

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES  
STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 27, 2003

3:04 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Peggy Wilson, Chair  
Representative Carl Gatto, Vice Chair  
Representative John Coghill  
Representative Paul Seaton  
Representative Kelly Wolf  
Representative Sharon Cissna  
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

HOUSE BILL NO. 171

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

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

**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
03/11/03		(H)	MINUTE(EDU)
03/13/03		(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 124
03/13/03		(H)	Heard & Held
03/13/03		(H)	MINUTE(EDU)
03/18/03		(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 124
03/18/03		(H)	Moved Out of Committee
03/18/03		(H)	MINUTE(EDU)
03/19/03	0583	(H)	EDU RPT 3DNP 2NR 1AM
03/19/03	0583	(H)	DNP: KAPSNER, GARA, SEATON; NR: WOLF,
03/19/03	0583	(H)	GATTO; AM: WILSON
03/19/03	0583	(H)	FN1: (EED)
03/19/03	0583	(H)	FN2: (EED)
03/20/03		(H)	HES AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106
03/20/03		(H)	-- Meeting Canceled --
03/27/03		(H)	HES AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106

**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 HB 174 and responded  
to questions from the committee.

JOHN SCOTT  
Gustavus, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

NANCY RICAR  
Trapper Creek, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

MARVEL LLOYD  
Nome, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

SERENA LLOYD  
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

JOHN PADEN, Counselor  
Alyeska Central School;  
Representative, Alyeska Central School Association  
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 174 and answered questions from the committee.

THERESA DEMOTT  
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

AYARIE CANTIL-VOOHEES  
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

LINDA VOOHEES  
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

BETTY COME  
Chugiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

NANCY WLADYKA  
Sitka, Alaska

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

DENISE MALONEY  
Willow, Alaska

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

SEAN RUDELLE  
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

VICTORIA MARTIN  
Anchorage, Alaska

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

HAYLIE RUDELLE  
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

VERNA GIBSON  
Anchorage, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

RYAN WOLCOTT  
Anchorage, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

KYM WOLCOTT  
Anchorage, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

JULIET ROBINSON  
Anchorage, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

VIRGINIA KAHLER  
Anchorage, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

VALERIE WHITE  
Whale Pass, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174 and  
answered questions from the committee.

PAULA WILLIAMS  
(Address not provided)  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

JENNIFER WILCOX  
Gakona, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174 and  
answered questions from the committee.

TIM MORGAN  
Anchorage, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

CHRISTINE WILCOX  
Gakona, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

CINDY MICHOU  
Anchorage, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

THOMAS ROBINSON  
Anchorage, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

BREANNA ROBINSON  
Anchorage, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

RUBY BULLCHILD  
Fairbanks, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

MARY TONY  
Fairbanks, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

SHEILA SYMONS  
Central, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174.

ALEXANDER DOLITSKY, Ph.D.,  
Juneau, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on his own behalf in opposition to HB 174 and answered questions from the committee about Alyeska Central School, where he teaches social studies.

CECILIA MILLER  
Alyeska Central School Education Association  
Juneau, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174 and answered questions from the committee.

KEVIN SWEENEY, Special Assistant  
Office of the Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 174 and responded to questions from the committee.

DEBBIE CHALMERS, Teacher  
Alyeska Central School  
Juneau, Alaska  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174 and responded to questions from the committee.

JOHN ALCANTRA, Government Relations Director  
NEA-Alaska

Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 174 and responded to questions from the committee.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

**TAPE 03-29, SIDE A**

Number 0001

**CHAIR PEGGY WILSON** called the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:04 p.m. Representatives Wilson, Gatto, Wolf, Coghill, Seaton, and Cissna were present at the call to order. Representative Kapsner arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 174- CORRESPONDENCE STUDY

CHAIR WILSON 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."

Number 0115

EDDY JEANS, Manager, School Finance and Facilities Section, Education Support Services, Department of Education and Early Development, testified in support of HB 174 and responded to questions from the committee. He explained that the bill would repeal the statutes referring to Alyeska Central School (ACS), which is a state operated correspondence program.

Number 0209

MR. JEANS said the committee has two fiscal notes in their bill packet. Fiscal note 1 in the amount of \$5.5 million reflects the BRU [Budget Review Unit] for ACS. In ACS's budget there is authorization to receive and expend \$5.5 million. He said \$500,000 of those funds are from receipt services or fees that ACS charges students for coursework. Through the foundation program, ACS generates about \$3.8 million so the \$1.2 million remaining comes from other sources such as federal grants through the department. Fiscal note 2 represents a reduction in the foundation program of \$1.1 million, which is approximately how much ACS generates for its summer school program. The

reason the department left the additional \$2.6 million in the foundation program is that the department believes those students in the regular ACS program will enroll somewhere else and that money needs to follow those children.

Number 0295

MR. JEANS told the committee that ACS has been in existence since 1939 and provides educational programs to students living in remote areas where there are no local schools available. Alyeska Central School also serves students in urban areas around the state. The department determined that approximately 84 percent of the students enrolled in ACS live in larger urban areas such as Anchorage, Fairbanks, the Matanuska-Susitna ("Mat-Su"), Kenai, Kodiak, and Juneau.

Number 0330

CHAIR WILSON commented that at the time ACS was created, it was the only correspondence school available. She asked how many other correspondence schools are available now.

MR. JEANS responded that there are a number of correspondence programs available on a district level and 11 other correspondence programs that are offered on a statewide basis. In 1997 just a couple of school districts started providing correspondence programs, and there has been quite an increase in the number of students being served through correspondence programs over the years. In 1999 there were approximately 7,890 students being served through correspondence school programs. Currently, the state is up to 9,655 students on a statewide basis. He said that if the committee looks at ACS's enrollment back in 1999 [including summer school enrollment], it was funded for 2,628 students. In the current year, ACS had 1,085 students in full-time programs. Mr. Jeans agreed with Chair Wilson's comment that there has been a sizable decrease since 1999.

Number 0466

MR. JEANS told the committee that the members will hear in testimony that ACS is the only accredited correspondence program in the state, but three other school districts have applied for accreditation for their correspondence programs. The Galena School District has a conditional accreditation pending completion of the actual accreditation process. The other districts that are in the process of accreditation include the

Craig School District's PACE Program and the Delta/Greely district's Delta Charter Cyber School.

Number 0481

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked for Mr. Jeans to clarify the numbers again.

MR. JEANS said the \$1.2 million is for the summer school program through the foundation program. The total funding ACS received was \$3.8 million through the foundation program. So there is \$2.6 million remaining that funds the regular school program.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked for clarification on the fiscal notes.

MR. JEANS responded that fiscal note 1 has a total of \$5.5 million; of that, \$3.8 million is funded through the foundation funding program as interagency receipts, \$500,000 is obtained through program charges or tuition from students, and the remainder of the funds come through the department from the federal government for programs such as Title I.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if the federal funds follow the students as well as state funds.

MR. JEANS replied that he believes the funds would follow the students. Those funds are distributed on a formula basis that is determined by the needs of the students.

Number 0660

JOHN SCOTT testified in opposition to HB 174 and answered questions from the committee. He told the committee he does not support the closure of ACS. In his previous testimony before the House Special Committee on Education he had told the committee how the local Rural Education Attendance Area (REAA) school could not offer an acceptable education for his children. He said his family was actually refused assistance when he pointed out problems with his children's failure to achieve mastery of subjects being taught. He said he could not plan for his children's education. In response to Chair Wilson question, Mr. Scott responded that he was refused assistance about three years ago.

Number 0681

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO said that is a serious accusation and he would like him to provide evidence that his family was refused assistance.

MR. SCOTT explained that his daughter was having problems with mastery of spelling and sentence structure. He said he had asked the head teacher if his daughter's teacher would be allowed to assist in getting additional coursework or workbooks, and he refused to help. The head teacher told him that he did not want to help him with this.

MR. SCOTT said another instance occurred when his children went from fifth to sixth grade. He had requested additional help with mathematics and science concepts. The teacher put her hand in his face and told him that she does not teach science.

CHAIR WILSON asked how the children were doing in class at that time.

MR. SCOTT said his children were getting As and Bs at that time. That is also part of the problem in that he did not think the evaluation reflected the work the children were doing. At that time, his family needed some quality choices and alternatives in order to ensure his children would not be left behind. As a result, his family studied what options were available and found that ACS was the only real alternative. None of the other correspondence schools could offer the history and prestige of ACS. Alyeska Central School was accredited, and therefore, courses were accepted by colleges. Other programs do not have a course catalog and program like ACS, and they do not have the willing and able staff capable of evaluating mastery of subjects, provision of assistance, and support.

MR. SCOTT told the committee he was struck by the testimony in previous hearings where there was an assertion that other correspondence schools could provide an equal alternative to ACS for distance education. The other correspondence programs do not offer an equal educational experience for his children that ACS does. He said he was struck by the testimony of the Department of Education and Early Development personnel indicating "they did not want to be in this business" and that other distance education programs could pick up the slack and were willing and able to do so. Mr. Scott asked what business the department wants to be in. He told the committee the only thing the other providers were willing to do is take the state's money and sign his children up before the "count date" in October so they could get the money. He said he was struck by

the emphasis or the assertion that money could be saved by the closure of ACS.

Number 0912

MR. SCOTT told the committee if they close ACS the state's contribution toward his children's education will rise from about \$3,800 to over \$10,000. There are other children who are in the ACS student body who could go to boarding school and the cost could go as high as \$15,000. He questioned what kind of accounting rules are being used in determining the savings to the state. He asked if Arthur Andersen [the accounting firm implicated in the Enron scandal] is lurking in the fiscal department.

Number 0950

MR. SCOTT summarized by saying that at best, this is a raid on the state's treasury by the less qualified and less capable district programs, or at worst, it is an attempt to get families to leave the state to seek education. Alyeska Central School is not redundant. He asked a number of questions about how the closure of ACS would be handled and what would happen to students. He said this bill leaves children behind, does not promote choice, and does not provide for a better alternative. He said he takes it personally because it is his children who will be left behind and his children who will no longer have a choice. He asked the committee not to support this bill.

Number 1060

NANCY RICHAIR testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee her son recently graduated from ACS. She said her son was the third generation of children in her family that graduated from ACS. Her children have experienced both public and correspondence programs in the past and found ACS a breath of fresh air. There is no comparison between traditional public school and ACS. She told the committee she called the Mat-Su [Matanuska-Susitna] Borough last week to see if its program was approved. Its high school classes are all ordered from out of state, and teacher contacts consists of ordering courses, monthly appointments, and recording grades. She said the Mat-Su School District correspondence program knew nothing about participation in the Academic Decathlon, Hugh O'Brien's Leadership Conference, or the state and national Close-Up programs. Alyeska Central School participates in all of these programs. In addition, if a

student enrolls after the November 1 cutoff date, the parents have to pay the \$250 fee for each course. When she called the IDEA [Interior Distance Education in Alaska] program, she was told that it is a home school program, not a correspondence program. The parents are the teachers; that means the child's education is as good as the parent's education and commitment. She said her son would not be where he is today without ACS.

Number 1177

MARVEL LLOYD testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she lives in Nome and has two daughters currently in ACS and a son who graduated from ACS who is currently a junior in college. Ms. Lloyd said it is clear from the testimony she has heard in the last three meetings that closing ACS is not a money issue. The uniqueness of ACS has been recounted over and over again. She told the committee ACS's required accountability with the teachers, the fact that the teachers know their subjects well and have written and rewritten the curriculum, and the "one-on-one" with students over the phone are some of the most important features of ACS. She questioned the policy that the state should not be involved in education. Alyeska Central School fills in gaps in education, especially with respect to summer school. Ms. Lloyd asked why the legislature would consider throwing away what is not broken.

Number 1262

SERENA LLOYD testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is a high school student with ACS and it is a very good program. No other correspondence program offers what ACS does.

Number 1310

CHAIR WILSON questioned whether ACS only accepts students after "the count" with special permission from the commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development. She asked if ACS also charges \$250 per class if students enroll after the count date. Chair Wilson asked if John Paden would come forward and speak to these issues.

Number 1354

JOHN PADEN, Counselor, Alyeska Central School; Representative, Alyeska Central School Association, testified on HB 174 and

answered questions from the committee. Mr. Paden responded that ACS does accept children at any time of the year. The students are counseled depending upon the particular time of the year they are considering enrollment. For example, if a student were to come in and want to start a class in April and finish it in June, the counsel would be that it is pretty unlikely that a student could finish the course in the amount of time the student has chosen.

CHAIR WILSON asked if in that circumstance there would be a charge and whether it would be necessary to get permission from the commissioner of education. She asked what the process would be.

Number 1400

MR. PADEN explained that typically a parent will call requesting late enrollment for the child. After discussions with the parent, he makes a decision based on the circumstances of the student and has the ability to approve enrollment without charge. He said that ACS does enroll some students who pay tuition, or at a given time of the year, ACS may waive the tuition. Much of the determination is based on the circumstances of the family; for example, if a student has moved from one district to another, the student would be enroll without tuition. If the student has not enrolled in a local school and is new to the state, ACS will enroll him/her without tuition.

Number 1462

CHAIR WILSON asked how easy it would be for families to enroll their children if a teacher became sick or for some reason students were without a teacher.

MR. PADEN responded that it can be very easy, depending on the circumstances. He said, for instance, if there has been illness or for some reason the student has not been able to be in class, then ACS will bring the student in at no charge to the family.

CHAIR WILSON asked if there is a limit on how many students ACS can accept in this way without charging tuition.

MR. PADEN responded that ACS cannot do it indiscriminately; however, they try to be responsive to what is happening with the family.

CHAIR WILSON asked what happens if it is not necessarily a hardship situation with the family. For instance, if a student is having trouble at school or the student does not like the teacher, so in the middle of the year the family wants the student to go to ACS, what would happen in that situation?

Number 1512

MR. PADEN said in a circumstance when the student has been in school and there is no medical issue, no change in district, and the student is not new to the state, then the usual procedure is to offer the program with tuition.

CHAIR WILSON asked how much would the family have to pay.

MR. PADEN responded that the cost is \$250 per course per semester.

Number 1568

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER said that one of the concerns she has for rural Alaska is that so many of the teachers in the Bush are teaching out of their subject areas. Since ACS has so many certified teachers in their subject areas, does ACS provide assistance to these teachers to help strengthen the programs for rural students?

MR. PADEN replied that it is possible and in some cases it does happen. He said that sometimes a district will say to ACS that it will pay the \$250 for a course. Requests do not always come from the family.

CHAIR WILSON commented that there are many teachers across the state, not just in rural areas, that are doing an excellent job teaching in areas that they are not certified to teach.

Number 1650

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked about schools that no longer offer a particular course, for instance, language courses. She asked what the arrangement is between districts and ACS with respect to enrollment of some of their students in classes that are not available in local schools.

MR. PADEN said it is not uncommon for districts to buy courses from ACS. The understanding when a district does that is that they are also buying teacher services. He commented that this

also relates to Representative Kapsner's question about when a district is getting not just teaching materials, but also teaching services. Sometimes a district may buy the course without the teaching services. He said he does not know all the details of that arrangement, but when that happens someone locally does the teaching portion of the course while using ACS's course materials.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if the charge of \$250 per semester per course would apply.

MR. PADEN responded that is correct. Those funds would go into program receipts that Mr. Jeans spoke of a few moments ago.

Number 1740

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER said that in reviewing testimony she noted there is a letter from Becky Crabtree, alternative education teacher in Barrow, who says that they have a partnership with ACS whereby over 50 North Slope students in six remote villages have enrolled in one or more classes. She said her question was answered thanks to both Mr. Paden and Becky Crabtree.

Number 1761

CHAIR WILSON noted that in the House Special Committee on Education meeting it was said that 26 percent of the students enrolled in ACS are also enrolled in other correspondence programs. She said that in many cases it is a "cafeteria" arrangement where classes are picked from different schools.

Number 1788

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA explained that since she was not at the House Special Committee on Education meeting that discussed this bill, she is trying to gain a better understanding of the issue. Representative Cissna shared her experience with a stepson who was a graduate of ACS in the mid-seventies. When she began home schooling him, he was three and a half years behind academically. He had been to a special school and a traditional school, but was getting further and further behind. She said as a family there was a decision to lock heels and put him in home school. It took 12 months of hard labor, and he graduated 8th grade on course level with As and Bs because of concentrated work. Her family felt it was the only way it could be done.

She asked Mr. Paden if there are statistics on why people choose these programs and what they are able to accomplish.

MR. PADEN replied that he does not have those statistics, but believes ACS has the ability to address that question somewhat. There are many circumstances that bring people to ACS, and it is hard work. Many come to ACS to shorten the time that would be required to bring kids up to their peer level. He said it does happen, but it is a lot of work.

CHAIR WILSON asked if there is an administrator at ACS that makes the decisions or is he the person that makes the determination as to whether or not a student comes into ACS.

MR. PADEN responded that there is an administrator. The Acting Director, Margaret McKinnon, is not here today. She is the person who ultimately makes the decisions.

Number 1942

TERESA DEMOTT testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174 and answered questions from the committee. She told the committee that her son is in his fourth year at ACS and he is just completing his eighth grade this year. She asked why a nearly perfect school is being looked at for closure. If her family goes with one of the other correspondence schools and the accreditation does not happen, her son will lose all that time in school. She said her son was not offered enough in public school. He was labeled a gifted child, but what they did for him is offer him a bus ride every Friday to go hang out with other gifted children. She said she knows what her child's capability is and it is her job to make sure he achieves his highest potential. Alyeska Central School has provided this to him. He is an excellent student, maintains As and Bs, and is in constant contact with his teachers, from whom he receives so much support. He gets the support he requires, and he did not get that in public school. Ms. DeMott said she knows money is a big issue. She believes that the committee has not been given enough information to make the right decision to protect ACS students. She said she feels that she is being attacked. She asked the committee to defeat the bill.

Number 2023

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked, if there were an alternative school that was accredited, whether that would be all right.

MS. DEMOTT responded that it would not, because they do not offer the same caliber of courses that ACS offers. This can be verified by looking at other school curriculums.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked if Ms. DeMott felt ACS is the only school that can provide the education needed for her son. [Ms. DeMott did not respond.]

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER asked if Mr. Jeans would respond to the reason ACS is being targeted when other schools are not.

Number 2070

CHAIR WILSON responded that ACS is the only state-run correspondence school.

Number 2187

AYARIE CANTIL-VOOHEES testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she has been enrolled at ACS since kindergarten, with the exception of three years. She said ACS is not a duplicate of other correspondence schools. She knows the other schools and would not be satisfied attending them, and would not have the personal dedication she has now for educational excellence, had she not gone to ACS. She said there are many students that need what ACS has, and it will end up costing the state more just to close ACS than it would to keep it open. If the other correspondence schools do not meet the 2005 standards, the state will have to reopen ACS. She told the committee that the governor asked the legislature to look at this bill and judge it wisely. Please vote no on HB 174, she asked.

Number 2187

LINDA VOORHEES testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she has used ACS for fifteen years to home school her children. The House Special Committee on Education heard a great deal of testimony on this bill and she urged members who were not there to listen to that testimony. Alyeska Central School is not a part of correspondence school duplication. Its particular combination of assets is not offer anywhere else. She cited the huge expense in Internet services for rural Alaskan families. The cost could be as high as \$900 per month per child, which is unaffordable to most Alaskan families. Ms. Voorhees said it takes between three and five years to get accredited once the school's application is in, and

it will mean students who graduate from these schools will not have diplomas from an accredited school. She said parents who do home schooling need options.

Number 2291

BETTY COME testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she has two children who are enrolled at ACS, even though her family only lives one and a half miles from Chugiak High School.

MS. COME explained that both of her children suffer from immune disorders. When her daughter was in ninth grade she got very sick and spent six months out of school. Some of the teachers would not have homework available. When her daughter was in school [her daughter has an individual education plan (IEP) for a learning disability], she was allowed to turn in her homework three days late; however, that was never followed through with the teachers, and she just got further and further behind. During that time, her family found ACS and it has helped her children tremendously. They are now staying up with homework and staying on task. Her son experienced the same problem with illness because the Chugiak High School is so overcrowded. Since he has been at ACS, he is doing tremendously well. Ms. Come said if it were not for ACS, her kids would be left behind. It is the best home schooling program out there.

**TAPE 03-29, SIDE B**

NANCY WLADYKA testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174 and answered questions from the committee. She told the committee that she has two sons, ages eight and twelve, who have been enrolled at ACS for about three years. Two words define ACS for her family: academics and excellence. She said they have been very impressed with the high-quality academic program ACS offers. They are grateful to have the privilege of working with the wonderful, dedicated teachers and staff at ACS.

MS. WLADYKA said her twelve-year-old son was enrolled in public school through the fourth grade. The curriculum was not challenging enough for him, and there was not much sympathy from the public school when she complained that her son needed to learn more than what was being offered. She said she knows teachers have their hands full working with children who are struggling. During the early years in school, she volunteered on a regular basis in her son's classrooms and witnessed the problem. Her son would spend a frustrating day in the classroom

and come home eager to educate himself. She said her eight-year-old son is allergic to peanuts, which can be a life-threatening allergy, and has asthma. She said her family decided it would be reckless to send him to a school with no school nurse and where peanuts are prevalent. They began home schooling and he is advanced in academics. Ms. Wladyska told the committee her children have benefited enormously from their education with ACS and believe it would be a mistake to eliminate ACS. No comparable program exists. She said ACS is not a duplication, it is a success story. Please do not leave kids stranded without ACS, she asked members.

Number 2274

CHAIR WILSON commented that Ms. Wladyska's children sound like exceptional children. She asked if the public school was unable to challenge them.

MS. WLADYKA responded that her son's test scores were at the 99th percentile in a second grade CAT [California Achievement Test] test. He was eligible to be tested at the Johns Hopkins University, and it was then recommended that he be privately schooled or tutored. She explained that her family does not have the financial resources for that kind of education. She said her husband worked in the timber industry for 30 years and she is sure Chair Wilson is aware of what is happening there.

Number 2224

DENISE MALONEY testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174 and answered questions from the committee. She told the committee that she is a concerned parent of an ACS student. There are several points that need to be looked at before considering the elimination of ACS. Alyeska Central School was established in 1939 and has been accredited since 1979. She pointed out that no other correspondence school offers this kind of record. Alyeska Central School offers an extensive curriculum to choose from in order to meet the needs of individual students. The teachers and staff develop the curriculum and grade the work. Many of the other correspondence schools use outside staff and do not grade the papers. Several of these schools actually use ACS as one of their vendors. Alyeska Central School is not the school that is duplicating services. She said that Mr. Jeans stated in committee that the only concrete savings is in the Department of Administration for leasing of space. The funds will still be there, just sent to other schools. Those students who return to public schools will

end up costing the state more. She said her child will. Ms. Maloney commented that her child is also a gifted child and has taken the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) as a seventh grader and eighth grader for Johns Hopkins University and has done outstandingly well. She said her daughter has been with ACS for two years. Originally, they enrolled her as a tuition-based student because her family was not happy with the public school system.

Number 2159

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked about the relationship between ACS and Johns Hopkins University.

MS. MALONEY responded that her daughter was identified as gifted when in the public school system because of her CAT scores or benchmark scores. She said Johns Hopkins University does a talent search for gifted children. These children are offered the opportunity to take the high school SATs at the seventh- and eighth-grade levels. In response to Representative Gatto's question as to whether ACS is in some way connected to Johns Hopkins University, she responded that it is not.

Number 2099

SEAN RUDELLE testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. He told the committee he is a student at ACS and likes the program very much. During his time in public school, from kindergarten through sixth grade, he found it to be a traumatic experience. He said his sister attended ACS and he believes ACS is the best program ever. Even though he could have attended Central Middle School, which is supposed to be one of the top five middle schools in the country, he chose to attend ACS. He said he loves the fact that he can choose his own learning pace and curriculum, and the one-on-one contact with teachers.

Number 2030

VICTORIA MARTIN testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174 and answered questions from the committee. She told the committee she is a home school grandmother and teacher. Her two kids are in eleventh and eighth grades and have attended ACS for three years. She commented that a cost sheet had been submitted by Rick Currier that proves that ACS is saving the state money. Many of the students are employed, and the state is getting tax money from these students. This program offers her children the opportunity to go forward more quickly. They are able to pick

up a phone and contact a teacher if they have a question. It is a great program and it does not need to be cut.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked about her comments on Central Middle School.

MS. MARTIN responded that her grandson won a lottery to go to Central Middle School. He was labeled as a gifted student and went from kindergarten through sixth grade in the Anchorage public schools.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked about her comment about picking up a phone and contacting a teach at any time. What are the teachers doing between phone calls?

MS. MARTIN responded that they are grading lessons. If a teacher is not available, then ACS finds someone who can answer a question. If they cannot get an answer right away, then the teacher will call them back. Sometimes teachers will even call on weekends.

Number 1927

HAYLIE RUDDELL testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She said that she has a really good friend who has been with ACS for six years now because of illness. Ms. Ruddell said she mentioned her friend because she is a good example of a child that did not fall through the cracks because of ACS. She said she has been going to ACS for three years now and it is a wonderful program. The list of good things goes on and on. She told the committee she does not want the school to be closed.

Number 1896

VERNA GIBSON testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is a parent and foster parent. When her daughter, who was an honor student, became ill, she was only able to graduate because of ACS. She now attends UAA [University of Alaska Anchorage] and is on the chancellor's list, received an associate's degree with honors, and will graduate in 2004. Her daughter was not able to come to the meeting and speak today, so she is testifying in her behalf. None of these opportunities would have been available to her, had it not been for ACS.

Number 1840

MS. GIBSON explained that she is also a foster parent for children who have problems and runs a therapeutic group home. She told the committee she has used ACS for some of her children who, because of behavioral problems, cannot attend public school. Had it not been for ACS, many of these children would not have been able to attend school. She summarized that she believes the committee would be doing a lot of children a disservice by voting for this bill.

Number 1819

RYAN WOLCOTT testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174 and answered questions from the committee. He told the committee he is twelve years old and a seventh grade student at ACS. His family has a business that takes them to different locations in Alaska, and ACS has provided them with the flexibility they need. He said he was hoping to finish seventh grade in April and move on to the next grade, hopefully completing the eighth grade by the end of the summer or shortly after. He told the committee his family contacted the Department of Education and Early Development for the other eleven options mentioned in prior meetings. On March 20 they sent an e-mail with a list of questions. Instantly upon e-mailing the eleven messages, they discovered six were undeliverable. They had to call to get the correct e-mail addresses. As of today, he said, they have only received three responses; one answered their questions, and two would not answer the questions and referred his family to their web site. He said he thinks it is very scary that if there is no support for his family now, what will happen when ACS is no longer there for him. No other program compares to ACS. Please save ACS, he asked members.

Number 1759

CHAIR WILSON asked Mr. Wolcott if he would fax her the questions his family asked.

Number 1721

KYM WOLCOTT testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee that she has already testified. Her main concern was to ensure that her son had an opportunity to testify on his views of ACS. She said that she hopes the committee will not vote to close ACS.

Number 1702

JULIET ROBINSON testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she has a daughter who is attending ACS because she is unable to attend a traditional school because she has Tourette Syndrome. It is a condition that is distracting to other students and teachers. She said that her daughter has always been an enthusiastic student, but in the last year has begun to miss a lot of school due to her illness or cold or flu. There is evidence that individuals who suffer from this disorder also have a weakened immune system. Ms. Robinson said when her daughter entered her freshman year in high school she was missing one week per month and it was becoming increasingly difficult for her to keep up with schoolwork. Anxiety causes the symptoms of her illness to become more pronounced.

MS. ROBINSON said after winter break, her daughter's anxiety became so bad that she was unable to return to school. She said that she looked into correspondence schools as an alternative but was told that they do not accept students in mid-semester and there was generally a charge involved. That is when she spoke to John Paden, a counselor at ACS. She told Mr. Paden about her daughter's condition and he told her that ACS does make allowances for illness and that they would admit students in the middle of the year and there would be no charge. Ms. Robinson said she was impressed by the wide range of classes offered by ACS. When her daughter learned that she could attend ACS, her symptoms decreased dramatically. Please consider everyone's testimony when you consider whether or not to close ACS, she asked members.

Number 1595

VIRGINIA KAHLER testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174 and answered questions from the committee. She told the committee that she has been attending ACS for three years now. When she attended public school in ninth grade, she completely failed it. She did not know how to do math and knew nothing about grammar. She said she was embarrassed to ask for help because she felt stupid. When she would ask for help the teachers would say they would work with her at lunch, so she would sit through the whole class not knowing what to do. When the teachers would help her, they would rush through it and she still would not understand it. She said she had no goals for herself. She said if she could not pass high school, what was she going to do with her life. When she attended ACS, the teachers gave her one-on-one attention and made sure she got it.

The teachers would call her to make sure she understood concepts. She said she was actually getting As and that felt good. Her sisters now ask her how to solve math problems and how to write paragraphs and where to put commas. She told the committee she has now set the goal of going into the military after high school. She said she would like to finish high school with ACS because she has done so well. Kids who attend ACS are graduating and getting their high school diplomas. She asked why the legislature would want to take that away from them.

Number 1491

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked, when she had a problem with math, whether she called ACS.

MS. KAHLER responded that she did.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO observed that when she worked face-to-face with a teacher in a classroom, she was not able to understand it, but was able to understand it through a phone call.

MS. KAHLER responded that is correct. She explained that the high school teacher in public school really had no patience with her. When she called ACS, the math teacher was there for her. She said he made sure she got the math problem 100 percent. She said until she went to ACS, she never ever got As on math tests.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked how long that phone call was.

MS. KAHLER replied it was probably a 40-minute call.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO commented that she had one-on-one for 40 minutes. He asked how often she calls teachers.

MS. KAHLER responded not very often, probably three times per week. Math is her weakest subject.

Number 1453

VALERIE WHITE testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is a home school teacher of two children, works in a family business, and is involved in the community they live, which is Whale Pass. She commented that she agrees with all the supporting testimony of ACS. Alyeska Central School is a very important program and should stay open. Her oldest son has been enrolled at ACS for twelve years and

hopes to get his diploma next winter. Her younger son was with ACS for the first years of school, but has been with the IDEA School out of Galena since 1998. Her family knows what the two types of programs offer. Alyeska Central School has made a huge difference in her son's life. He has been able to participate in programs like Academic Decathlon and Close-Up. Going to Washington, D.C., was a huge opportunity for a rural student. She said she is concerned that the other programs are fairly new and have not had the opportunity to prove themselves. They could easily get regulated out of existence by the Department of Education and Early Development or eliminated by their school boards if financial problems arise. Alyeska Central School is the only correspondence program guaranteed to Alaskans by law. Please do not make any rash decisions about ACS, she asked. She commented in response to Representative Gatto's earlier question about what the teachers do, saying that she has had the opportunity to visit the teachers at ACS and they are busy all the time. They have between 70 to 80 students each. She asked if the committee would try to do what it can to keep ACS.

Number 1302

CHAIR WILSON said ACS has 60 students per teacher capped for elementary school; however, there are more students in the high school, as they teach students at other high schools.

MS. WHITE said she knows the PE [physical education] teacher has about 200 students.

Number 1270

PAULA WILLIAMS testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee that she has three boys currently in ACS, and a daughter that already graduated from ACS. Ms. Williams commented on the many people who testified whom she agrees with and hopes the committee will keep their thoughts in mind. By closing ACS, the state will be losing the only mandated program, and for people like her family who live in the Bush, there is no brick-and-mortar school and there is no choice. She said she does not want to use some other program that may not be around in a couple of years. Ms. Williams commented that her son is a senior and wants to go to college and he needs an accredited senior year. This school is the only program that writes and updates the classes. Over the last six years, she has seen the science program improve with the latest information. Every year the teachers are improving the classes.

She asked that the legislature not close ACS. Be sure to look at all the facts, she urged members.

Number 1183

JENNIFER WILCOX testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She said she is a student at ACS and is opposed to the bill for two reasons. First, the other alternative schools are not equal to ACS. Second, closing ACS will not save the state money.

MS. WILCOX explained that the many alternative schools identified to her family as possible replacements for ACS have not received accreditation yet. In fact, it could take up to five years for some of them to become accredited, while ACS has been accredited since 1979. Many of the schools are trying to develop courses that are already in place at ACS. The other schools do not have the number of staff or teachers, and the teachers do not support their students the way they do at ACS. She said that some of the schools are completely computer-based, which is not an option for her and other students

MS. WILCOX discussed the issued of savings to the state. She said it costs \$3,220 for an ACS student versus \$10,992 for the state to send her to public school in her district, which would be a \$7,772 increase to the state. She pointed out that there would be no savings at all for her and her brother, just an increase. Please consider her testimony and keep ACS open, she concluded.

Number 1095

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked for the names of the schools her family contacted and which they decided would not be adequate.

MS. WILCOX named the IDEA Program in particular. She also pointed out that the superintendent for the Delta/Greely School spoke in Representative Gatto's committee about not being accredited and that it would take at least two years to be accredited.

CHAIR WILSON asked if her family had actually contacted the schools or had just heard about them.

MS. WILCOX replied that her mother did contact IDEA School and Nenana Student Living Center. Although she had contacted several, she said she did not have the list in front of her.

Number 1014

TIM MORGAN testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. He told the committee his daughter is currently enrolled at ACS. She got pregnant at 17, and her choice was to either drop out of school or go to ACS. She chose ACS and it has been a good choice for her. He said she has been able to stay home with her baby. He said his daughter has other friends who got pregnant in school, dropped out of school, and now are on welfare. He said if the state closes ACS, there will be more people on welfare because they do not have a choice. He said his daughter cannot afford day care, so her choice is to home school or not do school at all. He told the committee he does not think ACS should be closed.

Number 0963

CHRISTINE WILCOX testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She said she is the parent of students in ACS and is opposed to closing ACS for all the same reasons that the committee has already heard. There is no real savings. The alternative schools like IDEA did offer [her family] \$1,500 per student to attend, and the way it worked is that the family would send in their grades once per month and that was just about it. It did not offer the backup services offered by ACS. She said she just does not see any advantage to closing ACS. Everything ACS offers is excellent.

Number 0898

CINDY MICHOU testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she has testified in previous hearings but wanted to make a quick point that the Anchorage School District (ASD) relies on ACS and its summer school program. The Anchorage School District has a limited number of slots for the summer school, and ACS is the number-one school on the ASD list where students will be accepted and receive credits for high school. She said she believes that ACS acts as a safety net for a lot of kids across the state and she hopes the committee will vote no on HB 174.

Number 0806

THOMAS ROBINSON testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. He told the committee he has a child that has a need and like a lot of other parents has looked for a way to help his

child. He said ACS was that helping hand. Mr. Robinson told the committee he hopes the members will vote this bill down.

CHAIR WILSON asked what grade his daughter is in.

MR. ROBINSON replied that she is a freshman this year.

Number 0719

BREANNA ROBINSON testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is a freshman at ACS and enrolled because she has Tourette Syndrome. If it were not for ACS, she believes she would be behind in all of her classes. She said she is a "pretty smart" student and does not think it would be fair. She said she found that the other correspondence courses did not accept students in the middle of the year. She said that throughout her school career, she had been getting good grades until Tourette Syndrome got worse; however, since she has been enrolled at ACS she has been getting good grades.

Number 0620

RUBY BULLCHILD testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is a student at ACS because she had knee-reconstruction surgery last fall, which meant she fell behind in her studies. She urged the committee not to vote in favor of closing ACS. She said the President of the United States says he does not want any children left behind and said that if ACS is closed, she will be left behind. Ms. Bullchild said she is proud of attending school in Alaska and wants to graduate from Alaska and not from a school in the Lower 48 states. She said she is a straight-A student and is ahead in both math and reading. She said she wants to continue with ACS so she can stay ahead and believes if ACS is closed she will fall behind and may have to repeat ninth grade. Ms. Bullchild told the committee that she has been going to ACS for two years and has come to love the program because it is a great school for remedial and "super achievers."

Number 0509

MARY TONY testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee that ACS has experience, knowledge, and expertise. Alyeska Central School works. She said she knows this because she and three of her siblings completed elementary school through ACS when a local school closed due to low class size in the 1970s. She said that of the three of them, two have

college degrees, one is a lawyer, and one is both a mayor in a Bush community and a school board member. She pointed out that with many other programs, the money will be going out of the state and she feels these funds should be kept in Alaska. She summarized by asking if the committee was discussing any other resource would they consider sending state funds outside Alaska. Ms. Tony urged the committee to look closely at this program and other programs.

Number 0229

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO commented that Ms. Tony is very well educated and asked if she did the majority of the teaching. He asked if she really just uses the curriculum.

MS. TONY responded that she does the majority of the teaching; however, she calls ACS as a resource, especially when her daughter needs additional assistance.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked if she uses the curriculum and makes a phone call when needed.

MS. TONY responded that she relies on the teachers and their expertise.

Number 0184

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked if she has met the person on the other end of the phone.

MS. TONY responded that she has not met the teachers. She said that the curriculum is Alaska-based. For example, she said biology deals with Alaskan flora and fauna. She said this is what makes ACS unique.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO responded that this is not the point of education; whether it is or is not Alaskan flora and fauna, if biology is being taught it is important that her daughter get more than just some information. He commented that what is important in all of this is that when she makes a call, she gets a result. He pointed out that it is perfectly within her means to add some information or adapt the book. Representative Gatto said he is trying to determine if she likes ACS because she is used to it or because ACS truly is so much better than any other school and she can prove that.

CHAIR WILSON explained that the committee was running out of time and others still want to testify.

Number 0043

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER objected to the question's being asked without Ms. Tony having an opportunity to answer the question.

Number 0020

MS. TONY summarized her view that with ACS she has the confidence that she is there teaching her child to meet the state requirements for her education. The other programs do not give her that confidence.

**TAPE 03-30, SIDE A**

Number 0001

SHEILA SYMONS testified via teleconference in opposition to HB 174. She asked the committee to please listen to all of the testimony that has come before them. Whether the testifiers are rural or urban, they are all opposed to this bill. She asked the committee not to pass this bill and pointed out that the state does not even have a commissioner of education [in the new administration yet]. Please do not pass this bill, she asked.

CHAIR WILSON announced that she would like to hear from individuals in the audience who have something to add that the committee has not already heard.

Number 0126

ALEXANDER DOLITSKY, Ph.D. testified before the committee as a private citizen, although he is a social studies teacher at Alyeska Central School. He testified in opposition to HB 174. He wanted the members to know he is on annual leave and is speaking only for himself. He said he has been employed with ACS since 1988 as a summer school teacher and then for twelve years as a permanent full-time employee. When he was hired in 1990, the enrollment was 800 students, and over the years the enrollment has fluctuated between 800 and 1,100 students. In 1992 or 1993, when other correspondence programs emerged, ACS's enrollment decreased. The ACS parents understand what the other programs offer.

Number 0283

DR. DOLITSKY told the committee he wanted to address information that was provided by the department. He commented that the teachers at ACS are not only writing curriculum, but they are grading lessons, writing comments and commentaries, taking calls to discuss problems or questions, and writing letters. He said he grades between 30 and 35 lessons per week. For three years he taught Russian. He said he is under contract for 230 working days per year as a senior teacher. Those that are not senior teachers are under contract for a longer number days of vacation. Summer school hires 30 additional teachers, and if they do finish their work during that time, it is the year-round teachers who do the work. Last year he said he graded 600 lessons in addition to his own work. Any other schoolteachers in school districts have contracts for 186 days, while his contract is for 230 days. He pointed out that he works longer hours for the same pay.

Number 0405

DR. DOLITSKY told the committee that 84 percent of the ACS student population is in urban areas. He pointed out that that is consistent with statewide demographics, as 16 percent of the population in Alaska lives in rural areas. He said 50 percent of the students live in Anchorage. There are 459 students from the Anchorage area and nearly 440 students in all other areas. The proportion is the same. In summary, he said almost anyone can be a good teacher for a week, but not everyone can be a good teacher for 25 consecutive years. Every school has a success story, but not every school has a success story for 60 consecutive years. He asked the committee not to dismantle something that cannot be replaced easily. He commented that he does not want his daughter or his students to read Shakespeare from a [computer], but from a hard-cover book. There is such a thing as authenticity. Dr. Dolitsky pointed out that some programs come and go and it is not known what will happen with these schools. He said he is a teacher with a master's degree from Brown University and a Ph.D. from Bryn Mahr College. He said ACS should be proud of the teachers and students it has.

Number 0491

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA commented that she was involved with ACS over 20 years ago and it was a great program. She said she helped to create a program for a kid who was told by Capital School that they did not want him back. She said what she sees in the letters of support of ACS many things that have changed and things she has never heard of, like classes on line.

Number 0546

DR. DOLITSKY responded that there are 19 classes that have recently come on line. He said he does not teach those classes, but a couple of them are world history and American government. He said he has recently written three courses. The courses are updated all the time. Dr. Dolitsky said he often does meet his students if they go to Close-Up in Washington, D.C. He pointed out that some of his students were winners in the Alaska History Day competition. One student from Haines won fourth place in the nation.

Number 0594

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER said she noted that Dr. Dolitsky is a published author and said few schools can boast that they have published authors on their staff. She asked how many other teachers have published books.

DR. DOLITSKY said he has published eight books. He does not know how many other teachers have published books; however, he does know other teachers have written articles and that ACS has a remarkably qualified staff. He said he has taught college for 14 years at the University of Alaska Southeast.

Number 0672

CHAIR WILSON called a recess to the call of the chair at 4:50 p.m. The committee reconvened at 5:00 p.m.

Number 0685

CECILIA MILLER, Alyeska Central School Education Association, testified in opposition to HB 174. She told the committee she is a math and technology teacher at ACS, but is testifying today on behalf of ACS Education Association. As a teacher, she said she first came to work at ACS as a summer school teacher and found that the program really addressed at-risk kids' needs. For these kids, having someone they can call right away when they have a problem is critical to their success. She said before she did it, she could not imagine teaching math over the phone, but found that she is very good at it. Ms. Miller explained that she teaches a huge range of classes including business and consumer math, geometry, pre-calculus, and advanced algebra, both on line and print-based. She said she has developed some of the courses and can help her students

understand a difficult class easily. Teaching these classes is a tough job.

Number 0855

CHAIR WILSON commented that whatever happens with ACS, she will assure that the other correspondence schools become more accountable.

MS. MILLER responded that ACS would not comment on whether other correspondence schools are accountable. She said if the other schools are meeting the needs of students, then she is supportive of those programs because not every child learns the same way.

Number 0887

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked what kinds of questions are asked on the phone.

MS. MILLER responded that most of her day is spent evaluating student work, but recently she received a call from a student from Barrow who had a question on advanced algebra about logarithms.

Number 0945

KEVIN SWEENEY, Special Assistant, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, testified in support of HB 174 and responded to questions from the committee. He said he wanted to comment on the two major points the committee has heard about today. The first point is the money issue. Many have argued that this will not save money, but in fact will cost the state money. He said he believes that most of the students currently enrolled in ACS would enroll in another correspondence school if ACS were not an option. He believes that some of the testimony heard today actually supports that claim. A lot of these students said they tried their local public school and it did not work for them. It was not the kind of education they were looking for, and they do better in a correspondence type of program. Mr. Sweeney said that it is the department's opinion that most of these kids would go to other correspondence schools, which costs the same amount to the state as ACS does.

Number 1017

MR. SWEENEY told the committee there is a significant savings in the elimination of the summer school. Alyeska Central School is the only funded summer school in the state. Last year this school cost \$1.2 million. There are also significant facility leasing savings of \$370,000 per year. He said even if some of these students do not go into another correspondence school, a majority of them are not in that \$10,000-per-year-cost. A majority of them are in the urban centers, where ADM [average daily membership] [cost] is \$4,200. He said he believes the comparison of \$3,200 to \$10,000 is the extreme and not the normal occurrence.

Number 1044

MR. SWEENEY said the second issue discussed today was the issue of curriculum, the question as to whether the other correspondence schools offer the same curricula that are offered at ACS. He said if this bill passes, the department's exit plan for ACS is to gather up all the curricula that are currently offered at ACS and take that curricula and make it available to all the other districts by putting it in "our" library so it is accessible. The department wants to work with these other districts to assure they are offering different types of curricula. Other districts who offer correspondence classes have indicated that should the curricula be available, they would offer these classes and adapt to the students' needs. Mr. Sweeney pointed out that it is hard to compare at the moment what is going to happen at another correspondence school when ACS is not around. These other correspondence schools are really in competition for students, and it is apparent in their enrollment. He compared the enrollment of ACS and the IDEA School out of Galena. While ACS's enrollment has fluctuated, the department believes that it is on the decline, whereas Galena and other correspondence programs have been growing.

Number 1080

MR. SWEENEY said the department believes as a policy decision it is time to end the centralized correspondence program run by the state. The department would rather offer assistance to the districts that have seen their correspondence programs grow, and offer them the curricula that have been developed in the statewide correspondence program and meet the student's needs in that way.

Number 1129

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER asked Mr. Sweeney, if the department has a program that is growing, why the state would want to cut the rug out from under it.

MR. SWEENEY responded that the department is not asking the other correspondence schools to change what they are doing now. What the other programs are saying is that they will expand their curricula to meet the needs of the students they have now - some schools have 3,500 to 3,600 students - but also meet the needs of the students coming in. He summarized by saying that the department is not asking these programs to do a wholesale change. The schools have expressed an interest in making sure they develop the type of program that meets the needs of the students who would have chosen ACS, had it been available.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER said she is confused by this policy. She used the example of a private business where the most popular business in town is shutdown so the other stores will get a share of the business. She pointed out that the most popular store is popular for a reason, so why close it down for the benefit of stores that are not doing as well.

CHAIR WILSON commented that if it were the most popular, then it would have the most clients. In the case of ACS, it does not.

Number 1215

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked what happens to the students that the committee heard from who this year really depend upon this program because of accreditation. She said her understanding is that ACS is the only accredited correspondence school in the state.

Number 1240

MR. SWEENEY responded that if a student were to transfer to Galena School, where an accreditation is in process and the school has been given a temporary accreditation, the student would in fact be graduating from an accredited school. He also suggested that if accreditation is extremely important to the student, there is always the option of going back to the local district to finish the last year.

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA pointed out that the committee heard testimony that attending public school was totally impossible for some students. She said these students have a really good

reason for not being in public school. It is not something that is casually done.

Number 1285

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked how many of the schools that are doing correspondence programs now are just Internet-based and how many are U.S. mail-based.

Number 1309

MR. JEANS responded that the only school that is 100 percent Internet-based is the Delta/Greely School.

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER asked if there are any others that use the mail system. [No response was given to this question.]

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked how many schools provide books for students to read.

Number 1350

DEBBIE CHALMERS, Teacher, Alyeska Central School, testified in opposition to HB 174 and responded to questions from the committee. She explained that ACS provides books to students. It is her understanding that the other programs provide parents with stipends; with those funds, the parents can obtain educational materials, educational opportunities, or learning experiences. In response to Representative Gatto's question as to whether ACS offers the same choices to students, she responded that ACS does offer the same choices.

Number 1372

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON commented that when the Delta/Greely superintendent testified before the committee, he said the school could accommodate 200 students, but that they really only serviced college-preparatory classes or advanced-placement students. He asked if there is an effectiveness rating for those students who are not in those groups, for instance, groups who would be labeled as at-risk or special-needs students.

MR. SWEENEY asked Representative Seaton if he would clarify the question.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON replied that he is trying to make a comparison among different correspondence schools. He said he

knows that correspondence schools are not equivalent. His concern is for children in his district that are special-needs students. For example, he had a student who is autistic and was not able to function well in some of these correspondence schools, but was able to do well at ACS. He said he is trying to figure out if there is any kind of Department of Education and Early Development rating of how well the correspondence schools do in providing services to special-needs students.

MR. SWEENEY said he does not know if the department has ever done a rating system on all correspondence schools. He said he does not believe the department has ever even done a rating on ACS's ability to provide that service. He said he would have to look into what the other correspondence programs have to offer special-needs students. The district programs would have to be looked at also to see what they might offer. Mr. Sweeney clarified that there has been discussion of only 11 statewide correspondence programs and that number does not include the districts' correspondence programs that only serve students who live in their districts. He pointed out that there are more choices than just the 11 mentioned. For example, in Kenai for the last four or five years, the district's correspondence program went from less than 100 students up to 400 students in its program.

Number 1500

CHAIR WILSON commented to Representative Seaton that some families use out-of-state correspondence programs as well. There are a large variety of correspondence programs to choose from and a huge number of students that are enrolled in correspondence programs.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON responded that his purpose in bringing this issue up is that he has received a number a letters and testimony from families whose children would be considered special-needs students, whether it was because of autism or whether the students needed to be in school year-round so that they would not fall behind. He said the comparisons are not the same; this is not dealing with apples and apples, but apples and oranges. He said he is trying to find out the impact on at-risk students. He wants to know if there is something special about ACS. He asked if there is any empirical data for that.

Number 1565

MR. SWEENEY commented on an earlier point that Delta/Greely had said that it is prepared to absorb about 200 students. He said that full-time enrollment at ACS is approaching 700 [approximately 670] students. In a Juneau Empire article, Galena said that it can absorb 1,000 to 1,500 more students and that it also is ready to develop a program that has the same amount of teacher involvement to accommodate the students.

MR. SWEENEY also commented with regard to curriculum development that there is a consortium of school districts through Alaska On-Line, which includes the Mat-Su, Kenai, and Delta/Greely [districts] that are in the process of developing their own curriculum. Alyeska Central School is a part of that program and other districts may join on. They have been in the process of developing curricula and will continue to develop curricula that are focused on the idea of correspondence study. It is not fair to say that ACS holds the market on developing curricula. There are other districts that are doing it as well.

Number 1659

JOHN ALCANTRA, Government Relations Director, NEA-Alaska, testified in opposition to HB 174 and responded to questions from the committee. He pointed out to the members of the committee that ACS has a highly qualified faculty in place in the core content areas that meet the requirements of NCLB [No Child Left Behind]. Another important fact that has not been mentioned is that ACS could provide supplemental services for the NCLB that other correspondence programs could not provide. Alyeska Central School can also provide high school programs for teacher's aides and educational support professionals that will have to meet the qualifications of President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act. Some aides have to complete their high school diplomas, and some need additional course work, up to 60 college credits beyond that, in order to keep their jobs as educational support professionals.

CHAIR WILSON questioned that none of the other correspondence schools could do that.

MR. ALCANTRA replied that is correct. None of the other programs can do that.

CHAIR WILSON asked if that is because of the accreditation issue.

MR. ALCANTRA responded that it is partly because of accreditation and partly because ACS has been in place for 60 years, compared with a school that has been in place five years. These other schools just have not gotten there yet.

MR. ALCANTRA said that ACS existed before statehood, before oil pipelines, and before the first Alaska State Legislature. He said ACS needs to exist after the Twenty-Third Alaska State Legislature. Mr. Alcantra asked that the committee hold the bill because, as has been seen in the overwhelming testimony, this idea has not been thought through. Please do not rush to judgment on this, he urged.

Number 1777

CHAIR WILSON asked what the age requirement is for enrolling in ACS. She commented that most high schools do not permit someone over 21 years of age to attend.

MR. ALCANTRA responded that age would not be a factor under a program created for program providers. He said he is not sure.

Number 1805

MS. MILLER told the committee that statute says any Alaskan can go to ACS as a tuition-program student who wants to obtain a high school diploma.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked how many teachers will no longer be employed with ACS if this legislation passes.

MR. ALCANTRA said the number of teachers at ACS is 26.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked if these teachers are all certified and if there is a demand for certified teachers elsewhere in the state.

MR. ALCANTRA said he does not know specifically if there is a demand for the 26 teachers at ACS.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO inquired if the 26 teachers were under contract for the FY 04 public school year.

MR. ALCANTRA replied that is correct. These teachers' contracts will be ending at the end of the school year. In some places, that will be just about the same time the legislative session ends.

Number 1881

MS. CHALMERS told the committee she is a fifth- and sixth-grade teacher at ACS and wanted to offer her perspective as an educator. She said she has been a teacher since 1992 and did not even know the program existed until she walked through the door. Since she has been at ACS, she has gained a great deal in working with parents. When she started teaching in 1976, she had heard a lot about the home school partnership. She said she does not think she has seen that partnership more actively engaged than through the ACS program. Alyeska Central School works directly with students and parents, and does it well.

Number 1941

MS. CHALMERS said ACS curricula are not stagnant. If these programs are distributed to districts, the teachers would not use the print-based lesson plan to teach. It is like using the same lesson plan book every year. She said she updates her curriculum continually and integrates a variety of supplemental materials with her teaching. She provides online opportunities for students through the Jason Project, which is a science-oriented curriculum, and through National Geographic Experiential and Adventures in On-Line Quests, as the student is learning about the world around them. There are also online book discussions and book clubs. Ms. Chalmers said she connects her students through these opportunities, some through online and some through the print-based curriculum. This results in a level of expertise and enthusiasm, as a teacher does not travel with the curriculum.

Number 2037

MS. CHALMERS shared an experience she recently had with a home schoolteacher in Karluk. She said he is not a paraprofessional yet, but hopes to be and he is very concerned about his students. He said he really appreciates the teacher support ACS provides, because the stand-alone curriculum does not do that.

CHAIR WILSON commented that Ms. Chalmers has the qualities of a very good teacher.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO said he thinks Ms. Chalmers is bright, educated, and obviously experienced. He asked, if ACS is eliminated, what will happen to her students and what will happen to her.

MS. CHALMERS said that in Karluk the parents did not feel it would be an option to go to the district correspondence program. She said she does not know what will happen to all the students. Because of declining numbers of students, the state has had to close schools and there will be a need for correspondence education. One ninth grader in Karluk is considering Mount Edgecumbe as an option or possibly going back to Kodiak High School. He is not considering going to another correspondence program.

Number 2099

REPRESENTATIVE COGHILL commented that this discussion could go on and on. He believes the point has already been made.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO disagreed.

CHAIR WILSON announced that she would close testimony on the bill at this time.

Number 2106

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

Number 2112

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER objected.

REPRESENTATIVE COGHILL said he believes this is a policy call and is not intended to show any disrespect to the teachers or the history of ACS. He said he believes there has been some wonderful work and good curriculum development, and that the students have educational needs. He does not disagree with the testimony that has been given. Representative Coghill said that getting the students' needs met has been an issue the committee has struggled with for many years. The policy call he sees is whether the legislature should give the districts the responsibility of meeting these needs. There are a group of people who are getting special help from the state outside of the districts they live in.

REPRESENTATIVE COGHILL said he believes the districts need to take the responsibility. There are 135,000 students in Alaska, and this represents 1,080 students. The districts are stepping

up with cyber schools. This is a way to get those districts reconnected to the students, whether it is excellence in education, teacher certification, or culturally relevant issues that are important to those areas. The policy call has been made by the governor, and Representative Coghill stated he is going to support him. He said this is a tough decision because he likes educational choices, but he believes it is a good policy decision.

Number 2243

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Wilson, Gatto, Wolf, and Coghill voted in favor of reporting HB 174 from committee. Representatives Seaton, Cissna, and Kapsner voted against it. Therefore, HB 174 was reported from the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee by a vote of 4-3.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 5:35 p.m.