

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 27, 2009

8:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 33

"An Act relating to compulsory school attendance; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 206

"An Act establishing a career assessment requirement in public schools; and relating to postsecondary courses for secondary school students."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 33

SHORT TITLE: RAISE COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AGE

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) MUNOZ

01/20/09	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/09
01/20/09	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/20/09	(H)	EDC, FIN
03/13/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/13/09	(H)	Heard & Held
03/13/09	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/27/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HB 206

SHORT TITLE: HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSM'T/POSTSECONDARY CLASS

SPONSOR(S): EDUCATION

03/25/09 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/25/09 (H) EDC, FIN
03/27/09 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

KELSEY CLARK, Senior
Unalaska City High School
Unalaska, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 33.

NANCY WAGONER, Superintendent
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 33.

BARB ANGAIK, President
NEA-Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 33.

LARRY LEDOUX, Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 206.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 206.

ACTION NARRATIVE

8:03:34 AM

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Wilson, Edgmon, Gardner, Buch, Keller, and Munoz were present at the call to order.

HB 33-RAISE COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AGE

8:05:25 AM

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 33, "An Act relating to compulsory school attendance; and providing for an effective date."

8:06:01 AM

KELSEY CLARK, Senior, Unalaska City High School, stated support for HB 33 and paraphrased the following portion of her prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

As an Alaskan student I have witnessed many of my peers' drop-out of high school when they are sixteen. I have seen students who were once very enthusiastic, transition to frustrated students who give up. I was recently speaking with a boy, who I was supposed to walk with at graduation, about how he decided to drop-out of high school. The boy stated that he regretted dropping out, but felt like it was too late to go back.

I would have liked to have prevented my friend from dropping out, but since the past cannot be changed I feel the future could be. Since the drop-out rate is horrendously high, and thirty-nine percent of our ninth graders are predicted to not have high school diplomas I feel that as a state we need to create a change. I believe that one of the strongest and most effective ways we can create a change in Alaska is by supporting and passing the House Bill 33, which raises the compulsory school age in public schools.

The House Bill 33 was sponsored by Representative Cathy Munoz, and if passed would raise the drop-out age from sixteen to eighteen. In my most sincere opinion I feel this house bill could have a positively dramatic affect on Alaska's drop-out statistics. It is scientifically proven that at the age of sixteen the brain's decision-making section is not fully developed so many students do not truly mull over their decision to drop-out of high school. In my experience with my friend, he stated that he wished he had not dropped out, so if this bill had been enacted he would not have been able to make such a devastating decision.

8:07:27 AM

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON related concerns she has heard regarding having students in school who don't choose to be there, which could make it more difficult for others.

MS. CLARK noted that the friend she referenced in her testimony was very bright, had good grades, and participated in extracurricular activities. In response to Chair Seaton, Ms. Clark explained that her friend dropped out due to frustration and [to take advantage] of employment opportunities. The frustration arose from life in general, family problems, and homework. She related that everyone likes the school.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked whether anything else, besides a law requiring his attendance, could have been done to help Ms. Clark's friend stay in school.

MS. CLARK replied no, adding that her friend has indicated that he severely regrets the decision to drop-out now.

8:10:08 AM

NANCY WAGONER, Superintendent, Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, stated her strong support for HB 33, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I strongly support HB 33. Raising the compulsory attendance age to 18 sends the message that we (Alaskans) value education. It sets the expectation that all students should graduate from high school.

Will this Bill solve the Dropout problem? The answer is NO. However, it sets the expectation and then it is our job as educators to provide the three R's mentioned in the Bill: Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. We must provide a rigorous and challenging curriculum that is relevant in today's world as well as in the future. We must build strong relationships with students and families; letting them know that we believe in them and that we care about them and their future.

Knowing that students learn differently and at different rates, districts all across the state offer

a variety of alternative programs to accommodate the needs of students who are not successful in the traditional programs.

When the compulsory attendance age of 16 was set, the world was a different place. It was very possible to get good jobs without a high school diploma. That is not the case in today's world.

Passing this bill will provide districts with "some teeth" to our anti-dropout plans. It will provide support to parents who are trying to keep their children in school. Through attendance clerks and counselors, and excellent tracking records of students who leave school, and [by] encouraging them to enroll in alternative programs or re-enroll back into the school district, we will be able to increase our graduation rates and decrease our dropout rates. When Texas raised their compulsory attendance age, the Pasadena Independent School District recorded the low annual dropout rate of 1.6 percent.

The dropout problem is so alarming we must do all we can to turn it around. Increasing the compulsory attendance age can be an important component in a comprehensive effort to limit the number of students who drop-out of school each year. Research indicates there is no single reason a student drops-out of school, but that a combination of factors acting together increases the probability.

Understanding the dropout crisis is not a simple task, and improvement requires improvement at all levels. School districts, communities, and parents all play important roles in preventing students from dropping out of school. When students miss school frequently and/or drop-out of school, they are unable to gain the knowledge and skills they will need to be successful. They are not prepared for the work force and they are not prepared for postsecondary education.

Raising the compulsory attendance age will not by itself solve our dropout problem. It is our job as educators to focus on meeting the needs of all students by creating learning environments and opportunities that employ alternative programs, supervised work experience, and additional counseling.

However, setting the expectation that all students should stay in school until they graduate or reach the age of 18 sends the message that we value education. It sets the stage for students to take advantage of the educational opportunities afforded them through public education and prepares them for their future. All students should leave high school "work ready and college ready." It is not reasonable to think that 16 year old students are at this point.

Increasing the compulsory attendance age can be an important component in a comprehensive effort to limit the number of students who drop-out of school each year.

I encourage you to pass HB 33. Send the message that Alaskans value education and expect our children to graduate leaving high school "work ready and college ready."

[8:14:25 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked if those who drop-out in Fairbanks are all age 16.

MS. WAGONER responded no, but noted that students drop-out at different ages, but many are merely waiting for their 16th birthday to drop-out. Ms. Wagoner informed the committee that research has found that potential drop-outs can be identified at an early age, by third grade. In fact, warning signs for a potential drop-out can be seen as early as kindergarten and first grade.

[8:15:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if students who are at risk of dropping out have access to alternative programs without parental support.

MS. WAGONER commented that the district always attempts to include parents in educational decisions. However, the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, as do other school districts, has programs for struggling students. For example, Fairbanks has a career education program for those students who don't function well in a traditional program and only need a few credits to graduate. The student can take advantage of this program without parental involvement. She reminded the

committee that correspondence and home schooling programs are also available. In further response to Representative Gardner, Ms. Wagoner confirmed that students with parents who aren't engaged or responsive to the school district have options to find their own way to some of the programs.

[8:18:24 AM](#)

BARB ANGAIK, President, NEA-Alaska, related that NEA-Alaska is in support of any measure that would encourage students to stay in school longer. Although the organization isn't convinced that this legislation will solve the drop-out problem, it certainly can't hurt. In fact, the legislation may help some students who are on the fence, she suggested.

[8:19:39 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON recalled that NEA, nationally, supports raising the compulsory attendance age to 21. He then asked if NEA-Alaska is supportive of such.

MS. ANGAIK replied yes, adding that the feeling is that as long as students are in school, there's a chance of educating them.

[8:20:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER highlighted an e-mail [from Steve Pratt], in the committee packet, which encourages the committee to ensure that any decisions on the mandatory school attendance age doesn't increase class size, reduce teacher attention, or redirect resources from students who wish to remain in school. Representative Gardner asked Ms. Angaiak to speak to the concern of the possible increased disruption from those students who have no interest in being in school.

MS. ANGAIK opined that the [state] has an obligation to ensure that school districts offer what's needed for a child. Therefore, if different classes and programs have to be offered, it doesn't necessarily take away from the education of others. She pointed out that schools already have disruptive students who don't want to be at school. "We are working hard to try to help develop programs and plans to address the needs of all kids," she stated.

[8:22:00 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to the structure of a school in which there are older students, who do not want to be in school, and incoming freshmen.

MS. ANGAIK informed the committee that the middle school model has been very successful in many cases. Schools across the state, particularly those working on continuous progress models of older students who are in the same classes as younger students, already exist. She noted that as a middle school teacher in Bethel the age of those in her class range from age 12 to 18.

[8:23:20 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON closed public testimony.

[8:23:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH inquired as to how truancy will be enforced.

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ reminded the committee that in the Juneau School District one in four students don't finish high school. Furthermore, there are higher drop-out rates, as high as 54 percent, for some minority populations. With these high statistics, it is impossible to say that these drop-outs are all disruptive students. The current law and HB 33 provide exemptions for individuals to pursue. She informed the committee that the Juneau School District has a truancy officer who works to enforce attendance of those students under the age of 16 who aren't attending school. This legislation doesn't include funding for truancy officers. However, she opined that there's a lot of support for truancy officers.

[8:27:18 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON recalled that one of the concerns has been that the current exemptions allow any parent to say he/she is homeschooling their child. Furthermore, there are work exemptions and other "holes in the system" that allow children under the age of 16 to leave school.

[8:28:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON related her experience as a school nurse, and the attempts she made to encourage students to attend school. She opined that HB 33 is probably needed.

[8:29:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER expressed opposition to HB 33 and announced that he would oppose the legislation leaving the committee. He said that he wants to do something to address the drop-out rate, but he believes keeping a student in school who doesn't want to attend is harmful. He pointed out that in Alaska a high value is placed on freedom of choice. In fact a couple of cases heard by the Alaska Supreme Court specify that children have fundamental rights under the Alaska State Constitution. This matter also touches parental rights, in that parents have the right to the care and custody of their children. Furthermore, there is no evidence that raising the compulsory school attendance age will help. In fact, other states with higher compulsory attendance ages don't illustrate any correlation in higher graduation rates. Representative Keller said that the success stories in particular schools, such as those at Chugach High School, [Juneau's] alternative school, and the military academy, are more compelling.

[8:33:40 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER, referring to an article in "Education Week," related that the results of exit interviews, conducted by the Gates Foundation, with drop-outs between the age of 16 and 25 overwhelmingly found that the students weren't challenged, were unmotivated, and have problems outside the context of academics. Representative Keller expressed his belief that forcing children to stay in school won't help [with the drop-out rate.]

[8:34:24 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON directed the committee's attention to the Legislative Research Report 09.172 entitled "Compulsory School Attendance Age and Statistics Associated with Education Levels." The report references a 2007 Gates Foundation report that concludes that [raising the compulsory school attendance age should be done in conjunction with providing alternative learning opportunities and other educational reforms. The Legislative Research Report also relates the following: "Opponents of raising compulsory attendance ages hold that requiring all young people under age of 18 to attend school can marginalize those who fare least well in traditional high school. ... The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) is staunchly against raising mandatory age limits." Chair Seaton

also highlighted that the Legislative Research Report also relates the following:

Dr. Jay Smink, executive director of the National Dropout Center, believes that raising the compulsory school age might be a good idea. He cautions, however, that raising the compulsory age without identifying struggling students and providing them with alternative learning opportunities, would result in no benefit.

CHAIR SEATON went on to point out that a New Brunswick, Canada, study found that there wasn't any change in the relative drop-out rate in New Brunswick, although there were small positive effects in the United States. He then reviewed the top five reasons dropouts identify as major factors in their decision to drop-out. Chair Seaton expressed the need to critically analyze all the issues.

[8:37:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON stated that although he won't oppose HB 33 leaving committee today, he pointed out that school districts have varying resources available to address the drop-out situation. He suggested that perhaps at some point something other than merely raising the compulsory attendance age will be required.

[8:38:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ highlighted that the committee packet includes much information contrary to the information highlighted by Chair Seaton. In fact, the committee packet should include letters of support from organizations such as the Alaska School Board Association, the Anchorage School District, the Juneau School District, the Cordova School District, the Alaska Native Brotherhood Grand Camp, and the National Education Association. The aforementioned are the state's own people. Therefore, she questioned where the HSLDA fits into the discussion of Alaska's drop-out rate.

[8:39:43 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON said that he was merely encouraging members to thoroughly review the committee packet to ensure a knowledgeable decision. He then expressed the need for the committee to consider that the problem, as related by the Juneau School

District, isn't a drop-out problem but rather a push-out problem. If the aforementioned is the case, then raising the compulsory attendance age requirement will be of no consequence.

[8:41:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ clarified that the term push-out was first used by a local Native Sisterhood representative who explained the difficulty for Native Alaskans to succeed in a system that has cultural misunderstandings toward Native Alaskans. The Juneau School District was merely present at the meeting in which the aforementioned was discussed.

[8:42:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON informed the committee that research shows that adolescent brains do not mature, to the extent of fully understanding action consequences, until about age 24. She opined that she has come to believe that too many kids are able to easily opt out of things, and thus they don't learn how to stick with and work through uncomfortable situations. Furthermore, young people aren't developed enough to realize the consequences of quitting school.

[8:44:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER noted that often studies or research [can be found] showing both sides of an issue. She asked if the committee agrees that there should be compulsory attendance at all in schools. If so, the question is what age is appropriate for the student or family to decide they've received enough education. She mentioned her agreement with Representative Wilson that kids don't have the information and experience to make some important decisions. However, the CD How Institute has found that drop-outs fare worse later in life in that they earn less and are more likely to be unemployed, be on public assistance and other welfare programs, be in jail, and have poor health. Although changing the compulsory attendance age may not impact the drop-out rate to the extent desired, it may help some. Raising the compulsory attendance age, she opined, is a small piece in conjunction with programs that are known to work in keeping students in school. With regard to the exit interview responses, Representative Gardner related her skepticism because of a student's limited vision.

[8:47:54 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON stated that HB 33 would be held.
HB 206-HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSM'T/POSTSECONDARY CLASS

8:48:05 AM

CHAIR SEATON announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 206, "An Act establishing a career assessment requirement in public schools; and relating to postsecondary courses for secondary school students."

8:50:00 AM

LARRY LEDOUX, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), informed the committee that on the State Board of Education's fall meeting agenda is a complete discussion of the state's assessment system, including the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE). Therefore, the board is interested in discussing HB 206. Commissioner LeDoux then explained that existing regulations require students to complete the WorkKeys assessment during their junior year. Although the program is being delayed for a year, the board has been clear that it's not backing away from the requirement.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX related that at this time EED doesn't have a point of view on HB 206 other than that the assessments used must be of the quality to inform the student, parents, and employers and provide accountability for the school system. However, students who take the assessment as a senior don't have time to respond to the learning needs that are identified. Currently, the regulation requires completion of the WorkKeys assessment in the junior year in order that parents and students can review the scores and address areas in need. He noted that some states allow this exam to be taken more than once, and only the final score is listed on the student's transcript.

8:52:15 AM

CHAIR SEATON asked if the department intends to expand WorkKeys to freshman-year students in order that lower classes can track the development of their skills for intended careers or colleges.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX informed the committee that WorkKeys includes an assessment that is performed in sixth and eighth grade. The aforementioned includes a complete learning program, WIN, in which students can participate. Commissioner LeDoux then said that what's lacking statewide is a comprehensive,

integrated career education plan for Alaskan children. Although many districts have curriculum, many teachers would say that the career and technology curriculum isn't integrated into the courses being offered. The assessment will reveal what students have learned and what they haven't learned, but that won't be the program that ensures students learn the information.

[8:54:29 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked if the WorkKeys information is useful for college assessment purposes in determining the need for remedial classes and the possible success of a student during his/her freshman year.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX said that the WorkKeys assessment has a broad range, such that a high score would indicate a good foundation in math and technical reading. However, it isn't a pre-college exam. He related that the graduation exam for the State of Illinois is the WorkKeys exam plus a Standards Based Assessment (SBA) similar to that used in Alaska. He characterized the aforementioned as a good option. The WorkKeys program is a good exam for assessing certain skills, but it doesn't go far enough in terms of some of the technical skills necessary for college. For instance, the WorkKeys being used in Alaska only tests in the areas of finding information, math, and reading.

[8:57:06 AM](#)

ERIK MCCORMICK, Director, Assessment and Accountability, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), informed the committee that the Career and Technical Education [office] administers the WorkKeys test. He noted that he will be meeting with that office's staff to review correlations with the HSGQE. This will be the first review of the data. In response to Chair Seaton, Mr. McCormick said that he didn't know the cost for the WorkKeys program but offered to obtain that information.

[8:58:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked if the American College Testing (ACT) has a combination test for college readiness along with the WorkKeys test.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX related that one state uses the ACT college exam as its exit exam. However, Commissioner LeDoux opined that the ACT college exam is too limiting. He specified that the

combination test in Illinois includes WorkKeys and measures social studies, science, mathematics, and language arts skills in a broader standards based assessment, known as the Prairie State Achievement Exam.

[8:59:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if a student could completely fail a section of the Prairie State Achievement Exam and still graduate.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX opined that if it's a high stakes exam, then one would likely have to pass all sections. In response to Chair Seaton, Commissioner LeDoux said that he didn't know whether it's a high stakes exam.

[9:00:49 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX, in response to Chair Seaton, said that any time an assessment is going to be administered, the students must be given the opportunity to learn. The assessment needs to be integrated into learning activities, likely even in kindergarten.

[9:01:54 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON related:

Our goal here was to try to have something on the diploma that had an encouragement for achievement throughout the senior year so that you could actually, towards the end of the senior year, take it and have improved your scores and be more, shall we say, employable or there could be relative balance

CHAIR SEATON expressed the need to make the [assessment] exam relative to the diploma.

[9:03:11 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX remarked that he liked the fact that the Prairie State Achievement Exam can be taken several times with only the highest score being reported. He related his understanding that either the ACT or Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) will begin reporting an individual's highest score only. If students take a test during their junior year, they have the opportunity to know what they need to do to raise their score.

Therefore, the opportunity to take the test again should be allowed if the test is going to be used to form instruction, he said.

[9:03:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON inquired as to how many states have adopted the WorkKeys test.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX recalled that about 25 states have done so.

[9:04:22 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked if any changes to the first section of HB 206, the WorkKeys assessment, are necessary. He reminded the committee that HB 206 won't be moved through the legislature this session. The legislation is before the committee in order to engender interaction between the committee and the State Board of Education while working on the drop-out rate.

[9:06:03 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX remarked that the intent of this legislation is exciting. He then informed the committee that many schools have teachers teaching co-credit classes. In such cases, since the district is paying for the teacher, the only fee is a registration/credit fee. The fee is negotiated between the school district and the local campus. He then discussed the concept of middle colleges in which students take co-credit courses as well as associate level courses while in high school. Those courses that are taught by college professors who are paid by the university should probably charge full tuition. However, those courses taught within the high school by teachers under contract with the school district probably shouldn't charge full tuition.

[9:08:45 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON said that it's not the committee's intent to increase costs rather the intent is to formalize the HSGQE across the state. Therefore, he questioned how the aforementioned could be accomplished.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered that EED will work with the university on language to effectuate the intended goal of the legislation.

[9:10:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH characterized HB 206 as a laudable beginning, especially if the desire is to measure career aptitude and readiness. He suggested that [career assessment recommended in HB 206] should occur in elementary school at a very young age. He related that his goal is to help students such that by the time they reach 6th-8th grades they can be successful.

CHAIR SEATON highlighted his understanding that most members would agree that vocational education is lacking in the existing education system. Therefore, districts will have to gear education to accommodate more than the 30 percent of students who go on to higher education, which is one of the reasons for the career path language in HB 206.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH clarified that he is interested in the success of the student, whether it is in academia or otherwise.

[9:14:41 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX stated his agreement that career and technical education is lacking and is an area that needs to be addressed as it's a pathway to success for many students. On Friday, the State Board of Education approved Alaska's education plan, which includes a comprehensive package that will achieve many of the goals discussed today. Commissioner LeDoux agreed to provide the draft plan to the committee once it's available.

[9:15:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER stated that she finds the co-credit and middle college approach problematic. She reminded the committee that the national system already includes advanced placement classes in high school. Those classes are identified and recognized as being different from normal high school classes. Students don't receive college credit for those courses unless they reach a certain level on a nationally standardized test for that subject. Even then, some universities and schools don't accept them as credit toward graduation. She opined that the rationale is that a good education isn't necessarily a quicker education. Moving students through the system faster doesn't necessarily benefit the student. She recalled some 8th graders in her district that were ready for math that wasn't offered in the district. The question became whether these students should take math classes at the high school. However, high school

teachers felt that although these students could pass tests, it didn't mean the students had a "solid grounding." Representative Gardner opined that it's a mistake to rush students through high school or college.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX noted that many co-credit classes are vocational in nature, more specifically these are articulated programs that lead to vocational certification. Commissioner LeDoux then remarked that to treat all students the same is to treat them unfairly. Since students are different, he opined, schools need comprehensive centers of learning at which students can explore their individual interests and can learn at a pace which they are able and/or choose. One of the problems in Alaska's system that leads to dropping out is the lack of options. Commissioner LeDoux expressed the need to remove the transitions between early childhood and primary education, elementary and middle school, middle school and high school, and high school and college. Research, he related, on drop-outs shows that transitions are critical in regard to keeping children in school. He reiterated the need to remove the transition between high school and college because that's where students are being lost; opportunities for students to express who they are need to be available.

[9:20:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER clarified that she would view it as fine for a student who is doing well to take a college class. However, she would advise against a student trying to complete college freshman-year requirements in high school. "It's not a race to success ... we want to enrich what they're doing, not speed it up."

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX said he understood. In American society, graduation from high school represents passage into adulthood. Many feel that young people, because of their emotional maturity, need to be in a protected environment [high school].

[9:21:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked if the stimulus package includes funds that would provide the department more tools to achieve what Commissioner LeDoux has described.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered that the stimulus package is structured such that most of the funds are moved through the school districts. Very little money is targeted for the

department. Only 20 percent of the stabilization funds can be used by the department to pay down retirement.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON pointed out that many of the issues discussed aren't going to be addressed if the department doesn't receive the resources to do so.

[9:23:02 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX, in response to Chair Seaton, informed the committee that several schools in the state are piloting credit recovery programs or credit by exams, although it's not widespread. Using the HSGQE at the sophomore level is the gatekeeper for college classes, which will be a motivator for some students. He related his belief that students who are interested in taking college classes will [easily pass the HSGQE]. College classes, co-credit, are usually available during a student's regular schedule, although sometimes evening college classes are made available to high school students. In further response to Chair Seaton, Commissioner LeDoux pointed out that the state sets broad requirements while the districts must ensure that their requirements are aligned with the state standards. This is similar to what occurs when students transfer from out-of-state high schools.

[9:26:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON suggested that gaining college credits in high school is a cost savings for a number of students.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX stated his agreement while adding that for many young people college is no longer a four-year program, but rather a five-year program.

[9:28:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked if there is a readiness evaluation test for high school.

MR. MCCORMICK explained that the state's SBAs are aligned with the grade level expectations. Therefore, the courses a student takes in 8th grade represent what an 8th grader is expected to know at that point. From 3rd-9th grade the skill scores are vertically articulated, and therefore a student in 8th grade can be compared to a 9th grader. Mr. McCormick said that the state doesn't have the skills to say what a student going into high

school should know, but rather does know what a student should know by the end of 8th grade.

[9:30:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked, "Based on what standard?"

MR. MCCORMICK answered that there are content and performance standards that have been created by Alaskan educators. The state's SBAs are based on the grade-level expectations, which the department is working to integrate into curriculum across the state. He offered to share the specifics with the committee, if it so desired.

[9:30:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH surmised then that the SBAs are based on the national education composite, not just Alaska. Therefore, he questioned whether the information is standardized and could be compared to other states' data.

MR. MCCORMICK explained that the SBAs were specifically developed by Alaskan educations for Alaskan students. In Alaska the only norm referenced tests that can be compared state-to-state are the Terra Nova tests, the California Achievement tests (CAT), and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

[9:32:16 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX, in response to Representative Buch, related his understanding from the U.S. Secretary of Education that national/common standards are part of the agenda. He noted that he has been invited to a meeting of chief executives who will try to put together a coalition to facilitate the development of common standards for the nation. Some of the competitive funds in the stimulus package are to be allocated based on progress in development of some of these national standards.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH opined that if the committee intends to craft a change, it should be crafted in alignment with the national movement.

[9:33:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if Commissioner LeDoux believes that the common standards would incorporate academic preparedness along with something similar to WorkKeys.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX informed the committee that the State Board of Education has determined that WorkKeys is a high priority of discussion. Therefore, data will be collected and there will be discussions regarding the state's assessment program. He predicted that there will likely be changes to the exam recommended to the legislature.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER stated her pleasure with the aforementioned answer as much time is lost with [HSGQE] testing.

[9:35:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER said it is helpful to compare Alaskan students to those in other states. He asked if within the state there's a move to have an assessment based on the state's own standards.

MR. MCCORMICK reminded the committee that EED has been asked to perform a full evaluation of all the state's assessments. The recent federal Title I regulations now require all states to report NAEP results in their district and state report cards. Also, NAEP is piloting a 12th grade exam that tests reading, writing, and science. At this point, Alaska isn't one of the pilot states. Mr. McCormick expressed the need to ensure that a track of an occupation isn't limited by these assessment scores.

[9:37:24 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON pointed out that the second aspect of HB 206 is how to handle the HSGQE. He noted that he is not opposed to eliminating the HSGQE if EED and the State School Board find it necessary to do so. He mentioned that he has serious concerns with regard to the quality of the HSGQE. Therefore, he expressed openness to other possible tracks.

[9:39:28 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX asked to have a future meeting with the committee along with the State Board of Education. He noted that the department intended to have recommendations before the committee by mid-September. To that end, he asked if the committee would be available to meet this summer.

CHAIR SEATON replied yes, adding that members may also be able to attend work sessions of the State Board of Education.

[9:40:53 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX invited the committee to various discussions in the near future on topics such as the graduation rate.

[9:41:34 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON noted that Friday there will be an interactive WorkKeys presentation during which members can take the test.

[9:43:11 AM](#)

MR. MCCORMICK welcomed statements the committee would like to forward to the graduation rate committee that will meet April 15th.

[HB 206 was held.]

[9:43:40 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:44 a.m.