

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 2, 2010
8:06 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Bryce Edgmon

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Bill Stoltze

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW(S): UPDATE ON EDUCATION IN RURAL ALASKA BY PHYLLIS CARLSON~ ALASKA DIRECTOR OF RURAL EDUCATION AND MR. JOHN MOLLER~ ALASKA RURAL ADVISOR

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 206

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

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 206

SHORT TITLE: HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSM'T/POSTSECONDARY CLASS

SPONSOR(S): EDUCATION

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

03/27/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/27/09	(H)	Heard & Held
03/27/09	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/03/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
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
01/20/10	(H)	Heard & Held
01/20/10	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/01/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/01/10	(H)	Scheduled But Not Heard
02/05/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/05/10	(H)	Heard & Held
02/05/10	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/10/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/10/10	(H)	Heard & Held
02/10/10	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/12/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/12/10	(H)	Scheduled But Not Heard
02/15/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/15/10	(H)	Heard & Held
02/15/10	(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
02/22/10	(H)	Scheduled But Not Heard
03/01/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/01/10	(H)	Heard & Held
03/01/10	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/08/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/08/10	(H)	Scheduled But Not Heard
03/17/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/17/10	(H)	Heard & Held
03/17/10	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/19/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/19/10	(H)	Heard & Held
03/19/10	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/24/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/24/10	(H)	Scheduled But Not Heard
03/29/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/29/10	(H)	Heard & Held
03/29/10	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/31/10	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

03/31/10 (H) Scheduled But Not Heard
04/02/10 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

PHYLLIS CARLSON, Director
Rural Education
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview on education in rural Alaska.

JOHN MOLLER, Rural Advisor
Office of the Governor
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Commented and answered questions during the presentation on education in rural Alaska.

JIM SMITH, Superintendant
Galena City School District
Galena, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the presentation on rural education in Alaska.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:06:43 AM](#)

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Gardner, Buch, and Keller were present at the call to order. Representatives Wilson and Munoz arrived as the meeting was in progress. Also in attendance was Representative Stoltze.

OVERVIEW(S): Update on Education in Rural Alaska by Phyllis Carlson, Alaska Director of Rural Education and Mr. John Moller, Alaska Rural Advisor

[8:06:53 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be an overview and discussion on rural education by Phyllis Carlson, director, Rural Education, Department of Education and Early Development, and Mr. John Moller, rural advisor, Office of the Governor.

8:08:48 AM

PHYLLIS CARLSON, Director, Rural Education, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), provided her background as a lifelong Alaskan and her experience in a rural school setting.

8:10:10 AM

CHAIR SEATON asked for the size and diversity of the school Ms. Carlson attended in Chignik Bay.

MS. CARLSON said that currently there are 15 students; however, when she attended there were 30 students in first grade through eighth grade. When she reached high school age, her family moved to Kodiak and she attended high school there.

8:10:20 AM

MS. CARLSON turned to the subject of her role as director of rural education at EED. This is a new position created in part due to the size and social and cultural diversity of the state. The focus of her position during the first year is to work with the State System of Support (SSOS) teams of 30 to 40 content specialists that interact directly with school districts, coaching new teachers and lending support to rural districts. Ms. Carlson will also work with districts to help them implement the state cultural standards that were adopted in 1998 by the State Board of Education & Early Development (state board). The expectation is to provide direction for districts and teachers in their interpretation and use of the cultural standards.

8:13:08 AM

CHAIR SEATON asked whether the state or the individual districts will have a major role in the decisions for integrating the standards into the curriculum.

MS. CARLSON advised that each community is unique; in fact, the cultural standards are not in content area, but allow teachers to teach content through the local knowledge and perspective. In response to Chair Seaton, she said she will provide the committee with information on the cultural standards that were adopted.

CHAIR SEATON asked whether the cultural standards are the basis for the orientation classes for teachers who are new to Alaska.

MS. CARLSON indicated yes, although other information is included.

[8:15:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked when the standards were developed.

MS. CARLSON said the middle or late '90s.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH observed that this curriculum may be due for revision.

CHAIR SEATON pointed out that the cultural standards were not adopted not by the legislature, but by the state board.

[8:15:53 AM](#)

MS. CARLSON indicated yes, and added that she will also be advising the commissioner on the creation of a rural education advisory board to provide guidance to the department on rural education issues. Her final task is to represent the department on the suicide prevention council and build partnerships between schools and informed organizations in rural communities.

[8:17:16 AM](#)

MS. CARLSON related that she has visited the following school districts: Yukon Flats, Yupiit District, Lower Kuskokwim, Yukon/Kuskokwim, and North Slope. She further described her upcoming work with the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, Division of Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), the Bilingual Multicultural Education Equity Conference (BMEEC), and the Alaska Native Educator Associations.

[8:19:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER suggested the chair of the education committee for each legislative body should be a member of the proposed rural education advisory board.

MS. CARLSON noted that legislative seats on the board will be included. She listed the following additional upcoming tasks: continued work with SSOS teams and other EED divisions; work with the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) regarding community leadership in the schools; work with the Division of

Juvenile Justice, Department of Health and Social Services; and research of related materials.

[8:22:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked for a response to the recent decision regarding Moore v. State.

CHAIR SEATON advised that topic will be discussed in detail at a subsequent meeting.

[8:24:15 AM](#)

JOHN MOLLER, Rural Advisor, Office of the Governor, informed the committee he was from Unalaska and attended a school with about 100 students in Kindergarten through twelfth grade, subsequently graduating from high school in Salem, Oregon. Mr. Moller stated that in his capacity he works with all of the governor's commissioners and agencies, including Larry LeDoux, the commissioner of the EED. He said he treasured his relationship with Commissioner LeDoux and that they communicate on a regular basis, sharing thoughts and observations; in fact, he welcomed the creation of a rural education board as a vehicle to explore ideas and issues, and noted he will participate on the proposed board. Mr. Moller noted that in the course of his responsibilities regarding education, he is frequently contacted by residents and legislators throughout the state on issues from funding to building conditions. Calls from rural areas are often to get direction on where to go for assistance from state government, and he anticipated a natural increase in his participation in educational issues. He paraphrased from prepared comments on the Governor's Performance Scholarship (GPS), which read [original punctuation provided]:

Providing hope by providing our youth with the option and opportunity to go to college or to a job training course is a great thing.

As you know, over one-third of Alaska's high school students who start 9th grade don't complete 12th grade. But if we give them something to work for, give them something to fight for, something to hope for - that can change.

This Program offers every Alaska high school student the opportunity to work hard and earn their way to an Alaska trade school or an in-state university.

I believe in Setting the Bar Higher. I have four children of my own and it works for them.

If every 8th grader heard that if they do well in school they could qualify for a tuition scholarship, it not only helps them do better, it drives us as parents to demand more of our school system and our school district.

If there is a school district in Alaska that is only offering three math courses, and not four - This Program will encourage our school districts to improve what they offer.

The Governor's Performance Scholarship will help our economy and local businesses by providing a more highly trained workforce and creating jobs.

This administration is committed to increasing educational opportunities for ALL Alaska's students;

I have heard from a number of parents and Educators from rural Alaska hoping this program happens soon. This week alone, I had folks from St. Mary's and yesterday I was in Gakona where I heard from parents and educators who expressed their gratitude for its introduction. The list is longer but I wanted to mention the most recent.

SCHOOLS:

And we're committed to improving their learning environment,

Every Alaskan has the right to attend school in a well-lit, safe, and warm environment that is conducive to learning.

About a month ago, I traveled to three western Alaska communities with the Governor, Ms. Carlson and some of your colleagues to look at the condition of our rural schools.

These three schools were in the top four on our Rural School Construction and Renovation list. We found crowded schools, schools that were in poor repair and energy inefficient.

This Administration is committed to investing in Alaska's children and in their future, by giving them a safe and productive learning environment.

Health and Social Services has also asked me to participate as a member of the Strategic Prevention Advisory Council. The purpose of this Council is to reduce substance use, abuse and dependency in Alaska.

I know this is not necessarily an educational item but it is an issue and it is holding our kids back...at best. And contributes to some of the challenges.

[8:34:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked for information regarding the Parents as Teachers program.

MS. CARLSON said this program is funded outside of the department. Although she said she is not personally familiar with the program, she agreed with the idea to encourage parental involvement in education.

MR. MOLLER had no comment.

[8:36:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH provided information about the program's success in Hoonah, and noted that a program has been started in Galena to instruct very young parents on parenting. Representative Buch pointed out that there is pending legislation that endorses the Parents as Teachers program, and he encouraged the department to acquaint itself with the program and to consider the use of state and federal funds.

MS. CARLSON said every school district exerts local control and different programs are chosen for implementation.

[8:39:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER referred to testimony informing the committee that the Parents as Teachers program for preschool

children eliminated the urban/rural test score gap by third grade for students in Galena.

[8:40:00 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON requested that Ms. Carlson and Mr. Moller schedule a visit to Hoonah in order to gather information on the program. As 75 percent of the students have been part of that program, it is an important influence in that community. On the other hand, participation in Fairbanks is 4 percent. He stressed that the committee has heard compelling testimony of the program's effectiveness, and suggested it may work in other rural communities.

MR. MOLLER surmised that the proposed advisory board could address the merits of the Parents as Teachers program. He added that he has heard of the successes of the program.

[8:42:32 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON observed that the superintendent of the Galena City School District is present.

[8:43:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON noted that the committee has delved deeply into many educational issues; however, other legislators are not as informed on these topics. She pointed out that the legislature has been "putting quite a bit of money in education every year," so it is hard to find money to do extra things. Representative Wilson opined a rural education advisory group can add validity to the educational needs that are raised by the committee.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON suggested the presenters distribute a "mini white paper" to inform all legislators on a subject, in addition to testifying before a single committee.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER agreed that members of the legislature should be included on the rural education advisory board.

[8:47:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH discussed the value of bringing up ideas from all areas of the state.

[8:49:09 AM](#)

JIM SMITH, Superintendent, Galena City School District, informed the committee he has been working in the Galena school system for 11 years. Mr. Smith said the Parents as Teachers program has been a active program for four years. He pointed out that funding determines the activity level of a program, as does the involvement and enthusiasm of those involved. Although the Galena schools provide volumes of guidance for classroom teachers, he stated that the success in Galena has come through context; in fact, the Parents as Teachers program supports context by its effect on the child's learning environment and frame of mind. These factors of context also include the comfort of the classroom, whether the parent is engaged, and other influences that ready a student for learning. Mr. Smith affirmed that Galena has had great success in changing education.

[8:52:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked about the general level of parent involvement in the Galena schools.

MR. SMITH said the Galena school population is diverse and includes a residential school of 165 students from 50 communities. Thus, there are children from all cultures in his community. Although there is not an emphasis on culture, students embrace and share their cultures with others. Parental involvement is possible because students in the residential program keep in close communication with families by email and through regional advisory committees, but a few do not stay. Through the enrollment process at the residential school, 260 students were processed and 165 remain enrolled. Mr. Smith acknowledged the transition to living away from home is difficult and a connection between students, parents or guardians, and school, is essential. The Galena district also has 3,400 students in a correspondence school, and the level of parental involvement there is obvious as the parents have chosen to guide their children's education. The local schools also have involved parents, although the Parents as Teachers program probably will decline as Galena's school population declines. He stressed that the early childhood learning center will continue due to the positive influence of learning that begins at infancy. Furthermore, the Parents as Teachers grant funding is depleted and funding must now come from the community.

[8:56:40 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH surmised that as federal funding declines, community support for worthwhile programs is necessary. He said it is also helpful for the committee to know what programs are valued by the community and the local districts.

[8:58:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON observed that a parenting class in high school could replace the Parents as Teachers program. She said, "If we can't have the money to do it at one level, can we do it at another level in different way?"

MR. SMITH agreed. He opined there is time in the school day for instruction on family life and personal accounting.

[9:00:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked for details on the success of the Galena residential program.

MR. SMITH explained that Galena became the location for a residential school because of the availability of the former military facility. There is also tremendous support from the community for the schools that, in turn, maintain the life of the community. However, the need for a residential school is evident as the state has closed many schools in small villages due to the lack of enrollment. Regional learning centers may take the place of small village schools, and he expressed his belief that the geography of the state determines that more residential schools will be needed too. On the other hand, Mr. Smith pointed out the success of distance learning programs and said "anything is possible, we just shackle ourselves by saying everything should look this way."

[9:03:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked Mr. Smith to comment on the Governor's Performance Scholarship (GPS) program.

MR. SMITH described the GPS program as one tool for education. The program will be valuable for students who need a scholarship, and will motivate their performance. Educators need a variety of choices in order to serve all of their students.

[9:05:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON recalled a long history of rural legislative support for rural hub residential schools. Attending a residential school for short periods of time may prevent culture shock or homesickness when students leave home for college. She expressed her support for building a rural hub residential school.

CHAIR SEATON related the four residential schools in Alaska are Mt. Edgecumbe, Galena, Nenana, and Chugach Voyage to Excellence. He explained that the Chugach school is a short term residence facility where students from one of four school districts can come to stay at the school for three days to six weeks for concentrated study of a single subject. Recent data on the school showed that 98 percent of the students graduate. He asked whether Ms. Carlson or Mr. Moller were familiar with the Chugach School District and the Voyage to Excellence school.

MS. CARLSON said no.

MR. MOLLER said no.

CHAIR SEATON encouraged them to familiarize themselves with the Chugach School District in light of its success with this educational model.

[9:11:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON cited the military academy, Alaska Military Youth Academy (AMYA), and said Chugiak High School in the Anchorage School District is planning a partnership with AMYA to help students earn a high school diploma. She pointed out the value of early intervention for at-risk students and provided information about how schools were improved in North Carolina. One specific problem has been the disparity between grading systems in every class or school. Representative P. Wilson supported having an in-service for teachers to establish strict grading standards throughout the state.

[9:15:54 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON turned to a question from Representative Buch regarding the feasibility of having traveling teachers for rural areas.

[9:16:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH said this idea has been brought to the committee and asked for a response from the Galena superintendent of schools. He also asked Mr. Moller to comment on the possibility of an experienced group of teachers traveling around the state to instruct intense courses in rural areas.

[9:17:30 AM](#)

MR. MOLLER stated this plan could be more successful in some areas of the state, because of the diversity of the state. There are concerns from students about the turnover of educators without sufficient time to build trust. He suggested this would be another topic for discussion by the proposed rural education advisory board.

MS. CARLSON advised that some school boards and school districts have made the choice to bring in expert teachers. This is a local decision, similar to the choice of attending a regional or local school. In fact, the department and school districts value choice as all families and communities are not alike. However, although many worthy programs and models have come and gone, systemic change is needed to reach the goal which is local ownership of educational programs, parental ownership of their children's education, and children's ownership of their educational goals.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON agreed, except that the state must not require that every district "reinvent the wheel." It is important that the state provide successful models to different communities, and develop a base for the educational system from which districts can draw expertise and share experiences.

MS. CARLSON clarified her statement. She said she felt each school district should study the models available and make the best choice for its community. In further response to Chair Seaton, she pointed out that each school district has its own school board with the authority to choose curricula and allocate resources.

[9:25:10 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON acknowledged that the state has allowed local authority over curricula and resources; however, a recent court ruling indicates it is the legislature's responsibility to ensure the education of the children of the state. He remarked:

There's many of us that have been proceeding under the assumption that it is the district's responsibility. Well, it turns out that legally, the constitution rests that on us, and we have been defaulting through the Department of Education and to district plans. But, ... by the court order, districts are implementing for us...

[9:27:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked for the Galena superintendent's opinion on how traveling teachers might be received locally.

MR. SMITH stated that all relationships in rural communities are fragile. In fact, the Galena school district has used Peak Education & Consulting (Peak) for the last ten years and it has been a slow process for staff to accept outside presenters for a five-day workshop at the beginning of each school year. In addition, every new teacher attends a ten-day immersion workshop on how to develop a learning environment. Mr. Smith cautioned that Galena schools are not comparable to most rural schools because they benefit from school improvement funds generated by 3,400 homeschoolers, and other rural schools do not have sufficient funding to support a similar consulting program. Returning to the question, he said the local teachers have evolved a state of trust that allows them to benefit from presentations by Peak consultants. He related that the residential school has achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the last two years, due to the excellent instructional program.

[9:31:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked about the cost of the Peak consulting contract.

MR. SMITH advised the contract costs about \$150,000 per year for staff development. In further response to Representative P. Wilson, he said there are 30 certified staff in the village at Galena and about 30 certified staff serving the homeschool program.

CHAIR SEATON asked how many attend the summer program.

MR. SMITH estimated 12. He noted that the greatest expense was travel and suggested that larger school districts could develop a similar staff development program using local highly

experienced teachers. Rural school districts are generally at a disadvantage and are unable to hire highly experienced teachers.

[9:34:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER returned attention to the GPS bill. She explained that the proposed GPS legislation is not a scholarship program, but is an effort to fundamentally change education by using the scholarship as the "carrot". She pointed out that the Galena City School District has a successful correspondence course, teacher mentoring, and a resident program; however, she said it is difficult to have confidence that the GPS legislation will be helpful to rural and small school districts. While students in larger school districts have access to a fourth year of math and science classes with labs and proper equipment, she expressed doubt that these classes are possible everywhere.

MR. SMITH agreed that rural and small school districts probably cannot reach an extremely high standard. He was unsure of the standards required of the bill; however, the measure of a student's progress will not be determined by intellect but through effort and citizenship. A valued student is one who is engaged and who will chase an opportunity, even if he/she is not an academic scholar. Mr. Smith acknowledged that "my calculus in Galena, Alaska, isn't going to look like a calculus class in Anchorage ... but that doesn't discredit the kind of citizen they're probably going to turn out to be ..."

[9:39:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER said Mr. Smith's statements have confirmed her misgivings. To qualify for a GPS, a student must complete a rigorous curriculum with high grades, maintain a high grade point average, and reach high standardized test scores. These goals may not be realistic for students throughout the state.

MR. SMITH clarified that many students are brilliant and given the right environment would achieve the standards to earn a GPS, but not every student will have that environment available. He said students in rural areas who have potential will catch up when they have access to a rigorous curriculum during their postsecondary education. He said, "We can't place that same instructional profile curriculum."

[9:41:51 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON observed it is not necessary to be in an urban setting to receive a good calculus course. He then asked the superintendent to comment on the skills of homeschooled students.

MR. SMITH said test scores of the homeschooled students indicate lower math abilities. In fact, the school district has conducted parent and family in-services on teaching algebra; calculus is even more of a challenge. The proposed legislation would require the district to find ways to provide more access to teachers for homeschooled students.

[9:44:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER recalled his experiences traveling to North Slope area schools as a construction worker. He said he found that rural parents were eager to have opportunities for their students. Raising the bar for education in rural Alaska is exciting, because the students will respond when given the challenge and opportunity.

MR. MOLLER said that when he visits communities he asks whether school standards can be raised and he routinely hears the answer yes.

[9:49:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ opined the GPS bill should help many students attend postsecondary institutions and should also reform rural education standards. She asked Ms. Carlson to respond to those who believe that rural school districts will not be able to meet the demands of the program.

MS. CARLSON said she also has heard rural students and educators welcome the challenge of higher educational standards, even though reaching the new standards may take some time. Additionally, she expressed the possibility that the suicide rate for young people may be lowered by providing students with hope and vision for the future. The state can provide support to rural families through technology because young people are very adept at using technology as a vehicle for access.

[9:52:14 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON observed that along with hope, students must be adequately prepared during high school for success in college. It is known that two years of math is rarely enough for success

in postsecondary studies. The GPS legislation will inform students of the rigorous curriculum necessary to succeed in college.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON opined that suicides occur because of the lack of hope, and arriving at college unprepared will continue that feeling. She described how the recent court decision may affect local control over educational systems in the state.

[9:53:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH noted that a new fiber optic cable will link Alaska's west coast and provide real-time distance delivery to rural areas. Additionally, the broadband network may soon be enhanced with financial help from the federal government. He expressed hope that in the next few years, new technological opportunities will be available to students in remote areas.

MS. CARLSON also noted the state's investments in pilot technology programs are on-going, and she reported success in the areas of equity and access for students.

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ agreed that the expansion of broadband will present an opportunity for students "hand-in-hand with the GPS." Additionally, she said bringing local experts in each community into the schools to mentor students is especially important in smaller communities.

[10:00:15 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON observed that school districts and residents are not communicating their positions on the GPS legislation to legislators. He encouraged rural Alaskans and school districts to show their support of the proposed legislation at this time.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH, addressing the GPS legislation, said there may be a component where the "unmet needs attachments" require more money; in fact, the governor offered a merit-based scholarship, and has not been enthused that there is an attachment for students who need financial assistance. This issue may have caused a "waning of enthusiasm" for the legislation. Representative Buch opined that support must be shown for the unmet needs addition, as some legislators do not support the additional cost. He then asked whether senior volunteers are involved in rural schools.

[10:04:02 AM](#)

MR. MOLLER said some school districts have more involvement from elders than others, although bringing elders into the schools is always a topic of discussion.

[10:04:35 AM](#)

MR. SMITH stated Galena has a fair amount of that support, especially in the residential school, where elders become "adoptive grandparents." One of their senior volunteers is 94 years old and he comes every day. The senior volunteers are a big component at school because Native cultures are very supportive of engagement with elders.

[10:06:27 AM](#)

HB 206-HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSM'T/POSTSECONDARY CLASS

[10:06:37 AM](#)

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

[10:06:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON made a motion to adopt Committee Substitute (CS) for HB 206, 26-LS0765\C. There being no objection, Version C was before the committee.

[10:07:10 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON drew attention to the document in the committee packet titled "Questions from (H)EDC from 3/19/2010 Regarding Workkeys and the HSGQE." He pointed out that the response to question 2 from the Department of Education and Early Development (EED) was that the grade 11 requirement for the WorkKeys assessment is that it is to be included on the cumulative file, but not shown on the transcript or diploma. Thus the directive in the bill should remain.

[10:07:53 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON then referred to page 1, line 6, and offered Amendment 1 which would change grade 12 to grade 11.

[10:08:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER objected for the purpose of discussion.

[10:08:33 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON said this is in response to the State Board of Education & Early Development (state board) comments that indicated grade 12 was too late. Furthermore, regulations allow for students to retake the exam in grade 12, and if their scores improve, there is no cost.

[10:09:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH added that moving the assessment to grade 11 will allow students time to take corrective measures during the summer prior to graduation.

[10:09:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER explained her objection with the following description of the two requirements: administration of the test in grade 11 is in order to improve scores; administration of the test in grade 12 is to demonstrate the student's final level of skills. She said her preference was to require a student to take the test in grade 12, knowing that a student may take the test in grade 11, if desired.

[10:10:37 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON cautioned that the department would not pay for the test twice.

[10:11:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON recalled that a student can take the test as many times as he/she likes, but the state will pay to have it certified just once.

[10:12:17 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON clarified that the Worldwide Interactive Network Inc., (WIN) test can be taken multiple times at no cost; however, the WorkKeys assessment includes certification and will be provided once.

[10:12:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER concluded that if the intent of the test is to replace the HSGQE, in the terms of informing employers and postsecondary educators the level of skills a student has achieved, then it needs to be administered in grade 12.

[10:13:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON said she would like to have further discussion, as the committee's action may be influenced by the Moore v. State legal decision. She also requested legal advice from outside counsel on whether the HSGQE is unconstitutional.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER said he would also appreciate more time to study the bill. He expressed his understanding that removing the HSGQE will be perceived as "taking away the bar" for the education system, in spite of the failure of the HSGQE to serve its purpose.

[10:16:10 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON withdrew Amendment 1, and said HB 206, Version C, was held for further consideration of its two elements, the WorkKeys assessment, and the removal of the "high stakes" aspect of the HSGQE.

[HB 206 was held over.]

[10:17:16 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:17 a.m.