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**HOUSE BILL 2239**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2024 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Timmons, Eslick, Callan, Ramel, Reeves, Reed, Doglio, Leavitt, and Davis

AN ACT Relating to supporting student well-being through instruction in social-emotional skills; amending RCW 28A.300.288; adding a new section to chapter 28A.320 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28A.630 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature recognizes that there is an ongoing youth mental health crisis that requires a thoughtful and effective response strategy. The rates of psychological distress among young people have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Psychological distress can manifest as depression or anxiety, impulsiveness or irritability, substance abuse, as well as suicidal ideations and suicide attempts. Furthermore, a national survey conducted by the centers for disease control and prevention in 2021 found that high school students who said they felt close and connected to people at school less frequently reported negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their mental wellness.

(2) The legislature finds that teaching students how to build the skills to cope with stress, navigate their emotions, build healthy relationships, and develop problem solving skills helps to reduce harmful student behaviors and improve student well-being.

(3) The legislature acknowledges that the office of the superintendent of public instruction defines social-emotional learning as the process through which individuals build awareness and skills in managing emotions, setting goals, establishing relationships, and making responsible decisions that support success in school and in life. As directed by the legislature, the office of the superintendent of public instruction adopted social-emotional learning standards and benchmarks in 2020, but the use of these standards and benchmarks is required only in grades kindergarten through three.

(4) The legislature finds that numerous public schools in Washington are teaching students skills that promote social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health and wellness within a prevention-based framework and within a continuum of support, but that many schools do not have the capacity or resources to proactively provide similar student supports.

(5) Therefore, the legislature intends to encourage all public schools to provide instruction on skills that promote social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health and wellness inclusive of self-awareness, self-management, self-efficacy, social awareness, social management, and social engagement consistent with the adopted learning standards and benchmarks. The legislature also intends to assist public schools in supporting student well-being through the development of social-emotional skills by distributing funding to the public schools through determinations of financial need.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.320 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Every school district and public school is encouraged to provide instruction on skills that promote social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health and wellness inclusive of self-awareness, self-management, self-efficacy, social awareness, social management, and social engagement consistent with learning standards and benchmarks adopted by the office of the superintendent of public instruction pursuant to RCW 28A.300.478. It is recommended that any curriculum used to provide instruction in accordance with this section is research-based or evidence-based, developmentally appropriate, linguistically responsive, and culturally sustaining, incorporates elements of universal design, and promotes and supports student learning, mental health, and well-being.

(2) School districts and public schools are encouraged to coordinate actions to implement this section with related efforts, such as planning for emotional or behavioral distress in students under RCW 28A.320.127, priorities of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists under RCW 28A.320.280, implementing a comprehensive school counseling program under RCW 28A.320.600, and providing staff training under RCW 28A.415.445.

(3) For the purpose of this section, "public school" has the same meaning as in RCW 28A.150.010.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.630 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, between July, 1, 2024, and June 30, 2029, the office of the superintendent of public instruction shall annually distribute funding to school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools for the purpose of supporting instruction in social-emotional learning that is consistent with the learning standards and benchmarks adopted by the office of the superintendent of public instruction under RCW 28A.300.478. The process for distributing funding must be streamlined for the effective delivery of resources to rural and small school districts.

(2) The office of the superintendent of public instruction must prioritize funding distributed under this section first to the highest poverty school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools that are not providing instruction consistent with the social-emotional learning standards and benchmarks, and second to school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools in communities identified as highest risk under RCW 28A.300.288 and that provide instruction in social-emotional learning as a component of primary prevention for youth suicide prevention activities.

(3) Recipients of the funding under this section must comply with the recommendations under section 2 of this act, including the social-emotional learning curriculum recommendations.

(4) As required by the office of the superintendent of public instruction, recipients of the funding under this section must report to the office of the superintendent of public instruction with their perspectives on any student outcomes that were impacted by increasing the instruction in social-emotional learning using the learning standards and benchmarks adopted under RCW 28A.300.478.

(5) The office of the superintendent of public instruction must work with state and community partners to implement this section.

(6) By October 15, 2029, and in accordance with RCW 43.01.036, the office of the superintendent of public instruction shall submit to the appropriate committees of the legislature a report indicating the recipients of the funding, what each recipient used the funding for, and perspectives on impacted student outcomes.

(7) This section expires July 1, 2030.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.300.288 and 2014 c 103 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall work with state agency and community partners, including prevention experts in the division of behavioral health and recovery of the state health care authority, to assist schools in implementing youth suicide prevention activities, which may include the following:

(a) Training for school employees, parents, community members, and students in recognizing and responding to the signs of suicide;

(b) Partnering with local coalitions of community members interested in preventing youth suicide; and

(c) Responding to communities determined to be in crisis after a suicide or attempted suicide to prevent further instances of suicide.

(2) The office of the superintendent of public instruction, working with state and community partners, shall prioritize funding appropriated for subsection (1) of this section to communities identified as the highest risk.

(3) The office of the superintendent of public instruction is encouraged to work with state agency and community partners to promote funding opportunities available under this section to eligible schools.

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