

December 13th, 2021

To whom it may concern,

As a teacher in a middle school and because of a quick conversation I had with one of our school counselors, I felt a need to express my appreciation for the attention and funding that students' social and emotional health has received. When asked how she was doing, our counselor said that she just had the best experience in a classroom teaching skills of anger management. She said that the students were so engaged and eager to ask and answer questions.

I had a similar experience with my eight grade students when our plan for the class period got derailed when the students wanted to discuss drug use. Earlier in the day in my classroom, a friend of theirs had a health episode that stemmed from drug use. The students had questions, they wanted to share their reasons for experimenting with drugs, and they answered my questions of why they would start using drugs. The students were polite, respectful of each other and were genuinely anxious to discuss the situation.

As social and emotional health is batted back and forth among law-makers and policy-makers, I wanted to express from personal experience how beneficial it is to give social and emotional health a high priority. Our students need these soft skills; in addition to learning math and reading. More than ever, we see students without these skills navigate through their many complex experiences. Many students resort to drug and alcohol use, retreat into a world of silence, cause self harm or suicide, or are so completely disruptive with poor behavior that for them, a quality education is jeopardized by their behavior.

I feel that this African proverb expresses my feelings. "The child not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth." We see more and more children in schools take violent actions because of their social and emotional needs. To get ahead of this situation, and to cure the increased aggression and violence we see from our students, we must continue the conversation and keep the attention on this issue. A front page story in the Idaho Press's Sunday paper (December 12, 2021), "Event to focus on resources to prevent suicides," was on the efforts being made by Superintendent Ybarra and other leaders regarding this topic of social and emotional health as it relates to teen suicides. I appreciate Superintendent Ybarra for speaking out in support of students and their emotional needs.

Warm regards,

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