

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

February 7, 2006

11:06 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 25

Supporting consistent regulation of district and statewide correspondence programs; and encouraging the Department of Education and Early Development to remove student allotment restrictions on all correspondence students.

- MOVED HCR 25 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HCR 25

SHORT TITLE: REGULATION OF CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAMS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) NEUMAN

01/11/06	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/11/06	(H)	EDU, HES
02/02/06	(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/02/06	(H)	- Meeting Postponed to 02/07 11:00 AM -
02/07/06	(H)	EDU AT 11:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

REX SHATTUCK, Staff
to Representative Mark Neuman
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HCR 25 on behalf of Representative Neuman, sponsor.

EDDY JEANS, Director
School Finance
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HCR 25.

DEBBIE JOSLIN, President
Eagle Forum Alaska
Delta Junction, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 25.

PAT SHIER
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 25.

KATHY TAYLOR YOKEL
Fairbanks, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 25.

JONATHAN BRUEHER
North Pole, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 25.

NATASHA OLTHOFF
Fairbanks, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 25.

LEE YOUNG, Principal
Connections Program
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
Soldotna, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: During the hearing of HCR 25, asked questions and made suggestions.

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR MARK NEUMAN called the House Special Committee on Education meeting to order at [11:06:55 AM](#). Representatives Neuman, Gatto, Lynn, Salmon, Thomas, and Wilson were present at the call to order. Representative Gara arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HCR 25-REGULATION OF CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAMS

[11:07:04 AM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 25, Supporting consistent regulation of district and statewide correspondence programs; and encouraging the Department of Education and Early Development to remove student allotment restrictions on all correspondence students.

[11:08:37 AM](#)

REX SHATTUCK, Staff to Representative Mark Neuman, Alaska State Legislature, paraphrased from the following written sponsor statement [original punctuation provided]:

One of the most important issues facing us today is the education of all students. Accordingly, HCR 25 provides us with the opportunity to give clear direction for equitable treatment of correspondence and home-schooled students.

The Department of Education and Early Development's (DEED) 2004 regulations put funding restrictions on supplementary services to students in all statewide programs. DEED regulations eliminated many of the educational choices previously available to students and put further restrictions on the amount allowed for music, art, and P.E. A disparity exists between rules concerning how in-district and out-of-district school programs may spend funds. Interpretation of these regulations is having a negative impact on more than 8,000 home schooled and correspondence students.

HCR 25 requests that all students be treated equally and that student education allotments be unrestricted except as provided in the Constitution of the State of Alaska and Alaska Statutes.

[11:10:36 AM](#)

EDDY JEANS, Director, School Finance, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), referenced a letter from EED Commissioner Roger Sampson to Chair Neuman which identified two main issues in HCR 25: whether the regulations governing statewide [correspondence] programs should be applied to local school district correspondence programs and whether the 15 percent cap [on the base student allocation] on non-core expenditures should be lifted. He noted that the State Board of

Education and Early Development, the department, and the legislature have been working on this issue since December 2003, when the department worked with those operating statewide correspondence programs to develop the regulations addressed in [HCR 25]. It was from this cooperative effort, and in working with school districts, he explained, that these regulations were finalized, taken before the State Board, put out for public comment, and finally adopted.

MR. JEANS informed the committee that EED made a presentation in 2004 to the House Special Committee on Ways and Means, chaired at that time by Representative Mike Hawker, requesting guidance in addressing this issue, possibly doing so through amendments to the existing statutes. It was at the House Special Committee on Ways and Means' direction, he explained, that EED worked through the regulatory process with those involved with [correspondence] programs, and by June 2004, after many hours of amending regulations and making them available for public comment, the [regulations] were finally adopted. The issue of defining core subjects and setting a 15 percent cap on non-core subjects, such as music, fine arts, and physical education, were specifically addressed during this regulatory process. "It was the department's understanding ... that the programs involved during those discussions thought that was an acceptable limit," Mr. Jeans opined. He concluded by saying that [EED] appreciates the work [the committee] is doing on this issue.

[11:14:10 AM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN informed the committee that there is no fiscal note [for HCR 25]. Furthermore, should the restrictions on allotment funds for statewide [correspondence] programs be lifted, "this will not cost the State of Alaska one dime more" and "does not take away money from any other programs" since the funds are already allocated to the school districts. At 80 percent of the \$4,919 base student allocation (BSA), \$4,000 is allotted per student enrolled in the 11 [statewide] correspondence programs who, depending on grade level, typically receive \$1,800 to \$2,000 for curriculum purchases. In noting that these restrictions apply to the statewide correspondence programs and not the [in-district] correspondence programs, Chair Neuman expressed his belief that all students should be treated equally and have the same opportunities. He referenced a report on statewide correspondence monitoring that was reviewed at the meeting in June with EED and the State Board in which compliance issues for the statewide correspondence programs were discussed. Chair Neuman opined that considerable progress has been made by

the two statewide programs that had "minor problems" in only two of the six areas [of compliance] addressed in the report, and asked Mr. Jeans whether these programs are now in compliance.

[11:17:31 AM](#)

MR. JEANS informed the committee that there have been no audits of those programs since the initial audit and that it would be premature to say all are in compliance; however, he opined that "the programs are complying to the best of their ability with the laws and [regulations]."

[11:17:54 AM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN reiterated that those enrolled in the "in-district" [correspondence programs], which are not influenced by the same restrictions [as are the 11 statewide programs], have a lot more leverage with regard to how to spend their allotted funds. He sited an example of how this flexibility in funding can benefit those families with more than one child, who would only need to purchase one set of grade-level curriculum to be passed down from child to child, thereby saving money to spend on other programs such as music, art, and [physical education ("PE")] - programs which might meet a particular child's needs and interests. He expressed his belief that the leverage provided by the funding amounts is important and should be equally available to all children.

[11:19:16 AM](#)

MR. JEANS, in response to questions by Chair Neuman regarding enrollment in core subjects [for those students in the in-district correspondence schools], said that EED does not regulate that at this time. He went on to explain that [EED] "has on the books" a part-time attendance law, which would allow students to enroll in either a "brick and mortar" or statewide correspondence program on a part-time basis.

MR. JEANS reminded the committee that the State Board made a specific policy call, when adopting the regulations, because of its belief that local school boards should have the authority and responsibility to operate the programs that are within district boundaries. He said that parents of those children enrolled in such programs have the opportunity to approach their board should they feel one of its officials is inappropriately expending public funds, or simply choose not to re-elect him/her. However, he explained, schools that operate programs

statewide don't have this second layer of accountability, which is why the State Board has assumed that responsibility and why "those regulations were adopted dealing with core subjects, as well as the cap on [PE], music, and fine arts." He then noted that this came about when [EED] discovered "there were a number of students that were enrolling in programs on a part-time or even on a full-time basis, that weren't taking any core subjects; the full allotment was being spent on things such as health club memberships, ski passes, [and] family trips."

CHAIR NEUMAN claimed that in June, [EED] determined that this was no longer an issue as "these programs have changed their regulations and come into guidance with what EED is now requiring."

MR. JEANS added, "It's not an issue as a result of the regulations placing the limits on those programs."

CHAIR NEUMAN asked if there were currently any schools that do not require students to be enrolled full-time in core subjects while in the correspondence programs. Upon learning from Mr. Jeans that there are such schools, and furthermore, that this only applies to in-district schools, not out-of-district ones, he then asked Mr. Jeans whether the rules applied the same for all kids.

MR. JEANS replied that "the rules do not apply the same for in-district versus out-of-district correspondence programs."

[11:22:26 AM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN, referring to the duties of the State Board under statute, informed the committee that there is no mention of appropriation of funds; however, there are two different court decisions which gave this control and authority to local boards. He said that he "contends the local control stands with the parents." He also indicated that some school districts don't offer a correspondence program, which means that parents wishing to home school their children have to [enroll] in a statewide program.

[11:24:36 AM](#)

MR. JEANS expressed his belief:

I think it's been very clear from the beginning that the department has asked for guidance from the

legislature in this area. If the legislature feels that it's appropriate for families to spend the \$2,000 or \$1,800 that they get in a family allotment - all of it, on ski passes, family travel, memberships in health clubs - then please pass a piece of legislation, and we will be more than happy to amend our regulations to comply and implement the law. But, we don't believe that's an appropriate use of public funds and the State Board has stated that through their regulatory powers.

[11:25:25 AM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN replied that the school districts would agree with Mr. Jeans' views on the misappropriation of public funds and that they would "not allow that to happen any more."

MR. JEANS remarked that [school districts] are now "in compliance with the regulations as they are on the books today."

CHAIR NEUMAN, in questioning whether any of the [districts] have their own guidelines as to how the allocations should be spent, mentioned the Interior Distance Education of Alaska ("IDEA") [statewide correspondence] program as an example of one of the largest programs, with 3,500 kids, that has stipulations in place directing no more than \$350 or \$400 be spent on any particular subject.

[11:26:11 AM](#)

MR. JEANS, in response to questions by Representative Wilson, confirmed that Mt. Edgecumbe [High School] is indeed a state-operated school with its school board being the State Board of Education, which he agreed does have control of the school's funds "in some instances."

[11:26:47 AM](#)

MR. JEANS, responding to questions by Representative Gatto, explained that much of today's discussion was addressed at the House Special Committee on Ways and Means meeting in January 2004. He highlighted that there were instances, not all of which involved statewide [correspondence] programs, in which students were enrolled and attending private school on a full-time basis though not taking any core courses. Although it is not certain where the student allotment was spent, he said it wasn't being used for core courses. He concluded by saying, "If

that's your desire, to allow students and parents to spend public funds on anything they see fit, give us the statutory direction and we'll implement the [regulations]."

[11:28:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO opined that this is not the legislative intent and that the topic was discussed "at large" in the House Special Committee on Ways and Means as well as the House Special Committee on Education and the Finance Subcommittees. He said that some people did take advantage [of their allotment], and expressed his belief that it was the legislature's job to stop the inappropriate use of these funds. He asked Mr. Jean's if he was correct in thinking "it was a loophole and I think that loophole has disappeared."

MR. JEANS stated that the regulations currently on the books [successfully] dealt with this issue.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO said he has been approached by those who would like to be able to use some of their allotted funds for things other than what is required in "brick and mortar" schools. Referring to language in the sponsor statement, "HCR 25 requests that all students be treated equally", he sought confirmation that perhaps allowing some students to use their money differently than others is unequal treatment.

MR. JEANS opined that this shifts the discussion to "family allotment accounts" through which school districts provide family reimbursements for the purchase of instructional material, which is another topic that needs to be addressed.

[11:31:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA commented that HCR 25 doesn't appear to establish any standards or rules, and asked what possible impact its passage would have on EED.

MR. JEANS said that the department would take the resolution to the State Board for guidance in how to proceed - whether to reopen and amend the existing regulations or "stay the course with the current regulations." In further response to Representative Gara, he confirmed that if HCR 25 is passed as a nonbinding resolution, then the State Board wouldn't necessarily have to change anything.

[11:32:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked the sponsor if he were correct in understanding that those students living within a school district, enrolled in a districtwide home schooling program, are guided by the local school board regulations with regard to how to spend their allotted funds - such as determining how much money can be spent on non-core subjects as opposed to core subjects - while students who are from out of the district are guided by the state. Upon learning this is correct, he then asked Chair Neuman if it was his "intention to not allow local school districts to make the decisions for local students."

CHAIR NEUMAN said that this was not the intent. He provided an example of parents residing in the Mat-Su Borough School District with children enrolled in 1 of the 11 statewide correspondence programs [outside their district], such as the IDEA program [in the Galena City Schools district]. He surmised that in such a situation the parents would be restricted on their allotted funds because of where they reside. However, that wouldn't be the case if they lived within the district in which the statewide correspondence school is located.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA opined that the way the resolution language reads, requesting all children be treated equally, implies that local school districts would not be allowed to regulate things differently. He questioned whether the resolution does what the [legislature] intends in addition to whether standards and rules are addressed for the statewide correspondence programs.

CHAIR NEUMAN informed the committee that there are Alaska statutes and standards that "do talk about how [the money] is spent." He expressed his belief that the State Board was asking for guidance from the legislature and that he wished to provide such guidance in the form of a resolution.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked how the resolution would achieve the goal of having all students treated equally, if local school boards regulating those children within their districts are allowed to regulate their children differently.

CHAIR NEUMAN explained that the resolution asks the State Board to ensure that "whether you belong to an in-district program or an out-of-district program, you all play by the same rules."

[11:37:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON indicated that the reason in-district correspondence schools have different requirements for their students is because they have to follow the requirements determined by their district, each of which is different. For out-of-district [correspondence schools] with no local school board, she explained, the State Board provides the guidance. She expressed her belief that the choice parents make regarding where to enroll their children creates the difference not where they live. She asked, "If the rules fixed the problem ... then why do we need to change the rules?"

11:39:11 AM

CHAIR NEUMAN clarified that there were only two programs causing the majority of the problems, which caused the State Board to investigate and the school districts to implement new regulations to bring these programs into compliance. However, these [regulations] currently only apply to the statewide [correspondence] programs. He indicated that there are school districts which will fund those students enrolled in programs like the Sylvan Learning Center or in Christian schools in which the student is not "even enrolled in one core subject." He opined that "it's options and competition amongst the schools [which] is what makes them better."

11:41:18 AM

DEBBIE JOSLIN, President, Eagle Forum Alaska, announced that the forum has 1,000 members statewide, many of whom have children in statewide correspondence programs. She provided an example of a family with children enrolled in a correspondence school having only to buy one set of a particular curriculum to be passed down from child to child - a cost savings freeing up funds to be used on other things, such as music lessons or art supplies "if it's not tied up in a 15 percent cap." After much research, she said that she has "not been able to find any group of schools or school children anywhere that are being restricted in the manner that [EED] has restricted children in the statewide correspondence programs in Alaska." She explained that she looked at budgets and regulations governing charter schools in several other states and found nowhere are funds being restricted by certain percentages for the arts and physical education.

MS. JOSLIN opined that it might have initially made sense to allow only 15 percent of the allotments for elective classes, reserving the bulk of the funds for core subjects such as

reading, math, English, and science; however, with her experience as a home school teacher, she said she discovered that the elective courses cost more to administer than the core subjects, regardless of whether taught in a brick and mortar or a home school. She compared example expenditures for core subject materials versus elective materials. She also addressed the changes made to existing regulations by EED as a result of reports that allotment funding was being misused, and opined that there was no need to change the existing regulations because of that - "it wasn't the regulations that were at fault; it was individuals or certain programs that were misusing funds, and an appropriate action could have been taken to stop the diversion of money that was intended for the education of correspondence students."

MS. JOSLIN said she has not heard that correspondence students, as a group, are doing poorly on achievement tests and stated her belief that as a whole, correspondence students are "at a level, at least par with their brick and mortar public school counterparts." She questioned why [EED] would restrict the funding of correspondence school students to such an extent "that they are forced to choose one of the three subjects: art, music, or PE" and opined that it was never the legislature's intent, and furthermore, district correspondence programs are not being treated this way. She concluded by stating her belief that "these regulations do not cost the State of Alaska one red cent" as the allotment amount is the same with or without the restrictions, and urged the committee to pass this legislation.

[11:45:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA suggested that perhaps some rules are needed to ensure a correspondence student's focus is on core subjects. He asked whether there were any school districts which had policies that make sense and could be examined by the state for possible implementation by those correspondence programs not regulated by a school district.

MS. JOSLIN, referring to her involvement with a statewide correspondence program, said that the students would enroll in all of the subjects, including the four core subjects; however, this would not necessarily be reflected in core subject curriculum purchases as younger siblings could reuse the same materials purchased earlier for an older sibling unlike many of the expenses for non-core subjects.

CHAIR NEUMAN, referring to Representative Gara's comment that [correspondence schools] are not being regulated by school districts, opined that they are. He said, "The school district that runs the statewide program does have regulations in place, and that's who governs that correspondence program."

MS. JOSLIN explained that those parents with children enrolled in the statewide programs have the same ability as those with children in schools with local school boards in that they could express any concerns to a statewide correspondence school board or committee.

11:48:30 AM

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO, addressing comments made earlier by Ms. Joslin, said that he expected her to say that correspondence school students "far exceed" the performance of those students enrolled in public schools because of the 1:1 instruction that can be provided as opposed to the 1:35 ratio sometimes found in public schools. He asked if there was an explanation for why "you can't produce a product greater than 'at least as good as' a public school student."

MS. JOSLIN answered that she did not wish to exaggerate or speak for all parents or all students. She stated her belief that taken as a whole, those enrolled in the correspondence programs "do at least as well." She noted the high test scores her own children received on the national and statewide achievement tests they took every year they were enrolled in the statewide correspondence program and opined that this was largely due to having "the luxury" of taking time to help them understand concepts before moving on - a luxury not always found in the public schools.

11:51:22 AM

CHAIR NEUMAN, referring to the recent national accreditation of the IDEA program by the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS), highlighted the 10th grade test score results, with the highest for English at 86 percent and the lowest for math at 68 percent. He explained that the only reason they did not meet [adequate] yearly progress (AYP), "had to do with just marginally lower than average test scores of their 51 African American students that belonged to that program" and in looking "at the cut, they categorically evaluated and graded much higher than the cut in all other subjects."

11:52:42 AM

MS. JOSLIN, in response to a question by Representative Thomas, said her family used a video program for art and music, and paid for piano lessons, sheet music, and a piano teacher who charges \$170 per month - an out-of-pocket expense for two children.

11:53:59 AM

CHAIR NEUMAN noted to Ms. Joslin that both he and Representative Thomas home school [their children] and are very involved in the home school process, which first requires that an individual learning plan be developed for the [home school] child that is approved by the teacher. Furthermore, there are strict guidelines as to how the allotted funds can be spent. He paraphrased a section of the November 2005 visitation report by NAAS covering its evaluation of the IDEA statewide correspondence program:

... IDEA families tend to be very family-oriented, having chosen to commit the time and effort necessary to be fully involved in their children's education. They tend to enjoy spending a lot of family time together, and are often active in their local church and/or civic organizations.

CHAIR NEUMAN expressed his belief that the success of these programs is largely due to the fact that parents intimately know their child and can mold that child's education around his/her inner most needs.

11:56:08 AM

PAT SHIER shared that he has been a home school parent since 1987, before the statewide correspondence programs came into existence. He opined that the resolution restores flexibility, equity, and provides legislative guidance currently voiced to him as lacking. He urged that the 15 percent cap be rescinded to assist those families who deal with travel expenses for their child's sports-related activities and that school boards be allowed to have their full scope of authority in how they wish to administer their programs. He said he disagrees with those that say the secondary level of accountability is lacking [in schools] because the teachers, who interact with each parent, are very effective in tailoring curriculum for each student and play an important part in this local level of control.

MR. SHIER requested, "Let's not live in the old battle days of anecdote about a few parents that ... did something that wasn't quite right, and that's all gone now." Instead, he suggested focusing on success stories of students such as the fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) child struggling in school and not making connections with classmates or course subjects, yet at her teacher's recommendation, began interacting with animals and is now making connections with both students and subjects and no longer in special education. He said:

It's not an indictment of our brick and mortar schools, it's just a realization that they have all they can do and more. So let's find a way to level the playing field, to allow parents who are willing to incur this serious investment in time and money all the flexibility they need.

12:00:44 PM

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO, referring to Mr. Shier's comment that home school parents spend a significant amount of their personal funds on their children's educations, asked him if he then believed public school parents do not.

MR. SHIER clarified that was not his meaning and acknowledged that many parents with children in public schools "are spending a lot of money" paying for books and materials not supplied by some school districts. He mentioned that parent involvement is referred to as the "holy grail" and is an important feature in a child's education.

12:01:43 PM

REPRESENTATIVE GARA said, "Sometimes in these committees we debate a concept but we miss what the bill says, and I think that's what's going on here." He expressed his agreement with Mr. Shier that home school is a very valuable option for those parents willing to expend the time that this option requires. He also expressed agreement with Ms. Joslin's reference to the savings opportunity for those home school families sharing curriculum material among multiple children. The [resolution], however, includes no language restricting funds [for correspondence school families], except as provided by the constitution or by state statutes, neither of which have any rules regarding how much money may be spent on such subjects as PE, he highlighted. Therefore, he surmised that "if we pass this, there would be nothing to stop a parent, who didn't care

as much about their child's education, from spending all the money on sneakers, equestrian lessons and, let's say, a tennis club membership." He posed the question as to whether fair rules should be created for home school children versus "not having any rules at all."

MR. SHIER explained that controls are already in place; the school boards provide guidelines to local teachers who then work one-on-one with the parents enrolled in the statewide correspondence programs. He again "urged us to move on" from the past misuse of funds by a few parents, and opined that the resolution, if passed, would result in "re-leveling the playing field so that the students who are in the statewide correspondence programs can enjoy the same interaction with their teachers, the same flexibility that the current brick and mortars do."

[12:04:46 PM](#)

MR. SHIER, in response to a question by Representative Salmon regarding how parents communicate with the [statewide correspondence] school boards, explained that the Raven Correspondence School headquartered within the Yukon/Koyukuk School District (YKSD) in Fairbanks, Alaska - of which his wife is one of the local area administrators and teachers - uses teleconference equipment that connects not only the district's nine river schools, but all the remote sites as well. Regularly scheduled staff meetings, when the leadership meets with the school board, are held by teleconference or face-to-face. He clarified, for Representative Salmon, that "the school board for YKSD is scattered among some of the nine river villages that they serve and also in Fairbanks, I believe."

[12:05:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA related his understanding that the intent of the proposal is to have the statewide correspondence school children follow the rules set by the school board for that particular school and not leave the allotted funds to parents completely unrestricted.

MR. SHIER said that was correct "to the extent that these regulations return the statewide [correspondence schools] to the same fundamental controls that exist for brick and mortar schools, that's my hope that this resolution will accomplish." He also expressed his desire [for the statewide correspondence

schools] to be regulated by the school board for the correspondence school.

[12:06:42 PM](#)

KATHY TAYLOR YOKEL, as a former certified teacher for both elementary and secondary levels and a home school parent for 14 years, related her support of HCR 25. She requested that not only should consistent regulations regarding district and statewide correspondence programs be put in place but also that student allotment restrictions on all correspondence students be completely eliminated. She explained that regardless of all her teaching experience, she is not an expert in every subject which means hiring professionals to instruct her child in music and PE-related lessons. She highlighted that whereas about 80 percent of public school students are not required to have an individual learning plan, the students in statewide correspondence programs are required to have these plans "and it must be assessed and okayed by a certified teacher through [that particular] correspondence programs." Regarding the purchase of curriculum materials, she explained that not only are savings available when these materials are shared among siblings, it can be an additional savings when shared among friends or purchased at book sales or borrowed from libraries. However, this cost-savings is not possible when hiring professionals for private instruction in such classes as dance and music. She again opined that the allotment funds should be unrestricted, and should she choose to use her \$2,000 allotment for her child's voice, piano and ballet lessons - with everything else paid out-of-pocket or borrowed among friends - this should be allowed.

[12:11:05 PM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN clarified to the committee that "HCR 25 does not ask for full unrestricted of allotment funds" but does ask that the guidelines and rules apply equally among schools.

[12:12:00 PM](#)

JONATHAN BRUEHER, as a home school student through the IDEA program for the past three years, said the program provided him the opportunity to do things he otherwise would not be able to do.

[12:13:19 PM](#)

NATASHA OLTHOFF announced that several years of home schooling, through the IDEA program, has been a great opportunity and that her relationship with her family has been completely different because of the extra one on one time she has with them. Additionally, she said, it has enabled her to concentrate on different educational subjects and have a "more developed education," one in which she is given the opportunity to take control of her own education through the many times she is teaching herself. In response to a request by Representative Lynn, she related the lessons she's had in piano, art, science, snowboarding, horseback riding, swimming, and a variety of others that have helped her "be a better person."

[12:15:35 PM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN asked if Ms. Olthoff believed that being able to socialize with peers is a very important part of a well-rounded education.

MS. OLTHOFF opined that communicating with others is an important skill to have, and though the chance to be with peers doesn't happen as often for those who home school, there are still opportunities to do so. Additionally, she explained, home schooling has provided her with the opportunity to spend more time with adults, and not limited to teachers, which has made a difference in how she can relate to them.

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN commented that whereas some of the socializing in schools "is very good, some of it maybe should not be happening."

[12:16:47 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked Ms. Olthoff how her friends enrolled in public schools in Fairbanks respond when she tells them about her piano and horseback riding lessons.

MS. OLTHOFF said that her friends think it's great, that not all of them have the same interests, many of them have different learning opportunities at the public school than she has home schooling, and for the most part, she expressed, "I don't think they see it as being unfair."

MS. OLTHOFF, in response to Chair Neuman's request to explain her interest and goals regarding horseback riding lessons, said that it not only provides great exercise, but has given her the

opportunity to see its therapeutic effect on special needs children.

CHAIR NEUMAN informed the committee that his daughter enrolled in horseback riding lessons for these same reasons.

12:20:23 PM

REPRESENTATIVE GARA referred to page 2, [lines 4-6] of HCR 25 regarding the removal of restrictions on student allotment of public education money. He then asked Mr. Jeans what restrictions would remain on the allotments for those students enrolled in the statewide programs should the resolution pass and current restrictions be removed.

MR. JEANS said if the resolution passes, EED would have the State Board determine whether it wanted to amend the regulations or not. Additionally, he explained that should HCR 25 pass and the State Board remove the current regulatory restrictions, there would be no remaining restrictions in the Constitution of the State of Alaska or in the Alaska Statutes. In further response to questions by Representative Gara, Mr. Jeans clarified that the State Board would never have had to regulate these programs had the local school boards and administrations dealt with these [correspondence programs] appropriately in the beginning. Moreover, the regulations only came about because of the "misuse by the administration of these [correspondence school] programs."

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked whether the 15 percent rule applies to those students in a local correspondence school, regulated by a local school board, as well for those enrolled in the statewide correspondence programs.

MR. JEANS explained that the 15 percent rule only applies to students in the statewide programs.

12:22:40 PM

CHAIR NEUMAN asked Mr. Jeans whether most of the statewide programs have restrictions on how those funds are spent.

MR. JEANS noted that the statewide programs may now have regulations adopted by their local school board in place. However, he remarked, "The reason the State Board had to act was because those programs were not regulating themselves."

CHAIR NEUMAN agreed that there hadn't been adequate guidance before; however, the [statewide programs] did comply. He again highlighted for the committee that out of the 11 statewide programs reviewed last year, only 2 of the districts had "minimal problems" in 2 of the 6 areas, and that "most programs were in line with [the guidance] recommended by the state."

[12:23:47 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA noted that public testimony was not heard from those parents who didn't enroll their children in any of the core subjects and "tapped into the allotment to use for physical education." He asked Chair Neuman if he would consider amending the resolution to ensure that doesn't happen again.

CHAIR NEUMAN said that currently students in the statewide correspondence programs have to be enrolled in four core subjects and yet the students enrolled in the in-district correspondence programs do not. It would be changing the scope of the resolution to put restrictions on in-district programs, which is not his intent, he explained.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked if it would be acceptable to Chair Neuman "for a child not to be enrolled in any core subjects but to tap into money to use for recreational purposes."

CHAIR NEUMAN opined that he personally feels "that's the way it should be" and that this issue would have to be individually addressed with those school districts involved. He added that "we would certainly entertain that discussion at the [State Board]"

[12:25:58 PM](#)

LEE YOUNG, Principal, Connections Program, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, applauded the state of Alaska for providing families the opportunities to have home schools, which was not the case in the previous state where he was employed. He asked if the intent of the resolution was for home school families to spend \$4,000 instead of the \$2,000 he understood it to be, in an unrestricted fashion.

CHAIR NEUMAN replied that this was not the intent of the resolution. In further response to questions by Mr. Lee regarding the amount of the allotments, he listed examples of possible administrative expenses such as purchasing computers for home school families to use to communicate with the school

district as well as other administrative costs. He then opined that the \$2,000 amount allotted to families was enough of a strain on administrative budgets.

12:28:00 PM

MR. YOUNG posed a situation in which a small district, such as Galena City Schools which has established several offices throughout the state, were to enroll a student residing in a larger district. He asked if that student would receive an allocation "based on what Galena receives or based on what Kenai or Anchorage [districts] would receive."

CHAIR NEUMAN explained that the cost differential is the second formula in the student funding formula and that the correspondence programs receive 80 percent of the BSA, which for this year equaled \$4,000 and results in an even lower amount when the cost differential is applied. He then agreed with Mr. Young's statement that "regardless of where you live in the state, everybody gets the \$4,000 approximately," which would be the maximum amount.

MR. YOUNG asked whether there were "really two pieces to this bill" - one being the intent to make all programs consistently the same and the other to allow parents to spend their allocation in an unrestricted fashion.

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN reminded the committee that [HCR 25] is not a bill but a resolution that "does nothing except express an opinion."

CHAIR NEUMAN stated his agreement and remarked that the resolution is a non-binding opinion. He then asked whether "this is fair or not to the Department of Education [and Early Development]."

MR. YOUNG said that he sees the issue as bigger than what the resolution proposes and that he would advocate EED having "a working group with representation from all parties that might be involved" to provide recommendations. He suggested one possible solution would be to have a family account such that when one child does not spend his/her full allocation on fine arts, the unused funds could be transferred to another child in the family. He opined that children at different age levels can require different amounts of funds for fine arts, music, and PE which he said he has seen through requests from the families within the in-district correspondence program he administers.

CHAIR NEUMAN said the discussion of "cause and effect" and determining a possible need for forming a working group is the sort of thing "this kind of resolution does."

[12:32:23 PM](#)

MR. JEANS, in response to Representative Gatto's questions regarding part-time attendance of a student at both a brick and mortar school and a correspondence school, said that the allocated funds have to go to both hosting schools. Furthermore, he said, it is possible for a student to spend allotted funds on the same courses, such as music, at both schools. He highlighted the fact that EED has regulations for part-time enrollment that specify the funding amount allowed per number of courses, such that the amounts would be split among the programs and would not to exceed one full-time equivalent (fte).

[12:33:19 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO, referring to the line in the sponsor statement that calls for all students be treated equally, questioned whether it is indeed fair for the part-time student to have the opportunity to take music lessons at both the brick and mortar school and at home unlike the full-time brick and mortar student who only has one hour of music lessons.

[12:34:04 PM](#)

MR. JEANS reminded the committee that part of the reason for the regulations currently in place is "to ensure that students enrolling in correspondence programs that provide family allotment accounts are taking core subjects and not simply enrolling to get the benefit of the allotment account to support athletic memberships, music lessons ... basically electives."

[12:34:35 PM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN added that in the statewide correspondence programs, students have to be enrolled in at least four core subjects and do not have the option of attending part-time.

[12:34:46 PM](#)

MR. JEANS said that he disagreed with Chair Neuman's statement, and explained that a student is allowed to enroll part-time in

either a brick and mortar or correspondence school as long as 50 percent of the student's courses are core, as stipulated by the regulations. Therefore, the student is allowed access to supplemental money for things other than core courses. In response to Chair Neuman's questions, he clarified that his example holds true for the student enrolled part-time in multiple school districts although the allotment may be smaller.

[12:35:45 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked if she were correct in her understanding that those who home school basically "want to have more money allotted to them so they can spend it on the things that they want."

CHAIR NEUMAN said this was correct and added that [those who home school] wish to purchase educational opportunities that fit inside the boundaries of their [child's] learning plan.

[12:36:24 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked whether is was correct to say that the EED regulations allow part-time home school enrollment as long as at least 50 percent of the student's subjects are core.

MR. JEANS said this was correct. In response to additional questions by Representative Gara, he offered further clarification on the part-time student law which allows students to attend on a part-time basis, even down to one course. However, if the part-time enrollment is with a statewide correspondence program, EED regulations require that first course to be a core subject, to which a quarter allotment is applied, and additional courses may be in [electives] such as PE or music.

[12:37:32 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA asked Chair Neuman in which home school program his children are enrolled and whether he was compensated for the earlier mentioned equestrian course his daughter is taking.

CHAIR NEUMAN said that his children are enrolled in a statewide correspondence program which does not allow the 15 percent allotment be applied to equestrian lessons. The in-district correspondence programs allow this, but not the statewide ones, he pointed out.

12:38:33 PM

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN moved to report HCR 25 out of committee with individual recommendations [and the forthcoming zero fiscal note]. There being no objection, HCR 25 was reported from the House Special Committee on Education.

12:39:05 PM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Education meeting was adjourned at 12:39 p.m.