

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

April 13, 2004
11:07 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 84

"An Act relating to a curriculum for Alaska history; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSHB 84(EDU) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 551

"An Act relating to the issuance of teacher certificates to and revocation of teacher certificates of persons convicted of felony drug offenses and to the issuance of limited teacher certificates to persons convicted of certain crimes involving a minor and felony drug offenses."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 84

SHORT TITLE: ALASKA HISTORY CURRICULUM

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) KAPSNER

02/07/03	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/07/03	(H)	EDU, HES, FIN
04/13/04	(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 124

WITNESS REGISTER

MARJORIE MENZI, Project Director
Alaska History Curriculum Development Program
Alaska Humanities Forum
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a power point presentation on HB 84 and answered questions from the members.

IRA PERMAN, Executive Director
Alaska Humanities Forum
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a power point presentation to the committee, testified in support of HB 84, and answered questions from the members.

TIM STEELE, Member
Anchorage School Board
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 84 and answered questions from the members.

STEVE HAYCOX, Ph.D.
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 84.

KEVIN SWEENEY, Legislative Liaison
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 84 and answered questions from the committee.

BARBARA THOMPSON, Director
Teaching and Learning Support
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 84 and answered questions from the committee.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 04-18, SIDE A
Number 0001

CHAIR CARL GATTO called the House Special Committee on Education meeting to order at 11:07 a.m. Representatives Gatto, Seaton, Wilson, Ogg, and Kapsner were present at the call to order.

Representatives Wolf and Gara arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 84-ALASKA HISTORY CURRICULUM

Number 0035

CHAIR GATTO announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 84, "An Act relating to a curriculum for Alaska history; and providing for an effective date."

Number 0043

REPRESENTATIVE MARY KAPSNER, Alaska State Legislature, as sponsor, testified on HB 84 and answered questions from the members. She told the members that this bill requires that a student must [pass] this Alaska History course before graduating from high school. It directs the Department of Education and Early Development to develop a standards-based curriculum. The hope is this course would be one of six required social studies courses.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER shared that U.S. Senator Ted Stevens has provided for an appropriation through the Alaska Humanities Forum which has given the Department of Education and Early Development to issue a zero fiscal note on this legislation. She told the members that Marjorie Menzi will be presenting a power point presentation. Marjorie formerly worked for the Department of Education and Early Development and now works for the Alaska Humanities Forum specifically working to get the Alaska History curriculum in high schools.

Number 0182

MARJORIE MENZI, Project Director, Alaska History Curriculum Development Program, Alaska Humanities Forum, presented a power point presentation on HB 84 and answered questions from the members. She noted that the presentation is actually being done jointly with Ira Perman who is on-line from Anchorage.

Number 0229

IRA PERMAN, Executive Director, Alaska Humanities Forum, presented a power point presentation to the committee, testified in support of HB 84 and answered questions from the members. He told the committee that Marjorie Menzi, the Project Director for the Alaska History Curriculum Development Program, which is

developing a course for Alaska history for all Alaska high schools students. He told the members that the curriculum would be presented to the members through the power point presentation. Mr. Perman added that he and Ms. Menzi would be available to answer questions from the committee throughout the presentation. He said that after the members see the presentation he hopes HB 84 will be passed out of committee with a "do pass" recommendation.

MR. PERMAN reminded the members that about a month and a half ago during U.S. Senator Ted Stevens address to the joint session of the legislature he said the following:

The Alaska Humanities Forum is developing a statewide curriculum in Alaskan History. It is my hope that this curriculum will enable future generations to grasp and preserve what it means to be 'Alaskan'.

Number 0468

MR. PERMAN commented that everyone is aware of the fact that the state faces unusually difficult fiscal times, but Representative Kapsner said thanks to Senator Stevens' this bill has a zero a fiscal note.

MR. PERMAN offered that some might question why Alaska history should be required at this time. He explained that there is a large national awareness that democracy is not self-sufficient. It must be taught to every generation. It is important for students to learn about our history and about our values, and government institutions, so that each generation participates and continues to be involved. Including this course will prepare our students to be knowledgeable adults. Shortly after taking this course the students will be eligible to vote, he pointed out. To be a good voter a person needs to know the state's history, how the government works, cultures, and geography. Mr. Perman emphasized that everyone is concerned about our future generations and want them to stay in Alaska. If they have a sense of what it means to be Alaskan, it is more likely they will stay here.

Number 0614

MR. PERMAN explained that [the map in the power point presentation shows] how Alaska history is taught across the state. There are 52 school districts, and for the most part

Alaska history is taught at the elementary school level. Some school districts teach Alaska history at the high school level as an elective, he added. In the rural areas of Alaska, Alaska history is a required course that all students must take. However, Mr. Perman pointed out that in the highly populated areas such as Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Sitka, Matanuska-Susitna, and Kenai areas, if Alaska history is taught it is an elective at the high school level. He added that very few students actually take the course. So these students emerge from high school with very little knowledge of what Alaska is all about, he summarized. He told the members that this bill would require that every high school student have completed a high school level course in Alaska history.

Number 0719

MR. PERMAN said that their research shows that of the 50 states 47 require either through state law or regulation that their high school students take their state's history course. The laws also set the grade level at which the course must be taken, he added. Another interesting point that was discovered is that most states require that students take the course multiple times, for example at the elementary level, the secondary level, and again at the high school level. There is a big difference in what is taught. At the elementary level the teacher may pose the questions, "Do you know that you have a permanent fund? Do you know that you will receive a check? Do you know how much it is?" Then the question is: "Do you know where it comes from?" At the high school level the questions would be something like, "How did the permanent fund come to be?" This would bring into question Alaska's political process and how the state works. He summarized that Alaska History at the high school level is going to be far more in-depth.

Number 0865

MR. PERMAN told the members that the good news about this legislation is that there will be no cost to the state. The funding has been provided by Senator Stevens. It was determined a couple of years ago that there just wasn't enough money in the state's budget to make an effort like this happen. Senator Stevens made it his mission to ensure that money did not stand in the way of making this happen. All the costs associated with putting this in place was in the president's budget and will be administered through the Department of Education and Early Development. The course is under development now. Marjorie Menzi who is the project director will give a brief summary on

the status of its development. The funds have been provided for the classroom materials and teacher training.

Number 0992

MS. MENZI explained that the course is a web-based curriculum, not a distance-delivered curriculum. This course will be using the web as resource material, but it will be produced on a CD, and there will be one for every student and teacher in the state. There will also be a printed teacher's guide with the lessons and activities that will be on the CD. There will be standardized student assessment to ensure that the students have learned.

Number 1190

MS. MENZI told the members that there is a 28-member committee of primarily educators and community leaders from around the state who have directed the development of the course. These individuals have identified the six main narrative themes that will be the basis of the course. Chronology will be an important part as it relates to world history. It was also decided that regional history will be included because of the rich regional history that has already been developed by local school districts.

MS. MENZI explained that the committee will identify essential questions and enduring understandings that students should have as a result of taking this course. The six themes that are being developed are geography, cultures, Russian period, the early American period, government or statehood governance, and post statehood and current events. She told the members that all of the authors are affiliated with the University of Alaska as follows:

Geography - Dr. Roger Pearson
Cultures - Paul Ongtooguk
Russian Period - Dr. Steve Haycox
Early American Period - Jo Antonson
Government - Dr. Terrance Cole
Post Statehood/Current Events - Dr. Steve Haycox

MS. MENZI told the members that all of the main narratives are currently being worked on. Because this is a web-based curriculum it will be possible to incorporate primary documents from the Virtual Library and Digital Archives (VILDA) from the Alaska state historical library. The University of Alaska

Fairbanks has been working on what is called the "Juke Box" project which is an oral history collection and which will also be available for the class. Ms. Menzi shared that there will be a section on biographies. Many of our history makers are still alive and there is a great effort to capture their retrospective thoughts on what they lived through. That will also be included in the curriculum through the Juke Box project.

Number 1345

MS. MENZI shared that another special feature available through the class is a virtual field trips. There are many site currently up and filled with information, so by guiding the students through these virtual field trips it will enable students to experience a lot of Alaska that they might not be able to visit. As the former Director of the Alaska Close Up Program she became aware of the fact that so many of the students from Northern Alaska had no idea what Southeast Alaska was like, and students from Southeast Alaska had no idea what Northern Alaska was like. In the 1980s it was her experience that most of the students had no idea what the Capitol was like and what happened there. Virtual field trips will enable the students to experience historical monuments and landmarks around the state, she said. She emphasized that because this is a web-based course students will be able to visit sites like the Alskool site on Alaska Native cultures, the oral history sites, and government sites. She explained that the course will largely use public domain sites because it is very expensive to get copy write permissions for private materials.

Number 1450

MS. MENZI said that a special assessment tool called the culminating project. This was implemented by the National History Day program which encourages students to develop a culminating project in their studies. For example, the student could either do an exhibit, performance, paper, or documentary which demonstrates the knowledge obtained through Alaska history, she commented. There have been students in Alaska who have been recognized in National History Day competition for their contributions and have been published in national history journals.

MS. MENZI told the members that the committee is working with Lucid Reverie LLC in developing a site. Many other state model curriculums were studied to determine what important feature should be on the site. Some of the things that were identified

were the historical timeline. The dates used will be the same as those used by the library to do their VILDA project so the timelines will be in sync. She emphasized that there is an effort to work collaboratively with anything that might have input into this project. For example, the project is collaborating with the museum in Anchorage which is currently doing arts curriculum on-line and it will be incorporated in the history curriculum, she said.

Number 1658

MS. MENZI provided a brief visual overview of the site to the members. [The CD is available through Alaska History Curriculum Development Program, Alaska Humanities Forum, the Department of Education and Early Development.] She emphasized that funding for teacher training was also provided by Senator Stevens. This summer 30 teachers will be trained at UAA, will then pilot the course, it will be revised to address what does and does not work in the classrooms.

Number 1801

CHAIR GATTO announced for the record that Representative Gara has been in the meeting for the entire presentation.

Number 1810

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER told the members that this bill has widespread support throughout the state. She said that the following groups are in support of this legislation:

- Commonwealth North
- Humanities Forum
- Alaska Historical Commission
- Anchorage Chamber of Commerce
- Alaska Equal Rights Commission
- CIRI Foundation
- Alaska Resource Development Council
- Former governors
- National Education Association
- Alaska Association of School Administrators
- Alaska Municipal League
- Alaska Geographic Society
- Palmer Historical Society
- AFN
- First Alaskans Foundation

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER pointed to the many supportive newspaper editorials that have been included in the members' packets.

CHAIR GATTO asked if there are any organized groups that oppose HB 84.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER replied not to her knowledge.

Number 1868

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON complimented Ms. Menzi on her efforts and enthusiasm for this project.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked if the courses currently taught in Anchorage are the same as those that would be taught statewide.

Number 1903

MS. MENZI commented that the Anchorage School District adopted a requirement for a semester course in Alaska history last year. The project is working very closely with them. She noted that the Anchorage School District is doing a training this summer for their teachers which is separate from the training we will be providing. She emphasized that the courses are being merged and next year everything will be in sync. The course the project will provide will be on CD.

CHAIR GATTO asked how the student uses the CD.

MS. MENZI responded that it is used just like a textbook.

CHAIR GATTO commented that the student must have a computer.

MS. MENZI pointed out that if the teacher has one computer in her classroom, he/she could use it as has been done here in the committee room. It is also possible to print out the portions of the CD and give reading assignments. The CD's can be taken home, used at the library, or computer labs. She noted that this will be an innovation. She said that the Department of Education and Early Development can confirm this, but she believes 98-99 percent of Alaskan students have access to a computer and Internet connection.

CHAIR GATTO added that in Rural Alaska in some cases there are 14 students in a class and all are issued a laptop computer for classroom use. He asked if Anchorage adopted this requirement on its own without a state law.

MS. MENZI replied that is correct. The Anchorage School Board adopted this requirement.

CHAIR GATTO asked if there is some justification for imposing this class rather than allowing school districts consider and adopt this requirement.

MS. MENZI replied that there are some districts that have been reluctant to adopt it. Anchorage's leadership will be significant in terms of local adoption, but there are students who are not getting this. She shared that five of her children went to Juneau Douglas High School, and none of them are in the state. They each graduated from college and are all living elsewhere, she commented. She said she believes it is important for students to study their state and realize how unique Alaska is.

Number 2133

MR. PERMAN commented that most school districts simply did not have the resources to put this course in place. It is expensive to develop a course, train teachers, and provide materials for the course work. He emphasized that he has not encountered any school districts that have philosophical opposition to this. A poll a few years ago asked if it was believed that Alaskan high school students should learn Alaska history and the result was that 91 percent said yes.

CHAIR GATTO told Mr. Perman that he is not opposed to the bill, but has some further questions. In reference to the poll, he said he believes that there would be a positive result of 91 percent to teach most subjects.

MR. PERMAN replied that the phrasing of the question was "should Alaska history be required to be taught to every high school student in Alaska." Even though it was a requirement or mandate, the margin was still two to one in favor of having that course taught to Alaska high school students, he said.

CHAIR GATTO questioned what the response would be if the public were asked which class of electives should be deleted so that the student can be taught Alaska history.

MR. PERMAN responded that the same question came up in Anchorage. He commented that the state requires that there be 6 semesters in social studies and many of those are electives. He

admitted that having this course as a requirement would remove the opportunity for students to take one of those electives. Mr. Perman said that school districts have different electives. In Anchorage there are 49 possible electives. He said that he believes the local school districts will have to make the decision about what elective might not be taught.

CHAIR GATTO used a hypothetical example of Ms. Menzi's children who went to college. If they applied to college with a third year of math or two years of math and one year of Alaska History; would the absence of a third year of math diminish the number of colleges that might have accepted them, he asked. In other words, he questioned whether the students would be penalized for taking Alaska history and eliminating a chance for the students to take a third year of math.

Number 2368

MS. MENZI commented that since the students are already required by the state to take six credits in social studies to graduate, this course would not be taking away a course of study the student could take. It is just part of the existing social studies requirement, she emphasized. It is just that the state does not current dictate what any of those six semester must be, she added.

Number 2474

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON shared that he had received e-mails from the school districts he represents. The response from Sam Stewart of the Kenai Peninsula School District indicated that this change will mean that most schools will not be offering any social studies electives. He said it is interesting to note that in districts that offer Alaska history the course is not taken very much because other courses are considered to be more important by the students.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON said the other response he received back from Ron Keffler, principal of Homer High School, indicated that he would prefer not to have this be a requirement at this time because the school is still suffering staff cuts. The school's ability to apply sufficient and appropriate elective courses has already been diminished severely and this would exacerbate the problem. Another concern is that the social studies teachers that would have to teach the course are already fully subscribed. Representative Seaton asked Ms. Menzi if some of

the schools social studies programs would have to drop courses in order to offer this one.

Number 2574

MS. MENZI replied that most school districts offer or require one year of American History, one year of World History, and some have a requirement for a semester of government. In the Anchorage School District four credits social studies are required, rather than three. Anchorage also requires a semester of economics and Alaska studies. A survey was done a number of years ago which found the most commonly offered courses in social studies were economics, government, and Alaska studies. One of the great things about this program is that it provides for teacher training. Even though all teachers must take an Alaska history course for certification, many do not feel comfortable to teach it. The opportunity for more intensive training is something the teachers welcome, she added.

Number 2647

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON clarified that what Ms. Menzi is saying is if a school district has a six semester requirement, and required courses include one year of American history, one year of world history, one semester of economics and one semester of government; then one of these courses will have to be dropped.

MS. MENZI replied that the Alaska history that is being put forth has a government component. Government is also covered in American history as well, she added. She emphasized her belief that it is important for students to know the history of the state where they live.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON told the committee that he thinks it is great that there is a curriculum being developed that will be available to the districts, but explained that he is uncomfortable dictating to the districts on this point. He noted that it appears many of the rural districts do not have the options for as many electives. He said he is not sure that imposing this course on the other districts makes sense.

MS. MENZI commented that the bulk of the population is in the urban areas and is not being offered. That is of course is with the exception of Anchorage which has 43 percent of the student population.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER said that the nine school districts that do not require Alaska history are Chatham, Chugach, Delta/Greeley, Denali Borough, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Iditarod Area, Juneau, Sitka, and Unalaska. She commented that she is the only member of the committee who was required to take an Alaska history course. Representative Kapsner said she graduated from the Lower-Kuskokwim School District and was very surprised when she learned that other schools do not require it. She said she is surprised when meeting other Alaskans and finds that they do not know that much about the state in which they live. Representative Kapsner added that this topic has been the subject of discussion for many years. Senator Hensley introduced a resolution in the early 1980s urging an Alaska history course. Even after the resolution passed, few school districts heeded that resolution.

Number 2846

REPRESENTATIVE GARA commented that he believes there are many reasons this bill is important. A lot of flexibility has been taken away from schools because of the standardized testing requirements.

The committee took an at-ease from 11:53 a.m. to 11:54 a.m.

Number 2879

REPRESENTATIVE GARA pointed out that with the exception of Anchorage, the areas where kids are not learning Alaska history are urban areas. He added that these are areas where most of the population does not grow up in Alaska. Without requiring that Alaska history be taught most of these children will not have the benefit of learning about it. Representative Gara said he believes these kids are the ones who are most in need of having pride in where they are from. He told the members that there are 25 co-sponsors of this bill, which he believes is more than almost any other bill before the legislature this year.

TAPE 04-18, SIDE B

Number 2955

REPRESENTATIVE GARA acknowledged Representative Seaton's concern that there is only so much class time, but said he believes the need for it rests on its merits. He corrected his earlier statement that there are 25 co-sponsor, there are actually 29 co-sponsors.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON noted that there could be other reasons why schools do not teach Alaska history. For example, she shared that when she grew up 40 some years ago in Iowa, Iowa studies was a required course. She commented that she cannot remember a single thing that she learned in that class. The advantage Alaska has is an incredible curriculum that almost anyone could teach. Representative Wilson commented that a couple of years ago when this issue came up many schools did not want it because it was an unfunded mandate. Now the funding has been provided. She summarized her comments by saying that legislators should be doing all they can to ensure that some of Alaska's kids come back to Alaska. This course could be a start.

Number 2850

CHAIR GATTO asked Ms. Menzi if Alaska history is taught in 4th grade, U.S. history in 5th grade, and world history in 6th grade.

Number 2832

MS. MENZI replied yes, that is commonly done. It is taught in a cursory fashion because the students are not developmentally able to deal with very complex thought processes in terms of issues such as the permanent fund. As high schoolers they are much more mature learners and they have the ability to grasp complex concepts, she added.

CHAIR GATTO asked if Ms. Menzi would suggest deleting the course from the elementary curriculum.

MS. MENZI responded absolutely not. She commented that many states require their state's history be taught two or three times, elementary, middle school, and high school level.

Number 2745

TIM STEELE, Member, Anchorage School Board, testified in support of HB 84 and answered questions from the members. The Anchorage School Board believes that every student graduating from high school should have a demonstrable knowledge of Alaska's history, he said. He commented that there is a reason why 47 states have this requirement. Alaska needs it more than others because we have a rich broad history. He said whenever traveling to the Lower 48 states people are very intrigued with Alaska. Mr.

Steele said he believes we need to be good ambassadors for Alaska.

MR. STEELE told the members that the Anchorage School District is working very closely with the Alaska Humanities Forum. The requirement for completion of an Alaska history course goes into effect this year, he added. He urged support of HB 84.

Number 2670

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked Mr. Steele to respond to the question concerning the effect of requiring this course which would remove an option for an additional elective course.

Number 2647

MR. STEELE responded that it was a big issue, particularly for students who are high achieving students or advanced placement students that wanted to take extra language or math courses. He said that he believes those students will take extra classes anyway. The school board felt that it was overwhelmingly obvious that students need to have a common understanding of our state. So many come from somewhere else, he added.

CHAIR GATTO asked if this was a school board decision and asked what the vote was.

MR. STEELE responded that the vote was 7-0 in favor of requiring the course.

Number 2601

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked Mr. Steele if he believes if the state had made the decision and dictated the requirement of the course if it would have created a different reaction within the community.

MR. STEELE acknowledged that it probably would have been a "burr under our saddle" to be told to do it. When examining the rationale, it is found to be a good rationale, he said. He said he believes it is important to have common standards throughout the state. The materials that are being developed will make this a huge resource to the schools.

Number 2531

STEVE HAYCOX, Ph.D. testified in support of HB 84. He told the committee he is a former history professor at the University of Alaska, and has been published by University of Washington Press, and was the Chair of the Alaska Humanities Forum when this initiative was adopted to work for this requirement. He commented that his wife teaches honors world history in West High School and is one of ten teachers last year who taught the Alaska studies pilot course at West High School. She currently is currently in Kotlik with four West High School students who will be spending the week going to school there.

Number 2456

DR. HAYCOX pointed out that a certain number of language arts, math, and science credits are mandated statewide. He said he believes it is important to be comfortable with mandating Alaska history in understanding where and who we are. Dr. Haycox shared that the developmental issue is important. One question that needs to be answered by the students is "so what". What is important about Alaska history. For example, he said that Ernest Gruening was governor of Alaska. It is important for students to know that he dedicated himself to getting Alaska admitted in the union as a state. He agreed with Ms. Menzi that the developmental track is significant and repetition is important, but not just repetition, it is taking it to a deeper understanding each time the student is exposed to it.

DR. HAYCOX commented on Representative Seaton's concern by saying that in the Anchorage School Districts students still have a free elective even with the new Alaska history requirement. He emphasized that the school board looked closely at this issue and satisfied those concerns that the course could be required and still ensure a free elective.

DR. HAYCOCK agreed with Representative Gara that this is an essential course. For example, kids going to Service High School have no idea who Robert Service was, or kids going to Bartlett High School have no idea who Bob Bartlett was.

Number 2152

MR. PERMAN added an observation that his daughter graduated from West High School without taking the Alaska studies course. She did have the opportunity spend time in Rural Alaska and at culture camps. He explained that when applying for college the transcripts were sent that told how many advance placement (AP) courses were taken. He asked if it will disadvantage his

daughter if she has less AP courses than another student. The answer is no. What the colleges look for is that the students took as many as possible to take. So a student in a rural school district that does not offer AP courses is rated as highly as a student with five AP courses. She used the opportunity of her essay to write about Alaska and what she learned about the two or three weeks she spent in small community. That was the one thing in her application that made it possible for her to get into a very fine school. By having that understanding of what it means to be an Alaskan, she is a little unique and grounded. He believes she will come back to Alaska, contribute to the state, and not just wander off to some other state.

Number 1932

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON commented that of the six school districts she represents four already have Alaska history in their curriculum, and of the school districts that do not currently teach it, none of them responded negatively to including this course.

CHAIR GATTO commented that the question that needs to be answered is if most of the districts already have the course, should the requirement be imposed upon those school districts that do not.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON replied that if this was an unfunded mandate she probably would not support it, but because there is no cost to the schools, she believes it is a good for the students to learn Alaska history.

CHAIR GATTO pointed out that the program will be available anyway. It simply means that it will be up to the schools to adopt the course of study or not. He said he doesn't believe anyone objects to teaching Alaska history, but he questioned whether the local school districts should decide what is in the best interest of their students, rather than the legislature.

Number 1820

REPRESENTATIVE GARA acknowledged that the state does mandate courses that will be taken. There is a compelling case that Alaska history should be part of the fabric that forms the educational system. Just the fact that most school districts have adopted Alaska history courses shows that they are sensitive to its importance, he added.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA shared that he grew up in New York where its history was really colonial history that was not unlike that of Vermont, New Jersey and Massachusetts because they are all connected. He pointed out that Alaska has a uniquely different history than any other state. There are cultures in this state that have been here for thousands of years. He commented that there is a huge transient population in Alaska and it is important for those students to know about their state. He shared that he just complete a book entitle Edge of No Where by Jimmy Huntington which talked about the Huntington family's experience in Alaska at the turn of the century. It was fascinating, he said. Representative Gara reiterated the course's importance and urged the members to pass HB 84.

Number 1540

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON told the members that he is fully in support of the development of this curriculum. He has concerns as were expressed by the Kenai Peninsula School District and the Homer High School as to what will have to be eliminated to accomplish this mandate. He pointed out that he believes the Anchorage School District's local decision-making process was an important element in requiring Alaska history in its curriculum. There is a very big difference between what happened in Anchorage and a state mandate to local communities who have not bought into this proposal. He emphasized that a local process in adopting this course is essential. Representative Seaton told the members that he supports the bill but would like to offer an amendment.

CHAIR GATTO asked for Representative Seaton to hold his amendment until the members conclude their discussions.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON said he believes that this is a great curriculum. Once it is offered to districts, there will be discussions and he believes there will buy-in to the idea of including Alaska history in their curriculums. He summarized that he is only uncomfortable with the mandated portion of the bill.

CHAIR GATTO commented that Representative Gara pointed out that there are 29 co-sponsors of HB 84. He asked Representative Kapsner if she believes if a majority of the members wants something then it should be forced upon the minority.

Number 1377

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER responded that is an unfair question. She said that if there is majority support for a bill it should go to the floor for a vote. That is done every day, she added.

CHAIR GATTO agreed that the bill will go to the floor, but his question is really about districts which Representative Seaton represents that do not want the bill. He commented that he finds it ironic. There is a fairness question as to whether districts who do not want to include this course will be forced to do it.

Number 1320

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER said she sees that in many state statutes now. Not just in education but in many other aspects of law. The legislature comes together to decide what is in the common good's interest, and although it might not be convenient for everyone, there is agreement that something is in the best interest of our state or community.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA commented that he recently support a very good bill by Chair Gatto that required carbon monoxide detectors in homes. There was a minority of people that did not want that to be a mandate and it was decided the benefits far out weighted the detriments. He said he thinks HB 84 is another example of the benefits far out weighing the detriments.

Number 1194

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON moved to adopt Amendment 1, which reads as follows:

Page 2, line 7
Delete "shall"
Insert "may"

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER objected.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON told the committee that this amendment retains the provision that the Department of Education and Early Development shall develop a standard based Alaska [history] curriculum and each school board may implement the curriculum in their classrooms. He summarized that the only change is that the school districts will make the determination within their own districts as to whether it implements this course.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked where the Department of Education and Early Development stands on this bill.

Number 1096

KEVIN SWEENEY, Legislative Liaison, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, testified on HB 84 and answered questions from the committee. He told the members that this issue has been before the current Board of Education three times in the last year. This bill would require the board to do an activity that the board already has the power to do. If the board wanted to mandate Alaska history as part of the required curriculum, the board could do that without HB 84. The board received the same presentation from the Alaska Humanities Forum in March. The board is taking some time to consider whether this is something it wishes to mandate as a graduation requirement. Mr. Sweeney summarized that the board has not taken an official position on this issue yet. He added that the presentation was well received, but it has not taken action yet. Mr. Sweeney commented that he did not know if this issue would be taken up at the June board meeting.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER said that it was her understanding that this issue would be taken up at the September board meeting.

MR. SWEENEY replied that he is not sure if the board will be addressing this in September. The board has not taken a position against the bill whatsoever, it is looking at the issue, he said. Mr. Sweeney clarified that it would be odd for the board to support a bill that has the legislature telling them to do what it already has the power to do.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if the amendment would restrict the Board of Education's ability to mandate the course as a requirement for graduation.

MR. SWEENEY said if the amendment passed he is not sure what the effect of the bill would be. He reiterated that the board would still have the power to mandate Alaska history as a requirement of graduation.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked if Mr. Sweeney knows what percentage of teachers move to Alaska from out of state.

Number 0796

MR. SWEENEY replied that most teachers are not from Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked Mr. Sweeney if he believes it would serve Alaskan students well to have their teachers know and understand Alaska history.

MR. SWEENEY commented that he is not an educator and asked for Barbara Thompson to respond to that questions.

CHAIR GATTO asked for clarification of Representative Gara's question.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA said he is wondering if by mandating Alaska history if a side benefit of the bill would be that the teachers would also understand Alaska's history.

CHAIR GATTO commented that he wonders if a teacher could teach Alaska history without ever taking a class in Alaska history. He asked Ms. Thompson how many teachers come from outside of Alaska to teach.

Number 0564

BARBARA THOMPSON, Director, Teaching and Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development, testified on HB 84 and answered questions from the committee. Ms. Thompson said that her best guess is that 70 percent of the teachers hired in Alaska come from out of state. The current institutions in state do not have the capacity to educate enough teachers.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked if teachers are required to take an Alaska history class before being certified.

MS. THOMPSON agreed with Representative Wilson. Teachers are required to take two courses, Alaska history or Alaska studies, and multi-cultural education.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER clarified that it is her understanding that new teachers to the state have up to three years to take those courses, so a teacher could be teaching three years without taking those courses.

MS. THOMPSON responded that it depends upon the type of certificate a teacher is working under. New teachers have probably already taken those courses right out of preparation programs. If a teacher comes from out of state with a limited

certificate there is a one to two year time period to take those courses and receive a regular type A teaching certificate.

Number 0507

CHAIR GATTO asked if these courses are part of continuing education courses required to retain a teaching certificate.

MS. THOMPSON replied yes.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if those two classes would be adequate training to teach the Alaska history or Alaska studies classes.

MS. THOMPSON responded that there is really only one class related to Alaska studies or Alaska history that teachers are required to take. The other class is a multi-cultural studies course. She commented that after taking one course in Alaska studies that a teacher would be prepared to teach Alaska studies.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON questioned if this is implemented as a mandated part of the curriculum would the teachers who teach this course be required to obtain additional education.

Number 0400

MS. THOMPSON replied that would depend on the teacher. Additional teaching strategies may be needed by some teachers.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON rephrased his question by asking if the 70 percent of teachers who come to Alaska take the Alaska history or Alaska studies course and the multi-cultural studies course have enough preparation to teach the course in Alaska history.

MS. THOMPSON replied it would depend upon the teacher. She reminded the members that the current No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires that teachers be highly qualified in the subject with which they teach. So a history teacher would have to be highly qualified.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if a teacher who is highly qualified to teach world history or American history also be highly qualified to teach this course.

Number 0278

MR. SWEENEY responded that NCLB would only require a teacher to be highly qualified in social studies. It would not even be so in depth as to require a teacher be highly qualified in just history. He added that the funding for teacher education is included. Right now a pilot program is being done with 30 teachers, and next year it will be done with 300 teachers. He commented that there is the recognition that there will be extra training required, which is built into the concept of the course.

Number 0224

REPRESENTATIVE WOLF said he graduated from the Kenai Peninsula School District 25 years ago. At that time Alaska and local history was taught. A great deal of it was shared through storytelling and mentorship from local community members.

CHAIR GATTO asked if Representative Wolf is saying he would prefer to have a local history course taught rather than history of the entire state.

REPRESENTATIVE WOLF said his primary concern lies with mandating the course so he will be supporting Amendment 1.

TAPE 04-19, SIDE A

Number 0050

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER told the members that Amendment 1 would gut HB 84. She asked Ms. Menzi to speak to local input with respect to the course.

MS. MENZI told the members that a survey was done in the fall of all of the school districts and asked them to identify the materials developed locally and regionally that might be incorporated into the course. When the design for the course was done there was an icon for regional history, so students will be able to access information on specific regions of the state, she explained. She said that there was a fair response, but hopes as time goes on more and more information will be added. Since the course is on CD it will be possible to add more information as it becomes available.

CHAIR GATTO asked if there are experiences with CDs as a learning tool.

Number 0187

MS. MENZI responded that there is experience in this area. For example, she said she was involved in the CD that was on the retracing of the Harriman Expedition in 2001. That CD was made available to every school district in the state. It provide historical information on the voyage 100 years ago and information on some of the contemporary voyage.

CHAIR GATTO asked if there is experience in using CDs the way this CD is intended to be used.

MS. MENZI responded that is a new concept. Distance delivered education has been going on for some time, but the idea of CDs as the base curriculum is cutting edge, she said. She said that it is beginning to be done nationwide because textbooks are so expensive. Ms. Menzi acknowledged that this is an experiment. Nothing like this has been done in Alaska before.

CHAIR GATTO commented that he wishes that there was some record of this being successful. He said that he foresees a time when it may be necessary to use distance delivery to have a highly qualified teacher somewhere with everyone connecting.

MS. MENZI replied that she would be happy to research that subject and provide her findings to the members. One of the models used for this website is Nebraska's studies which has been doing some of there social studies education through this website.

Number 0438

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked if other states' teachers have had difficulty teaching the classes.

MS. MENZI responded that a social studies teacher would not have difficulty because they have had a lot of exposure to history. Most of the social studies endorsed teachers in Alaska have majored in history, rather than geography or economics, she commented.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked if there will be source materials for the teachers.

MS. MENZI said there will be a teacher's guide which will have the resource materials referenced. It will be provided on CD and in print.

Number 0572

CHAIR GATTO commented that he would suspect that in Kansas, for example, most of their teachers are hired from within state. Alaska simply cannot produce the number of teachers needed.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON reiterated that Amendment 1 would solve the two problems he sees with the bill. It removes the mandate for the districts who have not adopted Alaska history as a required subject. He said he also has problems with overriding the Alaska State Board of Education and this would also address that.

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Gatto, Wilson, Wolf, and Seaton voted in favor of Amendment 1. Representatives Kapsner and Gara voted against it. Therefore, Amendment 1 was adopted by a vote of 4-2.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON told the committee that she believes this is a very worthwhile course requirement; however, this is a very difficult decision because she does not like mandates.

CHAIR GATTO told the members that he intends to move the bill out of committee today.

Number 0850

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER reminded Representative Wilson that this bill will be heard in House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee next and could be amended there. It has a long way to go before reaching the Department of Education and Early Development.

Number 0972

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON moved Amendment 2 as follows:

On page 2, line 16
Delete "2003"
Insert "2004"

There being no objection, Amendment 2 was adopted.

Number 1015

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER moved to report HB 84 out of committee as amended with individual recommendations and the accompanying

fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHB 84(EDU) was reported out of the House Special Committee on Education.

Number 1045

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Education meeting was adjourned at 12:50 p.m.