

**Answers to House Finance Committee Questions on HB 198**

**Prepared by**

**Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education  
Special Education Service Agency (SESA)**

1. What is per student cost for SESA's budget? (Representative Gara)

SESA's low incidence disabilities (LID) programs provides consultation and training to support students, district staff, and their communities across the state of Alaska. The FY11 allotment was \$2,402,504 and 207 students and their Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams of were served. Of these students, 142 or 68.6% were students eligible for intensive needs funding. If looking strictly at the per student costs for the 207 students, the average cost was \$11,606 per student, of which \$198,661 was travel costs directly associated with specialists traveling to rural and remote locations of the state to consult on educational strategies for individual students. However, these trips also include specialists providing on-site training (sometimes for university credit) to school-wide or district-wide staff. SESA staff also present at the Alaska State Special Education Conference held annually in Anchorage. In FY11, 547 people received training statewide. On average, SESA staff spends 83% percent of their time in the individual student consultations and 17% on training. If the training time is subtracted out, the overall cost per student is reduced to \$9,633. The cost per person trained was \$1,973.

SESA services are described in Part IX Section 5 of the Department of Education & Early Development's *State Special Education Handbook*.

2. How much is the Department of Education & Early Development paying for special education? How does SESA intersect with the Department's special education funding? (Representative Tammie Wilson)

SESA's funding is appropriated by the legislature and routed through the Department of Education & Early Development (EED). EED staff is preparing a response to this question and will be forwarding information directly to the committee.

3. Why tie the increase to the Average Daily Membership (ADM) and the Base Student Allocation (BSA) versus just an increased amount fixed in statute? (Representative Costello)

Unless there is a mechanism to adjust for inflation (and that may not be possible to do in statute), an increased amount fixed in statute means that SESA would be in the same financial situation it is now within a few years, with no way to secure additional funding as inflation increases. Since there have been increases in the BSA over the years, it makes more sense to tie SESA's funding to the BSA; that way, if school districts receive an increase, so will SESA; if school districts do not receive an increase, neither will SESA.

As it stands now, because the current amount is set in statute at \$15.75 per ADM of the previous year, SESA has not had an increase in funding since 1998. Had SESA received the equivalent of percentage increases to the base student allocation, the \$15.75 would have increased to \$22.71 per ADM of the previous year.

4. What are SESA's administrative costs? What does it cost for SESA to participate in PERS/TRS? (Representative Fairclough)

<b>SESA Low Incidence Disabilities Program Administrative Costs</b>	
Administrative Salaries	186,790
Benefits	46,260
Accounting and Audit Services	103,000
Legal Services	5,000
Administrative Travel (includes 2 administrators and Board of Directors travel to 4 meetings a year and various other meetings/workshops)	60,600
Telecommunications	2,680
Office Supplies	7,000
Dues & Subscriptions	4,500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$415,830</b>

Cost to Participate in PERS (22% of salaries. SOA pays 11.49% as On-Behalf). The LID PERS cost, not including On-Behalf for FY12 will be approximately \$43,000. The On-Behalf will be approximately \$22,400.

Cost to Participate in TRS (12.56% of salaries. SOA pays 32.99% as On-Behalf). The LID TRS cost, not including On-Behalf for FY12 will be approximately \$129,000. The On-Behalf will be approximately \$338,900.

5. I have never heard of SESA. Are school districts receiving services twice? Can school districts do the work of SESA? (Representative Thomas)

SESA interacts mainly with school districts and typically does not have much interaction with the legislature except when its sunset review is underway. SESA was last re-authorized through June 30, 2012 by the 2004 legislature. Since the performance audit prepared as part of the sunset review process included seven audit recommendations, the Division of Legislative Audit was directed to conduct a follow-up review to its prior performance audit in 2006-2007.

In House District 5, SESA is currently providing services to 33 students in Cordova, Craig, Gustavus, Haines, Hoonah, Hydaburg, Kake, Klawock, Metlakatla and Skagway. They included students with autism, vision impairments, multiple disabilities and emotional disturbances.

<b>Number of Students SESA is Currently Serving in House District 5</b>	
Cordova	8
Craig	4
Gustavus	1
Haines	3
Hoonah	9
Hydaburg	1

Kake	1
Klawock	4
Metlakatla	1
Skagway	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33</b>

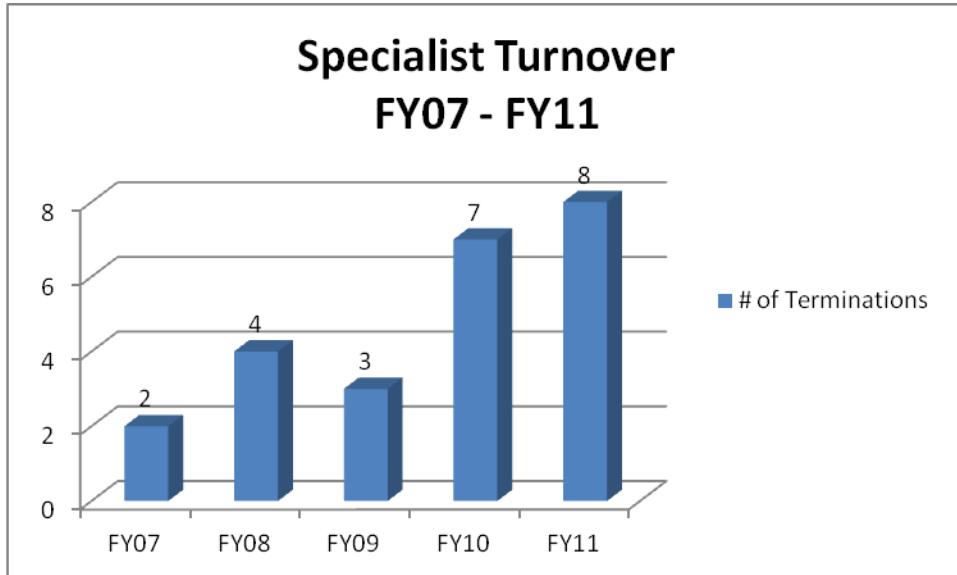
School districts are not receiving services twice. A district wouldn't call if they could provide the service themselves. In fact, EED's *Special Education Handbook* makes it clear that 1) the school district enrollment of children with similar needs must be too low to warrant a district-employed specialist; 2) SESA's LID program is supplemental to the district's programming; and 3) State and federal requirements in the identification, evaluation, planning and education for children served through the LID program remain the responsibility of the district.

As an example of what SESA does, a school in interior Alaska had a deaf student whose family refused to learn sign language. As a result, this young pre-school student had major behavior problems because he had no way to communicate with his certified special education teacher who did not know sign language and fellow students. Fast forward 4 years to the 2 and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade signing all the Christmas carols as a result of SESA staff teaching basic sign language to teachers, aides, staff and students at the elementary school. The students then fulfilled a requirement of his IEP by becoming his "like peers" to communicate although the parents still don't know sign language. Without SESA's assistance, the district would have been in a time-consuming and expensive Due Process hearing because sign language instruction was not available in the community due to loss of an instructor and the district would not have been providing a Free Appropriate Public Education with like communication peers.

6. Why isn't the Department of Education & Early Development distributing the District Cost Factor funds in such a way to make up for this kind of need? (Representative Fairclough)

This question is best answered by EED, but information is volunteered based on SESA's interactions with school districts. School district need for SESA services fluctuates based on students identified during the annual child count, children enrolled in the district after the child count and the qualifications, experience and skill sets of special education staff. Often, a district is faced with students transferring into the district due to relocations of members of the armed forces, coast guard, canneries, etc. These situations, which are hard to plan for ahead of time, require specialized special education programming, due to the federal timelines in place for districts to accept or reject the current IEP within a set period of time, and to develop a program for the child within stipulations laid out in IDEA. When asked for assistance, SESA helps the district fulfill its responsibilities by attending and/or facilitating IEP meetings and creating a new IEP if needed. Such action assists district staff avert potential problems by having access to a third party with expertise in the particular area of disability.

7. What is the turnover among SESA specialists? (Representative Fairclough)



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Average Employment Term with SESA for those terminating employment: 8.63 Years

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A total of 24 specialists turned over between FY07-FY11. Of these 24, 39.3% moved out of state; 28.6% took another position; 17.9% retired; and 7.1% did not give a reason. One person went back to school and another person died. The number of staff who turned over ranged from a low of 2 in FY07 to a high of 8 in FY11; the average number of staff who turned each year for the past was 4.8 employees; and the average turnover rate was 47.75%,

8. What makes SESA unique? Why should SESA be funded given all the competing needs school districts have? (Representative Costello)

The 2004 and 2007 legislative audit reports concluded that SESA meets a valid public need. There is no duplication of services between the Department of Education & Early Development, school districts, Southeast Regional Resource Center and SESA. SESA enables school districts to meet the distinct educational needs of students with low-incidence disabilities and avoid expensive and time-consuming mediations and due process hearings.

A good analogy for SESA and its unique role in Alaska is the provision of medical care. In this case, a rural hospital contracts for an administrative support (similar to what EED provides to school districts in terms of funding, monitoring compliance with federal laws, specialist support, e.g., SESA,

etc.); the hospital employs general physicians (general education teachers) and a general physician who decided to get additional training on the treatment of patients with cancer (special education teacher). Since the number of people in the community is not large enough for the hospital to have specialists on staff, if a patient comes in with a rare, advanced form of cancer or another rare disease, a specialized consultant (SESA) would be called in for a second opinion and consultation on the best course of treatment.

Some examples of SESA's unique services and outcomes are provided below.

SESA served a 4 year old deaf student who had no language and no school readiness behaviors. The district special education director, special education teacher, and speech pathologist asked for help. The SESA deaf specialist coordinated with the audiologist and school to set up a program and provided technical assistance and sign language training to the aide. The student is now making great progress at school and the aide is receiving ongoing sign language training from a SESA specialist via use of SKYPE.

Parents removed a deaf-blind child from school; found an out-of state program; and then brought the child back to the local school. The special education director called SESA in to help with interpretation of the visual program recommended by the school for the blind, and how it could be adequately implemented in a rural school in a manner compliant with special education law. The student is now a part of the school program with an aide trained by the SESA specialist. The aide also attended SESA specialist trainings provided at the state special education conference.

In addition to providing support and teaching strategies to school district staff in their classrooms, SESA provides support to the student, his or her family and school staff as the student begins to transition into the community and the "world of work". A young man with Down Syndrome is leaving school this year as the owner of an established business. The SESA specialist provided venues to promote his business and supported and facilitated agency connections for his family as a business plan was developed; his product line was expanded; and necessary transition plans were completed. In May, he will transition from being a student to a young, promising businessman with a bright future.

In addition, the infrastructure provided by the LID allotment enables the agency to offer, through grants, other specialized services such as the State Deaf-Blind Project, the Bring the Kids Home initiative providing assistance to school districts programming for students returning from out of state placement, the Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports Initiative designed to cultivate positive and safe school environments, and the Alaska Autism Resource Center. SESA is unique in its ability to grow local capacity, particularly in rural environments, through specialized training and support offered on site to school district personnel, parents, and community members. A prime example of this is SESA's current initiative to work with four different states in a combined Office of

Special Education Initiative to train teachers in Alaska, with paid tuition stipends, to earn a masters degree in the field of severe disabilities.

9. How many students by what type of disability by school district? Can a matrix be provided without violating confidentiality? (Representative Fairclough)

Please note: The Matrix represents LID services only. Many districts also receive services through SESA's grant programs. For example, Anchorage, Mat-Su, and Haines, amongst others, received services for deaf-blind children through SESA's deaf-blind grant which is subsidized by in-kind and other services from the LID program.

<b>School District</b>	<b>AI</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>HI</b>	<b>MD</b>	<b>VI</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Alaska Gateway Schools</b>						
<b>Aleutian Region Schools</b>	3	1				4
<b>Aleutians East Borough Schools</b>						
<b>Anchorage Schools</b>						
<b>Annette Island Schools</b>		1	2			3
<b>Bering Strait Schools</b>	4	5	1	5		15
<b>Bristol Bay Borough Schools</b>				4		4
<b>Chatham Schools</b>	1					1
<b>Chugach Schools</b>						
<b>Copper River Schools</b>	4	1		1	1	7
<b>Cordova City Schools</b>	2			4	1	7
<b>Craig City Schools</b>	3			1		4
<b>Delta-Greely Schools</b>	6		1	1		8
<b>Denali Borough Schools</b>	1	4				5
<b>Dillingham City Schools</b>		2	2	4	1	9
<b>Fairbanks North Star Borough Sch.</b>						
<b>Galena City Schools</b>						
<b>Haines Borough Schools</b>		1		1	1	3
<b>Hoonah City Schools</b>	3	2		2		7
<b>Hydaburg City Schools</b>					1	1
<b>Iditarod Area Schools</b>						
<b>Juneau Borough Schools</b>						
<b>Kake City Schools</b>				1		1
<b>Kashunamiut Schools</b>		1		3		4
<b>Kenai Peninsula Borough Schools</b>	2			2		4
<b>Ketchikan Gateway Borough Sch.</b>	5		3	3	1	12
<b>Klawock City Schools</b>	1			2	1	4
<b>Kodiak Island Borough Schools</b>			3	2		5

<b>Kuspuk Schools</b>		2	1			3
<b>Lake and Peninsula Borough Sch.</b>	2					2
<b>Lower Kuskokwim Schools</b>	2	4	3	7	4	20
<b>Lower Yukon Schools</b>			1	2	2	5
<b>Mat-Su Borough Schools</b>						
<b>Mount Edgecumbe</b>						
<b>Nenana City Schools</b>						
<b>Nome Public Schools</b>	2			2		4
<b>North Slope Borough Schools</b>	2		1	4	1	8
<b>Northwest Arctic Borough Sch.</b>	3	1	3	4	1	12
<b>Pelican City Schools</b>						
<b>Petersburg City Schools</b>	5	1				6
<b>Pribilof Schools</b>						
<b>Saint Mary's Schools</b>						
<b>Sitka Borough Schools</b>		6	2			8
<b>Skagway Schools</b>		1				1
<b>Southeast Island Schools</b>	2					2
<b>Southwest Region Schools</b>				1	1	2
<b>Tanana Schools</b>		2				2
<b>Unalaska City Schools</b>	1			1		2
<b>Valdez City Schools</b>	5			2		7
<b>Wrangell City Schools</b>	3	2				5
<b>Yakutat City Schools</b>						
<b>Yukon Flats Schools</b>	4			2		6
<b>Yukon-Koyukuk Schools</b>					1	1
<b>Yupiit Schools</b>		1		2		3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>207</b>