AN ACT Relating to providing students with skills that promote mental health and well-being and increase academic performance; amending RCW 28A.310.500; adding a new section to chapter 28A.300 RCW; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. Sec. 1. The education of children is critically important. In order for children to be ready to learn and ready to ultimately enter the workforce prepared, they need to have academic, social, and emotional skills. Responsible decision making, self management, healthy relationship skills, and self and social awareness are among the tools students need. These essential skills help improve school climate and reduce bullying, discipline issues, dropout rates, and the educational opportunity gap at the same time as they increase mental well-being, student engagement, and academic performance.

Schools teaching developmentally appropriate interpersonal and decision-making knowledge and skills of social and emotional learning see large increases in academic performance.

Students today experience unfathomable stresses. Over thirty thousand K-12 students are homeless. Thousands experience bullying, depression, abuse, or have witnessed domestic violence or other
violence in their communities. Many have lost a parent or suffered a traumatic experience.

Emotions and relationships directly affect how students learn and how they use that learning in other contexts. If a student is anxious, afraid, or worried about other stresses in his or her life, those emotions will interfere with attention, memory, and positive behaviors. By developing social and emotional skills, students will be equipped with tools to overcome barriers to their learning and even find solace in education and going to school.

The legislature is committed to investing in preventative strategies in schools to increase student mental health and well-being in order to support the education of our state's children.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 2. A new section is added to chapter 28A.300 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The superintendent of public instruction shall convene a work group to recommend comprehensive benchmarks for developmentally appropriate interpersonal and decision-making knowledge and skills of social and emotional learning for grades kindergarten through high school that build upon what is being done in early learning. These benchmarks must include, at every grade level, competencies for at least the following:

(a) Self management. Regulating one's emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; achieving personal and academic goals; and expressing emotions appropriately;

(b) Self awareness. Accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence;

(c) Social awareness. Being able to empathize with others; appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; effectively using family, school, and community resources;

(d) Relationship skills. Interacting cooperatively with others; resisting inappropriate social pressure; dealing effectively with interpersonal conflict; seeking help when needed; and

(e) Responsible decision making. Making decisions based on factors such as ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences; applying decision-making skills to daily situations;

(2) The work group shall also develop:
(a) Guidance for schools, school districts, and educators in promoting developmentally appropriate interpersonal and decision-making knowledge and skills of social and emotional learning that:

(i) Is culturally competent;
(ii) Is linguistically appropriate;
(iii) Provides a positive learning environment for students;
(iv) Is inclusive of parental involvement;
(v) Promotes school safety and a positive school climate;
(vi) Includes best practices in assisting students through school transitions between elementary, middle, and high school; and
(vii) Incorporates best practices to address the mental health continuum of children, from mental well-being and mental health to mental illness, and acknowledges research around adverse childhood experiences;

(b) Technical advice on how developmentally appropriate interpersonal and decision-making knowledge and skills of social and emotional learning fits within existing teacher and principal evaluations particularly as it relates to school safety and school climate; and

(c) An implementation plan that provides a framework for incorporating developmentally appropriate interpersonal and decision-making knowledge and skills of social and emotional learning and is aligned with other Washington state education initiatives including college and career readiness, STEM education, twenty-first century skills, and the Washington state learning standards.

(3) To inform the work of the work group, the office of the superintendent of public instruction shall conduct a survey of schools to ascertain how many schools in the state are teaching interpersonal and decision-making knowledge and skills of social and emotional learning and to understand individual districts' capacity to implement these frameworks.

(4) The work group must include persons with expertise in interpersonal and decision-making knowledge and skills of social and emotional learning; child development; job readiness; and mental health; and the following:

(a) One representative from the department of early learning;
(b) One representative each from the student support services and teaching and learning departments within the office of the superintendent of public instruction;
(c) One representative from the educational opportunity gap oversight and accountability committee;
(d) One representative from the office of the education ombuds;
(e) One higher education faculty member with expertise in social and emotional learning;
(f) One currently employed K-12 educator and one currently employed K-12 administrator;
(g) One school counselor, one school psychologist, and one social worker;
(h) One mental health counselor; and
(i) One representative from a school parent organization.
(5) The work group may also include one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the senate, appointed by the president of the senate and one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the house of representatives, appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives. Each of the two largest caucuses of the senate and the two largest caucuses of the house of representatives may determine whether or not a member from that caucus will be appointed.
(6) The work group shall consult with: School districts; educational service districts; school administrators; principals; teachers; paraeducators; school counselors; community organizations serving youth; a statewide organization with expertise in interpersonal and decision-making knowledge and skills of social and emotional learning; federally recognized tribes; the state's four ethnic commissions representing the following populations: African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islander Americans; and community organizations representing communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities, parents and students, and homeless children and youth.
(7) By October 1, 2016, the work group shall submit a report to the education committees of the legislature, the governor, and the superintendent of public instruction that includes its recommendations for benchmarks, guidance, technical advice, and an implementation plan. The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall make the report available to school districts by including it on the web site.

Sec. 3. RCW 28A.310.500 and 2013 c 197 s 6 are each amended to read as follows:
(1) Each educational service district shall develop and maintain the capacity to offer training for educators and other school district staff on youth suicide screening and referral, and on recognition, initial screening, and response to emotional or behavioral distress in students, including but not limited to indicators of possible substance abuse, violence, and youth suicide. An educational service district may demonstrate capacity by employing staff with sufficient expertise to offer the training or by contracting with individuals or organizations to offer the training. Training may be offered on a fee-for-service basis, or at no cost to school districts or educators if funds are appropriated specifically for this purpose or made available through grants or other sources.

(2) Each educational service district shall develop and maintain the capacity to serve as a convener, trainer, and mentor for educators and other school district staff on social and emotional learning. An educational service district may work with school districts to create a training model that works best for each school district and educational service district. An educational service district may demonstrate capacity by employing staff with sufficient expertise to offer the training or by contracting with individuals or organizations to offer the training. Training shall be offered at no cost to school districts or educators if funds are appropriated specifically for this purpose or made available through grants or other sources.

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