

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

March 11, 2003

11:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Carl Gatto, Chair
Representative Paul Seaton, Vice Chair
Representative John Coghill
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Kelly Wolf
Representative Les Gara
Representative Mary Kapsner

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 154

"An Act relating to admission to and advancement in public schools of children under school age; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 165

"An Act relating to community schools; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 171

"An Act repealing the charter school grant program; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 174

"An Act relating to the state centralized correspondence study program, to funding for educational programs that occur primarily outside school facilities, and to the duties of school boards of borough and city school districts and regional educational attendance areas; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS ACTION

BILL: HB 154

SHORT TITLE: UNDER SCHOOL AGE STUDENTS

SPONSOR(S): RLS BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page		Action
03/05/03	0421	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/05/03	0421	(H)	EDU, HES, FIN
03/05/03	0422	(H)	FN1: (EED)
03/05/03	0422	(H)	GOVERNOR'S TRANSMITTAL LETTER
03/11/03		(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 124

BILL: HB 165

SHORT TITLE: COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

SPONSOR(S): RLS BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page		Action
03/05/03	0437	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/05/03	0437	(H)	EDU, HES, FIN
03/05/03	0437	(H)	FN1: (EED)
03/05/03	0437	(H)	GOVERNOR'S TRANSMITTAL LETTER
03/11/03		(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 124

BILL: HB 171

SHORT TITLE: REPEAL CHARTER SCHOOL GRANTS

SPONSOR(S): RLS BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page		Action
03/05/03	0445	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/05/03	0445	(H)	EDU, HES, FIN
03/05/03	0445	(H)	FN1: (EED)
03/05/03	0445	(H)	GOVERNOR'S TRANSMITTAL LETTER
03/11/03		(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 124

BILL: HB 174

SHORT TITLE: CORRESPONDENCE STUDY

SPONSOR(S): RLS BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page		Action
03/05/03	0449	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME -

			REFERRALS
03/05/03	0449	(H)	EDU, HES, FIN
03/05/03	0449	(H)	FN1: (EED)
03/05/03	0449	(H)	GOVERNOR'S TRANSMITTAL LETTER
03/10/03	0496	(H)	FN2: (EED)
03/11/03		(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 124

WITNESS REGISTER

EDDY JEANS, Manager
 School Finance and Facilities Section
 Education support Services
 Department of Education and Early Development
 Juneau, Alaska
 POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 154, HB 165, HB 171, and HB 174 responded to questions from the committee.

KEVIN SWEENEY, Special Assistant
 Office of the Commissioner
 Department of Education and Early Development
 Juneau, Alaska
 POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 154 and responded to questions from the committee.

JOYCE KITKA
 Alaska Association for Community Education
 Juneau, Alaska
 POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 165 and answered questions from the committee.

CONNIE MUNROE
 Juneau, Alaska
 POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 165 and answered questions from the committee.

CARL ROSE, Executive Director
 Association of Alaska School Boards
 Juneau, Alaska
 POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 165.

REBECCA REICHLIN, President
 Alaska Association for Community Education
 Anchorage School District Coordinator
 Anchorage, Alaska
 POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition to the repeal of the community schools grant program in HB 165.

PETER MACKSEY, Coordinator of Community Schools
Inlet View Elementary School
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 165.

BLYTHE CAMPBELL, Chair
Anchorage Community Education Association
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 165.

LARRY WIGET, Executive Director
Public Affairs Division
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 165.

BARBARA HAYR, Coordinator
Bear Valley Elementary School
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 165.

JULIE WILD-CURRY, Community After School Program Director
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 165 and answered questions from the committee.

ROSE MARY REEDER
Kenai Peninsula School District
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 165.

DEANNA PATZ
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

HAYLIE RUDELLE
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 174 and answered questions from the committee.

JOHN PADEN, Counselor

Alyeska Central School;
Representative, Alyeska Central School Association
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 03-9, SIDE A
Number 0001

CHAIR CARL GATTO called the House Special Committee on Education meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. Representatives Gatto, Seaton, Wilson, Wolf, and Coghill were present at the call to order. Representatives Kapsner and Gara arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 154-UNDER SCHOOL AGE STUDENTS

CHAIR GATTO announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 154, "An Act relating to admission to and advancement in public schools of children under school age; and providing for an effective date."

Number 0365

EDDY JEANS, Manager, School Finance and Facilities Section, Education Support Services, Department of Education and Early Development, testified in favor of HB 154 and provided background information about the bill. He said under AS 14.03.080(c), a school district may enroll a child under school age if the child meets the mental, physical, and emotional capacity to perform satisfactorily within the educational program being offered. But the "education program" is not defined anywhere, so it has very broad meaning, and the department has found that over the years a number of school districts have developed what some call a two-year kindergarten program.

Number 0449

MR. JEANS said the foundation funding formula does not provide for preschool programs. This statute's purpose is to allow those students that are under school age, but ready to begin kindergarten at four years old, to enroll early. A problem occurred when the practice of allowing [all] four-year-olds blanketed across some communities to enroll in public school to generate an additional year's funding by implementing a two-year

kindergarten program. He pointed out that under this section of law it provides for a child under school age to be admitted into the public schools in the school district of which the child is a resident, at the discretion of the governing body. The department has taken the position that it means only school districts in which these children reside can enroll these children under age. In other words, the statewide correspondence programs that many school districts offer right now are not allowed, under the department's interpretation, to enroll these four-year-olds early. Mr. Jeans told the committee the reason the department interprets the statute that way is due to the fact that there is another provision under subsection (e) that says a child under school age shall be admitted to the school in the district in which the child is a resident if immediately before the child became a resident of the district the child was legally enrolled in a public school of another district or state.

Number 0615

MR. JEANS gave an example where a parent wants to enroll his/her four-year-old in the Juneau School District and is told the child is not ready. So the parent could enroll the child in a statewide correspondence program, then withdraw the child from the program, and then the Juneau School District would be required to accept that child early. Mr. Jeans said the department believes this provision was intended to allow for that exceptional child to enroll in the community school in which the child resides. That is the way the department would intend to enforce this statute if this provision is passed.

Number 0664

MR. JEANS pointed out that the fiscal note provided shows savings to the state foundation program would be approximately \$3.9 million. He told the committee there is a chart showing the savings by school district.

Number 0715

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked if there have been any studies done to see how many four-year-olds will be left without any affordable preschooling.

MR. JEANS responded that his office has not researched that question.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA told the committee that is information he would like to have before considering the bill.

CHAIR GATTO asked if Representative Gara wants to know the impact on these children.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA responded that is correct. He said if there are cuts, he would like to know what the impact is on the children who are being cut. He said he is in favor of efficiencies without harming children's educational prospects.

Number 0786

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if a parent whose income is above the income eligibility standard may buy into the Head Start Program and thereby, provide for participation in a preschool program like Head Start.

MR. JEANS replied that he does not know if families can buy into the Head Start Program. He told the committee the purpose of this bill is to clarify the language in this statute that this not intended to implement a two-year kindergarten program across the state. He said some school districts, not all districts, are enrolling four-year-olds as a normal practice. The department believes that if some districts are allowed to enroll four-year-olds as a normal practice in the foundation program, then the department needs to allow all districts to do that. The department's estimated cost in funding a two-year kindergarten program through the foundation program is approximately \$60 million.

MR. JEANS pointed out that the other piece of this equations is that once the state funds children under the foundation program, those students are then eligible for space in facilities under the state's space guidelines for school construction. So there will also be an increase in the need to build larger facilities in communities.

Number 0929

REPRESENTATIVE COGHILL clarified that Head Start is a totally different program and not included in the school funding formula.

MR. JEANS replied that he is correct. He said that some Head Start programs are housed in school facilities around the state.

Number 0951

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER told the committee one portion of the Kuspuk School District, which she represents, allows four-year-olds to be enrolled in school. Part of the reason the district does this is due to the fact that only part of their district has access to the Head Start Program. She told the committee that she found, in talking with the superintendent of schools, that many of the students do not come to kindergarten ready to learn. They come with gaps in oral language and lacking exposure to print-rich environments. Representative Kapsner said that most of the students, with the exception of the IEP [individual education program] students, are not funded through the foundation formula. She asked Mr. Jeans what his reaction would be to this information.

MR. JEANS replied that the department understands the problems school districts are having with children ready to learn in kindergarten. He said what this bill addresses is the policy question of whether the legislature wants to fund four-year-olds in the kindergarten-through-12th-grade [K-12] program. It is a very straightforward question. If the department allows some districts to do it, then the department must allow all districts to do it. He said this would not have been an issue ten years ago, when most school districts were operating close to or at capacity. But with the flat enrollment in the last couple of years and declining enrollment in prior years, he said the districts have space available. Mr. Jeans told the committee that the department is asking for clarity on whether or not the legislature wants to fund four-year-olds through the foundation program.

Number 1085

CHAIR GATTO commented that there is a certain quantity of funds devoted to K-12 education, and whatever the legislature does comes out of that funding. If funds are taken from one area, they are removed from somewhere else. He said wants and needs are very different things and something the committee should keep in mind. He pointed out that the amount of money available to education is not growing. He said the state is looking for efficiencies somewhere. The idea of starting kids early would be wonderful, if the state could afford it. Chair Gatto commented that he believes this is a "want," but not a "need."

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON noted that the chart shows one school district is getting \$871,000 more because of an extra

kindergarten program. She pointed out that the schools in her district are not receiving this extra money. She said she agrees with Chair Gatto that this is a "want" and not a "need." She asked Mr. Jeans if this is just a way for the schools to get more money.

MR. JEANS responded that he believes all school districts would tell the committee that they have the need to educate children at four years old, but, as pointed out, there are some districts that are simply enrolling all four-year-olds and claiming them for funding. This legislation is not intended to block the exceptional child from getting into school early. The department's purpose is to make it clear in statute that this is intended for exceptional children, and not a plan to enroll all four-year-olds, as is being done in some districts.

Number 1283

CHAIR GATTO asked, if the funding were eliminated and there were four-year-olds a district wanted to enroll in this program, whether it would be possible to do that without state funding.

MR. JEANS reiterated that the exceptional child should be able to enroll and should be allowed state funding. He said the department's expectation would be that the child would be advanced to the next grade level in the subsequent year, not remain in kindergarten for two years. He pointed out that there are not two years of first grade or second grade. Children advance and children are held back. That is the norm, not an entire population for one additional year for funding purposes.

REPRESENTATIVE WOLF shared his personal experience concerning early enrollment, saying that he and his wife could have enrolled their daughter at four years old, but his wife did not think it was appropriate. They put her in an early development school on the Kenai Peninsula and paid for it themselves. He said he will support this legislation.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked where four-years-olds [those who do not have access to Head Start] will go if the rug is pulled out from underneath them. What will the department do to help them? He said that studies show that four-year-olds benefit from a learning environment. It might be cheaper to enroll kids in Head Start, but the state only funds roughly 20 percent of Head Start needs. Representative Gara asked how the state is making education better rather than worse with this bill.

Number 1529

KEVIN SWEENEY, Special Assistant, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, responded that the commissioner would agree that education would be better if the legislature funded all four-year-olds. In some districts it has shown that bringing kids in at four years old has helped them progress. However, the fundamental question becomes whether the state feels that is something that should be funded through the foundation formula. Maybe something the committee should discuss is funding this program outside of the foundation formula. He said the question remains, now that some districts are doing this through the foundation program, of whether the legislature is willing to accept the increased cost in offering this to all four-year-olds in all districts.

MR. SWEENEY repeated Mr. Jeans' statement that if the state is going to pay for this through the foundation program, the legislature is looking at an additional cost of \$50 million to \$60 million. If the state has to use the same amount of money, the only way to do that would be to reduce funding to other students. That is the question.

Number 1605

REPRESENTATIVE GARA responded that he is talking about \$3.9 million for this coming year. He asked if Mr. Sweeney thought it would be the responsible thing to provide educational or Head Start services for the children already enrolled, rather than going forward with a proposal that just leaves these children with no educational services. He asked if this should not be a comprehensive approach.

Number 1634

MR. SWEENEY replied that it probably is something the state needs to look at with respect to the four-year-olds who will no longer be enrolled in this program. He said this issue should be dealt with separately. As more parents realize that this program is possible, they will be asking their school boards and school districts to provide the same program to their children. With space available in some schools, the districts will be taking advantage of it, and [the state is] looking at a large amount of money. He told the committee the department believes this section of the statute was never intended to be funded in this way. He said the committee needs to decide whether they want to expand the formula to include four-year-olds. Mr.

Sweeney said he could look at ways to help four-year-olds who will no longer be able to receive the educational opportunities available to them through the state.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO commented that school districts will look at this as a golden opportunity to increase funding. He said these are very young children and the parents bear some responsibility to work with the children before they get to kindergarten. He said he does not see anyone who can work with children better than the children's parents. In a way, he believes that it probably is not a good idea to have children enroll in two years of kindergarten.

Number 1767

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if all these children are four-year-olds or if some of them are three-year-olds.

MR. SWEENEY replied that he does not know if a district could then start a three-year program and is unaware of that being prohibited.

MR. JEANS replied that there are some three-year-olds included in those numbers, but for the most part it is four-year-olds. He pointed out that the state does provide funding for three- and four-year-olds that are special education students on IEP [individual education plan]. The department allows districts to claim those students once the student is identified for state funding. This is a block of four-year-olds getting a 13th [14th] year of funding in the public school system.

MR. SWEENEY told the committee that the department does not believe what the districts are doing is necessarily a bad thing. Their efforts are good. He said the administration's intention in putting this bill forward is not to prevent school districts from helping their students to the best of their ability, but to clarify this section of statute, because [the department] thinks what is occurring was never the intent of the statute.

Number 1902

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER told the committee that she believes schools should be doing more at a younger age. As a working mother with a four-year-old son, she has found, for instance, that in Bethel there is a preschool called the Little Red School House. It is expensive and requires parents to do a lot of volunteer work there to have a child attend. Her son could go

only six hours per week and he was begging to go; he wanted to learn. She said she believes the focus should be to cultivate ways to teach kids while they are still eager to learn. After a certain age they are not eager to learn. The state has put in a lot of regulations for childcare providers, and it has actually decreased the availability of day care providers by 30 percent across the state. She expressed concern about hamstringing parents. Representative Kapsner said she reads to her son every night and she believes in teaching him his numbers and alphabet. She said she does not see anything wrong with spending the \$50 million or \$60 million to get kids who are eager to learn in school and in a learning environment.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked Representative Kapsner where she would want to see the \$60 million come from.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER replied that she does not adhere to the idea that the money needs to be taken from somewhere else. She said she believes [the legislature] should increase education funding and look for other revenue sources.

Number 2060

REPRESENTATIVE GARA said no one seems concerned about the \$3.9 million for four-year-olds, and asked where the great concern is coming from. He pointed out that this statute has been in effect since 1987.

MR. JEANS responded that he gets telephone calls from school districts all the time asking specifically about this issue. The districts want to know if they can enroll four-year-olds and receive state funding. He told the committee his answer to them is that the state does not fund preschools. Mr. Jeans said the superintendents have an association and they talk with each other about these kinds of issues. He told the committee there are already a couple of school districts that were not on this list a year ago. This issue really came to the department's attention when the department asked for student-level data where the department takes a look at whether a child is eligible to receive state funding based on his/her school age. It is a question of equity. If the state allows some districts to do it, then all districts should be allowed to do it.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA replied that according to the chart, most school districts are already doing this, so in 15 years all the department has come up with is \$3.9 million worth of programs under this provision, and more than half the school districts

are already doing this. Representative Gara asked where the fear is coming from that it is going to be \$60 million next year.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO announced that HB 154 will be held and heard again at the next meeting of the House Special Committee on Education.

HB 165-COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Number 2218

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 165, "An Act relating to community schools; and providing for an effective date."

Number 2251

EDDY JEANS, Manager, School Finance and Facilities Section, Education Support Services, Department of Education and Early Development, testified on HB 165, which would repeal the community schools program outlined in Alaska Statute 14.36.010 through 14.36.070. Mr. Jeans told the committee the community schools statute was adopted in 1975, and the purpose and intent of this program was to assist local school districts in establishing community schools programs and to provide funds to assist the local communities in the initial development, implementation, and operations of community schools programs. Mr. Jeans asked the committee to review the fiscal note, which shows a \$500,000 reduction; however, the schedule attached to that fiscal note demonstrates that if the community schools program were fully funded at the statutory entitlement, it would generate almost \$3.3 million. He told the committee the program has been substantially underfunded for a number of years. He said the \$500,000 represents 12 percent of the school districts' entitlements, and the department believes, based on the intent language in the statute, that this program has fulfilled its intended purpose. The Department of Education and Early Development and the administration recommend that this statute be repealed.

Number 2336

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO said that for the record the repealing of this statute does not eliminate community schools. It just eliminates a portion of the funding that may be substantial to

some communities because they have become accustomed to state funding.

Number 2370

REPRESENTATIVE WOLF asked Mr. Jeans to confirm that repealing this statute would in no way deter communities from having community schools programs. For example, he asked if Kenai community schools could charge a user fee to fill the gap in loss of state funding.

MR. JEANS responded that Representative Wolf is correct. He told the committee that districts have put in place user fees to keep those schools open for after-school and weekend activities. He restated that the language could be repealed and community schools programs could continue with user-fee funding.

Number 2460

JOYCE KITKA, Alaska Association for Community Education, testified in opposition to HB 165. She told the committee she has been in the field for 23 years and agrees with Mr. Jeans that community schools has been underfunded for many years. She said the law was passed in 1978, and the initial funding for the community schools program was obtained in 1980. Ms. Kitka said that even though community schools [programs are] underfunded, services have still been provided and there has been fiscal responsibility for these years.

Number 2542

MS. KITKA challenged the committee to find a program for \$500,000 that logs in the number of hours this does, and 20,000 programs that serve children and adults. She told the committee community schools are responsible for many programs that help kids. They are ready to help the education system in meeting the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

MS. KITKA said community schools have already implemented fees to help administer the programs. She is concerned that increasing the fees too much will mean that the Head Start parents or the low-income parents will not be able to stay involved in programs because of the cost.

Number 2624

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked what portion of community schools funding goes to children's programs and what portion to individuals over 18 years old.

MS. KITKA responded that most of the adult programs actually subsidize the children's programs. She said locally, adult classes are a 60/40 split, with the instructor getting 60 percent, and community schools getting 40 percent. With that 40 percent she told the committee she opens the gym for approximately 150 kids, and is able to provide scholarships for kids to go to summer school. She told the committee she could not speak to the statewide programs.

Number 2658

REPRESENTATIVE WOLF asked how Ms. Kitka would propose the legislature find the dollars to fund community schools. He said the legislature has one source of funding. He asked if the community schools program is a nonprofit organization. He said he does not question the value of community schools, but wonders if there is a possibility to reach out to the corporate world.

MS. KITKA responded that she believes community schools have reached out to the corporate world. She told the committee the program has been creative in ways of funding programs. She said community schools do have a lot of business partnerships and she is always amazed at the return from the community. She said her personal preference for funding community schools would be to take her permanent fund dividend.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO praised Ms. Kitka for her dedicated work and told her how much it is appreciated.

Number 2815

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER praised Ms. Kitka as well. She said she believes Ms. Kitka was asked an unfair question because she did not run for office; that is what the members were elected to do.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER asked Chair Gatto how this is not the elimination of the community schools program. She said that since the program costs \$500,000 and [the bill is] eliminating \$500,000, that would eliminate the funding for the program. She asked how this is only cutting a portion.

MR. JEANS responded that the bill eliminates the program from the statutes. He said all communities are running some form of

community schools program. He told the committee he will provide the committee with a list of the total amount of money that is being spent on community schools; then the committee could look at that compared with what the state is contributing at the \$500,000 level. Mr. Jeans asked the committee to look at the statute and note that the intent of the statute was to assist communities in the establishment of the community school programs. Nowhere in the statute is there an intention to support on an ongoing basis community schools programs, and that is why the department and the administration have come to the legislature with this proposal. Community schools programs are operating across the state through user fees, small subsidies from the state, and private corporations.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO pointed out that the state does do a lot for community schools by providing the schools, heat, lights, and custodians, just not the funds. He said he believes the state is providing a good service by allowing communities to use the schools.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked Mr. Jeans what the impact will be on community schools if the \$500,000 is cut.

Number 2938

MR. JEANS responded that when he provides the committee with the schedule that shows how much money the districts are spending on community schools on a statewide basis, the members will be able to determine that. He told the members that the department has not done a formal study on the impact on each community if the state removes the \$500,000 contribution, nor does the department intend to do that. Mr. Jeans said he thinks when the members look at the \$500,000 in relationship to the total amount being spent on community schools, he believes the members will be able to draw their own conclusions.

TAPE 03-9, SIDE B

Number 2984

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON told the committee that he spoke with the superintendent of schools in the Kenai Peninsula School District and he was told that Kenai is the fourth-highest-funded school district. He said his district gets approximately \$32,000 per year. The total the district is spending on community schools is \$220,000 per year. Eliminating that \$32,000 would require

raising some fees, changing some programs, but it would not eliminate the community schools program.

Number 2920

CONNIE MUNROE told the committee she is a volunteer for community schools, retired from the Department of Education and Early Development, where she was in charge of this program, and received her master's degree in adult community education through APU [Alaska Pacific University]. Ms. Munroe said that while she is from Juneau, she is currently living in Healy, and it is her first experience in living in Interior Alaska where there is a very small school.

Number 2871

MS. MUNROE said that every single school district in the state applies for these funds to allow and encourage it to provide lifelong learning. Every dollar is spent providing the program to the communities. She said if the legislature eliminates that funding, then the communities will not pay someone to do it. It is really difficult to get someone to come into the school and open it, because that individual must be bonded. That is one issue. Another one is that the Department of Education and Early Development has made a very strong effort to reduce the paperwork to apply for this grant. She told the committee she has monitored and reviewed this program across the state.

MS. MUNROE spoke to the question of eliminating adult education and GED [general equivalency diploma] testing. She said it is usually the principal of the school who volunteers to be the GED proctor. She said that the librarian volunteers to keep the library open two evenings per week or on Saturdays for people to come into the school and study. Ms. Munroe said she will be doing some testing for Nenana, Anderson, Healy, and the park service area. She said the adult education program will be using community schools and does not have to pay a fee. In urban areas the fees are a problem. There is no way to persuade someone to volunteer to go to the corporate entities to get funds. It takes a lot of effort to get funds donated.

Number 2746

MS. MUNROE also spoke to the issue of a time of need for a homeland security type of public forum. One of the questions in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau was where the public would go if there were a war disaster in Alaska and there were no

utilities. The response was that the community would go to the schools. The question was who would monitor the schools and who would keep people busy if they were stuck in the schools two or three days, or even a week. Every community school will probably have someone who could take care of them and keep the kids busy. She told the committee she feels community education and community schools are essential.

Number 2692

CHAIR GATTO commented that because of his work with the fire department, he knows that the schools are designed and built to withstand earthquakes and other disasters. Schools and fire departments will still be standing when other buildings have fallen. The schools are designed to be there for the communities in the event of a disaster, and that is part of the reason why the state spends so much money in building them. He pointed out that in the Miller's Reach fire it was Houston High School that was the place where all of the incident command took place. Chair Gatto agreed with Ms. Munroe that the schools are there for the community.

Number 2637

MS. MUNROE told the committee that user fees are not charged for activities that do not charge participants. She said that the athletic programs charge, but for small children to do gymnastics or reading, there is no charge. Other groups and activities that are not charged for use of the building are adult basic education, private and nonprofit organizations, cooperative extension programs, or church groups that do activities. She added that if a fee is charged, the funds are for materials or support of a private or nonprofit organization that does not have money.

Number 2592

REPRESENTATIVE GARA thanked Ms. Munroe and Ms. Kitka for providing good arguments in opposition to cutting funds for adult services.

Number 2563

CARL ROSE, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards, testified in opposition to HB 165 because he sees the importance of community schools. He told the committee community schools is just a small piece of the peripheral issues

the state is dealing with in education. He said he is aware of the fact that all the funds come out of one source and whatever is reduced eventually is going to be addressed with the foundation formula. He said the association is supportive of community schools because the community is central to the schools and whatever will engage communities is what the association wants to encourage. In response to previous inquiries concerning how community schools will be funded if these dollars are reduced, he said he believe they will be picked up in other ways. The question is how far can you stretch that educational dollar. This is one of those peripheral issues and the state will be dealing with many more in the future.

Number 2515

CHAIR GATTO pointed out that the House Special Committee on Education is not the place to deal with how to enhance revenues. He commented that everyone wishes there were more funds, but the committee is faced with the task of dealing with the governor's bills to do something about the fiscal problems. Education is a huge portion of the state's budget. Chair Gatto reiterated that the legislature is just trying to deal with the governor's requests.

Number 2426

REBECCA REICHLIN, President, Alaska Association for Community Education; Anchorage School District Coordinator, testified via teleconference in opposition to the repeal of the community schools grant program in HB 165. She urged the committee to support the current level of funding at \$500,000. She said for the past 27 years community education has extended its reach to every school district in the state. She said that while on the surface it may seem that community schools' primary purpose is to provide access to school facilities beyond the school day, community schools' goals are far more extensive. She said they provide programming for extended learning for all ages, community development and a vehicle for community engagement, enrichment opportunities for school-age children, interagency cooperation, and opportunities for youth beyond the regular K-12 programs. In addition, community schools are providing more programs to meet the benchmarks and standards that the legislature has established in the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Number 2351

MS. REICHLIN explained that lifelong learning has many benefits. Research shows that a family of learners produces children who love to learn. Community involvement produces citizens who care and are active contributing members of society. Community schools are in the business of educating and providing services. The funding has been cut to \$500,000, but the money has been well spent. In the 2002 school year, over 20,150 programs were held, producing over 342,000 contact hours; over 20,000 volunteers contributed over 211,000 volunteer hours to the benefit of over 464,000 youths and 390,000 adults all engaged in learning. Alaska Gateway School District offered technology, tutoring, and GED and college preparation work for \$3,683 in grant funding. In order to provide these services, the district leverages the current state funding and matched it with in-kind donations, and business and nonprofit collaborations and partnerships. She asked members to please not dismantle these successful and far-reaching programs. She urged the committee to utilize community schools to achieve the state's goals; to provide safe, supervised places for Alaska's youth to be involved, and to involve local citizens and empower them for the good of Alaska's communities.

Number 2231

PETER MACKSEY, Community Schools Coordinator, Inlet View Elementary School, testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 165. He pointed out that there are approximately 600,000 residents in Alaska and that the legislature gives community schools approximately \$500,000, which works out to be about 84 cents per person. Anchorage gets between about \$145,000 and \$150,000, which works out to be about 53 cents per person. He said he knows Rebecca [Reichlin] told the committee about the quality and quantity of volunteer hours. He indicated that Anchorage already matches hour per hour and beyond what the legislature is doing for community schools.

MR. MACKSEY responded to Representative Gara's question about adult education. He said the evening adult-education classes are subsidizing all the children's classes that community schools are doing. He said community schools give back \$65,000 to the Anchorage School District out of the money raised. At Inlet View Elementary School, the community schools program subsidizes two other schools' after-school children's programs that are provided free of charge. He told the committee they are getting the most bang for their buck out of this money. In some places outside of Anchorage, this money is all that is

keeping an after-school program or gym open for kids to play basketball. He told the committee he reads the statute to say "operate" schools and not to say anything about stopping or just getting them started.

Number 2105

BLYTHE CAMPBELL, Chair, Anchorage Community Education Association, testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 165. She told the committee she has been involved with the community schools program since 1985. She said that HB 165 repeals the statute enabling state funding and pointed out that this funding is not a mandate in the district. She said eliminating this statute is not eliminating an obligation; there is no obligation. She said what it does do for her and the other 20,000 volunteers is to say that the legislature does not value this program and the state does not value this program. She said the association does not think the program needs to be described in the state statute. She said she does not think this bill is necessary. The budget process is totally separate from this bill. All this bill does is repeal language that community schools exist and she said she does not understand the reason for that.

Number 2037

LARRY WIGET, Executive Director, Public Affairs Division, Anchorage School District, testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 165. He said the Anchorage School District does not support eliminating community schools from statute or eliminating community schools funding as proposed in the governor's budget. For 27 years the Municipality of Anchorage has been strengthened through strong community outreach by community schools. The Anchorage School District has appreciated stronger support by community members in the educational efforts, programs, and services that are committed to providing for students, parents, and staff. Mr. Wiget told the committee the district is continually striving through community schools programs to more closely align its community schools offerings to assist the students in meeting the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act and the benchmark exams. The Anchorage School District does not support eliminating community schools from statute or eliminating its funding.

Number 1968

BARBARA HAYR, Coordinator, Bear Valley Elementary School, testified via teleconference as a long-time supporter of community schools. She shared with the committee that a community schools program she works with lost its funding a couple of years ago and they hung on. She said the funding was restored this year, but if it had not been, there would be no community schools program. She told the committee that with the funding they have instituted tutoring programs in reading and math, and have addressed the need for a school-age childcare program. She said Bear Valley has between 40 to 50 families who need childcare, and the community schools program is prepared to institute a before- and after-school childcare program next year. Community schools has been asked to help meet the needs of meeting the benchmark standards and No Child Left Behind; that includes both children and parents, and is for the whole group. State funding does not fund the program entirely, but it allows her, as a coordinator, to work on other fundraising efforts to establish partnerships and to seek out grants and donations from private businesses. She asked the committee to keep community schools in the statutes and to continue funding the programs.

CHAIR GATTO thanked Ms. Hayr and told her that all their efforts are appreciated.

Number 1855

JULIE WILD-CURRY, Community After School Program Director, Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 165. She told the committee that many of the points she would make have been touched on by previous speakers. She told the committee that the school district has been successful in leveraging "one to nine" funding in terms of bringing other funding in. They charge user fees, serve both students and adults, and work to assist in meeting benchmarks. Community schools help families in learning different ways to take tests, to read, and to study. Community schools also provides enrichment and a safe place for kids to be both after school and in the evening hours.

MS. WILD-CURRY told the committee if this funding were to go away along with the law, this program would not be available with the school district. There would not be a staffing position that coordinates all of these different events that take place in Fairbanks. Over 9,000 people were served in this program last year. For a community the size of Fairbanks, that is a great number of people. The one special program that is

offered in the community schools program in Fairbanks that is offered nowhere else in the state is a driver education program for teen drivers. Other communities are looking at this model. This is a class that used to be in the day program, but when it was eliminated from state funding, it was taken over in community schools because it was a definite need in the community with the driving conditions here. Community schools continues to operate that program and fees are charged for it; however, this grant helps subsidize those fees, and if the funding were not provided, the program would have the charge substantially higher rates. She urged the committee not to pass this bill.

Number 1747

CHAIR GATTO asked if the program would disappear if community schools lost this funding.

MS. WILD-CURRY replied that it would likely disappear. Community schools also provide an opportunities for community members, agencies, and businesses to partner to see how they can offer what is needed in the community. Through all of these processes, community schools have lost a great deal of funding, and each time they community has helped fund a larger portion of it by increased user fees, donation, or fundraisers. She questioned how far community schools can go in asking for this leverage for these programs.

CHAIR GATTO replied that if the legislature makes this reduction, it will be the last one made.

Number 1654

ROSE MARY REEDER, Kenai Peninsula School District, testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 165. She told members that she supports the current level of funding. At this time, the Kenai Peninsula School District gets a little over \$32,000 per year, which is spread over three sites, Soldotna, Homer, and Seward. She said they consider this basic funding, charge user fees, apply for grants, and do fundraising activities. This small amount of money the Peninsula gets is a representation of [the legislature's] support [for the program]. When applying for grants or asking corporations for donations it is important to show some kind of local and state support, and this funding has been very helpful.

MS. REEDER said all three sites have no overhead. [The program] works out of the schools and other municipal buildings, and that saves a lot of money. She said [the community schools program] usually has one staff person, some short-time people, and lots of volunteers. There is an effort to keep the school buildings open in the evenings, the weekends, and in the summertime, when those buildings would sit vacant. She told the committee Ms. Kitka's comment about the adult programs funding kids programs is very true in their case. For example, she said there are basketball programs two nights per week in the middle school for gentlemen; the \$4 that each one pays provides for community school activities for the Soldotna Middle School PE [physical education] program during the day and community schools activities for kids on the weekends.

Number 1564

MS. REEDER said that [the community schools program] reaches out to the community, and applies for grants. She said she has written four small grant proposals in the last month that are pending for summer programs. She said they try to keep the school open as often as possible, when they would normally be closed, and in many instances that is up to 18 hours per day [counting the school day]. Ms. Reeder said that they have an excellent working relationship with the school district and combine resources, which provides leverage to do so much more than would normally be possible. The community schools program provides cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities for all ages. Classes are even offered on the legislative process, which is very well attended.

MS. REEDER, in response to the question of impacts of the reduction of funds in the Soldotna community schools program, said their program has already done all those things recommended to raised funds. Some of the changes they have made to adjust to the reduction in funding are raising fees, closing the school one night per week, and eliminating programs. One of those programs was a craft program for families; they used to do three per year and now do two because the money for supplies is short. Those are the kind of impacts seen as the funds diminish. She told the committee that [the community schools program] has appreciated the legislature's support in the past and hopes it can count on it in the future.

Number 1468

CHAIR GATTO announced that that concludes the testimony for HB 165.

The committee took an at-ease from 12:17 p.m. to 12:25 p.m.

Number 1419

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked Mr. Jeans if, by repealing the statute on HB 165, communities lose some authority for facility use, insurance, or any other aspect of community schools activities. He asked about the alternative of not funding the grants, but leaving community schools in statute.

Number 1350

MR. JEANS replied as that as far as he knows, there is no loss in ability to use those facilities for community school purposes. The community schools program will continue to be operated by the school districts for after-school activities.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if there is somewhere else in statute that authorizes that use or if this is the only statutory authority for community schools.

MR. JEANS responded that this part of the statute authorizes use for this specific purpose, but there is not a statute that says a school district cannot use its facilities for after-school activities. He said there is no prohibition for this use in statutes. [HB 165 was held over.]

HB 171-REPEAL CHARTER SCHOOL GRANTS

Number 1335

CHAIR GATTO announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 171, "An Act repealing the charter school grant program; and providing for an effective date."

Number 1323

EDDY JEANS, Manager, School Finance and Facilities Section, Education Support Services, Department of Education and Early Development, testified in support of HB 171 and provided background information about the bill. He told the committee HB 171 would repeal the state grant program that was implemented in fiscal year 2002 (FY 02) that allocates \$500 per ADM [average daily membership] to each new charter school. The funding was

intended to supplement the startup grants for charter schools. The state Department of Education and Early Development is working very closely with the U.S. Department of Education to increase the level of startup grants through the federal program, thereby, eliminating the need for the state supplemental program.

MR. JEANS said the state would allocate to new charter schools \$150,000 per year for the first three years, and \$45,000 in the fourth year, for a total of \$495,000 in startup funds through the federal program. He pointed out that this legislation would not take effect until July 1, 2004. The reason is that in the current year's budget there is a request for \$158,400. That is the additional money that is due to the existing charter schools under this state program; [the department is] recommending that be funded in the current year's budget, and that this section of statute be repealed in the subsequent year. The state would then rely 100 percent on the federal grants. Mr. Jeans pointed out that the startup grants for the charter schools that exist right now range from approximately \$160,000 to \$180,000, and that is why there was a need for additional funding under the state program.

Number 1198

CHAIR GATTO asked, if a charter school is in the process of forming right now and its goal is to get started prior to the deadline and get full funding, whether it will be able to do that before the effective date without finding some obstacles.

Number 1157

MR. JEANS replied that the Department of Education and Early Development currently has four new charter schools on its agenda for the state school board next week. It is the department's intent that those new schools would be funded under the new federal program, not under the current state program.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked what the difference is in funding between the new program, using federal dollars, versus the old program, using state general fund dollars.

MR. JEANS replied that under the old program the state allocated \$160,000 to \$180,000 of federal startup grants to charter schools. In addition, the charter schools could apply for a state startup grant that was equal to \$500 per student. Obviously, the state allocation varied, depending on the number

of students enrolled. What these charter schools were allocated under the federal program was reviewed, and the allocation under the state program was added. It was found that the largest single allocation was to the Family Partnership Charter School out of Anchorage, which generated between the two programs \$478,000. What the department is suggesting is that with the new authorization under the federal program, the department would be able to fund any new charter school at \$495,000 in startup funds.

Number 1072

CHAIR GATTO announced as a point of information for the 30 individuals waiting on line to testify on HB 174 that the time is already 12:30 p.m. and the meeting will end at 1 p.m. He said everyone is welcome to continue to listen and to give testimony; however, it is unlikely that everyone will have time to testify today.

Number 1019

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked Mr. Jeans about just amending the law to say that if adequate federal funding is available, then the \$500 state appropriation will not be available, but leaving the law on the books for those schools and instances where federal funding will not be adequate. He asked why the legislature should repeal the law.

MR. JEANS replied that the law was adopted to supplement the level the state was funding school districts under the federal program. The department has been working very closely with the Director of Charter Schools at the U.S. Department of Education, Dean Kern, and has forwarded this proposal to him. Mr. Kerns supports [the department's] proposal at the level of \$150,000 per year for the first three years, plus \$45,000 in the fourth year, and with that support the administration does not see the need to leave the state statute on the books.

Number 0921

REPRESENTATIVE GARA said he is concerned that while startup money will be available for the next few years, there is no guarantee it will be available in the future. He asked Mr. Jeans: Why not leave this program in place that allows state money to be used in those instances when there is not enough federal money? Why not come up with a state formula that allows

state money to kick in when there is not enough federal funding available?

MR. JEANS responded that the legislature could amend the statute to say that if a charter school did not receive \$450,000 in federal funds that the school would qualify for an additional state grant. That is an option the legislature will have to decide. The Department of Education and Early Development believes that through the federal program there will be more resources available for startup funds than are currently available under the old federal program in combination with the state's startup grants.

Number 0820

CHAIR GATTO announced that testimony is closed on HB 171. [HB 171 was held over.]

HB 174- CORRESPONDENCE STUDY

CHAIR GATTO announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 174, "An Act relating to the state centralized correspondence study program, to funding for educational programs that occur primarily outside school facilities, and to the duties of school boards of borough and city school districts and regional educational attendance areas; and providing for an effective date."

Number 0727

EDDY JEANS, Manager, School Finance and Facilities Section, Education Support Services, Department of Education and Early Development, testified in support of HB 174. He told the committee Alyeska Central School (ACS) was once the state's only correspondence program offering educational services to students statewide. The school began operation in 1939, offering programs to students who lived in remote areas of the state with no local schools.

MR. JEANS explained that currently there are 12 school districts offering statewide correspondence programs to Alaska school age residents. The district-operated statewide correspondence programs have been in operation since approximately 1997 and offer a variety of operational delivery methods. Education delivery models include U.S. Postal Service, Internet, and family-developed programs with support from district staff. Eliminating ACS will be eliminating duplicate services currently

being offered by school districts enrolling students on a statewide basis.

Number 0662

MR. JEANS told the committee the department has two fiscal notes. Fiscal note 1 eliminates the ACS budget component within the Department of Education and Early Development and shows a reduction of \$5.5 million. The second fiscal note shows a reduction in the foundation-funding program of \$1.17 million or almost \$1.2 million. This reflects the elimination of the summer school funding that ACS currently enjoys.

Number 0555

MR. JEANS told the committee the reason for two fiscal notes is that in this proposal ACS will no longer exist in the department's budget, so it is necessary to remove that budget component.

MR. JEANS addressed the second piece to this, which is allocated through the foundation-funding program. He said the department believes the students who are currently served through the Alyeska Central School will be served through other statewide education programs, so the only real savings in the foundation program is that money which is associated with the summer school program. Currently, Alyeska Central School is the only school that is eligible to claim summer school funding. That summer school funding represents about [\$1.17 million]. Of the approximately 1,200 students that the state funds ACS for, 835 of those are enrolled in its regular program.

Number 0436

MR. JEANS told the committee the department has been contacted by other statewide correspondence programs that have indicated that if their schools are not providing what ACS is currently providing, they would be prepared to develop such programs and offer those services to the students currently enrolled in ACS. The department will work with those families [whose children attend ACS] to identify programs that will fit their needs.

MR. JEANS reviewed the bill by section. Section 1 under AS 14.07.020(a)(9) eliminates language that the department offers a statewide correspondence program. Section 2 under AS 14.14.090(2) amends the duties of a school board and allows for school districts to enroll students in a statewide

correspondence program. Section 3 under AS 14.14.120(c) requires an inoperative school district, in other words, a school district that is getting ready to close, to provide the families with information on correspondence programs available to them throughout the state. Section 4 under AS 14.17.300 removes the word ["centralized"] from the funding account. In this section of statute, central correspondence study referred to the state-run program, so by eliminating ["centralized"] it just refers to correspondence programs. Section 5 under AS 14.17.400(b) removes the word ["centralized"] and leaves the language open to all correspondence programs.

MR. JEANS stated that Section 6 is an important change that he wants to bring to the committee's attention. It read:

Sec. 14.17.430. State funding for correspondence study and similar programs. Except as provided in AS 14.17.400(b), funding for [THE STATE CENTRALIZED CORRESPONDENCE STUDY PROGRAM OR] a district correspondence program, including a district that offers a statewide correspondence study program, or a study program that occurs primarily outside a school facility, includes an allocation from the public school account in an amount calculated by multiplying the ADM of the correspondence or study program by 80 percent.

MR. JEANS told the committee this section says that if a correspondence study program in the district or on a statewide level or if it is a similar type of program, that would mean it is through [the state's] charter school legislation. The state does have charter schools that provide educational programs, mainly in the home. In other words, state-supported homeschooling will be funded at 80 percent. He said this is very important because the state does have some charter schools that offer that type of program, and nowhere in the statute does the law specify what their funding level will be. This language brings clarity to that issue.

Number 0067

CHAIR GATTO asked if the funding has always been 80 percent.

MR. JEANS responded that it has been 80 percent all along. The department's regulatory process has defined correspondence study programs to include those programs that are offered by school

districts that provide support for home-based programs. What this does is develop clarity in the statute.

TAPE 03-10, SIDE A

Number 0001

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER asked Mr. Jeans about a clear distinction between charter schools and correspondence schools.

MR. JEANS told the committee one example of this is the Family Partnership Charter School ("Family Partnership") in Anchorage. It is operated as a charter school under the Anchorage School District. It is a home-based educational program. Family Partnership will tell the legislature that it is not a correspondence program, but a home-support program. What it does not have that community schools has is a facility, the staff, and operational and maintenance costs to operate a facility. So under the foundation program there are two sets of funding: that set of funding that is provided for the operation of a facility to staff, maintain, and heat it, and correspondence funding, which is for all those programs that are not housed in a facility. What this amendment does is make that very clear. There are two different adjustments within the foundation formula.

Number 0151

CHAIR GATTO said that last year the Mat-Su [Matanuska-Susitna] school board received an application from Horizon Charter School, which identified itself as a group of homeschoolers who wanted to be included in this new charter school. He said he believed the board approved its application after a year, or in the normal timeframe.

MR. JEANS said the Horizon Charter School is on the agenda for the state board of education's meeting next week for state approval. Clarity in this area is very important.

MR. JEANS said under Section 7, AS 14.17.600(a) amends the foundation account statute, which repeals the section that deals with ACS, including the provision that allows that program to count summer school students. Under Section 8, AS 14.30.010(b)(10) amends the compulsory education law to eliminate ACS and simply refers to a child that is enrolled in a state correspondence study program. Under Section 9, AS 14.30.350(8) eliminates the reference to the ACS under the definition of school district. Under Section 10, AS

39.25.110(7) removes ACS teachers from this statute. This provision currently exempts teachers from the personnel rules that apply for people that are employed as classified employees. This is a cleanup in statutes. Under Section 11, AS 39.25.160(e)(7) removes the reference to the Department of Education and Early Development correspondence teachers. This statute prohibits these individuals from being in a management position of a political party. It is statutory cleanup. Under Section 12 is the effective date.

Number 0359

DEANNA PATZ testified in opposition to HB 174. She addressed Representative Kapsner's comment about homeschool and correspondence school and said there is a large difference between the two. A lot of families homeschool without district input. She said she would like to reread an item from Governor Murkowski's letter that was read by Mr. Jeans. In it the governor says: "However, there are 12 school districts currently offering statewide correspondence services to Alaska's school age residents." Ms. Patz said in reality those 12 or more districts are not correspondence schools in the same way that ACS is. They do not provide schoolteachers. They do not provide their own curriculum. They provide money. In large areas like Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau, they provide support groups.

Number 0557

MS. PATZ told the committee that ACS is unique. She told the committee that she has used ACS for 17 years and has six children who have been successful with this program. The school provides individual care and consideration for the students' needs and teachers who are there. They provide a library, supplies, and curriculum. Other schools such as Nenana and Galena only provide funding; they are not duplicates. She told the committee she is very opposed to having it eliminated. She said ACS fulfilled all of the needs her family had.

CHAIR GATTO announce that there would be another meeting on Thursday and he will make a special effort to hear those who have been waiting to testify today.

Number 0728

HAYLIE RUDELL testified via teleconference from Anchorage in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is a junior at

ACS and found the ability to totally focus on studying important. She said in public schools students are subjected to peer pressure and violence. Ms. Ruddell pointed out that there was just a shooting at East High School [in Anchorage] on Friday. She said ACS has allowed her to focus on her education. She said she just participated in the academic decathlon and her team placed 10th overall out of 30 schools. She said her team only had two months to study for it, and one student was the second highest scorer in the decathlon. The fact that ACS had two months preparation time when all the other schools had six months, and that they were able to do so well, really shows how successful ACS is, she suggested. She said it would be awful for this to be eliminated, especially in rural areas.

Number 0915

CHAIR GATTO asked if this program disappeared, what she and her brother would do.

MS. RIDDELL said she does not know. They would have to look for another program.

CHAIR GATTO asked if she has looked at other schools.

MS. RIDDELL said she looked at taking a course at University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) or possibly going back to public school, such as West High, and is still looking for another correspondence program. The other correspondence programs are not like ACS, which has been far better than she ever imagined.

Number 1085

JOHN PADEN, Counselor, Alyeska Central School; Representative, Alyeska Central School Association, testified in opposition to HB 174. He told the committee there is a big difference between ACS and other distance programs available in the state. He shared an experience he recently encountered when a family had to move from Southeast Alaska to the Interior of Alaska, and the problem facing their child was that there still was a little more schooling to be done for that school year. The parents wanted to know if ACS could help. The answer was yes, because at this time of year the program is able to take in kids. That child's semester began when the child received the materials, and the schooling can be completed, even though it will go into the summer. This particular student will finish her high school career in mid-July and be able to continue on with her plans

without having to wait another half a school year in order to finish up.

MR. PADEN shared another example of a parent from rural Western Alaska, who called because his daughter was ill, and had been ill quite a bit in the past year and missed a lot of school. He wanted to know if it would be possible for his daughter to come into ACS in February and finish her eighth-grade year. The answer is yes. She can finish up by August and be able to go back to her local school if that is what the father chooses. She would not have lost a full year. He told the committee that he gets calls daily, not just during open enrollment, from parents who want to school their children, and this program does exactly that. It is not relegated to the September-to-May period of time.

Number 1313

MR. PADEN said two days ago a father called from Western Alaska asking about his eighth-grade daughter. In this case, the answer was no, ACS could not take his child in. He said the question is where these kids are going to go, especially with the question of No Child Left Behind. [HB 174 was held over.]

ADJOURNMENT

Number 1357

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Education meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.