

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 11, 2009

8:06 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Paul Seaton, Chair  
Representative Cathy Engstrom Munoz, Vice Chair  
Representative Wes Keller  
Representative Robert L. "Bob" Buch  
Representative Berta Gardner

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Bryce Edgmon  
Representative Peggy Wilson

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 126

"An Act relating to continuing the secondary public education of a homeless student; relating to the purpose of certain laws as they relate to children; relating to tuition waivers, loans, and medical assistance for a child placed in out-of-home care by the state; relating to foster care; relating to children in need of aid; relating to foster care transition to independent living; and relating to juvenile programs and institutions."

- MOVED CSHB 126(EDU) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 172

"An Act relating to an investment in the education loan fund; relating to authority for the commissioner of revenue to enter into a bond purchase agreement and letter of credit with the Alaska Student Loan Corporation; and providing for an effective date."

- WAIVED OUT OF COMMITTEE

OVERVIEW(S): DROP-OUT PREVENTION

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 126

SHORT TITLE: FOSTER CARE/CINA/EDUCATION OF HOMELESS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) GARA

02/11/09	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/11/09	(H)	EDC, HSS, FIN
02/25/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/25/09	(H)	Heard & Held
02/25/09	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/02/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/02/09	(H)	Heard & Held
03/02/09	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/09/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/09/09	(H)	Heard & Held
03/09/09	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/11/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

#### **WITNESS REGISTER**

ERIK MCCORMICK, Director  
Assessment & Accountability  
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Participated in the discussion on drop-out prevention.

CARL ROSE, Executive Director  
Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Participated in the discussion on drop-out prevention.

KAREN MARTINSEN  
Sitka, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Speaking as a parent, teacher, and student, provided comments during the roundtable discussion.

BRAD FLUETSCH, President  
Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) Grand Camp 70  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Participated in the discussion on drop-out prevention.

TOM MORGAN, State Director  
Communities In Schools (CIS) of Alaska  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Participated in the discussion on drop-out prevention.

MR. SOBOLEFF, Representative  
Central Council  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Participated in the discussion on drop-out prevention.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:06:38 AM](#)

**CHAIR PAUL SEATON** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Gardner, Buch, and Keller were present at the call to order. Representative Munoz arrived as the meeting was in progress. Representative Wilson was excused.

HB 126-FOSTER CARE/CINA/EDUCATION OF HOMELESS

[8:07:12 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 126, "An Act relating to continuing the secondary public education of a homeless student; relating to the purpose of certain laws as they relate to children; relating to tuition waivers, loans, and medical assistance for a child placed in out-of-home care by the state; relating to foster care; relating to children in need of aid; relating to foster care transition to independent living; and relating to juvenile programs and institutions."

[8:08:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER moved to adopt CSHB 126, Version LS0309\p, Mischel, 3/9/09, as the working document.

CHAIR SEATON objected for discussion.

[8:08:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER related that he spoke with the sponsor at length and although all his questions weren't totally resolved, the sponsor pledged to work on the matters in the next committee of referral.

[Chair Seaton's objection to the adoption of Version P was treated as withdrawn.]

[8:09:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER moved to report CSHB 126, Version LS0309\P, Mischel, 3/9/09, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHB 126(EDC) was reported from the House Education Standing Committee.

HB 172-STATE INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION FUND

[8:09:29 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 172, "An Act relating to an investment in the education loan fund; relating to authority for the commissioner of revenue to enter into a bond purchase agreement and letter of credit with the Alaska Student Loan Corporation; and providing for an effective date."

CHAIR SEATON noted that HB 172 is a companion to HB 109, which the committee has already reported out of the committee. This legislation is a interim measure to allow for student loans to be made this year, and he characterized it as temporary. He requested that the committee waive HB 172 from committee and asked if any member held objection.

[8:10:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER inquired as to the strategy behind waiving HB 172 from committee.

CHAIR SEATON explained that HB 172 allows for funds, on a temporary basis, to be borrowed from the state for loans. The companion bill, HB 109, addresses the long-term program as it changes the credit rating in order to sell bonds. The long-term process addressed by HB 109 is one in which loan applications wouldn't be taken until the bonds have been sold and the money has been received.

[8:11:10 AM](#)

No objection was stated for waiving HB 172 from committee; so ordered.

OVERVIEW(S): DROP-OUT PREVENTION

[8:11:59 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the final order of business would be a roundtable discussion on high school drop-out prevention. He reviewed the contents of the committee packet.

8:16:08 AM

The committee took a brief at-ease at 8:16 a.m.

CHAIR SEATON introduced the presenters. He then asked for EED's definition of graduation, specifically how the standards are set.

8:18:32 AM

ERIK MCCORMICK, Director, Assessment & Accountability, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), explained that the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) is a requirement for graduation. The HSGQE measures proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics. There is also a statewide requirement of 21 units, which requires four years of English, three years of social studies, two years of math, two years of science, and Alaskan history. The aforementioned is the minimum requirement for districts, and therefore some districts require more than 21 units. In further response to Chair Seaton, Mr. McCormick explained that a unit is traditionally known as a Carnegie unit/credit for completion of course work. Typically, a unit is a full year whereas a half credit is a semester.

8:19:55 AM

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH inquired as to how an exceptional student is able to be in college by age 13/14.

MR. MCCORMICK assured the committee that most of the advanced students are meeting the minimum requirements and supplementing their public education with statewide correspondence or with additional courses through the district. He offered to find out more information regarding substitutions for credit requirements.

8:21:10 AM

CHAIR SEATON expressed his desire to address what is expected and valued of students. He related his observation that competency level, which is only measured minimally, is one expectation while the other is seat time or endurance.

Therefore, he surmised that graduation is almost entirely based on minimal competency and endurance of class time, without engagement. He expressed the need to help students graduate and also make it meaningful.

8:25:42 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER related his understanding that the credit requirement is a regulation. He asked how legislators would address the credit requirement.

MR. MCCORMICK offered to provide the specific regulation in which the credit requirements are located.

8:29:25 AM

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER recalled that either the Galena Interior Learning Academy or Mt. Edgecumbe require additional science credits. She asked if there has been any discussion regarding broadly increasing the science requirement.

MR. MCCORMICK answered that at this point he isn't aware of any such conversations. However, he noted that he has been asked to research the requirements of other states. He offered to share that information with the committee.

8:30:10 AM

CARL ROSE, Executive Director, directed attention to AASB's statement on drop-out prevention, included in the committee packet. He related his belief that the most difficult class is the one in which students try to earn a passing grade. If the information is introduced in a manner that requires mastery of content, then the grades will come, he opined. "Kids lose interest because they're not pursuing mastery," he remarked. Mr. Rose opined that Alaska's education system is a fairly good system, if the students are prepared to take advantage of it. He then explained that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) identifies the following four sub-groups: those students who aren't English language proficient; ethnicity; disability; and socially and economically challenged children. Although those groups have been identified, the system hasn't been allowed to devise a means to help those students. Schools are funded for regular instruction and the state is mandated by federal law to provide services to those who are disabled. After the federal and state mandates are addressed, the remaining funds are what are used to address the aforementioned four sub-groups. He

pointed out that class differential is dramatic and the data supports that assertion. For instance, there could be a variance of 2-3 million [recognizable] words and characters between students from poverty-stricken families who may not value education and use cryptic directional verbiage - do this, don't do that, interactions with their children, versus students from middle class families in which there are real conversations and a value is placed on education. By Third grade, the deficiencies that determine whether the child will gain advantage through the education system or require a remedial system can be professionally identified. Unfortunately, if there is a gap, it continues throughout their education since the unprepared child is trying to catch up while the others advance in their education. Mr. Rose opined that there are societal issues that parallel the preparation for quality education. Still, schools need to be engineered to be more interesting and engaging. He reported that many will say that schools can't do this alone and point to parents and communities as part of the solution. Mr. Rose noted that he has submitted testimony, to the committee, which he provided to U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski. Regarding the topic specifically, he said that students drop-out for various reasons. He then pointed out that schools are being labeled as good or bad in terms of achievement on their adequate yearly progress (AYP) reports, and opined:

If what you're measuring and your measurement is off, what does that have to do with how well your schools are? ... Before you start to look at sanctions and start to categorize schools, we should take a look at what we're measuring and what we're trying to accomplish.

MR. ROSE noted that the National School Board Association is trying to tackle the aforementioned and there are some efforts to rewrite NCLB.

[8:38:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER surmised that Mr. Rose is speaking to the adequacy of education and that the tools and mandate the [US] Department of Education uses, to address the aforementioned, misses the pieces identified as the four sub-groups. Although the DOE is not mandated to focus on those [sub-groups], it is incumbent on the state.

[8:39:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER inquired as to what Mr. Rose would suggest the legislature do to address this issue in the most expedient manner.

MR. ROSE answered that the most expedient manner to address education is to prepare children for success. He noted that there is much discussion regarding early childhood development, which comes in many forms. "The point I'm trying to make here is that if kids cannot get what they need ... [through] their families or at home, and the data shows us this, how do we go about [providing support] without creating another bureaucracy that consumes an awful lot of the resource that some kids already have," he said. He pointed out the disparity that arises when funds are spread across the spectrum of students. This benefits some, such as special needs students, and causes a deficit for others. Mr. Rose related that it is important to review the needs along with the programs and initiatives that could be placed in communities to help children [in the early years]. He cautioned against structuring a program that is limiting, and recommended providing more options for families.

[8:42:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER opined that the best thing that could be done is to support the parents to be loving and caring, otherwise the child struggles.

[8:43:06 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON, referring to the subgroups that were mentioned earlier, highlighted that there are different cultural perspectives, including valuing observation and visual learning. He inquired as to whether a child that comes from a home that values observation and visual learning would be placed in a difficult position in regard to meeting a third grade benchmark in an auditory learning system.

MR. ROSE related that as a young boy he was in all four of the earlier mentioned subgroups. He informed the committee that he is Hawaiian, dyslexic, spoke Pigeon English [as a child], and was from an economically challenged home. "The option of having an education gave me a chance to learn to conform, if you will, and get an education that would help me for the rest of my life," he said. He opined that the aforementioned is something owed to all young people. He further opined that [the education system] needs to observe and be culturally responsive to young people some of which come from many generations of rich culture.

The goal, he related, should be to provide children with the opportunity to be successful within the capitalist economy. Still, everyone comes from different cultures from which others can learn. Mr. Rose stated that America's educational system is rich, but much of it is drained down with a six-hour school day for 180 days. He questioned whether ways can be found to help those who are challenged to maneuver through the barriers in the existing education system. Across America there are success stories, he said. However, when a child's immediate challenges are ignored, they become problems, obstacles, and reasons why students leave. Mr. Rose opined that a culturally relevant education is what should be offered to all pupils.

[8:48:59 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON turned the committee's attention to EED's presentation.

[8:49:14 AM](#)

MR. MCCORMICK, in response to Representative Keller's earlier question, specified that the regulation for the HSGQE is 4 AAC 06.075. He then directed attention to the Department of Education and Early Development's Drop-out materials included in the committee packet. He informed the committee that on February 19 and 20, staff was brought together by the commissioner of EED for a dropout prevention meeting, which included representatives from Communities In Schools of Alaska (CIS), school districts, state board members, and Anchorage Promise. The focus of the meeting was to identify reasons why Alaskan students are leaving the public school system. Commissioner LeDoux began the meeting by discussing the three R's of education: rigor, relevance, and relationships. As the brainstorming activities took place, participants were asked to assign the factors into one of the following four categories: student, school, family, community. The one topic that was repeated throughout the meeting was relationships and the need for students to connect with an individual for an activity. Mr. McCormick recalled Mr. Rose expressing the need at the end of the school day for children to be motivated and want to come back to school the next day. Mr. McCormick then mentioned the "Golden T" in the classroom, which is the front row and straight down the middle. Classrooms need to connect with every student in the classroom because once a student is credit deficient in high school it becomes very difficult to make it back. The hope with this meeting was to develop steps/strategies for how to recover and retain these children. He noted that this group

plans to meet again in conjunction with the dropout symposium by the Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN) group in April.

[8:52:40 AM](#)

MR. MCCORMICK then reviewed the various topical handouts provided by EED to the committee. He related that the documents related to the average daily membership and statewide enrollment were included in order to provide perspective. Mr. McCormick turned the committee's attention to the document entitled "Dropout Rates in Alaska Fact Sheet." He explained that a child who completes the school year and receives a certificate of attendance isn't considered a dropout in the system. However, in the graduation rate such an individual is weighted in the denominator the same as a student who dropped out. In Alaska, grades 7-12 are measured for the dropout rates. Generally, for grades 9-12 the drop-out rate is about 2 percent more than the grades 7-12 drop-out rate. He pointed out that for grades 7-12 in 2005 the drop-out rate was about 3,800, which decreased to about 3,200 in 2008. "We are making gains, as far as limiting our drop-out numbers," he remarked. He noted that the aforementioned document also relates the Alaska Native/American Indian drop-out count as well. Mr. McCormick then directed attention to the document entitled "Graduation Rates in Alaska Fact Sheet," which indicate an increase in the number of graduate counts. The point, he related, is that in a time in which there is declining and stagnate enrollment, the number of graduates being issued a diploma is increasing. The aforementioned he attributed to actively retaining students.

[8:55:27 AM](#)

MR. MCCORMICK, in response to Representative Gardner, explained that the reason the graduation rate percentage has remained flat is because the denominator is growing faster than the numerator in the calculation.

[8:56:29 AM](#)

KAREN MARTINSEN, pointed out that the EED information relates a graduation rate of around 62 percent and a drop-out rate of around 6 percent. Therefore, she inquired as to the category of the remaining 32 percent of students.

MR. MCCORMICK explained that the drop-out rate is an event drop-out rate of a single year. Specifically, it's the number of students identified who drop-out during the school year divided

by the entire population for that group. The graduation rate is a measure over four years and relates that 63 percent of the students are [graduating] in four years. He noted that the grades 9-12 drop-out rate is about 8 percent, which makes the total close to 100 percent. The statistics are collected separately and recorded separately. The four-year graduation rate doesn't account for those students who graduate in their fifth or sixth year.

[8:58:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH inquired as to whether the structure has changed in regard to how the data is being gathered.

MR. MCCORMICK replied yes, and explained that in 2011 the new federal Title I regulations [require] a graduation rate that is comparable across the 50 states. In further response to Representative Buch, Mr. McCormick confirmed that in a sense the [percentages] are comparing apples to oranges. When the graduation rate before the committee today was first established, there was no access to student level data and thus duplicates were possible. However, now the data provides the ability to identify individual students such that if a student were to drop-out multiple times, or graduate late, that student would only be counted once in the denominator. The focus on the graduation rate presented today was on the seniors and working backwards, which is difficult. The new graduation rate will identify the first year freshman and move forward, which will be easier in terms of collection and reporting of data.

[9:00:27 AM](#)

BRAD FLUETSCH, President, Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB), Grand Camp 70, informed the committee that he is a [member of a group] that is a joint effort between Tlingit & Haida Central Council and the Juneau School District addressing a Drop-out Early Warning System (DEWS). Mr. Fluetsch emphasized that many resources are being expended discussing the numerators and denominators of the formula. If those resources were actually applied to educating children as opposed to debating formulas, "we would be infinitely better off," he charged. Therefore, he requested that the committee determine how much of the state's resources are spent on non-education. He suggested that the committee would be floored to learn how much is being spent to fly staff to meetings to discuss which students should be in the numerator and which should be in the denominator.

[9:02:11 AM](#)

MR. MCCORMICK returned to the graduation rate, and explained that the 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who are continuing could either represent a student who receives a certificate, that is a student who hasn't passed the HSGQE but has met the district's requirements, or a student who hasn't met either of the aforementioned but is expected to continue. He related that 69 percent, more than two-thirds, of those students who aren't making it through in their fourth year but are expected to continue passed all three parts of the HSGQE. In response to Chair Seaton, Mr. McCormick confirmed that the aforementioned students have passed the HSGQE but don't have the required number of credits.

[9:03:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER noted that many 10<sup>th</sup> graders pass the HSGQE, and then inquired as to the value of the HSGQE to the state.

MR. MCCORMICK said that the HSGQE is a standard specifying the minimum level at which students should achieve. The results of the Kristine Moore, et al vs. State of Alaska case are being reviewed in order to determine whether the HSGQE is a rigorous enough test. The HSGQE is of value because it means that the student's diploma represents something more than just a piece of paper for seat time.

[9:04:25 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON opined that if the HSGQE represents something that a student passed in the sophomore year, then the following two years are devalued. That establishes the wrong message for students who must then endure seat time to receive a diploma. He asked if there are any data from students regarding juniors who have already qualified and are ready to leave high school.

MR. MCCORMICK answered that the department doesn't have such data, but remarked that such would be a good topic for the April drop-out prevention meeting.

CHAIR SEATON further opined that the HSGQE was established to make the diploma meaningful. Therefore, he suggested the need to question whether the diploma is meaningful when students have passed the HSGQE in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. He then questioned how employers are viewing students who passed the HSGQE. He requested data

regarding the view of students and employers for diplomas with the HSGQE exam attached to it.

9:07:30 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER mentioned that when the HSGQE was established he was legislative staff to Senator Dyson. He recalled being fascinated that the department originally recommended higher standards than what was ultimately established for the HSGQE. He further recalled the pressure the legislature was under for keeping the standards at a level at which everyone could pass. Therefore, he characterized it as ironic that now the HSGQE has become the standard for graduation. Still, Representative Keller expressed the need for the diploma to have a value so that it's worth something when seeking a job, which he recalled as the original intent.

CHAIR SEATON opined that the question is whether the HSGQE, a minimal test, provides useful information to an employer or whether the graduation diploma should specify competency evaluations or criteria testing.

9:09:11 AM

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH remarked that the student has to place some value on graduation as well, and that achieving that goal is of value.

9:10:17 AM

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER commented that it appears little would be gained by retaining a second series of testing, considering what is required by NCLB. Furthermore, she opined that a disincentive appears to have inadvertently been created when students are asked to continue in school, if they have already passed the three tests. Additionally, she asked:

When we talk about the satisfaction and the sense of competency and having past this test in tenth grade, I don't understand how that would supplant the satisfaction and competence of having passed four years of high school English classes. And I would say, and posit, that if any student who passes four years of English classes and can't pass, can't be assumed to have been capable of passing the test in tenth grade. We have a real disconnect here, there's something completely wrong with the system. But the

question that comes to me is, do we have any idea how many kids in this state can meet all their high school graduation requirements except passage of the HSGQE and all its parts.

CHAIR SEATON stated that the department will be able to supply that statistic for the committee.

[9:11:38 AM](#)

TOM MORGAN, Sate Director, Communities In Schools (CIS) of Alaska, paraphrased from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I am truly pleased to be here today to represent Communities In Schools (CIS) of Alaska and our role in making a positive difference in the drop-out epidemic. National research has shown that students who do not finish high school earn less, pay less tax, rely more on public health, are more involved in the justice system, and are more likely to use the welfare system. I know that you all share the concern about the drop-out crisis, a topic that touches all Alaskans, particularly Alaska Native students at a disproportionately higher rate.

CIS of Alaska strives to work closely with school districts around the state. We offer an integrated student support delivery system; providing schools with prevention services and individual students with case management and intervention services. Like glue, we mobilize and connect resources with schools, better enabling students to "stick with it" and stay in school. As a statewide network in dropout prevention, we are committed to success through collaboration.

How do we know that we are helping kids learn, stay in school, and prepare for life? We evaluate our efforts by tracking indicators of student success like: attendance and stay-in-school rates, improved academic performance and improved behavior. Since our inception, we have worked with thousands of students at risk to dropping out; the majority of those students have stayed in school and improved their attendance, behavior and academic achievement.

Preliminary results from the Communities In Schools National Evaluation initiative (an independent, third-party evaluation) indicated that the CIS model does make a positive difference in:

- Decreasing the dropout rate
- Increasing the graduation rate
- Improving student achievement

These results are based on an in-depth analysis of 1,766 CIS schools and comparative analysis of outcomes for more than 1,200 CIS and non-CIS comparison schools over a three-year period.

We are not another social service agency. We broker and mobilize in an effective and coordinated way, EXISTING community services through the schools, saving valuable dollars while improving efficiencies of delivery of services to children and youth. During the 2007/2008 year, in just five affiliates, Anchorage, Bethel, Juneau, Mat-Su and Nome, our minimum leveraged services and resources were estimated at \$1.5 million dollars. In-kind contributions in revenue from other sources (last year) were approximately \$882,000. The amount of dollars for support is very small when compared to the successful outcomes it provides and the resources we are able to leverage! Through school-based affiliate programs and statewide initiatives, CIS of Alaska is crating a network of social services, businesses, community resources and volunteers that work together to break down barriers to ensure even the most vulnerable of our children have access to these basics and core needs.

Our statewide initiatives, Career Exploration Opportunities (CEO), an interactive distance learning career exploration program targeted at rural youth and the Imagination Library, an early literacy program for children birth to five, are being well received.

Our dream, our call to action, is to formulate support to implement the CIS model and provide a CIS coordinator/graduation coach in every school in Alaska; whereas, children's needs can be met to help keep them in school and teachers are free to teach.

We believe youth do not drop-out of school necessarily because of the school. We believe, and research supports; youth drop-out due to pressures outside of school. Educators cannot and should not be expected to have knowledge of the many resources available to help them and help their students stay in school. That is where CIS comes in. As one principal told me - You allow me and my teachers to teach. We need to clone the CIS coordinator. As stated earlier, like glue, we mobilize and connect resources with schools, better enabling students to "stick with it" and stay in school.

Support by the federal (and state) government will allow us to expand our existing sites and offer the opportunity for many more communities, especially rural communities, the ability to experience the positive outcomes we can provide for youth.

We have a program that has proven success in preventing dropouts. For every dollar invested, through building collaboration, brokering services and leveraging community assets, CIS of Alaska adds value to build return on investment.

Dollar for dollar, CIS of Alaska offers the right investment in our children's future. We look forward to partnering with you, doing what we do best; connecting the dots, coordinating and leveraging existing resources to keep youth in school and prepare them to succeed in life.

[9:15:36 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked for a specific example of how the agency works with individual students, interfaces with existing services, and the facilitation involved.

MR. MORGAN responded that the first step is to query the school to identify specific needs that are not being met. If a student cannot concentrate because their teeth hurt, a dentist will be engaged to provide pro-bono work. Students who are routinely hungry are identified and provided with food, including a backpack of meals for the weekend. Various local organizations and individuals are coordinated via the agency to provide these services. The coordination also minimizes, or eliminates, duplication of effort among service providers.

[9:18:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER acknowledged that, as resource managers, the agency appears to be helpful and commendable. He inquired how the high school graduation coaches are paid.

MR. MORGAN answered that payments are via a combination of state or federal funding. The initial seed money is provided through the school district, exploring the model. Once the district adopts the program, it is integrated into the school budget. As a non-profit organization ad hoc funding may also be available.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER noted the similarities between this agencies work and what Mr. Rose described: discovering the assets of an individual student and cultivating their strength via whatever/whoever is available in the community.

MR. MORGAN reported that the entities tend to be approachable on a personal level, when asked to help.

[9:20:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER referred to the graduation coaches and asked why the school counselor would not be handling this aspect. The bailiwick of the schools counselor would be to assist students with social issues, personal issues, daily concerns, academic scheduling, and include providing snacks or food.

MR. MORGAN stated that the agency expands on the role of the school counselor does a step further by taking the need outside of the school and engaging community resources. It serves not only the student but relieves the school administrator of some of their daily challenges.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER suggested that perhaps counselors need smaller case loads.

CHAIR SEATON pointed out that many schools do not have counselors.

[9:22:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH recognized the need for statewide coordination of services, and asked how that could be accomplished.

MR. MORGAN offered that having an agency person in each school would be helpful.

[9:23:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH recognized the speaker's allegiance to the agency he represents, and asked if a school employee were given this task, what would their position be and at what level would the position be integrated.

MR. MORGAN provided an example from a school in Richmond [Washington], serving a diverse demographic including socio-economic depressed areas. The school had a community action group which coordinated 82 entities to work in the school. He reported that the school had a 97 percent attendance record. The entities included the local radio station disc jockey who provided pizza for the social gatherings, and a grandparent who was a daily fixture to hold a caring presence in the hallway.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH summed up to say that in Richmond it was a community building requirement.

MR. MORGAN added that the social workers paid by the city, were re-positioned to work within the school, where the most good could be done.

[9:26:17 AM](#)

MR. FLUETSCH said that the public schools are charged with educating the students who walk through the doors. It is not appropriate for the district to blame academic failure on the parents or students. He directed attention to the committee packet and the responses he has received when polling students and other community members regarding the drop-out situation. Many of them are from drop-outs, who have never been asked why they left. It is not necessarily because they are not intelligent or incapable of learning. It may be because a student has a bad interaction with a bad teacher. How to identify bad teachers and how to deal with them should be the focus of the department of education, versus blaming parents and students. Incentive and compensation for teachers might be a consideration. Additionally, teachers require focus and support to improve strategies for helping students to graduate. He opined that the school districts tolerate failure. Approximately 3,500 students per year do not complete the education system, within the guidelines that have been designed.

These young people may add to the negative cost of society, but it is also 3,500 people per year not contributing \$50,000 of economic activity. Over \$14,000 per year, per student, is spent in the Juneau district alone, to help a student graduate; and they aren't graduating. Bullying is one of the paramount reasons for a student to leave school, in combination with other issues. Transportation can be an issue, but all of these are system problems. He stressed the importance of sitting down with the students to ask them directly about their issues.

[9:33:57 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON stated that this is another perspective to help complete the picture.

[9:34:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER paraphrased from a Native member of the legislature who has presented the question of why Native parents allow their children to drop-out, or not attend school regularly. She asked if that is contrary to what the speaker has presented.

MR. FLUETSCH pointed out that the focus of his argument is how the district is failing to perform for families, not what the parents are failing to do for themselves and the benefit of their children.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER pointed out that being a responsible parent is being an educator. The expectation cannot be that a student can attend school every day and come out twelve years later educated, she opined, without the support of their parents, the community, and educational professionals involved. She stressed that not one agency, facility, or individual is solely responsible.

[9:37:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ said her understanding that failure in 9th grade Physical education (PE) class could be an indicator for future drop-out/push-out candidates. Directing her question to Mr. Soboleff, as a past high school administrator, she asked if PE success represents a tangible benchmark, and whether there is data to substantiate the statement.

[9:38:34 AM](#)

MR. SOBOLEFF, Representative, commented that one of the key indicators of student success is whether or not they are able to survive the system. Physical education class is one of the determining facets for a student's ability to be successful. Usually, given the physical changes that the adolescent body experiences, along with the social context, standing up to the social, and physical, rigor imposed in the locker room and in the PE class presents a major hurdle. Even more startling, he continued, is the general acceptance, at the high school level, particularly held by the Native student, that graduation can be attained by passing three credits as a freshman and three as a sophomore. If that is not attained then the opportunity for graduation is lost. This is known as the rule of thumb for graduation. Over 60 percent of the minorities in Alaskan schools fail this accomplishment. The PE class becomes an indicator because of the challenge it presents, particularly to the minority student. One method utilized by some districts is to provide summer PE courses, offering students an optional means of achieving the credit requirement outside of the regular school year. The PE classes typically range from 25-80 students. Statistics on the effects of PE classes are available to support this statement, he advised.

[9:41:29 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON noted that the PE indicator does not appear as a factor in the department's report that prioritizes why students drop-out. It is relevant and requires flagging as a topic to be included for future discussions.

[9:42:52 AM](#)

MR. ROSE pointed out that all humans gravitate towards their strengths and excel in areas where they have confidence in their competency. Students may be ostracized when they cannot perform in a certain way. When students are required to stand and read aloud, in an elementary classroom, it becomes quickly evident which students have dyslexia and he stressed how uncomfortable it is for them to participate in this exercise. Entering an institution, where a young person may or may not be able to exhibit their strengths, creates an uncomfortable situation resulting in self protection. He challenged that the educational system need look no further than the inability of young people to cope with their lack of success in a host of areas and how this is addressed in a school setting. A first step might be to assist the adolescent in becoming conversational with adults. Feeling comfortable, visible,

known, and understood in the school setting directly ties into the success factor for every student, he opined.

CHAIR SEATON noted that some of these factors relate to competitive measurements versus individual achievements for a student. The school system represents a "box system," and it may not be easy to alter this structure.

[9:45:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER directed attention to Mr. Fluetsch's compilation of comments, in the committee packet, and read suggestions submitted by the signatory Jill:

I just retired from working with Alaskan Native students in a high school. [I suggest:] tribally-funded social workers in the schools, ... tribally-funded social workers available to families, ... tribally or federally funded counselors who mentor, encourage and advocate, ... tribal truancy officers, ... [and there are] tribes who link payouts to academic performance.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER explained that the contributor describes how tribes in other states encourage students to graduate by providing monetary incentives. The tribal funded approach is interesting, and she asked for comment.

[9:47:02 AM](#)

MR. FLUETSCH indicated that tribally funded describes money provided by the federal government. The Alaska Native Brotherhood Grand Camp and other local Native camps and corporation's value education, provide scholarships, fund school efforts, and participate in assisting students to graduate. He named several Native supported endeavors.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER surmised that the monetary support for Native programs is from the federal government because that is where funds were available, not because there is a different value held by the federal authorities versus state.

MR. FLUETSCH assured the committee that no separate value is attached to the federal funding.

[9:49:09 AM](#)

MR. SOBOLEFF returned to the question of the Carnegie unit to clarify that one credit equates to 120 hours of seat time. This is what the nation's educational system is based upon. He provided a brief biography including his struggles in the Juneau school system, followed by college attendance and various degrees attained Outside. To understand the Native student of today, he explained it is necessary to review history. When education was introduced to the Native people in Southeast, it arrived via the Russian Orthodox priests. The priests infiltrated villages, established churches, converted Native constituents, and set up the first schools. These schools were successful because, not only had the Russian priests translated their bible/teachings to the Native language, they empowered the students and their parents in the process of education. In 1885, Sheldon Jackson established the first formal schools in Alaska and became the first Commissioner of Education. Commissioner Jackson declared that the Alaskan schools would be administered in English, causing the Native's to collectively exclaim, "What?". This is why his address to the committee today is in English, he pointed out. It represents a cultural imprint that no Native carries, but it is a learning that has been imposed upon them; English is not the indigenous language of Alaska. The records reflect that many Alaska Natives have figured out the [Western] system with resultant success. However, thousands of Natives have not figured out how to navigate this system that requires setting their cultural skill sets aside to pursue and adopt another. He opined, that this is the problem which creates the issue of high drop-out levels among Native students. In learning, a skill card is employed by the student. A certain skill set must be attained in order to be successful: remaining in school for the required length of time, graduating, or achieving a GED. Generally, he said, the skill set applies to surviving the system. Native learners bring a different learning structure, to the educational setting, through their culture that is deeper than the language itself. Basically, when speaking or writing in English, nouns come first, followed by verbs and adjectives. In the Native culture, a reverse pattern occurs: the action word comes first, followed by the descriptive words, and finally the nouns. The difference of the thought pattern is the crux of the problem. He reported how through his efforts to graduate from Juneau Douglas High School, with minimal grades, and seek a college education, wrought with remedial classes, a clear understanding of the skill set deficit manifested for him. The primary, and sometimes the only, skill card that a Native student [inherently/culturally] brings to the school setting is the ability to observe and listen. Unfortunately, this significant

card set is omitted in the [Western] educational setting. Natives are imprinted with a culture established through oral history. Every Native child can learn whatever is required, through visual and hearing techniques, he underscored, and challenged the state to develop a pedagogy to address this critical deficit in today's classroom. Through the state's efforts to understand what creates a successful student and why some fail, what has been excluded, and not understood, is the need to cultivate the Native skill sets. Further, he paraphrased E. E. Cummings, stating, "History will show you that the most significant impact that they can have to change a system is to empower the student and their parent." These students are here to learn, he declared and challenged that it is the responsibility of Alaskan educators to discover a method to work on whatever meaningful level, and from any perspective, that will prove effective. Additionally, the battle for creating success on the secondary level is not at the secondary level, but lies in the primary second and third grade classroom. It is at this age that the active, practitioner mind enters to set the stage for the rest of the student's life, he opined. The ability of the teacher to engage an impressionable primary school child is the key to the success of every student. Learning should, and can, be an exciting process. Finally, he stressed that it is not acceptable to enter into a school system with the predisposition that by receiving six high school credits by the sophomore year, graduation will be attained. When a student understands that they are not the problem, they become engaged and interested. He finished by underscoring the importance to not dismiss, but rather capitalize, on the Native skill sets.

[10:04:13 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON acknowledged that this is an important perspective and it may assist the schools to more adequately address how to meet Alaskan student needs. He stated agreement, that it is not the student that is the problem, but the box that they are being put into by the establishment.

[10:05:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH noted that the retrospective effort to assist drop-outs is fairly thriving with a variety of options, but that is after the fact. Considering birth to death as the educational span, he asked what process should be started to assure the second or third grader will be on a track for success.

MR. SOBOLEFF responded, referring to a nationally recognized educational research institute, which indicates that at the heart of the decision making process for a successful school is parental and student involvement. The current system evolved because of the industrial revolution, with little change over time. Today it is important to capitalize on individual skills, he stressed. The process must encompass parents into the learning process, not just for parent teacher conferences. The time when a parent delivered a child to the school door, and left the rest up to the establishment, is gone, and doesn't work. The inclusion of the parents, and family, sends a strong involvement/interest message to the student. Finally, he suggested that the repeated failure of the system, demonstrated by the Native student, demands a complete paradigm shift of "what we're doing in terms of learning, and teaching."

[10:10:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ asked for a comment on the compulsory attendance age; would raising it have a positive effect on the Native student graduation rate.

MR. SOBOLEFF invoked the cultural age imprint and how it may not fit the parameters. The Native cultural imprint allows that between the ages of birth and 7 lives the child, from 8 to 24 arrives the young person, from 25 to 30 develops the young adult, from 45-60 you become a learned member of the community who people may consult with, and above age 70 you may choose to speak anytime and will be listened to intently, as an elder. The Western setting sees the young child below age 7, and at age 21 status in society is allowed. This chronological difference should not stop the ability to meet each age educationally, however, a teacher should be mindful of the variance. He reported that some GED students have not been in a school class setting for ten or more years, when they arrive at his program.

[10:15:27 AM](#)

MS. MARTINSEN said she has worked in the educational field for 30 years, primarily working with youth at risk. The term "at risk" could be changed to "disempowered" or "not embraced," she suggested, to be more accurate. Two issues are apparent: the need for a systemic reform to prevent drop-out; and immediate response to stem the crisis of having 4,000 drop-outs annually; candidates for public assistance or jail. An estimated 57,000 people in Alaska do not have a GED or diploma, and who are not

productive citizens. She advocated that an emergency response needs to occur specific for those who have already dropped out. She expressed concern for additional compulsory years of school attendance. The model for schools is based on a threatening approach, she said, "Learn or I will hurt you." She speculated that this threat is not working. Perhaps an option for all young people up to age 21 may be helpful. It would increase the school formula funding, and Alaska would join the states that have already implemented this change. Another important need is to provide alternative paths for young students. Every school assignment should allow at least five means for accomplishment. She noted that many models are being implemented around the nation, and the world, based on K-16 classes, or lowering the credit requirements for graduation. Another approach is to loan credits to provide future options. Imposing more compulsory requirements is probably not a direction that will be helpful. For the drop-out student, the capacity to be absorbed into a productive program is limited, and not part of our state educational system. She underscored the immediacy of addressing this crisis as well as formulating a plan for the future.

[10:22:23 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON acknowledged the multiple drop-out issues brought before the committee. He reviewed the various considerations that have come to the table, including creating kindergarten classes for four year olds, family and early learning options, graduation requirement/augmentation, and various educational assessment measurements being reviewed, en route to the committee establishing a revised policy. The conversation will continue, he declared.

[10:27:04 AM](#)

MR. SOBOLEFF offered final words, stating:

One of the things that is really imperative, is to make sure that as you plan the changes that you're going to do, [is] to look at it in its setting. ... We need to take advantage of the things that have preceded us in the world of education and learning. ... We just need to make sure that we're mindful of the participants in [a] learning situation, and that's really what it's all about. ... It's that student, in that classroom, interacting with the teacher and the peers, ... that are really at the heart of what Alaska should be doing for its students. [It] doesn't make

any difference what color you are, or whether you're rural or whether you're urban, it's that interaction of classroom-student-teacher relationship, ... that should be the crown jewel of [the] learning process.

[10:29:18 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON invited addition input be submitted, or personally addressed to the committee.

[10:29:49 AM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee on meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.