

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 3, 2009

8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Con Bunde
Senator Bettye Davis
Senator Charlie Huggins
Senator Donald "Donny" Olson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Cathy Engstrom Munoz, Vice Chair
Representative Bryce Edgmon

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

WORKKEYS INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION

- HEARD

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

HOUSE BILL NO. 204

"An Act increasing the number of students pursuing a medical education who are provided postsecondary educational services and programs; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED HB 204 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

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
03/27/09 (H) Heard & Held
03/27/09 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
04/03/09 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HB 204

SHORT TITLE: POSTSECONDARY MEDICAL EDUC. PROG.

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) DAHLSTROM

03/23/09 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/23/09 (H) EDC, FIN
03/30/09 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/30/09 (H) Heard & Held
03/30/09 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
04/01/09 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
04/01/09 (H) Heard & Held
04/01/09 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
04/03/09 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

MARCIA OLSON, Education Specialist II
Teaching/Learning Support

Department of Education and Early Development (EED)

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an interactive presentation on the WorkKeys program.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: During the WorkKeys presentation, answered questions.

SAM DIX, Staff
Representative Nancy Dahlstrom
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke on behalf of the sponsor of HB 204, Representative Dahlstrom.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:59 AM](#)

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Gardner, Buch, and Keller were present at the call to order. Representative Wilson arrived as the meeting was in progress. Also in attendance were Senators Davis, Bunde, Olson, and Huggins.

WORKKEYS INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION

[8:03:37 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be an interactive presentation with the WorkKeys program. He explained that WorkKeys is academic testing for real world identification of issues. Legislation, HB 206, has been introduced and would utilize WorkKeys as the assessment tool that would be recorded on the transcripts and diploma of students. He opined that WorkKeys would provide something for seniors who have passed the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) to work for in terms of elevating their scores. The intention is for WorkKeys to be a longitudinal assessment, and therefore it could be used throughout high school for students to identify their different skills relative to various career paths. The aforementioned proposed legislation specifies that in the final year, the highest results would be reported on the student's diploma.

[8:05:57 AM](#)

MARCIA OLSON, Education Specialist II, Teaching/Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development, began by informing the committee that she has been the lead person for the WorkKeys program, career ready project, over the last couple of years. She clarified that WorkKeys is an assessment and job analysis system developed by the Advanced College Tuition (ACT) Company. The WorkKeys system was designed to more specifically gauge foundational skills that are necessary in the work place. Before review of the specific test, Ms. Olson related that the WorkKeys test can be taken over the Internet or by paper and pencil. All of the WorkKeys tests are standardized tests that must be given in a proctored environment and are timed. She

provided the practice test to the committee and reviewed the various details of it.

[8:11:58 AM](#)

MS. OLSON demonstrated the Locating Information test, which provides a graphic representation of information to which the question relates. All of the graphics are ones that may be encountered in a workplace, such as a form. She pointed out that the Internet version has a navigation and review function, which allows one to return to past questions or mark questions for later review. She highlighted that the difficulty of the questions, graphics, and vocabulary increase as the test proceeds. In response to Chair Seaton, Ms. Olson related her understanding that the Internet version and paper version of the test don't have exactly the same questions. She noted that the practice copy of the paper test does provide the user with the correct answers as well as some backup regarding how one arrives at the correct answer. The paper copy of the test is probably best for students who are practicing, whereas the Internet version is best for test administration training.

[8:21:32 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON pointed out that the answer key also explains why the incorrect answers are incorrect. He indicated that the aforementioned would be helpful as a training tool.

MS. OLSON noted that the paper copy also provides an estimate as to the level score one would receive if a certain number of items are correct.

[8:22:38 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON requested that Ms. Olson review the math section. He then reminded the committee that the University of Alaska doesn't require an ACT or SAT score. Therefore, the committee is considering using another test that would provide knowledge as to whether a college freshman would succeed with the preparation he/she has received.

[8:24:01 AM](#)

SENATOR BUNDE opined that although 40-50 percent of Alaska's students go on to college, the WorkKeys test doesn't appear to be aimed at those students.

[8:24:20 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON indicated that the committee is trying to determine whether the WorkKeys test is [aimed at those students who go on to college]. So many college freshmen have to take remedial courses and it seems that there's a lack of knowledge regarding whether a single score can relate whether a student is prepared for college. In the Midwest, a test that combines the ACT with WorkKeys is used to track both work and college-readiness abilities. The committee intends to find a way in which to track and assess [work and college-readiness abilities] because a grade point average (GPA) means different things depending upon the school at which it's received. Furthermore, the committee desires to have a test that allows students to work up through the levels rather than having a single test at the end.

[8:27:04 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON suggested that the WorkKeys test includes the career path identifier that assesses the level at which one would need to be in order to be successful in a particular career.

[8:27:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked if Ms. Olson has reviewed the aforementioned hybrid test being used in the Midwest.

MS. OLSON confirmed that at least two states, Illinois and Michigan, use a hybrid test. She related that several states use different parts of ACT's assessment programs, some of which are suggested for use in the eighth grade. She then provided the committee with a summary of what tests states use. For instance, Michigan uses the ACT plus the writing as well as three WorkKeys tests plus a math, social studies, and science test that was developed within Michigan. She then noted that Illinois uses a couple of pre-assessments and interest inventory tests as well as ACT plus writing and two of the WorkKeys assessments. She related her understanding that Michigan is considering adding the third WorkKeys assessment, Locating Information. When a student takes all three of the assessments, a career readiness certificate can be earned.

[8:30:31 AM](#)

MS. OLSON, in response to Representative Keller, explained that the ACT college entrance test would remain a standard that would

be used for state-to-state comparisons. Although the WorkKeys scores are standardized, the data and results aren't owned by ACT. The data is owned by the individual who took the test and the entity that sanctions the test, which could be the state agency. Therefore, there's probably no way that [WorkKeys] will be compared state-to-state. She suggested that perhaps it's not so important to compare state-to-state information, but rather is a more individualized view.

[8:32:24 AM](#)

MS. OLSON, in response to Chair Seaton, clarified that the Prairie States Achievement Exam (PSAE) is used by Illinois. The PSAE is Illinois specific and consists of the ACT test plus the writing component of the ACT college test along with the math and reading portions of the WorkKeys test. In further response to Chair Seaton, Ms. Olson related her understanding that Illinois is considering inclusion of the binding information in order to provide students with an opportunity to earn the career-readiness certificate along with a high school diploma.

[8:33:23 AM](#)

MS. OLSON, in response to Chair Seaton, explained that the career-readiness certificate itself has three levels based on the score achieved. The certificate lists the skills demonstrated, but doesn't actually list the score itself. The ACT decided not to list the scores on the certificate.

[8:34:17 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON posed a scenario in which an Alaskan student takes the WorkKeys test; he/she would receive a diploma along with a career-readiness certificate that lists the competencies achieved. He then recalled a handout that listed careers and their average salary. He asked if that same handout lists the levels necessary for each career.

MS. OLSON replied yes, adding that it was a compilation of information from ACT and work the department did. She informed the committee that ACT makes its occupational profiling scores available to the public.

[8:35:37 AM](#)

SENATOR BUNDE asked if in other states, individuals have achieved a career-readiness certificate without receiving a high

school diploma. More specifically, he inquired as to the level of difficulty between the HSGQE and the WorkKeys test.

CHAIR SEATON clarified that WorkKeys is a separate assessment and certificate.

MS. OLSON explained that because the National Career-Readiness Certificate is sanctioned by the ACT Company, in order to qualify for the certificate one must achieve a level three score on the three WorkKeys tests. The ACT doesn't review whether an individual has a high school diploma or his/her GPA; rather, the ACT only reviews the three WorkKeys tests in order to determine whether an individual qualifies for the career-readiness certificate.

[8:37:26 AM](#)

SENATOR BUNDE inquired as to how a bronze level work certificate and a diploma would compare. He reiterated his earlier questions regarding whether an individual may qualify for WorkKeys but not for high school graduation.

MS. OLSON answered that she doesn't know if ACT has any data on the aforementioned. Furthermore, since Alaska hasn't had many students take the WorkKeys tests, the state has limited data. However, she noted that a preliminary comparison of the WorkKeys scores and HSGQE scores for about 200 students.

[8:38:20 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON explained that the committee is exploring whether the WorkKeys test can be utilized as a skills development and skills assessment test. He pointed out that a lot of students don't obtain a high school diploma because they don't want to remain in school. However, that doesn't mean that they couldn't pass a level of the WorkKeys test. The WorkKeys test isn't measuring seat time and endurance. Therefore, the WorkKeys test could encourage students to obtain greater achievement and focus on a certificate for the occupation in which they have interest rather than dropping out. He expressed the need for a comparison of the WorkKeys assessment.

[8:40:13 AM](#)

SENATOR BUNDE opined that the WorkKeys assessment could be a diagnostic tool that could be used early on to encourage students to stay in school and work hard.

[8:40:56 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON said that is the direction the committee hopes to pursue.

[8:41:06 AM](#)

MS. OLSON, in response to Chair Seaton, reviewed Attachment 3 and explained that those states that are using career-readiness certificates could be doing so through various state agencies, such as the State Workforce Investment Board. In further response to Chair Seaton, Ms. Olson confirmed that job centers could request that job seekers take these WorkKeys tests in order to place individuals with the appropriate skills for the position. Therefore, the WorkKeys test varies in the states as to how and by whom the test is being implemented. For example, the Florida Legislature provides funding for every Floridian to take the WorkKeys test.

[8:43:07 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to the cost of the WorkKeys test.

MS. OLSON related that ACT charges \$5.00 per test, thus it is currently \$15.00 for an individual to take the three tests. An additional \$5.00 is charged for the National Career-Readiness Certificate. Therefore, the total cost of the test is about \$20.00 per participant.

[8:43:48 AM](#)

MS. OLSON returned to the demonstration of the WorkKeys test and focused on the math portion. She presented various math questions, which became gradually more involved and more difficult.

[8:51:20 AM](#)

MS. OLSON mentioned that the largest job centers in the state have the capability to administer the WorkKeys assessments. With regard to the cost charged for an individual who takes the assessments at a job center, Ms. Olson opined that it may depend on the type of program in which the individual is enrolled. She suggested asking the Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DLWD) about the cost of the assessments taken at job centers.

[8:52:12 AM](#)

MS. OLSON then demonstrated the Internet version of the Reading for Information section, which utilizes reading passages that would be utilized in a job setting.

[8:55:30 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON suggested discussing whether the WorkKeys test satisfies some of the purposes the committee has discussed with regard to K-12 education and stimulating vocational education as well as other certificates.

[8:56:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked if the type of analysis [provided by the WorkKeys assessment] would be available outside of the school system, such as in a situation in which a parent administers the test in the home.

MS. OLSON explained that because the WorkKeys assessments are secure, standardized tests that must be proctored, it can't be taken at home. However, the practice software or a practice test could be utilized in the home or any location where there is an Internet connection. She directed the committee to the link on the department's web site entitled "Alaska Career Ready," which includes the WorkKeys testing and the Worldwide Interactive Network (WIN) instructional software.

[8:59:00 AM](#)

MS. OLSON, in response to Chair Seaton, explained that the links to the free on-line WorkKeys are practice tests that were not sanctioned or supplied by ACT but rather by a third party. The aforementioned links to various practice tests beyond those for WorkKeys. Although WIN isn't part of ACT either, ACT has reviewed its software and determined that it addresses the skills. Ms. Olson then related her understanding that the Alaska State Board of Education recently decided to delay the requirement for the WorkKeys test until the 2010-2011 school year.

[9:01:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER recalled that ACT charges \$5 per test per person. She then asked if the test is cost effective in terms of using it statewide through EED and DLWD.

MS. OLSON deferred to assessment staff.

[9:01:43 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS asked if the school districts will have to pay for the tests or will funds from EED's budget be designated to pay for the tests.

[9:02:27 AM](#)

ERIK MCCORMICK, Director, Assessment and Accountability, Department of Education and Early Development, said that he didn't believe the costs for the tests would be incurred by the school districts, but rather would be funded by EED.

MS. OLSON, in further response, confirmed that the tests given by DLWD will be handled through its own funds.

[9:03:14 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to why the implementation of the test has been delayed until the next school year.

MR. MCCORMICK explained that the Alaska State Board of Education would like to allow EED time to research correlations with the state's current assessment system, from K-12 and the HSGQE. The assessment office has already begun working with the Teaching/Learning Support office regarding correlations. The Assessment and Accountability office has been tasked with providing the Alaska State Board of Education with a report of the state's entire assessment system and an evaluation of what can be done with WorkKeys.

[9:04:23 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON requested that the results of that report be shared with the committee.

[9:05:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER related his understanding that the data is owned by the company, not the department. He inquired as to potential problems the aforementioned would cause in the scenario in which the WorkKeys score is used for a merit-based scholarship program. He also inquired as to whether cut scores with WorkKeys can be set under the current agreement with ACT.

MS. OLSON explained that ACT has its own scoring system in which it provides level scores as well as scale scores for test participants. She opined that it would be up to the state to establish a cut score either using one of the level or scale scores. Other states, she recalled, are reviewing legislation in which test participants who scored a certain level on all tests would be eligible for a scholarship. In response to Chair Seaton, Ms. Olson related that the packet of information provided to the committee should include information regarding how other states are handling the same question.

[9:08:21 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:08 a.m. to 9:12 a.m.

HB 206-HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSM'T/POSTSECONDARY CLASS

[9:12:06 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the next 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."

[9:12:39 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON noted that although the districts seem to like HB 206, they are concerned that the language regarding the districts paying for the courses after a student passes the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) doesn't have a limitation. Therefore, he asked the committee whether it wanted to adopt an amendment to clarify that there isn't an unlimited requirement for school districts to fund all kinds of distance education and not honor the agreements with the University of Alaska for reduced tuition rates. In response to Representative Buch, Chair Seaton confirmed that he is referring to the language on page 2, lines 21-23.

[9:14:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON related her understanding that in some areas the town, local Native corporations, or fishing fees pay for these classes. Therefore, the language should be crafted to accommodate the aforementioned, she indicated.

CHAIR SEATON suggested that the language could be crafted to specify that the district will secure funding for those additional courses, regardless of the mechanism.

[9:15:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER recommended deleting this [language] because every community has a different arrangement. Furthermore, those arrangements aren't carefully regulated and some of them are fairly creative.

[9:16:50 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON suggested that the discussion needs to focus on how funding will occur and whether there will be a limit to the benefit. As Representative Keller mentioned, there is no intention to interfere with the way districts have aligned the program.

[HB 206 was held over.]

HB 204-POSTSECONDARY MEDICAL EDUC. PROG.

[9:18:55 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 204, "An Act increasing the number of students pursuing a medical education who are provided postsecondary educational services and programs; and providing for an effective date."

[9:19:19 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON reminded the committee that pending before it is a motion to adopt CSHB 204, Version 26-LS0778\R, Mischel, 3/31/09, to which he had objected.

[9:19:59 AM](#)

SAM DIX, Staff, Representative Nancy Dahlstrom, Alaska State Legislature, relayed that the [sponsor] has decided to [support] returning to the original version of HB 204, which would merely add four students to the Wyoming, Washington, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho (WWAMI) program.

[9:20:25 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON informed the committee that there have discussions within the legislature, the medical field, and the WWAMI program regarding eliminating the section of [Version R] that addresses medically underserved areas of the state because the definition of "area" wasn't a particular practice. The existing language could result in a situation in which there's a medically underserved area with a profitable practice. There was a proposal to remove the aforementioned section and the definition of "underserved area." There was also discussion of changing the definition of "qualified practice" to refer only to uninsured and Medicare because Medicaid and Denali Kid Care are profitable in some practices. The concern was that [the legislation] would dilute the incentive for doctors to take the three-year reimbursement.

CHAIR SEATON explained that the motion to adopt Version R is before the committee and there is an objection to it.

[9:23:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON withdrew her motion to adopt CSHB 204, Version 26-LS0778\R, Mischel, 3/31/09, as the working document. There being no objection, it was so ordered and before the committee was the original version, HB 204.

[9:24:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER encouraged the committee to move the legislation out so that it can be considered in the House Finance Committee. From a policy perspective, he opined that the legislation shouldn't be passed in a vacuum and that the entire workforce shortage in the medical field should be considered.

[9:25:53 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON noted that Version R was discussed so that the policy questions incorporated in Version R were fully vetted.

[9:26:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER agreed with Representative Keller's comments, particularly since the real way to increase doctors in Alaska is to increase the residencies. Simply having more Alaskan students in a medical program doesn't necessarily mean those students will return to the state.

[9:26:52 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON stated his agreement, adding that he has learned much about the value of slots in medical schools. The slots are filled with the students from the states with medical schools, which is why WWAMI is so important.

[9:27:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON inquired as to how the benefit works.

[9:28:00 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON explained that the state support amounts to about \$56,000, half of which is converted into a loan and the student pays about \$23,000. That \$23,000 loan can be forgiven if the student returns to Alaska. A returning student who serves in rural Alaska receives a 33 1/3 percent per year reduction in their repayment obligation while those who serve in non-rural Alaska receive a 20 percent per year reduction in their repayment obligation. He recalled that about 50 percent of Alaska's WWAMI students return to the state and about another 38 percent of other WWAMI students come to Alaska. Therefore, Alaska receives about 88 percent of WWAMI students, although the state funds much less than that. Chair Seaton opined that the WWAMI program is successful at the current reimbursement rate.

[9:29:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER moved to report HB 204 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, it was so ordered.

[9:30:33 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON then asked if there was anything else the committee wished to discuss.

[9:30:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER reported that the Department of Education and Early Development (EED) has expressed an interest in the virtual charter school issue and has requested review of virtual education during the interim.

[9:31:21 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON reviewed the interim calendar for the committee and legislation pending referral to the committee.

9:34:23 AM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:35 a.m.