

President – Emily Scott, MD, FAAP  
Vice President/Treasurer – Jaime Stelzer, MD, FAAP  
Secretary – Pat Clements, MD, FAAP  
Past President – Tony GiaQuinta, MD, FAAP  
Executive Director – Christopher Weintraut, JD  
INAAP is Incorporated in Indiana



February 14, 2022

The Honorable Jeff Raatz  
200 W. Washington Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
*Via Email and Hand Delivery*

Dear Members of the Senate Education and Career Development Committee:

The Indiana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (INAAP) opposes HB 1134 because it threatens social emotional learning (SEL) and the critical role of early-intervention mental health services in schools. The bill also has a detrimental impact on the state's ability to collect critical data through surveys such as the Youth Behavior Risk Survey, and it creates a chilling effect on the safe, stable, nurturing relationships that students have with the adults in their school environment by threatening to revoke licenses of professionals including school psychologists, counselors, school social workers, school nurses, attendance officers, audiologists, and library/media specialists if certain concepts or mental health issues are addressed.

Social emotional learning is explained in the AAP School Health Policy and Practice Manual 7<sup>th</sup> edition (considered policy of the AAP): *Social and emotional learning is a process that promotes the development of life skills such as recognizing and managing emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically. Effective SEL programs help students develop social and emotional competencies such as self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, and self-management and relationship skills but are also associated with significant improvement in school performance. (p. 217 of the manual)*

SEL also provides schools with ways to work more closely with families and community partners to develop shared priorities and coordinate practices across different places where students live and learn. These partnerships create positive childhood experiences which have been shown to mitigate the negative health impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and toxic stress. We know that **SEL is grounded in science**. A large body of research across multiple countries shows the impact of SEL on a wide range of outcomes that support students' long-term success and well-being which in turn creates a healthy, effective workforce for our state.

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Further, after almost two years of disrupted learning and social isolation, Hoosier children and youth are struggling. Last year saw a rise in pediatric emergency room visits for mental health reasons, and it is clear that we need to focus on early intervention and prevention efforts in K-12 schools so every student has access to the mental health care they need. Adolescent mental health in Indiana was a crisis before the pandemic, and it's now more urgent than ever. Investments in prevention and early intervention with children and adolescents pay immediate dividends, create significant savings down the line, and ultimately help keep our kids alive. **Of students receiving mental health services, roughly 30% received those services in schools, making our education system the most accessed mental health delivery system by children and adolescents.** At this critical juncture, Indiana should be enacting policy that makes access to that care easier, not harder.

Finally, we are also concerned about the restrictions and limitations on surveys such as the Youth Behavior Risk Survey that provide our health and policy experts data that help us better address trends in health and well-being of our young Hoosiers. For the survey data to be helpful, our state needs to be able to reach children from every type of background, and this bill will make it harder to do so.

For all of the reasons, the Indiana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics urges you to oppose HB 1134.

Sincerely,

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Emily Scott, MD FAAP  
President, Indiana Chapter of the  
American Academy of Pediatrics