

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

February 26, 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

All Members Present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Quality Schools/Quality Students Update
High School Graduation Qualifying Exam Proposal

PREVIOUS ACTION

High School Graduation Qualifying Exam - See HESS minutes dated 1/27/01, 1/31/01, 2/12/01, 2/14/01, 2/21/01 and 2/24/01.

WITNESS REGISTER

Mr. Carl Rose
Association of Alaska School Boards
316 W 11th St.
Juneau, AK 99801

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed the QS2 Initiative.

Paul Thibodeau
Association of Alaska School Boards
PO Box 695
Craig, AK 99921

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed the QS2 Initiative.

Norm Wooten
Kodiak Island School District Board Member
PO Box 3016
Kodiak, AK 99615

POSITION STATEMENT: Prefers to delay the exit exam.

Sheri Wikan
Petersburg School Board Member
PO Box 929
Petersburg, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Prefers to delay the exit exam.

Hans Bernard
Student Advisor to the Anchorage School Board
18816 Roads End Circle
Eagle River, AK 99577

POSITION STATEMENT: Prefers to delay the exit exam.

Debbie Ossiander
Anchorage School Board
PO Box 196650
Anchorage, AK 99519

POSITION STATEMENT: Prefers to delay the exit exam.

John Davis, Superintendent
Bering Strait School District
Unalakleet, AK 99684

POSITION STATEMENT: Prefers to eliminate the exit exam.

Janelle Privett, Chair
Wrangell School Board
PO Box 775
Wrangell, AK 99929

POSITION STATEMENT: Prefers to delay the exit exam.

Deb Germano, Chair
Kenai Peninsula Board of Education
PO Box 1511
Homer, AK 99603

POSITION STATEMENT: Prefers to delay the exit exam.

Deb Edwardson
North Slope Borough School Board Member
PO Box 704
Barrow, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Prefers to delay the exit exam.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 01-15, SIDE A
Number 001

CHAIRWOMAN LYDA GREEN called the Senate Health, Education & Social

Services Committee meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. Present were Senators Ward, Wilken and Chairwoman Green. Chairwoman Green announced that the committee will first hear a Quality Schools/Quality Students (QS2) update by Mr. Carl Rose and Mr. Paul Thibodeau.

MR. PAUL THIBODEAU, President of the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), informed committee members that he is also representing the Craig School District. He said he will be discussing how communities can achieve quality schools and quality students.

QS2 offers training assistance in the areas of leadership, programs and staff, community, parents and resources. It is community based and addresses the resources that communities have that can be built on. QS2 helps schools to mirror their communities and includes the ASB advocacy agenda, which includes assets, community engagement, strategic planning, assistance in staff development and curriculum alignment with the standards. It also includes the AASB's agenda regarding school board development and school board standards.

MR. THIBODEAU pointed out that the Craig School District began a strategic planning process in 1990. The district needed the community to be involved. The district was also fighting funding limitations. The Craig School District can attest to how successful the QS2 approach can be. The district's curriculum is aligned with the standards and is ready for the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE), and it has been the vehicle that has helped the district grow, in spite of changes in administrations and changes in the community. He informed committee members that Mr. Rose will discuss the details of QS2.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN asked Mr. Thibodeau how large the Craig School District is.

MR. THIBODEAU said the Craig School District is a K-12 single site district, with 520 students.

MR. CARL ROSE, Executive Director of the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), said as districts begin to address how changes will be made to increase student achievement and how to implement standards, many are having difficulties. To develop a process to help three schools this year and six schools next year, AASB looked for a community based effort to try to improve student achievement. He referred to a study entitled, "Looking Back," and informed the committee that the statistics it contains are still valid. According to that study, in 1950 about 65 percent of the jobs available were for unskilled labor while jobs available for

skilled labor amounted to 15 percent. As of 2000, available jobs for skilled labor has increased to 65 percent while available jobs for unskilled labor is at 20 percent. Businesses surveyed value teamwork and cooperation, values and responsibility, communication skills, and competency in employees.

MR. ROSE informed the committee that the Business Education Compact started with the School to Work effort and moved through Career Pathways and is now a 501(C)(3) organization that is trying to ingrain the concept of experiential or applied learning. This group wants to take a look at the idea of relevance with the belief that if what is being taught is relevant, people will be attracted to it. The next page of the document deals with creating systemic change. The academic standards that are in place are a critical portion and are one measurement; second are the high school qualifying exit exam and the benchmark exams. The next issue becomes a business education compact. The outcome of applied learning looks something like an authentic assessment or portfolio; it shows what people know. AASB is providing QS2 right now to incorporate these areas. The most critical piece that AASB will play is the Alaska Initiative Community Engagement. AASB received a grant this year from Senator Stevens for \$2 million to use the assets model as its base. That model contains 40 assets. The measurement will be the survey offered to parents, students and adults to determine how many assets are available in their schools. It describes the amount of opportunity available in the community to help students succeed.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN asked if the Business Education Compact is a non-profit organization.

MR. ROSE said it is.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN asked if it is independent of AASB.

MR. ROSE said it is. He showed a diagram of the QS2 plan, which acts as an umbrella for the community's values. Four elements of education are required: leadership; program and staff; community, parents and youth; and resource investment. The community has the opportunity to take a look at what the future holds for their future and what values they want their children to learn. The committee that represents the community should reflect that community. He described the model that will be used and pointed out that 15 school districts will be using it. AASB is trying to build capacity across the state.

SENATOR WILKEN asked what the \$700,000 is for in year 1.

MR. ROSE said he will review a document that will break that down shortly. He pointed out the Business Education Compact is working to get the employability standards ingrained so AASB can work across the curriculum.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN asked if the Alaska Human Resource Investment Council (AHRIC) came up with these standards.

MR. ROSE said they did. He then described the four quadrants of the QS2 initiative: leadership; programs and staff; community and parents; and resources. The leadership quadrant covers school board development issues, in-district workshops, and professional development for administrators. The programs and staff quadrant will address the alignment of content standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment. The community and parent engagement quadrant is part of the Alaska Community Engagement effort. He reviewed the QS2 budget and pointed out the numbers have been revised. The program and staff training will be one of the largest expenses. The AASB has used some of its own seed money, has raised grant money and plans to raise more. The cost in the third year will be almost \$3 million. Two districts have already done their strategic plans and one has its inventory done. Hopefully, by the end of spring, the AASB will have an idea of what kind of programs will be needed to carry out the vision of the districts' strategic plans.

AASB hopes this money will be available through the foundation formula in the next ten years, but right now, AASB can't wait. There is regional and local interest. With the change to a standards-based diploma system, AASB believes the more capacity it builds, the more it learns and the more it can help.

Number 1249

SENATOR WILKEN asked if the AASB will have worked with nine school districts at the end of the three-year period.

MR. ROSE said that is correct.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN asked if the community assessments could be radically different from each other.

MR. ROSE said he didn't think they will differ radically because the focus is on reading, writing and mathematics. The degree to which those subjects can be spread across the curriculum will be the key.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN asked if the first three reports are likely to be

used as models for other districts.

MR. ROSE said the community will describe what it values and how it wants to move forward. Once the community decides where it wants to go, a program structure will have to be designed. He felt that most districts will tie their curricula to the exit exam and technology. He pointed out that a current problem is that leadership is in isolation so the idea is to get the community to work with the leadership and staff. If a community sees a vision and falls upon hard times, the community can speak through a strategic plan rather than fall victim. It is a powerful way for a community to be involved.

Number 1475

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN asked Mr. Rose to describe the status of the development of standards.

MR. ROSE said everyone is trying to transfer from content standards, what students should know, to performance standards, what students should be able to do.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN asked if the Career Pathways and employability standards work toward the performance standards.

MR. ROSE said they do. AASB is applying standards to areas of relevance across the curriculum. It is a powerful tool because students understand why they are dealing with the curriculum.

Number 1564

DRAFT PROPOSAL ON THE EXIT EXAM

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN informed participants that the information on the handout she provided contains ideas about the exit exam but they are nothing more than ideas at this time. She asked those who testify to describe the perfect solution.

MR. NORM WOOTEN, Kodiak Island Borough School District board member and a member of the board of directors of the National School Board Association, said he recently sat in on a briefing in Washington, D.C. given by the U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Page. He was gratified to find how closely aligned Alaska is with President Bush's education policy. President Bush's policy includes closing the achievement gap, particularly among disadvantaged and minority students, accountability for school systems, high standards, and assessment to accurately gauge how well schools are educating students. It also includes consequences for schools that fail to

meet the standards. It emphasizes reading in early grades and promotes parental choice. Finally, it includes safe schools. Alaska's content standards, benchmark exams, and the high school graduation qualifying exam directly support the Bush education policy. He thanked the legislators for their foresight and vision.

The Kodiak Island Borough School District supports high standards. The district wants diplomas to represent quality. The district is spending an incredible amount of staff time and financial resources to comply with those requirements. The district wants to continue testing its students, but suggests that the high school graduation qualifying exam be delayed to give the district time to do four things. First, the district wants to ensure its curriculum is adequately aligned, based on the results of the benchmark test. The district wants to take the data from students coming up through the system and ensure that the curriculum is designed so that tenth graders will have had the instruction and skills necessary to pass the test. Second, the district wants to implement remediation programs that target the district's weaknesses. Third, the district wants to reinforce its staff development program. Finally, the district wants to make sure the exam is valid, specifically by making sure the cut scores are appropriate within each content area.

MS. SHERI WIKAN, Petersburg School Board member, said she agrees with Mr. Wooten's statement. She said that if students are going to be held accountable, teachers should be held accountable.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN told Ms. Wikan that incoming teachers must take an exam, existing teachers were grandfathered in.

MR. HANS BENARD, student advisor to the Anchorage School Board, said the current deadline for implementation of the graduation exam will shortchange students' learning. An extension is necessary so that revisions can be made to the test, so that bilingual and special education issues can be addressed, and to ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn. It is in the best interest of all Alaskans to ensure the state is testing what it promised to test. A time extension will allow this process to be completed in the most thoughtful and thorough way possible. Not all students are the same, so it is imperative that time be taken to adjust the needs of students with learning disabilities and bilingual education issues. Legal issues are potentially the most critical to the legislature at this time; another reason the deadline should be extended.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN said that one thing that will be difficult to bring about is a total delay of the exam. She asked Mr. Benard if

he could think of any way the exam could be given, people held accountable and the test could be tested. She pointed out the tests are not static.

MR. BENARD said at this time an extension for the graduation requirement could be made but schools could continue to give the test and give students a designation on their diploma if they achieved the current cut score.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN noted that is one of the alternate solutions and some of the issues, such as crafting a test for the learning disabled, will be given to the State Board of Education and Early Development to deal with.

MR. BENARD said that giving the exam will also allow school districts to identify students who need remedial classes.

Number 2204

MS. DEBBIE OSSIANDER, Anchorage School Board Legislative Chair and board member of the State School Board Association, said she has come to recognize the positive discussion she has been monitoring in this committee. She is heartened by the proposal put forth and by committee members' remarks made in response to testimony yesterday. Many school districts believe the emphasis on the standards movement will be very helpful in the long run. It will put the spotlight on a proportion of the student population at the lower to middle end that don't see the spotlight. She felt a broader look at the exams will be helpful and she sees DOEED going in that direction. She appreciates the current discussion on the logistics difficulties that districts will face. The discussion about how to test the special education population needs to continue and will require a broad based approach. She applauds the committee for looking at a layered approach that will offer transitional endorsements. She believes the committee is heading in the right direction.

SENATOR WILKEN asked whether the Anchorage School Board has taken a formal position on the exit exam.

TAPE 01-15, SIDE B

MS. OSSIANDER said the Anchorage School Board has tried to bring to the forefront the particular problems that it is facing, because it believes a variety of solutions are available. The Board felt it was not productive to stake out the answer before it had the full analysis of the problem. The board believes it would have to address some specific problems if the test were given right now and

that would be very, very difficult. The board is generally in favor of a delay and has already offered a specific recommendation for a transition. She noted she spoke on behalf of the Anchorage School Board on all of her comments.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN said she believes the issue for the committee is to keep it simple so that districts are not overwhelmed with too many choices and chores. Some of the items on the back of the proposal do not have to be included in this legislation, even though they are very important. For example, language regarding a transcript requirement is not found in statute. She believes the transcript will become far more important than the diploma.

MS. OSSIANDER commented that the Anchorage School Board has had, over a number of years, discussions with the local chamber of commerce about the value of transcripts. The board believes there will be a general raising of the bar if a high stakes exam is used.

MR. JOHN DAVIS, Bering Straits School District Superintendent, said he is heartened and pleased by Senator Green's proposal. He is concerned that we have started with the premise that American schools are failing significantly. He asked Senator Green to challenge that assumption. This country continues to get measured against countries with political and economic systems that we do not aspire to, in particular Japan. According to the literature and the Japanese news, parents are not particularly pleased with what their children are doing and look to see how they can make their education system more like ours. He hopes we aspire to our own aspirations and continue to challenge them to do better. To that end, he supports the state's efforts to promote standards. He cautioned, however, that standards and assessments are different creatures. He does not support the continued use of the high stakes exam. He thinks it should be dismissed until such time that we know what we want to do and then establish a means of measurement. This approach established a measurement standard that has taken over the discussion to a much greater degree than it should. Consequently, everyone is in a bind. The year 2002 is about to arrive and districts are nervous that too many students may not be successful. The educational system has not changed so dramatically during the last few years that such a large number of students should be designated as failures. He suspects today's children are every bit as smart as adults, and maybe much smarter. There is material on the assessment that children should know and his district will continue to use that information to improve its program. He is concerned that a single standard is being used to measure these individuals. That is not done in any other arena. He is concerned that students be able to join and participate in the community, once they graduate.

Number 2120

MS. JANELLE PRIVETT, Wrangell School Board Chair, stated she believes Alaskan children can do anything that is put before them. The Wrangell district has worked hard; it has been involved in the standards process for a long time. The Wrangell district has longevity of teachers, which is a great benefit. That allows the district to develop educational plans that stay. The district has made a great effort to hire expertise because it is a small district and does not have the training opportunities that larger districts have. She believes Wrangell students are prepared to take the exit exam. She would like to see other districts have the opportunities that Wrangell has had and she believes that the pulling together of educational organizations and communities, such as with the QS2 plan, will bring about excellence in education. Most of the concerns she has heard as a board member are from parents of special education children. Until this point, there has been no discussion about those children. She also expressed concern that Alaska is proud of its diversity, yet bilingual speakers are not recognized in this test. She believes if the bilingual and special education issues are resolved, the state will have the accountability it is looking for. She supports the 2004 date to provide time to work out the details.

Number 1891

SENATOR LEMAN said that somebody is doing something right in Wrangell regarding education. He felt she probably undersells the community's involvement in the students and that families pull together, which account, in part, for the success. He believes that having everyone invested has positive outcomes. He asked her to share that model with other school districts.

MS. PRIVETT said that seniors do a year long project that is community oriented to pay back the community for the time and money spent on education. One student taught a full-year sign language class for a third grade class and the adults in the community. Students also have to raise \$400 for travel but do something that will benefit the community. They may hold a wrestling camp for younger children. The goal of the Wrangell School District was to point out to students the cost and the value of their education. For a time, students were asking for handouts from the community but the board did not want them to grow up learning that is how you pay for things.

SENATOR WILKEN asked Ms. Privett to elaborate on her concern about the language component of the exam.

MS. PRIVETT explained that she would like to make sure that the bilingual concerns are addressed. She pointed out that in Anchorage, 87 languages are spoken, and many dialects are spoken around the state. She questioned whether the test is sensitive to the bias it could create if it is not sensitive to those children's needs.

SENATOR WILKEN asked if she envisions the test being given in a language other than English.

MS. PRIVETT said she can't answer that question. She does not know what it would take to give that child the opportunity to have excellence in education. She believes DOEED has professionals that could answer that question. She pointed out that many of the children in Wrangell have never seen a stoplight before so if one were to appear on a test, the students would be confused.

MS. DEB GERMANO, Chair of the Kenai Peninsula Board of Education, said she appreciates the work that has been done on the legislation up to this point, but she is concerned that the legislation be kept simple. She is concerned about the endorsement piece. The Kenai District has been working on a certified diploma for a long time. She feels the local districts can address that issue more easily. If the school administration has to work on another problem, more time will be taken away from another issue that must be addressed, and that is to make sure that students are meeting the performance standards and able to pass the exit exam. In the Kenai district, many students are pressured to perform. The school administration is doing a good job to get that down and holding school administrators accountable for what is happening. A two year extension would provide time to look at the math portion of the test. The Kenai district is aligning curriculum to the performance standards. Staff development and remediation are big pieces. The special education issue is a big issue that professionals will have to deal with.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN commented that what is perplexing is the range of abilities and the description of "special education." She assumes that 75 to 80 percent of special education students will take the exam with some accommodations but the others could be assessed on whatever their educational goals were. However, that is very difficult to place in statute.

MS. GERMANO said the other piece of that puzzle is that we don't want to set every child up to need an IEP. Ms. Germano said the bottom line is that we need to educate our children and avoid litigation.

Number 1459

MS. DEBBIE EDWARDSON, North Slope Borough School District School Board Member, stated support for the delay of the exit exam. The district would also like to commend the committee for looking seriously at the issues involved. She feels it is really important to separate the goal, which is the standards, from the tool, which is the assessment that everyone agrees has problems. The Class of 2002 is expected to take the exit exam, yet they have not had the advantage of taking a benchmark exam. She supports a delay for that reason. The movement toward an exit exam is a major educational reform, one that has been needed for a long time, but to do that, the system has to be rebuilt from the bottom. The North Slope Borough has aligned its curriculum with the standards but it needs to look at staff development over a 90,000 square mile area with high teacher turnover.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN said when the original exit exam legislation was before the legislature, everyone who voted for that legislation assumed the current curriculum would be the basis for the development of the test, not something that exceeded the normal graduation requirements. The legislature was surprised to find the test had gone over the minimum requirements.

MS. EDWARDSON said in a village school, generalists are teaching secondary subjects so many students do not learn algebra.

CHAIRWOMAN GREEN said the legislature needs to find out how much of that is happening around the state.

MS. EDWARDSON said the issue of equity, between a large village like Barrow and smaller villages, is one that the district has looked at for a long time. The district tried to offer algebra through distance delivery.

SENATOR LEMAN said he does not believe that algebra is higher level math. He does agree that some districts do not teach what is on the exam and he is concerned that students are not being prepared to a level that the Alaska community has decided should be met. He has not seen anything on the exit exam that he would consider to be higher level math.

Number 1115

SENATOR WARD told Ms. Edwardson that this committee was quite surprised that the test contained algebraic questions yet the committee learned that not all districts teach algebra. The

committee asked which districts teach algebra but it cannot get that information.

MS. EDWARDSON said the North Slope district teaches algebra but they have had trouble teaching it in some of the village schools.

SENATOR WARD said that is one of the problems the committee is wrestling with now. He thanked Ms. Edwardson for attending.

There being no further testimony, CHAIRWOMAN GREEN announced the committee would hear a presentation by the Department of Health and Social Services on Fish Safety Monitoring, and it will hear SB 96 and SB 112 on Wednesday. She then adjourned the meeting.