

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

March 12, 2008

8:03 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

Presentation by the Yukon-Koyukuk School District: Success Project - A Success Plan for Alaska Schools

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to consider

**WITNESS REGISTER**

DENNIS DEWITT

Communities in Schools

Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced himself and was present for the meeting.

CARL KNUDSON

Consultant for the Yukon-Koyukuk (YK) School District

Galena AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented and overview of the YK School District Success Project.

CARL ROSE

Association of Alaska School Boards

Anchorage AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on the Success Project

BARBARA THOMPSON, Commissioner

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on how the Success Plan aligned with the state improvement plan.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

**CHAIR GARY STEVENS** called the Senate Special Committee on Education meeting to order at [8:03:53 AM](#). Present at the call to order were Senators Wilken, Olson, Davis, Huggins and Stevens.

**School Success Project- A Success Plan for Alaska Schools**

[8:04:30 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked people to introduce themselves for the presentation on the school success project.

DENNIS DEWITT, Communities in Schools, introduced himself.

CARL KNUDSON, Consultant for the Yukon-Koyukuk (YK) School District, apologized for the new superintendent, Karey Boyd, who couldn't attend the meeting due to a previous engagement. He said the district was at the legislature two years ago trying to do the same thing they are doing now. At that time they tried to do a school success plan in YK that would have modeled the program he started in Galena as a superintendent in 1995-2003. Today they are looking at the results of those years. He said the outline had a typo that said 56 school districts, but there are only 53. He said the outline described the focus of the school success model and presented the fact that 16 of the state's districts had been identified for corrective action and 6 have corrective action being implemented. Two years ago when he presented this plan to the legislature, he said he was unable to get funding.

He related that during this time the YK school board and the superintendent had watched Galena flourish and raise its student test scores. Galena sits in the middle of the YK school district and had been a member before pulling out and becoming its own district. The test scores when he first got there were quite similar in all the villages up and down the Yukon - bad.

[8:07:00 AM](#)

Before coming to Galena, Mr. Knudson said he had been a superintendent for 28 years in Montana and had never seen such low scores and he was somewhat frustrated about what to do. But he developed a plan and presented it to the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) and since they were not

able to secure funding he went to Washington D.C. to look for money. The Voluntary Public School Choice (VPSC) people had a lot, but they were giving it for kids to leave failing schools to go to better schools. So, he creatively approached them with the idea that the more kids you pay to leave a school the worse the school is; so why not put money into trying to fix the poor school so the kids don't have to leave. And they bought into that; so he became one of eight schools in the nation that the VPSC funded and the only rural one.

[8:08:52 AM](#)

MR. KNUDSON said the VPSC bought into the success model he would show them today. It changes the way teachers teach, the way students learn and improves instruction so that the school becomes a school of choice and the kids don't have to leave. The benefits to the district are that it revitalizes schools, raises student achievement, increases graduation rates, puts new technology in the hands of students and meets the requirements of "No Child Left Behind," creates jobs and provides continuity and sustainability for students.

The benefits to students are that it improved schools, raised test scores, lowered the drop out rate, increased college attendance, lowered use of drugs and alcohol and increased community support.

[8:09:19 AM](#)

MR. KNUDSON said the project goals are: meeting the requirements of "Leave No Child Behind" and meeting the requirements and needs of the students in the villages.

He said the district team's anticipated partners were the staff in the DEED that had placed the YK school district in corrective action. When the department saw the grant and what he was doing, they asked to have the school improvement plan resubmitted and that has now been approved. So, next year the grant will actually take over many of the areas that the state had already required improvement in.

MR. KNUDSON said he had approached the School Board Association for the project goals because they know from experience that unless you improve the situations from which the children are coming - the community and the family - the kids won't do well in school. Galena's experience proved that unless you address the other side of the report card, the kids wouldn't be successful no matter how much money was poured into the effort.

8:10:47 AM

Classroom solutions include the software he developed to make it easy for teachers to manipulate the Alaska grade level expectations (GLE). The state already requires Ames Webb assessment software for the schools in corrective action.

MR. KNUDSON said the commissioner of DEED asked him to provide supportive information that the project was successful, which was done. He was also asked to do that for the VPSC grant; so he used one of the things he used in Galena where Spencer Rogers was hired to implement this success model at their main campus. They brought in kids in to a boarding school who were in the 20-50 percentiles from failing schools or schools that had no high school program. The result was that in 2005, no student that stayed with Galena's boarding school for four years scored less than 90 percent on the qualifying exam, proving the success model worked in a boarding situation as well as it works in the others.

8:12:00 AM

MR. KNUDSON said he used Kaltag, another YK school that is 50 miles downriver from Galena, for a reference in his handout of Benchmark scores. It indicated that in 1995 when he first came to Galena its scores were the same as Kaltag's were in 2003. Now Galena has no "not proficient" marks in any of the categories. This shows the model does work.

8:14:44 AM

MR. KNUDSON said the core of the program is in the professional training. Teachers need to be retrained and students are trained to accept the training in a better way. He said the student success plan also developed software over the years and the commissioner had asked for supporting information on it. So he had obtained letters of endorsement; one was from a virtual school in Idaho that served 1,250 kids. It had a 10-percent gain in standardized test scores in its first year and an 18 percent gain in the second year. He said other districts were becoming aware of this training and this year another one has already requested involvement in the program.

He said that the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) had identified context, content and process as being necessary in order to have effective instruction. Of the 33 Native schools in Montana on seven reservations, all 33 did not make KYP. The one Native school that used this program showed great gains this year.

MR. KNUDSON explained that aides need to be trained as well, because they do a lot of work with individuals and can quickly see how families are related to learning in students.

MR. KNUDSON said the software database makes it easier for teachers to find the GLEs and identify they have been taught and mastered. He said the neat thing about a corrective action school is that department people who are supervising them can on any day see how many standards any student or class has mastered. "It's totally state-of-the-art."

8:17:00 AM

He said the state requires a formative assessment of GLEs in the corrective action schools. So under the model, learning gaps are identified and standards are targeted for grade levels. The curriculum is aligned electronically to the state expectations. All the students have an individual lesson plan created by the teacher from an electronic database.

MR. KNUDSON said one of the hardest parts about change is recognizing and admitting that the current process is not successful. When he came to the state in 1995, many schools were in the 20-40<sup>th</sup> percentile and they still are today. Efforts and finances have been raised, but these schools still have to determine where to put their resources and it has to be on student education. He said one of the good things about the electronic database is that it has a curricula map and teachers must enter every GLE in a month that they are going to teach that curriculum. The database is easier to supervise, because when the door closes and nobody knows what's going on, the principal can look electronically at curricula map; parents can print it out and students can see what they are expected to learn over the course of a year.

8:19:29 AM

Their focus is on measuring change and understanding Bloom's Taxonomy because it has been found that knowing how verbs apply to instructional strategies is essential. Training to recognize or develop appropriate assessments to monitor mastery of standards leads to development of a corrective loop that addresses the 20 percent of students who just don't get it. The traditional method for these students is for them to just go on to the next step. This model, however, teaches these kids with OdysseyWare that provides electronic instruction for every grade and subject and has a corrective loop. Kids can check out computers and work on them at home.

He said collaborative meetings are required by the state for schools in corrective action. This is where teachers share both their successful and their failed GLEs.

8:21:00 AM

MR. KNUDSON said it's important to realize that students need to possess assets in order to learn and that is where addressing the other side of report card comes in. Many communities don't do that and it's critical for improvement. He said the School Board Association puts out a book that is called "Education Alaska Style" that lists 40 possible assets - 20 internal and 20 external. Some internal assets are as simple as self esteem, five caring adults in a student's life; external assets are things like church community and involvement. If a student has less than 10 assets, they are 62 percent more inclined to be violent and participate in illicit drug use.

The grant actually has asset building activities so that after school and on weekends teachers can identify and work on building kids' assets. It's important for teachers to be aware of how to help students build assets. By the same token, if a student has more assets, then the leadership and values go way up.

8:24:35 AM

MR. KNUDSON said the program focuses on collecting data for a thorough evaluation process. The VPSC grant evaluation process would be replicated for this project. The proposed budget used an \$8 million five-year grant as a guide to plan the next four years. Anticipated contracting services would be with the School Board Association for the assets, resiliency and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) project and with people like Spencer Rogers to do the training on the ground (like in Galena). He understands that they are working in Copper River now and that other districts are becoming interested. If the YK project gets funded, he said they would look at putting representatives from the department, the school board and from different factions into a not-for-profit corporation for infrastructure. Vehicles like SB 281 (from a few years ago) would provide for a cooperative agreement with another district.

8:26:31 AM

CHAIR STEVENS commented that in listening to Mr. Knudson, he now realizes how much a handful of teachers impacted his life. He asked how teachers are retrained, especially if they have been teaching for 15 years.

MR. KNUDSON replied that all the components of the success model have a trainer trainer model and a 6-day training session. Teachers are enticed with a \$2,000 stipend and 3 credits as an accepted college program. The 6-days of in-service training will be followed up by 3 more credits for a total of 6 credits for the year.

In the summer as many as 10 volunteers from the 60 teachers are sent to Colorado for a week of training at the Spencer Rogers Training Institute. Those people then are used as trainer trainers for the 6-day workshops. One 6-day session is held in May and another 6-day session is held in the first week of August. They then have a couple of people who are hired as educational specialists that go out to the villages and help them get their arms around defining the GLEs and using the components. They have also developed a very good video conferencing system throughout the villages so that they can have daily and weekly sessions to help motivate and answer questions and keep people on track.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if that is where the computers are used on each student.

MR. KNUDSON replied yes; they simply log into the software and do a corrective loop. Students can do it with an aide in the resource room or at home. The important thing to remember is that kids have to be exposed to things 7 times in 28 days for them to remember something forever.

[8:31:44 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if he could tell them anything else about looping, for example, does it happen in the classroom or after.

MR. KNUDSEN replied that it can happen in both places. It starts outside the classroom because the teacher is the one who knows which students "didn't get it." If an aide is available, he could work with the student. An effort is made to "loop" in the classroom, because those students who don't get it will create another learning gap by going on with everybody else if they are not ready. They focus on having support from families and having after-school and free-time sessions for corrective loops as well as providing a laptop to take home. A student's corrective loop is available to him somewhere 24/7.

SENATOR OLSON congratulated Mr. Knudson on developing this program. He asked him what the seven factors were on the page he was referencing.

MR. KNUDSON replied those factors were developed from the Board Association's factors that include a student having five training adults in their lives providing the anchors that he needs and the community engagement.

SENATOR OLSON asked if that was part of the asset evaluation on the next page.

MR. KNUDSON replied yes.

SENATOR OLSON asked what Bloom Taxonomy is.

MR. KNUDSON answered that Bloom was an educator who wrote a lot of books on how children learn and how teachers must teach in order to be successful. He identified the fact that a teacher could wonder around in curriculum all day and unless they actually identified verbs what they were teaching couldn't be assessed. The teachers have to identify action verbs, like may, can and will, for the GLEs.

SENATOR OLSON asked if this model has worked in rural schools and if it has been tested in urban schools.

MR. KNUDSEN replied that Woody Jensen, Director of Adult and Community Services in Billings Montana, asked him to develop a model for them that is now working. But they implemented it just for the kids who have dropped out, dropped in and are in long term suspension and are incarcerated. The Montana detention center is in Billings and so it falls on that district to provide education services for them. So, the University most often provides a couple of teachers and most times the joke is that they don't get assigned there, they get sentenced. The worst teachers get put in the detention center and those kids don't have a chance.

[8:37:25 AM](#)

So, a model was created that provides for the individual learning plan; it gives the student a chance, because they can take that learning plan home with them when they are released. The student can demonstrate what he has done and work from there rather than have a learning gap.

[8:38:21 AM](#)

CARL ROSE, Association of Alaska School Boards, said when Mr. Knudson first came to Galena it was on the verge of bankruptcy. The ideas he came up with to expand services to kids not only

helped the Galena School District get back on its feet, but they created a boarding school and a distance learning opportunity as well. He said the state needs more good ideas like these.

MR. ROSE said he wasn't prepared to endorse everything they had just heard, because like the committee, he was just learning about it. When the association talks about identifying schools that need intervention, they have to look for the capacity to provide them assistance to do it. Some of it comes from the School Board Association because one of the things it does is assist local school boards in providing a quality education with a focus on student achievement through effective local governance. That underwrites one of their key pillars which is for a community to take the initiative in getting healthy and taking responsibility for itself. The association has rewritten a book called "Helping Kids Succeed Alaska Style" that shows the role communities can play.

8:40:00 AM

On the performance issue, the association created the "Quality Schools Quality Students Initiative" and went to three districts a year to help them create a strategic plan that would describe what the community wanted for itself and for its kids. With that, the association provided leadership, program and staff, community engagement and resources. Fifteen schools went through this initiative and some had great success and some had less.

The association has started addressing the digital age by defining the responsibility the state has to insure that digital technology is available in the schools. It is addressing the issue of effective local governance that is being questioned right now. The association provides training to school boards and leadership training to school districts. The average person on the street doesn't know what a school board does; in general the public doesn't understand how the district is governed, financed or what elements impact local public policy. In totality, what they do as a school board association is try to help communities deal with their responsibilities at every level.

MR. ROSE said that local control works in a large portion of school districts, but some are struggling. So the idea is if the state by court action is being asked to intervene, what kind of tools does it have to insure a level of oversight is provided that would actually result in student achievement and communities becoming healthier. While it's not the department's job to necessarily do all these things, it can act as a

coordinating body and it needs as much support as it can get from wherever they can get it. If SB 285 talks about plans of improvement and coaches, he said the question for the department would be: "Does this satisfy the requirements of standards and professional development and assessments in working with communities."

So, Mr. Rose said, he is here to listen as well. In his career the biggest thing the School Board Association has ever done is engage in the communities. People from outside a community can't provide the fix; the community has to be the group that decides it wants the change. He said that kids observe a lot and when you ask them the kinds of question that are in the "School Connectedness and Climate Survey," it shows a lot. If this program doesn't meet the standards laid out by the department, they have to see how it can be modified and then it has to be replicated around the state.

[8:46:03 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said one of the charts is on promoting positive behaviors and attitudes and it talks about assets that children have. He asked if he agrees with that.

MR. ROSE replied that is the premise behind their assets training program. It started out as a research project and the data was turned into a "how to" book and data indicates that children with more assets behave differently.

[8:48:07 AM](#)

BARBARA THOMPSON, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), said the department is intervening in five districts, one of which is the Yukon Koyukuk (YK) district. The department had already worked with the YK district on an improvement plan related to corrective action this year and then they got this grant. The department was surprised and excited to hear about it.

They thought perhaps some of the elements in the grant overlapped what the department was directing the district to do and they don't want the district doing the same thing twice. So, staff is looking at the plan and to see how it relates to the district improvement plan and the school improvement plans for the YK school district. In particular, they are looking at the formative assessment system provided by the grant. The department had already directed the district to use the Ames Webb Formative Assessment System and the Alaska Computerized Formative Assessment System, both of which can be monitored

online at the department as well as in the district office. So that way they are making sure the system provided by the grant aligns with state standards.

She said the grant is not replacing the district improvement plan, but she is hoping it will work in concert to move everything in that district forward. She said they are excited to hear about the grant. If it is effective the department would look at replicating it in other districts.

8:50:00 AM

CHAIR STEVENS asked when the department enters into a corrective action with a district, doesn't it lay out steps they have to go through to achieve success, and if she is saying this may be one of the ways that will be accomplished. It may or may not coordinate with what the department is already doing, but that is yet to be seen.

MS. THOMPSON responded when the department intervenes in a district, it provides very specific activities the district must participate in. Three core foundation items have occurred in each of the five intervened districts including focused weekly collaborative meetings within each school lead by the principal that focus on student achievement - their struggles, their successes. They also focus on the use of and monitoring of the formative assessments in each classroom so they can see which teachers are using them and how the students in every classroom in that district are doing and make needed adjustments. Third, they are requiring the principals and district administration in all those intervened districts to participate in leadership training to help them know what good instruction really looks like and how to walk through a classroom in five minutes and see if grade level expectations are being taught. The department helps arrange for any training that is needed in order to get that done, she said.

CHAIR STEVENS said he assumed the department would support being aware of the impact teachers have on students.

MS. THOMPSON replied, "Absolutely, we are supportive of the resiliency work that the grant proposes as well as all of the efforts that the School Board Association has put forth in this area."

8:54:35 AM

SENATOR HUGGINS said he's assuming the department thinks the grant is more or less within the general parameters of what they want school districts to do.

MS. THOMPSON replied that the grant's plan has elements that are similar to what the state is already asking districts to do; it is a positive approach to making changes district-wide in the YK school district.

SENATOR HUGGINS said he was impressed with what Mr. Rose was saying, and if the state is intervening, it should look at different techniques that have some track record.

MS. THOMPSON responded, "We are always looking for successful techniques." The interventions they have done so far have seen increased student proficiency across the district and have seen additional schools meet adequate yearly progress that had not met before. So what they're doing is on right track, but they always need to look for other ways to get there. They are hoping the YK grant works out well.

[8:57:18 AM](#)

MR. KNUDSEN concluded that the Yukon Koyukuk school district is very excited; some board members have said this is like a prayer come true. They live in these villages and know they need help. They voted to have this implementation be the number one goal of the district. They hired a new superintendent, Karey Boyd, the director of this grant. They had the applicants write a two-page essay on how they would carry out this project effectively. They are very serious about it. He is here because the board asked him if he could help them replicate what he did in Galena in the YK villages.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked everyone for their comments today and there being no further business to come before the committee, he adjourned the meeting at [9:00:17 AM](#).