

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

April 18, 2001
8:12 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Con Bunde, Chair
Representative Brian Porter
Representative Joe Green
Representative Gary Stevens
Representative Gretchen Guess

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Reggie Joule

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 171

"An Act relating to a curriculum for Alaska history; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 239

"An Act establishing a pilot program for a regional learning center."

- HEARD AND HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 218

"An Act relating to funding for school districts operating secondary school boarding programs; and providing for an effective date."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS ACTION

BILL: HB 171

SHORT TITLE: ALASKA HISTORY CURRICULUM

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) KAPSNER

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page		Action
03/09/01	0520	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME -

			REFERRALS
03/09/01	0520	(H)	EDU, HES, FIN
03/13/01	0579	(H)	COSPONSOR(S): MORGAN
04/18/01		(H)	EDU AT 8:00 AM HOUSE FINANCE 519

BILL: HB 239

SHORT TITLE: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PILOT PROGRAM
 SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) FOSTER

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page		Action
04/09/01	0903	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/09/01	0903	(H)	EDU, HES, FIN
04/11/01	0971	(H)	COSPONSOR(S): JAMES
04/18/01		(H)	EDU AT 8:00 AM HOUSE FINANCE 519

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE MARY KAPSNER

Alaska State Legislature
 Capitol Building, Room 424
 Juneau, Alaska 99801

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as sponsor of HB 171.

BRUCE JOHNSON, Deputy Commissioner of Education

Office of the Commissioner
 Department of Education and Early Development
 801 West 10th Street
 Juneau, Alaska 99801

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 171.

IRA PERMAN, President

Alaska Humanities Forum
 421 West 1st Avenue
 Anchorage, Alaska 99501

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 171.

STEVE HAYCOX, Chair

Board of Directors
 Alaska Humanities Forum
 3211 Providence Drive
 Anchorage, Alaska 99508

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 171.

JON KUMIN, Commonwealth North

808 East Street

Anchorage, Alaska 99501

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 171.

MICHAEL JONES

PO Box 1393

Nome, Alaska 99762

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on behalf of himself on HB 171.

ROGER PEARSON, Coordinator

Alaska Geographic Alliance

Institute of the North

Alaska Pacific University

PO Box 1354

Kenai, Alaska 99611

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 171.

DARROLL HARGRAVES, Executive Director

Alaska Council of School Administrators

326 4th Street

Juneau, Alaska 99811

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 171.

LARRY GOLDIN

400 East 24th Avenue

Anchorage, Alaska 99503

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 171.

JODY SMOTHERS MARCELLO

(No address provided)

Sitka, Alaska 99835

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on behalf of herself in support of HB 171.

LARRY LaBOLLE, Staff

to Representative Richard Foster

Alaska State Legislature

Capitol Building, Room 410

Juneau, Alaska 99801

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on behalf of the sponsor of HB 239.

JOHN DAVIS, Ph.D., Superintendent

Bering Strait School District

PO Box 225

Unalakleet, Alaska 99684

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 239.

MARY KNODEL, City Council Member
City of Nome
PO Box 280
Nome, Alaska 99762
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 239.

LAVERNE SMITH, City Council Member
City of Nome
PO Box 1069
Nome, Alaska 99762
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 239.

SHARON SWOPE, Ph.D., Interim Superintendent
Nome City School District
PO Box 131
Nome, Alaska 99762
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in favor of HB 239.

BOB MEDINGER, Teacher and Administrator
Lower Kuskokwim School District
PO Box 1063
Bethel, Alaska 99559
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 239.

EDDIE JEANS, Manager
School Finance and Facilities Section
Department of Education and Early Development
801 West 10th Street
Juneau, Alaska 99501
POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding HB 239.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 01-26, SIDE A
Number 0001

CHAIR CON BUNDE called the House Special Committee on Education meeting to order at 8:12 a.m. Members present at the call to order were Representatives Bunde, Porter, Green, Stevens, and Guess.

HB 171-ALASKA HISTORY CURRICULUM

[Contains testimony relating to SB 44, the companion bill.]

CHAIR BUNDE announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 171, "An Act relating to a curriculum for Alaska history; and providing for an effective date."

Number 0124

REPRESENTATIVE MARY KAPSNER, Alaska State Legislature, Sponsor, came forth and stated that HB 171 requires students who graduate from high school in Alaska to have taken the equivalent of one semester of Alaska history. She explained that as far back as 1981, the State Board of Education considered requiring high school students to complete a year of Alaska history and government. In 1988, Senator Willie Hensley introduced a resolution asking the State Board of Education to adopt regulations on this matter. She stated that there have been a number of organizations that have expressed a strong sentiment that this be required, including Commonwealth North. Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) has also offered a resolution.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER stated that the first intent of the bill is to ensure that every future Alaska high school graduate receive instruction in Alaska history through a locally adopted curriculum that meets the state's social studies standards. The second [intent] is that Alaska school districts should receive instructional support needed to put an Alaska history curriculum in place and to prepare teachers to maximize the effect of the curriculum. The third intent is that outside money be possible. She stated that there is a fiscal note, but one of the things that has come up, particularly working with the Alaska Municipal League, is the want for private contributors, grantors, and the federal government to be able to contribute to the development of curricula as well. She explained that Section 2 of the bill adds charter schools to this requirement, and Section 3 asks the Department [of Education and Early Development] to develop curriculum for grades 9 through 12. Currently, she said, many school districts in the state require Alaska history; however, the requirements are varied. Many require that it be taught in the primary grades, and the intent of this bill is to have a strong civics component in Alaska history so when voters reach voting time they are well aware of how government works, especially Alaskan government.

Number 0352

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER stated that she thinks one of the strongest elements of the bill is that it allows for flexibility at the district level. Alaska history can be taught in a one-

semester stand-alone course or woven into other courses already taught. She remarked that this would affect students who begin the ninth grade on or after July 1, 2002. She said she worked with many different groups on this bill, including the Alaska Municipal League, the Association of School Boards, the Association of School Administrators, NEA (National Education Association), and Commonwealth North.

CHAIR BUNDE stated that his concern is that schools have been asked to do a lot [with the High School Competency Exam], and that [teachers might] say they need another year to meet the challenges of the competency test because they now have another requirement put on them. He inquired how schools will be asked to do this without taking them off their central task of making children functionally literate.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER responded that this was one of her primary concerns as well, when introducing the bill, which is why she left it open for people to use Alaska history as a vehicle for teaching other subjects. She stated that right now a teacher in Dillingham is including Alaska history in [his history class] and says it is making his students more interested in learning. She added that she was pleased to see a fiscal note and that the department is taking a close look at how it's going to train people from various districts on how to teach Alaska history. She said it is an impressive fiscal note - \$223,000 for the first year of this bill and \$30,000 thereafter.

Number 0631

BRUCE JOHNSON, Deputy Commissioner of Education, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), came forth and stated that [the EED] worked with Representative Kapsner and her staff to outline a fiscal note that would be reasonable. It is front-end-loaded and involves only \$30,000 a year, which is primarily to keep the web-based or distance delivery courses up-to-date. On the front end [the EED] will develop a comprehensive curriculum and offer some oversight and involvement from a department person working on a half-time basis. Working with a minimal support staff, that person would develop a curriculum, take it out on a pilot basis, refine it, and then, during the following summer, offer training at the state's expense for at least one person from each school district. He added that obviously \$223,000 is a lot of money, but the return, if this is done well, could be very substantive.

REPRESENTATIVE PORTER asked if the curriculum that is developed under this format could be a semester course.

MR. JOHNSON responded that it could take many forms, but there would be a self-contained secondary course for a one-semester course, for districts that want to do it that way. He stated that [the EED] has conceptualized this so that it could be done in modules and be offered as a broad array of course offerings or integrated curricula.

REPRESENTATIVE PORTER stated that one of the requirements for graduation is that each student complete the curriculum with a passing grade. He asked if this is an unusual requirement for one history course.

MR. JOHNSON answered that the concept of a state history class around the nation is a relevant one and occurs in many states. At some point at the elementary level [students] study the history of their state. They do the same thing in the middle school, and then it is finalized in the high school years with a required class.

REPRESENTATIVE PORTER remarked that being required to study is one thing and being required to pass or [the student] doesn't graduate is another thing.

MR. JOHNSON responded that he thinks Representative Porter's reading [of the bill] is correct; the student would have to be successful with the course. He said many states have this as a graduation requirement.

REPRESENTATIVE PORTER asked, if the Anchorage School District chooses to integrate this into a series of courses, whether that then means a student would have to pass each course.

MR. JOHNSON answered that he thinks that would be something [the EED] would have to work out in regulations.

Number 0970

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN stated that in the Midwest, where he went to school, both civics and state history were provided. The state history was required to pass, and there was a separate test for U.S. history. He asked how many states require this sort of thing.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER responded that from the information she has from the NCSL (National Conference of State Legislatures), 22 states require state history for graduation.

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN asked, if the competency exam is developed by 2004, whether this bill's 2006 date is in conflict with that.

MR. JOHNSON stated that there is obviously a lot on school districts' plates right now; however, this [particular requirement] may not be on their plate at this juncture. He said people [the EED] has talked to, particularly in rural Alaska, have said if a good quality curriculum can be provided that is self-contained and if a teacher can receive modest training, it will be used and delivered. If this can be packaged in a way that it is easy to use, creative, and engaging for young people, it will probably relieve the teacher of some of those other responsibilities of trying to create the curriculum and the instructional package for an elective program.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER remarked that one of the things being worked on with the [EED] is to make sure that there is something on the Internet from which rural teachers can obtain lesson plans.

Number 1147

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN stated that he champions what Representative Kapsner mentioned about the integration of civics. He remarked that he thinks that is one of the problems with apathy among young voters; they don't realize how important voting is. He asked if [combining two courses] could be an impediment.

MR. JOHNSON responded that he thinks Representative Green touches on the same issue that Representative Porter brought up, which has to do with how the curriculum will be created. He stated that if it is done in the form of modules and a civics course is required, then that module could be integrated in that way.

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN asked if that would be statewide.

MR. JOHNSON answered no. He stated that [civics] is not a required course, but if [schools] don't offer civics now, they will at least get the civics portion that would come about through this curriculum.

CHAIR BUNDE stated that with the way the bill is written, it is really an expansion of the High School Competency Exam, because it is another state requirement for graduation. He asked Mr. Johnson what the department's view is on this and what he has heard from rural schools.

Number 1224

MR. JOHNSON answered that [the EED] has not heard a lot from school personnel at this point in time. He said he thinks people generally see the benefit of a course of this nature. He said [the EED] does not hear the "cry of unfunded mandate" and he thinks that if [the EED] develops the course and provides the initial training, it can be self-sustaining through distance delivery courses and other opportunities. He added that this is not to set aside how full the "plates" are in local school districts and add another mandate from the state level. He said he would leave that up to people's testimony on whether or not [the school districts] can cope with an additional mandate.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER noted that out of the 55 school districts in the state, 46 already require Alaska history at some point, but not for graduation. For example, Anchorage School District requires it at second, third, and seventh grade, while Fairbanks, Juneau, Sitka, and Delta/Greely are districts that don't require any Alaska history.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS asked if with modules the full stand-alone course could be offered or else every module that is in the stand-alone course could be offered somewhere else.

MR. JOHNSON answered, that's correct.

Number 1334

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS stated that the trainer model is great; however, she is concerned, when only one person from every school district [is trained], how bigger districts are going to integrate the curriculum.

MR. JOHNSON answered that [the EED's] notion is that the state would pay for one [person] but the local district could elect additional people to attend.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS asked if there is going to be a problem with kids who come into the system late, especially if there are modules and [the students] can't take all of the courses.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER answered that she had called Mr. Ford [the bill drafter from Legislative Legal and Research Services], and he is working on language to insert into the bill.

Number 1432

IRA PERMAN, President, Alaska Humanities Forum, testified via teleconference. He stated that the headline in the Anchorage Daily News spoke of the Knowles Administration's efforts to deal with racism and the incident that happened a few weeks ago [in Anchorage]. He shared that the article states: "We're here to announce action to combat a dangerous corrosion of Alaska's social fabric." He said the article didn't mention that the governor, as a solution, was supporting HB 171, and said he hopes it was just an omission. He remarked that he thinks there is nothing better people could do to stitch Alaska's social fabric together than to have an opportunity to learn about their common history and heritage. He stated that about 45 or 46 of Alaska's school districts currently require an Alaska history and Alaska studies course. Unfortunately, the ones that don't happen to be Alaska's largest school districts.

MR. PERMAN stated that his purpose in talking today is to give an update of what is happening in Anchorage. Last week, he said, a large group of people representing the Chamber of Commerce, Commonwealth North, Alaska Heritage Center, and the Alaska Humanities Forum met with Superintendent Carol Comeau to ask [the Anchorage School District] to begin a process similar to what this bill is proposing. He stated that Superintendent Comeau has invited [the Alaska Humanities Forum] to speak with the school board in this regard and is working to put together a process to work this through their social studies curriculum committee. He pointed out that his observation in Anchorage is that there is a strong feeling that it's about time this is done. He stated that what is making this go through the school systems so far is that, unlike previous attempts, it is not trying to displace anything that is required right now or add another credit requirement. There are eight required social studies credits; six of them are lined up, and two are electives. This would take one of those two electives and make it a requirement, just like the other six. The only real change would be the need for teacher training.

CHAIR BUNDE stated that the bill as it is written would basically expand the graduation requirements and expand the High School Competency Exam, because [the students] would have to pass this [course] to get a diploma. He asked Mr. Perman if he is also in support of expansion of the competency test, or the bill as it is written.

MR. PERMAN responded that he is in favor of giving this some teeth and thinks that it is important that kids learn [Alaska history].

Number 1860

STEVE HAYCOX, Chair, Board of Directors, Alaska Humanities Forum, testified via teleconference in support of HB 171. He stated:

I am a professor of history at the University of Alaska Anchorage, where I have taught Alaska History, History of the American West, and American Cultural History for 31 years. University of Washington Press will publish my new History of Alaska later this year. I'm a present board member and past president of the Alaska Historical Society, [and] present board member and past president of Cook Inlet Historical Society. For six years I have been a member of the board of directors of the Alaska Humanities Forum and for four years chair of the board. I very much appreciate the work of Representative Kapsner and cosponsors of the bill and I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak for history and for an Alaska history requirement. ... I heartily support passage of HB 171 and its Senate companion, S[B] 144, requiring a semester of Alaska History. I hope you've all had an opportunity to read Commonwealth North's report on this issue or will take advantage of that opportunity. Commonwealth North and AFN ... both recommend the requirement.

Knowledge of our past, of course, helps us to understand who we are and how we got to be the way we are; and that helps us make better judgments. It also creates due honor to those who make [significant] contributions to creating the world we live in, and understanding those who were victimized by the way it came to be, and why. ... I think this knowledge is critical for Alaskan young people. ... I can't begin

to count the number of not just high school kids I've talked to ... but even college kids who come in and can't tell me who Ernest Gruening was or who Robert Service was or who Bob Bartlett was, let alone the more obscure people. ... I believe that the most fundamental reason for a state history requirement is that it will help bring Alaskans together. It will make better Alaskans, and a better Alaska society.

History examines and can make connections between human beings. Recognizing that we all have the same background gives us something in common. And though each of us brings our own set of unique circumstances to Alaska and to our own particular communities and neighborhoods, we bring those individualities to the same place, a place that has the same history for all of us. ... That gives us a commonality, a way of connecting. I think we need ways to connect, a sense of community in Alaska. Our transiency rate is still high, as many people are not here primarily to build an Alaska community; they intend to retire somewhere else. That's a perspective that prevents people from focusing on others that might be different from themselves, who might live in ways that are different and have different cultures. History provides a way of understanding what it is to be human [and] what we share in common with others who are in the same place where we are - the place we call "our place." History, in other words, will humanize Alaska - give it context, and texture, and human meaning. I can think of hardly anything more valuable to our schools and more valuable that we as Alaska leaders could do for Alaska and for our students.

Number 1896

JON KUMIN, Commonwealth North, testified via teleconference in support of HB 171. He stated that the purpose of Commonwealth North is educating its members and all Alaskans on public policy. In 1999 [Commonwealth North] undertook the Urban Rural [Unity] Study, which covered a variety of topics. The effort was co-chaired by Janie Leask and Rick Mystrom, and a report was issued in September of 2000 that summarized what was learned. One of the common themes was a universal regret that Alaskans, typically, are not well informed about [Alaska] history. Because of that, the final report included six action items, one of which was to seek a mandated Alaska history course so that as

Alaska's students graduate from high school they will have a basic understanding of the history. An ongoing study group was formed to look in to this research. Initially, he said, the group sought input from a variety of people, including those that were involved in the earlier effort. Back in the late '80s this was tried, but it didn't pass.

MR. KUMIN stated that this group didn't just seek out those who would be in obvious support such as the Alaska Historic Society, The Geographic Alliance, The Cook Inlet Historical Society, or the Historical Commission, but tried to find those who might not be. He said the group talked to Rich Kronberg from NEA, teachers, Carl Rose from the Alaska Association of School Boards, and Darroll Hargraves from the Alaska Council of School Administrators, trying to identify what possible issues these various stakeholders might have that would cause them to not be in full favor of this. From talking to these people and hearing their concerns, the study group was able to work with Representative Kapsner and help incorporate language in the bill to address those concerns. The upshot, he said, was that a strong consensus was developed from groups who were sufficiently concerned about this. The NEA, for example, has passed a resolution in favor of this.

MR. KUMIN concluded by stating that like Ira Perman, he doesn't think it is appropriate for [Commonwealth North] to get into the details of how to put the curriculum together. [Commonwealth North] believes that it is the job of the legislature to set expectations, and it is a reasonable expectation of the legislature for Alaskan students, when they graduate from high school to know something about their history.

Number 2130

MICHAEL JONES testified via teleconference on behalf of himself on HB 171. He stated that he came this morning opposed to HB 171 because of some technical issues with the bill, but Representative Kapsner's introduction corrected his misconceptions. He said he is a teacher employed by Nome public schools and is endorsed in the area of history. As a history teacher and student, he remarked that he does support the promotion of history; however, he asked [the legislature] to keep in mind that this is one more requirement on the schools and to always consider any potential requirements seriously. He stated that he commends [the committee] for addressing three key issues with the bill: the effective date, so that it doesn't affect current high school students; the flexibility that the

bill now gives schools and school districts to implement Alaska studies or Alaska history; and the fiscal note that shows that the legislature does appreciate that there are costs for schools and school districts when new mandates are in place.

Number 2179

ROGER PEARSON, Coordinator, Alaska Geographic Alliance, Institute of the North, Alaska Pacific University, testified via teleconference. He stated:

I have been involved in education in Alaska since 1976, both at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and now at the Institute of the North. As a professional educator, I have been and remain excited to teach others about the history and geography of Alaska. Based on my 25 years of working with students and teachers in Alaska, I have found them to be fascinated with this state and eager to learn more about it.

House Bill 171 directly addresses the need for Alaska studies for students. For teachers, the matter was addressed years ago, as committee members know. To be certified as an Alaskan teacher, one must first complete a course in Alaska studies. That requirement applies to all Alaska teachers. I would like to address the role of the Alaska Geographic Alliance [AGA] in what it has done and can do to promote Alaska studies as emphasized in HB 171.

The AGA works to prepare Alaska's students to function effectively in a global society through the development of geographic literacy. To that end, the AGA has since 1988 provided professional development institutes for over 300 Alaska teachers and developed the Alaska: A Land in Motion, an elementary textbook; Alaska in Maps, a printed atlas; and also a CD-ROM. The AGA also involves our statewide network of teachers in the annual Alaska Geographic Bee ... and, with support from the Alaska Science and Technology Foundation, this year's AGA "Harriman Expedition Retraced" project. This project focuses on the last 100 years of Alaska history and will receive nationwide attention with a PBS documentary film. The AGA will develop Harriman-related, standards-based classroom materials to be used in Alaska classrooms for years to come.

The AGA is in a unique position to help carry out the aims of HB 171. The National Geographic Society has offered a challenge grant of up to \$500,000 to permanently endow the organization. Several other state legislatures have met this challenge, and we hope that our legislature will do the same. As background, between 1988 and 1996 the Alaska State Legislature funded the AGA nearly \$700,000 with a one-time \$300,000 textbook grant, plus \$50,000 per year. This state support has strengthened geography education and Alaska studies.

The Alaska Geographic Alliance stands ready to further develop a standards-based Alaska geography curriculum that would meet the aims of this legislation, whether the mandates come from this body or from individual school districts. And although AGA membership is split on the subject of mandates, we firmly believe Alaska history and Alaska geography should be taught in the schools, and have made that our mission from the beginning.

I might add ... that a few years ago I had a chance to speak with Gil Grosvenor, the chairman of the National Geographic Society. He told me that there had been more articles written in National Geographic [magazine] on Alaska than on any other region. So obviously there is a national and international interest in Alaska.

TAPE 01-26, SIDE B
Number 0027

DARROLL HARGRAVES, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), came forth and stated that the superintendents met recently in support of HB 171. He said this is a point that is not spoken of too much in modern times, but there was a time when public education was recognized as making good citizens out of the students. He remarked that he was pleased when business people in Anchorage were taking up the "drumbeat" for the need for this type of a bill. This is not the first time the state has made an effort to do this. In the '70s a lot of effort was made to develop materials; however, that effort didn't "catch fire." He added that ACSA offers a course called Alaskan History for Teachers.

CHAIR BUNDE remarked that he would be interested in getting feedback from [the ACSA] about this expansion of a graduation requirement or the expansion of the competency exam.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS stated that she would like to offer a conceptual amendment that the department may waive this provision for a student who transfers in and cannot satisfy the requirement of this section.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER stated that she is in favor of the amendment and will write it up in a new CS (committee substitute).

Number 0400

LARRY GOLDIN testified via teleconference on behalf of himself. He stated that he is a filmmaker and has made two films on Alaska history. One was "Alaska at War" and the second was "The Land is Ours." He said when he shows them in Alaska he gets very positive responses from people in the audience. He remarked that he has come away from this with the sense that Alaskans are hungry for their own history. People love history; the common wisdom that people aren't interested in history, he said, is wrong. He stated that some students in high school might think that this is dull, but as they get into it, students may have their interest piqued. He said he has seen that happen time and time again.

MR. GOLDIN concluded by stating that everybody has been concerned about the stability of society in Alaska due to recent events, and he believes that the more people understand Alaskan history, the more they will understand that this is a diverse state and that all of the various people who live here have made very important contributions.

JODY SMOTHERS MARCELLO testified via teleconference on behalf of herself. She stated that she has worked for the Sitka School District in curriculum assessment and staff development, and is a social studies educator. Presently, she is on the steering committee of the Alaska Geographic Alliance and co-chairs the Geography Content Standards Committee. Those standards, she said, were adopted in 1994. She noted that Sitka does require Alaska studies. Addressing the title of the course and the standards-based portion of that, she suggested that the bill be amended to require a standards-based Alaska curriculum in grades 9 through 12, not just in Alaska history alone.

MS. SMOTHERS MARCELLO remarked that the State of Alaska and [Sitka] have adopted content standards in geography, government, citizenship, and history. Putting a label of "history" alone on the curriculum may narrow the focus in many people's minds and the bill itself attests to a broad spectrum of needs of [Alaskans] arising from demographics, economics, and social needs. She stated that demographics, for example, are included in the geography standards in that a student should understand and be able to interpret the geographic characteristics of human systems including migration movement, the interaction of cultures, economic activity, settlement patterns, and political units in the state, nation, and world. Economics, she said, is also addressed under the government citizenship standards. She stated that social needs, as mentioned in the bill, rest in all three sets of standards as well as in the cultural standards. She said she hopes the standards-based component of this course will fall in all four standards and not just in the history standards.

MS. SMOTHERS MARCELLO stated that second, she would like to speak for the [Sitka School] District in supporting the bill in terms of a curriculum consisting of modules taught in the respective social studies classes required at the high school level. For example, in Sitka the American studies teachers have a unit on Native American Alaska in a freshman-required course. In 11th grade government, Ninilchik Native tribal government from the political systems of Alaska is studied along with American government, and she, as a guest instructor, just taught global issues in a required senior course debating whether or not to open ANWR (Arctic National Wildlife Refuge) to drilling and looking at its global aspects.

MS. SMOTHERS MARCELLO remarked that [people in Sitka] do recognize the need for the Alaska curriculum for high school students, but need to be able to organize learning opportunities based on the students' needs as they progress from grades 9 through 12, and from the levels of thinking that high school students go through. By having the requirement in the various courses, students are engaged to think about Alaskan issues at the various stages of their development.

[HB 171 was held over.]

HB 239-VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PILOT PROGRAM

CHAIR BUNDE announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 239, "An Act establishing a pilot program for a regional learning center."

Number 1006

LARRY LaBOLLE, Staff to Representative Richard Foster, Alaska State Legislature, came forth on behalf of the sponsor of HB 239. He stated that along with the sponsor statement, [the committee] should have received a letter from Dr. John Davis, superintendent of the Being Strait School District, who has been working with the community of Nome on the idea of developing a regional learning center utilizing the Nome Beltz Complex. This is a large vocational complex that was built by the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) and is operated as a vocational boarding school. He stated that the impetus of this came out of the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee hearings that were held last summer, which looked at education in Alaska. Part of their finding was that there is a lot of interest in developing specialized regional schools. The interest in Nome seemed to develop at that time, and there have been contacts between the school district and the City of Nome. The City of Nome has also come out in support of the concept and is currently seeking money from the federal level for a pilot program and would like recognition.

CHAIR BUNDE asked how this bill would relate to the attempt to eliminate boarding schools during the Molly Hootch era.

MR. LaBOLLE responded that he was an administrator in state-operated schools when the program [originally] was in operation. He stated that there were supervision problems and problems with students who were not ready to be away from home. These are issues that still need to be dealt with; however, he said when he looked at the complex, he saw tremendous potential to run a program similar to the concepts that Dr. Davis has brought forward. The vocational facilities are there; life skills could be taught, [in part] because there is a swimming pool; and there is the opportunity for students to go into the community in work-study programs. These would provide opportunities that are not available in small villages. He added that he does not think it is the answer for everybody. For example, if there are only two high school students in Diomed and one goes to Nome for a year, the high school population is cut by 50 percent.

CHAIR BUNDE stated that he is personally acquainted with Native leaders who had the opportunity to gain immensely from a larger school and network with other people throughout the state.

Number 1254

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS asked if this would be a boarding school or a regional learning center where people would go for a short amount of time, similar to Chugach School District's Anchorage House.

MR. LaBOLLE responded that he has conceptualized that there would be a flexible schedule at Beltz with block scheduling. Students would be able to come in for a nine-weeks' block and have a concentrated course such as welding plus core courses. He explained that from a management standpoint there is no reason why there couldn't be blocks of time that would extend over one year if a student were in an aircraft [concentration]; one semester if a student were dealing with welding; or possibly nine weeks if a student were studying home economics. He added that if students coming out of the program are to be ready for an apprentice program, there would need to be longer blocks of time with more concentration.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS asked if it would be nine weeks to a year for grades 9 through 12.

MR. LaBOLLE answered, yes.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS stated that one of her concerns is on page 2, line 2, where it specifies three things that need to be established. She said she doesn't see anything that deals with the reading, writing, and mathematics standards. She said she would be more comfortable if there were discussion of high school curricula or essential skills.

MR. LaBOLLE responded that the districts already have their curriculum and graduation requirements. Any student who goes to this program will have to complete all of the graduation requirements of his or her school district.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS asked if [those requirements] will be taught at the regional center.

MR. LaBOLLE answered yes, because Beltz High School is there. For example, the carpentry program that was taught when he was superintendent there was a half-day, two-year course.

Number 1458

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN stated that page 2, Section 2, mentions an effective date beginning July 1, 2001, and ending June 30, 2005, and an enrollment of at least 1,750 but no more than 2,000. He asked if there is assurance of funding and that there will be that many [students enrolled]. He also asked if this would work if there were less than 1,750 [students].

MR. LaBOLLE responded that this is the size the REAA [Regional Educational Attendance Area] school district must fall within in order to avoid special-interest legislation. He stated that the Bering Strait School District falls within that size category. He added that the number of students probably gives some idea of the core that they have to draw from in terms of funds, students, and the interest in the program. For many years Bering Strait brought students into Nome for special instruction; they were housed in the community for periods of time and had blocks of studies dealing with vocational programs.

CHAIR BUNDE inquired about Mr. LaBolle's mention of a 50 percent change in the high school population.

MR. LaBOLLE replied that his assumption would be that the money would follow the students. He said part of why this needs to be worked out carefully as a pilot program is because those are issues that need to be addressed.

Number 1589

REPRESENTATIVE STEVENS asked what vocational education would be available.

MR. LaBOLLE responded that the complex was built to deal with automotive skills, carpentry, home economics, and welding. In the area of business education, early word processing programs were put in place. He said he couldn't tell what is in place today.

Number 1651

JOHN DAVIS, Ph.D., Superintendent, Bering Strait School District, testified via teleconference. He stated that [the Bering Strait School District] sees this program as one that would grow over the course of the years, and does not consider it primarily a boarding program but a house program. This would

be an effort to supplement current high school programs found in the Bering Strait School District and the Nome School District. Each of the districts has had to pare back its programming over the course of years because of funding. He stated that [these districts] want to meld the available resources in the Nome Beltz facility and the large number of students the two districts have combined by adding additional programs. At this time the Bering Strait School District would not only be in charge of supervising the students but educating the students, whether they be in the Bering Strait schools or in this facility. The Nome School District would maintain control and supervision of its students as well. He stated that the issue of where the money does or does not go could be answered quickly. The program would be expected to be supported by the current ADM (average daily membership) funding; however, there would need to be help with the boarding and traveling portion of the program.

DR. DAVIS stated that [this program], hopefully, will provide an opportunity for students to become more interested and engaged in careers that are traditionally not seen as true vocational programs, such as health care, education, aviation, and law enforcement. He said this program is seen as servicing students who are deemed successful in completing their core programs and moving toward successful completion of the High School Competency Exam. Those [core] programs will be offered primarily in [the students'] home site; however they will be supplemented when the students are visiting the Nome facility. He added that he does not see the Nome facility housing 1,700 [students] at a particular time, but believes it will start much smaller. Hopefully, the program will grow to ultimately serve an apprentice-style program.

Number 1801

MARY KNODEL, City Council Member, City of Nome, testified via teleconference in favor of HB 239. She stated:

The City of Nome ... participated in the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee's Regional Learning Center discussions last summer while they were here in Nome. At that time we discussed the merits of a regional learning center concept and how Nome could help accomplish a successful program. The City of Nome has discussed a Regional Learning Center pilot with [U.S.] Senator Stevens for the past three years. As recently as two weeks ago, during Senator Stevens visit to Nome

for our 100th birthday celebration, we informed Senator Stevens of HB 239 and its possible impacts to Nome. Senator Stevens is looking to the state to support operations of a regional learning center. The senator has indicated to us he is excited about the pilot project bill and is waiting on state actions.

The City of Nome, the Nome Public School District, and the Bering Strait School District have presented a conceptual plan for a regional learning center to Senator Stevens. Dr. Davis has spoken about our partnership. Nome has the facilities to assist with the successful development of this pilot project. There are a number of things that we see as important to this region. One would be that helping those who have not yet completed their high school education be able to commute to Nome for short periods of time to pick up or complete a particular or specialized course. Maybe they need a [trigonometry] course that can't be offered at Little Diomedé. ... Also, it would help those young adults - hopefully with creation of grades 13 and 14 - who are 17 years [old] to 20 years old who have completed their high school education but haven't decided on a career. Maybe it will help to bring them to do some career development and maybe find a direction for them to go on in the vocational area here [or] maybe elsewhere in the state and beyond that.

It will also ... create employment of all the people in this region with jobs that are in our region, especially in the fields of health care. Norton Sound Health Corporation employs over 450 people in this region, most of which are not from this region. We need to fill those jobs with people from our area. The other area is education. We need teachers from our area to teach our own children. We need troopers and [village public safety officers] who are from this area, along with the trades people, to help keep our villages, our schools, our cities operating and running.

I think one of the other things ... [is] since Nome is the hub for this region, it will help to bring people in at a younger age to get to know the kids in Nome and the community of Nome, take them out of a small environment and bring them into a little bit larger

environment, [making] the transition a little bit easier. It will also help the people in Nome to understand the people in the smaller villages.

Number 1948

LAVERNE SMITH, City Council Member, City of Nome, testified via teleconference. She stated that she is employed by the University of Alaska Fairbanks on the Northwest Campus. She said she is also a program director for the Workforce Investment Act and the Communities Schools Program. She explained that she helps with job writing and skill training and brings youths from the different villages into Nome to do job shadowing with Nome businesses to participate with on-campus activities. She stated that one of the things that would happen with this program is that students would get the opportunity to participate in a swimming program.

SHARON SWOPE, Ph.D., Interim Superintendent, Nome City School District, testified via teleconference. She stated that it is [the Nome City School District's] position, through the joint approval of this conceptual plan, that it is a good example of collaborative partnership not only between the school districts, but also among Native organizations, the economic development commission, the northwest campus, and the city government. This is an attempt to seek a solution to a complex rural problem, and it is [the Nome City School District's] position that this pilot program should move in that direction. She stated that targeting a specific population of the last two years of public education through the first two years of adulthood serves a particular group of students by transitioning them from a kind of "lost" point to a successful point.

BOB MEDINGER, Teacher and Administrator, Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD), testified via teleconference. He stated that he is currently the site administrator of the Bethel Alternative Boarding School, which is a small regional boarding Vo-Tech (vocational technical) school. He said that he does have some concerns with some of the language of the bill. Page 1, line 12, references a pilot project utilizing existing facilities at former vocational education centers. He would prefer to have that language deleted because currently, as the bill is written, it is not allowing other areas of the state to participate in this program. On page 2, lines 7, 8, and 9, it references an average daily membership between 1,750 and 2,000. Actually, he said, no one else in the state would be able to fill that bill except the Nome region. He would like to see that number

increased to an average daily membership of 4,000 that would then give the entire rest of rural Alaska an opportunity to participate in this pilot program.

MR. MEDINGER stated:

Just to give you some additional information that would be in support of our area going for that, we do have an area in the delta of 28,000 people - 56 villages out here. And within our school, ... although I served 60 kids this year, we've had 260 applicants since we opened. ... We put a great little program together, but we're really on the edge of being able to show any kind of expansion or even maintain our program. However, we've also had tremendous partnering and expansion plans and have been moving toward a new school ... [known] as People's Learning Center. We have been also in contact with [U.S.] Senator Stevens and have a tremendous partnership that's been built with the regional health corporation, the Kuskokwim campus of the university, [and] the regional tribal profit and nonprofit organizations. Basically, all of the organizations out here are in desperate need for Vo-Tech training for our people.

Number 2229

JANELLE VANASSE, Lower Kuskokwim School District, testified via teleconference. She stated that she is in favor of the bill but has some of the same concerns as Mr. Medinger. She said she is not in favor of how narrow the focus is of the bill, pointing directly at Nome. It was earlier mentioned that the ADM line was placed in the bill to avoid special-interest [legislation]; however, she said she would argue that it does just the opposite. It places the pilot program in Nome, with no consideration of the possible value of a pilot program in another area of Alaska. There are several rural Alaska areas that have been investigating the merit of regionally serving vocational learning centers. Many of those regions have gone through a process of developing a plan and have pulled together some programs. She stated that she would argue that they deserve some consideration.

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MS. VANASSE continued, stating that program initiatives are already happening in Bethel and for the Yukon River Delta region. She said she would argue that other programs need to be considered as a pilot program if HB 239 is to go forward. She added that Bethel also has the jobs and initiatives going on in the construction trade, early childhood, health care, and aviation fields.

Number 0127

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS asked if Bruce Johnson or Eddie Jeans from the Department of Education and Early Development (EED) could tell the committee how many districts fall into the 1,750 to 2,000 ADM.

EDDIE JEANS, Manager, School Finance and Facilities Section, Education Support Services, Department of Education and Early Development, came forth and stated that the regional education attendance area that had an ADM of 1,750 but less than 2,000 in fiscal year 2000 was the Bering Strait School District. Therefore, this bill would require that the pilot program operate within the boundaries of the Bering Strait School District, which Nome deals with.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS stated that she was surprised to see no fiscal note.

MR. JEANS responded that the reason there is no fiscal note is because "we're" just now learning what the intent of the bill is. There will be a fiscal note forthcoming.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS stated that there is no evaluation of the pilot program in the bill.

Number 0330

MR. LaBOLLE replied that the reason that is not brought into the bill is because as [the EED] and the districts themselves draw up the working agreement, that would come out of the document that is developed to guide the program. He added that this is very much at the conceptual stage.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS stated that she thinks the concept is great, but the bill seems to be nebulous. She said Bethel has this, Chugach has a house project, and Kotzebue has thought about this. She asked, if districts seem to already be doing this, why this needs to be put in statute.

MR. LaBOLLE responded that the programs she mentioned are run within the confines of one school district; this is two school districts.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS remarked that it sounds like a memorandum of understanding agreement between two school districts. He asked why something would need to be put into statute for two school districts to work together.

Number 0501

MR. LaBOLLE stated that the districts would like some formal recognition from the [EED], and with that there will probably be some oversight. The reason the bill is nebulous, he said, is because when he requested that a bill be drafted, it was difficult for the drafters to sort out what was being done. Therefore, after many cutbacks, it is now just a directive to the department to recognize a pilot program.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS asked if there is nothing right now stopping Nome and Bering Strait from working together, and whether this would just be a recognition from the state, with some role that is to be determined by the [EED].

MR. LaBOLLE responded that his interpretation is that the districts could move forward despite this.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS asked, if federal funds are not available for such a project, how this is going to be funded.

MR. LaBOLLE answered that the districts are currently operating programs and would use existing funds. Nome also has had a grant for a facility upgrade of \$5,269,000 from the legislature in past years, and has also passed a bond for \$2,260,000 - its match to the project. Those funds are available for working on the facilities. He added that the federal funds would not be the only source of funding.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS asked if the district that would be administering this would be Nome or Bering Strait.

MR. LaBOLLE responded that he would visualize it as being a sharing of responsibility and administration by the two school districts. For example, he said he thinks the graduation requirements would be the districts' responsibility. [As far as the administration of the Regional Learning Center], the

dormitories would be administered by Bering Strait, and the classroom buildings would be administered by the City of Nome.

REPRESENTATIVE GUESS asked if there would, then, be no administration oversight, by the EED or the State Board of Education.

MR. LaBOLLE answered that he thinks if it is a pilot project there will be some oversight but not by the administrators of the complex.

[HB 239 was held over.]

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Education meeting was adjourned at 9:52 a.m.