

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

March 21, 2006

11:05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Woodie Salmon

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Consortium for Digital Learning

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

CARL ROSE, Executive Director
Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the Consortium of Digital Learning (CDL).

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR MARK NEUMAN called the House Special Committee on Education meeting to order at [11:05:37 AM](#). Representatives Neuman, Gara, Gatto, and Wilson were present at the call to order. Representatives Lynn and Thomas arrived as the meeting was in progress. Representative Salmon is excused.

CONSORTIUM FOR DIGITAL LEARNING

[11:05:59 AM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN announced that the only order of business would be a presentation on the Consortium for Digital Learning (CDL).

[11:07:08 AM](#)

CARL ROSE, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), informed the committee that his presentation would focus on digital technology, largely premised from Thomas Friedman's book entitled, The World is Flat. He noted that the committee packets include congressional testimony by Norman Augustine entitled, "Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future" which addresses globalization and its effect on national security. Also included in the packets, he said, is an article from the Education Commission of the States (ECS) which identifies technological advances in education. This article, he noted, lists Alaska's Denali Borough School District as one of a few nationwide piloting a 1:1 computing initiative where students are assigned their own laptop computers with Internet access. In response to Chair Neuman's request for more information on Norman Augustine's report, Mr. Rose clarified that it addresses "some of the advantages that [America] has ceded to emerging nations in a global economy." He further clarified that his presentation would examine some of the ways this can be addressed and some of the technological advances that can be made.

[11:09:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA said that assuming [the committee] is convinced there is a need to expand the availability of digital learning in the state, he would like to know what the requested \$5 million would purchase.

MR. ROSE explained that the CDL is trying to leverage local funds from school districts, in addition to state and federal funding, to obtain a total budget of \$15 million. This consortium, he highlighted, would consist of experts in technology as well as an advisory group of school district administrators and teachers. He further explained that [requests for proposals (RFPs)] would be distributed to determine which districts meet conditions of readiness based upon the level of technical assistance, professional development, and equipment they require. He described that this would be a one-year effort to help participating schools focus on advancing technology, after which time the districts for

those schools would be expected to appropriate dollars from their operating budgets to sustain CDL. He said that should the consortium be successful, AASB would then return to request another round of funding in order to give other districts a chance to participate. He remarked that CDL would use Apple computers initially; however, he said he envisioned the eventual participation of other interested providers who might offer substantial discounts for needed equipment with the opportunity to lease. He noted that whereas digital technology exists in some schools, it is not systemic. "So we're trying to make the systemic move here," he said.

[11:13:22 AM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN, returning to Representative Gara's question on funding CDL, stated his belief that this format of providing digital learning will be less expensive over time, freeing funds for other important educational goals such as early education and smaller class size.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA said he is "sold on the need to expand [delivery systems]," and now understands that what is being proposed will help provide an infrastructure to develop [digital learning] in the future.

[11:14:30 AM](#)

MR. ROSE directed the committee's attention to two other documents in their packets: one providing information on the CDL proposal and the other entitled, "The Road to the Digital School." The later, he explained, is a matrix showing the path to forming digital schools and its effect on leadership, learning, infrastructure, and community.

CHAIR NEUMAN inquired as to whether today's presentation would be available on the AASB web site.

MR. ROSE said it would be available on the web site as a podcast. Then, through a PowerPoint presentation, he noted that moving forward on any new endeavor can involve a host of questions. He opined that although it is hard to predict the future of children in any era, today's children will likely face a highly competitive and motivated, well-educated, technologically proficient, global workforce. He stated his belief that Americans are hesitant about change and said, "We know that the world is evolving, yet we're hesitant to get involved until it's at our doorstep." He covered topics such

as: living with a constant sense of urgency, having little time to accomplish things in every facet of life, becoming disoriented by rapid changes, and then making "poor predictions." He informed the committee that the information he is relaying today is actually a reality and not merely predictions. He described the significance of several historical dates and the effect each has on globalization. He also noted that "75 percent of our taxes" are being processed in India because it is more accurate, more efficient, and with a faster, lower cost turn-around. Additionally, he highlighted that magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is often done in Australia for similar, more economical reasons. He discussed other challenges resulting from globalization and the changes in demographics, values, beliefs, and technology.

[11:32:52 AM](#)

MR. ROSE then provided the committee with an example of nanotechnology by comparing the 8 megabytes of memory available in the 1964 mainframes to the "85 billion gigabytes" available in the 2005 portable media players - such as iPods. He also highlighted the advances in biotechnology, noting the sizeable amount of memory required to store the mapping of human deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). He returned to discussing the challenge of change and posed the question, "If our commerce is web-based and economies are global, what are we doing to prepare ourselves and our kids for the next generation?" He listed some of the significant academic gains, nationwide, for those schools with digital learning environments: more time on tasks, higher levels of comprehension, greater pride in work, and higher test scores. He opined that it is the "richness of the educational opportunity" that students will benefit from most. Providing an example of this, he referred to the 1:1 laptop program implemented in the Denali School District three years ago. He noted that although there have been promising results for special needs kids and those who are economically disadvantaged, "kids in that school district enjoy so much more ... because of the richness of the learning environment" and the "ability to get information that they are interested in [through technology] that relates to their learning." He concluded his slide presentation by summarizing the cost of implementing CDL, noting the possibility of obtaining additional funding through businesses, and reiterating the need to act on it now.

[11:40:23 AM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN informed the committee that he had recently visited a school that had 80 percent of its students from migratory families. This school, he continued, had just received an award from Microsoft [Corporation] for being one of the most advanced schools in the nation for its use of technology to reach students in remote areas. In regard to the discussion on what [fewer] educational opportunities are available in rural versus urban Alaska, he stated his belief that new information technology (IT) programs help bridge the gap. He further opined that he foresees more equality entering Alaska's educational system through the launching of CDL in schools.

[11:42:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked Mr. Rose to elaborate on how the readiness of schools will be determined.

MR. ROSE said that whereas several districts have already expressed interest in CDL, it is not possible for all districts to participate and that [merely] "wanting to do this is not good enough." He listed professional development and community support as important components for implementation of this initiative.

CHAIR NEUMAN added that the implementation of digital learning environments allows parents to become more interactive in the student's learning. In regard to the criteria by which schools are selected for participation in CDL, he noted that Mr. Rose had suggested using the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) grading system and to focus on those schools that have had more exposure to computers and Internet programs. He suggested that perhaps some of the rural schools do not have sufficient bandwidth to run the program.

[11:46:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON stated her belief that one of the reasons why rural schools are behind is because of "unfair funding" and that the school cost differential should be addressed. She opined that simply receiving a one-time grant is not adequate in staying abreast of continually advancing technology.

CHAIR NEUMAN added his belief that the cost of updating delivery systems is much more economical "than it is to change books." He opined that the educational strains of rural districts might be relieved by reducing the cost of their delivery systems.

MR. ROSE remarked that he has repeatedly heard there will be no funding of any new programs. To this, he said, "These are not new programs; the global economy is here, and we need to engage ... in a relatively quick fashion."

[11:49:44 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO suggested that the book, The World Is Flat, be given to all school board members to read. He said the book lets the reader know that the idea the digital revolution is coming is not true, but rather it has long since come. He then described some current technological advances and opined, "It is so important to not miss the ballgame."

MR. ROSE stated his agreement and said that it would take a concerted effort by many to come up to speed.

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN noted his repeated use of the computer for his legislative work. He also voiced his opinion that [the legislature] has to help the schools keep up with technological advances. Furthermore, he opined that to compete successfully, both nationally and globally, Alaskans need to know how to use technology. In response to Chair Neuman, he said that in some schools, parents can learn what their child's homework assignments are through the Internet.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO, in response to a comment made by Representative Wilson, stated his understanding that the aforementioned book notes that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) outsources 75 percent of the tax returns they process.

MR. ROSE, in response to Chair Neuman's inquiry, expressed his belief that national security is the most important issue in regard to keeping up with technological advances. He said he thinks about his unborn grandchildren and great grandchildren and poised the question as to "what is the legacy that we [want to] leave to our kids."

[11:58:03 AM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN opined that this topic on new delivery systems "stand above" those on early education and class size reduction.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO highlighted that the Discovery Channel has recently covered topics on global disasters, weather, and the sun. He said it was determined that under perfect conditions,

it is possible for the sun to eliminate electricity entirely for as much as 50 years.

CHAIR NEUMAN closed the meeting with a reminder that information on CDL is available on the AASB web site.

[12:00:39 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Education meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.