

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
JOINT MEETING  
**SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
**HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

January 27, 2001

10:07 a.m.

**SENATE MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Lyda Green, Chair  
Senator Loren Leman, Vice Chair (via teleconference)  
Senator Gary Wilken (via teleconference)  
Senator Jerry Ward  
Senator Bettye Davis (via teleconference)

**SENATE MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**HOUSE MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Con Bunde, Chair  
Representative Brian Porter  
Representative Joe Green  
Representative Peggy Wilson,  
Representative Gary Stevens  
Representative Reggie Joule  
Representative Gretchen Guess

**HOUSE MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HIGH SCHOOL COMPETENCY TEST

**WITNESS REGISTER**

Ms. Debbie Ossiander  
Anchorage School Board  
PO Box 670772  
Chugiak, Alaska 99567

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Discussed two challenges faced by the Anchorage School District regarding the timeline for the qualifying exam

Mr. Todd Arndt, Curriculum Principal

Dimond High School  
2909 W. 88th Street  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Discussed problems schools are facing when administering the benchmark and practice qualifying exam

Ms. Sherry Stevens  
HC04, Box 9228  
Palmer, Alaska 99645

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Opposed to using the qualifying exam as a requirement for a high school diploma

Ms. Carol G. Kane  
Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals  
PO Box 2889  
Palmer, Alaska 99645

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Mr. Rich Montgomery, Principal  
Petersburg High School  
Petersburg, AK 99833

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Do not delay the qualifying exam but make provisions for students with IEPs

Ms. Marjorie Paust  
PO Box 962  
Petersburg, AK 99833

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Favors implementation of the qualifying exam and alternative methods of proving mastery.

Ms. Judy Kearns-Steffen  
1101 Halibut Point Road  
Sitka, Alaska 99835

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports several requirements for graduation and not making graduation contingent upon passing the qualifying exam

Ms. Catherine Parker  
PO Box 1424  
Sitka, Alaska 99835

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam until 2006

Mr. Terry Bentley  
Superintendent of Schools  
Nenana, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Dr. Davis  
Bering Straits School District  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Ms. Mary Miller  
PO Box 598  
Nome, Alaska 99762  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Ms. Betty Bengtson  
PO Box 292  
Glennallen, AK 99588  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Dr. Bill Pfeifer  
2901 Baranof Ave.  
Ketchikan, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided several suggestions

Mr. Al Johnson  
Ketchikan, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided several suggestions

Mr. Steve Cathers  
PO Box 3015  
Valdez, Alaska 99686  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports more than one type of diploma and that the cut scores be reviewed

Ms. Laurie Scandling  
Juneau, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the exam, providing alternative diplomas and made other suggestions

Mr. Ryan DeLoach  
Juneau, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports allowing accommodations for learning disabled students when taking the qualifying exam

Mr. Louis Barton  
829 Haida Lane  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99712  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Believes the underlying problem is poor teaching practices

Ms. Naomi Walsworth  
767 Miners Court

Fairbanks, Alaska 99712

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Questioned the material covered on the qualifying exam

Mr. Bob Adkins

PO Box 455

Haines, Alaska 99827

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports administering the qualifying exam on schedule

Ms. Louise Parish

PO Box 1182

Valdez, Alaska 99686

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on problems with Alaska's special education program

Ms. Beverly Turley

NWABSD

PO Box 264

Kotzebue, Alaska 99752

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Believes the qualifying exam and its timeline needs to be reviewed

Ms. Frieda Arnhart

Superintendent

North Slope Borough School District

PO Box 69

Barrow, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Mr. Mike Milligan

Anchorage, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on problems with the education system

Mr. Bill Morisette

PO Box 2475

Homer, Alaska 99603

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Mr. Bill Webb

PO Box 102440

Anchorage, AK 99501

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports the current timeline for the qualifying exam

Ms. Peggy Cole

Lower Yukon Education Assn.

PO Box 186  
Emmonak, Alaska 99581

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Mr. Larry Johnson  
4185 Birch Forest Drive  
Palmer, Alaska 99645

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Discussed concerns with the cut scores on the qualifying exam

Mr. Doug Wesson, President  
Alaska Association of School Psychologists  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Ms. Elizabeth Bacom  
PO Box 683  
Petersburg, AK 99833

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Suggested adjusting the cut scores for the Class of 2002 or requiring that class to pass one of three tests

Mr. G. Sanbourne, Superintendent  
Unalaska City School District  
Unalaska, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports the current timeline for the qualifying exam

Mr. Jim Carden  
Pribilof School District  
PO Box 905  
St. Paul, AK 99660

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the date of the qualifying exam

Ms. Judy Doyon  
No address provided  
Kodiak, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Expressed concern about the math exam

Mr. Jeff Ralston  
Mekoryuk High School  
Mekoryuk, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports the qualifying exam - if any change must be made, he supports lowering the cut scores

Mr. Frank Platt  
Unalakleet, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports the current timeline for the qualifying exam

Mr. Carl Rose  
Association of Alaska School Boards  
Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam until 2004

Ms. Sara Gantt  
Service High PTSA  
12700 Atherton Road  
Anchorage, Alaska 99516

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Opposed to any delay of the qualifying exam

Mr. Ray Fenton  
PO Box 142792  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Mr. Jack Milon  
PO Box 749  
Barrow, AK 99723

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Ms. Dalonna Cooper  
836 Vide Way  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports a phase-in approach

Ms. Karen Dempster  
4762 Old Airport Way  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports standards and the qualifying exam but expressed concern about the legal issues

Mr. John Holst  
Sitka School District  
PO Box 1954  
Sitka, Alaska 99835

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam two or four years.

Ms. Christie Willett  
Address not furnished  
Ketchikan, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Favors standards but students must be taught

the standards first

Mr. Keith Lane  
759 Preston Lane  
Kodiak, AK 99615

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on problems for students with learning disabilities

Ms. Sherri Spangler  
700 Barra Loop  
Wasilla, Alaska 99654

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Ms. Sheri Wikan  
Petersburg, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Mr. Michael K. Mitchell  
6626 Foothill Drive  
Anchorage, Alaska 99504

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on the specific portions of the tests and on students with disabilities

Ms. Dianne L. Kiana  
PERC  
9710 Vanguard, #76  
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Opposes delaying the qualifying exam

Ms. Christine Smith  
1506 3rd Avenue  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Strongly supports delaying the qualifying exam

Ms. Mary Forner  
PO Box 3924  
Kodiak, AK 99615

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Ms. Barbara Lefler  
PERC  
8130 Dagan Street  
Anchorage, Alaska 99502

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Schools must be held accountable. Provide students with appropriate curriculum to ensure success now.

Mr. Jeff Stephan, President

Kodiak Board of Education  
Kodiak, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports several diplomas

Mr. Doug Lefler  
PERC  
8130 Dagan Street  
Anchorage, Alaska 99502

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports holding school systems accountable and suggested reviewing Idaho's statutes

Mr. Ishmael Hope  
No address provided  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on the qualifying exam

Mr. Darryl Hargraves  
Association of Alaska School Boards  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delaying the qualifying exam

Mr. Bob Briggs  
Disability Law Center of Alaska  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Urged legislators to explore alternative ways of exploring competency

Mr. David Busey  
801 Lincoln Street  
Sitka, Alaska 99835

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Suggested broadening the qualifying exam to measure other student attributes

Mr. Les Denzer  
Lower Kuskokwim School District  
No address provided

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Suggested requiring the Class of 2002 to pass one of three exams and the Class of 2004 to pass two

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

**TAPE 01-2, SIDE A**

Number 001

[NOTE: WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD CONTAINS ORIGINAL PUNCTUATION]

**CO-CHAIR LYDA GREEN** called the Senate Health, Education & Social

Services Committee and House Special Committee on Education meeting to order at 10:07 a.m. Senator Ward was present, as well as Representatives Porter, Green, Wilson, Stevens, Joule and Guess. Other legislators present were Representatives Coghill, Morgan, Chenault, Harris and Dyson. Senators Wilken, Davis and Leman were participating via teleconference.

CO-CHAIR BUNDE noted that the teleconference equipment was available until 2:00 and that he would rotate through the sites to take testimony.

CO-CHAIR GREEN announced that the Senate HESS Committee would be reviewing the exit exam issue over a period of a few weeks and that hearings would be scheduled for different interest groups so that another opportunity to testify will be available. She also asked that people send prepared comments to the committee to be included in committee packets.

CO-CHAIR BUNDE announced that the House Special Committee on Education will begin hearings on the Governor's bill to delay the competency test on February 14. Today's hearing was scheduled to take testimony on the general concept of the exam and standards. This issue came about because the business community has expressed frustration that many high school graduates need remedial education when they are employed. The University of Alaska expressed the same concern that many high school students needed remedial work when enrolling. The University has limited resources and wanted to charge public schools for the remedial work it has provided. He pointed out that in Alaska, the business community pays state taxes; they must have some confidence that they are getting the services they are paying for. The Legislature is looking at accountability and standards for education so that the young people who are leaving school do not leave with the illusion that they are prepared for the job market or college when they are not.

After considerable discussion, the Legislature, in 1997, came up with a reform package, which instituted a competency test for teachers and required the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DOEED) to provide for a high school competency test. That test was written by DOEED. Some expressed frustration that it would take three years but DOEED's argument was that the test had to be legally defensible, it had to be valid, and it had to be unique to Alaska. For three years, DOEED contracted with a national testing firm and then wanted at least one year to develop cut scores (the minimum passing score). Groups of educators from across Alaska set the cut scores. The state school board and DOEED have already reduced the cut scores recommended by the panel of teachers. The philosophy behind reducing the cut scores was that a

normally good student who was having a bad day would not fail. DOEED was concerned that those would be the students who would sue.

**CO-CHAIR BUNDE** said the crux of the problem now, depending on who one talks to, is that the test is either too difficult or not uniform in difficulty, and not valid. DOEED and the state board can change the cut scores, as they already have. The math portion seems to be the big problem. The Legislature will be facing a request to extend the deadline for requiring students to pass the exam for graduation. He asked those who testify to address the following questions:

- What should a high school diploma mean? What will the average citizen assume a student with a high school diploma is capable of?
- Should Alaska impose standards?
- If the implementation of the standards are delayed, what should be done in the intervening years that has not been done during the last 12 years?

The committee began taking public testimony.

**MS. DEBBIE OSSIANDER**, the legislative chair of the Anchorage School Board and the parent of a high school sophomore, made the following comments. She applauds the move toward standards. We owe it to our children to raise the bar in terms of what citizens can expect from public education. Regarding the legal challenge, she is concerned about the district's defensibility. Over the past three years, the Anchorage School District has spent a fair amount of time talking with school board members around the country on this topic. She believes that districts need to be able to prove that specific students have been exposed to the curriculum that prepares him for this test and that they have received a mandated remediation necessary to allow them to meet the challenge of the exit exam. Many districts across the state have recently received specific student information that gives districts an opportunity to meet that challenge. The districts will also have to shift their financial resources to make remediation available.

MS. OSSIANDER explained the second issue districts are facing is that all teachers must be prepared to teach a standards-based curriculum, which may be different from what they have done in their classrooms for many years. Districts must provide the opportunity for teachers to learn how to integrate that curriculum into their classrooms.

Those are the two major challenges the Anchorage School District

will be working on in the near future, although other questions will demand a lot of attention and energy from the district. She asked legislators to work with the districts to address the immediate challenges they face.

**MR. TODD ARNDT**, Curriculum Principal at Dimond High School in Anchorage, said his discussion will revolve around a sidebar to this issue: how to administer the exit exam. Dimond High School has 2100 students. Administering the test during the curricular day is very difficult. To administer this test in February, he will have to collapse 31 classrooms, which will impact 846 students, and move them to a different area, making it difficult for teachers to maintain the academic process. Dimond High School has been directed to have certified staff members proctor the exam, which creates another difficulty because he will need to find 31 teachers to teach in the classrooms while the test is in progress. Not all students in the 10th and 11th grades reside in the same classrooms. He will lose academic time across the curriculum during the test. To have people proctor the test during conference hours will upset the validity of administering the test.

MR. ARNDT suggested that one option is to administer the test outside of the curriculum of the school. The test could be given on a Saturday or the students who are not participating could be given the three mornings off.

**MS. SHERRY STEVEN**, testifying from the Mat-Su LIO and representing herself, submitted the following written testimony.

As a parent of five, two with special needs, and a prior Bush teacher, I feel qualified to comment on the exit exam. I think the test should be used as a tool for identifying strengths and weaknesses. The exam should serve as a guide for solving problems, not as a weapon of destruction-used to destroy 2/3rds of our young peoples lives.

Denying my daughter a diploma is denying her a government job, as well as other careers, which she is capable of succeeding in. One cannot standardize all students. Some children are late bloomers, some are famous in our history books (ex.-Einstein). My child's history of education is a story of its own (hint-all special needs are grouped together -physical, mental, emotional, etc.) With all our significant strides and success for people with disabilities-let us not go back to institutions for all. This is a travesty of justice!

Bush schools fare even worse for many reasons:

1. Some districts hire outside teachers who are totally ignorant of Bush Alaska and treat you as such! Like you need to be saved from yourself. In other words-low expectations.
2. Other districts label most students learning disabled for state and federal funding. Again, why have high expectations?
3. Then there is the obvious-aging buildings, limited plumbing, unsafe drinking water, no hot lunch program, little or no exposure to outside events, maybe one computer, and the list goes on.

Demographics will show that most of the students passing this exit exam (Even though in no way similar to the practice test given to study from.) live in affluent or ABC school districts. Private schools have the option of testing, however these students will acquire a diploma. This is not a surprise to some.

Students are tested on subjects-such as geometry-which is not even required for graduation. Two years of math are required. This is usually general math and pre-algebra.

It seems a shame that segments of the population (in rural and urban neighborhoods) that are already overwhelmed by alcohol and/or substance abuse, physical abuse-including sexual, mental abuse, and a high suicide rate are being abused by people in power. Some of these areas have rampant communicable diseases, cancers due to exposure of toxic wastes, radiation and polluted waterways. Now they are told-NO diploma. This should keep them in their place-a generation of dropouts.

A diploma is many things. It is also a show of upward mobility. Every child should have the right to be successful.

All the service agencies I contacted could not comment. Reason-they receive state funding. They could not take a stand for fear of retaliation, liability, etc. Is this the nation we want? No thinking allowed-no opinion here! One agency walked the thin line. "It doesn't really affect us. We just deal with teenage \_\_\_\_\_, not in education. Well, the exit exam does affect us all, especially when we talk of budget cuts. (Budget cuts

translates into administration receiving raises, eliminating the little man, and letting the middle man do twice the work. Talk of smaller class size, etc. is just talk. Why have all these experts when the dollar makes the final decision?

The jails, shelters, and non-profits are probably all for this exam. Job security! Is this what they mean when they want the private sector to provide more? How sad for our society that we have to expand and build more of these institutions.

If the legislature had to take an entrance exam, would all of you be where you are today? Look around-what do you really want to accomplish? Have you really thought this through? If so-Jim Crowe may live in the south, but his cousins have definitely moved to Alaska.

Thank you for your time.

**MS. CAROL KANE**, Executive Director of the Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals (AASSP) the following testimony for Mr. **Bob Thompson, Principal of the Wasilla Middle School.**

I had the good fortune to receive a Fulbright Memorial Fund award to travel to Japan this last fall. I had a wonderful experience and learned a lot about the education system in the Pacific Rim nations. Japan's education system is highly regarded in many parts of the world, and I was able to compare practices in the U.S. to those in Japan. Not surprisingly, many things were the same. Students went to classes similar to ours, they studied a curriculum that was very closely aligned with ours, they had a lot of music, art, and sports in their schools, and their communities recognized the importance of education for their children. I am now convinced that kids are kids no matter where you go in the world. These children were excited, sometimes rowdy, sometimes noisy, and sometimes not doing what they were supposed to do. But, for the most part they were good students and did what was expected of them.

There were some obvious differences as well. Japan has had a high-stakes testing system in place for many years. Students take a test at the end of 8th grade. If they do not pass, they do not go on to high schools that prepare them for college. There are also very difficult entrance exams for their universities. The Japanese have found

that these tests have created two problems in particular that they would like to correct. One, is the tests have put a lot of pressure on students as the test deadlines approach. Problems of depression, fatigue, rebellion, and stress are the result of the high-stakes of these exams. Parents are very demanding of their children, insisting they attend juku, or private schools that tutor weekends, and during breaks in the school term. Students in the 8th grade had dropped out of extra-curricular activities to receive tutoring in public school, and then most attended juku for up to 20 hours per week in preparation for the high school exam.

The second problem they have found is that their curriculum is being driven by these tests. Every teacher teaches the same curriculum in the same way with the objective of passing the test. When I asked teachers what determined the content that was taught in the classroom, they told me they had tests that students were given at the end of each semester. They taught the students what was on the tests. The result is a lot of students that are uniform in their knowledge and skills, without a lot of individualism, critical thinking skills, and creativity. The Japanese are concerned about this as they see their competitive edge diminish in the world.

So, the Japanese are reforming just as we are reforming in the U.S. They are moving away from high-stakes testing and conformity, while we are moving towards high-stakes testing and state standards. It makes for an interesting comparison.

Here is a list of some of the reforms being made in Japan.

- A 30 percent reduction in curriculum in grades 1-8.
- A decreasing emphasis on high-stakes testing.
- Provide counselors in all schools.
- Add integrated study courses.
- Increasing elective courses.
- Relax university entrance requirements.
- Transfer more decision-making to local districts.
- Encourage innovative teaching practices.

I believe in high standards and appropriate testing. I believe that educators and students should be held accountable for learning. I believe that holding students accountable to minimum standards can increase

motivation and raise the standard for learning, especially for low performing students that are capable of doing better. Yet, it is far down this path. The following points are things to consider from the comparison of education in Japan and the United States.

- Progress in Japan is being hampered by a top-down approach to education.
- Self-expression and adaptability are important components of a modern education system that strives to produce individuals that are competitive on a global scale.
- Too much standardization and reliance on tests can lead to too much conformity and a decrease in individual expression and creativity.
- Testing can produce motivation and higher student performance, but too much emphasis can lead to student stress and its inherent problems.

As we adjust what we do in education for Alaskans, it will be good to keep in mind the problems associated with too much of one thing. The most successful students are those that have a variety of experiences and are exposed to a diverse curriculum by teachers with high expectations. Alaskans are an independent people. That independence and individualized style is an asset to the competitiveness and future growth of our state. We must beware of the pitfalls of an education system that can lead to conformity.

MS. KANE made the following comments on behalf of the AASSP that resulted from a collective review of its membership of 280 members, including elementary, middle, and high school principals and postsecondary staff and superintendents. The AASSP Board fully supports the extension of the high school qualifying exam, based on Governor Knowles' recommendation. The AASSP Board believes careful attention needs to be paid to the impact of its proposal in that it does not want to negate the value of high standards and accountability. The AASSP Board also wants to reinforce that those students who have already passed the exam should be acknowledged for doing so. Finally, the AASSP Board wants to make sure there is fairness for all students, particularly for those with special needs. The AASSP has given a lot of thought to the actual process of the testing and recommends looking at multiple diplomas, doing the implementation in phases, and AASSP members want to be full participating partners in this whole process. She asked legislators to call on them so that they can do whatever possible to advance high standards and expectations of all students in

Alaska.

**MR. RICH MONTGOMERY** gave the following testimony from Petersburg.

My name is Richard Montgomery, I am the principal of Petersburg High School. I would like to thank the legislatures and particularly Rep. Bundy for having the courage in taking a stand when it comes to the requirement of students meeting reading, writing and mathematics standards prior to leaving our public schools.

Since the passing of this legislation I have seen quality changes in our school system as we proactively prepared in Petersburg for the challenge of the Alaska State Qualifying Exam. Our math requirements have jumped from a two credit requirement to a 5 credit requirement. Our freshmen are required to take math for a 90 minute block, five days a week. We have taken the time to identify students other than students on IEP's with reading difficulties. We then staffed three reading programs at the high school. We have made tutoring more available to students before school. We have developed diagnostic and prescriptive programs for students who have not passed the math portion of the exit exam. Many of our tutors, I might add, are our students currently enrolled in math analysis and calculus programs. Kids teaching kids is a powerful program! Writing has always been one of our highest priorities, but since the exam all teachers are more engaged, and writing across the curriculum has become the norm. This notion that reading and writing is the language arts teacher's responsibility has become a thing of the past. Students that used to seek out the easiest schedule are now realizing that it might not be enough to get them out the front door. Students that accepted a "D" know now that all that is ink. I believe discipline in our classrooms has improved as students are taking their studies a bit more serious. A few who would be classroom clowns have taken their studies a bit more serious. A few who would be classroom clowns have taken off their hats and decided to pick up their pencils. Make no doubt about it, at least in Petersburg this legislation has made students, teachers, administrators and parents sit up in their chairs and take notice. I believe to retreat from our course may prove costly to many of these students that have not only decided school is important but are feeling successful and are enjoying that feeling.

I do believe there needs to be serious consideration and accommodations for those students currently under an Individual Education Plan who unfortunately have disabilities that may unfairly keep them from graduation if they can not meet these standards.

We are concerned about losing credibility with our public. I am more concerned about the credibility we have when we look into the eyes of our students that took these tests seriously, spent countless hours sweating bullets taking the exam, and passed them only to tell them --We were just kidding. Wow!

We must be careful about using the excuse that standards are new and that in a few more years we should expect different results on reading and writing. I have worked in all corners of this State. I have never worked in a district where reading and writing weren't their highest priority. Each district spent a large portion of their budgets improving in these areas and teachers worked hard in coming up with every technique that they could find to make it understandable for their students. What was missing was an accountability factor, placed not just on the school system but on the parents and students as well.

Considering the political pressures out there it is probably inevitable that this piece of legislation will either be reversed or modified. I would like you to at least consider staying on course with the reading portion of this exam for the year 2001. It appears to be the easiest of the three to complete. In the year 2002, implement the writing, and 2003 the math. The math is the most difficult and requires for the most part geometry for success. Many districts will need time to restructure, as we did, their requirements and courses for success in the math exam.

At the very least, every diploma in the State of Alaska should give credit to the passage of one or more of the exams, perhaps with an official seal for each of the exams passed. If we are going to ask students to take an exam there should be something in it for them. I believe the students being asked to take a three day exam when they are not stakeholders is counterproductive. The expense of assessing the exam, not to mention the loss of six days a year of quality instruction for data that may

prove to be no more than shelf ballast is a discouraging thought.

Thank you for your time.

**MS. MARJORIE PAUST** gave the following testimony from Petersburg.

Good morning, my name is Marjorie Paust and I am the counselor at Petersburg High School.

I have two comments I would like to make this morning.

First, I believe that all students can learn but not at the same time or in the same way. That one third of our sophomores did pass the math section of the test last spring should not be a signal for despair if the test is intended as an exit exam. Instead we should celebrate that a third passed it early and use the next two years to fill in the skills that they are missing and that's what we're trying to do in Petersburg.

Secondly, I also believe that students should be given many ways to demonstrate what they know and can do. Certainly the exit exam is one way to show mastery of the standards. But I would like to suggest that an alternative path be made available to students to demonstrate mastery of the state standards. One way would be a portfolio to document what students understand and how they can apply the skills and knowledge that they have gained their school career. The portfolio would be presented to and verified by a representative local group (perhaps consisting of teachers, parents, business people, community folks and school board members). The portfolio choice would not be a quick or simple alternative but would provide another pathway to graduation.

I am in favor of continuing the current exit exams with the option for students to demonstrate mastery of the standards by other means as the exit exam. Thank you.

**MS. JUDY KEARNS-STEFFEN** made the following comments from Sitka. As a special education teacher, she teaches learning disabled students. She believes the competency test should be given to all sophomores and that those sections not passed should be required to be retaken in the student's junior or senior year. Those students needing accommodations according to special education guidelines should be provided with such. However, the criteria for high

school graduation should include several requirements. Students should be required to have passing grades in all subjects, an academic emphasis in one area, a senior project portfolio and the competency test. The two areas must be met with passing grades and although the competency test would be taken into consideration, non-passage would not keep a student from graduation. A special notice could be placed on the transcript for those who pass the competency test.

**MS. CATHERINE PARKER**, a Sitka parent of a sophomore who will be expected to pass the exit exam to obtain a diploma, read the following letter that she sent to legislators on January 14, 2001.

I am addressing this letter to all state legislators as this is an issue that concerns me as a parent and a citizen of the State of Alaska. I am asking the legislators to delay requiring the passage of the high school exit exam for four years. It will take at least that amount of time to allow school districts to fully prepare students for the test. I believe accountability must take place in our schools but making one single test the sole determiner of whether a student graduates with a diploma is wrong. As a former educator, finding a good test, one that fully measures a student's capabilities and potential is very hard. Assessments should be made as the student progresses, quarter by quarter, semester by semester, and year by year, by the instructor who is using guidelines set up by the school district. Each child learns differently, performs differently, and must be assessed as the individual that they are. Their future should not be determined in one fell swoop by a standardized test that does not take into account whether the student may be dyslexic, blind, totally right-brained to only mention a few individual traits that one may be "blessed" with, but that standardized tests will not take into account. I know that requiring high school qualifying exams as a determinant as to whether a student gets a diploma has become a national trend but I am reading that it is starting to backfire. For legal reasons and public pressure, many states are backing down. I do not believe that a single test is the answer for what could be such a critical consequence. I was recently sent an editorial from the newspaper, "USA Today," by Steven Gorie (ph), President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association and [indisc.] quote,

Teachers do not grade students on the basis of a single test. Colleges do not admit students

on the basis of a single test and state government should not determine which students may graduate from high school on the basis of a single test. The best way to determine whether high standards are being met is through multiple, fair and valid measures. Parents rightly would be upset if Johnny came home with an F for the year in math, despite doing well in classes, on homework, and other exams simply because he failed one test of questionable validity. They should be even more outraged if Johnny is denied a chance to go to college or seek a job based on an equally narrow performance measure.

I am a parent of a sophomore who will be expected to pass this test. She was in special education classes through fifth grade when she tested out of the program and legally could not get the extra help they offered. That does not mean that she does not need it. According to CAT and other standardized tests, she is a couple of years behind her peers academically. For years, the school systems have stressed self esteem - do not hold your child back. Well great, the high school qualifying exam is now in place, self esteem is out the window, and our children are forced to take summer school, seek tutors and repeat grades. Please move back the date for taking this exam at least four years or eliminate it altogether. My daughter would like to be an art instructor or an elementary educator but will be denied this goal if she is required to take this test and fails it. I believe that more time must be allowed to prepare for this test. Thank you.

**MR. TERRY BENTLEY**, Superintendent of Schools, Nenana, made the following remarks. The benchmarks are a wonderful thing to have and we should strive for excellence, but he is concerned that when a program is started in the middle of getting it formatted, one requires the end to be accomplished before the formatting is done. It's like building a house and putting the roof on before the walls. We are expecting students to reach standards who have not been through the system long enough.

TAPE 01-3, SIDE A

**DR. DAVIS**, Bering Straits School District, read the following testimony into the record.

As L.B. Kann (ph) wrote, in this month's "Cabin" (ph),

Do not let anyone tell you that standardized tests are not an accurate measure. They are and we can remarkably predict the size of houses by the scores achieved. Why is it adults design, administer and interpret a new test that a majority of children fail and never ask themselves if the test might not be flawed? Alaska is not alone, as other states have found this to be the case as well.

I speak today on our position of the misuse of these assessment instruments. The high school equivalency exam has the potential of providing our community with rich, important information about the achievement of the children and their progress in high school. Instead, we are on the verge of allowing this one tool to dramatically alter the Class of 2002 and the classes that follow. The opportunity to realize the individual components of this assessment will be lost if changes are not made. I have spoken for the suspension of this date. In one year and a few months we will find a most significant number of students not graduate from high school since the 1940s and 1950s and not because they are any less capable. The establishment of the high stakes exam came as a desire for accountability and improvement of Alaska education. This is an honorable goal. A movement not unlike it has swept other states. The desire for accountability has also been based on the belief that Alaska schools have done a poor job of educating children while consuming, some say, a significant and unreasonable amount of the state budget. As we have witnessed, the failure of students to pass all three sections of the high school exam has been widespread and not isolated to any one region. I want to remind those critics of Alaska public education that at no time in the history of the state has education been stronger, educated more children, and been more effective. No other model for delivering education has been more successful than the current model. Our children are achieving at a higher rate, attending school longer and continuing their education further than in any other decade. The issue confronting education is the same that confronts the entire community. Schools should not be asked to solve all societal issues. Children do come to school without being prepared. Some are mistreated. Some get very little sleep and some live in abject poverty. Some need medical care and, yes, some

need better trained teachers and more effective administrators. Simply placing blame on schools for poor achievement of children will never solve societal problems. It will simply provide some people with an excuse not to engage in the work to help our young people grow and develop. America has created a two-tier educational system. This system has worked well for some and not for others. Every decade since the news of the Soviet Union launching Sputnik, people have looked toward education as the reason for our country not being successful.

**MS. MARY MILLER** gave the following testimony.

I am Mary Miller from Nome. My daughter is a freshman in high school and I am speaking in favor of delaying the qualifying exam until, at least, 2006 thus allowing students time to prepare for the standards. I am particularly concerned for students, who work hard but are not high achievers or who, historically, do not test well. They have a right to equal opportunity to succeed on this exam. Based on the benchmark results for sophomores from the Nome School District, our students are not prepared. For the high school students, it is unrealistic to expect them to catch up to the level that they are supposed to be at and then expect them to pass the exam. At this time, we have a serious problem. We can be successful but more time is needed to integrate these uniform standards into our public schools. Sufficient time must be provided for appropriate intervention and support for students who need the extra help. By changing the effective date of this bill from 2002 to 2006 will demonstrate a more fair and responsible implementation of the exit exam law. I think we need to keep in mind what is fair to the students and what is our responsibility. All students are not high achievers and we see many students who work diligently and they should be entitled to earn the same diploma that the valedictorian and salutatorian of the class also earn. Thank you for this opportunity.

**BETTY BINGSTON** from Glennallen said that she wanted to thank the legislators for providing Alaskans the opportunity to give input into this educational issue.

I am the parent of a high school junior who has a B average, has scored 215 on the military ABSCAM exam, which qualifies him for any job in the military, and an

ROTC scholarship. He has scored 970 on the PSAT exam and 1190 on the diagnostic test administered on the cd-rom study program that he has been using. While I agree that as educators we need to establish goals and objectives for our students, and then hold them and their teachers, principals and superintendents responsible for meeting those standards, on the subject of extending the deadline for enforcing those standards I agree with Governor Knowles. When he states that it is unfair to the current junior class to expect them to meet standards, which have only been in place for two years. My opinion is based on two issues. First, in our school district, the number of teachers is limited due to the size of the community. Consequently, if a teacher's instructional style and the students learning style do not match the student is the loser. That has been my son's experience here in Glennallen in one subject area. In his case, I chose to buy curriculum and teach the subject at home. However, not all parents have the skill or the inclination to do that. I have heard nothing in the plan that requires students to qualify to also require teachers to teach to a variety of learning styles. Even if that means forcing teachers who do not work to help students to lost their job. Second, my concern is a basic understanding of test taking. Statistically, the scores of students given the same test on ten different occasions will not differ. In my son's case, this has also been validated. While he easily passed one subject, after taking the other two tests twice his scores are within less than ten points of passing are in the same range both times. The only solution left to parents and teachers is to teach to the test. What dismays me is that this is the stated end test of the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. In a booklet provided to our school counselor, in a section titled "Frequently Asked Questions", the answer to the question of what happens to a student doesn't pass was to establish an alternative program. It would be better to delay enforcing this requirement rather than become a state that uses questions on its tests to determine whether Alaskan educators have done their job of teaching and students have learned. This delay will allow school districts to reevaluate the priorities of the educational program, make adjustments and give the best exams to evaluate the progress of the students. Based on my son's demonstration of competency by other tools, how can the legislature cheat him or others out of their diplomas? Thank you very much.

**DR. WILLIAM PFEIFER** testified via teleconference and submitted the following written testimony.

My name is Dr William Pfeifer, I am a school board member in Ketchikan but my comments here are my own. I have 5 children in the public schools (ages 12,14,16,17,18). My oldest daughter, Angela, just started college at Oregon State University. My interest in education and raising standards and accountability started at the end of her year in Kindergarten. This is when the teacher and principal both agreed with my assertion that she had not learned one thing that year. But, according to them, that was OK.

I have worked on educational issues during the leadership of Alaska Commissioner Covey, Holloway, Cross and now again Holloway. I remember the start of academic standards with President George H. Bush, the move toward affective standards with some move back to academics with Clinton, and now we are to George W. Bush.

I served on the committee involved in creating and overseeing Ketchikan's minimum graduation competency that is still in place, and one of the few in Alaska. This has given us a head start on the State competency. We were scheduled to raise our competency level years ago but decided to wait for the State competency. We expected the State would bring us up to the next level of proficiency involving more advanced math and a more difficult, proficient, reading and writing level. Let me assure you there was a great public uproar when we set our competency. There were those who wanted to lower the standard and even those who asserted that students did not need to know that .75 is the same as  $\frac{3}{4}$ .

The reason I give you this history is to point out that the goal of raising standards and competencies did not start yesterday or a couple years ago. I have written to both Commissioners Holloway and Cross along with the community at large about avoiding a credibility trap. I have pointed out and emphasized that we should not be waiting for the results of the first HSQE to start addressing student weaknesses more aggressively. We have had the standards. We have had ITBS and CAT test results for years that showed 25% of our students scoring below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading. In fact there have consistently been districts in this State that have had

100% of these students scoring below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile. It is common sense that if a credible test was created it would parallel these results. We knew we would have some districts unable to issue a diploma to any of their students.

The credibility trap: 1) States do not stand up to the political heat when they set a true standard at a level at which students truly need to be successful. They realize that many will not meet the standard so they lower the standard, or delay it, losing credibility. 2) States set low standards initially so that enough of these students will be able to pass the test. Unfortunately, with the State's stamp of "proficient" the public will see the true result (lowered standards) in the work place and the State's credibility is lost.

Alaska's commissioners of education over the years have tried to keep this in mind and overall are heading down the right road, but they have become misguided by the fear of lawsuits. I attended the Alaska 2000 Education Summit both as a businessman and as a member of the Ketchikan School Board. The test data from the Alaska Benchmark Examinations in grades three, six, and eight, along with the results of the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Examination administered to sophomores were received and evaluated.

The goal of the summit was to send school district teams back to their districts with a specific plan, based on local test data, that would make sure students are on track to graduate with the skills they need for future success. I applaud the activities and efforts of the Governor and DEED that occurred during this event. The evaluation process was great but we were doing tasks a computer could have spit out immediately. The evaluation was also done on incomplete and misguided assessment data. It also had not been correlated with data from other assessments. Let me explain.

**Incomplete data:** We had no detailed item analysis. The broad categories of weaknesses were no more focused than some of the broad statements in our content standards. This gives districts little substance to focus specific improvement on.

**Misguided data:** This relates to the cut score level and setting it at the bottom of the range of statistical

error. It is misguided because the DEED has forgot the main premise for the standards and establishing a HSQE.

- 1) The original purpose was a commitment to the public and businesses to guarantee that students would graduate with a set of skills, and content knowledge. They would be proficient and fluent in their skills and have a command of certain knowledge that would allow them to succeed in the real world.
- 2) The purpose was never to guarantee a student receive a diploma for seat time.
- 3) The following reflects the change in percent of students passing given the community committee's original cut score and that reflecting the bottom of the range of statistical error recommended by DEED to the State Board.

Community Committee		DEED
READING	48% pass	75% pass
WRITING	16% pass	48% pass
MATH	15% pass	33% pass

- 4) I have requested the actual score that represents the top and bottom of the statistical error range for the HSQE, and Benchmarks, but have been told by Richard Smiley that this information is unavailable. I would ask for your help in acquiring this information from the testing company. I don't know if the testing company keeps this information to insulate the DEED from a FOIA request, but **consider this a FOIA request**.
- 5) If this was a licensing board set up to guarantee that a neurosurgeon had the skills and content knowledge to function in the real world doing brain surgery, would we set the cut score at the low end of the statistical error range? NO, in fact we would set it at the high end. If we are serious about the HSQE we would do the same, or minimally keep it at the midrange (the committee cut score).
- 6) The DEED's legal concern did not appropriately take into consideration that the student will have multiple times to take the exam before they complete high school. They also have up to 3 years after completing high school to pass the exam. If it was one test given one time then you might need to consider the statistical error. That, however, is not the case.

**Correlated data:** The analysis at Alaska's Summit 2000 only used one set of data. All districts have other

assessment data that should be correlated. Some include the ITBS, CAT and Gates tests that are norm-referenced assessments. Others include criterion-referenced tests based on their curriculum and the corresponding material.

The State has, unfortunately, eliminated the 11<sup>th</sup> grade CAT 5 test. The following may explain why. The last 11<sup>th</sup> grade CAT 5 test data available and reported was for 97/98. This data shows 24.7% of the students statewide scoring below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading. This has been the trend seen on previous State report cards for years. At the same time we have DEED saying that 75% of sophomores are proficient readers. While you cannot compare the two tests directly, it raises a serious question regarding the standard level when those certified by DEED as proficient are scoring at the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile on national tests, let alone international tests.

Let me give you an example:

Let's say we came up with a new weight standard for gold called "deeds". Then we say we have discovered a new claim that will provide 2000 deeds of gold to every Alaskan resident. Instead of the permanent fund check every resident will now receive 2000 deeds of Gold per year. Are 2000 deeds a good deal? We don't know. We don't know what it is comparable to. How does it correlate to a pound, the old standard? Is the measure accurate, valid, and reliable.

The same questions lie with our competency. 75% of our students proficient in reading based on a new standard without comparing to the old standards is meaningless until you see that individual in action. This is why there should be no delay in the competency. The people of this State need to see the type of student that the State has certified as "proficient". If that student is not proficient, if they cannot spell, do math, make change, read and understand a policy manual or write a business letter, the DEED and its certification of proficient will lose all credibility. To delay 4 years without a full understanding of proficient, especially given the statistical error adjustment, will allow potentially low standards to go undetected by the public.

There are some educators that are waiting for you to delay so they can continue doing what they have always done for the next few years before they retire. There are

those who plan to wait this out and believe it, too, will pass like all education fads and reforms in the past.

### **We need Success not Process and Delay**

\*Request the detailed and specific plans, prior to granting any delay.

\*Research, question, and consider raising the cut score in reading before any consideration of delay.

\*Request the scores that represent the statistical error range.

\*The low cut score in reading undermines the efforts of local districts that have higher expectations and understand the demands of the real world. A teacher of reading, that served on the cut score committee was at the 2000 summit and communicated this sentiment to me. He was very upset with the lowered cut score. He has been working diligently with students and their parents to address their reading deficit so they could be successful going into high school. Unfortunately, his efforts were undermined when the State said they are "proficient" readers. Is the proficient level that was set by DEED what you would want, and be satisfied with, for your own child?

\*Consider establishing an honors diploma to motivate our top students.

\*Consider bonus funding for districts that exceed the state standards and are funding locally to the cap.

\*Consider special legislative appropriation to districts who present detailed plans using proven programs with replicable research. It will take funds to train teachers who the universities have been negligent in properly teaching.

\*Funding must be tied to accountability and not just absorbed by the system.

\*We must acknowledge the value and importance of a certificate of completion. The message needs to be sent that a certificate of completion is important and it tells a lot to an employer. It is far better than dropping out. All certificates of completion should be of high quality like a diploma and have the competency scores of those areas passed included on them. A path for those students to gain skills to pass the remaining competencies beyond high school should be made clear.

\*To delay the competency means you are willing, again, to let students out in the real world unprepared. It will delay a system of support to help those students who need to continue to meet their remaining competencies after

high school.

**MR. AL JOHNSON** testified from Ketchikan and submitted the following written testimony.

Good Morning,

I ask that my full submission be inserted in the record and note that I am willing to respond to inquiry.

Hello, my name is Al Johnson. I am a life long resident of Ketchikan, I, my wife, children, my Grandchildren have and are in our public school system. I have been actively involved with our local public education efforts for 13 years. That time included the implementation of our "Ready For Work" graduating competencies. This activity has assured our graduating seniors for the past several years, that a minimum standard had to be met to obtain a graduating diploma. While it is a minimum standard, it is a "High Stakes" test.

Ketchikan is on the leading edge of participating in the educational philosophy President Geo. W. Bush has presented to Congress. We are actively addressing the 48% or students that are "Struggling" or "Non Reading". This situation of allowing 500 elementary students to be shuffled through the system on an annual basis must be addressed and eliminated. If you can't read you will fail and fail they do.

Education in Alaska is justifiably under review. The results of the exit examination recently given, reflects the urgency of such review. The request for an extension of the implication date for the exam gives cause for alarm.

The Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) exit test appears to be fair. The elementary grade benchmarks are assured to be in alignment. Educators from every grade level involved from across the state, gathered to make that assurance and reviewed the test format, determined singularly and in consensus, what a child should be able to demonstrate knowing and establish a minimum score to assure graduation. (The cut score established by teachers and the adjusted McGraw Hill test scores are listed next.)

Teachers' Committee Scores

McGraw-Hill Adjustment

Reading: 48% students passed	75% students passed
Writing: 16% students passed	48% students passed
Math: 15% students passed	33% students passed

Is DEED alleging that the test demonstrated education prior to 1997 was so remote and different in content that only 48% four students passed a simple level of reading? Only 16% passed the writing requirement established by a writing consortium process? Only 15% passed the math proficiency test that contains adding, subtracting, multiplication, division, algebra, geometry and problem solving segments? Is this enough to require a four year extension? If so, what is to prevent the same situation with "New" sophomores four years from now?

What on earth has been going on in education that allowed the DEED to become complacent?

My personal view, is the department is staffed by those that have come through a complacent system. Many of the staff are professionals from districts in Alaska that are today reflecting low achievement levels. This confirms that while they'd were employed by those districts, the academic mediocrity level was acceptable. Until the advent of the results of the exit examination was publicized, the complacency continued. I have similar concerns with the make up and membership of the Alaska Association of School Boards (AASB) and the Alaska School Administrators Assn. (ASAA). Many are past employees or revolving employees and administrators of these failing district. None of the above to my knowledge, have ever volunteered that the current status of our educational system is deplorable. The legislature stepped up and addressed the unacceptable results.

The initial test resulted in less than stunning results across the state. Fears of law suits against districts by parents were recognized. DEED hastily obtained adjustment numbers from McGraw-Hill, the test maker, they adjusted the scores to a more palatable level. This is a disservice to the public and legislature. An obvious attempt to cover up flaws of current educational efforts.

I offer these suggestions for consideration. While they all do not address specifically the exit exam, they should be an integral part of any review process.

Revisit the cut scores established by our professional

teachers. Those were "Minimum Scores". This will establish legitimacy to the scoring process. Honesty is demanded.

Second: Oversight the DEED for accountability by establishing specific legislative goals for accomplishment. While this suggestion addresses the elementary grades, it has affect on future students to assure their successful preparation, "That all able children exiting the third grade will be proficient in reading at or above grade level and will remain proficient". Establish a date certain for accomplishment. The same for mathematics and writing.

Third: Establish funding outside of the formula that allows districts to submit grant applications for both benchmarks and the exit exam which reflect methodology to be used to accomplish specific skill level goals. That any model used be of replicable research, not philosophical in nature, and that anecdotal research be discounted. Grants should be funded in segments based on the achievements projected by the submitting district. Mandate all results with an annual review. Grants to be discontinued where projected goals are not achieved., (Note: it is not intended that grants provide funds for new tenured employees, only as approved, to supplement grant employees as required in grant time lines)

In some format, implementation of these suggestions immediately to establish accountability. Only then should consideration of extending the exit exam implementation till 2004 be decided.

Summary: The DEED staff are inbreed from long standing mediocrity. A legislative wake up call has been issued. Mandate the use of the teacher established cut scores, not the ginned up McGraw Hill numbers. The availability of grant funding tied to annual goal results as they relate to both the elementary benchmarks and high school exit exam deficiencies. Oversighting by the legislature HESS committee for the near future, will assure the public that all the players are on the same page. Consideration of extending the implication date for the exit exam based on confirmation by DEED agreement to terms.

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony.

**STEVE CATHERS** from Valdez testified next.

I am Superintendent of Valdez City School District and also president-elect of the Alaska Association of School Administrators. I am speaking on my own behalf and my comments are not representative of the Valdez school district necessarily. I'm also the parent of five school age children. Thanks for hearing my testimony.

I support standards and the qualifying exam. I wish they'd answer the question you posed about what a diploma means. In answering that question, I want to suggest a solution, which is appropriate for all students and that maintains standards. It is also a model that is tested successfully and acclaimed nationally. Diplomas used to mean that some students are prepared to enter careers as manual laborers directly. It also meant that some students were prepared to enter college. At one time, it also meant that some students were ready to enter manual labor careers, with no training. Standards must be kept high, I agree with that, but more than that, standards must be targeted. Diplomas never meant that all students were ready for college. Making all students ready for college should not be our goal.

The U.S. Department of Labor says that only 20 percent of our graduates will work in jobs requiring a college degree. In the next ten years, most of the remaining 80 percent of our students will work in skilled labor careers requiring technical training. Students are different and have different needs. I believe it is time to consider different kinds of diplomas instead of denial of a generic diploma.

An academic diploma could represent readiness for college and a technical diploma could represent readiness to succeed in a skilled labor force. Standards for each should be equally challenging but different. They would also address vast differences in student aptitudes and strengths. I believe beginning to look at this type of model provides us a solution that will address the uniqueness of all students. Last, I would like to make a quick comment on test scores. Test scores should never be fixed in stone. They are subjective and were established by a particular group of people on a particular date. Likewise, the standards upon which the test was based were established by a unique group of individuals. I was involved with the Unalaska City School District Board of

Education in passing a resolution opposing the standards for the math exam before the exam was developed. Some of those standards were not appropriate; they do not represent minimal requirements for graduates. They far exceed that. I believe the math standards and cut scores should be reviewed. Thank you.

**LAURIE SCANDLING** from Juneau testified next.

I am a product of Alaska's public school system from kindergarten through graduate school. I also have two children at Juneau Douglas High School who are sophomores and I suspect both will easily pass their first attempt at the exam, which occurs at the end of next month. I currently teach in a special program at Juneau Douglas High School for students who are at risk of not graduating because of a variety of special needs. While I support standards, and we all need direction, standards provide that direction and a threshold. I support some way of testing. Are they competent? I do see myself here to represent those students that you may never hear from and to share some of their concerns.

First I have a couple of questions for you. I want you to think about this. Are you the kind of person for whom balancing your checkbook is the pinnacle of your math wizardry? Are you someone who remembers everything and easily absorbs what you see and hear on television and you love having a high level debate with somebody and exchanging ideas but reading complicated materials may be confusing or you may get lost? Those are the kind of kids who in 16 months will not be getting a diploma. I work with those kids, they are very real people and I deal with them every day and hear that, for them, a diploma is precious and is a goal. Perhaps, in many places, they are the first person to achieve a diploma.

Within the last eight weeks, two of the juniors I work with have dropped out to the distress of their family. Both students expressed to me that they are afraid that they will not pass all three parts of the exam by next spring, in their senior year, and they did not see the point in staying in school. They feel they now need to move on and get a job. For 25 years prior to becoming a teacher, I worked in the public and private sector and have also taught college. I think I have a very strong understanding of what students ought to be able to do in the larger world once they graduate. I certainly think

it's fair to ask students to demonstrate those skills but I want to encourage every Alaskan, especially employers, to look at the exam, which is available on the Internet, and to ask yourself, is this important for kids to know? I have taken the exam, and I have some questions about that. I'm not sure that every single part of it is exactly what employers really do want kids to know. I think delaying the exam is necessary to assess whether the test is measuring what we want to measure and to make sure that all kids get all of the help that they need. I think that there are some fundamental issues that must be addressed, regardless of whenever this test is finally implemented.

I want to touch on three topics briefly, brain research, remediation and endorsement diplomas. In listening to the testimony, it's obvious to me that it's not an original idea on my part. We know from brain research that young kids who experience chronic stress either from poverty, chaos in the home, abuse or neglect, actually suffer a physiological withering of transmitters in the brain and they never fully catch up with their better cared for peers. I've certainly seen this. We also know that some children are born with, and have permanent, learning disabilities that mean that they may never be able to spell the correct direction or in the right way or to punctuate correctly or to order numbers in the right way. For them, going to school is an experience like having a Macintosh disk inserted in their IBM brain. It is very challenging. I don't think that the exit exam recognizes this research fully or the differences children are born with and will never fully overcome. I wonder if the current exam, as currently administered, could withstand a legal challenge from the disabilities community. I think accommodations for kids must be considered.

Second, there is a serious need for remediation funding. In the typical urban high school, a high school teacher has 25 to 35 students, all learning at different speeds. It's natural; we are all different yet a certain amount of material must be covered in a finite amount of time. For a whole lot of reasons, most or which are outside the control of the teacher, some kids just, inevitably, will learn as quickly as others. They want to make it, their teachers want to help them make it, but our districts are squeezed so tightly now for funding. Meeting standards will take different kids different amounts of time and time is money. We know this. We want kids to make it;

please help us help the kids who need it most. We would like to have an expanded summer school. We would like to have expanded tutoring, after school, in our library. We cannot afford it. Many of us are volunteering to do that because we believe so strongly in it.

Finally, I am concerned about the punitive nature of the exam. To say that a young person, who has an excellent attendance record over four years, who has achieved at least average grades, who has passed two of the three parts of the exam but may, repeatedly, come within a few points of passing a third part, to tell them they cannot have a high school diploma seems unjust to me. You can be assured there will be hundreds of hardworking students who will be in that situation 16 months from now. I think to hand them a certificate of attendance suggests that they did nothing in high school but show up. I don't think that's fair. I would suggest that an endorsement diploma be permitted that reflects which portions of the exam a student passed and thus you might win a partially or fully endorsed diploma and the employer could ask what your endorsements were in. If we're serious about having kids demonstrate certain proficiencies then we have to be serious about providing all the help they need, be fair and accommodating scientific research on learning differences and be just in permitting young Alaskans to earn a diploma, which does reflect their proficiencies. Thank you.

**MR. RYAN DELOACH** gave the following testimony to the committee.

Hello. My name is Ryan DeLoach. I am a sophomore at Juneau Douglas High School and I have struggled with a learning disability since second grad.

An Individual Education Plan, IEP for short, is made to assist a student by allowing them learning aides such as calculators, spell checkers, etc. These tools allow me to catch up in areas that are difficult due to my disability and have allowed me to succeed in school.

An IEP is built for students to be successful, depending on their individual needs. When these needs are not met, students with the IEP's are at a severe disadvantage.

Accommodations are helpful with reading a lengthy document, writing reports, and doing math. My IEP allows me these tools when needed, including while I am taking a

test, but they are not on the exit exam.

My IEP is a legal document that has been set up by a team of teachers, any my parents. It is designed to help me deal with my learning disability, and to succeed in school. It seems very unfair to teach a student to learn using the accommodations in his IEP, and then take them away for the exit exam.

I think it is important to allow school districts and students time to prepare to succeed with this new testing system, before it is used to prevent someone from getting their high school diploma. I am in favor of delaying the exit exam so that students are prepared when they take it.

A high school diploma is important to me. I plan to graduate and go to college for a business degree. I feel I will be successful as a business person, but I am concerned that this exit exam may prevent me from reaching my goals.

I thank you for listening to my concerns. I am confident that you will make the right decision about the exit exam, and allow hardworking students such as myself to reach their goals, and become productive citizens.

Number 1610

**MR. LOUIS BARTON**, a 31 year resident of Alaska and parent of two freshmen at Lathrop High School made the following comments.

Some have speculated that improper test standards or scoring techniques may be the problem with the low scores seen thus far. It's difficult to comment specifically to that not having seen the testing material. It may or may not be part of the problem. However, I personally believe the underlying problem is that students are not being adequately prepared for high school graduation. I strongly feel the fault is at least two-fold. One factor is likely to stem from poor study habits and lack of motivation on the part of many students who do not score well. However, I consider a second factor to likely be the greatest reason for the poor test scores seen to date. And that is that the basic and necessary concepts and principles of reading, writing and arithmetic are not being adequately taught.

I'll give you just one example, of several, from personal experience of what I consider inadequate teaching. My two boys each had an English course and a reading/literature while in the 7th grade at Tanana Middle School. In neither of these two courses, taught by two different teachers was grammar, sentence structure, spelling, nor vocabulary taught - I mean virtually none. But apart from this example of what I consider totally unacceptable instruction, I also am convinced that today our schools are derelict by not failing students who deserve it. Instead, they go ahead and pass them through the system. That schools are reluctant to fail deserving students is exemplified by quotes from Representative Bunde in a front page article of Thursday's edition of the Fairbanks Daily Newsminer. Representative Bunde was quoted as saying, 'Certainly if we delay it four years the seniors for the next three years have no motivation to improve.' A further quote by Representative Bunde read, 'I've heard from teachers very frustrated because they don't seem to have a great deal of influence with students because they know they're going to get a diploma if they do the work or not.' My question is why should anyone be advanced from one grade to another, much less receive a high school diploma, if required work is not done? Again, the implication here is that we just can't fail anyone that deserves it. I believe students in every grade should be tested in each subject over the material they were expected to learn that year, and those who don't pass should be failed and required to repeat that grade the next year. That's how it was done when I was in school.

But aside from this type of testing, which should already be the standard practice, I think that statewide standard testing should also be conducted, but not just for a high school diploma. Standardized tests should be given to students 2-3 times throughout his/her educational experience prior to graduation. For example, give appropriate standardized tests to students, say, in the 4th grade, again in the 6th-7th grade, and again in the 9th-10th grade. These could be used as benchmarks to see how students are progressing and to evaluate how well curricula are being taught. Then give an exit exam for graduation.

Further, I strongly recommend that every teacher in the state be required to take the same exit exam that will be required for high school graduation. Any teacher that

does not pass any part of the test should be laid off as being unqualified to teach in Alaskan schools. If they don't know the material needed by which to pass the test, then they're certainly not qualified to teach it.

In summary - here is the problem as I perceive it. The public school system has created a situation where it has advanced many students for the past several years to grade levels they were not qualified for, because of the failure to adequately and properly prepare them throughout their advancement, including not failing those who should have been. Now many are nearing graduation, and whether or not they pass the exist exam, they will in fact have to struggle once out of high school. While that's very unfortunate, it's a little late to be thinking about those who will soon be graduating in 2002. The damage has already been done, even though much may be through the fault of some of those students - their own fault.

You must focus on establishing a system that will ensure all students are being taught and learn the necessary basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. Having several standardized tests throughout a student's tenure with Alaska's public school system. I believe, would be an important step forward, not only by which to measure their performance, but also that of teachers and administrators. But lowering the test scoring standards for those nearing graduation in 2002 in order for them to receive a diploma would also be lowering the standards of those making their way up through the school system now. In my view such a measure would only exacerbate an already bad situation by sanctioning the level of inadequacy in teaching students at the present time. On the other hand, not lowering the test standards may help foster an incentive for students to begin to take the matter seriously and be more accountable and accept responsibility for their actions.

But whatever you decide, you must proceed in a manner that ensures the basics of reading and writing and arithmetic are taught, and finally I strongly believe that teachers must also be held accountable by requiring each to take the exam. Thank you very much for this time to comment.

CO-CHAIR BUNDE commented that a teacher competency test was part of the Legislature's education reform package. The new teachers are

taking a fairly rigorous exam.

**MS. NAOMI WALSWORTH**, one of 15,000 PTA members in Alaska and a concerned parent with four children, said that she expected the test to speak to minimal standards for graduation. She was very surprised when she took the test herself. She expected the test to cover skills needed for living and surviving on one's own. The test contains questions about factoring polynomials, geometry, equations for lines, and problems far beyond the basics that students need to succeed in the world beyond graduation. She challenged legislators to take the test.

**CO-CHAIR BUNDE** told Ms. Walsworth that she is not the first person to suggest that. He added that students are given the test the first five times for diagnostic purposes and have three years to pass it.

**MR. BOB ADKINS**, a retired educator from Haines, testified on his own behalf. He spent 32 years in education, all in Alaska. He strongly supports the proposed standards and strongly opposes delaying implementation of the exam. He was recently hired to tutor a class of 14 high school juniors who have all failed the mathematics section of the exit exam, most of them twice. Of the 14 students, five refused to take the tutorial class on the grounds they don't believe the Legislature will require the exam. In the two weeks since the class started, two have dropped out because it was too hard and they wanted to be elsewhere. Of the seven remaining students, none have passed either practice test given so far. The test will be administered in 19 days. In the past week, one student went to Mexico for three weeks, one went to Disneyland for two weeks, and one student left to visit relatives with no return date.

Regarding testing to meet a standard, MR. ADKINS said that every airline pilot must pass one test, every lawyer, doctor and CPA must do the same. Testing is used everywhere. There is no need to delay implementing the standards. The practice tests he has seen contain material that he taught in his 8th grade math classes. He agrees that the Class of 2002 is experiencing a shock because they do not think the exam will be given, but the Class of 2003 will adjust. Every school district should be clamoring for these standards to be put in place. He believes the same process should be put in place for eighth graders. Students should not go on to high school until they pass a competency test. He believes this issue is more important than the natural gas line or ANWR drilling. This issue deals with our children and the future of our nation.

**MS. LOUISE PARISH** testified and submitted the following testimony.

## INTRODUCTION

My name is Louise Parish. My 16-year old-daughter receives special education services at Valdez High School as a child with a specific learning disability and a language disorder. She has been diagnosed dyslexic. She is currently in 10th grade. She works hard, has always gotten A's, B's and maybe a C on her report cards, and is a super kid. I am including a picture of her so you can see a "face of an Alaskan child with learning disabilities." Sometimes decision-makers can forget that the decisions they make profoundly effect real kids' lives and real kids' futures.

## ADVOCACY BIOGRAPHY

Either my daughter or I are members of PERC, Parents Plus of Valdez, the International Dyslexia Association, The Alaska Blind, Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic, the Valdez Reading Association and other advocacy organizations. I subscribe to a variety of advocacy and education email newsletters. I comment on proposed regulations to AkDEED. I attend statewide special education-related conferences. I attend most of my local school board meetings. I network with many of the parents who are also testifying today. I'd like to give you some information and ask for help. I now try to offer solutions as much as possible. I'm very tired of complaining.

## OUR BACKGROUND STORY

Katie began her struggle to read in first grade. She was retained. She was identified as having a learning disability in 3rd grade. She began receiving services in the last months of that year. I tried to advocate for her from the get-go. It seemed to me that the system was not working. I wrote letters. I asked for meetings. I got private evaluations. I thought I did everything I could. I felt the system was failing her. Special education for learning disabled kids is supposed to try to close the gap between a child's ability and their achievement. My daughter's gap had widened to the size of Texas. When I went to an IEP meeting to prepare her eighth grade IEP, school participants suggested that an appropriate reading goal was for her to read at no greater than a fifth grade level. I protested and asked why. I was told it was because she was reading at a third grade level. I was also told that she was really quite successful, and that perhaps I shouldn't expect so much. I began a seriously study of special education. The next year I invoked due process on Katie's behalf. The next year I unilaterally removed her from school and temporarily placed her in a private remedial clinic called Lindamood Bell Learning Processes (LBLP) The LBLP clinic provided Katie with direct instruction in reading using multi-sensory sequential language education (MSLE). (Newsweek, "Dyslexia and the new science of reading," Nov. 22, 1999.)

#### THE OUTCOME

The district and I stayed out of court and went to a legal settlement in May 2000. It is interesting to note that the district spent approximately \$85,000 fighting us - about \$63,000 in legal fees and \$22,000 for other payments. (May xx, 2000 VCS-Parish settlement agreement; xxxx emails Cathers to Parish). Our family's unrecovered outlay was approximately \$5,000. In the final analysis, the district had spent about \$17 for every \$1 we did. I believe other parents will begin to exercise their due process rights if we don't clean up the system. I hope you can help.

#### REMEDIAL HELP FOR KATIE

My daughter's resource teacher was sent out to get training in LBLP practices. My daughter now receives direct instruction using multi-sensory sequential language education (MSLE) from her teacher. Despite late professional intervention, she is progressing. According to an informal reading inventory Katie took last week, she is reading at about a 7th grade level. Her listening comprehension (when the information is read to her) was independent at the 10th grade level. This is typical of kids with specific learning disabilities. They have a discrepancy between their abilities (listening comprehension) and at least one area of achievement (decoding/reading ability). I expect Katie's reading ability to continue to close the gap. I'm quite certain that by the time she graduates she will be able to read any newspaper, magazine, bill or directory she wants to. I'm quite certain that if I hadn't fought, she would have exited 12th grade as a functional illiterate.

#### STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

I support the new benchmarks and high school graduation qualifying examination. I believe it is the only way kids with learning disabilities will get the resources and services they need. I think we all have to get down, get dirty and get real for this reform to work. I am into plain speaking and rolled up sleeves.

#### SB 71 AND THE EXIT EXAMS

The legislature should take great interest and responsibility for writing good statutes on SB71, a bill related to the education of kids with disabilities. This bill is just as important as the exit exam bill. The two bills should go hand in hand. They are inextricably intertwined. They will both either be done well and improve outcomes for learning disabled kids, or will both become a messy quagmire ripe for unnecessary battles. I hope you will hold a hearing on SB71 soon. New regs are also out for comment. You can check them out at the AkDEED reg site: [www.eed.state.ak.us/regs/4aac52-800spcedgifted.pdf](http://www.eed.state.ak.us/regs/4aac52-800spcedgifted.pdf) . I have tried to get advocacy agencies and AkDEED to hold public forums/expert

discussion panels for parents on last year's failed HB301/SB 205 and this years SB71, but have been unsuccessful. You can read more of my views and comments to AkDEED regarding proposed regs, etc. at an Alaskan site I post to called Akceptionalities at: [www.akceptional.org/cgi-bin/HyperNews/get/akceptionalities.html](http://www.akceptional.org/cgi-bin/HyperNews/get/akceptionalities.html)

#### HIGH/LOW EXPECTATION PROBLEMS

This year our state regulation still defined a free appropriate public education for sped students as that which provided "educational benefit." I believe it is a statute too.

I believe the reg related to the definition of FAPE was recently revised by AkDEED to align with IDEA 97. I think it was changed in Sept. 2000. I will double-check and send the cites by email.

I was told during the years I fought that my daughter was only entitled to educational benefit. No wonder she sat at a third grade level for so long. What will schools do differently to teach our kids now that they haven't done in the past? They will hopefully teach our sped kids to their needs instead of to simple educational benefit.

#### DON'T WAIT, CREATE LAWS TO EFFECT CHANGE

Kids don't get enough early intervention. Currently, I believe the state requires a pre-K screen. We need to require first and second grade screens. Right now the jump between a pre-K screen and a third grade benchmark is too wide a gap. Kids are falling through in droves. Write a law that fixes this. Don't leave it to AkDEED. Write a law. The legislature should require schools to screen every first and second-grade student for reading difficulties, using a legislatively-approved screening tool. Texas has a good model of ten approved screens. (cite here) Kids that ARE currently diverted may be getting the SAME kind of help that didn't help them in the first place. The legislature should require schools to divert kids who fail the approved screen to small group direct reading instruction that addressed phonemic awareness difficulties with teachers using proven methods such as LBLP offers. (Texas link. EDL link. LBLP link.) Traditional methods and whole language approaches don't work for 20 percent of the population. (NICHCY link)

#### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Professional development is sorely lacking. Schools must provide teachers with real training on how to give direct reading instruction to our kids. (LBLP link.) Teachers need to insist on having the opportunity to learn proven research-based methods of teaching that work for our kids. They need to take responsibility for reform too.

#### EXTENDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES NEEDS

We need extended learning opportunities for our struggling

students. Schools should provide research-based remedial opportunities for students that do not pass the benchmarks and exit exams. This would include after school or summer school programs for older kids. (USDOE extended learning opps link.)

#### LEGISLATURE NEEDS TO FIND MORE FUNDS

The legislature will have to provide schools with the funds to meet these new kinds of needs. Schools need more funds to implement these programs. Most municipalities are at their legal cap for school contributions. We can only ask the state and federal government for more money. We can only cut so much and then it's down to the bone. How can we improve without the resources to do so?

#### PRIORITIZE FUNDING TO TAXPAYER CONCERNS

I believe taxpayers want you to allocate funds to education. National Gallup polls show education to be at the top of citizens concerns. (CNN polls). The legislature prioritizes what we spend our money on. I suggest that you move money from other allocations to the schools. I suggest that the majority of our residents want to see police, fire, emergency services, hospitals, garbage, snow removal and education at the top of our list. A 1995 survey of local Valdez residents shows this to be so. (City survey) If money is tight, you must prioritize, not make across the board cuts. You may have to cut something else out completely, but you must fund for the new benchmarks and exit exams. Pull the money from other areas if you have to. I believe most Alaskans place good education at the top of their list of concerns.

#### LOCAL CONTROL MEANS LOCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Many people complain that the federal government requires all this IDEA 97 stuff for the learning disabled but doesn't fund it. That is very unfortunate. But I say the reason the legal protections are there is because people weren't and still aren't embracing teaching these expensive kids at the local level. Local Control (state and municipal control) also means taking local responsibility. These kids are our kids, not something the feds carted in. I know Congress promised to fund 40 percent of IDEA related costs years ago and that the actual funding has been much less. Now republicans and democrats seem to be moving closer to agreeing to fund it. It'll take about ten years to phase it in once they do it though. Again, we need to take Local Control to Local Responsibility. I am glad Pres. Bush says we must "leave no child behind." I hope to see this become a reality. We at the local level must say the same thing, mean it and back it up. I've heard the argument, "If we have to teach the 20 percent that have difficulty, it'll bankrupt us." I suggest that we don't, it will become just as expensive in a great big exit exam/legal quagmire. I ask you to do what's right for the

kids. All of them.

#### MISPERCEPTIONS ARE A BIG PROBLEM

Dispel misperceptions about special education to ensure our kids are included in the high expectation movement. I have been surprised at some of the comments I still hear from folks. Most people still equate developmental disabilities with learning disabilities. The two terms are not interchangeable. One signifies severe cognitive disabilities. The other is defined as to be of at least average intelligence with at least one area of learning that is difficult for them. (IDEA 97, state regs) This can be understood when you think of my daughter. She can comprehend at her current tenth grade level, but is only reading at a 7th grade level. With intervention, she is closing the gap between her ability and her achievement. If you allow schools to simply hand kids like her an IEP diploma in 12th grade, schools will be able to continue to let them sit at 3rd grade reading levels. I believe this is discriminatory. If you require early intervention the kids will learn better and later costs will be reduced.

#### MORE ON DD & LD

Less than 2 percent of kids in Alaska are identified as developmentally disabled. (Anchorage Daily News. " Parents: Exit Exam Unfair." 7-3-2000.

It is my understanding that these students who are developmentally disabled currently often receive certificates of attendance. Students with other disabilities make up about 13 percent of Alaska's schoolchildren. (see above story). Approximately 9,000 kids, the vast majority of kids in special education, fall into the category specific learning disabled (see above story). Many agencies believe about 20 percent of people experience difficulties learning. (NICHCY).

#### REMEMBER: ACCOMMODATIONS AVAILABLE

There are a number of accommodations that are allowed for sped kids who take the exit exam. With good remedial opps and accommodations if absolutely necessary, they should be able to pass the tests (see DLC link). Don't dump them into functional illiteracy with an IEP diploma.

#### USDOE'S NEW POLICY STATEMENT RE: STATE ASSESSMENTS

The Office of Special Education Programs, USDOE, has issued a new policy statement regarding state assessments and alternate assessments. (8-24-00 cite) Alternate assessments should be used only in cases of extreme cognitive disabilities. I say, "Do not implement an IEP diploma. It is discriminatory." I know my daughter has said she'll go sit in the Governor's office until the cows come

home before she'll accept a diploma that "says I'm dumb." I believe an IEP diploma system will likely be successfully challenged.

#### READING IS CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUE

Reading is becoming a civil rights issue (Bush) (Vancouver link).

#### IT WILL PAY OFF TO INVEST IN OUR SYSTEM

Intervention is cheaper in the long run anyway. Parents have said this forever. A new study will officially support it. (see study link.)

#### CUT SCORE CHALLENGES

Cut scores might be a problem. The committees were divided into three categories. They were subjective. (See article). Then, after the scores were established by the committee, they were lowered. (See cut scores). I heard they were lowered by one standard deviation to allow for different abilities in the bell curve. I went to a state board meeting at my LIO several months ago. I listened to a fellow who had served on one of the cut score committees ask Assistant Deputy Commissioner Bruce Johnson to comment on why the cut scores had been lowered before they were introduced. Mr. Johnson declined to comment. I believe businesses and regular parents may have been poorly represented in the construction of the exit exam. I've heard that the Fairbanks School District has questioned the cut score construction.

#### POSSIBLE LEGAL CHALLENGES & SUGGESTIONS TO SUBVERT

I want the exit exam system to work. That means we have to really mean it when we say we want to raise expectations for kids. We must look to the potential problem areas, and address them proactively. Likely successful legal challenges, in my estimation, will include:

A.) a child not having enough time to route in the required subjects the exam tests upon (some kids haven't been required to take the sequence of math tested on. This builds through years.)

B.) purposeful exclusion from regular curriculum being tested on. (IEP diploma and exclusion/poor expectations for LD kids); or

C.) exit exam construction problems; or

D.) cut score problems

Fix the first by immediately funding and requiring remedial opps. Fix the second with appropriate work on SB71 and including special ed kids in the high expectation movement. Fix the last two with a legal review.

#### A LITTLE VENTING!

Sometimes I wonder if legislators are not looking to represent all kids and families, but only the ones that they can get the most

bang for their buck with. This is a mistake. Particularly since the kids with disabilities have the most legal protections. They have these protections because they have so often been passed by in just such a manner. Learning disabled kids can't rise to the occasion of benchmarks and exit exams without good remedial efforts using proven methods of direct instruction. Schools must rise to the occasion. Schools must be given the resources to do so.

People still describe learning disabled kids as "those handicapped kids," or the "kids with diminished capacities" or worse. The old "slow," "stupid" and "lazy" labels are really annoying. It is the 21st century, for goodness sake. But I also understand. I didn't know anything about learning disabilities until ten years ago either. We must educate each other and raise expectations for all kids. I believe Gov. Knowles was mistaken when he promoted an IEP diploma. He said that our sped kids should get IEP diplomas because they are doing the best they can with their God-given abilities. Our LD kids in Alaska are not doing the best they can with their abilities. Nowhere near it. Our kids don't need an IEP diploma. They need a decent education including direct instruction using research-based, proven methods of teaching.

WHO IS TO BLAME? WE ALL ARE

I don't blame simply the congress, or the state legislature, or AkDEED, or the teacher's unions, or the school boards, or the advocacy agencies, or the parents or the democrats or the republicans. I blame everyone for not being real and working together for the good of our kids. I listen to the arguments. Congress has not funded IDEA 97 to the promised 40 percent. (I think we'll see a shift in that area soon as both democrats and republicans are coming closer to agreeing on it, but it will take ten years to fully implement the increased funding.) Some people say the state legislature is mainly Republican and interested in reducing costs and that they simply want to require schools to do better without giving them the resources to do so. Others say that AkDEED doesn't have good accountability and internal controls. Still others say that teacher's unions can encourage teachers to follow tenets and beliefs that protect their personal and union rights above children's rights. Some say advocacy agencies are have political ties that must be protected and therefore present a semblance of advocacy instead of true advocacy. Others say parents might be too afraid to speak out due to fear of retaliation or rejection. Another argument is that school boards are elected on popularity and have too large a learning curve to be effective. I listen to everyone's points of views. Eventually you get a picture of the whole. All the bad stuff has to stop for our kids' sakes. We must all be real and work together. I hope that's possible and that you can help. Please contact me anytime.

Number 2293

**MS. BEV TURLEY**, Principal of Kotzebue Middle High School, made the following comments on her own behalf. The benchmark qualifying exam has brought the focus of education to the local level - parents are looking at and comparing test scores and asking questions. In addition, students are looking at what classes they are taken. However, there are things we need to do with the exit exam:

- It needs to be reviewed in its entirety to determine whether it is appropriate for our students;
- Students who pass the exit exam need to be rewarded - the passing score should be noted on their transcripts and diplomas;
- The timeline needs to be reviewed as well as how other states have phased in their exit exams;

MS. TURLEY said she believes the exit exam is important and the focus on education that it has brought about is extremely important. She does not favor eliminating it, but it needs to be reviewed.

TAPE 01-3, SIDE B

**MS. FREDA ARNHART**, Superintendent of the North Slope Borough School District, testified and submitted the following written testimony.

It is the District's belief that the requirement to pass the exam should be postponed until 2006 for the following reasons:

-Students need time to learn the standards.

In 1998, only three years ago, school districts were mandated to adopt state standards and began aligning their curriculum to those standards. Districts frantically began the task without additional money or manpower to assist.

As standards were aligned, textbooks become the next step to align with the standards. Our textbook adoption is on a rotation cycle of every five years. Therefore, math has been adopted with language arts and health adoption due this year. Needless to say, no additional moneys were given to districts to complete this task either.

-Administrators and teachers need time to analyze test data to determine students' strengths and weaknesses and devise a plan to assist students in areas of weakness.

After receiving the HSGQE scores in the fall 2000 from the first tests taken in the Spring of 2000, our District began the process of disaggregating the test results into meaningful, useful data. Might I also add, no money was given to the District for this task.

Approximately 3 weeks ago the District received the second testing results. Our administrators have proceeded to work together many hours on the data, analyzing the information and presenting it to individual sites in hopes that plans for remediation can begin ASAP. Unfortunately, time is running out for the Class of 2002 to assist them in areas of weaknesses.

-Having test results for approximately four months only gives students, who did not pass the test, one summer and one school year the opportunity for remediation. Also the administration and teachers will only have the same amount of time to devise and implement a plan for tutoring after school classes, summer school, etc. The time frame is almost impossible to ensure success.

The concern our district has is not teaching to the standards or being accountable but we feel

- The state has put this plan together too fast
- Has not had time to review and analyze the content and validity of the exam. Why are we so sure the exam is valid?

We like the idea of having standards, being accountable and preparing students for the future, but it is our desire to stop, take a breath and analyze the situation before we make one mistake after another.

We need time to assure

- Our curriculum is aligned with the state performance standards
- We have textbooks and materials to support the standards
- The state provides resources for summer school,

tutoring and special classes.

We believe all stakeholders involved, the legislatures, education department, administrators, teachers, parents should ask themselves one question, "Is this good for kids?" "Who is being penalized?" "Whose future is being destroyed?"

It's not the legislature, state department, administrators, teachers nor parents, it's the kids. The very previous commodity we are entrusted to protect.

We are pushing forward too fast without thinking of the consequences. Is the state, as well as school districts, prepared for the consequences when students are denied a diploma?

Thank you.

Number 0227

**MR. MIKE MILLIGAN**, representing himself from Kodiak, said he is the parent of two children who will be taking the exit exam in 2004 and 2006. He concurs that the nature of the exit exam is punitive. The biggest reward that high school students get from passing the exam is that they are not punished. Alaska needs an exam that helps to develop the strength and the potential for development of our students. Last year, in his 7th annual State of American Education, President Clinton's Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, stated, "Long summer vacations, a cherished perk, offsetting the leave paychecks of teachers, must be abolished by American public schools if students are to have a chance of meeting new, ambitious academic standards. In 1985, Republican Governor of Tennessee, Lamar Alexander, instituted a study that proved conclusively using scientific principles that class size was a determining factor of student performance in later years. That study, which lasted for four years, went on to prove the relationship that 1-18 class sizes would have. If we were to deal with educational standards that would allow America, including Alaska, to compete in a global economy, we have to make the decisions now to how we will relate in five years. This is similar to what has happened with the California power crisis, which is the result of what California did five years ago. Alaska can do better. Don't punish students who cannot pass the exam. He offered to send articles to the committee.

Number 0548

**MR. BILL MORISETTE**, a fifth grade educator with 23 years of teaching experience, testified on his own behalf. He asked that the timeline be moved forward so that the first students that take the exam will have had the opportunity to take the 8th grade benchmark test. There are no decisions any legislator will make during their legislative careers that will affect so many young people. He believes in standards and that the exit exam is a good idea but the timeline is a disaster waiting to happen for many young people. His concern comes first as a parent and second as an educator. His daughter, a junior, faces the possibility of not passing the exit exam. She plans to go to college and has been on the honor roll several times, yet she is not strong in math. Many other students are in similar situations. Please consider that she passed the reading and writing portions of the practice exam easily but she did poorly in math. The past commissioner and some legislators have said that students who are not seniors should not be discouraged because they would not peak in math until their senior year. His daughter completed algebra and geometry just prior to completing the exam in her sophomore year - just prior to taking the exam. She will not have had the benefit of taking the grades 3, 6, and 8 benchmark exams to identify the areas in which she is weak. She won't have the benefit of remedial programs. Students in lower grades will have those opportunities. He believes the math exit exam requirements are excessive. He questioned the huge discrepancy between the reading and language scores and the math scores. He requested that the date for implementation of the exit exam be moved forward to enable students with weak areas to identify and strengthen those areas.

**MR. BILL WEBB**, testifying from Anchorage, said he has operated businesses in Alaska since 1975 and has hired about 2,000 employees during that period of time, many of whom were graduates of Alaska schools. He is now the guardian of an 8 year old boy. He strongly supports no delay in the implementation of the high school exit exam for everyone's sake. Alaska high school diplomas should ensure that all persons who earn one can read, write and do math. Regarding algebra and geometry, he noted he has two nephews who did not go to college but are successful due to their knowledge of algebra, geometry, carpentry and electronics. Another nephew did not do well in those subjects and his options are limited. All students need those options in this electronic and technical world. Failure to ensure basic skills diminishes a person's opportunities for employment and in life. As an employer, a lack of skills causes expensive rehire and recruitment costs and presents emotional difficulties for all involved when someone must be terminated because of a lack of skills. The arguments for extending the deadline for testing do not hold well under scrutiny. Students have 12 years to learn the standards, which is enough

time.

**MS. PEGGY COLE**, Lower Yukon Education Association, gave the following testimony.

As a parent, bush teacher and representative of our local teacher's union, I support the efforts to improve the education of our children. I advocate for the time extension to pass the High School Exit Exam.

Our children in rural Alaska need this extra time to adequately prepare to pass this exam. We do not want our students to be singled out because of where they live and because of their culture or socioeconomic status. As a district we need more time to learn from other districts, to assess our students and to implement a curriculum aligned with those standards, which will develop in our students the skills they need to pass the exit exam and to be successful, contributing members of our society. We, as teachers, need more time to adequately implement standards in our classrooms.

Therefore, on behalf of our students in Lower Yukon School District, I support the proposal to extend the year for passing the exit exam to 2006. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this Assembly.

Number 1077

**MR. LARRY JOHNSON**, a 33-year teacher and parent, made the following comments on his own behalf. The exit exam needs to be referred to as a competency test since it simply qualifies students for a diploma. It may be high stakes but it is not a high level test, except perhaps for the math portion. He sat on the cut score committee for the reading test. When the committee finished its work, members were asked if they were satisfied with the score set. He was not happy with it because he felt it was too low, but he said he could live with it. After the committee finished, the test "people" then lowered the number again and it was again lowered by DOEED. He thinks the reading test is very basic - it does not look at content. Committee members asked themselves whether the test was "doable" and teachable. When members checked off on each item for the cut score, they had to answer "yes" to both questions. In addition, they asked themselves at what level this test is necessary for students to lead a successful life. At the school he teaches at, standards have been integrated into the curriculum. The skills can be built into existing programs at the freshman level. He noted the state has held quality schools institutes for

the past few summers, which has been attended by a number of school districts. The resources are available but it is a matter of thinking outside of the box. He asked legislators to consider increasing the foundation formula from \$3900 to \$4200.

Number 1313

**MR. DOUG WESSON**, a Juneau School District school psychologist and President of the Alaska School Psychologists Association, made the following comments on his own behalf. Initially he was skeptical when he heard about the qualifying exam. Historically, schools have become scapegoats during major changes in society of which ours is technological. As a school psychologist, he is very familiar with tests. He cautioned that a single test can only reflect a sample of skills, it does not look at the whole student. Tests must be valid by measuring and predicting what it is meant to. In his profession, test scores should never be used alone to make a determination about a child. During the last two years, however, he has seen a change in the middle school. Parents and teachers like the standards and the public is asking for accountability. He applauds those efforts because accountability ensures that our mission to educate children in a changing world is measured. Regarding school restructuring, he has seen schedule flexibility to help students, he has seen more cooperation from parents, and he has seen a change in attitude among students. That should continue.

MR. WESSON said he is concerned that a student could pass all classes and meet all requirements but not pass the qualifying exam and receive only a certificate of attendance. He asked, if that is continued, that the certificate be changed to one of completion. Also, on behalf of the learning disabled students he works with, he asked they be given the same accommodations during the test that they are given to make it through school, such as calculators.

MR. WESSON's last concern was for students of military families who may not attend Alaska schools until their later school years. He concluded by saying, "Our mission is to educate the youth and we hope that we don't measure by how many students are left behind in the end of the high school qualifying exam." He felt a delay is appropriate although four years may not be necessary.

**MS. ELIZABETH BACOM**, testifying from Petersburg, submitted the following written testimony.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you this morning.  
My name is Liz Bacom. I wear two hats, and I would like  
to give you my concerns about the delay of the exit exam

from both of these perspectives. My first hat is that of president of the Petersburg School Board. Our district has spent countless hours and a great deal of money to align the education of our students with the Alaska State Standards. I think we are doing a terrific job, but we aren't done yet. Our district has performed quite well, but I very well recognize there are many other districts that have not. There are districts that are dealing with many serious socio-economic issues, I am sure you are aware of these, which hamper their ability to bring students up to the mark. They certainly need more time to nurture the education of their students, 4 years is simply not enough time. The beauty of the benchmark exams is to check the system for leaks, fix them and proceed. The more benchmark exams a student is exposed to, the better the overall education will be at the end.

I am therefore urging you to consider a timetable that will allow students to be exposed to the additional benchmark exams before requiring the "BIG TEST" to be the final judgment.

All that said and done, I now put my other hat on, a more important hat to me: I am a parent of two students, both would be impacted if you delay the exit exam, one is an 8th grader, the other is a Sophomore. They have been preparing, mentally and academically, for a "BIG TEST: that they may not personally be thrilled about taking, but they know it is a requirement. My kids may not pass all three sections, I wish they had been educationally nurtured from first grade to prepare for this exam. But to tell them for 4 years this was coming, and then tell them the adults that make the laws made an error gives them the wrong message.

I would prefer that there be a SOFT LANDING for our kids. The exam should be required to graduate. There are several scenarios that could be considered:

1. The grade cut off could be adjusted based on how many years the Alaska Educational System has had time to prepare kids to pass the exam.
2. Another scenario: The class of 2002 would have to pass one of three, the class of 2004 would have to pass two of three, and the class of 2006 would have to pass all three.

This exam will make adults accountable to provide an environment at home conducive to learning, students

accountable to learn, educators accountable to adequately teach our children and most importantly, lawmakers accountable to adequately fund education. I know you will carefully consider the consequences of every decision you make as lawmakers, especially in the arena of education. Thank you for your time.

Number 1714

**MR. G. SANBOURNE**, testifying via teleconference from Unalaska, said he is the Superintendent of the Unalaska City School District. In his opinion, the concerns that have not been addressed are as follows.

1. Special education students
2. ESL students
3. Out of state students, not only students from military families.
4. The data has not been studied sufficiently to determine how a student will do on the exit exam.
5. The issue of when a student can legally leave the school system when it is obvious the student will never pass the test.

**MR. JIM CARDEN**, CEO of the Pribilof School District, read the following statement.

I have been an Alaskan educator since 1969. I was a classroom teacher for 16 years, a principal for 6 and [indisc.] administrator for four years, and a superintendent/CEO for the past five years. My first six years were spent in an urban school district and the remainder of my years have been spent in three different rural school districts. It has been my experience that teachers will pass students and eventually make them eligible for high school diplomas if the students make a serious effort to do their school work. Admittedly, in certain situations it is not the quality of the work done that determines if a student passes or fails, rather it is the judgment on the part of the teacher that the student, who may not have the ability to do a certain quality work, is making the best effort possible and is living up to his or her full potential.

Once such a student receives a high school diploma, that student is able to apply for postsecondary education and/or employment opportunities. In effect a diploma offers the graduate the opportunity to explore opportunities after school. There are students who will

not pass graduation qualifying exams. For example, in the two testing periods thus far, we have given 67 examinations and students have passed a total of 19 tests, 28 percent of the tests. Of the 16 students who have participated in one or both testing sections, four have passed all three, three have passed two, and one has passed one. Looking at the [indisc.] students who have thus far participated in our district, I estimate that up to four students who are not identified with disability will not pass all of these tests no matter how often they take them. These are good kids, each of them have potential to be good, positive, productive members of society. However, it is my fear there is nothing in place to deal with these folks. The lack of a high school diploma will effectively eliminate them from having the opportunity to apply for, and at least to have the opportunity to demonstrate their personal positive skills and personal attributes to potential employers. As it is, the examination punishes individuals who may or may not be responsible for their inability to pass the examination. It may or may not affect the educational institutions.

My question is: how do we differentiate between the students who are living up to their potential and those who are not. What do we have in place to give those who have a positive work ethic and attributes but not the ability to pass the test, the chance to demonstrate they can do good work and become productive members of society.

I ask that the effective date of the examination be delayed so that the state and its business partners can address this and like issues. Thank you for your time and consideration. Thank you Representative Bunde and committee members.

**MS. JUDY DOYON**, the principal of a K-12 rural village school in the Kodiak Island Borough School District, testified on her own behalf. She has been an Alaskan educator for 30 years, teaching from kindergarten through college levels. She supports the standards and qualifying exam and believes they have had a positive effect in causing communities and parents to focus on educational issues at the local level. However, she believes we need to proceed on a reasonable timeline and not rush into this. We need time to re-evaluate our educational programs. She has some concerns about the math exam and believes it should be reviewed again, since only 30 percent of Alaska students are capable of passing that exam. She

believes the math test needs to be reviewed to determine whether it is overkill, rather than basic information. She also questioned what the goal is for students, and whether that goal is admission to college. She noted that many students are not proceeding on an academic track. Districts also need time to make adjustments to make sure their curricula are in alignment with the standards, that standards are implemented in classrooms, and that remediation is available. Districts also need time to address the needs of special education students and cultural differences. The dropout issue is immense and we need to make sure we are not creating a higher rate.

Number 2167

**MR. JEFF RALSTON**, a Mekoryuk High School teacher, said he was originally an engineer. The reason he was able to work as an engineer was because he could do math, which is why he teaches math to students now. This exit exam gives him and parents an excuse to require students to do their homework. Some students will fail the test but that is not a bad thing: it will start a change in education, which is necessary. He suggested lowering the score rather than delaying the exam if something must be done. He considers it an insult when he hears people say that students have not been given the opportunity to learn. Public school teachers have been teaching students the information on the exit exam. Requiring this exit exam does a service to students in rural Alaska. It is analogous to requiring one's children to go to bed at night.

Tape 01-4, Side A  
Number 001

**MR. FRANK PLATT**, testifying from Unalakleet, read the following written testimony:

The primary concern of the community during these meetings was whether the lack of high scores would affect the communities access to the gym. The community leaders assured me that the legislature would never implement such a requirement, and with attitudes such as these I believe it indicates the legislature did not have the intention of [indisc.] communities around the state. And now that the legislature has the intention of the communities in the state, these same communities are wanting the legislature to excuse their negligence in preparing for this high school qualifying exam. So I would like to go on record as strongly supporting the position that the legislature keep the time line in place, while it has the attention of

the state's communities. Only through the diligent effort of the communities will education change throughout the state. Not only will it encourage communities who have not been diligent in their educational efforts, it will reward the hard work done by students, parents, schools, and those communities that took the legislature at its word that communities and their schools must be held accountable.

**CO-CHAIR BUNDE** commented that everyone's testimony is important but time is running short. He asked the people who could not testify to fax their testimony to the committee so it can be put into the record.

Number 204

**MR. CARL ROSE**, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), said he has submitted written testimony and AASB has submitted a critical issues document on testing. This document will provide background on testing specifics and how they are being used.

MR. ROSE responded to an earlier question about what a diploma should mean. A diploma should mean that kids graduating from high school could exercise real choice.

MR. ROSE said AASB does support standards and an extension. AASB has standards that prescribe to one membership that should take a look at the vision, structure, accountability, and advocacy of programs. Every classroom has to be looked at to determine if the pieces are in place for alignment, ensuring that each child has an opportunity to get what they need for successfully passing the exams.

MR. ROSE said AASB has resolved to support an extension to the year 2004. An additional two years will give an opportunity, with a caveat, that an investment needs to be made. There are critical elements that need to be in place to ensure that kids have this opportunity, from technical assistance, materials, and in-service training.

MR. ROSE said that for this investment, some things have to be put in place for aligning the system to make good on the promise that was made. AASB wants higher standards for the students, but the reality is that legal challenges are coming. What burden of proof is there to ensure that every student has been given an opportunity, and will the remediation requirements be met.

MR. ROSE commented that recently a group of bipartisan individuals met in Girdwood to look at how this problem might be addressed statewide. They looked at data from individual districts and asked what common statewide causes create these results. Time was one of the elements looked at, time within a day and the school year, to ensure that there is alignment and that professional development is there.

MR. ROSE said alignment is the most critical issue. The state system has to be looked at classroom by classroom. Is every classroom in every district aligned and is every student receiving this opportunity?

CO-CHAIR GREEN commended AASB for their excellent publication - Critical Issues. She asked if people could access the publication on the net.

MR. ROSE responded yes.

Number 517

**MS. SARA GANTT**, testifying via teleconference from Anchorage, submitted the following written testimony:

**TESTIMONY TO SPECIAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE FOR DELAYING THE HSQE**

My name is Sara Gantt. I am the parent of an elementary, middle school, and two high school students at Service High in Anchorage. I am also the Vice-President of Curriculum for Service High School PTSA and speaking on behalf of the Board. Service is the largest high school in the state with a current enrollment of 2360 students and projected enrollment of 2441 for next fall.

The Service PTSA Board is opposed to any delay of the High School Exit Exam.

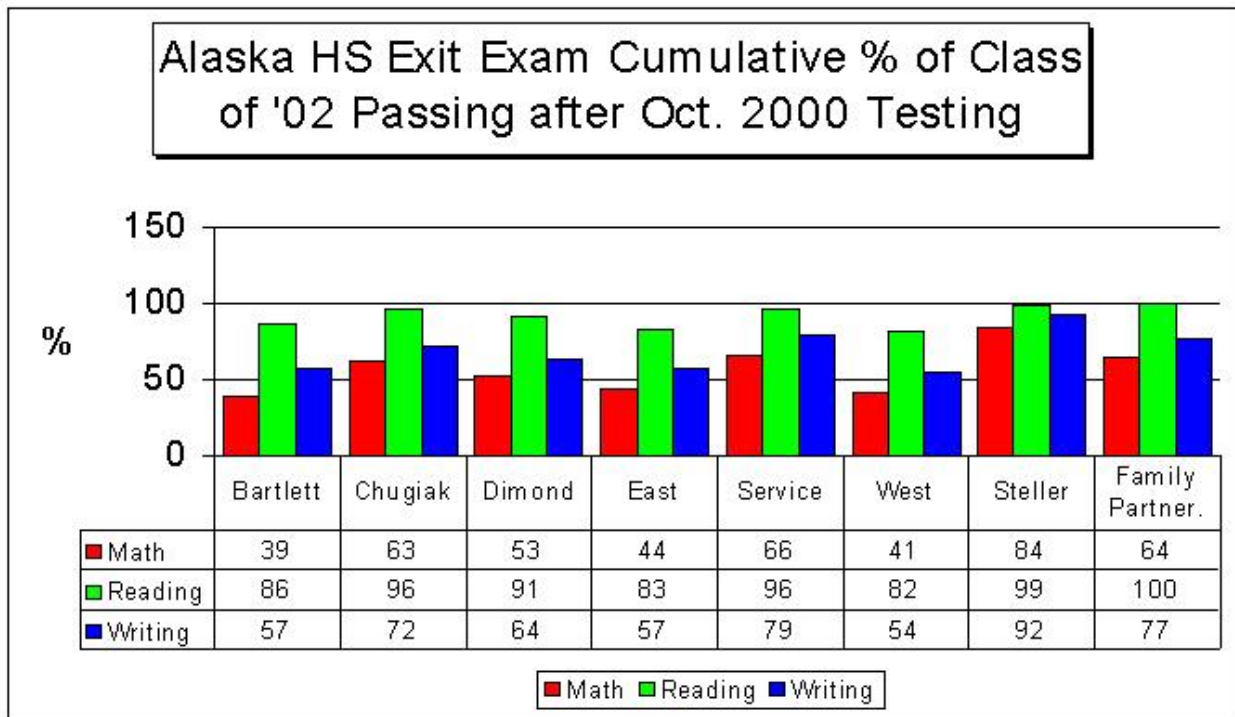
Simply stated, it was not until this fall when the first round of test results were received that the PTSA witnessed any attempt to address the individualized curriculum needs of the students in the building. However, we do recognize the unique situation with special needs students and feel their situation has not been fairly addressed.

Students and their parent(s) were counseled in the fall to take remedial courses in whatever area(s) they did not pass. Two weeks ago, parents and students were again involved in schedule changes to help the 32 juniors who did not pass the reading section, the 164 students who failed Math, and the 112 who did not pass the

writing test this fall and to be placed in what remedial classes are available.

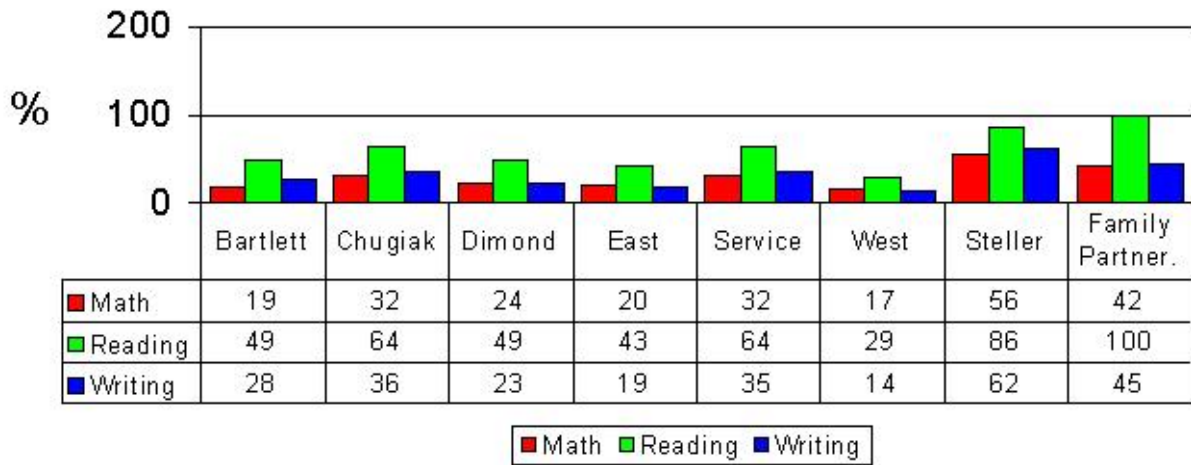
Personally, my oldest is a current junior. She was a 7th grader when the legislation was passed in 1997 and I have not witnessed until this fall any individualized attempt to address the obvious failings of the curriculum as highlighted by the dismal state-wide exit exam results. However, I have seen by the ASD attempts in the last two years to address reading and spelling issues at the elementary, middle school and high school levels.

The first graph shows the cumulative percent passing to date for the ASD High Schools. The numbers are not 100% accurate as we have not made adjustments for new kids coming into the school, kids transferring out or dropping out. [GRAPHS CAN BE VIEWED USING PDF SELECTION.]



The graph below shows the percent of students passing the Oct. 2000 exams. Remember, this also reflects the results of the students who retok the test or were new to the school and took the test for the first time. [GRAPHS CAN BE VIEWED USING PDF SELECTION.]

## Alaska High School Exit Exam Passing Results for Fall 2000



I also wanted to share some concerns that have been raised by principals, teachers, and parents. The exit exam is a very good example of the havoc of unfunded mandates. The administration and PTSA at Service are currently wrestling with the logistics of delivering this next exit exam in the spring to 1000 students.

Also, we are extremely concerned with the loss of six more instructional days. We would like to suggest moving this testing to a weekend format similar to the SAT/ACT. The building is essentially shut down and we are faced with having to come up with creative activities for the rest of the students. Some of the suggestions include motivational speakers, college admission preparation, tutorials on taking the exit exam, and recreational activities just to mention a few. In addition to coordinating the activities, we are faced with funding and supervising these events. Not all schools have the resources to be able to do this.

What are we going to do with the potentially large number of students who only receive a certificate of attendance rather than a diploma? What impact will this have on the education system and on the community resources? At the education level, will we still have 21 years old attending high school with 15 yr old freshman?

How does the validity of the GED fit into the picture? If the exit exam is not required for students opting to take the GED are we encouraging marginal students to drop out school and take the GED to avoid the exit exam to receive a diploma? How does the diploma from a private institution compare to a public school since private schools are not being held to same standards?

While raising some questions, we also wanted to offer some

suggestions. Instead of delaying the exit exam, we did feel the test results indicate that both the Math and Reading pass/fail mark needs to be revisited. The former being potentially set too high and the Reading too low. The other approach is to revisit the contents of the two tests particularly the Math to ensure that if Algebra 1 is the minimum curriculum requirement for mathematics to receive enough credits to graduate then the exam should be reflective of that standard. Also, a clear and fair determination needs to be made in regards to the special needs students. Change the testing format so not to impact six more instructional days in the school year.

Again, we would encourage this committee not to delay the exit exam. Doing so is public admission of the failings of the public school system. More importantly, it is readily agreeing to six more years of graduating students who are not academically prepared to enter the work force.

Thank you for your time this morning and concern for the kids in Alaska.

**MR. RAY FENTON**, PhD., President of the National Association of Test Directors, testified via teleconference from Anchorage. Mr. Fenton submitted the following testimony:

Let me introduce myself that you will have a context for my remarks and concerns about our Alaska assessment system.

I am currently the President of the National Association of Test Directors and also have served on the Board of Directors of that Organization for three years. I have served as a member of the Joint Committee on Testing Practices that authored the National Standards in Student and Psychological Testing. During the past year I have served the United States Department of Education as a consultant reviewing state assessment programs for compliance with the requirements of Title 1.

I currently serve our Alaska Department of Education as a member on two committees related to our state assessment system: Alaska Technical Review Committee and the Alternative Assessment Committee.

I have been an educator in Alaska for more than 25 years. First, I was a teacher at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. I now serve as the Supervisor of Assessment and Evaluation for the Anchorage School District.

There are only four points that I would like to make with you

today. My remarks support acceptance of the Governor's proposal by a delay in the implementation of the graduation requirement. They also support the effort that the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development is now making to assure that Alaska will continue the effort to reform education through high standards, quality instruction, and assessment for student and school accountability,

1. There is now evidence that our Alaska assessment system may need some fundamental changes to make it valid for high school graduation decisions.

Alaska implemented the High School Graduation Test on a fast track. You may recall that Professor James Popham from the University of California provided testimony when the legislature was first considering use of a high stakes test to validate the diploma. Dr. Popham is a national expert on high stakes assessment and developed assessment systems for states and school districts. The day after Dr. Popham spoke to the legislature in Juneau he met with the Technical Advisory Committee here in Anchorage.

Dr. Popham said that we could have a test based graduation requirement that we could defend in court if every element of our fast track implementation worked perfectly.

- Standards had to be developed and adopted that would reflect what a student needed to know and he able to do to qualify for graduation.
- Instruction for every student had to be aligned with the standards to assure that we had provided direct instruction and remediation where necessary to every student held to standards.
- Assessment instruments had to be developed that were fit in measures that produce valid and reliable scores.
- Cut scores had to be developed that would fairly reflect the level of knowledge and performance to be expected of all Alaska high school graduates.

None of these are simple and every one has proved to be a problem in one or another of the states that have adopted high stakes tests across the United States.

Dr. Popham gave his testimony in 1996. While Alaska had done work as early as 1992 on voluntary educational standards and

reform, the requirements of a high stakes testing system to support a high school graduation decision are quite different and more demanding than the system planned in 1992. Senate Bill 36 calling for performance standards was only signed into law in 1996.

Substantial evidence is now being generated across the state that there are problems with our assessment system. It appears that it will be unfair to deny diplomas to the class of 2002 based only on the scores generated by the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination.

Professional staff members from school districts in Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau, and Kenai have examined the results relative to other indicators of student performance and can provide the committee with ample evidence that students who appear to deserve high school diplomas will not get diplomas because our Alaska Assessment System is not yet ready to serve as the basis for high stakes decisions.

The evidence shows that there is a good reason to step back from the 2002 date specified in AS 14.03.075. Standards, benchmarks, opportunity to learn, assessment instruments and cut scores all need reexamination.

2. We need to ask some very careful questions about the fairness of the system for LD students.

It appears that there are some substantial performance differences between male and female students, students from more and less affluent families, and students from urban and rural Alaska, students with differences in ethnic and racial heritage.

Our position at the National Association of Test Directors is that assessments and assessment systems need to be fair for all students. Court decisions have made it clear that the state has a direct interest in education and can set standards for students for high school graduation and promotion so long as fairness and instructional validity (opportunity to learn) are met.

The gross differences in performance among Alaska groups indicate that there needs to be a careful review in terms of fairness and instructional validity. The internal studies of the tests and validations of the testing system provided by the test contractor and the methods of test development have been exemplary. But, we need to go further.

More needs to be done to examine fairness and instructional

validity in terms of the obvious differences between males and females, urban and rural students, and the obvious and disturbing differences in average performance among heritage groups.

We need to be certain that the tests are fair to all.

3. We need to ask some very careful questions about the treatment of students with differences and students who come from homes and communities where English is not the dominant language.

English as a second language is of special interest here in Alaska where we have schools where instruction in early grades is offered only in Russian or Eskimo languages. Parents also raise questions about the denial of diplomas to students who have been successful in schools outside the United States and come to Alaska as high school seniors.

There are two issues around special education students. One issue is the accommodation of students through changes in testing procedures or test format so that the disability does not stand in the way of the demonstration of Reading, Writing, or Math skills. The other issue is the fair treatment of students who can reach minimum competency in most of the skills that are needed for success in everyday life but not on some of the more advanced academic standards included in our Alaska tests.

Alaska has not yet resolved some of the issues that must be faced with Special Education and English as a Second Language Students.

While I cannot speak to you in detail about the U.S. Department of Education review of state testing systems for compliance with Title I requirements, I am familiar with the reviews that have been completed for other states with similar assessment systems. I have little doubt that Alaska will have some serious issues that must be dealt with in relation to special education, English as a Second Language, and the desegregation and reporting of test performance by heritage and special education groups.

It is my belief that the Federal Government will recognize the overall quality of the Alaska Assessment System and our efforts to date while calling for Alaska to make changes to address these important issues.

4. We need to take a very close look at the differences in curriculum and instruction among schools with an emphasis on programs at very small schools.

Alaska is no different from other states in our desire for high

standards, a good educational system, and students who will be able to demonstrate that they have gained the skill and knowledge needed for success in life. We are somewhat different than other states in that we are a very rural state and that there has not been a tradition of high school education that has gone back beyond the Molly Hooch decision in many of our rural communities.

When I started as an Alaska educator twenty-five years ago at the University of Alaska, I quickly learned that not all communities were created equal when it came to education. Students from small, rural communities would generally not reach their sophomore year.

Things have gotten better. Our Alaska students have much more of a chance to go to school though some schools are very small and curriculum choices are very limited. Parents still have to agonize about sending their children away from home to get the education that is available in a large urban high schools.

I am pleased to have been part of Alaska education long enough to see that all Alaskans can now expect to get a high school education. But, I am not at all certain that we have a system where there is an equal chance for a student in very small rural schools and large urban schools.

It is my belief that we need to be certain that every child has had the opportunity to learn what is on the required high school graduation examination. I do not believe that has been demonstrated. The gross differences in performance among Communities and school districts raise some very, very serious questions about the fairness of failing students in 2002 who have not had the instruction required to reach the performance levels required by the tests.

This is an area where we need some sophisticated research that looks at the standards, looks at curriculum, looks at instruction and looks at the individual test questions. I think the efforts planned by the Alaska Department of Education will do this.

However, I do not believe that improvement will come in time to help the Class of 2002.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to say that Alaska has come a very long way since 1996 when the legislature mandated that the

students in the class of 2002 pass competency exams in Reading, Writing, and Math to get a high school diploma.

We have high expectations for education. Now we also have standards, we have benchmarks for student performance, and we have produced our first high stakes tests, and we have made our first effort to develop cut scores. We have moved forward on a very fast track.

Unfortunately, the evidence from our first application of the high stakes testing system indicates that we have some problems. There is lots of evidence. The evidence is coming from all around the state.

A reasonable person would conclude from the evidence that the application of the current system to the class of 2002 would be unfair and would punish students who deserve a high school diploma.

I believe that your committee should recommend accepting the proposal being made by the governor with the support of parents, PTA groups, school boards, and educators.

Moving the implementation date for the diploma requirement does give up on standards. Does not give up on or high expectations. Does not reduce our ability to assess the relative performance of schools and educational programs.

Moving the implementation date will provide time to reassess the assessment system and to assure that it will be fair for individual Alaska students.

Number 987

**MR. JACK MILON**, testifying via teleconference from Barrow, said he is a longtime educator. He has taught elementary school through university doctoral programs. He has a PhD in educational psychology. Mr. Milon said he hopes the legislature will delay the implementation of the high school graduation qualifying exams, if not stop it entirely. This would be futile unless the legislature and DEED can find someone competent to construct a testing instrument which does not have a serious negative impact on Native Alaskan students. There are districts where no Native Alaskan students have passed. This is completely unacceptable. Civil rights issues involved, and Mr. Milen hopes the legislature will address these issues when taking action.

Number 1056

**MS. DALONNA COOPER**, testified via teleconference from Fairbanks.  
Ms. Cooper read the following testimony:

My name is Dalonna Cooper. I have been a resident of Alaska for twenty-four years. My husband and I are both CPA's in Fairbanks. We have three teenage sons in the public school system.

I am here today to tell you as a businessperson, parent, active community member and PTA officer, no one disputes the need for accountability and standards in education in this state and nationwide. However, your original bill has huge flaws. The very population you sought to help, our kids, are the ones about to be penalized by the law.

By not allowing for a phase in of the program you're expecting change to occur overnight. And, yes, it takes change - as early as elementary school, programs need to be expanded and revised to meet the learning styles of all kids.

Failing to allow the law to be phased in over time, doesn't allow the benchmark exam results to be used as intended. Students caught in the transition of this law need time and assistance to help them meet the standards.

You invite lawsuits to challenge this weakness in your law. The state will be tied up in the courts for years, perhaps jeopardizing the entire process and costing the state lots more money, money better spent in supporting the educational mandates you propose and have not funded adequately to date.

The kids who have been successful in passing the exam are the college bound kids. The same kids who have always scored well test taking and who have demonstrated the abilities we want to see in all kids. The way the law is written, providing benchmark exams in third, sixth and eight grades allows for students to be tested over time. Schools around the state need time to react and respond to the benchmark results.

Our oldest son is a high school senior who will not have to take the exam. He is a capable independent learner and he would pass the exam. He will be going to college in the fall. But he's not our only child. We have twin sons who are eighth graders. We believe they have had the best of what public education in our state has to

offer. Our twin sons were born premature and as a result were developmentally delayed and learned to read late. This has put them behind grade level from the beginning. We recognized their problem early on and sought tutoring outside the public school system to teach our sons to read. They have been tutored since third grade. One remains on the IEP, the other has been exited from his plan.

These boys will take their first benchmark exam this spring and they will be freshmen this fall. Is that enough time to react to their individual needs or those like them? We are pleased with their progress but will it be enough to meet your standards? We believe the stakes are too high for the kids caught in the middle. To withhold a diploma when they have met all other high school requirements marks them for life. They become the victim from the very law that was meant to prepare them for life beyond public school.

In summary, we challenge you and your fellow lawmakers to each take the exam this session using the present cut scores so your constituents can fairly evaluate whether you have the basic skills required to be effective public servants leading us into the new millennium.

Better yet, just do your job. Make good laws. Listen to parents, educators, the Alaska PTA the state Board of Education and your governor. Postpone the effective date of the exam, give your law time to work and the result will be better-educated kids. We can then all be proud of having worked together to find solutions to the problems facing us today.

**MS. KAREN DEMPSTER**, Superintendent of Schools, Yukon-Koyukuk School District, testifying via teleconference from Fairbanks, said she holds four university degrees - psychology, math, administration supervision, and law. She is a licensed practicing attorney and she is profoundly dyslectic. Ms. Dempster asked the committee to "please avoid a demonstration of how to shoot yourselves in the foot. Better known as, you have a fine, wonderful idea, but to fail to implement it correctly will be the bullet through the foot."

MS. DEMPSTER noted that the high school exam is excellent. Without the legislation that was passed, it would be hard to implement changes that are necessary to bring a system into compliance with state requirements for curriculum and high school graduation

requirements.

MS. DEMPSTER said she has three fulltime grant writers. The grants are needed to fund programs for teacher training and improvement of teaching skills, which are not funded with money from the state. They have implemented accountability of instruction from top to bottom. They are training teachers to up their skills. They are aligning their curriculum and extending contract time - this is where they will need the help of the legislature. Grants can be written for helping to provide trainers but grant money cannot be used for extending contract time for salaries. The principal's contract was extended because there was no time for planning and implementing plans, which are necessary for this program.

MS. DEMPSTER said that what the legislature is doing is right. Speaking as a lawyer, the diploma is a property right. If the proper foundation is not laid, there will be litigation. This exam is a criterion reference exam. This exam is similar to the bar exam, it is based on a set of criteria. It has to be assured that the criteria is accurate and reflects what the student should know.

MS. DEMSTER pleaded with the committee to allow the validity of the exam to happen.

**MR. JOHN HOLST**, testifying via teleconference from Sitka, said he agreed with Ms. Dempster's testimony. He said no one is opposed to the standards. Mr. Holst said Sitka did not do very well on the high school graduating qualifying exams; their benchmark results are much better though. He thinks that putting the test requirement for the qualifying exam for two or four years is a good idea.

MR. HOLST'S district went through a dramatic drop in school enrollment. They lost 141 students, eight percent of the student population. The largest group that left were 25 students between the 10th and 11th grade year. They took the qualifying exam last spring for the first time.

MR. HOLST said it would be a shame to see this effort stopped because the standards are desperately needed. The exit exams hold everyone accountable and this is a good thing. It is important that this is done in a reasoned and thoughtful way.

**MS. CHRISTIE WILLETT**, testified via teleconference from Ketchikan. She said she is concerned about the qualifying exam. Changing the process at the end of a student's high school years rather than building a foundation earlier in the process is not fair. She is in favor of standards but they should match the curriculum. The earliest class that should be considered prepared for a new higher

standard is this year's fourth grade. While she feels math is important, she is not convinced that every student needs algebra, geometry and trigonometry. College bound students need these classes but students who are interested in vocational technology need different skills.

MS. WILLETT wondered where the plans are for the students who do not meet the benchmark standards. Retesting without remediation is senseless. High schools are losing teachers and programs at an alarming rate; this is not a good formula for success.

Number 1758

**MR. KEITH LANE**, testifying via teleconference from Kodiak, said he has a son with learning disabilities. His son has been receiving special needs and resource time for about ten years and he does not feel his son will ever be able to pass the exit exam. This will have a huge impact on his son's future when he tries to join the military. The air force requires a high school diploma; a graduation certificate will not be adequate. This is causing tremendous stress on children with learning disabilities.

Number 1814

**MS. SHERRI SPANGLER** testified via teleconference from Mat-Su. Ms. Spangler said her 11th grade son has a learning disability in reading, writing and math. She is concerned with the time line on the exit exam. When her son was in elementary school, she questioned his teachers about his poor writing skills and inability to spell. Each time she was told it was more important that he learn the content of what was being taught. She was told he would be able to use spell-check and have a secretary when he entered the work place. When her son was in the ninth grade, she was told that the exit exam would major in spelling and writing ability. It has been difficult finding help for her son. Special summer classes have not been available and other special classes have been cancelled after a few weeks. When help has been available, his scores improved. Ms. Spangler feels it is unfair that for the first nine years of her son's education there was one set of rules and now he has to meet another set of rules. Ms. Spangler feels the exam should continue but she asks that it be delayed, so that kids like her son are not penalized.

**MS. SHERI WIKAN** testified via teleconference from Petersburg. Ms. Wikan read the following written testimony:

My name is Sheri Wikan. I am a parent of five children, two that graduated in Washington, two that graduated here

in Petersburg and a junior to graduate in 2002. I have served on the PTA and am currently a school board member.

I am here to speak on my concerns on the implementation of the state high school exit exam. I feel the concept of having our schools and students accountable for what they learn is right, however I feel before you can expect our teachers to teach to the standards and our students to learn the teachers need to know what the standards are.

In an article this week in our weekly newspaper it was stated that Bunde said the Department of Education took three years to develop the test and has set its own cut-off scores for a passing grade. The thing I find disturbing about this comment is that DOE takes three years to develop the test, and how do you know that in our schools our children have been taught the standards that is in the test?

I attended an AASB conference last year and one of the topics discussed was the state high school qualifying exam. I asked a question of "why are you choosing the then sophomore class to be the first ones to take the exam?" Their response was - that was the way the legislature wanted it.

We had our 3rd, 6th, and 8th graders last year take the benchmark testing and now know where the focus is for assisting those students for being successful when they someday will need to take the high school qualifying exam. I feel our high school has done an excellent job of preparing our students. Last springs test was an unknown to administration, staff and students - our students did exceptional. This falls test was difficult because we did not have the results in time for scheduling, based on needs and to fully prepare the students for the test. The exam in February/March this year will be more of a known. It is difficult for me to understand without the early learning of standards and the benchmark exams how you can require this for a high school graduation with a diploma, something most of these kids have looked forward to for a very long time.

Since the middle school my daughter has planned to go to college for pediatric nursing, and she is worried about graduating with a diploma. She is constantly advising us she wants to leave her senior year to graduate elsewhere.

I wonder how many other students are out there concerned about that as well?

There is also the issue in the schools, when you mandate anything such as the exit exam that you do not fund it. Last year we purchased new math books for the middle school and high school. This year we will purchase books for the elementary school. We have also added a new math teacher in the high school. There is a possibility of high school with four years of math, if you have not passed the math portion of the exit exam. Not to say a fourth year is bad but if they would have been taught the standards in the first place this may not be necessary.

I guess what it all boils down to is let our staff know what the standards are and educate our students first then have the expectation of this exam.

Number 2085

**MR. MICHAEL MITCHELL** testified via teleconference from Anchorage. Mr. Mitchell read the following letter:

Just when you thought there was nothing more to say about the high school qualifying test (HSQT), here I am with a suggestion.

I have proctored the test, read the test, read the news articles about the test, talked to the educators in Juneau who are responsible for constructing and establishing passing criteria for passing the test and have come up with these thoughts about the test.

Firstly, the reading and writing part of the test are appropriate. No one who cannot perform these two parts or the test should be awarded a diploma. If you can't read and write you should not have been promoted to the 10th grade, anyway.

Secondly, my tilt comes with the "math" part of the test. I do not have any problem with the arithmetic problems. Arithmetic includes only addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of whole numbers, fractions, decimals and percents. These arithmetic skills are necessary to achieve in the real working world and every graduate should be competent in arithmetic. My problem is with the "math" concept. Arithmetic is a sub-set of math. Math includes many things that few graduates need

or use in the real world. Some math teachers want problems in geometry and algebra to be included in the HSQT. True a high school graduate should be able to find the area and perimeter of a plain object. However, no one needs to prove the congruency of triangles by proving that the sides, angle, side, are equal et cetera. Furthermore, few people use algebra outside of the school. Oh, yes, I will hear from those vocal people who do use algebra but they are in the minority. I know from 45 years of teaching experience that many of the students who are enrolled in geometry and algebra are not proficient in arithmetic. I believe that arithmetic proficiency in both calculations and solution to work problems is critical to success in life.

Let's make the HSQT a real measure of the practical skills that are valued by employers.

Now there is another issue, and that is intensive needs students.

Intensive needs students are those with an IQ of 60 or below. Intensive needs students receive a certificate of attendance instead of a high school diploma.

If the high school diploma is to mean anything we must test all students.

The federal government has established specific requirements for student placement in the intensive needs program. However, the Alaska State Board of Education has mandated that the intensive needs teachers do a complex and time consuming additional alternative assessment. Why?

The intensive needs students will never learn to read, write, or calculate. You can assess until the world ends but the intensive needs students will never be able to read, write, or calculate. The teachers do their best to help their students to be able to function independently. That's all. Anything that takes away from the time that the teachers of the intensive needs students spend with their students hurts the students.

Please don't hurt the students by taking the teachers away from their teaching tasks and away from their students by loading them up with more paperwork.

Number 2230

**MS. DIANNE KIANA** testified via teleconference from Anchorage. Ms. Kiana said she is a member of Parents for Effective Reading Curriculum (PERC). Ms. Kiana said she is opposed to the delay of the state exit exam. She is opposed to her children having to settle for IEP diplomas, which she feels are a direct result of not being properly diagnosed with specific disabilities. These issues affect the children in urban Alaska but have the same, if not worse effect, on children in bush Alaska.

MS. KIANA has three children who are learning disabled. All three of her children continue to fall further behind despite the fact that they have been provided assistance in special programs. They are passed from grade to grade, even if they have failed several of their classes. Her children are smart individuals who work hard at home to improve their grades. She feels that her children can achieve the academic goals set before them if they are given the proper tools in which to learn from. She believes they can pass the exit exam if they are first properly diagnosed with specific disabilities and then given an effective educational program which includes a research based reading curriculum.

MS. KIANA does not believe the exit exam should be delayed but that proper diagnosis should be provided for those not passing and then proper tools for remediation should be applied. Ms. Kiana believes delaying the exit exam is a cop out for accountability.

Tape 01-5, Side A  
Number 001

**MS. CHRISTINE SMITH**, testifying via teleconference from Fairbanks, said she is the principal of Lathrop High School. She grew up in Fairbanks and attended the University of Alaska. Ms. Smith said she applauds the legislature's support of standards and accountability. She supports the state's underlying philosophy that education is important for all students and that all students can learn.

MS. SMITH strongly urged the legislature to delay the effective date of the high school graduation qualifying exam. The effective date of 2002 has mandated great changes in education, but these changes are just starting. Ms. Smith's district has recently received data from the first test, in a form useful for making effective changes in an efficient and reasonable manner. A delay will mean that educators can progress with changes that are needed.

MS. SMITH commented that until 2006, the students who complete the

requirements for a diploma would receive a diploma. A delay will give the department and the districts the opportunity to address both the test and the preparation for the test. The test itself needs review and revision. A delay would also accommodate the need for change in curriculum and instruction.

Ms. Smith asked, "Are all the items on the test really what a student needs to know to make the basic diploma meaningful?" She urged lawmakers to take the practice test and then vote.

Number 235

**MS. MARY FORNER** testified via teleconference from Kodiak. Ms. Forner said she is the parent of a freshman and junior in high school. As she understands the issue, there are two areas of responsibility - accountability and implementation of the exam.

MS. FORNER is concerned that sufficient scrutiny has not been used for the timeline. The benchmark is the most useful tool that has been developed for the district, teacher, student and their parents. The exam creates something independent of the report card for measuring a student's achievement.

MS. FORNER supports extending the exam up to the class of 2004. She believes that within this time frame DOE will continue to respond with the benchmark exam as well as the exiting exam so that the standards set by the legislature are truly reflected.

MS. FORNER said she is also concerned with funding. There has been no mention of where the funding will come from for support services, both educational and counseling, or how the students will be integrated.

MS. FORNER commented that legislators have talked with business people, educators, and parents, but have they spent time with the students who will be negatively impacted by this exam.

**CO-CHAIR BUNDE** said that several legislators have attended high school classes and talked with students this past year.

Number 561

**MS. BARBARA LEFLER**, testifying via teleconference from Anchorage, said she has furnished the committee with a packet of information. Ms. Lefler read the following testimony.

My name is Barbara Lefler. I am also with PERC and you

have just met my husband Doug and learned a little about our son Neal.

I would like to direct your attention to document 5 called Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam. It is Neal's report from his first experience taking the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam. Neal was a sophomore at the time this test was taken and as you saw in a previous document, Neal was reading at a 3rd grade level. If you will look at the top right hand corner, you will see not only how Neal scored on the three parts of the test but also where the passing cut off score is. Neal came home after the test experience under a lot of stress. He said the reading portion was so difficult for him that by the time he had merely flipped through a few pages of the test booklet he wrote, "I can't read this" at the top of page 10. His frustration became so great that he ended up putting "see page 10" through out the rest of the test. Then Neal proceeded to do all he could do and began randomly filling in the bubbles on the answer sheet. I hope you are as amazed as we were to find that Neal had guessed himself halfway to passing the reading competency portion of the test. PERC is adamant that when the standard deviation was applied to the cut scores, it virtually invalidated the true measure of competency.

Please turn to the final document 6 called Quality Schools Grant Application. As an example of lack of accountability, on page one you will note that a school district received \$94,600 for "Materials and training opportunities for parent-teacher collaboration in working with students and training parents to work with students." When applying for the grant, schools had to answer the question found on page 4 of this document, "How will parents be involved in learning to help their children meet standards?" The answer to this question is astounding. We read, There is not a concerted, district-wide effort to "involve parents in learning to help their children meet standards," rather there is ongoing encouragement from the School Board, the Superintendent, and the Administration to remind parents of their essential role in sending us students ready to learn, regardless of the grade level." This district was given \$94,600 after it was clearly stated that "there is not a concerted district wide effort to" use the funds as specified.

Can you imagine how many teachers could have been trained in scientific based, systematic, comprehensive reading instruction for \$94,600? Can you imagine how many specific, supportive reading curriculum materials could have been purchased? Can you imagine how many children's lives could have been effected and how many more of our children could have been as prepared as Neal now is to face the competency exam and possibly graduate with their peers?

Parents are tired. We can and we will continue to fight for the rights of our children individually, but we are battle weary. We need your help to insure our children's success. We need our districts to be held accountable for the funds they receive.

Please help us. You have the power to require accountability. You are using that power to hold our children accountable. Now is the time to use that power to hold the education system equally accountable. Stop allowing our money to be wasted. Our children have a right to read. Our children are capable of learning. The window is closing. With the 2002 deadline pressing we need intensive remedial programs for our children NOW. These programs must include proven, research based, systematic instruction, just like the state of Idaho is requiring. We will support the 2002 deadline, if our children are provided with the appropriate curriculum to insure they have an opportunity to graduate with their class.

NUMBER 801

**MR. JEFFREY R. STEPHAN**, testifying via teleconference from Kodiak, read the following testimony:

Senator Green, Representative Bunde, Representative Stevens, and members of the senate and house committees. My name is Jeff Stephan, and I have the privilege and honor of serving as the president of the Kodiak Board of Education.

The Kodiak Board of Education supports standards, we support assessment, and we support accountability. We applaud the legislature for your initiatives with respect to standards, assessment and accountability. The Kodiak Board of Education supports the delay in the effective date of the high school competency exam; therefore, we

support HB 94 and SB 56.

We believe that the board of education, the administrators and educators of the Kodiak Island Borough School District should be accountable to the public, to the parents, and most of all, to the students whose future employment, future success and future contributions to society rely greatly on the education that they receive in our school district.

The Kodiak Board of Education is very proud of the quality, commitment and dedication of our teachers, and of the level of instruction that our teachers provide to our students. We are confident of our teacher's ability to align curriculum to meet state standards, and to teach relevant content that prepares our students for the high school competency exam. However, we agree with others in the state that the Alaskan school districts need more time to allow our professionals to readjust to the new task of addressing the subject exam.

We fear that the premature implementation of the exam will stigmatize young people with the label of failure; that is, a certificate of attendance may result in imposing a negative stigma on our young people, improperly influencing them in their education and career choices, and having unintended unfavorable consequences. Our Alaskan students need your leadership to provide them with positive encouragement to continue their education, and to feel good about themselves.

We ask you to consider that we are dealing with predominantly young folks here. There are significant issues of maturity, age and self-esteem that we believe you should take into consideration. We ask you to consider a system whereby students who meet local high school graduation requirements should receive a high school diploma, and students who pass the high school competency exam should receive some type of a special high school diploma; for example, similar to the "regents diploma" system that is used in the state of New York, and in many other states. This adjustment will still provide you with the statistical data on individual district and school performance, while removing the unnecessary stigmatization that a certificate of completion will represent to many of our valued Alaskan students.

By delaying the implementation date of the high school competency exam, you will provide Alaskan school districts with the time to adjust the curriculum and instruction with Alaskan standards and the high school competency exam.

Thank you for your attention. We appreciate your consideration of our request that you delay the implementation date of the high school competency exam.

Number 974

**MR. DOUGLAS LEFLER**, testifying from Anchorage, testified and submitted the following written testimony.

My Name is Doug Lefler. I am the father of four children. I am a member of Parents for Effective Reading Curriculum.

Our family moved to Alaska when our son Neal was in the sixth grade. By the time Neal was 3 years old, we knew he didn't process information the same way you and I do. We knew by kindergarten, that Neal would have difficulty learning to read and write. Over the years my wife and I have spent thousands of dollars and thousands of hours to teach our son to read. Neal has qualified for special education services since he was in 2nd grade. Special Education is designed to provide individual instruction to meet a child's unique needs. During Neal's entire school career, every meeting we attended with school staff we were assured that Neal was a nice boy, who was making progress. But, were determined that our son would be literate. If you will look at document 1 labeled Neal Lefler, you will see that by the time Neal was 16.5 he had made only half of a year gain in reading in the last three years in special education. Here was a bright young man in the class of 2002, facing a competency exam and he could only read on a third grade level. It was a hopeless feeling. Fortunately, we learned of a private clinic in Anchorage who used a method that was proven to teach reading.

Because we believe that every child has a right to read and every school has a responsibility and obligation to teach this basic skill, we turned to our school district for support in our efforts for Neal to learn to read. It was a time consuming and heart wrenching challenge, but with the help of a parent advocate, we used the process

laid out in the IDEA. We had to go to the point of mediation with our school district for support in our efforts to insure an appropriate education for our son. Last March, Neal read at a 3rd grade level. In April and May, Neal attended that private clinic and, 20 hours per week for 7 weeks of intensive remediation using the Lindamood-Bell Learning Process. Neal's reading went up 2 grade levels. The summer passed with no further instruction.

When Neal returned to school for his junior year in September, he received support in his classroom by a teacher trained in the Lindamood-Bell Learning Process, the same process he received at the private clinic. In December, right before Christmas, Neal brought home an envelope with a big gold bow on it. We opened the gift to learn that Neal was reading ON GRADE LEVEL. He was reading slowly, but his accuracy and comprehension were commendable. It is now possible for Neal to pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam and graduate with his peers.

PERC believes that every child in Alaska deserves this opportunity. I know that there are those within the sound of my voice who are looking for public support in keeping the 2002 deadline for the competency exam. PERC is here to voice our support. We believe our children are capable of meeting or exceeding state standards. However, our support must be conditional. Our children are being held accountable when many haven't received the instruction necessary to meet the standards. We are looking to the legislature to hold the school system equally accountable. We are looking to the legislature to only budget funds for remedial programs that meet rigorous standards. In Idaho, legislators passed laws that mandated specific guidelines for the state school board to uphold. Documents 2 and 3 in your packet are Idaho State Statutes produced by the legislature. If you read nothing else, please read these 2 documents. Document 4 is the Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Plan that is mentioned in the Idaho State statutes.

As a father and a member of the Alaska community, I request your immediate attention to this matter. Follow Idaho's leadership for the sake of our children.

Number 1196

**MR. ISHAMEL HOPE** said he graduated from Juneau Douglas High School in the year 2000. He testified on his own behalf but said he hoped to advocate for students.

MR. HOPE said that because a person has a high school diploma does not necessarily mean that that person is capable of being a successful member of society. Mr. Hope believes that everyone deserves the chance to be successful and to be a competent member of society. "A diploma should not carry the major weight of how a person carries on their life - that is up to the individual, not a standard."

MR. HOPE said that on the other hand, he supports the exit exam as long as "empirical data," not just a national fad, can show that the qualifying exam will truly raise the level of education - in all facets. Every student needs the chance to succeed.

Number 1390

**MR. DARRYL HARGRAVES**, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), said the Association of School Administrators (ASA), a sub-group of ACSA, has passed a resolution which says that they believe Alaska's public schools are educating children at a higher level than ever before. They think that Alaskan educators desire to see improvement and work very hard to seek that there is accountability among students and staff. ASA also believes the high school graduation qualifying exam was put on an ambitious time line and if the unintended consequences could have been foreseen, a different time line may have been set.

MR. HARGRAVES commented that ASA thinks there are many legitimate social issues confronting children, some of which are not based on education. ASA is concerned that some children have not had access to the necessary curriculum directed toward the standards and benchmark test for passing the exit exam.

MR. HARGRAVES said ASA recommends the effective date for fully implementing the exit exam be suspended until all students have a reasonable opportunity to go through the lower grades and access the curriculum required to be successful. ASA recommends that the exam be kept in place but it should be delayed.

MR. HARGRAVES commented that ASA is not opposed to the state implementation of standards for high school graduation. Some students will need mentoring, summer school, and extended day instruction and work to come up to standard.

Number 1640

**MR. ROBERT BRIGGS**, staff attorney for the Disability Law Center of Alaska (DLCA) in Juneau, said he is not an agent of a legal challenge of this law. DLCA has a new executive director, Mr. Dave Fleurant, who has specific expertise in special education. DLCA has hired a new attorney, Ms. Amy Headrick, in Anchorage to deal specifically with special education issues.

MR. BRIGGS said DLCA has expressed to the board of education concerns with the way the current administration is administering current law. DLCA's first concern is the lack of reported performance on the exam, on both the state and local level, for students with disabilities. This is required under federal law - Individuals With Disabilities Education Act. DLCA expects to see data that will show how students with disabilities have done on these tests as compared to their peers.

MR. BRIGGS said DLCA's next concern is the importance of using the test as a predictor of success. If this test instrument disproportionately affects a segment of the population, and the test instrument does not validly predict success, then that is illegal. It is very important to show whether the test has a disproportionate impact or whether the test has been validated as a predictor of success. Evidence has not been seen yet that there has been proper validation of this test instrument. There is support for delaying the deadline of the qualifying exam.

MR. BRIGGS urged the committee to explore alternative ways of demonstrating competency besides using a single test. One alternative is to delay implementation until the Alaska Board of Education has determined if the test instrument is a fair predictor of success and does not unfairly discriminate against any group of students.

MR. BRIGGS said a class action legal challenge is a last resort after all means of political change have been exhausted and he urged all members of the committee to seek and find consensus on this subject. DLCA is committed to helping, so that unnecessary legal challenges can be avoided.

**MR. DAVE BUSEY**, testifying via teleconference from Sitka, said he is speaking for himself. He has taught college and high school mathematics and computer science for many years. He is the parent of two students who are now in college.

MR. BUSEY said he believes the exam is a good tool; he favors standards and accountability. The exam is a good tool for school assessment but it is not good as a single criterion for graduation.

A single written math exam inadequately represents a student's mastery of high school math. He suggested the exam be broadened to include more varieties of student measurement, and instructional time for teachers should be cut in some areas so they can prepare students for the exam.

MR. BUSSEY asked the committee to delay implementation of the math test and to restudy ways for a better math exam.

**MR. LES DENZER**, Assistant Superintendent for instructional programs, Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD), testified via teleconference. Mr. Denzer submitted the following testimony:

Thank you for the opportunity to voice our opinion and position today. As we all know, the role of the public school in our society has taken on and continues to take an evermore challenging and demanding role. The increased number of dysfunctional families, the widespread use and abuse of drugs, inhalants and alcohol at an increasingly younger age, the increase of violence in the homes and in our schools have all taken a great toll on the instructional delivery system. All to the point that it is fruitless to determine an effective delivery system until safety, security, and healthy life choices are fostered and assured. Schools need to be provided with adequate resources in order to deal effectively with these social concerns before they can see even slight success and progress in the basic academic pursuits for all children.

Alaska is not unique when it comes to social malady as a state we share in this challenge. Social ills show no preference for race or community size. Urban and rural alike fall victim to the negative news reports we hear all too much. These social ills need to be addressed by society and all too often the burden falls upon the shoulders of the school staff with little or no financial or professional support from the appropriate agencies or authorities.

Alaska is unique however in the responsibilities of the schools in other areas. Village schools of rural Alaska are required to be the stewards of the community's wastewater management program. They are considered the sole source of funds and personnel to manage a healthy water quality program for the community as well. These are only two examples of issues that rural schools are asked to manage, support and finance both directly and

indirectly. These issues or programs do not fall within the responsibility of the urban school districts. Rural schools are often asked to support these community programs at the expense of educating the children in our schools. Money intended for education is often siphoned off to provide adequate facilities and support for the community at large.

These and other responsibilities are taken care of by the public school system in rural Alaska and always at the expense of the child in the classroom. While we are asked to consider the option of requiring passage of a qualifying exam now or later for graduation, we ask the legislature to simultaneously consider appropriate funding which would allow adequate and timely instruction for all students. Especially now given the challenging role of public schools in the new millennium and also to provide other agencies of rural Alaska the necessary resources to manage and support community social and physical infrastructure. Then schools can be about the business they are trained to do and can thus be justly evaluated.

In relation to the timing of the high school graduation qualifying exam and when passage should be required. The LKSD would like the legislature to know that we welcome the purpose of the qualifying exam and the accountability it guarantees to the students and communities we serve. Also know that we will abide by the decision of the legislature and work toward as great a success as possible if the decision is to let stand the current requirement. However, at a recent LKSD board meeting it was decided that the LKSD's official position and recommendation be:

- The state require that students graduating in the year 2002 pass any one portion of the current exam and meet local district requirements before he/she can receive a state high school diploma.
- The state require that students graduating in the year 2003 pass any two portions of the current exam and meet local district requirements before he/she can receive a state high school diploma.
- The state require that students graduating in the year 2004 pass all three portions of the

current exam and meet local district requirements before he/she can receive a state high school diploma.

If the state changes the passage requirement of the HSGQE to a later date, the LKSD may decide to phase in the HSGQE requirement anyway as stated above unless our policy would be in conflict with state regulations.

Once again thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns and our position on the deadline for passage of the high school graduation qualifying exam.

**CO-CHAIR GREEN** said she looks forward to the Senate HESS Committee delving into this matter to see if they can come up with a solution. She is not sure that one test will adequately suffice to be the determinate of whether a person graduates or not.

**CO-CHAIR BUNDE** thanked the people who participated in the meeting and said there was a considerable amount of testimony that schools are working toward improvement. It is important to note that this is not the legislature's test or DOE's test. When the bill was passed in 1997, it became Alaska's test. Everyone has a right and responsibility to make sure the bill is crafted to be an asset to the students. Co-chair Bunde's personal goal is to increase the investment in education but with the investment of state funds comes accountability. Almost three quarters of a billion dollars are spent every year to support the public schools. In some schools that is more than \$20,000 per student per year. This money should be well used and the students should receive the benefit of every nickel of that and future money. This is not a punitive action; the ultimate goal is for improvement and to not leave anyone behind.

**CO-CHAIR BUNDE** said that on February 14 the House HESS Committee will hear HB 94.

With not further business to come before the committee, **CO-CHAIR GREEN** adjourned the meeting at 1:55 p.m.