

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

February 1, 2008

8:07 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair  
Senator Bettye Davis  
Senator Donald Olson  
Senator Gary Wilken via teleconference

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Charlie Huggins, Vice Chair

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 16  
Establishing and relating to the Education Funding District Cost  
Factor Commission

SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

SENATE BILL NO. 241

"An Act relating to a report to the legislature on teacher  
preparation, retention, and recruitment by the Board of Regents  
of the University of Alaska."

HEARD AND HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 241

SHORT TITLE: UNIV. REPORT: TEACHER TRAINING/RETENTION

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) STEVENS BY REQUEST OF JT LEG EDUCATION  
FUNDING TASK FORCE

01/18/08	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/08	(S)	SED, HES
02/01/08	(S)	SED AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

**WITNESS REGISTER**

TIM LAMKIN, Staff  
Senator Stevens  
State of Alaska  
Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented overview of SB 241.

PAT PITNEY, Vice President  
Planning and Budget  
University of Southeast Alaska (UAS)  
Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an overview of university activities related to teacher training and retention.

JOHN PUGH, Chancellor  
University of Southeast Alaska (UAS)  
Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an overview of university activities related to teacher training and retention.

LARRY HARRIS, Dean  
School of Education  
University of Alaska Southeast (UAS)  
Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an overview of the School of Education at the University of Alaska Southeast.

MARY SNYDER, Dean,  
University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)  
Anchorage, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an overview of the School of Education at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

DIANE HIRSCHBERG, Researcher  
Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER)  
Anchorage, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an overview of the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) study of teacher recruitment and retention.

MELISSA HILL, Director  
Teacher Placement  
University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)  
Fairbanks, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supported SB 241.

JOHN ALCANTRA, Director  
Government Relations  
National Education Association Alaska (NEAA)  
Anchorage, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supported SB 241.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

**CHAIR GARY STEVENS** called the Senate Special Committee on Education meeting to order at [8:07:30 AM](#). Present at the call to order were Senators Davis, Olson, Stevens, and Wilken via teleconference.

**SB 241-UNIV. REPORT: TEACHER TRAINING/RETENTION**

CHAIR STEVENS announced consideration of SB 241.

[8:08:43 AM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Stevens, presented an overview of SB 241. He said the bill is the product of work by the Joint Legislative Education Funding Task Force (JLEFTF). The spirit of the bill is to bring the University of Alaska and the regents into closer dialogue with the legislature regarding teacher/work force development in Alaska.

[8:10:03 AM](#)

PAT PITNEY, Vice President, Planning and Budget, University of Alaska Southeast (UAS), Juneau, AK, said she would provide an overview of activities related to teacher training, recruitment and retention. She said a timely and formal report to the legislature could easily be accomplished. She said the Alaska Commission of Postsecondary Education (ACPE) and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) have information that could add to the overall scope of increasing Alaskan teacher recruitment. She said those testifying would provide an overview of programs designed to move toward this goal.

CHAIR STEVENS said that his oldest daughter received her MAT in teaching from UAS and is now pursuing a PhD in Clinical Psychology.

[8:13:31 AM](#)

JOHN PUGH, Chancellor, University of Alaska Southeast (UAS), Juneau, AK, said he was the former Dean of Arts and Sciences and Education at UAS and the creator of the Master's program in teaching at UAS. He said the university realized there was a problem in nursing and health a few years ago and met with hospitals and nursing associations to put together an enhanced nursing program that could double the number of nurses. He said the same incentive is motivating the university to seek a solution to the teacher shortage problem.

[8:15:11 AM](#)

LARRY HARRIS, Dean, School of Education, UAS, Juneau, AK, said the university offers beginning teachers initial certification with a Bachelor Degree (BA) in Elementary Education, a program that has grown from 40 students to 80 students currently. He added this is not a guarantee that 80 students will graduate. Students are allowed to complete their program from a distance. They are on campus for the first couple of years after which they return to their home community in Southeast Alaska where they complete their course work and practicum experience.

MR. HARRIS said there are three Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) programs: a one-year program in elementary education in Juneau which will be expanded next fall to include Sitka and Ketchikan to hopefully double the enrollment; a secondary MAT program with cohorts in Juneau and Sitka; and a third cohort residing between Craig, Homer and Wasilla that accommodates 30 students. The plan is to target more science and math teachers. A third MAT program is a distance-delivered two-to-three year program in elementary education. It has about 60 students from all over the state who already have a BA.

[8:18:48 AM](#)

MR. HARRIS said other programs for experienced teachers include: a reading specialist program; a program in educational technology; and a math education program with 13 students in rural middle schools for teachers not qualified to teach math. There's a huge shortage of special education teachers in the state. The university's special education programs work with 36 students in Bethel, Wasilla, Kake, Northwest Arctic School District and other districts. The students are already teaching in the classroom while becoming qualified as special education teachers. The program was changed last year from an endorsement-only program to a MAT and the enrollment tripled.

CHAIR STEVENS said he appreciated the innovative programs, especially the one-year teacher education program which his daughter participated in at UAS. He asked if the university has this program in other parts of the state.

[8:22:29 AM](#)

MARY SNYDER, Dean, University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), Anchorage, AK, said the university has addressed the problem of its lengthy special education program with a new certification program. There were 100 students who graduated last year with a total of 217 graduating with a BA or an MAT. The undergraduate programs at UAA are for elementary and early childhood education, and there's an MAT program for secondary education

similar to the one at UAS. One hundred percent of graduates were hired locally either by MatSu or Anchorage districts. UAA has 40 to 50 elementary, middle school, high school or early childhood interns in the Anchorage and MatSu districts. It has partnership programs with Kenai and Kodiak where the courses are delivered via distance and students can complete their degrees on the local campus. About 47 percent of courses are delivered via distance. Other graduate programs at UAA include special education, early childhood education, counselor education, and speech and language pathology. UAA also provides education for principals and superintendants. It has an Alaska Educational Innovations Network (AEIN) partnership grant that serves over half the students in the state and partnerships with nine districts.

[8:26:19 AM](#)

DIANE HIRSCHBERG, Researcher, Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), Anchorage, AK, said ISER has been looking at the issue of teacher turnover since 2000. The initial study published in 2002 demonstrated the need for further research. ISER has since developed collaborative relationships with Alaska Teacher Placement, the Department of Education, the University of Alaska (UA), its colleges of education and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to develop a memorandum of understanding that looks comprehensively at teacher turnover, the supply from outside as well as from in-state programs. It is currently responding to requests for data from these institutions and feeding it back to them in order to help with accreditation efforts. From the last report in 2006, ISER produced the four-page summary in the bill packet. The turnover rate is much higher in rural Alaska. The state doesn't train enough teachers within the state to meet the need. If the state could reduce turnover it could produce enough teachers. There is always a certain amount of turnover that has to do with personal lives. However, in Alaska the turnover rate also has to do with issues like working conditions and salary. Addressing this issue might significantly reduce turnover. The state needs to bring in about 800 new teachers per year. This does not include teachers who are switching districts or taking a leave of absence to have a child or get another degree. The state is meeting about 25 percent of that need with in-state programs. All the programs are increasing their capacity and the number of graduates.

MS. HIRSCHBERG said one of the issues that still needs to be addressed is the impact of recent policy changes around retirement, licensure, and changes in the national market for teachers. Alaska salaries are declining relative to the national average. ISER is putting together a proposal to study these

issues in collaboration with Alaska Teacher Placement, the Anchorage School District and UA. This would include a state-wide survey of teachers who are exiting the profession or the state to find out why they are leaving. ISER is also planning a new study of supply, demand and turnover.

[8:32:52 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said that addressing the housing problems for teachers in villages might go along way to solving the problem of turnover.

[8:33:39 AM](#)

MELISSA HILL, Director, Teacher Placement, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), Fairbanks, AK, said she applauds the intent of this bill. Every year there are school districts that start the year without certified teachers in high need areas. The issues that affect supply, demand and retention include the impact of an affordable retirement system and current policies and regulations regarding what are necessary to become certified. These are concerns expressed by superintendents and personnel directors across the state. Other issues include the cost of living and housing in rural Alaska, and salaries in comparison to other employment opportunities. Many teachers in rural areas have to share housing.

MS. Hill applauded several programs in the University of Alaska system focused on recruiting and retaining teachers like the Future Teachers of Alaska. The Department of Education Early Development program has been hugely successful supporting a statewide mentor project that provides daily support in the classroom for 400 first and second year teachers.

[8:37:13 AM](#)

MR.PUGH said UAF has similar distance-delivery programs for communities in Southwest, Northwest and Western Alaska. All those districts have future teacher programs. There will be a future teachers conference in Juneau this spring with youth from around the state. Students need to know about and take the correct courses in high school because teacher education programs have become more stringent. He suggested that members of the committee might like to meet with these students when they gather in the spring.

[8:38:55 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked Senator Wilken to comment since he was a member of the task force and this bill came from his suggestions.

[8:39:20 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN said legislators have tossed around the idea that at least one-third of teachers should come from the state. He said it's important to focus on driving that number up with a goal of getting to 50 percent. Eight years ago it came to the attention of the legislature that the state was importing nurses at a cost of millions of dollars. Today it is obvious what a huge success the nursing program at the university has been. He proposed doing the same with teachers. He said there needs to be a dialogue between regents and legislators at least once or twice a year. He thinks of the regents as the board of directors of a billion dollar enterprise that is the university, and the legislators as the board of directors for the billion dollar budget.

[8:43:43 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said that on page 2, lines 5 through 7, the bill puts the onus on the regents to prepare a written report. It would be good to have a face-to-face meeting with them on this issue.

[8:44:10 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN said that on page 1, line 6, it says that regents shall prepare and present an annual report. It might be good to embellish the bill to state where and when, specifically "in person and during the legislative session."

[8:45:08 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said that whatever the venue and whether it is with the Senate HEALTH EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE or with a new standing committee on education, he agrees there should be a face-to-face meeting.

[8:45:43 AM](#)

MR. PUGH said one thing that might improve the bill would be to have this report at the first session. That and presenting it every other year gives the process a two-year time period.

CHAIR STEVENS said the way it reads now it's an annual report. He asked why Mr. Pugh was proposing two years between reports.

MR. PUGH explained that ISER says that doing it every other year produces more significant information. Reporting in the second session doesn't leave much time to act on suggestions that arise.

[8:47:31 AM](#)

JOHN ALCANTRA, Director, Government Relations, National Education Association Alaska (NEA-Alaska), Anchorage, AK, said he represents 13,000 public school employees throughout the state. He appreciates the testimony of Ms. Hill and agrees that policy changes involving portable retirement and other issues are having a dramatic impact on the ability to recruit and retain teachers. He supports SB 241. He said the closure of Sheldon Jackson College this year means an additional loss of educators. Rural teacher housing, a major cause of turnover, has been a priority of NEA-Alaska since 1978. Fifty percent of teachers leave in the first five years. A statewide survey of exiting teachers would be immensely valuable.

[8:50:27 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS proposed a committee substitute (CS) to address the idea of a meeting in the first year of a two-year session including where and when. Since the regents meet every spring, that might be an appropriate time.

MS. PITNEY said that most discussions are only on budget. She encouraged the committee to draft a CS that includes a provision to talk about the programs face to face with either of the aforementioned committees.

[8:52:09 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS said she approves of having a report every other year, but recommends an update in the off year.

MR. LAMKIN said there is a hearing on the bill in the House next week.

[8:53:11 AM](#)

SENATOR WILKEN said he'd like to talk about a report every year versus every other year.

CHAIR STEVENS said he would have a CS prepared for the next meeting.

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the meeting at [8:54:06 AM](#).