

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 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

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 221(EDC)  
"An Act establishing an advisory task force on higher education and career readiness in the legislative branch of government; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 221

SHORT TITLE: SCHOLARSHIPS/ LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCES

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

01/19/10	(S)	READ THE FIRST MR. LAMKINE - REFERRALS
01/19/10	(S)	EDC, FIN
01/27/10	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM FAHRENKAMP 203
01/27/10	(S)	Heard & Held
01/27/10	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
01/29/10	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM FAHRENKAMP 203
01/29/10	(S)	Moved CSSB 221(EDC) Out of Committee
01/29/10	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/01/10	(S)	EDC RPT CS 4DP NEW TITLE
02/01/10	(S)	DP: MEYER, THOMAS, DAVIS, STEVENS
03/08/10	(S)	FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532

03/08/10 (S) Heard & Held  
03/08/10 (S) MINUTE(FIN)  
03/10/10 (S) FIN RPT CS(EDC) 6DP  
03/10/10 (S) DP: HOFFMAN, STEDMAN, HUGGINS, THOMAS,  
EGAN, ELLIS  
03/10/10 (S) FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532  
03/10/10 (S) Moved CSSB 221(EDC) Out of Committee  
03/10/10 (S) MINUTE(FIN)  
03/12/10 (S) TRANSMITTED TO (H)  
03/12/10 (S) VERSION: CSSB 221(EDC)  
03/15/10 (H) READ THE FIRST MR. LAMKINE - REFERRALS  
03/15/10 (H) EDC, FIN  
03/22/10 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

SENATOR GARY STEVENS

Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented CSSB 221(EDC) as the prime sponsor.

TIM LAMKIN, Staff

Senator Gary Stevens  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided additional information on CSSB 221(EDC), on behalf of Senator Stevens, prime sponsor.

BRENDA BAUTSCH, Education Policy Specialist  
National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)  
Denver, Colorado

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided a PowerPoint presentation titled "Improving Higher Education."

CARL ROSE, Executive Director  
Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in favor of SB 221.

BARB ANGAIK, President  
National Education Association-Alaska (NEA-Alaska)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in favor of SB 221.

MARY FRANCIS, Executive Director  
Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA)

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in favor of SB 221.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:02:47 AM](#)

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

**SB 221-SCHOLARSHIPS/ LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCES**

[8:03:00 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 221(EDC), "An Act establishing an advisory task force on higher education and career readiness in the legislative branch of government; and providing for an effective date."

[8:03:21 AM](#)

SENATOR GARY STEVENS, Alaska State Legislature, informed the committee CSSB 221(EDC) was the result of statistics and conclusions found in a book titled, *Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America's Public Universities*, by William Bowen. Present day universities, including the University of Alaska, are dedicated to equal opportunity and affordability for students; however, the fact is that less than 60 percent of the students entering four-year colleges are graduating. Senate Bill 221 creates a task force that would research this problem and what can be done in Alaska. He read the following from the above referenced book:

Educational attainment in the United States today is highly consequential.

[8:10:06 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS related the following statistics: people with a bachelor's degree earn 60 percent more over a lifetime than those with a high school diploma; college graduates live healthier and longer lives and are less dependent on social programs; college graduates participate more in civic

activities. In fact, by improving college success, Alaska will increase individual economic and societal benefits. He listed several reasons why students are unable to complete college and noted that the task force would be charged to identify these, gather and analyze data, and find solutions. Senator Stevens acknowledged there has been criticism about forming another task force; however, he listed positive contributions made by previous task forces, and stressed that this task force could make an enormous contribution to the University of Alaska (UA).

8:12:34 AM

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON agreed that a task force could be helpful, but she opined that the remedial education focus should be toward K-12 institutions, and not at the college level.

8:13:55 AM

SENATOR STEVENS concurred that remedial education does not belong in college; however, students are not sufficiently prepared in grammar and other basics of education.

8:15:03 AM

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER observed that members interested in this subject have heard extensive testimony and studied the issue. She suggested that the reasons students do not complete college are the same nationally, and information is already available.

SENATOR STEVENS agreed that the problem is not new; however, UA does not have an effective means for helping students complete their degree, outside of a one week pre-college camp for students from small communities. He related an anecdotal story of a student who has succeeded without support from the university. After a dismal freshman year at UAA, the student did not receive counseling, except for help with financial aid. Senator Stevens advised that the university system needs to be able to identify students at risk and provide more guidance for them, as private colleges do.

8:20:15 AM

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER recalled one of the UA programmatic priorities included funding for a student success initiative that would identify and support students who are most at risk for not succeeding; however, this program was not funded by the legislature. She assured the committee that the UA is aware of

the problem and of "what needs to happen" but also needs the resources to act.

SENATOR STEVENS remarked:

... the university needs to find a way to solve this problem, and shouldn't be coming back to us to say 'We can't do it unless you give us more money'.... We can expect more from our institutions.

8:21:44 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked whether the task force could be expanded to include representatives from industry and workforce development. He noted that the university has been asked to include more vocational training, particularly at the smaller campuses, and other programs, such as two-year certification classes, should be represented.

SENATOR STEVENS responded that the membership of the task force is not exclusive, and could be amended without objection by the sponsors. In fact, student representatives were previously added. He further advised that industry and universities are in agreement regarding the levels of expertise needed from high school graduates.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER observed that community college representatives would be able to represent the needs of industry.

SENATOR STEVENS indicated that suggestions for additions to the membership of the task force are welcome.

8:26:28 AM

TIM LAMKIN, Staff to Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, summarized CSSB 221(EDC) by saying that the bill establishes a task force with a focus on higher education and career readiness. The reference to career readiness indicates that the bill seeks to ensure that high school graduates are prepared with the skills needed for college, or to enter the workforce. Mr. Lamkin informed the committee the task force would be comprised of the following 18 members: the governor or designee; the executive director of the Alaska Postsecondary Education Commission or designee; the commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development or designee; one member appointed by the governor who represents vocational,

technical training, or apprenticeship programs in the state; a student representative of the K-12 system and a student representative of the postsecondary system; the president of UA; the executive director of the Association of Alaska School Boards; the executive director of the Alaska Association of School Administrators; the president of the National Education Association-Alaska (NEA-Alaska); the president of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN); the chairs of the senate and house committees on education; one member from a private [educational] institution; a member appointed by the governor who represents postsecondary institutions not affiliated with UA; three faculty members specialized in remedial education, at least one of whom does not reside in Anchorage, Fairbanks, or Juneau. The task force would meet at least once every three months in order to compile data and identify ways to decrease remediation, improve graduation rates, and improve the overall success of the state's education system.

[8:30:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked whether the chairs of the legislative committees would be able to appoint designees considering this is an election year.

MR. LAMKIN opined the sponsors are open to making allowances, although the legislation does not specify.

[8:31:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON restated his concern about the work load for the chair of a legislative committee also serving on the task force during an election year.

MR. LAMKIN suggested a staff person may be assigned "the bulk of the work."

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON assumed the staff person would not sit in at the meetings in place of the chair.

[8:33:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked whether there are two unions that serve teachers.

MR. LAMKIN stated that NEA-Alaska represents K-12 teachers. The sponsors assume task force members from the university system would represent postsecondary educators.

[8:34:13 AM](#)

BRENDA BAUTSCH, Education Policy Specialist, National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), informed the committee the NCSL is the bi-partisan membership organization of the 50 state legislatures that seeks to strengthen state legislatures through research, information-sharing, and forum. Furthermore, NCSL research topics range from energy to health and education. Recently, the NCSL education program focused on college access and success. Ms. Bautsch directed attention to slide 3 of the PowerPoint presentation titled, "Improving Higher Education," and noted that UA serves a non-traditional student population. For example, a description of the student population at UA Anchorage (UAA) is as follows: 55 percent of students are full-time, 45 percent are part-time; 10 percent are American Indian or Alaska Native; 44 percent are age 25 or older; an open access university that serves students that may need remedial coursework.

[8:36:12 AM](#)

MS. BAUTSCH presented slide 4 that indicated that the retention rates for full- and part-time students attending four-year institutions and returning for their second year are a U.S. rate of 75.5 percent and an Alaska rate of 66.6 percent. Slide 5 indicated the retention rates for full- and part-time students attending two-year institutions and returning for their second year are a U.S. rate of 53 percent and an Alaska rate of 47.6 percent.

[8:37:09 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked how two-year institutions were identified by the study, noting that UA campuses across the state include rural and main campuses offering a combination of programs.

[8:38:43 AM](#)

MS. BAUTSCH explained the data was based on whether a student was enrolled in a two- or four-year program, and not on the status of the institution. Slide 6 indicated the three year graduation rates for full-time associate degree-seeking students are a U.S. rate of 27.8 percent and an Alaska rate of 24.1 percent. Slide 7 indicated the graduation rates for full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students are a U.S. rate of 56.1 percent and an Alaska rate of 22.4 percent. Ms. Bautsch pointed

out other states are struggling with the issue of how to improve retention and graduation rates, and have created higher education task forces. Slide 9 listed examples from other states to be used as resources, but she cautioned that each state is unique in its higher education system and student population. The proposed legislation was modeled after the Arkansas 2007 Legislative Task Force on Higher Education Remediation, Retention and Graduation Rates. In August 2008, Arkansas released its final report leading to the implementation of legislation, policies, and programs. Slide 11 was an excerpt showing how Arkansas tracks legislative responses to the task force's recommendations. In fact, after two years, the task force has "shaped the discussion around higher ed and is constantly brought up as a reference ... moved the state agenda on college access ... and shaped the way that policy is being thought about and being created in their state."

[8:43:10 AM](#)

MS. BAUTSCH advised that one similarity between CSSB 221(EDC) and the Arkansas legislation is its membership, which allowed "buy-in" from all of the stakeholders resulting in "sweeping changes around higher education in their state."

[8:44:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON referred to slide 9, and asked for an update on the NCSL 2006 Blue Ribbon Commission On Higher Education.

MS. BAUTSCH related that the NCSL commission was a three-year national overview of issues, and it identified affordability as the key to college graduation.

[8:46:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked to compare the state closest to Alaska, considering non-traditional student population and other factors.

[8:47:00 AM](#)

MS. BAUTSCH suggested a comparison to other rural states such as Montana, Idaho, and perhaps Washington, Arkansas and Louisiana that have rural aspects, or large Native populations. Also, there is a trend nationwide towards part-time attendance.

[8:48:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON observed that considering factors such as the high cost of education, limited broadband capability, distance education, and the barriers to delivering higher education to 150 communities off of the road system, the statistics for Alaska are difficult to compare to other states.

[8:49:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked for the definition of an "associate student."

MS. BAUTSCH acknowledged there is not accurate data on how to calculate community college credit because it is unknown whether students are seeking a certificate, an associate degree, or just taking a few courses. She agreed with Representative Edgmon that it is difficult to compare states, particularly to Alaska, which is one reason for the state to have its own task force.

[8:51:24 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON returned to slide 3 and asked which other states are also open access universities.

MS. BAUTSCH explained that Alaska is unique in that its largest university is open access, whereas other states have a combination of open access colleges and those with higher benchmarks for admission.

CHAIR SEATON surmised the closest comparison for Alaska is slide 6, that indicated three-year graduation rates for associate students.

[8:54:04 AM](#)

MS. BAUTSCH agreed.

CHAIR SEATON opened public testimony.

[8:54:28 AM](#)

CARL ROSE, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), expressed his support of SB 221 and related some of his personal experiences with postsecondary education systems, noting that most college students must "swim upstream." He suggested that a task force could increase the legislature's

understanding of the issues by hearing discussion from numbers of people beyond what the committee can hear, and by compiling information. The responsibility to solve this problem belongs with the state, K-12 education, and the UA. Because our university system is open access, students may enroll who have not planned on attending college, and thus may require remediation. However, he stressed that the ability to read, write, and compute is critically important for all students whether they are going to college or to career technical training; therefore, the educational system must focus on delivering a quality education to every student so that each is prepared. Mr. Rose questioned the point at which the responsibility flows from the K-12 system to the university system; in fact, from a student's point of view, university faculties are not always student-friendly. He concluded that a task force would have an opportunity to examine the data and present an informed perspective to the legislature. In addition, the task force could look at the responsibilities of each educational system and the role it plays. Mr. Rose offered to serve on the task force.

[9:01:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON agreed and asked whether the task force would need additional data.

[9:02:19 AM](#)

MR. ROSE advised that a lot of data already exists, but it needs to be analyzed and reported in a meaningful way. He opined without an advocacy group to present improvements, the educational systems will continue as they are. The task force would be able to provide the four principles critical to evaluation: feasibility, propriety, utility, and accuracy.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON urged the committee to add a reference to digital learning to the bill.

[9:05:29 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked whether the career readiness aspect makes the mission too broad for the task force.

[9:07:11 AM](#)

MR. ROSE opined the work of the task force would not be diluted by the inclusion of career readiness issues. The K-12

educational system must prepare students so that they can make a successful and meaningful contribution in life, and the issues of college and career readiness are not mutually exclusive.

CHAIR SEATON assumed the career readiness issue changes the focus of the task force from university and college to K-12.

MR. ROSE stated that students should be able to exercise choice, and that means having an adequate K-12 program. Both issues need to be explored; in fact, every school, at each level, needs to be student friendly. He noted that AASB data indicates that students at any age need a comfortable school climate in order to succeed.

[9:11:41 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON, noting that Mr. Rose was a member of the legislative education funding task force, asked whether the strong legislative representation contributed to the effectiveness of that task force. The proposed legislation only calls for two legislative members.

MR. ROSE reported that the legislative education task force included five members from each body of the legislature with a clear understanding of the report, and that was an advantage. He urged the involvement of more legislators, although the resulting increased cost is a concern.

[9:15:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether having members of the finance committee on the education funding task force was helpful.

MR. ROSE said yes.

[9:16:04 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON observed the education funding task force and the proposed task force serve different purposes.

[9:16:59 AM](#)

BARB ANGAIK, President, National Education Association-Alaska (NEA-Alaska), spoke in favor of SB 221, underscoring the obligation of educators to guide students towards a realistic educational path, including the career-ready, workforce

development aspect of education. Also, the proposed legislation addresses the disconnection of communication between the K-12 and the UA educational systems regarding UA's expectations for students. Ms. Angaiak stated the proposed bill presents an opportunity to make certain students in Alaska are college-ready, or are successful in whatever programs are right for them. Private colleges routinely provide students with individual attention and support; however, Alaska schools do not ensure that students understand how to prepare for college and what is expected of them. She assured the committee NEA-Alaska would support this legislation and would participate in any recommended actions.

[9:21:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked whether the speaker had been a member of a task force before.

MS. ANGAIK indicated no.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH noted that there are current reforms forthcoming, and asked whether the proposed legislation is a timely effort.

MS. ANGAIK acknowledged that timing can be problematic, particularly considering national legislation regarding elementary and secondary education; however, NEA-Alaska is committed to participation on this task force at this time.

[9:23:36 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON described successes that K-12 Alaska school districts have had by establishing close contact between faculty and at-risk students. He assumed NEA-Alaska would advocate for a program to help with retention and success through counseling and individual support.

MS. ANGAIK said correct.

[9:25:59 AM](#)

MARY FRANCIS, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), stated her support for SB 221. She added that one advantage of the proposal is that the task force would be comprised of a group of individuals who do not usually have the opportunity to work together toward a common purpose.

[9:27:15 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON closed public testimony.

[9:28:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON said it is crucial for the committee to recognize the status of digital education in Alaska. She advocated for the inclusion of digital learning in the scope of the task force.

[9:30:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER pointed out the UA system is engaged in the delivery of distance learning.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON expressed her concern about the delivery of distance learning to remote areas at the elementary and secondary educational levels.

[9:31:02 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON called attention to page 3, line 31, which read [original punctuation provided]:

(6) explore new approaches that may be effective in producing increased levels of college and career readiness;

[9:31:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON, in response to Chair Seaton, suggested addressing digital learning on page 4, line 9, as follows:

Page 4, line 9

Add

(10) digital learning and how it relates to the success in college and of rural students.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON stated this addition was needed because there are rural students who are disadvantaged in that they cannot receive digital learning.

[9:32:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON expressed his support for requiring the task force to address digital learning; however, he suggested the language on page 3, lines 28-30, may resolve the concern.

[9:34:05 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN advised that the interpretation of the above referenced lines would cover the issues of broadband and distance education. In any case, the sponsor would accept a specific reference.

[9:34:48 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked to what paragraph (6) on page 3, line 31, refers, if not distance education.

MR. LAMKIN explained the above reference encompasses unknown action other states have taken "to produce the successful outcomes that we're after."

[9:35:36 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON requested that the committee submit amendments to Legislative Legal and Research Services to be drafted and offered at a subsequent hearing.

[9:36:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked for clarification on the task force meeting schedule.

[9:37:30 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN advised that the meeting schedule would be the prerogative of the chair of the task force.

[9:38:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON pointed out the bill provides for a report to the legislature due on March 1, 2011, and he expressed concern that the budget cycle would be in progress. Recalling his participation in a work committee last summer, he cautioned that the schedule could be a challenge to meet. Representative Edgmon then stated his support for the bill.

[9:40:14 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN agreed that March 1, 2011, was chosen to allow as much time as possible for the members to meet and for legislators to take appropriate action.

[9:40:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON commented on the number of legislators on the task force. She provided an anecdote regarding a past task force that was unsuccessful in seeing its recommendations enacted. She warned that legislators that work on policy items hear testimony that is not heard by "the people that are going to [make] funding ... decisions." Representative Wilson urged the inclusion of additional legislators, some of which should be finance committee members.

[9:43:48 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON warned against comparing a funding task force with a task force concerned with policy issues. Neither should meeting dates be based on financial deadlines. He opined that this task force would be recommending statewide changes to educational systems, educational requirements, and methods. However, Chair Seaton agreed that to be effective the task force should engage more members of the legislature.

[9:46:38 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN clarified that the Senate Education Committee intended for the task force to bring interested parties together, and that any member of the legislature is invited to participate. Further, regarding the fiscal note, he confirmed that more legislators seated on the task force would raise the cost.

[9:47:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER pointed out that one responsibility of the task force is to make recommendations to the legislature, which does politicize the group. He then suggested that the sponsor consider a provision for funding for support staff in order to maintain a balance.

MR. LAMKIN said the bill provides for legislative staff to staff the task force. Staffing support may be requested from Legislative Legal and Research Services or the UAA Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER).

[9:49:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER added that another point to consider is that the bill does not stipulate the disclosure of conflicts of interest.

[9:50:16 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN said he expects that the task force would have sufficient resources to fulfill its goals.

[9:50:59 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON advised that the reporting date should be moved to April 1, 2011, to allow for thoroughness. Moreover, if legislative policy changes are recommended by the task force, they would be addressed in subsequent legislative sessions. However, some recommendations may be put in place directly by schools or educational systems.

[9:53:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON contemplated the timeline, election concerns, and staffing, and asked for sponsor comment.

MR. LAMKIN observed the reporting date may need to be May 1, 2011.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON raised the possibility that the finance committee may add costs to the fiscal note.

[9:55:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ asked whether the participating organizations have committed to absorbing travel costs.

MR. LAMKIN said there have been no objections, but there are no written commitments.

[9:56:03 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that SB 221 was held for further testimony and consideration of amendments.

[9:56:26 AM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:57 a.m.