

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
January 24, 2007
8:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Charlie Huggins, Vice Chair
Senator Bettye Davis
Senator Gary Wilken

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Donny Olson

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Overview: Alaska Statewide Mentor Project by the Department of Education

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No action to consider

WITNESS REGISTER

Roger Sampson, Commissioner
Department of Education &
Early Development
801 W 10th St.
Juneau, AK 99801-1894

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in overview

Dr. Gary Whiteley
Department of Education &
Early Development
801 W 10th St.
Juneau, AK 99801-1894

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in overview

Barbara Thompson, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Education &
Early Development
801 W 10th St.
Juneau, AK 99801-1894

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in overview

Mary Francis, Executive Director
Alaska Council of School Administrators
326 4th Street
Suite 404
Juneau, AK 99801

POSITION STATEMENT: In favor of program

Bill Bjork
NEA-Alaska
114 Second Street
Juneau AK 99801

POSITION STATEMENT: In favor of program

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the meeting to order at [8:00:38 AM](#). Present at the call to order were Senators Davis, Wilken, Huggins, and Chair Stevens.

OVERVIEW: ALASKA STATEWIDE MENTOR PROJECT BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

CHAIR STEVENS announced the committee would be having an overview from the Department of Education on its statewide mentoring project. ROGER SAMPSON, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Dr. GARY WHITELEY, Department of Education Consultant, and BARBARA THOMPSON, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education & Early Development.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON announced they would be making a group presentation and then respond to any questions the committee might have. He clarified that he would be talking about principal coaching as well as teacher mentoring across the State of Alaska. He announced that the group had three goals: to reduce the turnover rate of their teachers, increase the effectiveness of principals, and increase student achievement across the state. A pilot was run without State money for two years with excellent results. The statewide retention rate has been improved from 68 percent to 78 percent. They are also using research data from ISER and the Department of Labor to study the cost to the state of the teacher turnover, which was resulting in a loss of approximately 18.5 million dollars a year at the previous rate.

[8:03:44 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON explained that nationally, 50 percent of the teaching force is lost within five years of entering the profession. His group is focusing on a way to stop the drain. The model they're using for the teacher and principal mentoring shows the results of 18 years of use in other regions, where the retention rate is dramatically heightened. The mentor project is clearly effective, and they have found that schools that are making significant growth in student achievement always have effective administrative instructional leaders. He noted, however, that not all administrators in Alaska are receiving proper leader training. Teachers need to be supported by the building administrators.

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COMMISSIONER SAMPSON emphasized that the mentoring program is not just a rural program, but is in 41 districts across Alaska. However they are unable to fill all the requests for the program due to some travel constraints. The program has greatly expanded in recent years, except for the number of mentors which has not been increased as they have wished.

[8:07:11 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON remarked that they have begun to draw more heavily on recently retired teachers, who have greater availability and do not drain the career pool. He then introduced Gary Whiteley, the director of the principal coaching division.

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MR. WHITELEY pointed out that the relationships with the mentors, teachers, and principals are confidential. The information is not shared with district administration.

[8:08:42 AM](#)

MR. WHITELEY referenced a brochure brought before the committee, explaining the program training history within the last year. The program serves 60 principals in 26 districts, with 9 part-time coaches. They are moving more towards centralized-location training for the principals' training in many areas. The three major elements that impact student achievement are alignment and coherence of curriculum, instructional time, and monitoring progress.

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MR. WHITELEY began a PowerPoint presentation. He explained how they use taped teaching sessions to train their teachers and principals, looking for different teaching elements.

[8:12:50 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON clarified that GLE refers to Grade Level Expectations. They have a very precise "roadmap" for teachers and administrators that leads to state standards in reading, writing, and mathematics. Approximately 1000 actual assessments addressing GLEs are accessible to teachers and administrators on the State website.

[8:13:55 AM](#)

MR. WHITELEY explained that they base their programs on proven research. Fairbanks, Anchorage, Ketchikan, and Juneau had minimal turnover rates this year, and thus didn't use the program's services. Superintendent turnover rates are at 70 percent in the last six years in Alaska. He explained that all of their information is housed on the State website. Their documents can be reviewed online, as well as a description of the program and topics. He also provided the committee with a list of program participants and their coaches. He emphasized that the program is voluntary, and also that occasionally they have had to advise people to seek other employment because they felt they did not belong in the profession.

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COMMISSIONER SAMPSON said that there are 9,000 certified teachers in the state and 450 principals, and that while everyone could benefit from mentoring, expansion is not realistic; putting more focus on the principal coaching program is more efficient and rapid. After spending 2-3 years mentoring, 50 percent of mentors return to teaching and 25 percent move into leadership roles in schools. Schools that are not meeting AYP standards in many areas usually do not have effective leadership in the building.

[8:20:33 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON offered to take questions.

[8:20:39 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked how one decides whether the program is successful or not. Is it based on the retention rate?

[8:21:16 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that those who are a "bad fit" in education comprise a very small percentage. Generally teachers that have good training are happier, more productive professionals.

[8:22:09 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked which practices have the greatest impact.

MR. WHITELEY responded that classroom-level practices have about twice the impact on student achievement as do school-level practices, and are within the control of the principal.

[8:23:19 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked what level of exchange there was between rural and urban schools.

[8:23:44 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that effective instructors can do so in both rural and urban settings, and this creates a rich environment for mentors.

[8:25:00 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS said that he was concerned that the mentors might be usurping or replacing the principal's power.

[8:25:30 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that most principals haven't been trained to be effective instructional leaders.

[8:26:03 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked how it's determined that one becomes a principal. What is the qualification system?

[8:27:15 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that there is a further preparatory program which might not be effective enough, and that a method was needed to more effectively align the training with the job. They are currently working on redesigning the leadership program. Only 1 of 5 administrators comes from the Alaska university system, which is one of the primary reasons efforts cannot be focused there. It is unrealistic to think that all preparation can happen outside of the school or classroom.

[8:29:09 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS remarked that the legislature had previously recommended that they look into expanding the program to five years, and asked if there was a standard test for becoming a teacher.

[8:29:47 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that all teachers must pass a content-area test in order to become qualified.

[8:30:29 AM](#)

MR. WHITELEY said that a Wallace Foundation study showed that principals learn on the job, and that many principals in rural Alaska had no administrative experience.

[8:31:43 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked what the turnover rate for superintendents was, and remarked that he remembered it as being three to five years.

[8:32:10 AM](#)

MR. WHITELEY replied that it takes five to six years to implement changes in a district.

[8:32:34 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS remarked that superintendents are often in more political positions.

[8:32:45 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN said that it might be helpful for the committee to understand more of the inner workings of the program, and asked what the typical interaction with the program was.

[8:33:28 AM](#)

MR. WHITELEY explained that a coach spends an average of two to three days with the principals during site visits, and talks on the phone once or twice a week with each principal; also there is a bi-weekly conference call with all of his coaches. The coach also supplies materials, resources, and offers support. All of the coaches are part-time.

[8:34:42 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN remarked on the challenges to funding in the history of the program, and that though the program was very highly spoken of it would be a challenge to find money for it, and also discussed various ways of finding money for the mentor program.

[8:39:02 AM](#)

MS. THOMPSON replied that in this year's budget there is \$2.7 million in a general fund request, and the University of Alaska did contribute their usual \$500,000.

[8:40:13 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN asked if the budget for the program was still \$5 million.

[8:40:22 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that the \$5 million budget was not enough to serve their goals for this year, and that the mentors were overworked.

[8:41:32 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN asked for clarification on the number of teachers that come from in-state.

[8:41:43 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that it was one in five.

[8:42:00 AM](#)

MR. WHITELEY stated that Alaska post-secondary institutions can only train up to 225 teachers a year.

[8:42:24 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN asked if every Alaskan-trained teacher had a job upon graduation.

[8:42:39 AM](#)

MR. WHITELEY replied that not every teacher takes a job or is hired, but that there are clearly more vacancies than candidates.

[8:42:47 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS asked for clarification on the age of the program.

[8:43:01 AM](#)

MR. WHITELEY replied that they were in their fourth full year.

[8:43:03 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS asked how many mentors there were.

MR. WHITELEY replied that they currently had 27 mentors and nine coaches, and that they wanted three more mentors and one more coach. They did not receive the funding last year until it was too late to recruit.

[8:44:09 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS asked for clarification on the budget totals, and why they were asking for \$5 million when the program would more clearly benefit from \$7 million.

MR. WHITELEY replied that the mentor program had prepared three different budgets, and they have confidence that the legislature will make the proper decision.

[8:46:19 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked what the dropout rate was, and if it was an indicator of success in the program?

[8:46:51 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that the mentoring impact is difficult to measure but the dropout rate remains high.

[8:47:21 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if there was a state-wide strategy to abate the dropout rate.

[8:48:13 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS pointed out that several bills were to be presented to the committee in the near future that dealt with the subjects of drop-out rates and truancy.

[8:48:57 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that it was a major concern of the department as well, and was to be a concern of a state-wide summit in Anchorage in April.

[8:50:04 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN asked if the recent Moore vs. State case made an impression on the mentoring program.

[8:50:31 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that the judge involved saw the program as proactive and positive.

[8:51:19 AM](#)

MR. WHITELEY remarked that he testified in that case for 90 minutes and he agreed that the program was thought of positively.

[8:51:53 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said that he knew one of the coaches on the program list and that he understood the very hard work. He asked what percentage of the coaches were retired.

[8:52:45 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that one third of their program's mentors are retired or on a break, and that they are on contract with the program. The other mentors are on loan, and receive the same salary and are guaranteed a spot back in their district. The least experienced has six years experience, and the most has 31. All of the principal coaches are retired.

[8:54:09 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked if the budget includes funds from the Alaska Student Loan Corporation.

[8:54:33 AM](#)

MS. THOMPSON replied that \$1.2 million in funds to the program come from secondary education, \$2.7 million from general funds, and the remaining is from federal funds and the university.

[8:54:57 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked if anyone from the audience would like to comment.

MS. FRANCIS stated that the Alaska Council of School Administrators was supportive of the program, and that they were concerned with the retention of superintendents, and were very happy to see them included in the program.

[8:56:31 AM](#)

BILL BJORK, NEA-Alaska, stated that NEA-Alaska supported the program and wanted to see it expanded because they recognize the cost of replacing teachers, and the program is a good investment fiscally and quality-wise.

[8:58:25 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN called the committee's attention to a summary of school funding programs published under the Knowles administration, helpful for seeing the different ways that educational funding is distributed.

[9:02:25 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS, seeing no further business, adjourned the Special Committee on Education meeting at 9:02 a.m.