

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE BUDGET & AUDIT

April 3, 2001

12:05 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gene Therriault, Chair
Senator Randy Phillips

Representative Hugh Fate, Vice Chair
Representative Eldon Mulder
Representative Reggie Joule

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Jerry Ward
Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Dave Donley

Representative John Harris
Representative Ken Lancaster

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Presentation: Regional Learning Center Study

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE GAIL PHILLIPS, Former Representative
House of Representatives
Alaska State Legislature;
Former Chair, Joint Committee on Legislative Budget and Audit
[No address provided.]

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed the Task Force's findings
regarding the Regional Learning Center Study.

DALE ANDERSON, Staff
to Representative Mulder
Alaska State Legislature
Capitol Building, Room 507
Juneau, Alaska 99801

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a PowerPoint presentation
regarding the Regional Learning Center Study.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 01-4, SIDE A

Number 001

CHAIR GENE THERRIAULT called the Joint Committee on Legislative Budget & Audit to order at 12:05 p.m. Senators Therriault, Phillips, and Wilken and Representatives Fate, Lancaster, Mulder, and Joule were present at the call to order.

Presentation: Regional Learning Center Study

REPRESENTATIVE GAIL PHILLIPS, Former Representative, House of Representatives, Alaska State Legislature, informed the committee that the Joint Legislative Budget and Audit Committee was charged last interim with determining if there was interest in re-establishing the regional learning centers across the state. Twelve communities that expressed an interest in being visited were visited by the committee. Therefore, the PowerPoint presentation will illustrate what was learned during the visits to those 12 communities.

Number 0168

DALE ANDERSON, Staff to Representative Mulder, Alaska State Legislature, informed the committee that during the last interim he served as the Legislative Aide for the Joint Committee on Legislative Budget and Audit, specifically to organize this first phase of the study on education that he is reporting on today.

CHAIR THERRIAULT explained that last year the Joint Committee on Legislative Budget and Audit received an appropriation to undertake this study. Representative Gail Phillips was the chair of the Joint Committee on Legislative Budget and Audit during the last legislature. He recalled that Representative Phillips was the one person that visited all of the locations.

MR. ANDERSON began his presentation as follows:

Alaskans from across the state are speaking out and asking policymakers, educators, parents and communities to explore new avenues to revitalize and guarantee excellence in education for our children. They are challenging lawmakers to consider innovative educational opportunities that provide an environment where urban and rural children alike make successful transitions from school to life. Our children need the necessary academic skills and personal

characteristics to reach their full potential and become productive citizens of our state.

A key message that's stressed within this report is the importance of a community and school forging an educational partnership, bridging cultural differences and supporting each other in the educational process. It was made clear by both urban and rural students and parents that they wish to exercise choice in their educational experience. Quality educational opportunities provide all young Alaskans the option to choose educational economic, social, and cultural guidelines that provide a fulfilling, prosperous lifestyle of their choice.

A strong educational system in our state is necessary to fuel economic prosperity. And more than ever, economic growth depends on new ideas and technological advances to lower costs, increase productivity and tap into global markets. Based on this concept, the LB&A Committee directed the task force to explore a two-fold mission: to assess the public's interest in establishing Regional Learning Centers, and to begin to determine the feasibility and viability of such a system. In completing that initial phase of the study, the task force engaged in exhaustive research, two constituent questionnaires, and conducted community meetings during a dozen site visits across the state. We discussed the issues with numerous educational associations, attended the AFN Conference in Anchorage and met with attendees, interviewed Native leaders, parents, and students, and met with several state and federal agencies. All told, over 3,000 Alaskans personally received information and an invitation to comment on the pros and cons of a regional school system. In this study, the question revolves around what type of plan best serves "small" schools and student populations educationally, socially, as well as monetarily. That is, should there be regional schools or should there be a small rural high school in each community? Today, the message communicated throughout the study is the realization that some combination may be the most effective.

MR. ANDERSON then provided the committee with a very brief historical perspective of education in rural Alaska as a

background for understanding the current issues that the state faces. The Territory of Alaska maintained a dual system of education, that is separate education for Alaska Native children and non-Native children, for more than 50 years. Ultimately, the state made a policy decision to keep Alaskan children in Alaska's schools and thus the Boarding Home Schools were established in Nome, Kodiak, and Bethel. There was no lead administrative agency and thus the state-operated schools were centrally operated from Juneau. Subsequently, the Bureau of Indian Affairs turned its schools over to the Alaska Department of Education. Mr. Anderson said, "[The] lack of administrative day-to-day contact with the students and faculty, a deficient discipline system both in the classroom and dorm facilities, along with poor planning for policies and procedures created a blueprint for failure." Therefore, the boarding schools closed in the coming years.

Number 0663

MR. ANDERSON continued:

There were two events that were instrumental in developing the structure of the current rural education system. The Ninth Legislature, in response to pressure to decentralize the control of the rural educational services, created the Regional Education Attendance Areas (REAAs) for the unorganized borough. The REAAs provided for local control through local school advisory boards that control policy and curriculum for the school in each of their areas.

The second event was the filing of a class action lawsuit in the name of Molly Hootch to compel the state to provide secondary schools in their communities. The lawsuit was based on the legal theories that the state, by failing to provide the local high schools in all the regional villages, was violating the educational clause of the Alaska Constitution that required the state to establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children. In May 1975, the Alaska Supreme court held for the state in a 4:1 decision, but the case set the stage for an eventual out-of-court settlement in a companion case, Tobeluk v. Lind.

During the 1976 legislative session, the State of Alaska agreed to build [or] renovate and operate local

high schools in more than 125 [rural] communities that opted for the program. Today, as a direct result of the Tobeluk case, ...

Number 0739

MR. ANDERSON then turned to the three recurring questions that surfaced throughout the task force. There was the question of the level of public interest in the RLC concept. Great support was found for the RLC concept, although there were those that didn't think it was a good policy. Often there was reluctance to take children from their homes for nine months in order to send them to school. There was also the question of the concept of having a residential school versus a magnet school. The results for that question were more evenly split. Mr. Anderson informed the committee that the majority of those responding to the surveys and those participating in the community meetings, held that some combination may be the most effective educationally as well as monetarily.

MR. ANDERSON also informed the committee that the committee packet should include a comprehensive analysis, which is in Appendix A. This analysis was performed in order to identify small secondary schools in the state. In this analysis, "small" was any secondary school that averages less than 15 students per year over the past 11 years. He explained:

[The] 11-year period [relates] back to 1989 when the parties associated with the Tobeluk Consent Decree stipulated that all schools, at that time, had been completed. This action signaled the era of the local secondary schools in each village and, for all practical purposes, the end of the Alaska boarding school program, with the exception of course of Mount Edgecumbe High School in Sitka.

In the 25 years of Molly Hootch schools, the state has built or renovated more than 130 schools at a cost of over \$200 million. This analysis identifies more than a hundred schools across Alaska that, over the past 11 years have averaged less than four secondary students. The majority of these schools are perceived as though they may be unable to provide a quality educational experience for the high school students in Alaska. In this analysis, the number of students attending these schools ranged from 580 to 805 per year, averaging 698 overall. This finding indicates there is a

significant population of Alaska students that may benefit from the implementation of a regional learning center.

MR. ANDERSON then showed a map that illustrated the distribution of the 127 schools the task force identified. He said he believes that "this indicates that there is a statewide concern as these markers are pretty evenly spread across the state." Data was also examined in order to address the concern voiced regarding the risk of closing local schools if all the students left their homes to attend a regional residential program. With a very narrow scenario based on fiscal year 2000 elementary student counts, only four schools of the 127 would fall below the standard of eight students that would [result] in a reduction in funding or school closure.

Number 0968

MR. ANDERSON addressed the site visit overviews. He said:

Numerous communities have expressed strong interest in accommodating a regional learning center. This analysis identifies preferred community resources to identify and improve the cost efficiencies of residential school operations and enhance the quality of social and educational opportunities of secondary high school students. Site criteria used during this evaluation included: transportation infrastructure; access issues; professional public resources; police, emergency medical facilities; [food] service and the supply sector; and tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity in the town.

MR. ANDERSON informed the committee that the task force visited the following sites: Fairbanks, Nenana, Galena, Nome, Kotzebue, Sitka, Bethel, St. Marys, McGrath, Takotna, Seward, Seldovia, and Kodiak. He highlighted the following. The first community the task force visited was Fairbanks where it met at the Hutchinson Center, which has broad-based vocational education and vocational technical programs that train youth and adults for existing and emerging jobs in Alaska. The center has also created some unique partnerships with the North Star Borough School District, Tanana Valley College, local unions, private sector businesses, and industry. These [programs] have been in operation since 1972 and currently serve about 1,000 students, which are evenly split between secondary students and adults.

MR. ANDERSON continued with the task force's visit to Nenana, which confirmed the desire of many Alaskans to reinstitute boarding school programs in Alaska. Nenana found its school facility at about 25 percent occupancy and decided to do something about it. Therefore, the school board procured a loan to construct a student living center for approximately 100 students. The primary mission of this boarding school is to develop a curriculum and standards for a program targeting work-readiness and career education.

Number 1134

MR. ANDERSON then turned to the visit to Galena where the school district operates three distinct programs that include the local Galena High School, a cyberschool called the Interior Distance Education of Alaska (IDEA), and the Project Education Charter School. Mr. Anderson noted that Galena has the advantage of being able to use the local air force base, which is in warm status. Furthermore, this district has a "can do" attitude, which was refreshing. He said, "This community is dedicated to kids learning." Furthermore, Galena's vocational education program has been enhanced through partnerships with industry such as GM, Suzuki, Compaq computers, U.S. Air Force, and Frontier Flying. Mr. Anderson related his belief that this is a program to watch and utilize as a resource for ideas and direction if the state decides to proceed with a regional school program.

MR. ANDERSON moved on to Nome where there is an empty facility, the Nome-Beltz Boarding School, that is ready for use after some renovations. He informed the committee that there is consideration of a regional pilot program featuring a magnet school concept utilizing the Nome-Beltz school. The planned curriculum is in vocational trade training, although there are plans to offer additional advanced courses in professional level jobs such as health care, aviation services, and government positions. These jobs are jobs that the community has to constantly go out of the region to fill. Therefore, the [desire] is to fill those positions [with local people].

Number 1275

MR. ANDERSON continued with the visit to Kotzebue, which has the following three distinct educational facilities: Kotzebue High School, Alaska Technical Center (ATC), and Chukchi Campus. Currently, the Kotzebue High School is operating at or above capacity. Mr. Anderson informed the committee that in each

community the facilities in the community were reviewed in an attempt to determine whether the facilities were being underutilized. It was found that the ATC facilities were underutilized. Mr. Anderson also informed the committee that at the town meeting Representative Joule expressed the need to improve what has been started and to ensure a seamless transition for regional students to move from high school into ATC or Chukchi.

MR. ANDERSON then turned to Sitka where Mt. Edgecumbe High School was visited. Mount Edgecumbe High School, which has been in operation for nearly 50 years, is the only state-operated high school boarding program. The school has approximately 300 students and there is a lengthy waiting list. Mr. Anderson said, "During our visit to Mt. Edgecumbe, we found important keys to the success of those who graduate from Mt. Edgecumbe appears to be largely attributable to the infrastructure present in Sitka, years of tradition, and the quest for excellence. There is an emphasis on entrepreneurship, critical thinking, technology, and Pacific Rim studies." Classes offered at UAS-Sitka and Sheldon Jackson College compliment the program at Mt. Edgecumbe. Furthermore, people seem to trust Mt. Edgecumbe because of its years of experience as a boarding school. Mr. Anderson pointed out that if the RLC project proceeds, Mt. Edgecumbe would provide a source of expertise that could be utilized. The administration at [Mt. Edgecumbe] is supportive of new RLCs.

Number 1415

MR. ANDERSON moved on to the visit to St. Marys, which housed the oldest and longest operating boarding school in Alaska. The school closed in 1987 after the Tobeluk Decree was settled. Saint Marys Boarding School successfully educates many children and thus support for RLCs is high. Mr. Anderson said, "The community is committed to reopen a regional learning center." Furthermore, there are two great facilities that could be utilized for a RLC once there is a student population. From that town meeting, Mr. Anderson wrote the following note: "This is a very supportive, cohesive, forward-looking group of leaders focused on enhancing education. They're ready to tackle the job at hand of bringing a regional school back to their community."

MR. ANDERSON addressed the visit to McGrath, which has been a leader statewide in the quest for providing kids with educational tools that will serve them well for life. He informed the committee that this district operates under a "seat

time" waiver from the Department of Education & Early Development and thus have moved away from the Carnegie principle. "The program was granted charter school status for its innovative approach and that appears to be working well," he added. Currently, Takotna is operating a boarding school with an emphasis on vocational curriculum using a project-based model. He also added that the district has been successful in taking at-risk students and placing them on a path with learning skills in a real-life setting.

Number 1562

MR. ANDERSON turned to the visit to Bethel, which is the regional hub for transportation and health care. The Bethel Alternative Boarding School was established in 1998. This school provides a new start for students who have left school or are having difficulties in their current school. Furthermore, this school provides a variety of opportunities, including vocational education and job skills. Students can work towards a Lower Kuskokwim School Diploma, a GED, or job/vocational/life skills. He recalled someone saying "This school is designed just to give us one more chance." He also recalled a student saying "Strong discipline is the key." Mr. Anderson also noted that on-the-job training is an important aspect of [this school].

MR. ANDERSON moved on to the visit to Seward where creating opportunity is important through the Alaska Vocational Technical Education Center (AVTEC) and their schools. He noted that the high school is generally running at capacity. Although the community's infrastructure is in place, additional classrooms and residential facilities would have to be constructed if the expansion was to be substantial. Mr. Anderson said, "The goal of Seward's education community really is to produce a seamless transition so the high school students don't get sidetracked before they reach their full potential." Therefore, a major focus at AVTEC are life-transition skills. Furthermore, they have very strong programs in vocational and technical training and are very supportive and responsive to industry needs.

Number 1646

MR. ANDERSON continued with the visit to Seldovia where he gathered the lasting impression of "a town that truly has a passion for kids," which permeated every aspect of the community. He didn't believe that any decision is made in Seldovia without considering what it creates for the future of

its children. Seldovia does want to establish a RLC and the city council unanimously voted to pursue the project. Furthermore, there is existing room for expansion within existing teaching facilities, which are currently at about 50 percent capacity. There is also a vocational facility that has room for expansion. He noted that the Kenai Peninsula Boys & Girls Club plans to build a new facility in Seldovia and they brought forward a proposal to try to combine plans and funding in order to create a facility that would work for them as well as a RLC. He also noted that [Seldovia] High School has a tradition of producing great results and today the [average] grade point average here is above 3.0. However, the fear of parents sending their children elsewhere for education relates to the atmosphere and environment the children will be living in 24 hours a day.

MR. ANDERSON turned to the visit to Kodiak Island where consideration has been given to a RLC in order to serve the island's small communities. Prior to the Joint Committee on Legislative Budget and Audit meeting, the community held islandwide discussions on this issue. The primary issue for the community is regarding whether to house the school in Kodiak or an outlying community. Currently, there is no existing square footage in Kodiak that could be utilized. Port Lions and Old Harbor actively support the RLC concept and have the infrastructure to support a RLC. However, teaching classrooms and residential halls would have to be built. He noted that the village of Ouzinkie is strongly opposed to the RLC concept. Kodiak's community infrastructure is well developed and could handle the influx of additional students.

Number 1798

MR. ANDERSON reviewed the task force's current recommendations that were highlighted on the PowerPoint slide:

To establish a relationship of trust between the schools and [communities], educators and lawmakers.

To continue a strong statewide educational system to translate learning partnerships that continue to fuel social and economic prosperity.

Attendance in this system should not be mandatory but be an enhancement of existing programs.

Although a great deal of broad-based support was found for the regional learning center concept, it's too early in the process now to make any conclusive recommendations to establish a regional school structure.

MR. ANDERSON said that if the study is continued the following areas should be focused on:

To tighten the focus on the topics of possible facility locations.

Produce financial proformas and fiscal analysis as it relates to the existing education budget.

Research dorm policies, application procedures, and curriculum options.

Therefore, the task force strongly recommends continuing this effort on behalf of all students in Alaska.

Number 1893

SENATOR PHILLIPS asked if there was a Copper Center Boarding School.

REPRESENTATIVE PHILLIPS replied yes and noted that it was well-attended for quite some time. She clarified that the Copper Center Boarding School was [affiliated] with a church.

MR. ANDERSON clarified that the three boarding schools he mentioned were the state-operated boarding schools. There were eight other boarding schools in Alaska [that were operated by churches].

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE interjected that there were also parochial boarding schools: St. Mary's, Unalakleet, and Copper Valley. He related his belief that the church that owned [Copper Center Boarding School] still owns 400 acres.

Number 1921

CHAIR THERRIault pointed out that in regard to the boarding school concept, the districts are ahead of the legislature as illustrated with the Bethel Alternative Boarding School, the residential school in Nenana, and the utilization of the U.S. Air Force buildings by Galena. The existing foundation formula

is being utilized to piecemeal the money together to operate. He surmised that this is happening without regard to any legislative direction. Therefore, he pondered whether the state should become involved to gauge the level of interest and determine whether there should be a state policy.

MR. ANDERSON informed the committee that the hope of many in the communities that are currently funding their expenses with a piecemeal approach through the foundation formula is that if they establish a RLC with a residence, then some of the residential costs would be associated with [the RLC].

CHAIR THERRIault remarked that such would have to be reviewed in the expense of any proposal.

Number 2026

REPRESENTATIVE FATE mentioned a study by Judy Kleinfeld, University of Alaska, which addresses the regional high school as it relates to the Molly Hootch schools. The study [Small School Question -- Alaska's Uneasy Compromise] is very insightful and thus he felt it could be helpful in this process.

REPRESENTATIVE PHILLIPS directed everyone to the Appendix B Source List. She informed the committee that the first thing the task force did was to try and develop as complete a bibliography of all the research that has been done on this issue in the past. Ms. Kleinfeld's study was very prominent in the material the task force reviewed.

REPRESENTATIVE FATE said that more [sources] could be added because the [regional learning center] concept goes back to its inception by the Fairbanks Native Association in 1964.

REPRESENTATIVE HARRIS asked if there will be any legal hurdles facing these proposed RLCs.

REPRESENTATIVE PHILLIPS replied no and informed the committee that much time was spent reviewing that question.

MR. ANDERSON pointed out that the Molly Hootch decision was in favor of the state. Per the constitution, the state is required to offer an educational program to every student in Alaska. However, the decision didn't require the state to build a structure, but it did allow the use of correspondence.

Number 2134

REPRESENTATIVE HARRIS surmised then that if a central school [is constructed] for surrounding remote villages, then the state won't be sued for forcing students from these remote villages to attend a central school.

MR. ANDERSON reiterated the [task force's recommendation] to not make this mandatory. The child would be offered an education that the child could take advantage of either by cyberschool or correspondence or by attending the regional school.

REPRESENTATIVE PHILLIPS informed the committee that there was the question of whether students had to attend the regional school in their area or could they go elsewhere. Representative Phillips expressed her hope that there would be open enrollment throughout the state. Therefore, if there was a school that focused on health care, a person might want to attend that school due to its health care focus.

REPRESENTATIVE LANCASTER inquired as to what the next step would be.

REPRESENTATIVE PHILLIPS stressed her hope that the Joint Committee on Legislative Budget and Audit would continue working on this. She identified the next step as determining how many facilities would be needed and where to place them. Furthermore, the type of structure to put in place as far as the academic program, the vocational training program, and the dormitory program would have to be determined. As far as the dormitory program, Mt. Edgecumbe has that in place and thus that aspect wouldn't require much effort.

MR. ANDERSON pointed out that the booklet outlines some of the exceptional programs that are already in place. There is a great deal of expertise and enthusiasm available.

Number 2224

CHAIR THERRIAULT noted that there was concern regarding the overall concept. Some expressed concern for the loss of cash flow in the community if there was one less teacher while more money might be funneled to a regional center. However, he recalled the overriding concern to be the quality of education in order to preserve choices for the children.

REPRESENTATIVE PHILLIPS recalled a meeting with either the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) Education Committee or the

Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated, Education Committee. From that meeting, she heard the request to make one of the RLCs a high class academic school.

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE informed the committee that he asked representatives from Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School what they saw in terms of their students moving on to postsecondary education. The response was that they [saw] 80 percent move on to postsecondary education whether it was vocational education or college. Therefore, if "we're" thinking of doing something like this on a more local level...

TAPE 01-4, SIDE B

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE continued, "... as it relates to those students who are going to school in some of the smaller communities, there's no economic connect." If there is no economic development or opportunities in those smaller communities, then the high school qualifying exam isn't going to be as meaningful. However, if the case can be made for job-sharing in the hub communities, then he believes "we can latch on to something." For example, the tribal health organizations provide medical service in the rural hubs and every region has a Native corporation that has subsidiaries and career activities could become part of the curriculum rather than two or three days out of the school year. In such a case, people can see the opportunities.

Number 0096

REPRESENTATIVE PHILLIPS identified the following question as one the legislature should address: should these specifically be the high school years, grades 9-12 or grades 10-14? There was much discussion on that issue and there was much support for making this postsecondary in order to tie in other education.

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE agreed and said that was one of the focuses in Kotzebue. The discussion in Kotzebue focused on having grades 10-14 in order to provide a transition into postsecondary. Representative Joule informed the committee of a discussion he had with a student from Mt. Edgecumbe who, by the time he graduated, would have 45 college credits and thus would enter the University of Alaska - Fairbanks as a sophomore. In this case, the challenge will be the social transition not the academic transition. However, if the academic transition can be addressed, Representative Joule predicted that the social

transition would be easier. Therefore, Representative Joule believes that there are ways for this to come together.

Number 0215

CHAIR THERRIAULT turned to the Mt. Edgecumbe result of 80 percent of its students continuing to traditional postsecondary education. He wasn't sure that one could assume that would happen for the students coming out of any of these facilities because Mt. Edgecumbe seems to be geared towards college preparation. If grades 10-14 were established, then a student could finish the program with a certification that could be used for immediate employment. Chair Therriault recalled that there was concern about drawing rural students into urban areas for school. However, he said that wasn't what he had in mind.

REPRESENTATIVE FATE asked if the task force received a good view of how the parents in these communities felt about a regional high school.

REPRESENTATIVE PHILLIPS replied yes. Each targeted community had expressed their interest to the task force in having a RLC in their location. The task force went to the aforementioned communities because they wanted to be considered for one of these centers.

Number 0425

REPRESENTATIVE FATE pointed out that Mt. Edgecumbe was said to have tradition. However, he recalled the time when there wasn't tradition at Mt. Edgecumbe. If it had not been for the desire of those [first] children that attended Mt. Edgecumbe and their parents' support, it wouldn't have its current success. That is so important to the success of these regional centers.

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE, as a product of a boarding school, said that the fear of those in the smaller communities is that after growing up with a family for 13 or 14 years, then the child is placed in a boarding school system. As a result of that, there were individual children whose growth was incomplete in terms of their traditional knowledge and maintaining the things the community felt important. In addition to reviewing a quality education delivery system through a RLC, there is the opportunity [to maintain traditional knowledge] at the local regional level in future educational endeavors. That could be built into the curriculum. Although he knew that there is great concern with taking students away from home, this [proposes]

doing so close to the village and not necessarily 2,000 miles away. Furthermore, there is the opportunity for excellence in instruction and delivery, to maintain a tie with the community value system, and to bring in the business community as a partner so that students learn what their economic opportunities are in a hub community as well as the existing smaller communities.

Number 0689

REPRESENTATIVE PHILLIPS said that there are two factors today that are significantly different than when there were boarding schools in the past. Firstly, the transportation is much better today; one can fly into almost any location. Secondly, the advent of telecommunications in linking everyone allows daily communication between families. Representative Phillips believes that those two factors will make a tremendous difference. Furthermore, Nenana has the idea to hire the house parents for the dormitories from the communities that the students come from. She believes that is a good idea because the students would feel like they have someone from home to [relate to].

CHAIR THERRIAULT acknowledged that he had never really thought of what Representative Joule was saying. That is, that he went to a boarding school and received a good education, but missed the subsistence education [that he would have gained at home]. Therefore, he tended to agree with Representative Phillips that improved transportation would address that and allow students to return home more often. Chair Therriault related his belief that, for instance, those from the Interior coming to a facility in Nenana would still have more of a tie to the area. Hopefully, if [subsistence education] was of importance to the student, then he/she could choose a location that would have such activities in order to avoid the feeling of being left behind and disconnected from their village.

CHAIR THERRIAULT echoed earlier comments regarding the fact that the task force visited communities that invited the task force; these are communities that have expressed an interest in boarding schools. The smaller communities that are facing the real possibility of losing students were not visited. If those communities were visited, he was sure that more concerns would be expressed. Chair Therriault recognized that questionnaires were sent out at the AFN Convention in order to solicit input from these [smaller] areas.

REPRESENTATIVE PHILLIPS pointed out that St. Michaels did approach the task force at the AFN Convention, although it was too late to schedule a visit. Saint Michaels said that it was willing to provide the land because it wanted to be part of this RLC program.

Number 0927

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE asked if the committee is going to consider today whether to continue this endeavor with a more specific focus.

CHAIR THERRIAULT said that he would like some indication from the leadership in the House and Senate regarding whether to continue this process, specifically to help shape the parameters of the "next bite." After hearing from both sides, then there would be discussion regarding the specified desires.

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE remarked that he is very understanding of some of the concerns, in particular those of rural schools who are saying [boarding schools would be at the expense of other things]. He recalled the earlier mention of not making [attendance] mandatory. Representative Joule, having had a very good experience in a boarding school, said that the thought of having regional schools is very intriguing. Therefore, he expressed his desire for the committee to move forward with this concept in regard to specific locations and the ways to finance it. However, he stressed the need to keep in mind that some communities have real concerns and thus they can opt not to take advantage of this option.

Number 1111

REPRESENTATIVE FATE concurred with Representative Joule. He returned to Judy Kleinfeld's study, which indicated that some individuals wanted to and should attend a more advanced high school. However, it also indicated that were those that didn't want to. Therefore, this RLC concept could be made flexible enough to tailor it to the situation needed in rural Alaska. Representative Fate reiterated his concurrence with Representative Joule that this process continue because there are many technical aspects such as curriculum that need to be determined.

CHAIR THERRIAULT noted that Senator Halford had, at one point, expressed his support in looking into this issue. However, he

noted that he hasn't spoken with Senator Halford regarding continuing this effort this year.

MR. ANDERSON thanked the committee for allowing him to participate in this process. He acknowledged that the mandatory attendance of the past created great angst for the people of rural Alaska. Furthermore, he noted that Ms. Kleinfeld's studies were well read as they pointed out the problems of the past. However, if the state proceeds with this, Mr. Anderson hoped that the state would learn from the past and certainly the source list would be a part of doing such.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the Joint Committee on Legislative Budget and Audit meeting was adjourned at 1:08 p.m.