

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

March 8, 2005

11:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Mark Neuman, Chair
Representative Carl Gatto
Representative Bob Lynn
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Les Gara
Representative Woodie Salmon
Representative Bill Thomas

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 128

"An Act establishing the Alaska Schools Physical Activity Task Force."

- MOVED HB 128 OUT OF COMMITTEE

OVERVIEW: Alaska Native K-12 Education Indicators Study by AK Native Policy Center

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 128

SHORT TITLE: SCHOOLS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TASK FORCE

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) MCGUIRE

02/04/05	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/04/05	(H)	EDU, HES, FIN
02/24/05	(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/24/05	(H)	-- Meeting Canceled --
03/03/05	(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/03/05	(H)	Heard & Held
03/03/05	(H)	MINUTE(EDU)
03/08/05	(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE LESIL MCGUIRE

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the sponsor of HB 128.

SARAH SCANLAN, Director of Education

First Alaskans Institute

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a report on Alaska Native population, health, economics, and education.

GRETA GOTO, Director

Alaska Native Policy Center

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a report on Alaska Native population, health, economics, and education.

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR MARK NEUMAN called the House Special Committee on Education meeting to order at [11:04:05 AM](#). Representatives Gara, Salmon, Gatto, Wilson, and Lynn were present at the call to order. Representative Thomas arrived as the meeting was in progress.

Representatives Reggie Joule, John Coghill, and Mary Kapsner were also in attendance.

HB 128-SCHOOLS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TASK FORCE

CHAIR NEUMAN announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 128 "An Act establishing the Alaska Schools Physical Activity Task Force."

[11:05:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA introduced and moved Amendment 1 labeled 24-LS0298\Y.1, Bullock, 3/8/05, which read:

Page 4, line 6:

Delete "but are entitled to"

Insert ", "

Delete "and"

Insert ", or"

Page 4, lines 6 - 7:

Delete "authorized for boards and commissions under AS 39.20.180"

REPRESENTATIVE GARA said Amendment 1 clarifies that the members on the Physical Activity Task Force won't be paid and won't receive per diem. He said he doesn't think anyone desires to be paid, and it will zero out the small fiscal note.

CHAIR NEUMAN objected to Amendment 1 for discussion purposes. He said he agrees with the amendment and that legal services had some questions about it. He withdrew his objection and hearing no others, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[11:07:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LESIL MCGUIRE, Alaska State Legislature, said, "All of us are aware of the epidemic that obesity is becoming in our country, and the saddest part is watching our young people slip into ... a lifestyle that is very difficult to get away from." She said there are medical and societal costs. She and Representative Gara met with physicians and decided it would not be fair to mandate something that wouldn't be funded, so they decided that a task force would be appropriate. She said they looked forward to working with physical educators, teachers, physicians, and members of the legislature to see what can be done to tackle the obesity problem in children. She added that there is interest from the heart association and others.

[11:10:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO commented that things are being done--he saw a television show focusing on obesity.

[11:11:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCGUIRE commented that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough has voluntarily introduced nutritious foods into the school menu with positive reviews.

[11:12:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON said she used to be a school nurse, and she has seen a huge difference in children's weights over the last 20 years. The lifestyle has changed from children running around playing ball to sitting in front of the television, she added. Doctors are now finding high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and a large increase in diabetes in young kids.

[11:13:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN said vending machines should have healthy food.

[11:14:34 AM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN said HB 128 asks representatives to volunteer to be on the committee and he encouraged members to be involved.

[11:15:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA said 30 to 40 percent of the nation's children are overweight, and by adulthood it increases to 70 percent. He suggested looking at what other states are doing to combat obesity, including mandating healthier food in schools.

[11:17:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE THOMAS asked if an ad hoc committee can be created before the bill moves since there is no fiscal note.

[11:18:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCGUIRE said that people are already being rounded up as the bill moves through the legislative process. She said she thought a task force would bring more publicity and media attention than an ad hoc committee. A task force also adds some structure, she added.

[11:19:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON moved to report HB 128, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. Hearing no objection, CS HB 128(EDU) was passed.

OVERVIEW: ALASKA NATIVE K-12 EDUCATION INDICATORS STUDY BY AK NATIVE POLICY CENTER

[11:20:43 AM](#)

SARAH SCANLAN, Director of Education, First Alaskans Institute (FAI), Anchorage, said the mission of FAI is to develop the capacities of Alaska's Native people, and it is involved in research with the Alaska Native Policy Center. Both groups hope to see the research findings reflected in policy.

[11:21:41 AM](#)

MS. SCANLAN said she and Greta Goto are presenting two recent reports: "Our Choices-Our Future" and "Alaska Native K-12 Education Indicators, 2004". The reports do not look at demographics, health, education, and the economy as separate entities, but they are intricately connected, she said.

GRETA GOTO, Director, Alaska Native Policy Center, Anchorage, said "Our Choices-Our Future" is an analysis of 30 years of information on Alaska Native population, health, economics, and education. The Alaska Native population is growing, it is young, its life expectancy has increased, the majority of it lives in rural and remote Alaska, it is mobile, and it has changing family structures, she reported. She said there were 120,000 Natives in Alaska in 2000, and the number is expected to grow to 165,000 in 2020.

[11:24:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked how that growth compares with the rest of Alaska.

MS. GOTO said Native birthrates are higher and average lifespan is increasing, so it is a faster increase.

REPRESENTATIVE THOMAS asked for a definition of Native.

[11:26:27 AM](#)

MS. GOTO said anyone who is full or part Alaska Native or American Indian is included. People self-select and determine their own race during a census.

MS. GOTO said about 44 percent of Natives are under 20 years of age, and only 33 percent of non-Natives are in that age category. There is a growing elder population among Natives. She added that better access to medical care increases life expectancy. The trend of living arrangements for Native children is of more single parental care, which is the same in the entire population.

MS. SCANLAN noted that this data helps the state predict its needs for elder care, education's future requirements, and other future needs.

[11:29:26 AM](#)

MS. GOTO said in 1950 the life expectancy for Alaska Natives was 46 years when other races had a life expectancy of 68 years. It is now over 70 years for Alaska Natives. Native children are better immunized than other American children. Certain diseases have been sharply reduced.

MS. GOTO reported that infant mortality rates in Alaska Natives have decreased tremendously, but there is still a disparity. Obesity has increased more dramatically than other races.

CHAIR NEUMAN asked how health care and obesity correlate.

MS. GOTO thinks it is dietary. Diabetes has increased, and smoking rates are higher than non-Natives. She discussed Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) rates.

[11:34:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked if FASD is a bigger problem in rural areas.

[11:35:14 AM](#)

MS. GOTO didn't know. She said teens have similar health issues; there are improvements but the disparity with other races still exists. There is a higher teen pregnancy rate for Natives. She said student smoking has gone down, but still more Native students smoke than non-Native, which might be due to the higher number of adult smokers in the Native community.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked if the smoking tax deters smoking.

MS. GOTO said, "It hasn't stopped my husband."

MS. SCANLAN said the tax is new and she hopes it will be reflected in future data.

[11:37:13 AM](#)

MS. GOTO said marijuana use has gone up, and she suggested reading the report for more detail on drug and alcohol use.

CHAIR NEUMAN asked about inhalants.

[11:40:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked about a correlation between the upswing in marijuana use and population increase, because "you might do activities that you normally wouldn't do under the influence of alcohol and drugs."

MS. GOTO said she didn't think there was a correlation.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked if the use of marijuana would go up as the price of tobacco increases.

MS. GOTO said she compiles the data and presents it to people.

MS. SCANLAN explained that some of the committee's questions are issues that the studies have touched on but were not directly analyzed.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO wants to know the action plan in response to the data.

[11:43:30 AM](#)

MS. GOTO gave credit to others for helping make this data available.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked about limited curricula in rural schools. He wonders if there is a statewide requirement to learn about these issues in school.

MS. SCANLAN said there is not, and that would be very useful if there were. She added that the data reflect lower numbers of problems than reality.

[11:46:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked why some of these things can't be taught without dedicated teachers and extra funds.

MS. SCANLAN stated that that is a loaded question. She explained that some of the government programs need to be integrated, holistic, and with a community approach.

[11:49:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON stated that as a school nurse she taught drug and alcohol prevention in every classroom. This was in another state. "We don't fund things" in Alaska she said. Most schools don't even have a school nurse, she added.

[11:50:51 AM](#)

MS. SCANLAN stated that early childhood education with parental involvement is needed, and Alaska does not have such a program.

MS. GOTO noted that 17 percent of the state's workforce is Alaska Natives, and 33 percent of unemployed Alaskans are Natives. Average incomes of Natives and non-Natives corresponds to rates of poverty--20 percent for Alaska Natives and 7 percent for non-Natives. The cost of food and energy in rural communities is much higher.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asks what the Power Cost Equalization program does.

MS. GOTO explained that it subsidizes energy costs. She said that Natives own about 11 percent of all the business firms in Alaska, generating about 5 percent of Alaska's business revenue.

CHAIR NEUMAN stated that high unemployment rates of Alaska Natives shows a need for an outreach program in rural Alaska. He added that there are several bills in process now for regional learning centers to make sure there are vocational programs, "so we can put Alaskans to work."

[11:56:47 AM](#)

MS. GOTO said Natives have increased access to education but there is an academic achievement gap, and there are actions that are required to close that gap. The percentage of Natives attending college and high school have dramatically increased because there are more high schools in rural Alaska.

[11:59:03 AM](#)

MS. GOTO stated that Alaska Natives do place a high value on education, but school performance is a concern.

[12:00:04 PM](#)

MS. GOTO said the report also looked at the ethnicity of educators, and there is little change.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked if that would soon change.

MS. SCANLAN said she hopes it will, because Alaska has a program to train indigenous teachers.

[12:02:33 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked which campuses teach education.

MS. SCANLAN said Sheldon Jackson, Alaska Pacific University, University of Alaska-Southeast, University of Alaska-Anchorage, University of Alaska-Fairbanks, and distance delivery campuses.

MS. GOTO said the turnover rate of teachers and administrators is high in certain districts.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked if remoteness makes a difference.

MS. GOTO stated that it depends more on the school district.

MS. GOTO said that Alaska Native performance in benchmark exams compares poorly with other students.

[12:06:37 PM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN asked how the No Child Left Behind policy affects Native students.

REPRESENTATIVE SALMON asked what is causing the problem.

MS. SCANLAN stated that there are many, many reasons. Funding, teacher turnover, lack of curriculum, parental involvement, lack of early childhood education, teacher professional development, and goals of school boards are some. There is also a huge mobility issue of kids hopping from school to school, she said. There are 1,800 homeless children in the Anchorage school district, and one third are Native.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA stated that problems are more a measure income level than ethnicity.

MS. GOTO stated that is correct, looking at poverty levels there is a correlation. Dropout rates for Native students are higher than other students, but she thinks that trend may be decreasing. High school graduation rates are 47 percent for Native students and 67 percent for all other ethnicities. "Less than half our kids who start at ninth grade complete [high school]," she said.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked what the expectations are of families, noting that some families want a subsistence lifestyle where a high school degree might not be necessary.

[12:13:30 PM](#)

MS. SCANLAN said teens are telling us that they do not see the relevance in what they are being taught. Employment opportunities in remote areas don't relate to math and rote memorization, she added. She said students can see the value of vocational training. "How we value education" is an issue. She added that resources to identify children who need help are not available. "Nailed on top of that is the high school qualifying exam," she said. No Child Left Behind is causing some students to drop out. She noted that there is no silver bullet and no single answer.

CHAIR NEUMAN stated that the graduation rate is striking. He asked where we are losing kids along the way.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON said some areas have no Head Start programs.

[12:17:27 PM](#)

MS. GOTO stated that she thought 100 out of over 200 communities in rural Alaska had Head Start programs.

CHAIR NEUMAN said statistics show Head Start works.

MS. GOTO said there are good programs but they don't reach everyone.

[12:18:48 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA stated that the legislature should support better funding for Head Start this year.

[12:19:32 PM](#)

MS. SCANLAN noted that there will be a campaign for early childhood literacy which is very critical. Challenges that she has covered today are not specific to Alaska Natives. Funding is a key issue, and she stressed the importance of early childhood development. She suggests supporting teachers so they can help as many students as possible. The issues are huge and

complex, and she requested the ability to continue working with lawmakers to solve them.

[12:22:52 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON stated that drinking was not mentioned.

MS. GOTO responded that this is one of the issues that communities wanted more information about.

REPRESENTATIVE SALMON asked about districts cutting lunch programs and what that effect might be.

[12:25:04 PM](#)

MS. SCANLAN responded that in Title 1 schools there are federal monies available for school lunch programs.

[12:25:57 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO stated that he is not aware of any schools that don't provide lunch, and some are offering breakfast. He said the state does have early childhood education, "we do have kindergarten, we do feed them, we do have classes for them, what we want them to do is to arrive super duper primed, rested, nourished, clothed properly; the trouble is we're finding them arriving...without snow pants and then recess comes and they say 'I don't have snow pants.'" Their parents have that responsibility, he said. If they are hungry, they go see the nurse for snacks. "I don't know what more the state can do." We have x-amount of dollars, and every group that we meet is saying if we had more money we could do better. There isn't a group that comes to us and tells us we are over-funding them, he declared. He said he is wishful that "we could get the parents involved, we need some accountability to make them show up. We have truancy problems, but how much can the schools do?" He asked if parents are less involved in their children's education and welfare.

[12:28:33 PM](#)

MS. SCANLAN stated that it is the opposite and said maybe he should visit schools in impoverished districts. Many families are doing the best that they can, but they themselves are homeless, she said. A larger percentage of families do care about their children's education. The numbers of families with problems is a concern, however, and she said that there is a

huge draw on education funds to try to bring those students up to the level of the others. She suggests bringing all groups together to work for a common goal. She held up the United Way as a model. We are not moving away from parental involvement, she said, it has to do with wellness in communities and it must begin at home.

[12:31:01 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA stated that he agrees with all of the statements on early childhood education and asked for any proposals Ms. Scanlan's group might have. He said the state made a huge mistake eliminating the early childhood education program, and any proposals she has, he encourages her to come and present them.

[12:32:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN commented that the best early childhood education begins at childbirth with parents. "Kids don't belong to the school system, kids belong to parents." "I support all of these things but we should never take parents out of the equation."

[12:33:35 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON said there are a lot of schools that don't have lunches.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Education meeting was adjourned at [12:33PM](#).