

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
**SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
February 14, 2001  
1:35 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Lyda Green, Chair  
Senator Loren Leman, Vice Chair  
Senator Gary Wilken  
Senator Jerry Ward  
Senator Bettye Davis

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

None

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION QUALIFYING EXAM - TESTIMONY FROM EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

**WITNESS REGISTER**

Ms. Bobette Bush, Board Member  
Alaska Association of School Administrators  
Aniak, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delay in HSGQE

Ms. Carol Kane, Executive Director  
Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals  
PO Box 2889  
Palmer, Alaska 99645  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delay in HSGQE

Ms. Patricia M. Hogan  
PO Box 877518  
Wasilla, Alaska 99687  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delay in HSGQE

Mr. Rich Kronberg, President  
NEA-Alaska  
114 2nd Street  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delay in HSGQE

Ms. Susan Stitham, CHAIR

State Board of Education and Early Development  
801 West 10th Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delay in HSGQE

Mr. Carl Rose, Executive Director  
Association of Alaska School Boards  
316 West 11th Street  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports delay in HSGQE

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

#### **TAPE 01-11, SIDE A**

Number 001

**CHAIR LYDA GREEN** called the Senate Health, Education & Social Services Committee meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. Present were Senators Ward, Davis and CHAIR Green. She announced that the focus of today's meeting would be to take testimony on the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE). She asked participants to focus their comments on corrective action that could be taken, rather than the Governor's bill. The Senate HESS Committee will not be looking at the budget aspect of the exam.

MS. BOBETTE BUSH, Superintendent, Kuspuk School District, testifying via teleconference, said she is on the executive board of the Alaska Association of School Administrators (AASA) and is testifying on AASA's behalf. On November 8, 2000, the AASA Board passed a resolution in support of extending the date of requiring students to pass the HSGQE to graduate. The board supports the extension because it believes students have not had the opportunity to learn the specific skills covered in the exam. To withhold a high school diploma based on a lack of opportunity would be unfair.

CHAIR GREEN asked if the AASA Board considered any other suggestions.

MS. BUSH said most board members are concerned that diplomas will be withheld in 2002 if a student does not pass the exit exam. There is concern that students will not have enough opportunity to learn what is necessary for passing the exam.

Number 455

SENATOR WARD asked which school districts do not supply the proper curriculum for passing the exam.

MS. BUSH said it takes a major reform effort on the part of school districts to align a curriculum with the standards and to also have a standard based curriculum. The HSGQE is not a basic skills test, therefore, for students to be successful on the exam, their instruction needs to be aimed at these skills. For the past 25 years, most school districts have not implemented a standards based instruction model. Adequate time is needed for developing the exam, and the results need to be given to the school, parents, and students in a timely manner for adequate training.

SENATOR WARD noted AASA's resolution said that not all children have received the necessary curriculum in order to adequately pass the exam. He asked for a list of schools not giving the adequate curriculum in order to pass the exam.

MS. BUSH said she did not have such a list.

SENATOR LEMAN said Ms. Bush used the phrase, "some of these children have the lack of opportunity to learn." He said this troubled him and he asked Ms. Bush what she meant by lack of opportunity to learn.

MS. BUSH commented that this is a legal standard. It means that students have not been instructed in the required skills that are needed to successfully pass the exit exam. If a student has the opportunity to be instructed in a system that utilizes standard based instruction, by the time they take the tenth grade HSGQE, they would have had the opportunity to learn the necessary items for passing the exam.

SENATOR LEMAN said when he was young he attended a small elementary and high school in Alaska, and that system gave him an adequate opportunity to learn what was necessary for taking and passing an exam. He wondered what has happened since that time, that some schools do not have this standard. He asked if there had been a change in the educational philosophy.

MS. BUSH's response is not noted because the tape was inaudible.

SENATOR LEMAN said he had taken the HSGQE and he felt it was not unreasonable, but the state scores do cause him concern.

Number 952

CHAIR GREEN asked if AASA would have designed a different format for the exam.

MS. BUSH passed on that answer.

CHAIR GREEN commented that blame had been put on the exam but when the exam was developed, it was felt that it tested on what the schools were teaching.

SENATOR WARD asked if AASA helped in the creation of the exam.

MS. BUSH deferred to Mr. Darroll Hargraves who is the executive director for Alaska Council of School Administrators. At the time this system was legislated and developed, all state professional and educational organizations and the Department of Education said the timeline for the implementation of the high stakes portion of HSGQE was too short.

DOE's recommendation was that the exam not be given before 2006.

SENATOR WARD asked again if AASA had any involvement in the creation of the exam.

CHAIR GREEN asked Ms. Bush to have Mr. Hargraves furnish the committee with this information.

SENATOR BETTYE DAVIS said that most of the information the committee needed about who was involved with the creation of the exam had already been provided.

MS. CAROL KANE, Executive Director, Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals (AASSP), testifying via teleconference, read the following testimony:

Thank you for providing professional educators a forum for giving input on issues related to the HSGQE. As you know, AASSP has gone on record supporting accountability and standards for all Alaskan students. As principals, it goes without saying, our entire focus is on academic success regardless of whether students live in rural or urban communities.

My educational background has been in early childhood, middle school, high school, and post secondary education. I have been a teacher, assistant principal, principal, director of instruction, and an associate superintendent. I have served as the executive director for AASSP since 1998. My comments are framed with this experience base and collective input from our membership.

AASSP does support the delay for the HSGQE and for further review of various issues. Included, but not

limited to the following:

- Sustained funding for all schools at an appropriate level providing the necessary resources, staffing and facilities to meet the present demands. Reference many of the recommendations made by the Governor's Funding Task Force Committee.
- Provide time for staff development to continue curriculum alignment and review - addressing all the standards. Staff development should not be the number one target for cuts in the budget formulation. Staff development is essential for improved instructional programs.
- Experience and research validates that norm - referenced testing does not necessarily guarantee quality of teaching or learning.
- Reevaluate the theory that a high stakes exam is the only way to measure if a student should receive a high school diploma.
- Examine if the 'wave for accountability' is driving both educators and students away from developing a productive citizenry for life long learning.
- Implement appropriate interventions and accommodations for all students with special needs.
- Send a strong message that responsibility for accountability is shared: student commitment, parental meaningful involvement, educators to provide the appropriate learning environment, and to legislators ensuring appropriate legislation, which will sustain funding.

We commend the Department of Education and Early Development's efforts to review numerous issues related to the HSGQE and benchmark tests. We appreciate and value that site administrators and other educators have been active participants in the recent efforts to reevaluate the HSGQE and benchmark testing in its entirety. It is very evident there are no quick fixes and that further time, materials, and resources are necessary.

The technical review team - Tom Straugh, Ray Fenton, Jim Elliott, and Vivian Daily have made several practical considerations for the actual testing process, which will assure quality of testing and reduce the disruption of instruction for students that are not being tested. Some suggestions include the following:

- Additional testing days added to the school calendar; students who need to be tested are the only ones expected to be in attendance.
- Schools would be allowed to operate on a modified schedule.
- State managed testing centers.
- Proctors trained to monitor the test, which would not require a certified teacher.
- Test on Saturday or non-school days in the fall for those students who did not previously pass the exam.
- Schools 'bank' time by decreasing passing and lunch hours by seven minutes per day in order to create testing days which begin with a three hour testing period. This allows all students to have the same length of instructional days when aggregated across the school year.

Additional recommendations would be available by request from the Technical Review Team.

It is essential that commitment to higher standards and accountability be continued. Part of the commitment and validation will be to indicate on diplomas the scores for those students who passed the HSGQE. This sends a strong message to everyone. Employers who look at those scores as part of the hiring process also would validate the process.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our input. Please feel free to contact me if the AASSP or I can be of further assistance.

CHAIR GREEN said she thought Ms. Kane would be pleased with some of the things the committee had in mind, even though the draft

legislation and amendments are not yet ready. She asked if AASSP had considered giving the exam on the morning of an in-service day.

MS. KANE replied yes. She said a survey of the membership suggested this type of thing.

CHAIR GREEN said administering the test should not disrupt the whole school, and she liked some of AASSP's suggestions for this problem and others.

SENATOR WARD asked if Ms. Kane or AASSP participated in the creation of the existing exam.

MS. KANE said she had not participated. A few years ago when the exam was being proposed a few of the board members expressed some of the concerns that have now become evident.

MS. PATRICIA HOGAN, Alaska Parent Teacher Association (AK-PTA), testifying via teleconference from Wasilla, gave a brief biography of her life, education, and work history for the committee. Ms. Hogan said the letter sent to the committee on behalf of AK-PTA addresses the consequences of the exit exam. The law that was passed in 1997 was to present the exam in 2002. The students from the class of 2002 were only in the seventh grade at that time and have only been given the California Achievement Test. The exam that is being addressed now is based on specific standards that are important to Alaskan students, and the benchmark test will lead to the successful completion of the exit exam. The students from the class of 2002 have not been taught the benchmark standards, they have been taught general standards. Students that have not had the opportunity to take sixth and eighth grade benchmark tests will not have the standards they need for remediation.

MS. HOGAN said the issue of military families has not been addressed. She wondered if the federal government would have to provide American school diplomas for students who are overseas. The issue of transfer students and special needs students have also not been addressed.

MS. HOGAN commented that remediation should be provided before a student reaches the eleventh grade. Validity of the exam is at question when 60 percent of the students do not pass.

MS. HOGAN suggested that parents, business members, and graduate and college students be involved in addressing these questions. Students also need to be educated in how to take a test, and the exam needs to be in a location other than the school because it is too disruptive for the other students.

Number 1902

MS. HOGAN said AK-PTA members believe there is a responsibility for all students of the state. She said she had participated in eighth grade reading assessments for the benchmark.

MR. RICH KRONBERG, President of NEA-Alaska, made the following comments:

I want to directly respond to one question that has been raised and is, in my mind, the key to the whole issue. 'What would a delay provide students that is not currently available?' This is the heart of the issue, and it is the question that must be answered if a delay is justified. It is a question that NEA-Alaska members have been examining as well.

Our examination began last fall, and it has continued up to now. Our leadership and staff have engaged in extensive conversations to articulate those elements in the educational program that can make a difference for students and to determine if they require additional time to implement, to take a position in support of a delay. The end result of this internal process was a decision taken at our Delegate Assembly, held in January, to support a delay of four years in the effective date of the exit exam.

NEA-Alaska has an extensive list of changes but I will just read a few. The whole list is in the committee packet.

- Districts must align their curriculum with the standards.
- The content and the passing level for each test must accurately reflect what we really want all of our graduates, not just the college bound, to know and be able to do.
- Benchmark test results must be provided to teachers in a way that will inform their instruction.
- Districts must institute coherent systems of professional development that focus on instruction in a standards-based system.

- All students should be provided access to summer school.
- All students should be provided access to quality tutoring in after-school settings.
- Alternative methods must be developed and implemented for special education and limited English proficient students to demonstrate mastery of performance standards. These alternative methods must be rigorous and fair.
- Districts must provide all students access to qualified, quality teachers.

We have followed up our Delegate Assembly action with a survey of our online community. The results show a fairly accurate representation of where our members are on the issue. We will provide the results to you, but let me give you the executive summary.

About seven percent of the respondents want to do away with the exit exam altogether. Another 20 percent want to go ahead with the current timeline for the effective date. But over 70 percent of the members argue for a delay so that everything can be done to help the students meet or exceed the standards.

In Oregon special education parents filed suit because their children were denied diplomas because that state's exit exam did not allow them to demonstrate their mastery of standards. That suit has been settled in a way that satisfies the demands of the plaintiffs. In Arizona the effective date of the high stakes test has been delayed and the math portion of the test has been replaced twice. In Virginia the effective date of the test has been delayed and there is a movement among parents and educators to simply eliminate the test. We should learn from the experiences of others, and I would never suggest that Alaska should follow the lead of another state, but we can be aware of mistakes made in other places and try to avoid them.

The move to high standards and enhanced student performance is one that NEA-Alaska fully supports. We believe the best way to accomplish this is by doing

everything we can to make sure that Alaskan students have the tools they need to meet and exceed the standards. Passing the exit exam is one indicator of our success. Some of these tools require a delay in the effective date of the test. That delay should be granted specifically so districts and the state department can make the necessary changes. NEA-Alaska is not asking for a delay to provide more time for more of the same. A delay is the right thing to do only if it is used to do the right things for Alaska's students. We believe that if the right things are done, a delay in the effective date of the HSGQE is indeed the right thing to do and we urge your support for such a delay.

Number 2256

SENATOR WARD asked if NEA-Alaska participated in the creation of the current exam.

MR. KRONBERG said that NEA-Alaska originally supported the legislation but said that an infusion of resources would be needed. Members of NEA-Alaska did participate in the original standards group that developed the state standards in the early 1990's. There were also members who participated on the benchmark and cut score committees. NEA-Alaska has consistently argued that in order for students to pass, additional resources targeted to those students should be applied.

SENATOR WARD asked if there was an error in the final math portion of the exam.

MR. KRONBERG said legitimate questions have been raised as to the focus of the test. The question is, "Does the test accurately measure what every student should know before going on to a subsistence lifestyle, college or trade school?" This is an open question that is being looked at.

SENATOR WARD asked if NEA-Alaska voiced this concern at the time the cut scores were designated for the math portion of the exam.

MR. KRONBERG said he was not sure he could find the answer to that question. Some of the members who were on the benchmark and cut score committees did articulate concerns.

SENATOR WARD asked how many members were in NEA-Alaska.

MR. KRONBERG responded 11,000.

SENATOR WARD asked how many members responded online.

MR. KRONBERG said he did not know how many members responded. NEA-Alaska has a list of several hundred members and the request was sent to them - not all members. The Delegate Assembly is about 400 people and the vote to support a delay was almost unanimous.

SENATOR WILKEN asked what a limited English proficient student is.

MR. KRONBERG said it is a term used for students whose first language is not English.

SENATOR WILKEN asked if NEA-Alaska could envision a student graduating without being proficient in English.

MR. KRONBERG replied no.

#### **SIDE B**

MR. KRONBERG said that when a student comes to this country when they are in eighth or ninth grade, different methods of instruction and assessment would be needed to determine whether or not they are proficient in English.

CHAIR GREEN commented that from now on the focus should be on what items should be put into statute.

Number 2317

MS. SUSAN STITHAM, Chair, State Board of Education and Early Development, said the board appreciated the senate's effort in gathering information on this issue. She said the board's resolution is the result of hours of public meetings on all aspects of the HSGQE. The resolution expresses the concern that basic fairness requires a delay in the implementation date. The board is unanimous in wanting to go forward with accountability and high standards. The 2002 implementation date would be unfair to the students of the class of 2002.

MS. STITHAM said the resolution does deal with children of special needs, limited English proficiency, military students, the alignment of curriculum, and the test itself. She said the exam could not be blamed for the results - the test is 90 percent right but there are things that need to be changed.

MS. STITHAM said there is more than one way to measure what the community and society value. The paper test does not measure anything other than literacy; therefore, the board would like

direction from the legislature on how to find additional ways to measure what a student knows in terms of standards such as work ethic.

MS. STITHAM noted that teachers have never before had the data that is now available from the benchmark test. Standardized tests have never given the teacher the type of information that shows how to help a particular student. But because the HSGQE is standards based, teachers will now be able to focus instruction and align the curriculum.

MS. STITHAM said she served on Governor Hickel's task force in 1990, which came up with the idea for the Alaska 2000 meetings. She also co-chaired the Language Arts Standards Committee, served on the state board and co-chaired the Content Review Committee on Reading. Standards in the early 1990's were voluntary and they were good, but now that there is a mandatory exam with high stakes there is a different focus.

MS. STITHAM said the important things for the legislature to do are to give guidelines and also to give the State Board of Education and Early Development the authority to deal with specific details, such as coming up with a way to fairly assess the special needs students. These details should come from the board instead of through compromise with the legislature.

MS. STITHAM said with regards to Senator Leman's question about what has changed since 1968 - the culture and values have changed enormously and there are more students staying in high school and studying for a diploma. College prep students are not having a problem with the exam but there are a large variety of students in Alaska with lots of goals and they all deserve a diploma as an indication of their basic skills. It is important that the exam tests essential skills and that the questions are being asked in ways that are fair.

Number 1857

SENATOR WILKEN asked how students from military families should be handled with regards to a competency exam.

MS. STITHAM replied that military students do present the problem of fairness. Reciprocity needs to be considered - if a student passes an exam in another state, maybe they would not have to pass the Alaska exam. Another alternative is that the military might develop some type of American school assessment.

SENATOR WARD asked if Ms. Stitham had seen a copy of the test the

military gives to students overseas for the American Diploma.

MS. STITHAM commented that she had never seen the test.

Number 1718

CHAIR GREEN said the legislature would continue to work on certain items but it would probably pass some on to the board for its continued work.

MR. CARL ROSE, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), said AASB supports an extension to 2004. The standards based effort is one of quality and quality should not be compromised for the sake of urgency. The exam is not just about standards but also about students having the opportunity to learn.

MR. ROSE said the real issue is teaching, if students receive the education they need they will learn. What needs to be done to ensure that quality teachers are in the classroom? Many teachers are teaching in areas they are not qualified in. Generally the students that need the most help are saddled with teachers that are the least qualified, through no fault of the teacher - the system is flawed. In rural areas teachers are given very little supervision and developmental assistance, little support or evaluation, and they are in settings that are not optimum for education.

MR. ROSE noted that standards define what students need to know. Alaska has the components of a world-class system but it is not aligned yet, that will take time. Efforts need to be focused on teachers by using in-service professional development and also by letting them know what the standards are.

MR. ROSE said he was on the adequacy study, he was at the summit, and he served on the funding task force. AASB organized around the statewide strategies identified at the summit. He said the Foundation Formula gives districts the flexibility to address district needs.

Number 1300

CHAIR GREEN asked if AASB could move its members toward the screening and training of teachers in rural Alaska.

MR. ROSE said three years ago board standards were adopted that would allow the board to focus on accountability, advocacy, conduct, and ethics. The vision is to provide students with real choice when they leave school. The board is looking at how the

system is structured, but now instruction is being piecemealed.

CHAIR GREEN asked for an example of what is being piecemealed.

MR. ROSE said, for example, a school may need specific instruction but the only teachers available do not have a major in that area. If the structure does not allow the vision to be reached, either the vision has to change or the structure has to change.

MR. ROSE said because of the national pool of teachers, it is becoming difficult to attract and retain teachers. The teaching profession has been devalued, the message to young people who are potential teachers is not to go into education because teaching does not pay and teachers are not valued. Standards are a road map out because communities recognize them and they also focus on what is important. Mr. Rose noted that submitting to urgency would put all of this at risk with court challenges.

There being no further business to come before the committee, CHAIR GREEN adjourned the meeting at 2:57 p.m.