

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

February 12, 2007

1:35 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Bettye Davis, Chair
Senator Joe Thomas, Vice Chair
Senator John Cowdery
Senator Kim Elton

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Fred Dyson

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Overview: No Child Left Behind Performance, and Program Changes
Presentation: The Gender Gap in Higher Education in Alaska

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to consider

WITNESS REGISTER

Les Morse, Director
Division of Assessment & Accountability
Department of Education & Early Development
POSITION STATEMENT: Presented overview

Carol Comeau, Superintendent
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, AK 99519
POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

Tom Brannon, Member
Nome School Board
Nome, AK 99762
POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions

Dr. William S. Pollack, Director
Center for Men and Young Men
McLean Hospital
Belmont, MA 02478
POSITION STATEMENT: Presented overview

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR BETTYE DAVIS called the Senate Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at [1:35:47 PM](#). Present at the call to order were Senators Thomas, Elton, Cowdery, and Chair Davis.

OVERVIEW: NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND PERFORMANCE AND PROGRAM CHANGES PRESENTATION: THE GENDER GAP IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN ALASKA

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LES MORSE, Director of Assessments and Accountability for the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), said he would be explaining school and district accountability under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, including Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks and yearly growth progress. AYP is the test that measures whether schools are performing to certain levels; 95 percent of the students in a given school must take the test. The target, or Annual Measurable Objective (AMO), is the percent of students who must be proficient in the tested areas of language arts and mathematics. Graduation and attendance rates are also measured, the latter in schools where graduation is not a consideration (elementary and middle schools).

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MR. MORSE gave past Alaska AYP results for language arts and mathematics. By the school year 2013-2014, AYP is projected to be at 100 percent. Currently evaluations are done for the entire school, and then broken down into racial, ethnic and economically disadvantaged sub-groups. The DEED has submitted a proposal to the US Department of Education to be allowed to look at individual student growth.

He explained that the graduation rate is calculated based on the number of freshmen who graduate four years later. The rate is currently 60 percent; that doesn't necessarily mean that 40 percent of students drop out, but rather that some did not complete high school in four years, or are special education students who stay in school longer than four years. The yearly dropout rate is between five and six percent.

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MR. MORSE presented PowerPoint slides to show how AYP would be calculated in an example school and how missing in one or several subgroups can cause the school as a whole to miss AYP.

He explained the different levels of consequences for schools that do not meet AYP for one or more years in a row. The school district is responsible for implementing these consequences, which can include restructuring school administration. The state is in turn responsible for implementing consequences for school districts not meeting their collective AYP. The DEED feels that measuring individual student growth towards proficiency would be more logical than requiring eventual 100 percent proficiency in math and language arts.

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MR. MORSE explained that there has been some positive growth since the 2003 implementation of the NCLB act in Alaska; a change in rules between 2003 and 2004 may have slightly affected the AYP rates. In 2004, 13.3 percent of schools missed AYP because of the Limited English Proficient (LEP) student subgroup. By 2006, the number had dropped to 8.7 percent.

He explained that there are 31 possible ways for a school to miss AYP, but no school failed in more than 15 categories in 2006.

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MR. MORSE said that three districts missed AYP for the first time last year and so were at consequence level one, eight districts were at level two, ten districts were at level three, and eleven districts were at level four. He restated that the state wishes to see individual student growth and achievement tracked throughout different levels of schooling. The DEED's currently pending application regarding using such a tracking method should be approved or denied by April 2007.

He explained that an individual tracking method would be useful to show that a school may be improving its teaching methods even if it doesn't meet the NCLB AYP target.

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MR. MORSE explained that the NCLB requirement for highly qualified teachers is a problem for some Alaskan communities because it is difficult for teachers in rural areas who must

teach multiple subjects to be "highly qualified", or possess masters degrees in each subject area. The DEED is working with the federal government to try to see legislation introduced to ease the restriction.

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SENATOR ELTON remarked that it seemed unfair that schools would potentially miss AYP solely because of the performance of the disabled student subgroup, and that other students could suffer as a result.

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MR. MORSE replied that the DEED has struggled with that issue, and that they audit districts in such positions to help them with their improvement plans. He believes the NCLB rules should be adjusted to allow for differentiated consequences for such schools.

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SENATOR ELTON asked if the rigidity of the NCLB requirements would lead a school to discourage certain students from attending so as to improve the school's AYP scores.

MR. MORSE replied that that hypothesis was another reason that the DEED wants to be able to track individual student growth. Even transient students would be traceable through such a system.

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SENATOR ELTON remarked that even urban districts see many transient students.

MR. MORSE replied that most transient students come from another school within the state and are thus currently traceable between districts.

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SENATOR COWDERY asked whether males' or females' dropout rates were higher.

MR. MORSE replied that he didn't have the information with him, but that the DEED does track dropout rates by gender, ethnicity,

and grade level, and the fewest are in grades 7 and 8 and the most in grade 11.

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CHAIR DAVIS asked for detail on school restructuring consequences.

MR. MORSE replied that the DEED has worked with some districts to restructure district and school administration and lay down targets for schools to meet. Restructuring has been successful in the past but is a very intensive process.

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CHAIR DAVIS asked if federal NCLB funding is adequate.

MR. MORSE replied that the assessment funding is inadequate, and has remained at the same level for the past 5 years. Alaska receives less funding than other states, and some ongoing costs are not recognized by the law.

CHAIR DAVIS asked if some NCLB funds go directly to school districts.

MR. MORSE said that some funding goes to DEED administration but much is given to districts in the form of grants.

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CAROL COMEAU, Superintendent of the Anchorage School District (ASD), said that the ASD supports the idea of using an individual growth model, which would show progress better than an across-the-board standard. She said that the assessment department in her district is vastly under-funded and that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is under-funded as well.

She added that she would like to see the problem of the highly qualified teachers requirement addressed, particularly in rural Alaska. The ASD has been working with Senator Lisa Murkowski to improve these issues.

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TOM BRANNON, Nome School Board member, said that the highly qualified teacher requirement does not take proficiency into

account, which could be measured with a yearly individual growth model.

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DR. WILLIAM POLLOCK, Director of the Center for Men and Young Men at McLean Hospital, said that school-age boys have been falling behind in learning for years, particularly in Alaska. Boys do less well on proficiency exams, are more likely to drop out of high school, and are less likely to attend college, where there are 100 girls for every 77 males. Depression, suicide, and crime rates are also higher among men than women. Change will come from understanding and practicing gendered learning, taking into account that boys learn to read and write later than girls. Emotional connection in learning is important to health and happiness as well as succeeding in school. 23 percent of children with only one college-graduate parent are in the lowest level of reading proficiency.

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CHAIR DAVIS asked Dr. Pollock for suggestions on improving the problem.

DR. POLLOCK said that acknowledgement of the social and emotional learning connection between teachers and students is important, as well as parent involvement in schools and using curricula that teach integration and understanding of different learning levels.

He added that the earlier the intervention with these new types of teaching skills, the more social problems are avoided later on in boys' lives. Different behaviors in boys need to be understood and accommodated with more physical learning activities in "moving classrooms", free access to computers, and more frequent recesses.

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SENATOR ELTON asked if NCLB exit exams were academically discouraging to male students.

DR. POLLOCK replied that statistics show this is the case. Assessments like NCLB are necessary, but tests should be more inclusive of gender differences.

SENATOR ELTON said that he thought much of this improvement would come from educating teachers.

DR. POLLOCK replied that he thought prevention and intervention should be done simultaneously, and many teachers are not currently learning effective techniques.

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SENATOR THOMAS said that education has become much less structured in recent decades, and that NCLB seems to be reinstating educational structure, but that Dr. Pollock's research seemed to indicate that less traditional structure was beneficial to students.

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DR. POLLOCK replied that the NCLB aims are positive, but implementation is faulty and is even causing parents to withdraw their children from public schools. Policies need to be adapted realistically, which can be done at no extra cost.

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CHAIR DAVIS said that techniques need to be taught to teachers while they are being trained, and before they enter classrooms. She is also in favor of continuing education credits for teachers.

DR. POLLOCK said that in order to enact such changes, there must be a concerted effort by the state government and local schools boards.

CHAIR DAVIS thanked Mr. Pollock for his testimony and, seeing no further business, adjourned the committee meeting at [2:54:04 PM](#).