

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

January 26, 2007

8:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Charlie Huggins, Vice-Chair
Senator Gary Wilken

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Donny Olson
Senator Bettye Davis

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Joe Thomas

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Overview: School & District Accountability Under No Child Left Behind

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No action to consider

WITNESS REGISTER

Les Morse, Director,
Division of Assessment & Accountability
Department of Education &
Early Development
801 W 10th St.
Juneau, AK 99801-1894

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented overview

Senator Joe Thomas
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

POSITION STATEMENT: Commented on overview issues

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the meeting to order at [8:01:12 AM](#). Present at the call to order were Senators Wilken, Huggins, and Chair Stevens.

OVERVIEW: SCHOOL AND DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY UNDER NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

CHAIR STEVENS announced that the first order of business would be an overview presentation from Les Morris, Director, Division of Assessment and Accountability, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED).

MR. MORSE explained that he would be talking about AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) and attendance rates, and poor performance consequences for schools and districts and their implementation.

[8:03:29 AM](#)

MR. MORSE explained that he would also be showing AYP results from 2003, which is the first year the DEED tracked AYP progress for every school in the state rather than just Title I schools, and then end by addressing a pending application with the United States Department of Education regarding individual student growth in the state's AYP calculations.

CHAIR STEVENS invited Senator Thomas to join the committee at the table. Senator Thomas accepted.

[8:04:03 AM](#)

MR. MORSE explained that AYP is calculated for every school and district in the state, and the state itself. A certain participation rate in the evaluation is required from every school and its sub-groups. The DEED makes sure that 95 percent of students take the test on test days. They also emphasize meeting academic targets regarding the percentage of proficiency in language arts and mathematics in each school. Federal law requires reading evaluation as well. The target is called the AMO (Annual Measurable Objective).

[8:05:39 AM](#)

MR. MORSE continued to explain that the DEED also evaluates graduation rates and attendance rates. He then referenced a PowerPoint presentation to explain proficiency rates for

previous years in mathematics and language arts. The FYP results are required by federal law to increase, in six increments, to 100 percent FYP by the school year 2013-2014.

[8:06:35 AM](#)

MR. MORSE explained that in the beginning years the program was designed to build more capacity in schools and increase proficiency rates to 100 percent. In evaluating yearly progress, the DEED looks at overall school progress, district progress, ethnic sub-groups within the school, economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficiency students, and special education students.

[8:07:24 AM](#)

MR. MORSE explained that there are other indicators of progress as well, such as school graduation and attendance rates. They are calculated in a particular way.

[8:07:54 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked until what age students are allowed to remain in school.

[8:08:14 AM](#)

MR. MORSE replied that the maximum age is 19, unless the student is a special education student.

[8:08:24 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked for clarification of the definition of "drop-out".

[8:08:39 AM](#)

MR. MORSE clarified that a continuing education student is one who returns and graduates after dropping out, whereas a dropout does not. The number of students in ninth grade who finish school four years later compromise the graduates, and if a student drops out more than once the drop-out is only counted against the school one time. The numbers of continuing students, those not graduating on time, do count against the school. However, if they go on to graduate in their fifth year, it becomes a credit to the school.

[8:10:41 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked what happens if the student graduates later.

[8:10:48 AM](#)

MR. MORSE replied that the school will be credited.

[8:10:52 AM](#)

SENATOR THOMAS asked whether Mr. Morse tracked the number, and not the name of the students, and if new enrollers would be considered to be taking the place of drop-outs, number-wise.

[8:11:15 AM](#)

MR. MORSE replied that the drop-outs are always counted and all students are tracked through unique identifiers if they transfer to different schools. New students are tracked as well.

[8:12:11 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS remarked that Anchorage has a relatively migratory student population, and asked which school gets the credit or penalty for graduating students or dropouts.

MR. MORSE replied that the last school attended is the school that receives the penalty or credit.

[8:13:04 AM](#)

MR. MORSE clarified that statewide there is a 60 percent graduation rate, but that does not mean that 40 percent of students are drop-outs. Also included in that 40 percent are continuing students who do not graduate on time and special education students in school through their twenty-first year. The DEED produces a yearly dropout rate that looks at the number of students dropping out from grades 7 through 12. In the last few years the dropout rate has averaged six percent. At times people take the graduation and dropout rates at face value, but they are complicated calculations.

[8:15:36 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN requested rate explanations on paper, and then asked how home school is incorporated in the rates.

[8:16:07 AM](#)

MR. MORSE replied that home school depends on the arrangement made. If the home school is not done through a registered institution, the student is considered a dropout. If the schooling is done through a registered institution, the student is considered a transfer student.

[8:16:49 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN asked for an example.

[8:17:01 AM](#)

MR. MORSE explained that there are nine statewide correspondence schools and their students can be considered transfers. Private institutions' registration with the DEED is voluntary, thus if the private school is registered the student will be considered a transfer. Otherwise the student is considered a drop-out.

[8:18:17 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN asked if there was a list of approved private schools.

MR. MORSE replied that yes, there is a registered school list. Records from that school must be received by the DEED for the student to be considered a transfer.

[8:19:25 AM](#)

MR. MORSE said that the attendance rate in Alaska is calculated as part of AYP but only for those schools where a graduation rate is inapplicable (middle, elementary schools). In that case, the school must meet a target attendance rate. He referenced the PowerPoint presentation to show example individual school data. He felt that there should be some adjustment in consequences for schools with more disabled students.

[8:22:57 AM](#)

MR. MORSE said that graduation rates in the state are 60 percent and the attendance rate is generally in the 90s. The target rate is at least 85 percent for attendance. Most schools make this target. The graduation target is 55.58 percent, and generally the state as a whole meets this target as well.

[8:23:40 AM](#)

MR. MORSE explained that there is a series of consequences if AYP is not met, depending on the number of consecutive years AYP has not been met. The district is responsible for implementing consequences for schools. They create school improvement plans that are reviewed at different levels. Mr. Morse went on to explain the different levels of consequences, both disciplinary and financial.

[8:24:49 AM](#)

MR. MORSE said that to have the consequences lifted, a school above level one on the disciplinary action scale must meet AYP for two consecutive years.

[8:25:20 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if there was any difference in a school being Title I or not.

[8:25:46 AM](#)

MR. MORSE replied that financial consequences apply to Title I schools only. All schools level two or higher must create a school improvement plan, but Title I dollars must be set aside under the consequences.

[8:27:12 AM](#)

MR. MORSE explained that the state is responsible for ensuring that the district implements appropriate consequences. Districts have four consequence levels, and schools must meet AYP for two consecutive years to be removed from the list of consequences.

[8:28:05 AM](#)

MR. MORSE then said that he would be going over some of the AYP results the districts have received. He listed school results for the past three years, and pointed out that a change in rules in 2004 may have partly influenced the results. He then explained language arts and mathematics scores, divided by subgroup, and noted that in 2004 19.7 percent of schools missed AYP due to the performance of all the students combined.

[8:30:02 AM](#)

MR. MORSE said that he would be giving an example of how sub-groups can affect the school performance. In 2004, 13.3 percent of the schools in the state missed the target for language arts, mathematics, or both, due to the performance of the Limited English Proficient (LEP) student population. In 2005, the number was at 9.7 percent, and in 2006 it was at 8.5 percent.

[8:31:07 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if teachers know who the economically disadvantaged students are.

MR. MORSE responded that state regulations require schools to identify such students using the criteria for the free and reduced lunch program. Districts may have different methodologies.

[8:32:41 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if the kids are identified to the teachers.

[8:32:51 AM](#)

MR. MORSE replied that the teachers do not know the specific students unless it is deemed important to know.

[8:33:47 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS remarked that statistically it would be important for the teacher to know if that was a group whose performance needed to be improved.

[8:34:32 AM](#)

MR. MORSE replied that a reason to know such information might be if the school offered a scholarship for students who were economically disadvantaged.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if the family was allowed to waive confidentiality.

MR. MORSE replied that the family is informed of all information released. He believes that the family may share the information with the school.

[8:35:33 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked for a definition of economically disadvantaged.

MR. MORSE replied that the criterion is meeting income eligibility for free or reduced lunch. Every year the family size and income that fit the definition are updated.

[8:36:14 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN asked if intensive needs students are included in just the disabled group or all the ethnic groups.

MR. MORSE replied that they are counted in the disabled group as well as their corresponding ethnic groups.

[8:37:26 AM](#)

MR. MORSE explained a chart with data from 2004-2006 showing how many schools missed AYP in which categories. The DEED hopes to see schools addressing needs in particular sub-groups. The number of schools missing AYP in many subgroups is being reduced, and this is an important way of measuring schools' progress.

[8:39:00 AM](#)

MR. MORSE announced that he would then be talking about district AYP. The DEED measures students in individual schools then adds all together for the district. In 2006, 3 districts were at level 1, 8 at level 2, 10 districts at level 3, and 11 at level 4.

[8:40:19 AM](#)

MR. MORSE said that Alaska has long had a desire to include student growth in AYP. He explained that it is difficult to track progress when student graduation to different schools (elementary to middle, for example) doesn't allow for continual tracking of growth. What the DEED wants to do is continue tracking students through different school levels, for example from fifth to sixth grade. The state currently has an application with the United States Department of Education asking to be able to do this, and that it should be reviewed by April. AYP would still be done the way it currently is, but in addition the DEED would run a growth check on all schools, differentiating between student and school performance.

[8:42:59 AM](#)

MR. MORSE gave an example of how the system works with the current models and how it will work if they are allowed to evaluate individual students. He explained that as the system is now, even if individual student performances increase or decrease, it doesn't necessarily mean they will meet or miss their target for AYP. The proposal before the USDE will enhance the tracking system.

MR. MORSE explained that ten states will be allowed to pilot a new growth model for tracking AYP, with slightly more restrictive rules.

[8:45:40 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked Mr. Morse if, in his opinion, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act had made a difference in schools' performance.

MR. MORSE replied that yes, some gains had been made, but most importantly now there is a clearer set of expectations for each grade level. It is easier for teachers and administrators to meet a certain set of standards.

[8:47:38 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if NCLB was grossly underfunded, or received funding based mostly on grants.

[8:48:01 AM](#)

MR. MORSE replied that he was not sure of his qualifications in answering that question, and didn't know that there was a clear answer.

[8:48:22 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN asked for the significance of a number in the PowerPoint presentation provided by Mr. Morse.

MR. MORSE explained that methodology used to set up the chart accounted for that particular decimal. The student in the twentieth percentile is calculated, and the proficiency percentage in that student's school is considered the starting point for formulaic calculations.

[8:50:13 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN asked for the definition of an LEP student.

MR. MORSE replied that an LEP student is a Limited English Proficient student. There are about 20,000 such students in the state of Alaska.

[8:50:31 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN asked how an ethnic class under 10 students in a particular school would be quantified.

MR. MORSE replied that an ethnic class must be represented by at least 10 students to be considered as a sub-group, and an ethnicity represented by fewer than 10 students would only be considered in the school as a whole.

[8:51:29 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN remarked that slide 12 from the PowerPoint presentation seemed to be a powerful chart for plotting progress. He pointed out the progress in schools meeting AYP from 2004 - 2006, and asked how many were taken off the consequences list.

MR. MORSE responded that 86 schools were removed from the list in that time period, and that every school in the state was represented on the chart.

SENATOR WILKEN asked if there was any prediction for 2009.

[8:52:35 AM](#)

MR. MORSE replied that there was no established goal, but that he would hope to see the trend continue.

[8:52:57 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN remarked that the mean AYP had gone up, so it seemed that things were happening positively, and asked for a copy of the list from the past year. He then said that he had received an email from Donna Foxley, the NCLB coordinator for Alaska, with multiple attachments regarding the program. He asked Mr. Morse to look them over and recommend the most useful to Senator Stevens for printing out for the committee. He

remarked that this appeared to be a big year for renewing NCLB, and asked what role the committee and legislature could play to help in the renewal process.

[8:54:44 AM](#)

MR. MORSE replied that the DEED will want to stress certain components that are important for changes to the congressional delegation. A united voice from Alaska would be very helpful. They would like to see the new growth component written into the law.

[8:55:57 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN responded that he thought this committee would be the one to help in that dialogue, and that he thought this legislature would be appropriate in speaking to the government about such changes.

[8:56:44 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS thanked the department for the presentation, and asked for clarification in the numbers of Hispanic and Asian students. He asked if the rising numbers of achievement among these ethnic groups in Alaska was an aberration or if this was a national trend.

[8:58:21 AM](#)

MR. MORSE replied that this was not a national comparison, and he would have to look at other indicators to know exactly what the trend meant.

[8:58:30 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if it would be more advantageous to a school to take a student off the school roll instead of counting him or her as a drop-out, and if there were any concerns about this incentive.

[8:59:06 AM](#)

MR. MORSE responded that one of the pitfalls in a law this complicated is that the data can be skewed, but this data is carefully analyzed by the DEED to account for all the students. DEED staff looks to see if schools appear to be losing many students, and if that rate is more dramatic than the state

average. He has not so far seen any schools attempting to do such data skewing.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Mr. Morse for his presentation, and seeing no further business, adjourned the Special Committee on Education meeting at [9:00:53 AM](#).