

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

April 19, 2006

1:51 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Fred Dyson, Chair  
Senator Gary Wilken, Vice Chair  
Senator Kim Elton  
Senator Donny Olson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Lyda Green

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

OVERVIEW: The Whole Village Project  
HEARD

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 28  
Relating to the innovative application of education technology tools to provide improved distance education programs in the state.

HEARD AND HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 281  
"An Act relating to interdistrict operation of public schools; relating to enrollment of students by school districts and regional educational attendance areas; and relating to charter schools and correspondence programs."

SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

Overview: The Whole Village Project  
No previous action to record.

BILL: SCR 28

SHORT TITLE: TECHNOLOGY FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION  
SPONSOR(S): HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES

04/13/06	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/13/06	(S)	HES
04/19/06	(S)	HES AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

**WITNESS REGISTER**

Kerry Boyd  
Yukon-Koyukuk School District  
4762 Old Airport Way  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-4456  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the Whole Village Project Overview.

Carl Knudsen  
Former Superintendent  
Galena City School District  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SCR 28.

Frank Odasz  
Lone Eagle Consulting  
2200 Rebich Lane  
Dillon, Montana 59725  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support to SCR 28.

Eric Downey, Business Manager  
Alaska Manufacturing Extension Partnership  
1577 C Street, Suite 301  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SCR 28.

Dan Etulain, Sitka Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SCR 28.

Fletcher Brown, Vice President of Communications  
DRS Technologies  
Technical and Management Services Corp.  
310 K Street Suite 200  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
Phone: (907) 264-6689  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented information on technology related to SCR 28.

Carl Rose, Executive Director  
1111 West 9th Street  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SCR 28.

Wes Keller, Legislative Aide  
Staff to Senator Dyson  
Alaska State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided information in support of SCR 28.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

**CHAIR FRED DYSON** called the Senate Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at [1:51:44 PM](#). Present were Senators Kim Elton, Gary Wilken, and Chair Fred Dyson. Senator Olson arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**OVERVIEW: The Whole Village Project**  
**SCR 28-TECHNOLOGY FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION**

CHAIR DYSON announced that SCR 28 was up for consideration.

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KERRY BOYD, representing the Yukon-Koyukuk School district (YKSD) and Alyeska Worldwide (AWW), a non-profit formed by YKSD, provided an overview of the Whole Village project, the goal of which is to incorporate safety, health, education, economic development, social services, culture, government, and entertainment to create a comprehensive program using communication technology to improve education in rural Alaska.

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CARL KNUDSEN, Former Superintendent in Galena School District (GSD), said that several hundred schools in Alaska are not meeting federal requirements and face federal takeover. GSD implemented a new training model that dramatically improved students' test results. Any training model must be collaborative, successful, replicable, and sustainable, and the program developed in Galena meets these criteria. He recommended that rural districts work with teachers and parents to create an individual learning plan (ILP) for every student, and said that using web based software created for the purpose, preparing and administering ILP's is not difficult.

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FRANK ODASZ, Lone Eagle Consulting, remarked that he founded the Big Sky Telegraph Project in 1988 to connect rural, one-room classrooms, and that in 1997 he did the first internet workshops for the villages of the Yukon-Koyukuk School District.

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MR. ODASZ related other internet programs that he has administered to illustrate the opportunities for entrepreneurial development in rural Alaska using Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

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MR. ODASZ said that the developing Alaskan Village Sustainability Action Plan entails: ensuring educational success for native youth through online k-12 instruction, youth entrepreneurship and ecommerce, culturally appropriate community learning including multi-generational digital storytelling. He said that they have spoken with Junior Achievement about partnering with them to add a youth e-commerce and micro-loans component to the program.

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The Alaska Manufacturing Extension Partnership (AMEP) is partnering with the Alaska Native Arts Foundation to create sustainable village economies through global e-marketing of Alaskan Native Art. Mr. Odasz will be promoting new partnerships with 23 countries within the next week. The Whole Village concept focuses on creating a fully integrated community-wide solution to raise student achievement, which can be used for e-commerce training and cultural expression.

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ERIC DOWNEY, Business Development Manager, Alaska Manufacturing Extension Partnership, said that part of AMEP's mission is to create rural economic development, mostly through the sale of native art. His organization believes that the Whole Village project would vastly decrease the cost of training and economic development throughout the state.

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He stressed that education is important for the cultivation of entrepreneurial awareness and expertise among the youth of Alaska and the world.

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DAN ETULAIN, Sitka, said that he dreams of establishing a community TV station in Anchorage, with statewide delivery through the Internet and satellite broadcast. He said that the programming emphasis would be on interactive education and entrepreneurship, and that all of the technology that has been presented in the committee could be augmented through TV broadcast.

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FLETCHER BROWN, Vice President of Communications for DRS Technical and Management Services Corporation (TAMSCO), said that all of the concepts presented by previous speakers require

that applicable and effective information can be delivered to people in the villages when it is needed. He offered his vision of pushing relevant and critical information out to villages instantly and economically.

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MR. BROWN provided information about his company, which was founded in 1982 and certified under the 8(a) Business Development Program as a minority business. Today TAMSCO has over 900 employees with a variety of officers in remote countries. Most of TAMSCO's work is for the Department of Defense, providing rapid-deployment communications systems for use worldwide. Since 1993 Mr. Brown has been working in Native American and Alaskan Native tribal development. They brought up communications to 37 villages on the Yukon Delta by satellite, 11 by microwave and tied them into a new satellite hub based in Bethel. He said that DRS TAMSCO is currently building a state-of-the-art telephone service using voice Over IP (VOIP) to 50 villages on the Yukon Delta.

He said that bandwidth alone is not the answer to the communication needs of rural Alaska. There are more efficient and cost-effective ways to transmit information, such as Internet Protocol (IP), which allows multiple users to share bandwidth, but when transmitting rich media content this solution falls down.

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MR. BROWN said that buying more bandwidth is not the answer because it is not affordable or efficient, and because it cannot deliver truly interactive and rich multimedia. The solution lies in using bandwidth-efficient tools to improve functionality through: multi-casting, collaboration servers, terminal services, digital video broadcasts, and the use of content management systems.

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He said that these systems are not widely used in Alaska at present, but his company is developing the infrastructure for them in rural Alaska now. He referenced a slide on virtual content management systems and cited examples of content management systems currently in use.

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Mr. Brown cited some areas where these systems can be applied, including education for at-risk youth, rural economic development, and the preservation of native culture.

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CHAIR DYSON asked Carl Rose to address the committee before opening the floor to questions.

CARL ROSE, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), referenced two documents that he had provided to the committee, a schematic, and two pages of bulleted comments. He prefaced his comments by referring to Thomas Friedman's book "The World is Flat", and its discussion of the convergence of technology and events that has affected everything in our world, including education.

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He said he is concerned that we are spending all of our money on education as it is today, and that our current model will not prepare students for the digital future. He proposed a digital consortium to help Alaska with an investment to put digital technology in our schools.

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MR. ROSE said that his organization is looking for funding of one third, or \$5 million each, from federal, state, and local government. He said that the current means of acquisition is not well coordinated and that the school districts are attempting to consolidate the acquisition process in partnership with Apple Computer.

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He referenced the bulleted document and said that it shows why, how, and when the program will be implemented. He emphasized the challenges and the threats we face due to globalization, and the need to prepare our children for a global economy.

CHAIR DYSON asked the witness to explain how this network will affect K-12 education.

MR. ROSE said that it would be a pilot program to give Alaskan students the opportunity to use technology for learning.

CHAIR DYSON asked if this technology would help a student who has a specific learning problem to access a teacher who specializes in the area needed?

Mr. Rose said yes, that is true across the curriculum.

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CHAIR DYSON asked how this program would help provide choices for the parents of children in failing schools in the state.

MR. ROSE said that he believes the program will help with that, but that Chair Dyson is beyond where he is now with the program. He is looking at pilots to create levels of success so that they can address other issues at a later date. The magnitude of the problem is so great that it cannot be dealt with all at once.

CHAIR DYSON asked Wes Keller how this kind of program could help to address some of the other requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and the mandate of Alaska's educational standards?

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MR. KELLER said that Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and NCLB, have called to our attention the fact that 203 Alaskan schools are failing in one area or another. Among the consequences for not meeting the standards are parental choice, and supplemental education services. He referenced a power-point presentation to better answer the question.

SENATOR WILKEN asked Mr. Rose to clarify the relationship between the two presentations brought before the committee today. If his school district decided to participate in the digital initiative, would they make the decision regarding the vendors and the systems?

MR. ROSE said that the AASB, as a non-profit private entity, has taken full accountability for the money they are pursuing. AASB and the Whole Village project are not the same entity; and if a local school district were to implement a digital program, local control would determine the vendor, the curriculum, and the software.

SENATOR WILKEN said that his understanding is that the school district would choose the tools to use to implement the AASB initiative, one of which might be the Whole Village.

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MR. ROSE said yes. He said that AASB is in partnership with Apple, which will provide the hardware, software, the peripherals, the professional development to operate those systems effectively and the technical support. Other vendors will offer professional development for teaching and learning.

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CHAIR DYSON asked how the technology would solve half a dozen, significant problems that face the state today.

MR. KELLER said that the median cost of education in Alaska, just published in SCR 28, is \$16,655 per student, which is the highest in the nation due to the extreme cost of our rural education.

He said that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), published in fall of 2005, shows that roughly 70 percent of the nation's children are not proficient.

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MR. KELLER presented a slide of the AYP status of Alaskan Schools and noted that the number of Alaskan schools at Level 5 is increasing. The implications of each level are: Level 1 Alert - the school must seek technical assistance from the school district or the Department of Education and Early Development (EED); Level 2 Improvement - the school must provide choice or Supplemental Education Services (SES); Level 3 Improvement - the school must provide choice and SES, as well as an improvement plan; Level 4 Corrective Action - the school must offer choice and SES, and make one of six changes ranging from replacing staff to restructuring; Level 5 Restructuring - the school must offer choice and SES, and take additional steps ranging from replacing staff to restructuring. At Level 5 the district must make a plan to prepare for alternative governance.

He stressed that all of the requirements stated at each level could be addressed using applied educational technology.

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MR. KELLER presented a slide showing how technology could be implemented to assist failing schools to meet the requirements that are placed upon them. For example, technology would make it possible for children in diverse locations to receive tutoring from a gifted teacher, allow teachers to work together, and assist districts with the development of ILP's through the compilation of student records.

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He addressed some of the criticisms of the program, and referenced a slide showing the number of schools with small student populations, noting that these are our most expensive schools. He said that technology could be used to reduce the cost of education in these schools.

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MR. ROSE said that technology is not the "silver bullet", it must be introduced and perfected, and we must have system wide proficiency to see the benefits of technology.

SENATOR ELTON remarked that while we are looking for "silver bullets", schools are getting rid of ancillary programs and are teaching to the NCLB tests. He said that we seem to be Balkanizing our funding sources, that it might be best to add all of the money available for specific program funding to the Base Student Allocation (BSA), and give the districts the opportunity to participate in Mr. Rose's program, for example. He said that when he looks at the Whole Village project and it's mission, he realizes that many schools are removing those types of programs and teaching to the test.

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MR. KNUDSEN said that he supports what Mr. Rose is trying to do, but would like to delineate the two projects. He said the AASB project is commendable and necessary, because there will be no significant changes in the system if the current funding and way of operating remain the same. He said Mr. Rose's project seeks to demonstrate that specific funding for educational technology can make a difference.

He said that the Whole Village is concerned about the current trend to teach to the NCLB tests to the exclusion of all else. The approach he is proposing, and what worked in Galena, is to train teachers to integrate the state standards into their lesson plans so that they are teaching to the standards represented on the test, thereby improving student achievement. "We have to get away from the concept that the curriculum is the textbook."

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SENATOR ELTON said that the Whole Village project seems to include a lot of programs that are being removed in other districts, such as art and extra curricular activities. He said that he agrees that those things are important; but he still thinks that the best thing to do may be to add to the BSA and let districts decide how to use those funds.

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MR. KNUDSON replied that over the past four years we have added 34 percent to educational funding, but it wasn't enough. In his experience, increasing the BSA will not help unless we change the way the money is being used.

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CHAIR DYSON said that his understanding of the tools that these programs are proposing to use is that they will free teachers and students from the restrictions of geographical location, and reduce the administrative duties that detract from teaching, so that children can enjoy learning.

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CHAIR DYSON adjourned the meeting at [3:21:15 PM](#).