

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 18, 2009

8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Peggy Wilson

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

Cindy Lou Aillaud, Delta Junction
Jill M. Exe, Kaktovik
Linda Lee Gillam Black, Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

State Board of Education

Janel Keplinger, Kodiak

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Linda Lee Gillam Black, Anchorage

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

DISCUSSION: THE GALENA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT'S EARLY LEARNING
CENTER - SIDNEY C. HUNTINGTON SCHOOL

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 58

"An Act relating to a student loan repayment program for specified occupations or fields in which a shortage of qualified employees exists."

- BILL HEARING CANCELED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

CINDY LOU AILLAUD, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Delta Junction, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

JILL M. EXE, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Kaktovik, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

JANEL KEPLINGER, Appointee
State Board of Education
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee to the State Board of Education.

CHRIS REITAN, Principal
Sidney C. Huntington School
Galena, Alaska;
President-Elect
Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals
Galena, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of the Sidney C. Huntington School and responded to questions.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:21 AM](#)

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Buch,

Gardner, Munoz, and Keller were present at the call to order. Representative Edgmon arrived as the meeting was in progress.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)
Professional Teaching Practices Commission

[8:02:49 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be confirmation hearings for the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

The committee took an at-ease from 8:03 a.m. to 8:05 a.m.

[8:05:42 AM](#)

CINDY LOU AILLAUD, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, related that she has found her work with the Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC) very rewarding. She opined that she is a good representative for the teachers in the state of Alaska. Ms. Aillaud characterized herself as a very fair, honest, and trustworthy advocate for teachers and students in this state.

[8:07:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER began by thanking Ms. Aillaud for her willingness to continue serving on the PTPC. She then inquired as to whether Ms. Aillaud saw any area in which the interests of students and teachers aren't fully aligned.

MS. AILLAUD answered that the interests of students and teachers aren't always fully aligned. Therefore, one purpose of PTPC is to be careful that the teachers in the state hold the students' interests as the number one priority.

[8:08:11 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to whether the PTPC deals with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements and other testing mandates.

MS. AILLAUD replied yes, adding that there are clear rules for administering tests. When the rules for the tests aren't followed, the PTPC is alerted so that it can address the situation. She highlighted the importance of protecting the

students. She then noted that problems have arisen with various tests, particularly with the NCLB tests.

[8:10:33 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked if the PTPC addresses criticisms and concerns regarding how information from the annual standards testing is used by the profession in terms of teaching practices.

MS. AILLAUD related that the PTPC works with districts and superintendents to assure that the ethics of teaching is followed. "And testing, of course, is one of our big issues," she remarked. She suggested that at some point more specific language may need to be adopted into the [teachers'] moral code of ethics.

CHAIR SEATON commented that he would appreciate review of the possibility of more individualized student information to utilize in considering effective teaching methods.

MS. AILLAUD interjected that she will do so.

[8:12:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER inquired as to the reach of PTPC's jurisdiction. He recalled that in the past, teachers were expected to have the values of the community and local area. He asked if the PTPC has to deal with situations in which a teacher doesn't share the values and beliefs of the community.

MS. AILLAUD pointed out that every case is unique, and therefore all evidence must be considered in order to make a well-informed decision. She then highlighted that every teacher receives a moral code of ethics, which encourages all teachers to follow a professional standard to deliver education because the priority is to assist students in learning and becoming productive members of society. Although the hope is that every teacher has that as a goal, some teachers differ, she remarked.

[8:14:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER inquired as to whether a teacher who breaks the moral code of ethics outside of the classroom would be handled.

MS. AILLAUD explained that first such a case would be reviewed by the commissioner to determine whether a case exists for PTPC.

The committee can then decide whether the commissioner's decision is appropriate or whether steps to a hearing need to be taken.

[8:17:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER pointed out that the nominee has a special education endorsement, but is currently teaching physical education. Therefore, she asked if Ms. Aillaud is a teacher who has "taken off the [special education] endorsement from your teaching certificate." She further asked if Ms. Aillaud has any suggestions for state policies that would encourage teachers to attain a special education endorsement.

MS. AILLAUD specified that she has the following three endorsements on her certificate: elementary education, physical education, and special education. She explained that she has recently retired from her physical education position and has been traveling throughout the U.S. to present author visits regarding her book Recess at 20 Below. However, her local school district called her in February because the high school special education teacher resigned. Therefore, she is currently holding a high school special education position for the remainder of the year. Ms. Aillaud opined that talking with teachers throughout the state has been a great opportunity to discuss issues impacting various schools and the state, which she has been able to bring to PTPC. With regard to suggestions to encourage teachers to enter the special education profession, Ms. Aillaud pointed out that it's a national problem with no easy solution.

[8:20:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ inquired as to how the PTPC deals with targeted campaigns to discredit a teacher and if so, is it something that occurs often.

MS. AILLAUD said that such situations have certainly been brought before the PTPC, but she said she wouldn't characterize it as something that occurs often. She reiterated that every case is unique and the facts of each case must be reviewed. Although a hearing affords each side to present their case, it's unfortunate for an educator to have to be put through this type of stress.

[8:24:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ moved to advance the confirmation of Cindy Lou Aillaud to the joint session of the House and the Senate for confirmation to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission. There being no objection, it was so ordered.

[8:26:01 AM](#)

JILL M. EXE, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, said that she is eager to participate in the PTPC as it's a continuation of her current position at the district level as a grievance chair person. The combined efforts of the PTPC and the committee's interest in improving education in Alaska are important. In response to Representative Keller, Ms. Exe relayed that although this is her first year teacher in Kaktovik, she has worked in the North Slope Borough District for 16 years. She further relayed that she moved from Barrow to Kaktovik.

[8:29:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER noted that Ms. Exe has an English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement, and then asked whether she has cause to use such an endorsement in Alaska.

MS. EXE explained that the district in which Kaktovik is situated has a number of English Language Learners (ELL) because the Native language is spoken in the home. In fact, there are seven students in Kaktovik that will be receiving additional support and there is an ELL coordinator. In further response to Representative Gardner, Ms. Exe said that she has heard of the Parents as Teachers program, but doesn't have any experience with it.

[8:30:54 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON restated his previous question regarding testing and teachers using individual testing scores to better educate students.

MS. EXE opined that the coming together of nine teachers from across the state to discuss education in general could foster professional development in the districts in which they work. However, she wasn't sure if the actual advocacy on the PTPC fits into the equation. Still, teachers, as professional educators, can advocate what they know needs to occur.

[8:33:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER moved to advance the name of Jill Exe to the joint session of the House and the Senate for confirmation to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission. There being no objection, it was so ordered.

State Board Of Education

CHAIR SEATON then turned the committee's attention to the confirmation hearing for the State Board of Education.

[8:34:58 AM](#)

JANEL KEPLINGER, Appointee, State Board of Education, began by relating that she has had a passion for education since high school. She further related that she has been in the field of education for 27 years and has served on many committees within the school district and her school. Ms. Keplinger stated her interest in broader service to the state in the field of education.

[8:35:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER inquired as to Ms. Keplinger's perspective on school choice and how it relates to what is available in the state.

MS. KEPLINGER opined that it's important for parents to have a choice, but it is also imperative that they be informed in that choice beyond hearsay.

[8:37:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER pointed out that Ms. Keplinger has a Master's of Art in special education, and asked her to address the need for special education teachers in this state.

MS. KEPLINGER characterized [filling] special education [positions] as a tremendous challenge. She indicated the need to get university students involved with special education early on to stimulate an interest and encourage them to participate in special education classrooms. She even suggested encouraging interest in special education in high school. It's important, she opined, for young people to see that needs of special education students aren't that different than those of any child in the state's educational system.

8:40:27 AM

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH inquired as to how the Parents as Teachers program is utilized in Kodiak.

MS. KEPLINGER said she isn't familiar with the aforementioned program in terms of how it's utilized in Kodiak, but noted that she has read about it. She related excitement with regard to the philosophy of the Parents as Teachers program, and added that early education makes a difference for students long-term. Furthermore, the program creates a partnership [between the parents and the teachers/school] and causes the parent to realize the importance of education. She surmised that this program would be important in rural areas. Furthermore, parental involvement, she opined, is one of the key indicators of a student's success in school.

8:42:50 AM

MS. KEPLINGER, in further response to Representative Buch, related that the Kodiak community is very involved in its schools and the schools make much effort to engage parents. However, as parents it can be intimidating to enter the school. Ms. Keplinger further related that Kodiak schools hold family nights for reading and math in which the students bring the parents. She also highlighted the use of student-led conferences that help parents relax and see the importance of [involvement].

8:44:42 AM

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH inquired as to how many students speak English as a second language. In the Anchorage School District, he recalled, 93 different languages are spoken.

MS. KEPLINGER estimated that perhaps 50-60 percent of Kodiak's students are English Language Learners. She noted, however, that Kodiak has a diverse population.

8:45:40 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER inquired as to how Ms. Keplinger would address the high drop-out rate, were funds of no concern.

MS. KEPLINGER responded that she would spend a lot of time with kids, parents, and teachers. She recalled her own three children's time in high school, which she characterized as a

very different experience for each. Therefore, direct contact with the students is imperative in order to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of each student's education because traditional education settings don't meet every student's needs. Every student requires support in different ways, she remarked. She recommended the use of vocational education for those students who aren't finding success in the traditional high school setting.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER said that he was impressed with Ms. Keplinger's answer as it dovetails with what some alternative school students related at an earlier hearing on this topic.

[8:48:38 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON noted that the committee has had discussions about making the high school diploma/graduation certificate more relevant. He noted the problem of the high school diploma merely reflecting seat time and minimum competency. The committee has discussed utilizing an assessment of achievement. At this point, the committee is reviewing the WorkKeys system. He inquired as to Ms. Keplinger's thoughts about graduating students having an achievement assessment on their diploma.

MS. KEPLINGER said that she has reviewed the concerns in this area. The WorkKeys appears to be a meaningful program, particularly for the students who aren't having success in a traditional setting. Furthermore, WorkKeys also assists the employer in the hiring process. A portfolio, versus a diploma, would be more meaningful for students as they enter college or the work force. She characterized WorkKeys as a great idea that would motivate kids.

[8:52:25 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON then turned to the High School Qualifying Exam (HSQE) and related that the committee has been reviewing how to make it meaningful. Thus far the idea is for the district to provide tuition for vocational education and/or distance courses at education facilities throughout the nation upon passage of all three sections of the HSQE. The HSQE, he related, is a requirement for graduation, but doesn't mean that a student who passes the HSQE is proficient in all the areas a high school student should be.

MS. KEPLINGER remarked that at one point the HSQE was needed for accountability. "Assessment is important," she opined.

However, there are different levels of assessment. Ms. Keplinger said that it may be difficult to use the HSQE to drive instruction. Still, the HSQE has created opportunities for teachers to have particular discussions. She noted her agreement that passage of the HSQE has been represented, especially in the student body, as being done with high school. The aforementioned needs to be changed, she opined. The WorkKeys program includes an assessment piece for sixth, eighth, and eleventh grade students. To fit another assessment into the schedule will be challenging, she pointed out. She questioned how that will drive every day instruction. She relayed that several educators who have taken the WorkKeys test have suggested using the assessment portion of WorkKeys in conjunction with the HSQE or possibly melding the two. The aforementioned would be much more effective, she opined, especially since the WorkKeys test provides immediate feedback. In further response to Chair Seaton, Ms. Keplinger related her belief that allowing dual credits for vocational or college classes for those students who pass the HSQE would be effective.

[8:58:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON recalled testimony from the Avant-Garde Learning Foundation which is conducting an alignment study to help create a dialogue between educators, citizens, and policy makers. The organization, he related, is interested in data-driven discussions that move beyond educational decisions not based in fact. He asked if a gap exists such that a non-governmental entity needs to come forward to [determine how] to better serve the educational needs of the state.

MS. KEPLINGER related her hope that a separate entity wouldn't be required to stimulate this cooperation and discussion regarding education in the state. She expressed the need for legislators and teachers to come together to have discussions regarding educational concerns. Ms. Keplinger opined that there can be a lot of data that an outside agency could organize for better understanding. She said she is not familiar with the company, but assumed it would explain the data and ways in which it could better be used. She expressed hope that [Alaska's education community] would come together to discuss issues as such would be a more valuable discussion than having another entity do so.

[9:04:29 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON highlighted that Alaska has one of the highest drop-out rates in the nation, and therefore it's important to address the facts and not diminish the need.

[9:05:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked if Ms. Keplinger's children had challenges in school.

MS. KEPLINGER related that her two boys and one girl had extreme difficulty learning to read. Dyslexia has played a major role, and as a parent it is a difficult realm to work within. She described how one of her children learned how to hide his difficulty, but through the help of teachers and the vocational options was successful. She indicated that her experiences with her children will help her in her position on the State Board of Education.

[9:08:38 AM](#)

MS. KEPLINGER, in further response to Representative Buch, opined that in elementary school much time is spent determining what type of learner the student is and relaying to the students that not every student is the same. Doing the aforementioned provides students with the ability to appreciate their own strengths and weaknesses as well as to be more empathetic to other students. The aforementioned is carried through to middle school, where professionals speak to the students about careers, and provide shadowing opportunities. Ms. Keplinger indicated that Kodiak seems to be turning back to vocational opportunities. She then related how the program Community Experience Career Education helped her realize she wanted to be an educator.

[9:12:35 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON recalled previous testimony that Alaska Native children enter school with visual and auditory learning skill sets. If the schools don't build on those skill sets, then Alaska Native students are alienated and may contribute to the high Alaska Native drop-out rate. Chair Seaton characterized the aforementioned as very meaningful. He asked Ms. Keplinger would view that as reality and that the schools need to do a better job working with the skill sets Alaska Native students have.

MS. KEPLINGER remarked that [accommodating various learning skill sets] for all children is important, but particularly for Alaska Native children. The classroom situation may be easier in a small village in which all the students are Alaska Native. However, most classrooms are very diverse in terms of the skill sets of the students as well as the cultural sets. Awareness is the first step, and each teacher can learn how to honor every student. She mentioned the need for teachers to work in experiences for students that are outside of the classroom, which provide students with a different environment in which they may "shine."

CHAIR SEATON related the committee's concern with the fact that there is a higher drop-out rate of Alaska Native students as compared to the rest of the student population. The aforementioned, he opined, hasn't been taken into account on a statewide basis. He further opined that new teachers in the Bush don't have any idea of the skill sets students bring to the classroom.

[9:18:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if Ms. Keplinger would suggest anything at the state level that would help Dyslexic students.

MS. KEPLINGER opined that reading teachers have made a tremendous difference. She highlighted that each student is an individual and his/her needs should be reviewed. Furthermore, working as collaborative teams [with a reading teacher] provides [teachers] the ability to know [the learning level] of the students and his/her progress. Such teaching also allows the [reading teacher] to relate the strategies that would benefit a particular student. Being able to have [Dyslexic students] in small groups makes a tremendous difference, she stated. Moreover, early intervention is the key in helping address issues such as Dyslexia.

[9:23:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH reminded everyone that there's a cost for every kind of intervention. The state has limited resources, and therefore it will take help from folks such as Ms. Keplinger to make intervention choices. Also, vocational education may be the only way to reach some students not to mention that three-quarters of [Alaskan] students hold jobs that don't require a college education. Therefore, he encouraged Ms. Keplinger to keep the aforementioned in mind.

[9:25:01 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON reiterated his understanding that many districts and teachers in the state aren't fully utilizing data the annual assessments generate. He expressed the need for the State Board of Education to review ways in which to fully utilize assessment scores to identify student [education] levels.

[9:26:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER moved to advance the name of Janel Keplinger to the joint session of the House and the Senate for confirmation to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission. There being no objection, it was so ordered.

[9:27:42 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON noted that there will be a subcommittee meeting Friday at 7:30 a.m. with the State Board of Education. He then noted that consideration of the appointment of Linda Lee Gillam Black to the State Board of Education would be held over.

DISCUSSION: THE GALENA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT'S EARLY LEARNING CENTER - SIDNEY C. HUNTINGTON SCHOOL

[9:28:47 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the next order of business would be a discussion of the Sidney C. Huntington School Galena City School District's Early Learning Center.

[9:29:17 AM](#)

CHRIS REITAN, Principal, Sidney C. Huntington School, Galena, Alaska; President-Elect, Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals, informed the committee that four years ago the Galena City School District wrote a Native education grant that was modeled after the Hoonah program. In Galena there's an early learning center that is a childcare and preschool facility that also houses the Parents as Teachers program. The four years under this program has produced huge differences in regard to literacy development, parenting skills, and comfort of parents working with the school system. The effort is being tracked through the Kindergarten profile as well as in conjunction with the Terra Nova test data. He noted that other schools use the Terra Nova test in grades 5 and 6, but Galena

has chosen to test the early grades in an effort to obtain another indicator. He related that Galena City School students are scoring above the national average, across the board, in first and second grades.

MR. REITAN opined that he didn't see how the state can move forward without more efforts in the early learning area. He noted that Galena has attempted to have a comprehensive approach for Galena children from the time they are born while taking into consideration the entire spectrum of vocational programs in Galena. He characterized [the Parents as Teachers program] as a missing component. He indicated that the committee should review the research on the Parents as Teachers program from the University of Washington. The key for Galena is to hire the appropriate person to work with the families in the home. Sometimes helping families is as easy as distributing books while for others it's relating developmentally appropriate games for the child in order to engender success for children. Mr. Reitan related that there's a stark difference, in terms of school ready skills, between students who have experienced early learning or a Parents as Teachers program and those who have not.

[9:33:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER inquired as to who was the grantee for Galena's grant.

MR. REITAN answered that Galena received a Native education grant from the U.S. Department of Education. In further response to Representative Keller, Mr. Reitan specified that the grant was for three years, but Galena was able to extend it for a fourth year. Just recently, Galena City School District has submitted a renewal for the grant because without those funds, there would be no program. Mr. Reitan said that he couldn't speak to whether the U.S. Department of Education has an ongoing interest in supporting the Parents as Teachers program. However, he did relay his belief that the U.S. Department of Education does have an interest in research-based programs that have proven they work.

[9:35:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if Galena will produce a formal write up regarding the results of the Parents as Teachers program in the Galena City School District.

MR. REITAN said such is done every year because in order to access the funds, evidence of the status of meeting the objectives has to be provided. He said that he has the last three years' worth of data that has been submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. He explained that in Galena, Alaska Native students are compared to Caucasian students statewide. In almost every grade level, the discrepancy between Alaska Native students in Galena [participating in the program] and Caucasian students is eliminated. In fact, Galena's Alaska Native students, as indicated by the Standards Based Assessments, rank at or above the state level as compared to Alaska's Caucasian students. The next step is how to continue that trend as students progress through the grade levels, because nationally and statewide there is a bit of a decline at the junior high school and high school levels. He noted discussions he has had with Representative Buch regarding the need for vocational education as well as lots of other opportunities for students.

[9:39:30 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to the percentage of parents who participate in the Parents as Teachers program.

MR. REITAN answered that about 75 percent of parents, with children through age five participate.

[9:39:56 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON recalled that Hoonah reported that about 80 percent of parents participate in the program. Furthermore, Hoonah reports that almost all the students who are successful in school participated in the program. Chair Seaton requested that Mr. Reitan provide the committee with the four years of data that Galena has collected. Chair Seaton then announced that the commissioner will speak to the committee regarding the early education programs, including the Parents as Teachers program.

MR. REITAN agreed to provide the information.

[9:42:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON related his observation that it has become clear that the closest thing to a silver bullet for education is to focus on early education.

[9:43:32 AM](#)

MR. REITAN interjected that all of the current research also points to focusing on the early childhood experience versus the drop-out age student. However, he acknowledged that focusing on early education won't eliminate all of the problems in secondary education. "I believe with a conservative, deliberate and sustainable effort, it'll minimize a lot of them and we'll be seeing some huge differences in regards to just what our schools look like, K-12, and the school system," he said. He applauded the committee for its efforts with education.

[9:44:42 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON related that early education can ensure that children have skill sets that will enable them. However, without altering how classrooms operate, the early education strides won't make the difference that's necessary. Chair Seaton opined that it's imperative to focus on what an individual student is good at doing rather than what he/she is not doing.

[9:46:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH characterized Galena as a microcosm of the state, and indicated that the state may look to places like Galena for answers in the future. Representative Buch recognized the presence of Mr. Perkins, the principal of the largest junior high school in the state, and invited him to forward his information as well.

[9:48:51 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON noted that the invitation had been extended to educators throughout the state.

[9:48:55 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:48 a.m.