

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

March 18, 2003
11:05 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. 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."

- MOVED HB 174 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS ACTION

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
03/11/03		(H)	Heard & Held MINUTE (EDU)
03/13/03		(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 124

03/13/03 (H) Heard & Held
MINUTE (EDU)
03/18/03 (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 in support of HB 174, responded to questions and provided the committee with information requested at a previous hearing on HB 174.

KYM WOLCOTT

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174.

MARVEL LLOYD

Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174.

LINDA VOORHEES

Ketchikan, Alaska

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

AYAIRE CANTRELL

Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174.

NANCY RICAR

Trapper Creek, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174.

WENDY TWOGOOD

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174.

PAULA WILLIAMS, President

Parent Advisory Council

Alyeska Central School
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 174.

RICK GRESSETT, School Counselor
Wrangell School District
Wrangell, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 174.

KANDI SOWARDS
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 174.

ELNORA WALKER
Trapper Creek, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 174.

JENNIFER WILCOX
Gakona, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 174.

DANIEL KNUDSEN
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 174.

JOHN SCOTT
Glacier Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

JOHN FRENCH
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

JACK CADIGAN
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174, offered
suggestions, and answered questions from the committee.

JEANNIE PADEN
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

DAN BECK, Superintendent of Schools
Delta/Greely School District
Delta Junction, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified before the committee on HB 174
and answered questions by the members.

SUSAN UNDERBAKKE
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 174.

BECKY CRABTREE, Alternative Education Teacher
North Slope Borough School District
Barrow, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 174.

CINDY OLSON
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 174.

THOMAS ROBINSON
Anchorage, Alaska

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

BREANNA ROBINSON
Anchorage, Alaska

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

CINDY MICHOU
Anchorage, Alaska

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

DEBBIE REISWIG
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified via teleconference in opposition
to HB 174.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 03-13, SIDE A
Number 0001

CHAIR CARL GATTO called the House Special Committee on Education meeting to order at 11:05 a.m. Representatives Gatto, Seaton, Wilson, Wolf, and Kapsner were present at the call to order. Representatives Coghill and Gara arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 174- CORRESPONDENCE STUDY

CHAIR GATTO announced that the only 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." He told the committee it is his intention to hear testimony and move the bill out of committee.

Number 0142

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if the information requested by the committee from the Department of Education and Early Development is available.

CHAIR GATTO asked Mr. Jeans to address how the state would save money by implementing HB 174.

Number 0183

EDDY JEANS, Manager, School Finance and Facilities Section Education Support Services, Department of Education and Early Development, provided the committee with requested information. He told the committee the only additional savings the department was able to identify is in the lease cost for the space that is associated with Alyeska Central Schools (ACS). The department has estimated that amount to be \$365,000 annually, provided the state does not use that space for some other purpose. He pointed out that the lease costs are paid out of the Department of Administration's budget.

CHAIR GATTO said one of the questions he had was what happens to a typical student if ACS closes. Chair Gatto asked what other options are available beyond moving out of state or enrolling in another correspondence school, public school, or private school.

MR. JEANS responded that the only option Chair Gatto did not mention is enrolling in a charter school.

CHAIR GATTO commented that the funding for educating ACS students goes with that student.

MR. JEANS replied that Chair Gatto is correct.

CHAIR GATTO pointed out that there are two other options students may choose. One is quitting school and the other is to enroll in a private school where there is no cost to the state.

Number 0380

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if the department is looking at what the current ACS students will probably cost the state if ACS closes.

MR. JEANS told the committee it costs the state approximately \$3,800 per student to stay at ACS or in any correspondence program. He mentioned that in a previous meeting there were discussions about the range of costs per student. Specifically, Representative Gara had asked what the high end would be, and Mr. Jeans said he had responded that the cost could be as high as \$15,000 to \$17,000 per child.

MR. JEANS told the committee he recently received a call from one of the parents of a child currently enrolled at ACS who wanted to know how much it would cost to send her child to the Far North School, which is in the Yukon-Koyukuk School District. He said he wanted to use this as an example because if the committee looks at extremes, it is important to look at the other side as well. Mr. Jeans explained that the Far North School currently has 12 students enrolled in it. Through the state foundation-funding program, a base allocation covers 10 to 20 students. In other words, if a school has 10 students, the school gets exactly the same amount as if there were up to 20 students. This parent currently has three children enrolled in ACS, and if this parent were to enroll these students at the Far North School, there would be a savings to the state because the funding would not change for that particular school, since the numbers would still fall between 10 and 20 students for the base allocation for this school. He told the committee he was quite shocked when this parent pointed this out to him and the funding worked out that way. Mr. Jeans pointed out that this is the other extreme.

Number 0574

MR. JEANS said a lot of the cost in educating these students depends on what grade level they are in, because the larger high schools in Anchorage, for example, generate 0.84 funding once the school exceeds the 750 student threshold. He told the committee these schools generate 4 percent more than what an ACS student generates. The cost or savings will be determined by the setting that these students select.

Number 0622

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked if there are charter schools that are also correspondence schools.

MR. JEANS responded that there are a couple of them. Specifically, Delta/Greely is a cyber school out of Delta Junction. In Anchorage there is the Family Partnership, which is a homeschool correspondence environment. He said there is also the Horizon School that the state board will be considering for approval. That school is in the Mat-Su [Matanuska-Susitna] area.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked if there would be an opportunity for current ACS students to go to other correspondence schools or to a charter correspondence school.

Number 0637

MR. JEANS responded that the department is committed to helping these families find alternative programs. There are a number of statewide correspondence programs and charter school programs. He said he reviewed ACS enrollments by community and found that 85 percent of the total students enrolled in ACS live in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Mat-Su, Petersburg, and Sitka. Mr. Jeans pointed out that these students are going to have other opportunities available to them in the communities they live in, along with the other statewide correspondence programs.

CHAIR GATTO commented that two charter schools in Mat-Su are both trying to increase their enrollment right now, so these schools will likely try to capture some of these students.

Number 0818

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER asked how many charter schools have availability and how many students will be required to gain admittance by lottery.

MR. JEANS responded that the only lotteries he is aware of are by charter schools. The statewide correspondence programs do not have lotteries. He said the department has been talking with them about assisting with an additional number of students.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER asked if the schools have the capacity to meet the needs of these additional students.

MR. JEANS said that he knows Galena City School District has already expressed some interest. Galena will say that it does not have the exact program that ACS has in place right now; however, it is committed to developing a program that meets the needs of those parents. Galena is unique in its delivery. If a parent does not want a lot of involvement from the school district, Galena can provide minimal services along with the allotment, or if a parent wants a lot of involvement and a lot of teacher contact time, Galena will also accommodate that. He told the committee the majority of people enrolled in Galena's program do not want a lot of teacher contact, but that contact is available.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER asked, since this bill is an effort to look at cost-saving measures, if Mr. Jeans could provide the members with how much the state would save if the department recalculated the growing communities and determined how much they are saving by not including 100 percent of their property base.

MR. JEANS responded that he believes Representative Kapsner is referring to the required-local-effort calculations and the inclusion of only 50 percent of the increased value.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER said she would like to know how much the state would save if the department would look at 100 percent of their property value.

MR. JEANS responded that he could provide that information to the committee.

CHAIR GATTO commented that he is certain that if HB 174 reaches the House Finance Committee, that information will need to be reviewed.

MR. JEANS responded that HB 174 is not strictly a cost-saving measure from the department's perspective. It is a policy issue, and with the additional schools providing statewide

correspondence functions, the department asked the basic question of whether the department really needs to be in this business anymore.

Number 1052

KYM WOLCOTT testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee ACS is very important to her family. She currently has two children in seventh and eighth grades enrolled at ACS. Their experiences with local schools were absolute nightmares. She said she was told many times that the school did not have time for her children because of overcrowding, lack of staff, and funding. Upon repeated messages such as these, her family started researching other options for her children's education and found ACS. It is the best resource because her family business takes them all over Alaska. Alyeska Central School allows her family to be together, contribute to their education, and assure it is the highest quality education. At the time her children were in the local school system they were receiving low to middle grades; now, due to ACS's quality education program and excellent support system with certified teachers, her children are receiving topnotch grades. On Saturday there was a town hall meeting in Anchorage, and she heard the Anchorage School District trying to stop the budget cuts that are coming. She told the committee closing ACS is just shifting the problem from one hand to the other. She said her children actually enjoy learning through ACS's program and asked the committee to maintain ACS. She also told the committee she does not believe the facts that Mr. Jeans provided to the committee. She was told the cost per student is actually \$3,200, not \$3,800.

Number 1300

MARVEL LLOYD testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee her family has been with ACS for 13 years. Of her three children, one is a sophomore in college, one is in junior high school, and one is in high school. She said when she started with ACS the main reason she chose ACS was the homeschool accountability, with the parents and children being accountable to real, live teachers. When the other homeschools started up offering free computers and paid for piano lessons it was actually very tempting because she did not have a good computer and could not afford piano lessons. She said at that point her family reevaluated and came up with two reasons why they decided to stay with ACS. The first one was accountability. The second reason, was that the teachers have

written and rewritten their curriculum, and the courses are a high quality of education. She commented that in listening to the hearings she knows this is mostly about cost savings and about whether this is going to be more or less. She asked the committee to address quality education. While Galena may be able to develop a quality curriculum, it is not yet in place.

Number 1456

LINDA VOORHEES testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee her family lives in a remote location where they do not have access to a brick-and-mortar school. For fifteen years she has used ACS to homeschool her children. Her oldest child graduated from ACS two years ago and is currently a sophomore at Stanford University. She said she hears the committee discussing other correspondence schools that will satisfy the families that lose ACS. She said that will not be true because ACS offers outstanding programs, and no other program offers so much for so little. No other correspondence school in the state can offer the staff of certified teachers that ACS does. She told the committee that she personally called every other correspondence school in the state and found that most of them have one or two teachers for all the grades and classes. One estimated that it would have 15 teachers, but it does not grade papers or even comment on the student's work. That makes ACS the only correspondence program that can remotely comply with the No Child Left Behind Act by the year 2005.

MS. VOORHEES asked if any of the members have asked how many correspondence schools will be left in 2005, when specifically qualified teachers will be required for each grade and subject in order to stay open. This is the only correspondence program mandated by the state; that means all the other programs can shut down anytime they think it is to their advantage to do so. She suggested this is going to happen in 2005. She also asked what it will cost to reopen ACS if all the other distance programs fold. The money will not be saved; it will just follow the students. She said she was surprised to hear the comment that most if not all students would just go to other correspondence schools, so there would be no increased cost. There are a number of families she knows that are already considering public schools. She decided to call some other families who are currently enrolled at ACS and found eight out of ten of the families are considering brick-and-mortar options. These families are considering brick-and-mortar schools only because the schools would be accredited and would have teachers that can offer the support that students need. Ms. Voorhees

acknowledged that there would be savings in lease space for ACS, but the building is owned by the Alaska Permanent Fund Corporation, and this is just about money going from one state department to another. While ACS does get money for the summer school; it is important to note that the summer school is the only one in the state.

Number 1671

CHAIR GATTO asked Ms. Voorhees about the school that has teachers that do not grade papers.

MS. VOORHEES replied that he is correct. One charter school does not even know how many teachers it has. It estimated about 15, but the parents grade all the papers.

CHAIR GATTO asked the name of that charter school.

MS. VOORHEES replied it is IDEA [Interior Distance Education of Alaska, program of the Galena City School District].

Number 1725

AYAIRE CANTRELL testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she has been a student with ACS since kindergarten and is now a senior with a 4.0 GPA [grade point average]. Alyeska Central School is neither outdated nor a duplicate service because it is excellent at delivering a topnotch education to Alaskan students. She said that while it does use course work from the University of North Dakota, its curriculum is always evolving to specialize the program for Alaskan students. Courses offered at ACS includes on-line courses, advanced placement courses, and college credit courses. There are specific teachers for each subject, which brings them closer to meeting the 2005 standards for the No Child Left Behind Act than any other correspondence school. She said while ACS receives 20 percent less funding than brick-and-mortar schools and no funding for special education, it still provides special education. She told the committee ACS has provided her with an excellent education. Students who have graduated from ACS have attended such schools as Stanford [University], Pennsylvania State University, and Duke [University]. Ms. Cantrell said that while she had tried other correspondence schools because she wanted an easier math course, she did not feel challenged by any of the other courses. She said that if ACS were to close, she would be faced with a number of unsatisfactory options. One of them may be to attend a school

that may open in the community where she lives. If that does not happen, then she might have to use PACE [Personal Alternative Choices in Education, correspondence program]. She also pointed out that she likely will not be able to finish her senior year before June 30, which means she will have to wait until the beginning of the next school year to enroll and finish her classes.

Number 1919

MS. CANTRELL summarized her statement by saying that the only real savings the committee is discussing is by closing the summer school. The students who enroll in the ACS summer school, especially seniors, are doing it so they do not have to delay going on to college. It will mean those students must wait until the following year and another whole year of funding. In this way, it will save money.

Number 1970

NANCY RICHAIR testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee that many parents go to other correspondence schools because the programs are not as rigorous or demanding of the student's time. She wanted the committee to know that ACS does not just take the top students of the school for the academic decathlon, but that they take an equal amount of A, B, and C students on each team. The kids on these teams excel. They took third place in all the large schools in Alaska. Ms. Richair said ACS students are doing so well and are meeting the requirements of the exit exams in reading and writing early on. She urged the committee to keep the school open as an example for other schools to come up to their level. Ms. Richair said the only option in Trapper Creek is the local high school, where they have cut all electives and actually buy courses from ACS to fill in other courses. She said she has neighbors who put their children in Mount Edgecumbe [High School] a few years ago and she was told it cost the state \$15,000 per year, compared with \$3,000 at ACS. She asked if there is a political agenda that is unseen in the discussion of closing ACS.

Number 2173

WENDY TWOGOOD testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she wanted to echo all the supportive testimony from the parents about ACS. This is a school that is keyed for educational success. For example, she

said her two children have been enrolled at ACS, and last year her son, who is in the ninth grade, passed a college entrance exam for the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) with a score of 89. That means he will be able to skip developmental English and enter into the 111 level at UAF. He is a full-time student at UAF and has complete 23 credits. She told the committee her son could not have done that without the help of ACS. He is dually enrolled at UAF while completing his high school requirements. He is holding a 3.0 GPA. Her daughter is a full-time student and a junior at UAF. She told the committee that she has been on the dean's list, and chancellor's list, and currently is holding a 3.75 GPA. She said her children have been enrolled at ACS since 1989. Ms. Twogood told the committee she has friends who have enrolled their children in public schools, but removed them because of the negative influences there, tried other correspondence schools, but found that ACS is superior to the other programs because of the attention to detail. Her son still needs two more years with ACS to finish high school and get his master's degree by the year 2007 in computer science at the age of 20 years old. Ms. Twogood told the committee closing ACS will be a disruption.

Number 2363

PAULA WILLIAMS, President, Parent Advisory Council, Alyeska Central School, testified in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee that she has been listening to the testimony over the last three days and the parents have covered what the team has put together. She said this will not save the state any money, since many students will be going to schools that will cost more, and maybe some to schools that will cost less. She talked about the changes ACS has gone through over the last 62 years and the successes graduates from ACS have accomplished including acceptance at nationally known universities. Ms. Williams pointed out that the state will lose the only state-mandated correspondence program; the summer school is the only summer school, and last year over 3,450 students enrolled to finish their graduating credits so they wouldn't have to spend another semester in high school.

Number 2465

MS. WILLIAMS shared her family's experience, saying that for the last ten years her family of six has lived in a log cabin, 40 miles away from the nearest road, store, school, or power supply. Their nearest neighbor is 20 miles away. When her husband retired after 20 years in the U.S. Army, they moved

there to raise their children, and run a small family lodge. After two years of trying other homeschools, she told the committee they found ACS and have been with it since. Her daughter graduated, and her three boys are in high school. They have aspirations of attending college, and do not believe any of the current homeschool choices can give them the accreditation they need. She said her family feels their only choice is the Nenana Student Living Center. The cost to her family is not only losing their children prematurely, but also losing their active participation in running their family business.

MS. WILLIAMS pointed out that the cost to the state per child at ACS is \$3,800 and Nenana is \$15,000. If this is not a money-saving move for ACS, why is this being taken away from her children? Why would the state have another school develop a program like ACS when it is already in place? Alyeska Central School was developed over years, the teachers have written the courses, and a school cannot just say it will develop a program and have it done. It will take a lot of time and money to have that happen. The department asked if they really need to be in this business, she noted. This is a mandated program for the state. The state should be proud of the program that they have built. She said she chose this option because it is the best.

Number 2173

MS. WILLIAMS said in response to Chair Gatto's question about the number of children in her family that she has four children and there are six in her family including her husband and herself.

Number 2535

RICK GRESSETT, School Counselor, Wrangell School District, testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. He told the committee that removing ACS would be taking a major tool from him. When he had heard that this might happen, he immediately started calling other schools for a replacement. One place he called shifted him to five different people, none of whom answered the phone; he left a message with all five of them two weeks ago, and he has yet to receive a returned call. He told the committee if a fellow professional does not get that courtesy, what would happen to a parent or student.

MR. GRESSETT said in checking with some of the other schools he found that the number of credits required for graduation is above the state requirement, which is 21. The three that he

talked to require 24 to 26 credits. There are many reasons why students want to get on with their lives and reasons why they are unable to attend a brick-and-mortar school. Many times a student will become a second-year senior because of being just one-half credit short of qualifying to graduate. He said he turns to ACS to help that student graduate on time. Sometimes the student can pick up that credit in summer school. This is the only accredited summer school. He pointed out that other schools do not permit part-time school. It is about the money, he suggested. What those schools want is for the student to be enrolled before the count. Once the count is over with, there is no money in it for them. However, ACS will take a student at any time, and it is a key difference. He said he was told by the other schools that if the student enrolls after the count, the parent has to pay out of pocket. Mr. Gressett added that if a student is expelled from school, ACS will accept that student. He said ACS is a major tool for school counselors.

Number 2765

KANDI SOWARDS testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is a 17-year-old senior and has been with ACS since third grade. Ms. Sowards said as she listened to her fellow students, teachers, and friends she feels everyone has brought up so many excellent points and she can only restate many of what they said. Her one main point that she felt was not mentioned enough is the simple fact that the whole point of the bill is to save the state money, and the point has obviously been made that this will not save the state any money. Alyeska Central School has been an excellent educational resource to her, she told members. She said the only savings she can see is from cutting the summer school; however, it is the only summer school that is available to Alaskan students, and she feels it would be irresponsible for the state to get rid of it. Ms. Sowards told the committee that almost all the Lower 48 states have consolidated their correspondence, homeschool, and cyber school programs into one institution because they found that the cost of having many school districts competing and duplicating resources on a small scale translates in the long term to reduced services to students and more cost to the state. Alyeska Central School does not have to pay for the expenses a brick-and-mortar school must pay. She said she recently heard of a school in the Anchorage School District that spent \$600,000 on art while renovating a school.

Number 2948

ELNORA WALKER testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is a tenth-grade student with ACS and has been since kindergarten, with the exception of two years when she tried other schools. Her brother is currently an eighth-grade student at ACS. She said that anyone who says ACS is duplicating services is mistaken. The teachers and librarian take into account students' needs. She lives in the remote Bush. When an assignment comes up that requires the Internet to complete, ACS provides materials and books to help its students complete the assignment.

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MS. WALKER said the teachers are wonderful and always available to the students. At the other school it would be necessary to make an appointment to ask questions that were not answered very well. She said her brother was able to choose what classes he wanted, and he had three or four choices per subject. When she was in the eighth grade those choices were not available, so she said it is always interesting to see new changes each year.

Number 2879

JENNIFER WILCOX testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is in the 11th grade at ACS which is the only accredited year-round school in the state. There are excellent teachers who are accessible by telephone, e-mail, fax, or mail, and over 250 classes are offered including on-line and advanced-placement classes. Many extracurricular activities are offered through ACS including programs such as Alaska and National Close Up and the Academic Decathlon. Ms. Wilcox summarized her comments by saying she believes it should remain an option in Alaska's educational system.

Number 2827

DANIEL KNUDSEN testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. He told the committee he is a senior at ACS and has attended ACS for the last three years; however, before that time he attended private and public school. He said no other school came close to the education he is receiving at ACS. The curriculum is interesting, challenging, and flexible. The teachers are qualified and competent. Last summer his father was diagnosed with cancer and he had to leave the state while he received treatment. He had not finished classes before that time, and at any other school, he would have had to retake

another semester of high school to make up for it. That is one of the things that makes ACS such a great school. The school has also been successful in creating a sense of community for the students by allowing them to know each other and the teachers. Alyeska Central School unites the parents and teachers to educate the student in the best way possible. He said he hopes that ACS will be available for students for years to come.

Number 2727

CHAIR GATTO announced that the committee would take a brief at-ease at 11:57 a.m. The committee reconvened at 12:05 p.m.

Number 2692

JOHN SCOTT read his testimony in opposition to HB 174 into the record. The first part of his written testimony read as follows [original punctuation provided, but some formatting changed]:

My name is John Scott and I reside near Glacier Bay, Alaska. I am here to testify against HB 174. I do not support the closure of Alyeska Central School (ACS). In very general terms all I have ever asked of this State's constitutionally mandated and funded educational system is:

- 1) What subjects are you going to teach my children
- 2) When are you going to teach the subjects
- 3) How will you know if mastery has been achieved
- 4) Will you provide assistance to me as a parent and to my child as a student if mastery has not been achieved.

The local REAA school could not provide clear answers to questions 1 through 3 and in several cases refused assistance when we as parents found mastery of subjects being taught was lacking.

As a result we as a family studied what options were available.

ACS provided the only alternative with a 60-year history, with a Legislative charter, that offered accreditation and a complete course catalog and program that we could plan by. They also offered the only experienced distance education staff willing to

evaluate student performance and capable of providing assistance. ACS also has the support capable of providing quality course work.

None of the other in-state correspondence schools could offer the following:

- 1) History and prestige of ACS
- 2) Accreditation and therefore acceptance by colleges of course work completed
- 3) Course catalog and program
- 4) Willing and able staff capable of evaluation of mastery and provision of assistance and support

Number 2580

CHAIR GATTO asked if no school could provide the combination of all four or only one individual point.

MR. SCOTT responded that he was looking for a school that could provide all four of the items. He said, as an example, none of them could provide the history and prestige and none of them could provide the accreditation. Some could provide a course catalog, but not a complete program. None, other than ACS, had staff that were capable. He said he is bothered by the discussion of state funds. There needs to be some equality; the committee is comparing apples and oranges. These other correspondence schools are not at the same level. Mr. Scott continued to read his statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The proposed closure of ACS smacks of a money raid by the shills of other less qualified and less organized correspondence school programs in the state.

ACS is not redundant. It provides the only acceptable, accredited correspondence school program in the state.

If you are going to push this proposal forward, what are you going to provide or offer to the ACS High School students as an or-equal alternative in their last years of study? How are you going to handle ending the program, meaning how do the current students complete their one-year course of study if their year is up in September and your ax falls in June?

The Republican Party public stand regarding education has been to "leave no children behind" and to "provide choice and alternative to families faced with poor or failing schools (i.e.; better choice and alternatives)" Yet here I sit testifying on a bill which leaves children behind and does not promote choice and does not provide for better alternatives.

Please do not support this bill. If you want to follow this logic you will get rid of the State library (there are three libraries in Juneau alone) or perhaps the State Museum (does not Anchorage or Fairbanks have a museum). I would not support these tongue in cheek proposals and hope you won't either.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

John Scott

Number 2494

JOHN FRENCH testified in opposition to HB 174. He told the committee he is the father of a student of ACS, and he thanked the committee for taking the time to truly listen to the testimony. He compared the story of "Angela's Ashes," where the drunk father takes his children's money and spends it in the bar, which is what he said he feels the legislature would be doing by passing this bill. He said he feels the state would be trading on the children's future on an orgy of free government. An immediate problem would occur for the students who are in this program.

MR. FRENCH said he cannot imagine that the "will of the people" had this in mind when they elected the present government. He said he can see how well-intentioned people have tried to meet unreasonable mandates, and tried to meet those demands. The demand to cut education is wrong to begin with, he suggested. If it must be cut, this proposal does not even meet that criterion. It creates a great academic loss for little or no savings. Perhaps it will create more cost. Cutting ACS is a shell game that may look good to the uninformed, but which crumbles under scrutiny. He challenged the legislators to balance the needs and protect those who have no voice. He said today he thought they were expressing that voice very well. If ACS closes, there are basically three options: a brick-and-mortar school, for increased cost; a Mount Edgecumbe-type

school, for greatly increased cost; or Internet-based charter schools with no teaching services and no savings there, so it is a wash in the funding.

MR. FRENCH asked how many of the folks in the room have gone to college. He noted that about half the people raised their hands. He asked who feels qualified to teach every subject in high school. He noted that there were not many hands up. He asked who feels that they could be impartial with their own children if they had to give the grade. He noted that a few people raised their hands. He told the committee these are the kind of schools the legislature would be handing these students over to. It might be interesting for the committee to look at the charter schools that are out there and see if they are credible, he suggested.

Number 2274

MR. FRENCH responded to Chair Gatto's question, concerning charter schools that have teachers that can teach every grade, by saying that the parents are the ones in charge of teaching and grading. That is why many of these schools are not accredited. Mr. French said if he were an admissions administrator of Stanford University and had some child from the Bush that wanted to go to Stanford and the student's educational background was an unaccredited school, taught and graded by his parents, it is unlikely there would be very much credit given to the student's application.

CHAIR GATTO responded that the student's Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT scores), interview, and application would mean more than where he or she went to school.

MR. FRENCH replied that in this competitive market, everything counts to highly competitive schools. Alyeska Central School has students that have gone to Stanford on scholarships because they have done a terrific job. He said he made this point to show that there are not equal-to-equal educational choices. The main areas he is concerned with are accreditation and teacher services. Teacher services is where ACS shines. If a kid lives in the Bush, are we offering them an opportunity to go to college? Urban kids that go to ACS have reasons why they are not attending the public schools where they live. He reminded the committee of that high school senior who cannot complete a course on time; instead of being allowed to finish that class in summer school, the student has to go back for another entire semester to finish high school and has to wait an entire year to

go to college. He said his daughter is a high achiever and has been taking courses each summer to pad the credits she is getting to go to college. She wants to do a foreign exchange program next year and during that time take courses through ACS that will be accredited so that when she comes back she is not penalized for having outside interests and doing extra things.

Number 2177

CHAIR GATTO asked Mr. French how much time in a normal week he spends working with his children on their studies.

MR. FRENCH responded that his family does not have television, so his kids study during the week. Two to three hours per day are spent doing schoolwork. He summarized his comments by saying that he believes the state should be in this business because it is the state's business to assure quality education to all children. The "No Child Left Behind" idea is correct, and ACS serves as the safety net for those children who are in danger of being left behind. He urged the committee not to delay the decision or pass the buck, but to do what is right.

Number 2086

JACK CADIGAN testified in opposition to HB 174. He asked to make two brief points. First, he pointed out that the U.S. military requires a high school education, not a GED [general equivalency diploma] for entry into the armed services, and to the best of his knowledge, homeschool diplomas and unaccredited correspondence school are also not accepted. Second, he said two years from now there will be a real problem in the Bush when all school will be required to have certificated teachers in all subjects. Mr. Cadigan pointed out that ACS has a lot of certificated teachers. He said in the past he has taught, through small schools, subjects for which they did not have certificated teachers.

Number 2016

[Rick Currier, who had testified previously, asked to speak to the financial aspects of the bill, but was informed by Chair Gatto that the House Finance committee would be the more appropriate venue to address the financial aspects.]

Number 1991

JEANNIE PADEN testified in opposition to HB 174. She said she had two children who were students at ACS, two grandchildren who are currently in ACS, and a third who is hoping to start next fall. She told the committee she wanted to make two points that are important for the committee to note. One is that ACS is the only school in the state that offers year-round enrollment. As a parent of two boys, she told the committee both of them would have been left behind had it not been for ACS's year-round open enrollment. Both of her boys graduated and went on to college. On March 12 the administration vowed to support the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). At the same time, the administration is removing the only safety net that is available, because ACS is mandated to take these kids.

MS. PADEN said her second point is that if ACS is shut down, there will no savings to the Department of Education and Early Development, and savings will actually be to the Department of Administration. She pointed out that jobs will have to be created to handle the transcripts of all the kids who have gone to ACS, and it will be ongoing for many years. She said she believes the department wants to sacrifice an accredited school that would fit in to the NCLB, over rent. She asked if ACS has been given the opportunity to talk to the Department of Administration about seeking cheaper facilities, and if it has not, it is an insult to every child in this state. Ms. Paden closed her comments by saying ACS is a great bargain for education and urged the committee to seriously consider the welfare of the children of Alaska.

Number 1743

DAN BECK, Superintendent of Schools, Delta/Greely School District, Delta Junction, testified before the committee on HB 174 and answered questions by the members. He stated that he was not testifying for or against the bill, but asked to clarify some points. Delta/Greely School District has the only statewide charter program in the state. He said the school initially started serving students in grades seven through twelve, and does not offer a choice for parents to select this curriculum or that curriculum. All classes are developed and delivered on line. The classes are Alaska standards-based and taught by teachers who are highly qualified in their area, and their qualifications fit the definitions of the NCLB Act. Mr. Beck said the school is in the process of accreditation, and the emphasis on the classes has been upper end, advanced-placement, and college-preparatory classes. Currently, it has between 150 and 200 students who attend part-time while they attend other

public schools in Alaska that cannot offer classes in those areas. He wanted to clarify that there are options out there, but the options are pretty narrow. He commented on references that were made earlier that students' work is not graded by the certified teachers or assisted by certified teachers; he said it is not true of the Delta/Greely school. In response to Representative Kapsner's question, he said he is not aware of the practices of other schools, but all work is graded by certified teachers at Delta/Greely school. He explained that the school has been in operation for about five years now, and it has some teachers who have developed programs that work.

Number 1606

CHAIR GATTO asked if the certified teachers have contact with the students.

MR. BECK responded that contact is by phone or e-mail.

CHAIR GATTO commented that it is a cyber contact.

MR. BECK said he is correct. These are on-line courses, as opposed to a paper-and-pencil type of distance delivery.

CHAIR GATTO asked how long it will be before Delta/Greely will be accredited.

MR. BECK responded that the application is in this year, and he is not sure if accreditation would be given this year or next year.

Number 1577

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER asked what can be done for communities that do not have Internet access.

MR. BECK responded that he does not have an answer for that. He said that Delta/Greely does provide an in-district correspondence program for those services.

Number 1549

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if Delta/Greely has space for developmentally disabled or other learning-disabled students.

MR. BECK replied that it provides a service to Pathway Home in Anchorage, a residential treatment facility, and is working with

some intensive-type educational programs for students there. He said Delta/Greely has students from other areas of the state on IEPs [individual education plans] that it manages to service, although it is not funded to do that because there is no factor for special-needs students but the school is still required by federal law to provide those services. He told the committee that if Alyeska Central School closed down tomorrow, the Delta/Greely school could not absorb the number of students it has and offer a quality program.

CHAIR GATTO commented that Delta/Greely has 200 students. He asked what the school's capacity is.

MR. BECK responded that the 200 students Chair Gatto is referring to are just the students who are dual-enrolled in public schools and Delta/Greely. He said there are probably 400-500 students who are enrolled either part-time or full-time. Delta/Greely has private-school students who will enroll because they cannot get classes they need in the schools they are enrolled in.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked how many students his school could take in addition to what are already enrolled.

Number 1447

MR. BECK replied that is a tough question. He said the sooner the school would be notified, the more Delta/Greely could absorb. He said it might be possible to take on 200-300 more students. He emphasized that it would only be a viable option if these students had access to the Internet.

CHAIR GATTO pointed out that some schools actually furnish a computer.

MR. BECK responded that the Delta/Greely school will loan a computer to a student.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER pointed out that does not mean there would be Internet access.

MR. BECK agreed. There is still a need for a telephone line.

Number 1365

CHAIR GATTO commented that a student would have to be pretty remote not to have access to a telephone.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER said that even if an individual has telephone access, he/she may still not have access to the Internet or access to long distance, which could generate thousands of dollars in charges.

Number 1320

SUSAN UNDERBAKKE testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is currently a student at ACS. She said that she lives in the Mat-Su Valley, and while she could go to a brick-and-mortar school, the school does not provide classes that are as good as what is offered by ACS. She told the committee many of her friends who do go to public school choose to take summer classes to make up for those inferior classes. She explained that some of her friends have experienced problems with diplomas from outside charter schools where the diploma was not accepted at college. She pointed out that ACS is not a duplicate school, and, in fact, ACS offers classes that local high schools do not offer.

CHAIR GATTO asked what community Ms. Underbakker lives in.

MS. UNDERBAKKE told Chair Gatto she lives in Wasilla.

CHAIR GATTO noted that she has access to not only the local public schools, but charter schools as well.

MS. UNDERBAKKE replied that none of these options offered as good an education as ACS. Also, there are other negative influences in the local public high school, which is the original reason her family left the local public school system.

Number 1217

CHAIR GATTO asked what school she would have gone to and what negatives are involved.

MS. UNDERBAKKE said she would have been attending Colony High School. When her brother attended Colony High School there were bomb threats and other problems for which the troopers had to be called into the school. In addition, the classes were inferior to ACS's, and the school only offered Spanish and French in the language program.

CHAIR GATTO asked if the initial problem was security.

MS. UNDERBAKKE replied that that is correct. Her brother was getting beaten up on the school bus, and he was receiving threats and crank calls to their home, and when her parents discussed it with the district, nothing was done to correct the problem.

CHAIR GATTO asked if Colony High School offered adequate academics or if ACS would have been better.

MS. UNDERBAKKE stated that she believes ACS is better. She knows students who are repeating classes at ACS because the classes are better than at the traditional public high school.

Number 1000

BECKY CRABTREE, Alternative Education Teacher, North Slope Borough School District, testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee one of her jobs in the North Slope Borough School District is to coordinate correspondence classes. She said that the district had begun an affiliation with ACS last March, and since that time over 50 North Slope students in six remote villages in grade levels one through twelve have enrolled in one or more classes. A wide variety of classes are available to their students who do not have access to higher-level language classes or other elective offerings, or for those who chose to study at home and for those who need a class at a time when some of their small schools cannot schedule it. She told the committee about two students who live in a tiny village; one is learning basic electronics, and another is taking photography. These are both classes that the district cannot offer in school. The students have in-depth support for their studies from ACS. She told the committee that her students need ACS and the accredited classes it provides. The proposal to close the school has driven her to search for other options that might be offered to the students. After looking at the alternatives, she told the committee ACS offers the best academic support and variety of classes both off line and on line. She asked the committee to please consider the needs of rural students when considering this bill.

Number 0852

CINDY OLSON testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is a parent of a student who just recently enrolled at ACS and, in fact, just received the materials this week. Her son is a seventh grader who is gifted and has special needs. She told the committee he is just coming

out of Central Middle School, which is considered one of the best middle schools in the state. However, the classroom environment is not appropriate due to his special needs. She plans on keeping him enrolled at Central Middle School for electives, but using ACS for all core curriculum classes.

MS. OLSON said she is concerned not only for her own child, but for all children like him. She is the past president of the Alaska Chapter of the Autism Society of America and has been known as a disabilities rights advocate for the last nine years. Alyeska Central School gives students such as her son the opportunity to focus on their education, to take advantage of a very clean, concise curriculum that is highly developed. The information that was provided will give her son what he needs to learn and move forward. He has tested out at the gifted or genius range at the 99th percentile; however, in the normal school environment he is failing. This is what ACS offers. As a parent she has seen her own child benefit from access to ACS. The interest he lost as he experienced problems in a mainstream classroom is being reignited. With the quality of the curriculum and materials he is receiving, he is now saying that this is something he can do and understand. This curriculum gives him the information he needs so he can move forward and learn. Children who have trouble dealing with others socially have a tendency to be victimized by bullies. He is one of the sensitive children and not one of the aggressive children. That is why he is enrolled at Central Middle School part-time, so he have exposure to other children and will pick up some of those social skills that are important, but she told the committee she is counting on ACS to provide the core curriculum he needs to learn at his level. She told the committee the state needs this quality of school to be maintained. She pointed out that even in Anchorage it can be difficult to maintain an Internet connection.

Number 0578

CHAIR GATTO asked if she was homeschooling her son and how much time she spent each day working with her son on schoolwork.

MS. OLSON replied that she is doing part-time homeschooling. She said she is only just beginning at ACS and is expecting that the two to three hours per day that she use to do with homework will be adequate to do the daily schoolwork.

Number 0540

THOMAS ROBINSON testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. He told the committee that his daughter, who is in high school, is also a special-needs student. While she has always been an honor roll student, due to her special needs she found it impossible to sit through the classes without her special needs disrupting the class. He said his family had to find another alternative to get her into, and in their search they found ACS. It takes at least three to four hours each day for them to help her with classes. This school has really answered a need for his daughter. There must be hundreds of other parents out there with this same problem. Alyeska Central School has a 60-year history that is working.

MR. ROBINSON summarized his comments by saying that he has heard about the federal legislation which would leave no child behind; however, with this bill it means no child will be left behind unless the students have special-needs or live in the Bush.

Number 0214

CHAIR GATTO announced that anyone who is not able to testify today may testify when the bill comes before the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee, which is the next committee of referral.

MR. ROBINSON said he would like to hear from some of the alumni of ACS. He believes it would be very helpful.

Number 0137

BREANNA ROBINSON testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is new to ACS and is not able to go to public school because her special needs disrupt the classroom. Without ACS she would be more than a semester behind, and that is not fair because she deserves the right to go to school. If the legislature closes ACS, what will happen to the special-needs students next year? She said she cannot use on-line courses because her family only has one telephone line into their house.

CHAIR GATTO asked Ms. Robinson what grade she is in and how old she is.

MS. ROBINSON replied that she is in ninth grade and is 15 years old. She said a big advantage in going to ACS is that there is one-on-one instruction if a student has a problem.

TAPE 03-14, SIDE A

Number 0046

CINDY MICHOU testified via teleconference in opposition in HB 174. She told the committee she has been homeschooling her eighth-grade son this year, and it has been a lifesaving experience. He has asthma really bad and gets sick when he is in school. She said she is unsure whether it is the dust or mold, but he is sick a lot. Since he started homeschooling with ACS, his health has been wonderful. He has not had asthma attacks. The teachers are super there. He has had opportunities he would not have had through the Anchorage School District. Now that there are high school exit exams, she said the Anchorage School District is changing its curriculum drastically, trying to come in line with the exit exams. He has been bored for the last three years because they keep going over the same things. Alyeska Central School has provided him with more challenging schooling, new materials, and an opportunity to participate with the Lego Team this year. The school where he formerly attended sent a team also, and the coaches from that school did not even bother to show up. Patrick Herding from ACS flew all the way to Anchorage to cheer the team on. The teachers there are absolutely wonderful, she said, and she would hate to see the school close.

Number 0237

CHAIR GATTO asked what her thoughts are on the high school qualifying exit exam.

MS. MICHOU said she believes that if the public schools had been teaching the basics to begin with, the state would not have needed the high school exit exam. The basics are what ACS has taught for years.

CHAIR GATTO asked if she thought ACS would be able to continue on with the same curriculum and its students would have no problem passing the exit exam.

MS. MICHOU said yes, she believes its curriculum addresses the exit exams perfectly.

Number 0318

DEBBIE REISWIG testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she has been homeschooling for 15

years, three of them with ACS. During those years her family has tried several of the charter school programs available within the state and outside of the state as well, and they found ACS to be superior to everything out there. She said ACS is unique and not duplicated by any other program. She said that is especially true for the high school level from grades 9 through 12, which is when they put their children in ACS. The fact that ACS is accredited is important when looking at college admittance. The quality of teachers at ACS is very high. They are professional, and certified, but most importantly, they are interested. One problem that they found with charter schools was the lack of accountability, which is not the case with ACS. The grades that she provided were the grades that showed up on the transcript with no questions asked. Alyeska Central School really provides that accountability.

Number 0480

CHAIR GATTO asked her if she was able to assign grades that her children earned or felt she had padded the grades.

MS. REISWIG responded that she was tough on her kids because she wanted them to succeed. She kept good records to assure that the grade was fair. Ms. Reiswig said she has quite a bit of training in the education field, so she just used her background to ensure that grades were fair.

Number 0560

CHAIR GATTO announced that testimony on HB 174 is closed. He told the committee any amendments to the bill will be taken up in the next committee of referral.

Number 0613

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON moved to report HB [174] out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

Number 0643

REPRESENTATIVE GARA objected for purposed of discussion. He said that when he first heard the governor's rationale behind HB 174, it sounded compelling. This was just a duplicative school, and a cost savings of \$5 million would be achieved. The committee has heard testimony on the bill, however, and he said he believes ACS is not a duplicative school and is convinced

that it is the best of all the correspondence schools in the state. He believes the cost savings spoken of earlier are not significant and that it may end up costing the state more. He said he does not see any fair way to assume closing ACS will save the state money.

Number 0736

REPRESENTATIVE GARA said the testimony has been overwhelmingly in support of the summer school. He said it is an important service to the students of this state. It is clear that closing the summer school will be leaving children out of school, the children who need twelve months to complete a nine-month curriculum, the children with illnesses, and the children with learning disabilities. He said he sees this bill not as addressing the No Child Left Behind, but rather as leaving more children behind.

Number 0784

CHAIR GATTO commented to the members that if anyone has information that deal with numbers, it would be excellent for those figures to be provided to the next committee of referral. It would also be helpful if the numbers would be made available to Mr. Jeans so he can be prepared to respond.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA responded that he does not have additional numbers other than what was discussed in testimony. He said he thinks it is speculative to assume there would be any savings to the state based on what he has heard. He said he will be voting against the bill because he does not think it is smart to close the best correspondence school in the state and take away choice from parents.

Number 0860

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER told the committee she is also opposed to moving this bill out of committee. She said she thinks the members need to be asking themselves what is good for the kids in the state. She does not think this is one of those things. She pointed out that Mr. Jeans said this is not necessarily a budget decision, but a policy decision. She said she thinks it is a terrible policy decision. The governor said during his state of the state address that he is supportive of providing distance education choices for rural Alaska, she observed. She said a lot of people do not understand the technology gaps that are experienced in the state. Not only is it very expensive,

but the service is very sketchy. That is terrible because kids will be unable to complete tests because they will get cut off from on-line service. This flies in the face of the No Child Left Behind Act. Representative Kapsner said she is in strong opposition to this bill's passing out of committee.

Number 0966

CHAIR GATTO announced that there will be additional input in the next committee of referral. He said there have been three hearings in this committee already and there will be more in the next committee.

Number 1010

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON said that to accommodate the chair's wishes he is willing to vote to move the bill to the next committee; however, he will oppose the bill in terms of its passing. He said after the testimony he has heard, he does not believe this bill makes sense.

CHAIR GATTO clarified Representative Seaton's comments by saying that while a Representative may vote in favor of moving a bill from committee, each Representative may add his/her recommendation as to whether the bill should pass or not. He said the next committee of referral will look very carefully at the recommendations of the previous committee.

Number 1065

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Gatto, Wilson, Wolf, and Seaton voted in favor of reporting HB 174 out of committee. Representatives Gara and Kapsner voted against it. Representative Coghill was absent for the vote. Therefore, HB 174 was reported out of the House Special Committee on Education by a vote of 4-2.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Education meeting was adjourned at 1:03 p.m.