

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**For interviews or more information, contact:**

Sarah Butcher, [selforwa@gmail.com](mailto:selforwa@gmail.com); 425-442-3430

## **Bills would help create optimal learning environments**

*Legislators from both parties, both chambers and both sides of the state sponsor bills to support students socially, emotionally and academically*

-

SEATTLE – A bipartisan effort in the state House and Senate is taking root to support optimal learning for Washington children, with parents and child development experts cheering them on.

Two legislators from Mercer Island – Rep. Tana Senn, D, and Steve Litzow, R – sponsored companion bills [HB1760](#) and [SB5688](#) that would help students master skills that promote mental health and well-being.

"We know that students learn better when they have self-regulation, self-awareness, problem solving and relationship skills to support their mental health and well-being," says Sarah Butcher, a parent from Bellevue and co-founder of SEL for Washington, a grassroots advocacy group. "This legislation will prioritize social and emotional skill development alongside academic competencies. Being taught these skills can actually help remove barriers that students experience in their learning, and ultimately increase their academic outcomes."

"The research on academic and life achievement is clear," echoes Liliana Lengua, Ph.D., director of the Center for Child & Family Well-being. "It takes the integration of social, emotional and cognitive skills to attain success. This bill reflects the latest understanding of how critically important it is for learning to take place in safe, stable, supportive and nurturing environments that are free of bullying and threat."

Studies of social and emotional learning show it improves school climate and reduces bullying, discipline issues, and dropout rates. The companion bills would establish a work group to recommend learning benchmarks, and direct educational service districts to train school staff. It also calls on districts to develop action plans for multi-tiered systems of support.

"Solid mental health is a critical building block for life – and for learning. Unfortunately, many students today experience extreme stresses, ranging from bullying to homelessness," says Rep. Senn. "Providing social and emotional skills to all students will help build resiliency, confidence and mental well-being."

Co-sponsors in the House include Chad Magendanz, R-Issaquah; Tina Orwall, D-Des Moines; Melanie Stambaugh, R-Puyallup; Lillian Ortiz-Self, D-Mukilteo; Ruth Kagi, D-Seattle; Mike Sells, D-Everett; Steve Tharinger, D-Dungeness; Chris Reykdal, D-Tumwater; Laurie Jenkins, D-Tacoma; Dick Muri, R-Steilacoom; Roger Goodman, D-Kirkland; Marcus Riccelli, D-Spokane; June Robinson, D-Everett; Gerry Pollet, D-Seattle; Joan McBride, D-Kirkland; Sharon Tomiko Santos, D-Seattle.

Co-sponsors in the Senate include Christine Rolfes, D-Bainbridge Island; Rosemary McAuliffe, D-Bothell; Joe Fain, R-Auburn; Andy Hill, R-Redmond; Jeanne Kohl-Welles, D-Seattle; Mark Mullet, D-Issaquah; and Andy Billig, D-Spokane.

\*\*\*

**SEL for Washington** is a statewide, grassroots coalition advocating for social emotional learning. It was started by two parents, Jennifer Karls and Sarah Butcher, and has grown to include dozens of organizations in education, health and human services. Learn more about social emotional learning and SEL for Washington here: [www.selforwa.com/](http://www.selforwa.com/)