TESTIMONY
HUMAN SERVICES INTERIM COMMITTEE
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Department of Public Instruction

Good morning Chairman Damschen and members of the Human Services Interim Committee. I'm Valerie Fischer, Director of Safe & Healthy Schools for the Department of Public Instruction. Today's agenda requested a brief presentation on the inclusion of emotional intelligence in the health education curriculum.

North Dakota Century Code (NDCC 15.1-21-02.2) requires one credit of physical education for high school graduation. However, schools can offer ½ credit of health education and ½ credit of physical education as an alternative; subsequently, some students may graduate from high school never taking health education. The content of health education is determined by each local school district and school board. State Health Education standards exist and were last revised in 2008 by the Department in concert with statewide health educators. The standards provide the framework for the skills and knowledge that students in grades K-12 are expected to attain in health and serves as a resource that help districts provide students with information and skills for healthy living now and throughout their lives. The standards identify what, not by what means of curriculum, but only <u>what</u> students should know as a broad foundation of health. There are specific references in the Health Education standards promoting social emotional learning (i.e., responsibility, communication skills, and conflict resolution).

Emotional intelligence is likely to be taught by school counselors in addition to health educators. The North Dakota School Counseling Standards include Personal and Social standards relating to self knowledge, interpersonal skills, decision making and personal safety.

Emotional intelligence - the ability to perceive, understand and manage emotions - focuses on the following key points:

- the ability to know one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, drives, values and goals and recognize their impact on others;
- self –regulation, or controlling or redirecting one's disruptive emotions and impulses and adapting to changing circumstances;
- empathy, or considering other people's feelings especially when making decisions;
- self-awareness, or the ability to express and control our own emotions, as well as the ability to understand, interpret, and respond to the emotions of others.

The ability to identify, use, understand, and manage emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges, and defuse conflict is critical, and greatly aligned with the committee's work on behavioral health needs of our youth; and in fact, individuals of any age.

Effective emotional intelligence can reduce stress, increase focus and connectiveness to others in a variety of setting and circumstances. Using one's emotional intelligence and being emotionally aware in every day life can help students cope with bullying, stress and improve self confidence, coping skills and challenges. Without emotional awareness, students are unable to fully understand their own motivations and needs, or to communicate effectively with others. They are at greater risk for becoming overwhelmed in situations that appear threatening. Resolving conflict in healthy, constructive ways can strengthen trust between people. When conflict isn't perceived as threatening or punishing, it fosters freedom, creativity, and safety in relationships.

The Department does not have a mechanism to identify how many schools specifically teach emotional intelligence and in what classes or grades.

This concludes my testimony and I welcome any questions you may have or requests for additional information or presentations.