

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 25, 2009

9:08 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Paul Seaton, Chair
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Representative Wes Keller
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Robert L. "Bob" Buch
Representative Berta Gardner

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Cathy Engstrom Munoz, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 184

"An Act relating to the debt authorization of the University of Alaska."

- MOVED HB 184 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 94

"An Act creating a postsecondary scholarship program for Alaska residents based on high achievement and financial need."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 184

SHORT TITLE: DEBT AUTHORIZATION FOR UNIVERSITY

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) KELLY

03/12/09	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/12/09	(H)	EDC, FIN
03/23/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/23/09	(H)	Heard & Held
03/23/09	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/25/09	(H)	EDC AT 9:00 AM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HB 94

SHORT TITLE: POSTSECONDARY SCHOLARSHIPS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) GUTTENBERG

01/28/09 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/28/09 (H) EDC, FIN
02/16/09 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/16/09 (H) Heard & Held
02/16/09 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
03/25/09 (H) EDC AT 9:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

DEREK MILLER, Staff
to Representative Mike Kelly
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified and responded to questions on HB 184, on behalf of Representative Kelly, prime sponsor.

DIANE BARRANS, Executive Director
Postsecondary Education Commission
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified and responded to questions during the discussion of HB 94.

REPRESENTATIVE GUTTENBERG
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified and responded to questions during the discussion of HB 94, as prime sponsor.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:08:44 AM](#)

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Keller, Wilson, Edgmon, Gardner, and Buch were present at the call to order.

HB 184-DEBT AUTHORIZATION FOR UNIVERSITY

[9:09:14 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 184, "An Act relating to the debt authorization of the University of Alaska."

[9:09:41 AM](#)

DEREK MILLER, Staff to Representative Mike Kelly, Alaska State Legislature, called attention to the committee packet, which should include information addressing some of the concerns of the committee members regarding receipt authority versus bonding authority of the university. He highlighted an email from Mr. Dosch, Controller of the University of Alaska, which should explain the differences of authority at the university. Mr. Miller related that all university projects need receipt authority regardless of the source of funding or the amount of funding. This legislation, he clarified, is separate from the aforementioned. He pointed out that the committee packet should also include a zero fiscal note and a letter of support from the university. He noted that as soon as hears back from the Associate Vice President of Student Services and Enrollment Management regarding how students pay for the University of Alaska he would forward that information to the committee.

[9:12:11 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON stated that public testimony would remain closed.

[9:12:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH requested that Mr. Miller speak from a personal level regarding how HB 184 would've affected his financial experience with the university.

MR. MILLER related that as a student representative on the Board of Regents he voted against the 10 percent tuition increase. However, he acknowledged that the University of Alaska does provide quite a deal when compared to other undergraduate universities. Still, a tuition increase isn't a good feeling [for students].

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH said that with [HB 184] the [tuition increase] would be 25 percent.

[9:15:05 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON pointed out that this bonding authority is not independent of the legislature's granting receipt authority. Therefore, the legislature will have to vote on every project.

[9:15:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER moved to report HB 184 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 184 was reported from the House Education Standing Committee.

HB 94-POSTSECONDARY SCHOLARSHIPS

9:16:20 AM

The committee took a brief at-ease form 9:16 a.m. to 9:17 a.m.

CHAIR SEATON turned the committee's attention to HOUSE BILL NO. 94, "An Act creating a postsecondary scholarship program for Alaska residents based on high achievement and financial need."

9:20:04 AM

DIANE BARRANS, Executive Director, Postsecondary Education Commission, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), referred to the document entitled "Structural Components for Hybrid Need/Merit Scholarship Programs creating a postsecondary scholarship grant program for Alaska residents based on high achievement and financial need." She pointed out that the implementation issues listed in the document are those issues that occurred to her and that there may be other issues that would arise. There are some very challenging aspects to developing and implementing a scholarship program, particularly a merit component. Furthermore, if there is a consensus that a grade point average (GPA) is not a standardized measure due to the variance within particular curriculums, then the assessment piece is difficult to achieve. Ms. Barrans highlighted that she isn't an assessment expert and pointed out that it's a specific area of expertise. She remarked that she doesn't believe adopting a readily available system is a good fix for Alaska.

9:22:02 AM

CHAIR SEATON commented that if an already existing assessment tool isn't utilized, then no assessment tool is used because the committee doesn't have time to research and develop such. He recalled testimony from the commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development (EED) relating that EED is moving toward using the WorkKeys program as an assessment tool, as well as the GPA. He expressed the need to review the decision piece for a merit-based scholarship.

9:23:08 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked if his understanding that the American College Testing (ACT) test is used by vocational schools across the nation is correct.

MS. BARRANS explained that the ACT test uses an array of testing tools. The ACT test is commonly accepted to determine college readiness and there are ACT scores that are commonly accepted as denoting an individual is college ready. The WorkKeys is an assessment tool that ACT has developed and deployed. She noted that ACT has also tailored programs for particular state objectives. Ms. Barrans informed the committee that sometimes the K-12 and the college level assessment groups have particular biases that result in the two groups not agreeing on the appropriateness of particular tools. However, she opined that although it would be possible for those groups to come together to agree on what may be used, disagreement may remain regarding the minimum score to remain college ready. The literature indicates that there is a gap in the expectations between what children should be able to do upon completion of high school and the expectations of college faculty regarding what students can do when they enter college.

[9:25:37 AM](#)

MS. BARRANS, in response to Chair Seaton, related that the ACT and the SAT are comparable/interchangeable exams. However, some colleges require the SAT because of its essay component.

[9:26:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER related his understanding that in Alaska only 26 percent of the state's graduates take the ACT while about 50 percent of the state's graduates take the SAT.

MS. BARRANS stated her belief that Alaska doesn't have great participation rates with either the ACT or the SAT, which she attributed to the fact that Alaska schools don't require the tests for entrance.

[9:27:14 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON related his understanding that there isn't a good correlation between SAT scores and whether a student will complete his/her first year of college. He recalled the WorkKeys presentation and the scoring system that shows proficiencies within key skill areas.

MS. BARRANS pointed out that WorkKeys has testing levels such that the competencies and difficulty of each level increases. Therefore, WorkKeys can test discrete sets of skills.

[9:28:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if [the levels in WorkKeys] would be comparable to an advanced placement test.

MS. BARRANS answered that she didn't believe so, but suggested that it would be helpful to question an assessment person to understand this aspect.

CHAIR SEATON remarked that generally a higher level of basic skills is necessary to take advanced placement courses. However, WorkKeys allows testing at different levels and thus one would assume that the school is making the assessment that an individual is ready and capable with the basic skills to do advanced placement.

MS. BARRANS said that she couldn't speak to that.

[9:30:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER noted that many schools will administer an AP test and allow college credit for those attaining a certain score. Therefore, she surmised that it's some evaluation in a specific area.

[9:30:54 AM](#)

MS. BARRANS, in response to Representative Keller, said that she suspected that expertise in assessment may reside within the faculty at the University of Alaska or EED.

CHAIR SEATON noted that there is an assessment person at EED who can be consulted. However, he pointed out that EED has a regulation requiring WorkKeys [testing] at grade 11, and thus the department believes that WorkKeys is an appropriate assessment tool. He suggested that at a future meeting the committee could obtain more detail on the WorkKeys assessment. Perhaps, the committee could even take the WorkKeys test in order to determine how to proceed.

[9:33:45 AM](#)

MS. BARRANS related that she shared the matrix given to the committee today with university personnel who may want to weigh in on the assessment aspect. She offered to provide the committee with the name of someone who may want to be involved.

[9:34:26 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON pointed out that the matrix doesn't list WorkKeys for the outcome of increasing college-readiness whereas it is listed for promoting adult re-training.

MS. BARRANS pointed out that outcome of decreasing remediation rates [does specify the need for an assessment tool to be identified]. She explained that her thought with the outcome of increasing college-readiness was to increase the number of students who are actually taking the courses that will produce a higher number of college-ready students. If the desire is to have students perform at the college level, [the need to identify an assessment tool] could appear for both outcomes.

[9:35:50 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON ascertained that committee members agreed that the GPA isn't a very good comparative tool to assess college-readiness. Therefore, he concluded that the committee is looking for an assessment tool other than GPA.

[9:36:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER related her understanding that the WorkKeys assessment does not necessarily focus on academia, but rather on real-life skills. She inquired as to how WorkKeys compares to the ACT or SAT [in the instances] in which it attempts to assess academic readiness.

MS. BARRANS opined that WorkKeys wouldn't be a substitute for either the ACT or the SAT.

[9:37:46 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON remarked that since Alaska's university system doesn't require ACT or SAT test scores for admittance, Alaska can't duplicate what occurs in other states. However, the American College of Testing may have information regarding correlation between WorkKeys scores and success in college.

MS. BARRANS offered to help coordinate finding a WorkKeys spokesperson to address the aforementioned.

CHAIR SEATON expressed the need to know what level of confidence the committee should give the WorkKeys test. He opined that his level of confidence with the SAT test is low, in regard to success in two years of college.

[9:39:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER noted his agreement with the need to "compare apples to apples" in terms of an assessment tool. He related his understanding that the ACT can be customized to cover the areas desired.

CHAIR SEATON recalled that the SAT was once considered the general college entrance exam while the ACT was used to determine specific skill levels.

[9:40:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID GUTTENBERG, Alaska State Legislature, speaking as the prime sponsor of HB 94, explained that the legislation focuses on in-state tuition versus those students who attend Outside colleges. He then related his belief that those students who achieve high grades [in high school] have places to go to obtain scholarships based on the aforementioned achievement.

MS. BARRANS specified that if Representative Guttenberg is referring the National Merit Scholars, those are the top 3-5 percent of students.

REPRESENTATIVE GUTTENBERG commented that from his experience the parents of students attending college have the most expertise on these assessment tests and where to go for scholarships.

[9:42:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GUTTENBERG remarked that if the focus is on in-state students, the university can tell the committee on what it bases its evaluations.

[9:42:59 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON highlighted that the committee has been discussing the following three aspects for assessment: decreased

remediation rates, increased college-readiness, and promotion of adult re-training. He asked if there were any questions.

[9:43:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER opined that the remediation rate illustrates the gap between K-12 education and college. She questioned how that gap is a discussion of postsecondary education.

CHAIR SEATON explained that the discussion was focused on balancing a program that would give a scholarship and have a merit-based component in order to ensure that scholarships are given to those who can function in college. The desire is to have better success rates and perhaps avoid remediation courses.

[9:45:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER recalled testimony at a prior hearing regarding the Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) plan in which funds are made available for students to attend college if they meet certain criteria. Presenting the idea of attending college, that is raising the bar, encouraged kids to try to do better. The aforementioned is the same as the merit-based approach.

[9:45:59 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON interjected that the desire [of the committee] is to develop a tool to reach achievement levels at which students can obtain scholarships. The aforementioned is the merit aspect and providing funds seems to result in a high probability of success.

[9:46:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH surmised that the sponsor of HB 94 is being asked to provide legislation that will be successful, which occurs prior to students graduating from high school.

[9:47:30 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON noted his agreement. He announced that the committee will likely introduce committee legislation on this topic, with which the sponsor agrees. He then asked if the committee would agree to use WorkKeys as the merit-based portion of legislation if the data says that WorkKeys will form the

assessment tool and provide high school students the opportunity to progress and be competitive. He acknowledged that additional information on WorkKeys is necessary for the committee to make this determination.

[9:51:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER highlighted that the University of Alaska's Scholars Program has brought the idea and the possibility of going to college to rural kids who might not have otherwise seen college as an option. Even if the kids weren't well prepared for college, it served as something to which to aspire. Therefore, she related her hesitation to close that option and move away from it.

[9:52:41 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON said that the committee will have to decide whether it intends to replace the Alaska Scholars program with WorkKeys. He related that the aforementioned isn't his intent.

[9:52:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER pointed out her assumption that those students who would qualify for the Alaska Scholars program would also be the students who would do well under the WorkKeys program. She reiterated the need to be sure that opportunities for rural Alaska aren't eliminated.

[9:53:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GUTTENBERG remarked that replacing one program/test for another may not be the best direction. He suggested that establishing guidelines as to what is expected from a test may be more appropriate.

[9:54:19 AM](#)

MS. BARRANS said that the Postsecondary Education Commission in conjunction with the commissioner of EED could be charged with the responsibility of establishing a conceptual description of what is expected from the test. She explained that she included EED representation because the fundamental training for eligible candidates comes from the K-12 system. The commissioner would then be charged with identifying the levels of required assessment. Whether a test was an appropriate assessment would be apparent shortly after the program was in place due to

knowing the student's ability to perform college work. However, for the population being targeted [rural students], the wrap-around support programs will be critical. A test score doesn't mean anything if a student entering college doesn't have familial support, she remarked.

[9:56:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON explained her understanding that WorkKeys is a tool to provide students with self-assessment information to attain a particular career or vocation.

MS. BARRANS responded that Representative Wilson isn't mistaken and that one feature of WorkKeys is its use as a diagnostic to identify holes in a student's skill set. However, the program/test isn't limited to the aforementioned.

[9:59:09 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON related his belief that the desire is to have a tool from which middle school students can benefit and use as a directive for their skills.

[10:00:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH characterized today's discussion as evolving around a means of assessment.

[HB 94 was held.]

[10:01:49 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:01 a.m.