

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 22, 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

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Scott Kawasaki

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 297

"An Act establishing the governor's performance scholarship program and relating to the program; establishing the governor's performance scholarship fund and relating to the fund; relating to student records; making conforming amendments; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 206

"AN ACT RELATING TO THE LOCAL CONTRIBUTION TO PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 297

SHORT TITLE: POSTSECONDARY SCHOLARSHIPS

SPONSOR(S): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/19/10 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS

01/19/10	(H)	EDC, FIN
02/03/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
02/03/10	(H)	Heard & Held
02/03/10	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/12/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/12/10	(H)	Heard & Held
02/12/10	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/15/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/15/10	(H)	Heard & Held
02/15/10	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/17/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/17/10	(H)	Heard & Held
02/17/10	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/19/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/19/10	(H)	Heard & Held
02/19/10	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/22/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

C. J. REEVES, II, Vice President
 University of Alaska Southeast Student Government
 University of Alaska Southeast
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support for HB 297.

JESSICA ELLER, Student Senator
 University of Alaska Southeast Student Government
 University of Alaska Southeast
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support for HB 297 with a needs based component.

CHARLES SEDDON
 Class of 2010
 Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support for HB 297.

LESLIE SEDDON
 Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during discussion of HB 297.

NICOLE CARVAJAL
 University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)
 Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support for HB 297 with a needs based component.

CHELSEY DORMAN, Student Body President
Kenai Peninsula College
Kenai River Campus
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during discussion of HB 297.

EDDY JEANS, Director
School Finance and Facilities Section
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified and answered questions during discussion of HB 297.

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified and answered questions during discussion of HB 297.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:47 AM](#)

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Gardner, Buch, and Edgmon were present at the call to order. Representatives P. Wilson, Keller, and Munoz arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 297-POSTSECONDARY SCHOLARSHIPS

[8:03:09 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 297, "An Act establishing the governor's performance scholarship program and relating to the program; establishing the governor's performance scholarship fund and relating to the fund; relating to student records; making conforming amendments; and providing for an effective date."

[8:04:17 AM](#)

C. J. REEVES, II, Vice President, University of Alaska Southeast Student Government, University of Alaska Southeast, expressed support for HB 297, with the addition of a needs based

amendment. She described the difficulty of attending college without financial support. She reported that the UAS student government had polled the student body, and the response had been that students needed financial help. She stated that, nationally, Alaska had the smallest percentage of low income students attending college. She requested committee support for HB 297.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER clarified that the bill would not apply to currently enrolled students.

MS. REEVES acknowledged this.

[8:07:35 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked Ms. Reeves if her high school classes had included the four years of math, four years of science, four years of English, and three years of social studies which were required in this bill.

MS. REEVES replied that she graduated from a Florida high school, and that those classes were required.

CHAIR SEATON explained that he wanted to determine if the preparation base required in the scholarship program was adequately preparing students for college.

[8:08:48 AM](#)

MS. REEVES, in response to Representative Wilson, replied that she did not feel completely prepared for college when she enrolled at UAS, even though she had attained a 3.8 grade point at her high school.

[8:10:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked if the needs based component to the bill should be in addition to the current bill structure.

MS. REEVES declared that a high school grade point average did not determine a student's success in college. She expressed a preference for SB 224, the Senate version of HB 297.

[8:11:41 AM](#)

JESSICA ELLER, Student Senator, University of Alaska Southeast Student Government, University of Alaska Southeast, stated that

Alaska has had the lowest financial support for students over the past 16 years. She opined that giving financial aid to low income Alaskan students would benefit the Alaskan work force and economy. She shared that she would not personally qualify for the needs based support, but that she still supported HB 297.

[8:12:59 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON mentioned that Jessica's father was a nationally recognized, award winning teacher in Homer. He asked if the courses she took in high school had prepared her for UAS, or was remedial coursework necessary.

MS. ELLER replied that she took four years of math and three years of science, as well as a community service requirement. She opined that the grade point average (GPA) was not as important as the rigor of the curriculum in preparation for university. She stated that she was well prepared for college coursework.

[8:15:54 AM](#)

CHARLES SEDDON, Class of 2010, expressed his continued interest in the Governor's Performance Scholarship (GPS) since its announcement. He reported that he had dropped his elective classes, added more science and math classes, and gave up a part time job and his hobbies, all in order to meet the criteria of the scholarship. He stated that the scholarship offered him the opportunity to continue his education and remain in Alaska. He asked that HB 297 be amended to include the Class of 2010. He described himself as a needs based student, as well as an A grade point average (GPA) student, and more than willing to earn his way.

[8:18:08 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked whether the math and science classes available were adequate preparation for college.

MR. SEDDON replied that he was enrolled in college algebra and had taken a private pilot ground school course. He stated that he was not taking any remedial courses.

[8:18:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked what area of study holds his interest, and where, without the GPS, he has considered in or out of state postsecondary study.

MR. SEDDON replied that he was interested in medicine, and that, although he wanted to stay in Alaska, he would probably have to go out of state.

[8:19:38 AM](#)

LESLIE SEDDON shared that she was the parent of a 2010 graduate and that she had submitted a written testimony. She referred to the Transition Provision in HB 297, page 13, lines 19-21. She stated the importance of including the graduating class of 2010, and she noted that the seniors had worked hard to meet the requirements so as not to be excluded from the scholarship opportunity. She acknowledged that the financial assistance would not be available until July, 2011. She opined that funding was available to include the class of 2010.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER acknowledged the disappointment for graduating seniors, and asked what lead to the belief that the scholarship would be offered to these students.

MS. SEDDON replied that the high school had notified the seniors, and worked with the students to adjust curriculum to qualify. She opined that as the GPS was high on the governor's priority, she had assumed that it would pass this year.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER clarified that HB 297 was not written to take effect in the current year, and that there had never been a decision to specifically exclude the graduating class of 2010. She stated the possibility that HB 297 would not pass, or could be amended.

[8:23:46 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON pointed out that the current version of HB 297 did not have a needs based component.

[8:24:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON suggested a review of the development of HB 297.

[8:24:31 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON outlined the process for passage of a bill, and how funding is separately allocated. He explained that the current funding suggestion was for an account from which the generated earnings would be used for the scholarships. He welcomed the preparation for college that students were already exhibiting.

8:26:43 AM

NICOLE CARVAJAL, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), provided statistics for low income family members who go to college which showed the national average was 28 percent, and that the Alaska average of 7.9 percent was the lowest rate in the U.S. She mentioned that the next closest was Nevada with 14.2 percent. She directed attention to the fact that Alaska had ranked last for 16 years. She spoke out in support for an amendment of HB 297 to include a needs based component. She opined that this was an investment in a trained workforce for Alaska, as many students would not otherwise attend college. She said that although she qualified for the University of Alaska Scholars Program, she still needed to work to support herself.

8:29:00 AM

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if Ms. Carvajal had taken four years of high school math.

MS. CARVAJAL replied no, but that she did take a rigorous course load. She expressed her concern that this focus for math, English, social studies, and science would drain resources from alternative classes.

8:29:36 AM

CHAIR SEATON asked about unmet financial need. He referred to previous testimony about the Oregon Plan, and he indicated that some financial plans required student participation. He asked what amount of student financial participation was appropriate.

MS. CARVAJAL replied that it was not unreasonable for students to hold a job while attending school, but she opined that it may inhibit academic success.

CHAIR SEATON relayed that the Oregon Plan had indicated how 15 hours of weekly work for 48 weeks each year, was reasonable and not proven to be detrimental.

MS. CARVAJAL replied that this may depend on the job, as some jobs pay minimally. She offered her belief that a set number of working hours was more reasonable than a set amount of money to contribute.

[8:32:32 AM](#)

CHELSEY DORMAN, Student Body President, Kenai Peninsula College, Kenai River Campus, reiterated that this bill was an investment for Alaska and its future students.

[8:33:28 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON described the two opportunities that this scholarship provided: vocational/technical, and academic. He directed attention to an amendment to allow a cross application for the use of a scholarship to either track.

MS. CARVAJAL replied that a discussion among the coalition of student leaders had supported equal funding be applied to either track.

[8:35:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON identified the program as being more than a scholarship, but as education reform. He asked how the program would be seen as an incentive for lower income students.

MS. DORMAN said that there was strong support from the small communities. She noted a desire for an option to the Pell grants, and she reported that Alaska was the only state without a state funded scholarship.

[8:37:25 AM](#)

MS. CARVAJAL reported that she would have taken 3 years of science and 4 years of math to meet the requirements, but she opined that the students who qualified for the needs based may not have the home support to take the necessary requirements. She expressed the primary concern should be the creation of a scholarship program.

[8:38:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON clarified that support for the needs based program was twofold: to help low income students receive

financial assistance and to offer the framework for required classes.

MS. CARVAJAL agreed that it would encourage students to take more rigorous classes. She offered her belief that she would have been better prepared for college had this been available.

[8:38:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked that every witness respond whether their school had offered the 4 years of science, 4 years of math, and 3 years of social studies, and, if not, would their parents have insisted that the school offer this curriculum if the GPS existed. She expressed a desire for schools to offer these courses.

[8:39:33 AM](#)

MS. CARVAJAL replied that North Pole High School did offer these courses, and that her mother would have demanded that the courses be offered.

[8:39:45 AM](#)

MS. DORMAN stated that Nikiski High School also offered these courses, and that the parents of students would have also demanded that the courses be provided.

[8:41:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked the students present to respond whether their high school had offered this course curriculum. [Eight students raised their hands to indicate yes.] Next, Representative P. Wilson asked if their parents would have insisted that these classes be offered. [Six students raised their hands to indicate yes.]

CHAIR SEATON asked if the students would have requested the classes if their parents had not.

MS. ELLER stressed the importance of curriculum reform to hold high school students to a high standard, but she pointed out that what the parents want may not always be best for the students. Furthermore, she expressed concern for keeping the arts and foreign languages programs.

[8:44:14 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON, in reference to the earlier poll conducted by Representative P. Wilson, clarified that most of the students had responded that the curriculum was available, and that their parents would also have insisted on the curriculum.

[8:44:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked how many of the students present were from small schools. [The hand count was 8.]

CHAIR SEATON asked to clarify the definition of a small school.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON replied that it was any school outside of Fairbanks and Anchorage.

[8:45:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked how many of the students present were required to enroll in remedial classes. [The hand count was 7.]

CHAIR SEATON interjected that although the rigorous classes were available, students may not have taken them, and he noted that a little over half of the students present had to take remedial classes.

[8:46:23 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON closed public testimony.

[8:46:37 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:46 to 8:50.

[8:50:38 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON directed attention to the packet of amendments and began consideration and discussion.

[8:51:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ moved to adopt Amendment 1, labeled Version 26G-2, (2/12/2010), (12:42 pm), which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Page 1, line 9, following "award of a":

Insert "merit-based"

Page 3, line 17, following "academic scholarship":

Delete "and"

Insert ", "

Page 3, line 17, following "school scholarship":

Insert "and a needs-based scholarship"

Page 7, line 5, following "awards for the":

Delete "program"

Insert "merit-based programs"

Page 8, following line 3:

Insert:

"Sec. 14.43.828. Eligibility for a needs-based scholarship and maximum awards. (a) Subject to appropriation, the commission shall award a needs-based scholarship to a student who meets the eligibility criteria for the award.

(b) A student is eligible to receive a needs-based scholarship if the student

(1) is eligible for a merit-based academic scholarship or a merit-based career and technical school scholarship; and

(2) can demonstrate in a year in which the student receives a scholarship that the student has unmet financial need greater than \$2,000.

(c) The maximum amount for the needs-based award is 50 percent of unmet financial need greater than \$2,000.

(d) The qualified postsecondary institution attended by the student shall determine unmet financial need by subtracting from the student's allowable standard costs of attendance at the institution all non-loan sources of financial support, including an expected family contribution and all federal, state, and private scholarships or grants received by the student.

(e) In this section,

(1) "allowable standard costs of attendance" means

(A) for a student who receives a merit-based academic scholarship, the lesser of the

(i) standard costs of attendance at the University of Alaska, as determined by the commission; or

(ii) actual costs of attendance at the qualified postsecondary institution that the student attends or plans to attend, as determined by the commission;

(B) for a student who receives a merit-based career and technical school scholarship, the costs of attendance at the qualified postsecondary institution that the student attends or plans to attend, as determined by the commission based on room and board costs that do not exceed the standard room and board costs at the University of Alaska as determined by the commission;

(2) "expected family contribution" means the amount a student or the student's family is expected to pay towards the student's costs of attendance, as determined by use of the most recent federal Free Application for Federal Student Aid."

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON objected for discussion.

[8:51:50 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON moved to adopt conceptual Amendment 1 to proposed Amendment 1:

Page 1, line 17, following, "Eligibility for a":
Delete "needs-based scholarship"
Insert "unmet needs scholarship component"

CHAIR SEATON explained that the intent is to include an unmet needs component in the GPS.

[8:53:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether the unmet needs would be calculated after possible receipt of a federal PELL Grant.

CHAIR SEATON explained that this component would be offered if there was an unmet need of more than \$2,000.

[8:54:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER, directed attention to the bill page 3, line 12, Article 11A, and said the reference suggests that the conceptual amendment is unnecessary.

CHAIR SEATON agreed that the conceptual amendment did not change the structure of the bill, but that this would clarify the perception for needs based scholarship.

[8:56:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER stated support for conceptual Amendment, and pointed out that it will relate to language on page 1, lines 9, 17-19, and page 2, line 4, as well as others. He asked for comment from the Department of Education and Early Development (EED).

CHAIR SEATON, in response to Representative Keller, explained that, as a conceptual amendment, the language would be made consistent throughout the bill.

[8:57:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ stated support for conceptual Amendment 1, and acknowledged how input from the University of Alaska students was the impetus for this proposed Amendment 1.

[8:58:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked whether proposed Amendment 1 and conceptual Amendment 1 would be tabled for further consideration. She also asked for comment from EED.

[8:59:16 AM](#)

EDDY JEANS, Director, School Finance and Facilities Section, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), said that conceptual Amendment 1 did provide clarity for proposed Amendment 1, and it did follow the intent of the EED.

[8:59:57 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON indicated that the language for conceptual Amendment 1 would be carried throughout the bill. He underscored the need to provide this language for purposes of clarity.

[9:00:55 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON, hearing no objection, announced conceptual Amendment 1, to Amendment 1, adopted.

[9:01:15 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:01 to 9:03.

[9:03:05 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON referred to proposed Amendment 1, page 2, lines 4-5, [subsection (c)] and explained that if, after reception of all other financial aid, there was still an unmet need greater than \$2,000, this would pay 50 percent of the unmet need.

[9:04:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked if there was a ceiling for this financial award.

CHAIR SEATON replied that the ceiling would be 50 percent of the unmet need.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON pointed out that the tuition rates for two years at the University of Alaska was included in the bill, so that would be a part of the ceiling.

CHAIR SEATON replied that the merit based scholarship was not tied to the tuition but to the unmet need of the entire cost of attending college. He explained that the purpose was to assist with access to college, and he said that if a student had no other means for funding after other sources were exhausted, this would provide 50 percent of the unmet need.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON indicated that there was not a ceiling.

CHAIR SEATON responded that the cost would be determined by the department.

[9:07:43 AM](#)

MR. JEANS directed attention to proposed Amendment 1, page 2, line 12, "allowable standard costs of attendance" which he explained was a term used by the Alaska Postsecondary Commission for determining the total costs of attendance, which was capped by the standard costs of attendance at the University of Alaska. He explained that after other scholarships and grants were considered, the balance of cost was addressed through the needs based component.

[9:09:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON stated support for the provision but he questioned an increase in the overall demand with the additional funding component.

MR. JEANS anticipated the same number of participants, but that the fiscal note would be adjusted.

[9:10:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ declared her surprise at the 50 percent provision, as she reflected that earlier discussion was for the state to pay all but \$2,000.

[9:11:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER pointed to proposed Amendment 1, page 2, lines 15-19, and asked to clarify that (i) referred to the University of Alaska, and (ii) referred to other qualified postsecondary institutions.

[9:12:06 AM](#)

MR. JEANS addressed proposed Amendment 1, page 2, line 14, and stated that the cost was based on the lesser of (i) or (ii). He elaborated on an earlier question by Representative Edgmon, and noted that the cap was the cost to attend the University of Alaska.

[9:12:44 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked about the availability of the standards that the commission uses to determine costs of attendance.

MR. JEANS replied that the information would be provided to the committee, and he recounted that costs include books, housing, and meals.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER clarified that the standards are not in statute.

[9:13:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH said the figures are based on 2010 tuition, and asked direction to locate the reference in the bill.

MR. JEANS replied that it was on page 7, line 8.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH pointed out that this was the cap.

MR. JEANS agreed that this was the cap on the performance scholarship. He clarified that a second cap was for the allowable standard cost of attendance, which was a separate calculation.

[9:14:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER, referring to the 50 percent of unmet needs, identified that this was distinct from the levels of performance award, which retained the incentive of higher award for higher grades.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked if that was accurate.

[9:15:46 AM](#)

MR. JEANS explained that even if a lower level scholarship was attained, there was still the unmet need component to help pay for the total allowable cost. He said that a 100 percent coverage for the unmet need above \$2,000 would negate the value for the different levels of scholarship. That was the reason to only offer a 50 percent coverage.

[9:16:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked to clarify that the unmet need covered food, lodging, and books and some of the tuition.

MR. JEANS concurred.

[9:17:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON removed her objection.

CHAIR SEATON, hearing no further objection, announced Amendment 1, as amended, adopted.

[9:18:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ moved to adopt Amendment 2, labeled 26G-2, (2/10/2010), (1:14 pm), which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Page 5, line 28:

Delete "grade-point"
Insert "grade"

Page 5, line 30, following "scholarship;":

Insert "the top tier is the A average tier, the second tier is the B average tier, and the third tier is the C plus average tier; the grade-point average for the A average tier is 3.5 or higher, for the B average tier is less than 3.5 but no less than 3.0, and for the C plus average tier is less than 3.0 but no less than 2.5; the board shall set by regulation minimum requirements based on a substantially similar standard for districts that do not assign grades;"

Page 6, following line 2:

Insert "(4) a process by which a student who meets the grade standards in (2) of this subsection for a particular tier, but does not meet the minimum scores established under (3) of this subsection for that tier, may apply for a lower tier scholarship;"

Page 6, line 3:

Delete "(4)"
Insert "(5)"

Page 6, line 5:

Delete "(5)"
Insert "(6)"

Page 6, line 7:

Delete "(6)"
Insert "(7)"

Page 6, line 23:

Delete "grade-point"
Insert "grade"

Page 6, line 24, following "school;":

Insert "the minimum is C plus average; the C plus average requirement is a grade-point average of 2.5 or higher; the board shall set by regulation minimum requirements based on a substantially similar standard for districts that do not assign grades;"

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON objected for discussion.

[9:18:20 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON explained that the intent of proposed Amendment 2 is to provide a letter grade qualification rather than a grade point average (GPA) number.

[9:19:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked whether amendment alters the function of the bill.

[9:20:05 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[9:20:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked where the award tiers are set out in the bill.

CHAIR SEATON located the language on page 5.

[9:21:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if the highest tier was 3.5 or 4.0. She offered her belief that Tier A should not be a 3.5 GPA, and asked if it was appropriate to put this into statute.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON, reflecting that there is not a grading standard in Alaska, asked how this will be addressed.

CHAIR SEATON replied that the standardized tests would establish the bar.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER ascertained that a similar problem arose with the Alaska Scholars program, and pointed out that 34 percent, of those students, required remedial classes in math or English. She stated her belief that the intent is to reform K-12 education, and opined that Amendment 2, by lowering the top tier, was diluting the rigor of the bill. She said, "An A should be something special."

CHAIR SEATON asked to clarify whether an A- would drop a student off the top tier.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER replied that, in the broader sense, "an A is an A, and a B is a B." She reported that students taking

Advanced Placement (AP) classes could attain a GPA higher than 4.0. She stressed her desire to retain the rigor of the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked to hear comment from EED.

[9:26:46 AM](#)

MR. JEANS shared that the governor desires that both the GPA and the letter grades be reflected in the legislation. He offered that as students would be taking a more rigorous curriculum, a 3.5, or higher, GPA should qualify for the highest level scholarship.

[9:27:49 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked if there was a statewide standard for a 3.8 or a 3.5 GPA to translate to a letter grade.

[9:28:29 AM](#)

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), replied that there is not a statewide standard, that each district has its own standard. He shared that some districts use a 4-point scale, and a few use a 5-point scale, for advanced placement courses. He noted that some districts also give significance to a plus or minus designation, but there is not a standard for this, either. He summarized that, generally, a 3.5 GPA means that a student has attained half A's and half B's.

[9:29:37 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON pointed out that there is nothing in the bill to standardize the scale used, or give additional weight for taking AP classes.

MR. JEANS declared that the department's intent is to require districts to use a 4-point GPA scale.

CHAIR SEATON observed that this should be stipulated in the bill.

[9:30:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH stated his understanding that proposed Amendment 2 is an attempt to establish in statutory definitions of letter grades for GPA ranges.

MR. JEANS concurred.

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ asked about the cut scores for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the ACT test requirements.

MR. JEANS replied that EED could make recommendations, but that it was up to the Alaska State Board of Education EED to adopt those scores.

[9:31:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked to receive a comparison of the economics for the various award levels, to better understand the incentive for each tier.

MR. JEANS agreed to provide the information to the committee.

[9:34:29 AM](#)

MR. MORSE, in response to Representative P. Wilson, explained that "less than" is more explicit because a decimal can be carried out several places.

[9:35:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON, referring to proposed Amendment 2, page 1, line 10, asked if "for districts" includes private schools, correspondence schools, and home schools.

MR. JEANS replied that some districts are on a standards based system and do not assign grades. He explained that EED requires, as part of the GPS approval process, that the standards are convertible to a letter grade.

[9:36:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER, referring to earlier testimony that a 3.5 GPA could mean half A's and half B's, requested removal of the language labeling the top tier as an A average.

CHAIR SEATON offered an example for an academic student who could not get an A in physical education, and therefore would not qualify for the top tier. He asked if that was encouraging excellence, or might a student seek out less challenging courses in order to achieve and maintain an A average. He asked whether

the scholarship GPA will be measured by the core classes alone, or include every class taken.

[9:39:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER expressed the need for AP classes to be graded on a 5-point scale, which would allow a student the opportunity to take more difficult classes, without compromising their GPA. She offered her support for the scholarship to be measured only against the core classes.

[9:41:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER offered that this may put extreme pressure on a teacher for grading.

[9:42:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH declared that HB 297 is a transition towards a more rigorous curriculum. He conveyed that students require incentives to take challenging classes, and opined that proposed Amendment 2 does not lower expectations, but rather quantifies grades on a statewide level.

[9:44:04 AM](#)

MR. JEANS, in response to Representative Edgmon's comment, said that the UA Scholars Program is awarded to the top 10 percent of students attending high school.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked if it is also awarded at vocational schools.

CHAIR SEATON clarified that the UA Scholars Program is not funded by the state.

[9:45:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked about the practical application of proposed Amendment 2, and how it relates with the UA Scholars Program.

[9:45:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ expressed support for proposed Amendment 2, as it offers another opportunity for a student to qualify for a scholarship award, outside of the UA Scholars Program.

[9:46:12 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON expressed his concern that grade point inflation might occur, in order for students to qualify for the GPS.

[9:46:59 AM](#)

MR. JEANS referred to the A, B, and C+ average and offered his belief that the governor intent is for students to qualify using the letter grades as a basis. He noted that the bill does not require a student to achieve straight A's in order to maintain a 4.0 GPA and qualify for the top tier award; an encouragement for students to take a rigorous class load.

[9:48:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER moved to adopt conceptual Amendment 1 to Amendment 2:

Delete "3.5"
Insert "3.8"

Delete "A average tier" [all letter grade tiers]
Insert "tier 1, tier 2, or tier 3"

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER stated that this amendment will bring accuracy to the bill. She opined that a student's score reflecting half A's and half B's, resulting in a 3.5 GPA, does not constitute an A student, and, hence, the top tier should not be considered an A average tier.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON objected for discussion.

[9:49:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER argued that the amendment is insignificant as there are three basic criteria for a student to qualify: the grades, the cut score on the ACT or SAT test, and the curriculum.

[9:50:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON expressed concern for striving students, and she suggested having conceptual Amendment 1 reflect a GPA of 3.6.

[9:51:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH commented that it is important to retain the advanced placement courses, but that it is also necessary to return to a statewide standard of 4.0 GPA. He stated support for proposed Amendment 2, but not for the conceptual amendment.

[9:53:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER pointed out that the cut scores for ACT and SAT are not in statute. She agreed that the AP classes encourage students to achieve, but she opined that the 4.0 GPA is a disincentive. She offered her belief that should the tier levels be set low, an unintended consequence may occur and said, "[It may cause] a lazy factor for A students, many of whom don't learn great work habits because ... [school is] easy from kindergarten on." She emphasized that no matter where the standard is set, someone would always be excluded. She stressed that establishing half A's and half B's as the top tier, for GPS, does not reward the "best of the best."

[9:55:27 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON opined that this is not the only performance incentive. He expressed his desire for every student to be encouraged to excel, and not just the straight A student. He stated opposition the conceptual Amendment 1.

[9:56:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON stated opposition to the conceptual amendment.

[9:56:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER, recalled the GPS goal of reaching for real excellence, and expressed disappointment. She said, "I see this as building in slack for the best already."

[9:57:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked what determines an A grade.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER replied that 4.0 is an A, and 3.8 is a B+.

CHAIR SEATON clarified that conceptual Amendment 1, to Amendment 2, removes the A average term, and introduces a different label.

[9:57:41 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:57 to 9:58.

[9:58:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER relayed that the argument was convincing and stated support for the conceptual amendment. He said he had not considered that the cut score is not in statute. In further reflection he said, "There "really is an almost unstoppable pressure to lower [educational] standards."

[9:59:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON noted the disparity of instructional service and curriculum quality among the 53 statewide school districts and said that he would defer to the judgment EED. He stated his opposition to conceptual Amendment 1.

[10:00:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON stated that this bill is meant to stimulate education reform. She emphasized that the state's current education system is not performing adequately. She expressed support for setting higher standards, and stated support for the conceptual amendment.

[10:01:38 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON offered his belief that this will set such a tight grade range that grade inflation could become an issue. He stated that any grade lower than an A may disqualify a student from the top tier, and conjectured that grades are a target and an impetus, not an end all. He opined that an A tier for a GPA of 3.5, and above, is reasonable and encourages a rigorous curriculum. The benefit to student achievement by setting a higher level is questionable.

[10:03:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER, referring to Representative Edgmon's deference to the judgment of EED, offered her belief that departmental judgment will be based on the judgment of the current administration. She agreed that there is a disparity in

educational opportunities for rural and urban districts, emphasizing that there is not grade disparity, but achievement disparity. She stressed that conceptual Amendment 1 will reserve the highest GPS award for students who demonstrate the highest achievement.

[10:05:19 AM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Gardner and Keller voted in favor of conceptual Amendment 1 to Amendment 2. Representatives Buch, Munoz, P. Wilson, Edgmon, and Seaton voted against it. Therefore, conceptual Amendment 1, to Amendment 2, failed by a vote of 2-5.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON removed her objection to Amendment 2.

CHAIR SEATON, hearing no further objection, announced Amendment 2 adopted.

[HB 297 was held over.]

[10:07:58 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:08 a.m.