

From: [Norm Wooten](#)
To: [Senate Finance Committee](#)
Cc: [Lisa Parady](#)
Subject: HB 44
Date: Wednesday, June 10, 2015 10:01:21 AM
Attachments: [2015 SCCS Grade5-12 Student Survey Sample.pdf](#)
[ATT00001.htm](#)
[Sample 2015 AASB School Climate-Student Survey Grade3-5.pdf](#)
[ATT00002.htm](#)

Good Morning Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Norm Wooten and I am the Executive Director of the Association of Alaska School Boards. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 44.

1. During this legislative session AASB worked closely with the Superintendent's Association to identify statutes and regulations that over the years have created a layer of mandates. They were mostly unfunded and have imposed a layer of bureaucracy that is time consuming, expensive and negatively impacts time that could be better spent on classroom instruction. We provided this information to Senator Dunleavy and are very appreciative to see this first step in providing relief to school districts. That relief is particularly timely given the fiscal problems facing Alaska and the need to become more efficient in the way we operate schools. Districts across Alaska are being forced to downsize administration and teaching staff and this relief will somewhat mitigate these reporting and training regulations. I know you realize this, and encourage you to always keep in mind that a zero fiscal note only means the state will have no cost. Make no mistake though; school districts bear the cost either in actual dollars or manpower. Thank you for realizing this and taking steps to help us.

One part of HB 44 is of concern to our Association and to school districts.

Section 6 and 7 would require districts to obtain written permission prior to administering any questionnaire or survey to students. Over a decade ago AASB developed the School Climate and Connectedness Survey (SCCS), an evidence-based tool that provides schools with data about climate, connectedness, community, and social and emotional skills which are essential to help youth succeed. In 2014, over 32,000 students and 7,000 staff members took the survey. What this survey measures is directly linked with higher school proficiency rates for reading, writing and math. This is more than a survey. It is a way for schools and communities to make informed decisions for district strategic planning, classroom strategies, and developing specific steps to help students succeed.

This survey does not ask students about their individual behaviors, but their perceptions on their school climate, connectedness, and social and emotional learning skills.

The survey was designed to ensure anonymity and to avoid delving into or invading family privacy. A student can never be identified. The results show

trends and percentages of perceived behaviors and competencies and provides schools with data that allows them to improve the climate and promote healthy lifestyles we all desperately want for our children. We believe this provision in HB 44 would negatively impact the ability to obtain valid data. We believe this for two reasons:

- It is very time consuming to obtain written permission from every child's parents. It is unlikely that school districts will be willing to expend the amount of staff time necessary to obtain a written permission letter from every parent thus depriving schools of a tool that has been so helpful in improving our children's lives.
- We also anticipate the number of students taking the survey will significantly drop. There are concerns about being able to maintain the statistical validity of the survey should there be a drop in numbers of students taking the survey.

During the Senate Education Committee testimony it was suggested that these fears were only suppositions and were unfounded. We stand by our reservations and ask that you consider amending the bill. We also believe in parental rights. However, passive permission, rather than active permission, that is allowing any parent to opt of the survey at any time, is a more reasonable approach. A parent opting out of the survey is never a cause for consternation. That is an inalienable parental right. However requiring a written permission letter seems to inhibit our purpose in trying to improve the lives of students - something every parent wants.

I am attaching a copy of the survey for the committee to read at their leisure so that we can be completely transparent in the SCCS process.

Thank you for your time and for considering our request.

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