewise with DEED and the board to ensure that their interpretation of the proposed legislation as written is the same.

[8:45:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON indicated that outcomes are the goal with education in general, and that the wording of the language distinguishing instruction versus outcome should be carefully considered. She stated her understanding that many other states do not require SEL and suggested that SEL should be implemented on a non-mandatory basis until more is understood.

[8:46:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS suggested that students who do not possess the skills taught in SEL may be held back and do not experience success to their potential. He allowed that some states may not have mandatory standards in SEL; however, the states that do experience positive outcomes.

[8:47:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY expressed her pride in co-sponsoring the bill. She emphasized that age-appropriate programs are necessary. She cautioned that outcomes mandated by law might not be achieved as intended, and the measurements of those outcomes can become unwieldy. She encouraged Representative Hopkins' stated intent of cooperation with DEED and the board in order to maintain the focus of the holistic nature of SEL in the classroom. She suggested the analogy of SEL as a "lens" through which educators might teach.

[8:50:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS expressed his agreement with Representative Zulkosky's expressed viewpoint of the intent of the proposed bill and agreed to continue development and refinement of the language to ensure alignment with that viewpoint.

[8:51:09 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND inquired as to the number of districts currently using SEL.

[8:51:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS stated that standards may exist at a variety of levels, from individual classrooms, to schools, to districts; therefore, the data is not easily compiled. He suggested that implementation of the proposed bill would lead to more transparency in terms of where SEL is used and thereby its

efficacy. He suggested that an attempt to obtain that data would result in granular results due to the variety of standards and methods in SEL in a variety of settings.

[8:53:34 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:53 to 8:54 a.m.

[8:54:29 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND drew attention to fiscal note HB136-EED-SSA-1-19-20.

[8:55:05 AM](#)

ERIN HARDIN, Special Assistant/Legislative Liaison, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Education & Early Development, explained that the fiscal note reflects changes adopted under the CS before the committee, Version U. She noted that DEED analysis of HB 136 was completed using similar methodology as was used for analysis of HB 181. She listed the itemized fiscal considerations for fiscal year 2021 (FY 21) as \$60,000 for travel, \$41,000 for services, and \$12,000 projected expenditures for FY 22 to align best practices in standards development. She explained that FY 21 costs are associated with a contractor that would facilitate stakeholder engagement, and FY 22 costs would be used to cover printing and distribution of standards to stakeholders.

[8:57:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked whether DEED examined development of standards for teaching methods, curriculum, or both.

[8:58:05 AM](#)

TAMERA WAN WYHE, Division Director, Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education & Early Development, explained that the fiscal note was based on the process of development of any set of standards, including non-assessed standards. She added that assessed standards are language arts, math, and science. She suggested that SEL efficacy is maximized when the teachers adopt standards, and that the interpretation of the proposed bill is directed towards instruction and what a teacher does in the classroom.

[9:00:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY inquired as to the role of DEED regarding development of curricula.

[9:00:42 AM](#)

MS. VAN WYHE explained the difference between standards and curricula: standards are what students need to know - as developed by DEED - whereas curricula are tools and resources developed to impart the standards to students - as developed by the districts.

[9:02:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked what resources are received and needed by DEED for standards development.

[9:02:37 AM](#)

MS. VAN WYHE outlined the standards development process, which in general includes a contracted subject matter expert, stakeholder engagement, draft versions, multiple stakeholder reviews, and public comment in advance of adoption by the board. She emphasized that broad and thorough stakeholder engagement is critical to standards development.

[9:05:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY suggested that concurrent proposed legislation under HB 136 and HB 181 being related to education standards could result in "cross-pollination," cost savings, and efficiencies, while she underscored the uncertainties of predicting outcomes based on proposed legislation prior to it becoming enacted.

[9:07:16 AM](#)

MS. VAN WYHE noted that DEED has been tracking both bills and allowed that they each would require similar work to implement once enacted, and DEED has been preparing for the potential that both bills would pass, and agreed that efficiencies could be achieved. She added that HB 136 and HB 181 include fiscal notes that would be duplicative should both bills pass.

[9:08:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked for clarification of the difference between standards and guidelines.

[9:08:29 AM](#)

MS. VAN WYHE explained that standards with regard to education reflect what students are expected to know. She allowed that the concept of guidelines, by definition, accurately reflects the intent of what educational standards are designed to accomplish.

[9:09:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether the amounts detailed in the fiscal note reflect only DEED's direct costs.

[9:09:28 AM](#)

MS. VAN WYHE confirmed that is correct.

[9:09:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether DEED had an estimate of what costs stakeholders may be required to bear during the standards development process.

[9:09:49 AM](#)

MS. VAN WYHE asked for clarification on who Representative Prax referred to as stakeholders.

[9:09:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX explained that districts would bear costs during the standards development, namely the time spent reviewing and contributing through the stakeholder engagement process.

[9:10:17 AM](#)

MS. VAN WYHE explained that cost analysis for districts would vary widely through the standards development and implementation phases, and she could not project an accurate estimate of what those costs might entail.

[9:10:44 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:10 a.m. to 9:11 a.m.

[9:11:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked whether non-assessed standards are voluntary.

[9:12:03 AM](#)

MS. VAN WYHE confirmed they are. She explained that standards in math and language arts are very prescriptive and that districts may adopt their own; however, they would be similar to the state standards when adopted.

[9:12:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked whether the proposed legislation would result in a non-assessed standard if passed.

[9:12:59 AM](#)

MS VAN WYHE confirmed that DEED's interpretation of the proposed legislation is one that would result in non-assessed standards.

[9:13:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked for further differentiation between instruction and outcomes, such as the question of teacher professional development. She asked whether DEED coordinates with UA regarding its behavior management programs, which she indicated is analogous to SEL, and what insight DEED has into the instruction taking place at UA.

[9:14:39 AM](#)

MS. VAN WYHE explained that DEED does not approve UA coursework. She allowed that SEL is trending as important throughout the country. She cautioned that while she could not definitively confirm that SEL is included in UA's coursework, she stated her confidence that SEL exists and is being taught.

[9:15:20 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY suggested that the committee contact UA to confirm the extent to which SEL is incorporated into its education programs. She asked DEED to confirm that the

standards in the proposed legislation would be implemented in the classroom and not implemented to instructors.

[9:15:49 AM](#)

MS. VAN WYHE acknowledged that the answer to the question posed is complex and explained that SEL is implemented in the classroom, in the manner that teachers engage with students. She noted that SEL is implemented in a variety of methods at school, local, and state levels throughout the nation. She offered that the committee substitute would direct the standards to be implemented through teachers to the students directly in the classroom, though teacher professional standards are not addressed in the bill.

[9:16:57 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked whether the language in the bill should be changed to replace "instruction" with "learning".

[9:17:12 AM](#)

MS. VAN WYHE suggested that she confer with colleagues in order to confirm whether a change to the language would be recommended by DEED.

[9:17:28 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND continued public testimony on HB 136, [which had been left open from the previous bill hearing on 2/28/20].

[9:17:44 AM](#)

DAVID NEES offered biographical information. He expressed his appreciation of the change incorporated in the committee substitute that resulted in the removal of an unfunded mandate, but cautioned that in communities such as Boston and Chicago, the cost has been estimated to be between \$20 and \$50 per student for the implementation of SEL training and administrative support. He postulated that there would be costs within limited resources and that districts would be compelled to make decisions to cut other programs. He recounted that Anchorage and Milwaukee both have had SEL implemented in their districts for approximately 25-30 years and that no study has taken place to determine the efficacy of the programs. He noted that studies including Alaska's Education challenge suggest that SEL is effective; however, data has not been obtained

specifically demonstrating benefit to students and that a research component should be added to measure effectiveness of SEL under the proposed bill. He suggested that the word "instruction" in the proposed bill is problematic and recommended that existing standards may provide the framework in which SEL standards could be included; however, teacher certification requirements may need to be examined to ensure proper training.

[9:21:17 AM](#)

NATALI JONES, School Counselor, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, shared that the schools in which she serves are: Nanwalek School, Port Graham School, Nikolaevsk, Susan B. English School, Chapman School, and Homer Flex High School. She expressed appreciation that SEL is being addressed in proposed legislation, and that teachers have a diversity of skillsets in SEL. She cautioned that counselors, while supportive of SEL, would not be the ideal vehicle to implement SEL in districts; rather, SEL skilled teachers and school culture would be the appropriate channels. She suggested that students exhibiting the behavioral problems that SEL seeks to mitigate can often be handled in the classroom environment through teachers skilled in SEL. She expressed her support of SEL and acknowledged that the topic of policymaking for SEL is a complex undertaking and one of importance to student success.

[9:23:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY acknowledged there exists a shortage of school counselors, in some communities to an extreme. She asked Ms. Jones how many students she supports and what level of professional support she receives.

[9:24:09 AM](#)

MS. JONES described the conditions in her district as having 3 itinerant counselors among 43 schools, each counselor serving approximately 5 schools. She noted that the national model suggests one counselor to 250 students in urban areas, and rural areas the ratio is one counselor to 125 students due to the challenges rural logistics impose. She added that, at current levels, counselors provide services for ten minutes per student per year.

[9:24:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked for additional information about the schools in which Ms. Jones works.

[9:25:23 AM](#)

MS. JONES explained that Susan B. English School is located in Seldovia; Port Graham School and Nanwalek School are both located in Native villages; Nikolaevsk School is in a Russian Orthodox village; Homer Flex High School is located in Homer; and Chapman School is a middle school located in Anchor Point.

[9:25:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether there was a need for culturally different approaches to the work she conducts at each site.

[9:26:23 AM](#)

MS JONES suggested that local cultural customization and autonomy would be important for effective implementation of SEL.

[9:27:21 AM](#)

HERMAN MORGAN testified in opposition to HB 136 and suggested that other legislative priorities should be established.

[9:30:14 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND closed public testimony on HB 136 and announced that the bill would be held over.

[9:30:21 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 9:30 a.m.

[9:30:47 AM](#)

**HB 260-STATE EDUCATION POLICY: EARLY CHILDHOOD**

[Contains discussion of HB 181, HB 136, and SB 6.]

[9:30:50 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."

[9:31:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR, Alaska State Legislature, presented HB 260 as prime sponsor and offered her availability for questions or further discussion of HB 260.

[9:31:57 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND suggested that HB 181, HB 136, and HB 260 are conceptually similar and would shape DEED's approach to SEL standards and practices and child development, but they remain separate proposed legislation.

[9:32:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY requested that Representative Tarr explain the concepts of restorative practices as proposed under HB 260.

[9:32:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR recalled work that had taken place during restorative justice summits and noted that restorative practices and SEL fall under a wider umbrella of trauma-informed approach to learning. She suggested that HB 260 was drafted with the intent and addresses these concepts from the broader umbrella perspective. She recalled that Senate Bill 105 [passed into law during the Thirtieth Alaska State Legislature] instructed trauma-informed approach to the Department of Health & Social Services, whereas HB 260 is instructive to DEED. She referenced AS 14.03.015 and opined that it is brief and lacking. She emphasized her belief and experience that changes proposed to education policy should be undertaken with caution and a measured and deliberate approach to include the educational community in the development of policy.

[9:34:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR noted that work has been taking place over the last four years to shape the proposed legislation and include stakeholder input from Anchorage, Fairbanks, Palmer, Wasilla, Valdez, Homer, Sitka, Juneau, Bethel, Chevak, Chignik, and Kwethluk. She explained that stakeholder feedback revealed a consensus to include trauma-informed approach to education policy, and that local districts and schools deploy that approach in SEL, restorative practices, and other strategies. She recalled previous testimony in which witnesses revealed that

students experience trauma and bring it with them to school. She explained that HB 260 would serve to orient thinking towards trauma-informed approach as compared to a policy mandate. She noted that the State of Alaska conducts a significant level of crisis intervention, and the bill was drafted with the intent of prevention.

[9:36:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY proffered that the proposed legislation would be a policy statement regarding social/emotional learning and the addition of mental health education standards.

[9:36:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR indicated that research conducted during the formation of HB 260 from a variety of locations throughout the country revealed a desired trend from educators and stakeholders wherein policy intent is stated, and SEL and other standards can be deployed with local and culturally relevant implementation.

[9:37:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR noted that SB 6 is a detailed bill that contains funding considerations and, comparatively, HB 260 is intended to inform overall policy formation and imparts a gradual approach to policy reform. She indicated her support for SB 6, HB 136, and HB 181 and expressed hope that funds will be made available for implementation of these and other legislation which trend toward a trauma-informed approach to education.

[9:37:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND restated the concept of "orienting our thinking" as a suitable description of the intent of the proposed language.

[9:37:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX referred to AS 14.03.015 as consisting of only one paragraph and inquired how adding a subsection "b" would occur when there exists no subsection "a" currently.

[9:38:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR explained that this is due to the technical draft requirements as provided by the "revisor of statutes" and, if passed, the subsections would appear as intended.

[9:38:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX opined that AS 14.03.015 is a broad statement and asked whether the intent could be accomplished without amending statute, to avoid any unintended consequences that might result.

[9:39:44 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR indicated that the proposed legislation included stakeholder feedback and reflects the modern classroom environment, and the policy statement under the proposed legislation would codify the need to meet the issues that are confronted in the classroom.

[9:41:33 AM](#)

KATIE BOTZ shared her personal experience of assault that she endured as a school aged child. She explained that the stigma surrounding sexual abuse perpetuated her abuse, and the criminal justice process that ensued interfered greatly with her education. She indicated that in her job as a school bus driver she has noticed and is sympathetic toward children who may not exhibit outward signs of trauma and abuse.

[9:45:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK expressed his gratitude for the courage demonstrated by the public testimony Ms. Botz had provided.

[9:45:44 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND closed public testimony on HB 260 and announced that the bill would be held over.

[9:46:02 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:46 a.m.