

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 20, 2010

8:02 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

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Charlie Huggins
Representative Jay Ramras

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT:
GRADUATION RATE WORKING GROUP
ADVISORY PROGRAMS
ASD NATIVE TUTOR PROGRAM

- 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 & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 206

SHORT TITLE: HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSM'T/POSTSECONDARY CLASS

SPONSOR(S): EDUCATION

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| 03/25/09 | (H) | READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS |
| 03/25/09 | (H) | EDC, FIN |

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|----------|-----|----------------------------|
| 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 |
| 04/03/09 | (H) | Heard & Held |
| 04/03/09 | (H) | MINUTE(EDC) |
| 04/15/09 | (H) | EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106 |
| 04/15/09 | (H) | Heard & Held |
| 04/15/09 | (H) | MINUTE(EDC) |
| 01/20/10 | (H) | EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106 |

WITNESS REGISTER

CYNDY CURRAN, Director
 Early Learning and Teaching Support
 Department of Education and Early Development(EED)
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the department's report on the Graduation Rate Working Group.

DOREEN BROWN, Supervisor
 Title VII Indian Education
 Anchorage School District
 Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a report on the Native Tutor Program in the Anchorage school district.

SEAN DUSEK, Assistant Superintendant of Instruction
 Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
 Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a synopsis of the student advisory program instituted in the Kenai Peninsula District school system.

BILL WATKINS, Principal
 Kodiak High School
 Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as a member of the Graduation Rate Working Group.

EDDY JEANS, Director
 School Finance and Facilities Section
 Department of Education and Early Development

POSITION STATEMENT: Responded to questions raised during the Graduation Rate Working Group overview. Testified on HB 206

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:48 AM](#)

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Munoz, Wilson, Edgmon, Keller, Buch, and Gardner, were present at the call to order. Senator Huggins and Representative Ramras were also in attendance.

**Overview: Department of Education and Early Development:
Graduation Rate Working Group; Advisory Programs; ASD Native
Tutor Program**

[8:03:48 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be an overview report from the Department of Education and Early Development Graduation Rate Working Group; Advisory Programs; ASD Native Tutor Program.

[8:05:05 AM](#)

CYNDY CURRAN, Director, Early Learning and Teaching Support, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), said that the Graduation Rate Working Group has been collaborating with EED to accomplish the goal of increasing graduation rates throughout the state. She directed attention to the committee packet handout titled "Ideas for Eliminating Push-outs," to review the categories that the group brainstormed, during the most recent meeting, in October, 2009. A push-out is considered anything that has the effect of indicating to a student that "we don't want you here anymore," she said, and then read the broad category list: School-wide/District-wide, Statewide, Social/Emotional Issues, and Teachers. In the first group, School-wide/District-wide, the condition of the facility has been deemed a factor. When a school building or classroom is not welcoming, or is in disrepair, and the school grounds have trash and are not kept, a student may feel pushed out. She read across the column headings, of the handout, to indicate what the group identified as ways to involve a community, at little or no cost, to improve the identified situations of a given category. She added that this is not a complete list of what the committee generated as possible solutions.

[8:08:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if there is data to support the theory that building conditions, are a reason that students drop-out of school.

MS. CURRAN responded that this list was brainstormed by the committee, not necessarily referencing hard data, but taking into account what the community members chose to report. She used the example of her son's high school in Palmer, and the depressing situation of the building. The student council and PTA, acknowledged the situation and joined forces to make improvements. The joint volunteer effort made the school more welcoming and uplifting, at minimal cost. The facelift proved to make a difference in how the students and community members felt upon entering the facility.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER clarified that it could then be assumed that if schools were ranked according to building condition, and all other factors were equal, the drop-out rate would reflect this theory.

MS. CURRAN stressed that the committee identified this as an important aspect to include on the list.

[8:11:26 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON interjected that he also believes that this factor contributes to a student choosing to leave a school, but not a sole reason.

[8:12:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON commented on how building conditions have effected students in Sitka. The alternative high school students have commented to her that, "Yeah, they put us over here and nobody cares about us." When the site was improved the students felt as though they were cared for, as well, which is why she believes that this is a valid point to consider.

[8:13:02 AM](#)

MS. CURRAN encouraged the committee members to review the list, keeping in mind that it is still being compiled and concrete solutions are being formulated. In February, 2010, an audio conference will be held, to synthesize all of the suggestions into a formal recommendation to the state school board, and if accepted, it will be forwarded on to districts and communities statewide. Another development has been the completion and

distribution of the "Raising a Graduate It's Everybody's Business," poster, which she reported has been well received. The group is also working on a website for access by parents to assist them in intervention efforts, if they believe their child is in danger of dropping-out or feeling pushed out. It may also be accessed by students to help them explore options. Although many websites on this topic exist, she opined, they are not as user friendly as what the department is developing; an active, engaging tool. The working group has been joined by three Anchorage students, from Diamond, Bartlett, and Eagle River High Schools, and two rural school districts have committed to sending students to the committee meetings, as well. She reported that the student liaisons have been enthusiastic to discover that there are adults who are concerned with their education/graduation. The student participation will be an integral connection to the EED group.

[8:16:10 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON pointed out that the second item in the "Ideas for Eliminating Push-outs" is grading. He reported that the teaching and administrative group members identified a need for implementation of a grading policy course to facilitate a consistent method of classroom evaluation. Removing grading curves and other variables that create a non-uniform policy has been identified as a disruptive factor. A non-subjective grading policy will be developed to address this type of discouragement. Every student should know what affects their grade and what to expect in the realm of retakes, make-up options, or partial credit.

[8:18:29 AM](#)

MS. CURRAN returned to the push-out list and the final category: Teachers. The Alaska studies and multi cultural coarse work for Alaskan teachers is proving to be important, for improving teacher quality. Student advisory programs are appearing to be essential at the high school level. Non-formal advisors are also an effective means to make important connections with students, beginning as early as middle school, to suggest career paths and options. Showing an interest in a student and providing direction improves a student's sense of importance as they enter high school.

[8:22:08 AM](#)

MS. CURRAN indicated the Statewide issues category, and said the working group discussed the policies for student participation in extra-curricular activities. Club or athletic connections are a primary factor in providing a positive connection for continued high school attendance. Also, options to the Carnegie Unit requirement for completing course work were considered including: a virtual school model; alternative school days/hours; and a variety of choices that would allow a student to pursue a self paced course of study outside of the confines of a traditional school setting. An attendance policy is being formed that delineates uniform tardy and absence repercussions, establishes whether a student may make-up the work missed, and identifies means to assist an individual in finishing their course of study.

[8:24:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER said that he sits on the NCSL (National Conference of State Legislatures) Drop-out Task Force, and he recalled a presentation addressing the topic of chronic absenteeism. He stated his support for assessment and improvement of the policies governing attendance.

[8:25:22 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired about the policy to de-enroll a student who has missed 10 consecutive days, and whether it is a state requirement or a district policy.

MS. CURRAN said she would provide the committee with that information.

[8:26:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked for an explanation of the ASAA (Alaska Sports Athletic Association).

MS. CURRAN indicated that ASAA policies govern all of the school related activities, not just sports.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER queried how altering the ASAA eligibility would affect policies regarding substance abuse.

MS. CURRAN explained that the intent is to help students remain in school. If the only positive connection that a student has is through an activity, that relationship should be cultivated not severed. A student who makes a mistake with drug/alcohol

abuse may be at risk for dropping-out, but with help they may continue. The alternative is that they may feel pushed out for making that error, lose their primary connection, and make the choice to drop-out.

[8:27:37 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON addressed the eligibility requirement, established by the ASAA. He described a situation in Homer where students of the Russian Old Believer Schools are not being allowed to participate on the Homer hockey team, due to the size of enrollment. There is a real problem with the Russian School graduation rates, and yet the ASAA policy eliminates this important vehicle for student engagement and retention.

[8:28:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER referred to the consideration being made of moving away from a zero tolerance policy, and asked whether data exists to support a finding that the policy does work as intended. Perhaps it is an effective deterrent to students abusing drugs and alcohol or other undesirable behavior, she posed.

MS. CURRAN indicated that there is data to support both sides of this argument. She opined that the students who skate near the line, of breaking a rule or not, are the ones who need the majority of the help. More information is being gathered to assess this situation, she said.

[8:30:29 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON recalled that the working group considered a progressive type of policy, imposing penalties for infractions.

[8:31:29 AM](#)

MS. CURRAN concluded and said the working group will hold an audio conference in February, 2010, to continue the push-out discussion. The third week in April will be a group meeting, and may be timed to coincide with the end of the legislative session to enable the committee members to attend; who are welcome to join any meeting.

[8:32:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ encouraged a discussion topic of the compulsory education law; current law requiring attendance to the age of 16. Districts statewide have identified this as a deterrent for keeping some students in school, and feedback from the working group would be helpful.

MS. CURRAN reported that this topic was discussed at the most recent meeting. Opinions varied and it was not included on the push-out list, nor did they arrive at a recommendation to alter the current age requirement. A student suggested that the requirement be graduation from high school, instead of stipulating an age. If graduation is truly the goal, and there is a variety of means for attaining required competencies and standards, an age requirement may be moot. She directed attention to the committee packet and the hand outs titled "Let's Abolish High School" and "Requiem for a Dropout." The first suggests that what is being required of students may be outdated for the current society. The second is authored by the national teacher of the year, and discusses options for drop-outs.

[8:34:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH requested an update on the revamping of the cultural studies courses offered by the University of Alaska System.

MS. CURRAN reported that the course syllabi are being collected from each campus. The teacher quality committee is also concerned that the needs of the teachers are not being met. A sub-group from that committee will be reviewing the syllabi and making a recommendation for action. Additionally, a rural education director has been hired, Phyllis Carlson, who will be working on this topic to provide appropriate review and state board of education recommendations.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH recalled that a time table for this work had been established at one time, and inquired whether it would be possible that it be completed by the end of this session; within 90 days.

MS. CURRAN stated that the departmental goal is to bring the recommendations forward to the state board in March, 2010, which will then direct the department on how to move forward. The committee will be provided with a comprehensive overview, following completion of the process.

[8:38:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked if, when defining a push-out, the focus is on the environment of the school, or are home life and other outside, factors also considered.

MS. CURRAN stated that the working group has not specifically targeted what occurs outside of school as a topic for scrutiny. However, engaging parents may be a future aspect for student retention, but district control resides within school boundaries. She relayed how, as a primary teacher, she made efforts to engage parents, but at the high school level it becomes more difficult for parents to remain involved.

[8:41:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON noted that a child's home life is of importance, as well as the family configuration. Challenging children often have a difficult home life, and although no control can be exerted the information is still important and usable by the teacher.

MS. CURRAN offered that this is one of the purposes to have an advisor positioned in the school; to provide a student with a safe adult to approach. High school is an important time for students to have this type of access to, and personal interest from, an adult.

[8:44:41 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON encouraged committee members to attend the working group meetings in person or via telecommunications. The setting is informal to provide lively dynamic conversation. He then turned to the next topic: A report from the Native Tutor Program in the Anchorage School District.

[8:46:35 AM](#)

DOREEN BROWN, Supervisor, Title VII Indian Education, Anchorage School District, referenced the committee packet handout and listed the resource positions available for cultural support. These positions are by Title VII, state general funds, and federal program funding. The positions which she is responsible for include: approximately forty-four Youth Development Tutors, working in K-12 programs; Community Counselors at the middle and high school levels; one Resource teacher; one Cultural Enrichment Specialist; and two Indigenous Language teachers

providing Yupik and Tlingit. All of these positions work specifically with Alaska Native and American Indian students. The charge is to increase the graduation rate, decrease the drop-out rate, and work on academics and cultural transitions. She indicated that she works closely with the Anchorage School District Superintendent, as well as The Native Advisory Committee, which is comprised of parents of Native students, educators, administrators, and high school students. Meetings are held in an open venue, inviting suggestions and opinions from the attending public. The feedback from these sources helps to ensure that Native needs are being met through the program.

8:50:35 AM

MS. BROWN stated that the tutors address not only the student, but the entire family, including elders, aunties, uncles, and cousins. The tutors are able to work with students in small groups, which allows for an opportunity to ensure that the curriculum is culturally responsive. The ELL (English Language Learners) program is another facet of the program. Established curriculum units may be a challenge for students who transfer between locales, and focus can be brought to adapt the curriculum to address the prior knowledge that an individual may have on a topic, maintaining a relevancy that otherwise might be lost. She stressed that this is critically important work for increasing the Native graduation rate. Community counselors are working at the middle and high school level, focusing on the social/emotion learning aspect, and ensuring that resources are available. Postsecondary Native students do not always navigate the system well and the advisors assist them in that effort. Plans are established to assist the student in mapping out a four year high school career. Attendance issues are monitored and transportation assistance can be provided.

8:52:59 AM

CHAIR SEATON queried whether the high school plan uses an IEP (individual education plan) model, and, if so, does every student in the tutoring program carry an IEP.

MS. BROWN responded that the Youth Development Tutor program does use the IEP model for elementary and middle school students. However it is no longer the norm at the high school, due to recent changes, and with over 400 students to assist at that level. The target is to meet with a student three times a

week, for thirty minutes a day, and focus on specific areas of concern.

[8:54:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON directed attention to a committee handout and noted the practice of having children raise their hands, without verbalizing, if they know the answer to a question. She asked if there is a significant difference found when students are encouraged to practice this technique.

MS. BROWN said that teacher development in this area is important, and how they can help students to express their knowledge of a subject, particularly in a group setting. She provided examples of how this can be accomplished, such as helping students understand the difference between the home and school cultures and how responses are appropriate in the different settings.

[8:57:46 AM](#)

MS. BROWN reported that research from the First Alaskans 2006 survey, "Getting Behind the Numbers," is an indicator reference utilized in the program, along with the 2009 Virtual School Clearinghouse drop-out indicators. Another resource employed is "How to Make Things More Culturally Relevant," as well as the 2003 First Alaskans study to address specific interventions for student.

CHAIR SEATON requested that the referenced material be forwarded to the committee.

[8:59:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ expressed concern that the Native programs are dependent on unstable federal dollars, and asked whether the foundation formula could be used to provide a predictable state funding source.

MS. BROWN reported that the Anchorage School District focuses on students who are doing well. "At the bottom of that barrel is our Native students, and then it would be African American students," she said. The district is putting energy towards providing equal access to these underserved students, not just throwing money at the issue. She illustrated her point using an analogy of having a General Practitioner treat a patient who has a severe heart issue; it wouldn't be done. As a parallel to

education, teachers are generalists but many students require the help of a specialist. Specialists are needed in the schools to serve the specific needs, and develop strategies to assist the struggling student population that includes Native Alaskans, ELL students, African Americans, and Pacific Islanders. Funding for the program is diversified through Title VII, under NCLB, and other federal sources such as Native Equity funding.

[9:03:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON pondered the possibility of reversing an achievement aspect in PE (Physical Education) by introducing traditional Native sports. The Native students would certainly have a feeling of achievement over the others who might be more challenged. She read from a committee handout, "In science class tools and techniques of survival used by First Alaskans are studied and after school traditional Native sports are practiced." Why aren't Native sports brought directly into the school, she asked.

MS. BROWN reported that the Cook Inlet Tribal Council has PE teachers at the middle and high school levels, providing Native Youth Olympics (NYO) as an elective credit; a class that has proved to be very popular, but future is tenuous, as the funding will end this year. Her program offers Junior Native Youth Olympics for first through sixth grade students. Participation is open to all children not just Natives.

[9:06:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON wondered if any Caucasian children participate.

MS. BROWN said yes, and NYO offers accessibility to sports that children may not otherwise experience if they are not cut out for hockey, wrestling, or basketball. The camaraderie that this competition affords is amazing, she said, and allows those who have never competed before to enter the arena and prove their abilities.

[9:08:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ recalled the discussion from an earlier committee meeting regarding the correlation between the success in ninth grade PE and a student's future success in high school. Promotion of alternative PE programs could allow more students to be successful.

MS. BROWN agreed and established that urban Native students do not find equal access to basketball, or football, for several reasons including costs, competition, and transportation. Additionally, if a student is in Resource, Special Education, these organized sports are not an available option.

[9:09:56 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON moved to the next topic, a synopsis of the student advisory program instituted in the Kenai Peninsula School District.

[9:11:14 AM](#)

SEAN DUSEK, Assistant Superintendant of Instruction, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, provided that the districts high schools have a population range of 300-500 students. In 2005 a program titled "Breaking Ranks," promoted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, was implemented. The program introduced a new three R's approach: Rigor of instruction, to challenge students; Relevance of instruction, students understand why they are learning particular concepts; and Relationships. The advisory program being implemented in the Kenai district arose from the relationship aspect of that program. Advisories were established on two different principles: social orientation, allowing for a personal connection to the student; or a curriculum based model, helping a student plan their educational career including postsecondary goals. He reported that three of the larger high schools have chosen the social approach. The program has developed into a student driven program, using student surveys to match interests of individuals with particular teachers, and providing the benefit of developing 1:1 personal relationships. Three other schools have taken up the curriculum based program, but the schools still retain a means to address the social component. The key aspect for these schools is their ability to match students with an advisory teacher who continues with them throughout high school. The district advisory program is a work in progress, he stressed, which the middle schools are just beginning to implement. The school board has been focused on graduation via individual attention, teaching to strengths, and addressing weaknesses. Developing a personal education plan (PEP) for each student, is a goal of the school board; a possibility with the advent of the advisories. Additionally, the board has requested that the school administration help seniors develop plans for postsecondary transitioning into

continuing education institutions, or for entering the work force. The graduation rate may not have increased because of these advisory efforts entirely, but the level has increased by about 10 per cent overall, and as high as 17 per cent in individual schools. He believes that the advisories, and the PEP approach, have been a contributing factor to this increase.

[9:18:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked about the district's teacher retention ability, which is a cornerstone of this program.

MR. DUSEK reported that the retention rate is approximately 90 percent, at the district's larger high schools. He opined that a student has an excellent chance of staying with the same [advisory] teacher for four years.

[9:19:24 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired whether the students tend to stay with the same advisor in the student driven program, like they do in the curriculum based program.

MR. DUSEK replied that they rotate on an 8 week basis. In a given year a student will work with three different teachers, each of whom will bring a different area of focus: robotics, strategy concepts, leadership, as well as involving the counselors to plan postsecondary options. These are small intense groups participating with a teacher in a mutually chosen area of high interest, he said, "that's not a normal, graded type class."

[9:21:09 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked about the relative graduation rates based on the two different models.

MR. DUSEK reported that Kenai's Central High School curriculum based program has served to raise their graduation rate from 72 to 89 percent, and Sterling's Skyview High School was at 68 percent and has risen to 80 percent, representing a student driven program. He will provide further outcome data on these two programs to the committee.

[9:23:50 AM](#)

BILL WATKINS, Principal, Kodiak High School, Kodiak, Alaska, emphasized how the condition of a facility effects the users, with a research history of 20 years. It does play a large role in push-outs, he opined. Information has been accumulated regarding ventilation systems, lighting, acoustics, and the general ascetics. He quoted one study that reported a 5.5-17 percent increase in academic achievement from students in facilities that provide quality surroundings.

[Due to technical difficulties, audio connection with the witness was lost.]

[9:26:36 AM](#)

EDDY JEANS, Director, School Finance and Facilities Section, Department of Education and Early Development, explained the 10 day rule: In accordance with the student accounting manual, a student will be dropped from the rolls, after 10 consecutive days of absence, if district officials are unable to make contact with the student/family. Responding to Chair Seaton, he explained that the intent of this policy is to keep the school in contact with the parents and to maintain an awareness of the locale of each student. The schools must drop the student from enrollment, if they are not able to reach them, as the family may have relocated to a new area. Additionally, he pointed out that the foundation funding program is based on enrollment, not attendance, directly relating to the 10 day policy.

[9:28:41 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON notated that the 10 day rule applies throughout the school year, and is not limited to the foundation formula count period.

MR. JEANS specified that the count period is a 20 day period in October. Thus, a student might be absent for five days prior to the period, and five days at the beginning of the period and be dropped from the attendance register.

[9:29:30 AM](#)

MR. JEANS referred to the committee's request for information regarding the Alaska School Activities Association (ASAA) stance on drug, alcohol, and tobacco use. He reported that the legislature provided funding for ASAA to conduct a prevention program. As a parent of two high school age children, he has had the opportunity to participate in the program first hand.

For every activity that a student enrolls in, the program is administered. The approach is to impose a progressive disciplinary action with an educational component. A student found in violation of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco policies will receive a penalty excluding them from sporting activities. The penalty may be reduced if they attend the educational program.

[9:31:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether this program is statewide.

MR. JEANS answered affirmatively.

^#hb206

HB 206-HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSM'T/POSTSECONDARY CLASS

[9:31:22 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."

EDDY JEANS, Director, School Finance and Facilities Section, Department of Education and Early Development, explained that HB 206 would require a second mandatory enrollment count, for 20 days, in the month of February. Under the old foundation program an optional count could be taken in February, but that was only for districts that had increases in enrollment. He reported that this did not happen very often in the larger districts, but did impact smaller districts. In any year, the department might have between three to six districts applying for this optional count period. The proposed bill requires two count periods of 20 days each, one in February and one in October, and guarantees that districts are funded based on the prior year count. The funding for the current year would be based on the two counts from the prior fiscal year; a guaranteed minimum level of funding. During the current school year, the October count will be taken, averaged with the count from the previous February, and if the count has increased a funding benefit will be realized to reflect the rise in average daily membership (ADM).

[9:33:15 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked whether formula funding is currently based on an estimate of projected enrollment without considering the previous year counts.

MR. JEANS clarified that funding is based solely on the current year count, as taken during the 20 day count period in October. Projections are received from school districts that are used to build the department's budget, but it does not impact how much money a district receives. District funding levels are based on one twelfth of what they received in the prior year, for the first nine months, then the final three months are adjusted in accordance with the current year count. One of the issues is that, with only one count required, schools may focus on retaining students just through that period. Also, a number of senior students may graduate mid-term, but schools are staffed based on autumn numbers, not on how many students they expect to have in the spring. Mr. Jeans reported that Commissioner LeDoux suggests a longer count period of perhaps three months, basing the funding on previous year counts, and a provision for district's to demonstrate a need due to increased enrollment. As proposed, HB 206 requires the averaging of two counts, which may cause some confusion. However, the bill does retain the basic concept to allow appropriate budgeting and a means for addressing an increase of enrollment, he opined.

[9:36:00 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON stated his understanding that Commissioner LeDoux would be interested in a five month count period. He asked if the average would be derived from the daily attendance, membership, or enrollment.

MR. JEANS explained that enrollment is different than attendance, and attendance is different from membership. Typically enrollment is a one day snapshot of how many students are enrolled in each grade and program. The average daily attendance (ADA) is exactly that: how many students are attending school, on average, on a daily basis. The average daily membership (ADM) represents how many students are enrolled in the school district, not necessarily attending on a given day. The current funding formula uses the ADM, based on the 20 day count period. He explained that the daily attendance is totaled for the 20 day period, divided back by 20 and the number arrived at represents the ADM. Thus, a student who is enrolled for 10 days, during that period, would count as half of a student.

[9:37:42 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON clarified that the alternatives, which Commissioner LeDoux discussed, were based on the ADM.

MR. JEANS confirmed the chairman's understanding and pointed out that the commissioner was also considering having the count occur over a longer period of time, 3-5 months, utilizing the same process that is now in place. Additionally, the current year funding would be based on the previous year's count, with the possibility to compensate for increased numbers.

[9:38:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked for clarity on the proposed time frame to establish the ADM.

MR. JEANS reviewed the count schedule as previously laid out. Additionally, he reiterated reasons for changing the current system: being able to utilize the prior year count will help district's during the budgeting process, knowing exactly what to expect for their budget, and also being able to receive a current year benefit should enrollment increase.

[9:39:44 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON stated that the committee is interested in statutory mechanisms to encourage retention of students. The count period change may stimulate districts to eliminate factors resulting in push-outs, or instituting other measures to increase the retention rate of student's throughout high school. The presumption is for this change to increase graduation rates. When only one count period occurs, he opined, there may not be a concerted effort to help students continue throughout the year.

[9:40:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON indicated that some families move during the school year, and she expressed her interest to ensure that a district is not penalized when this occurs. She addressed the handout and read: "Reduction in the spring is based on the drop-out rates from 2008 and 2009, as if it were 5.2 percent." She asked whether this legislation will make an incentive strong enough for the schools to make an effort to retain students, particularly problem students. Is there a possible fix for the numbers representing the students who graduate mid-year, she asked.

MR. JEANS addressed the dropout rate first, explaining that it was calculated using the number of students from the October count and establishing the number of students still enrolled at the beginning of summer. The rate arrived at was 5.2 percent, and has been declining, however it represents approximately 3,000 students statewide. Whatever means is adopted, to establish the ADM in schools, school budgets and district efforts of retaining students will be effected. He opined that changing the count method will not solve the drop-out problem, but it will exert financial pressure on schools to keep students engaged. Changing the count period will result in less funding than districts are accustomed to receiving. To offset the impact that this type of count/budget change will have in the first couple of years, consideration for increasing the base student allocation rate is in order. The increase would be important as a means to incentivize districts, not penalize them with a budget cut.

[9:44:35 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON summarized that when students move away a school would experience a decline in enrollment, but the funding is already in place. Further, if enrollment were to increase in the course of the year, a budget adjustment would be made to account for the additional numbers.

MR. JEANS confirmed that if enrollment has declined, a budget based on previous year counts, will provide a one year delay to adjust a schools budget.

[9:45:40 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ expressed her support for basing funding on previous year counts, noting the benefit to the budgeting process. However, a converse impact of a second count, due to the natural ebb and flow of a student population, may prove problematic. She directed attention to the committee packet and the memo received from the Southeast Island School District indicating annual number fluctuations that would jeopardize their future funding, under the proposed scenario.

MR. JEANS agreed and said that anything done outside of the current funding count period will have the largest effect on the state's smallest schools, and it may be difficult for some to survive.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked for clarity on the cost implications for the state's school districts when considering an ADM averaged over a five month count period versus two 20 day counts.

MR. JEANS responded that there may not be a big difference between the two resulting numbers, but when the count period is expanded, he said he believes lower counts will be the result.

[9:48:44 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON advised that at the next regular committee meeting a longitudinal study, undertaken by the Anchorage School District, will be presented. The data will indicate how a student who drops-out will probably drop-out multiple times throughout their high school career; very few students exit the system without returning. Schools need to be incentivized to keep these students engaged, he opined. Situations vary, he commented, and the same student may be dropping-out continuously, the family may be away fishing each year during the count period, or students may enroll in another school for part of the school year.

[9:51:51 AM](#)

MR. JEANS cautioned that perceptions may be skewed, and what is actually happening may be confused with what is thought to be occurring. Historical data does not indicate huge influxes of population, following a student count period, that would be detrimental to a district. The smallest schools are effected when, for instance, a family with six students relocates, representing a significant population change. Changes of this type are anomalies, not the norm. Situations do arise routinely, he reported, such as students leaving home correspondence programs and enrolling in a brick and mortar school.

[9:53:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked for the department's official position on HB 206. The testimony provided today appears to conflict, he noted, with the commissioner suggesting a lengthier count period and the director cautioning against changing the status quo.

MR. JEANS clarified that the most important aspect is, and the commissioner agrees, that funding be based on the prior year's

count, giving the districts a guaranteed base, and the bill provides this measure. There are varying methods for arriving at the ADM, and the commissioner prefers a count period extended beyond the current 20 days.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON maintained his inquiry for an official departmental position on HB 206.

MR. JEANS refrained from expressing an official position, pending further discussion with the commissioner.

[9:55:45 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked whether the longer count period requires implementing a new administrative process, or if it utilizes the current attendance methods and information.

MR. JEANS confirmed that HB 206 alters the count period process, but the procedures are in place and remain the same for obtaining the ADM.

CHAIR SEATON welcomed comment from the districts regarding the advantages of the different procedures.

[9:56:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked if the economy of scale should be taken into account, because of the effect it may have on smaller schools. Perhaps the means for funding smaller schools should be reconsidered, he opined.

MR. JEANS said that it is not his intent to suggest adjusting the school size table, but to caution the committee that extending the count period, many districts will experience a drop in their ADM count, and some schools will be seeking a form of relief. The apparent means to offset such a scenario, is an increase in the base student allocation.

[9:58:01 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON stated that the bill would be held for continued discussion.

Overview: Graduation Rate Working Group

[9:58:18 AM](#)

BILL WATKINS, Principal, Kodiak High School, advised that facility conditions are a major push-out factor. Nationwide, 50 percent of the schools have been identified as having sick building syndrome. Health research indicates a direct correlating influence of these buildings on teenagers with existing conditions such as asthma. Sick building syndrome has been thoroughly researched and the impacts it has on student attendance, and achievement levels. He offered to provide additional information on this topic to the committee. The advisory program was implemented two years ago in the Kodiak schools, and this year students are meeting with their advisory teacher once a week. The expectation is to increase these contacts to a daily basis. Effectiveness data on the advisory program is being collected via student surveys, GPA comparisons, attendance records, drop-out rates, number of students taking college entry or work-force readiness exams, number of students graduating with an established plan, and the number of students entering high school with a class course and post graduate plan in place. He touted the importance of the middle school advisory program for helping the students make a smooth transition into high school, and to guide them to the necessary course work for meeting their goals. The advisor expects to remain with a student for the four year duration, building a meaningful relationship. He reported that Kodiak has a teacher retention rate averaging 95 percent. The new assessment tools, particularly Key Train and WorkKeys, are being utilized. The advantage of the WorkKeys program has been the flexibility for testing, and individual motivational benefits that come from the instant test results, allowing a student to target curriculum needs, and resulting in increased student retention. Another key has been providing each student with a lap top computer for ease of viewing the Alaska Career Information System (ACIS) website, where the students build their career portfolios. Regarding the question of whether to restrict activities, he stated opposition to the four strikes and you're out approach. Activities are sometimes the only carrot that can be used to engage a student and the possibility should not be taken away regardless of drug/alcohol/tobacco abuse. Also, activity involvement provides a student with an additional adult to help guide them and keep them engaged and connected. He said that the school believes in the power of five: a 5:1 ratio, adult/coach to student in need, for creating success.

[10:06:03 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON solicited further comments on the bills in question, and thanked the day's participants.

10:07:18 AM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the Department of Education and Early Development meeting was adjourned at 10:07 a.m.