

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

April 2, 2007

8:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Charlie Huggins, Vice Chair
Senator Donny Olson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bettye Davis
Senator Gary Wilken

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Overview: Vocational Transitional Skills Program

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record.

WITNESS REGISTER

Roger Sampson, Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented overview

Click Bishop, Commissioner
Department of Labor and Workforce Development
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in overview

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Special Committee on Education meeting to order at [8:04:35 AM](#). Present at the call to order were Senators Olson, Huggins, and Chair Stevens.

VOCATIONAL TRANSITIONAL SKILLS PROGRAM ROLL-OUT

ROGER SAMPSON, Commissioner for the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), said that the department has been looking for a way to emphasize work-ready skills in K-12

education. He explained the differences between work-ready and college-ready skills, and how they're divided into foundational skills, technical skills, and soft skills.

[8:07:25 AM](#)

He said that currently school education is based on textbooks and theory, which leads to non-practicality of skills for many youth; the context of workplaces and postsecondary training situations needs to be considered. The job skills assessment program that he was presenting, WorkKeys, would provide a way to assess skills, profile jobs, and educate and train students, helping to fix the gap between school and post-secondary education readiness.

He explained that WorkKeys assesses students' capabilities for particular jobs on a scale of one to seven, based on their capabilities in three areas: applied mathematics, reading for information, and locating information. He then explained how the scoring system would rate a potential employee or student for a particular job. A curriculum has been developed to target specific skills associated to certain jobs. The skills are aligned with Alaskan standards, and there are management tools for teachers and administration included; the program is proficiency-based, so students don't advance just because they've finished a level of the course.

[8:14:47 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if Commissioner Sampson would consider the program to be standards-based.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that he would. He added that the programs are available online or in hard copy, and there are informative assessments included. He then showed a slide to demonstrate how the system would evaluate students for certain jobs including nurses' assistants and orderlies. Many employers don't have enough of an employee pool from which to choose.

[8:17:33 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if Commissioner Sampson had any statistics on workers' compensation.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that he did have some information provided by current program users like the MidAmerica Pipeline Company, who use the program to solve employment issues.

8:18:21 AM

CLICK BISHOP, Commissioner for the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DLWD), said that he didn't have such information with him.

SENATOR HUGGINS said that he would assume that successful people in the workplace would be one of the highlights of the program.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON explained how a diagnostic test could be performed on a middle school student to determine what kinds of jobs would be appropriate for him or her; it will encourage students to reach a higher level of evaluation so as to be qualified for more different jobs.

8:20:38 AM

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON said that people tend to say that kids don't know anything, and so the high school qualifying exit exam was created to have a benchmark. However, people are still opining that kids don't learn enough, so this program will teach them to learn how to apply their knowledge in a more practical way.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if determination of motivation is accounted for in the model.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that that is part of the program, in a broad way. It shows to kids that there's a huge number of professions available for them to aspire to.

8:22:25 AM

COMMISSIONER BISHOP added that in visiting many schools, he's seen that once a student looks at the thousands of opportunities available, they really see what the results of hard work in school can be.

CHAIR STEVENS said that the program seems to mesh well with the fact that many people will have multiple careers in their lifetime.

8:23:55 AM

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON said that on average people change careers 14 times by the age of 38. The last section of the program

addresses this issue question; better hiring results in lower job turnover.

[8:24:49 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER BISHOP emphasized that decreased training time and costs are hugely important to businesses.

SENATOR HUGGINS said that the program is similar to the European schooling model, and that in his opinion many people make career decisions based on examples they see in life and not on a book system.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP said that he has met a lot of school-age youth who don't know what they want to do yet.

CHAIR STEVENS said that maybe the program would help a lot of youth determine a career path.

SENATOR HUGGINS said that he thinks this program would be more effective in addressing truancy than truancy officers.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON said that programs like WorkKeys have been reducing employee turnover, overtime, training costs, and improving profit. He used the example of MidAmerica to show the benefits of the program, and said that the business world supports this national standardized curriculum. So far, no state has implemented this program at the K-12 level, but those that have used it at secondary schools have seen increased exit exam levels, SAT and ACT scores have improved, and graduation and attendance rates have improved.

[8:30:37 AM](#)

He said that employers have made it clear what they want to see in potential employees, and Alaska needs to look into different ways to prepare its graduates; this element of the program is not as developed as other areas.

SENATOR HUGGINS said that the program reminds him of an Alaskan youth academy, which was initially comprised of kids who were bright but directionless. In later years, the kids in the program wanted to find a system to give them direction.

[8:32:30 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON explained that the WorkKeys program offers a Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) that allows an individual to document his or her skills, and it provides a measuring tool for employers. He said that education can be tied to life outside of and beyond school through the CRC, which is nationally recognized. Schools are frustrated with trying to remediate students who leave high school unprepared; the program is a national training tool that provides a means of measuring skills across the board.

He explained that incentives for a good program outcome need to be made available through job shadowing, internships, reduced training fees, and vouchers for post-secondary education. He gave an example of how schools and businesses are interested in using this program, and showed an example of how a CRC would benefit a prospective employee.

[8:37:23 AM](#)

He explained how the program is really just another curriculum idea, but that it's nationally recognized and easily measurable. He proposed that the state adopt a regulation to do a placement test with young students, and explained how the scale of the scoring system works. The program could be used by a teacher in a variety of ways, even with young students; if they see reasons to increase their scores, they will try to do so. Requiring this certificate will go a long way in getting students to try to improve their performance.

He suggested that the CRCs will attract many students who would otherwise fail in the later years of high school. The program would allow emphasis in technical skills early on for youth who are otherwise uninterested in academia; it can be managed the first few years through the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), if individual districts choose not to do so. No new staff will need to be hired.

[8:42:46 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Commissioner Sampson and asked how the WorkKeys program will improve education, and what sort of category the program fits into.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON said that the program is being promoted by the private sector as a way to teach kids the proper skills for the positions for which they're hiring. Districts using this curriculum have seen improvements not only in the technical

aspects of education but in general study as well. Many teachers don't see the practicality of technical skills, so WorkKeys will provide instructional guidance for that area. He explained that there are only two companies that have provided this sort of program in the US so far, and it's relatively inexpensive.

[8:46:30 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS said that while the program makes sense, many students do go to college, and he asked how the program will be kept from following the model of other educational systems.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that subjects can be taught in two different ways; teaching the skill, and teaching ability of applying the skill. Most schools in the country just teach knowledge, and not application and analysis.

[8:48:16 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if any school principal could decide to use the program, or if an entire district must decide together.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON replied that any student would have access to the program whether their school utilized it or not. It would be more effective with a school-wide base, but it can be done on one's own.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if school districts will want to do this program, or if they might not be able to afford it.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON said that ideally no one new will have to be hired to do this program, and hopefully schools will see the usefulness of WorkKeys and will at least offer students access. He gave an example of a district that used the program and explained how useful the concept could be in giving a student direction.

[8:51:50 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked for the Board of Education's opinion of the program.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON said that the board is prepared to move forward with the program, and that there's no devaluing in the program regarding collegiate versus technical application. Commissioner Bishop is working on securing funding for buying

the licensing and training, and regulation development is underway.

[8:53:27 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said that the program may be out of date in a certain period of time, and asked how this can be avoided.

[8:54:09 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON said that the job index is updated every five years, and the program is mostly about transition, not necessarily specific job training; the skills taught are core skills that will be applicable for a lifetime.

CHAIR STEVENS said that the program is exciting, and asked where support will need to come from.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON said that he sees the program as a way for the DLWD and DEED to work together, and that the model needs to be moved forward without immediately asking for funding; the licensing and processing can be done without a financial commitment this fiscal year, and only minimal support in the future.

[8:56:34 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER BISHOP commented that this program is the first step in an important process.

CHAIR STEVENS agreed that the program will have a big impact on Alaskan schools.

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON said that the truancy issue would be better resolved by a program such as WorkKeys, where the officers could spend time talking to kids about job possibilities. If the CRC could be made motivating and stimulating to youth, it would help more remain in school and graduate.

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the meeting at [8:58:47 AM](#).