

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 9, 2010
8:07 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

DISCUSSION-FOLLOW-UP TO MOORE V. STATE WITH SCHOOL DISTRICTS ON
THE IMPROVEMENT LIST~ THE INCENTIVE PROGRAM

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

DR. NORMAN ECK, Ph.D., Superintendent
Northwest Arctic Borough School District
Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed the intervention required under
Moore v. State, as superintendent of an intervention school
district.

ROGER SAMPSON, President
Education Commission of the States
Address not provided

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed aspects of the Moore v. State
court order.

WILLIAM WOODFORD, Superintendent

Yukon Flats School District
Fort Yukon, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed aspects of the Moore v. State court order.

HOWARD DIAMOND, Superintendent
Yupiit School District
Akiachak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed aspects of rural education.

DIANE GEORGE, Assistant Superintendent
Yupiit School District
Akiachak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed methods of intervention, as assistant superintendent of an intervention school district.

WILLIE KASAYULIE, Chairman
Yupiit School Board of Education
Akiachak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed challenges faced by the Yupiit School District.

JOHN LAMONT, Superintendent
Lower Yukon School District
Mountain Village, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed methods of intervention, as superintendent of an intervention school district.

ALEX RUSSIN, Assistant Superintendent
Lower Yukon School District
Mountain Village, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Asked a question of the committee.

BRIAN KROSSCHELL, Director of Curriculum
Lower Yukon School District
Mountain Village, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed aspects of rural education.

DAVID SHARSTROM, Director of School Intervention
Lower Yukon School District
Mountain Village, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed the focus of intervention school districts.

KERRY BOYD, Superintendent
Yukon-Koyukuk School District
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed the intervention required under Moore v. State as the superintendent of an intervention school district.

CAROL DOYLE, Director of Instruction & Curriculum
Yukon-Koyukuk School District
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed the intervention required under Moore v. State as the director of Instruction & Curriculum of an intervention school district.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:07:29 AM](#)

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:07 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Peggy Wilson, Edgmon, Gardner, Buch, and Keller were present at the call to order. Representative Munoz arrived while the meeting was in progress.

Discussion-Follow-up to Moore v. State with School Districts on the Improvement List, the Incentive Program

Discussion-Follow-up to Moore v. State with School Districts on the Improvement List, the Incentive Program

[8:08:08 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the only order of business would be a discussion with the five school districts named in the Moore v. State case regarding education improvement plans.

[8:11:18 AM](#)

DR. NORMAN ECK, Ph.D., Superintendent, Northwest Arctic Borough School District, suggested four ways to improve educational scores in rural Alaska school districts, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read [original punctuation provided]:

I am Dr. Norman Eck, Superintendent of Northwest Arctic Borough School District. I have been employed as an administrator in this District for 12 years and this is my 5th year as superintendent. Last year I was the Alaska State Superintendent of the Year.

On a personal note, I have 2 adopted children, both born in Calcutta, India. My son is 16 and my daughter is 14. Both have had their entire school experience in the Northwest Arctic Borough Schools, both have scored highly on the State's required tests. My wife is a teacher in Kotzebue High School and she dearly loves her students.

At this time it will do us little good to review the difficult history of intervention that the Department of Education has put upon these five Districts. We have learned from the mistakes made, and we can move forward in a collaborative manner with solid solutions to the problems that we have to address. I think that this can all be done in discussions over the next couple months.

While it is true that our system of public education has its shortcoming, it will do us no good to lament about what is wrong. Doing so will weaken and divide us. What we need to do now is join in our efforts and our actions to provide strength to our classroom teachers and power to the lessons they teach to our students.

Some blame the poor test scores of past years on poverty. Some blame it on teachers, administrators, the school boards, parents, the local community, and even the ability of our children.

I do not buy any of that. The truth is blame accomplishes nothing.

When I take an honest look at my own school district I see many things that we do quite well and some things that leave substantial room for improvement. Over the years many educational programs have been implemented and perpetrated upon our students. Many educational experiments have been done in the name of educational improvement. These programs were, perhaps, well-intended but all too often poorly executed. Let us agree that there are no silver bullets.

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Producing better results requires informed decision-making, appropriate training, levels of commitment, support, persistence, and accountability that, until now, have been difficult to achieve or sustain. We

know that students living in poverty can achieve at high levels and be successful in school. There is ample research to document not only that it happens, but there are successful strategies we can employ. We have seen this in Northwest Arctic in the past few years where several schools that were poor performers have had increased test scores that we are very proud of.

In order to move us forward, I would like to comment on 4 issues of importance. These are issues that you, as legislators, can address and your actions in the legislature will bring the educational futures of our students to the higher level of success that is needed.

First, I would like to say that the single most important element in improving educational scores in Northwest Arctic is not anything in the school: It is to provide Public Safety to the families and, especially, the children in our villages. I commend the Governor's initiative to increase the ranks of Village Police Safety Officers. This needs to be complimented with an equal number of additional State Troopers. No one in Juneau or Anchorage would feel safe if the streets were patrolled by unarmed VPSO's. We expect to have State Troopers and City Police on duty to keep us safe. This factor cannot be overlooked in improving children's educations in rural Alaska.

Secondly, Early Childhood Education must be in place to insure the success of our students by the third grade. For we know, that if a child is not reading at grade level by the third grade, he or she has a 50% likelihood of dropping out of school. We need at minimum, a two year Kindergarten program, where 4 year olds can come to school and be counted at full FTE's. That would fund the additional teachers required for the program. Parental involvement has to be a major element included in the program, as well. Early Childhood programs must be intentional learning environments, academically based, taught by certified teachers, and they must adopt the 9 standards that are nationally recognized as components of quality early childhood programs.

Let me illustrate, our Kindergarten children come to school and take a test called the Kindergarten Developmental Profile. In the areas of Socialization and Kinesthetic abilities, our children are on par with the average students across Alaska. However, in the areas of pre-cognitive abilities and pre-reading they are, on average 2 to 3 years behind. That is for students who are five years old. How can you expect students to not only gain a year's growth in a year's span of time, but by 3rd grade, just within 4 years, expect them to make up an additional 2 to 3 years of development?

These children do not come to school impaired but they simply have lacked the language and cognitive developmental experiences that most children across America have received. They need language and numerical cognitive experience to be built into the Early Learning and Kindergarten programs. Much research, evidence, and documentation is available to substantiate this.

Third, let me address teacher capacity. The department this past year has done a lot to improve its ability to provide support to teachers. However, it is not sufficient to the need of the teachers that this is directed at. For teachers new to rural Alaska there should be a two-week to a four-week pre-service program that would provide orientation to the cultural setting the teacher is going to, the curriculum to be taught, and the lifeways of the people the teacher is going to serve. Districts cannot afford this out of their regular operating budget.

Another needed program is for teaching certification programs to be offered by our universities in the State that provide an emphasis and specialty in teaching in rural Alaska.

A much overlooked answer in this area is the development of specific teacher training programs to be offered to rural Alaskan students where they can have a direct pathway from high school graduation to a BA degree and certification as a teacher. Magnet-type school opportunities should exist. Smaller regional boarding facilities in rural hub cities can provide the specialization for our students who have high

level of abilities but cannot go to Mt. Edgecombe. We have 70 high schools in rural Alaska with 10 or fewer high school students. Strategically placed smaller Mt. Edgecombe-type boarding facilities is an idea whose time has come.

Fourth, targeted assistance programs for rural schools need to be in place. A model for this is one that the Anchorage School District has provided. Examine the history of Mountain View Elementary School. Eight years ago it was considered a school that was failing its students. With specific targeted assistance programs and personnel, it was restructured into being a beacon of success for its community and the children who go there. This school has consistently, over the past 5 years, had high levels of academic achievement by its students. It has made Adequate Yearly Progress as measured by NCLB.

The targeted assistance at Mountain View included additional staffing comprised of a school psychologist, community liaison, English as a Second Language Specialist, a reading specialist, and a speech pathologist, all this for a 300 to 400 student school.

In summation, we can do much to bring our students in rural Alaska to high academic achievement. This effort will require our determination and commitment but the pathway is clear. Research has shown that to adopt and fund, and properly implement the four issues I have discussed here this morning will bring success to our students. Thank you.

[8:20:33 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON couched the committee questions, for the benefit of the witness, as being non-adversarial.

[8:21:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER referred to Dr. Eck's testimony that the lack of public safety in villages is the biggest impediment to student success. She asked from what students needed protection.

[8:23:24 AM](#)

DR. ECK explained that small villages do not have police officers or Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs), and children may come to school exhausted from an evening spent in an unsafe setting, or from sleeping out if they cannot go home. Although this type of situation does not affect every family, the few children who are affected may act out in the classroom, when domestic abuse and violence is part of their life. The rates of domestic abuse and violence are high in Alaska, and he noted that there are few counselors and social workers to serve his region. Children and families need order in their lives.

[8:25:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked whether substance abuse treatment programs are available in the region.

DR. ECK said there are elements of treatment programs in place, but not at a sufficient or adequate level.

[8:26:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked whether Dr. Eck was aware of the governor's program to place about 12 additional VPSOs in rural areas.

DR. ECK acknowledged the new program; however, he expressed his belief that the need is for "dozens and dozens more ... and an equal number of troopers to go along with that." The situation is similar to staffing a hospital with only nurses, but no doctors.

[8:28:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH related that there are 38-39 funded trooper positions, but some positions remain unfilled because the Department of Public Safety Academy does not reduce its standards, which makes it difficult to find recruits.

DR. ECK observed that schools and children are blamed for things that are out of their hands.

[8:29:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether any of the villages in his school district are connected by roads.

DR. ECK said in Northwest Arctic Borough School District there are no roads, but service to this region does not come at an insurmountable cost. For example, the state trooper contingent in Kotzebue has recently been increased by two, bringing the number to seven. He suggested that some of those seven could be assigned to villages. When schools are provided by the state, it seems that public safety should be provided, also.

[8:32:36 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked whether Northwest Arctic Borough School District has one of the pilot pre-k programs.

DR. ECK explained that his school district applied, but the funding was denied. He further explained that a pilot program is unnecessary, as it is already a proven fact that early childhood development is fundamental; in fact, elements of the pilot program call for an intensive research and assessment of data that is already proven, thus funds are going to administration rather than to the direct instruction of children. He advocated for two years of kindergarten, beginning at age four.

[8:34:18 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON noted the variety of data before the committee that comes to different conclusions. He clarified that Dr. Eck is supporting two years of kindergarten attendance for children in the Northwest Arctic Borough School District.

DR. ECK said yes. He listed further reasons to support this program such as its simplicity to implement, and its adaptation to existing facilities. This type of model is called "intentional learning" and supporting research indicates that two years of kindergarten provides the most success for children who lack the type of experiences to be ready for school.

[8:35:50 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON recalled a two-year kindergarten was in place a few years ago.

[8:36:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether a first year teacher could successfully teach a two-year kindergarten.

DR. ECK opined many first year teachers are natural teachers, and others have a difficult time regardless of the assignment.

[8:38:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked whether the school district has space available to house a two-year kindergarten program. She also asked whether a district-run, two-year kindergarten could incorporate the added benefit of family involvement that is integral to Head Start and Parents as Teachers programs.

DR. ECK confirmed that sufficient facilities exist in the Northwest Arctic Borough schools to provide a two-year kindergarten program. In response to Representative Gardner's second question, he opined Head start and Parents as Teachers programs are great alternatives for parents who are involved in the education of their children. In fact, any early education program must have an aspect of parental involvement or parental training. He recalled the Getting Ready to Learn program that followed parents for three years after the birth of a child. The program addressed developmental stages wherein parents were taught how to better prepare children for school. It was a successful program, but federal funding was not available after five years.

[8:41:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked whether data on the students who participated in the program was known.

DR. ECK responded that children in a previous two-year kindergarten program are in the upper grades of elementary school. The federal program ended three years ago, and the children are just entering the school system. He attributed part of the growth in the district's test scores to the brief periods of early childhood learning.

[8:42:23 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked if the superintendent expected additional teachers would be needed to staff a two-year kindergarten program, and whether housing would be available.

DR. ECK anticipated needing only an instructional aide for some schools, but in Kotzebue three additional teachers would be needed. He estimated a total of eight teachers and three

instructional aides would be needed in the district, and housing would be available.

8:44:38 AM

CHAIR SEATON asked for an estimate on the percentage of participation in a voluntary, two-year kindergarten program.

DR. ECK explained that state law does not require school attendance until a child is seven years old. He projected attendance would be 88-92 percent, similar to kindergarten attendance for five year olds.

8:45:23 AM

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether the school attendance age requirement should be changed.

DR. ECK indicated yes, and added that it is more important to require school attendance in the early years, rather than extending attendance beyond 16 years old. He said, "Everything we do at these early years saves us tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars to society later on for the rest of the lifetime, and the educational time of that child. You can make up so much more in the beginning, than you can when a child is in high school." In further response to Representative P. Wilson, Dr. Eck suggested changing the age to start school to five years old, with an allowance four year olds.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON spoke about truancy problems.

DR. ECK agreed that truancy is a problem for a wide range of insufficient reasons. Given the current structure of the law, truancy laws are difficult to enforce and are not a priority for the district attorney. For example, the Northwest Arctic Borough took 25 truancy cases to the district attorney around November, none of which have been addressed to date. In addition, after ten days of absence, the student is dropped from school rolls.

8:50:03 AM

CHAIR SEATON directed attention to Dr. Eck's position on teaching capacity and a teacher orientation program.

DR. ECK explained that with funding, Kotzebue could provide orientation training to new teachers. However, offering this

training in the University of Alaska (UA) system would be best. An adequate preparation program would "wash out" those teachers who are not going to be successful, which is preferable to having them in the classroom. The expense would be too much for the districts to shoulder, but together the districts could provide the content and the teachers.

8:53:36 AM

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH turned attention to state boarding schools. He recalled a related court case and asked whether there is statewide support for regional education hub schools.

DR. ECK said yes, and advised it is a concept whose time has come. Magnet school-type opportunities in Bethel, Northwest Arctic, North Slope, and Galena school districts would help local residents become the future teachers, doctors, nurses, and specialists working and living in the community. Teacher retention would improve and the drop-out rate would also be affected. Students should have a pathway to be hired into legacy-type jobs, as educators or other certified workers, in their home villages. He assured the committee that the students will "step up to the challenge, they can be successful and fill those positions." Dr. Eck mentioned several technical certifications that are currently available at rural education centers.

8:58:38 AM

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER has heard opening boarding schools will cause some existing small schools to close.

DR. ECK said small schools should not have to be closed due to improvements in distance delivery and on-line courses. However, some students need "larger opportunities."

9:01:29 AM

CHAIR SEATON announced further questions will be provided in writing to Dr. Eck in order to move on to the other witnesses.

9:04:30 AM

ROGER SAMPSON, President, Education Commission of the States, informed the committee he is a former commissioner of EED. Mr. Sampson reviewed the court order regarding the five school districts placed in "improvement status" by No Child Left Behind

(NCLB) legislation. He said Mr. Morse and Commissioner LeDoux have made significant improvements in outlining targeted strategies in professional development, and in the support of teachers and administrators. Clearly, the court order puts the legislature and EED in a position of "deep intervention, in fact, to the point of removing local control." Taking that action would be uncomfortable for local school districts, the legislature, and the department. Mr. Sampson noted actions directed by the court order and advised two things should occur: review the results of current testing data and target what needs to be enhanced, and what will help, such as scheduling, teacher professional development, and further assessment; review options for early learning. He acknowledged the value of pre-kindergarten, but cautioned that new research indicates that pre-k takes non-proficient kindergarteners to average or proficient levels to begin school, yet "fade-out" occurs, and the advantage is lost by third grade. The fade-out factor is well documented, and can be countered by carrying literacy programs for affected students at least through third grade. He supported Dr. Eck's testimony, and concluded that the court order may force the legislature and the department to "takeover" local school districts, "unless we can build an incredibly strong partnership with the superintendents, the teachers, and the boards of those districts."

[9:11:08 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON warned that takeovers are not necessarily an effective strategy, and the legislature is not eager to implement an action without proven results.

[9:12:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether adding teacher aides to kindergarten through grade three classrooms would suffice.

MR. SAMPSON further explained that the continuation of an early learning program must include an open and intentional design and dialogue ongoing between the pre-k through third grade instruction. This would create safety nets and an ongoing target moving through the curriculum with grade level expectations. Successful programs include formative assessments that provide daily information to teachers.

[9:14:10 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked, "Isn't that what teachers should be doing in their classroom instruction currently?"

MR. SAMPSON said correct, but it is not the norm in many classrooms. Further, superintendents and principals must ensure that classroom instruction teaches lessons aligned to the standards.

[9:15:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked how the legislature can fund opportunities such as early learning and regional education hubs. He asked Mr. Sampson to respond in writing at his convenience.

[9:17:15 AM](#)

WILLIAM WOODFORD, Superintendent, Yukon Flats School District, informed the committee his 30 years of educational experience includes time as a principal, director of curriculum and development, and superintendent. In response to Chair Seaton, he advised that issues in the Yukon Flats School District pertaining to Moore v. State include teacher preparation, curriculum alignment, and the retention of highly qualified teachers. He emphasized that programs to prepare and mentor first- and second-year teachers are commendable; however, he encouraged expansion of the program to more "time in the trenches" with mentoring teachers. In addition, he would like to see internship programs available to train members and residents of the community to be educators because it is difficult for teachers recruited to Bush Alaska to fully understand the unique conditions awaiting them. Mr. Woodford suggested forgiving student loans for teachers would be a strong incentive. Regarding curriculum alignment, he said his school district is pressed to find the time to accomplish this task and urged a more streamlined approach using existing grade level expectations (GLEs) and additional help from the state to develop curriculum. Finally, in order to retain highly qualified teachers, adequate housing is essential. Available housing is mostly cabins that are not suitable for winter conditions, and living expenses are compounded by the high cost of heating fuels in the villages.

[9:29:49 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON added that housing concerns are also a problem with expanding the mentor program, as mentors must sleep on the floor of the school house during their stay.

MR. WOODFORD acknowledged that situation, and agreed housing is a desperate need. A housing complex is needed for housing teachers and mentors.

[9:32:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON said she has heard that building teacher housing has caused resentment from residents.

MR. WOODFORD pointed out that raising the standard of living for everyone is the best outcome and would make it possible to retain highly qualified teachers. In fact, the turnover rate of about every two years applies to highly qualified teachers and to district superintendents. The demands are extreme, the comforts are minimal, and good housing should be provided.

[9:34:34 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON observed the base student allocation (BSA) and geographic cost differential apply to rural areas, but teacher salaries are lower than in some urban schools. He questioned how local districts address salaries for teachers.

MR. WOODFORD said his base salary is \$41,581. He gave several examples of average living expenses in Fort Yukon, and concluded that the high costs are of greatest impact to the youngest and newest staff members.

[9:37:28 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON explained that base salaries in Juneau, Anchorage, and Fairbanks are higher than in rural areas. He questioned how teachers can be retained in high cost areas when paid lower salaries.

MR. WOODFORD opined some teachers seek out an experience and lifestyle in Bush Alaska. Furthermore, quality housing would offset some of the salary differences and "is not a luxury, it's a need."

[9:40:08 AM](#)

HOWARD DIAMOND, Superintendent, Yupiit School District, informed the committee he has worked in rural Alaska for about 30 years as a teacher and superintendent. He expressed his concern regarding the high drop-out rate and low child interest, and parent investment, in school. The best research-based reading and math programs will not work if there is a lack of interest in school, and if what is being taught is not relevant to students and parents. He said a broad and well-defined career technical education program in his district would be an effective way for students to connect to the curriculum and learning standards, and feel that the standards are meaningful to their future lives. Regional education hubs are needed to provide experiences, job-shadowing, internships, career awareness, and employment skills, and to expose students to life outside of the village. Although reading, writing, and math are basics, there is a need to provide music, art classes, and activities to hold students' interest. He reiterated the previous speaker's concerns about the teacher turnover rate and housing situations for educators. Finally, he said he agreed that students who start out behind may never catch up, and preschool is needed to help them off to a good start.

[9:48:48 AM](#)

DIANE GEORGE, Assistant Superintendent, Yupiit School District, informed the committee she began her work in Akiachak with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1980. She gave her perspective as an educator, administrator, parent, and community member. Ms. George concurred with the previous concerns and added that efforts have been put in place in the last year to help the schools attain Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), in particular the technical assistance received at the Yupiit School District. She stressed that the teachers and staff who have come to support them are well received; in fact, small school districts require state assistance and support, as the staff is limited. However, rather than itinerant staff a few days per month, her district needs staff from the community working with teachers on a full-time basis, such as a psychologists, speech pathologists, and administrators. Again, housing is an obstacle, in fact, recruitment efforts are often dictated by housing restrictions. Ms. George concluded that rural school districts have ideas for solving problems in their districts, but need support from EED to implement them.

[9:54:34 AM](#)

WILLIE KASAYULIE, Chairman, Yupiit School Board of Education, informed the committee he has been a member of the school board for 20 years. He said he agreed with the previous testimony from the rural school districts. The six school districts in the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta area were formed to allow local control of education, and many challenges continue to be faced. A major challenge is the retention of teachers, and he opined that success will occur when teachers remain in the communities.

[9:56:52 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked whether teacher housing attached to schools is supported by the community.

MR. DIAMOND observed that housing is close to the school in his community but modern four- or six-plexes are needed. He stressed the need to provide teachers with a comfortable infrastructure.

[9:59:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON said she would like to submit written questions to the superintendents.

[10:01:22 AM](#)

JOHN LAMONT, Superintendent, Lower Yukon School District, stated he was a life-long resident and superintendent of the Lower Yukon School District for five years. He assured the committee his district deals with all of the issues addressed by the previous witnesses. Mr. Lamont questioned whether the committee is looking only at the intervention districts related to the Moore v. State lawsuit, or at education throughout the state. He noted he has extensive testimony to give regarding education, curriculum, retention, and other observations.

CHAIR SEATON clarified that the committee is holding hearings about the many options available that will allow the legislature to fulfill its responsibility for the education of students in the five intervention districts, and across Alaska.

[10:05:26 AM](#)

MR. LAMONT said he appreciated the support his district has received from the department, although more is needed. He stressed the need to put early learning and creativity back in education, and move away from test scores and test results. In

addition, quality staff is vital to develop curriculum and to relate to staff, parents, and students. He said, "Test scores should, and will ... be able to take care of themselves providing that there is quality instruction going on." Although there are major issues with attendance and behavior, Mr. Lamont assured the committee that students have the ability to excel when given the creativity to cultivate their conditional learning style. He emphasized the importance of local control at each school, and cautioned that regional boarding schools may improve students' behavior and achievement scores, but they do not build individual communities, bring families into schools, or provide extracurricular activities. He suggested that some physical activities need to give way to a focus on learning, and indicated that his complete written comments are forthcoming. Mr. Lamont then commended the district improvement team and coach at the Lower Yukon School District, and recalled the commissioner's visit to the district, which is the first time that has occurred.

[10:16:05 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON noted the court order addresses other curriculum standards such as music and art. He asked Mr. Lamont to clarify his comments regarding physical activities.

MR. LAMONT confirmed that the emphasis on reading, writing, and math has made offering additional creative subject areas such as history, art, and music, difficult. However, for too long there has been a focus on basketball, when other content areas are important. A community should be aware that when kids are doing better academically, and parents are involved, then sports can be incorporated.

[10:21:04 AM](#)

ALEX RUSSIN, Assistant Superintendent, Lower Yukon School District, asked what the acronym DEED stands for, to underscore the need for early childhood development for every student in the state. He encouraged the department to refocus on early childhood development, and supported previous testimony.

[10:23:05 AM](#)

BRIAN KROSSCHELL, Director of Curriculum, Lower Yukon School District, stated that he supported previous testimony and emphasized Mr. Sampson's statement that early learning must be continued through grade three, because there is a disconnect

between preschool and the school system. Furthermore, he urged that intervention districts should be recognized as successful when students who enter school two or three years behind, graduate only one year behind.

[10:24:16 AM](#)

DAVID SHARSTROM, Director of School Intervention, Lower Yukon School District, assumed the focus of most intervention schools, and perhaps all schools in Alaska, is on academics due to the pressures of intervention and the need to bring students to grade level. The result is reading, writing, and math all day and all week. Each year during his 12 years in Bush Alaska, he has conducted a spring survey, and students are now reporting that school is not fun anymore. Mr. Sharstrom concluded that it is difficult to have a balance and a "sparkle" in the school day that is desired by students.

[10:27:10 AM](#)

KERRY BOYD, Superintendent, Yukon-Koyukuk School District, stated her hope that there will be additional funding for quality pre-k programs because her district received a grant for the pilot pre-k program, and it is successful, but funding will run out. Ms. Boyd asked the committee to support extended learning opportunities for students, as two of her district's schools have progressed from Level Five in corrective action to reaching AYP for two successive years, and extended learning was a big factor in that success. She also encouraged the continuation of professional development in the areas of "assets" and "resiliency," that look at more than the academic side of a child. Regarding curriculum alignment, the department has provided good direction and support; however, this requirement is daunting for her district, and more assistance is needed. In fact, the director of instruction and curriculum has spent one year focused on curriculum when she needed to be working with teachers on site. Ms. Boyd closed by pointing out that her district covers 65,000 square miles and nine sites, seven of which must be reached by air.

[10:29:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER offered greetings.

[10:30:28 AM](#)

CAROL DOYLE, Director of Instruction & Curriculum, Yukon-Koyukuk School District, informed the committee she has worked in the state for fourteen years in four rural areas. She pointed out that the problems in rural areas are the same for schools that attain AYP or that do not. The Yukon-Koyukuk School District was part of the curriculum alignment team working on state standards and it was a huge process that took a lot of teacher and mentor time that could have been better spent. She opined that the district has good standards-based curriculum, but it lacks resources to ensure that needs are filled in the villages. Ms. Doyle said that if EED were to handle the paperwork involved in the curriculum process, it would be helpful to the district.

CHAIR SEATON related that the issue of local control for curriculum is being scrutinized. He has heard that local districts have difficulty putting all of their energy into developing and aligning the curriculum. If the curriculum was ready to be implemented in rural Alaska, local districts would have more productive use of their time.

[10:33:20 AM](#)

MS. DOYLE observed that students will improve when the focus of the local district and mentoring teachers is in the classroom, not developing curriculum, and other paperwork.

[10:34:11 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON recalled the committee created and passed out legislation meant to eliminate much of the burden of paperwork on rural districts. He encouraged an exchange of additional written information between the committee and witnesses.

[10:34:39 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:35 a.m.