

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

April 15, 2009

8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Bettye Davis, Vice Chair
Senator Charlie Huggins
Senator Donald Olson
Senator Gary Stevens

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 215(EDC)

"An Act repealing school experience for salary scales provisions."

MOVED CSHB 215(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 215

SHORT TITLE: TEACHERS' SALARIES: SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) WILSON

04/03/09	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/03/09	(H)	EDC
04/08/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
04/08/09	(H)	Heard & Held
04/08/09	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/10/09	(H)	EDC RPT CS(EDC) NT 3DP 3NR
04/10/09	(H)	DP: WILSON, GARDNER, SEATON
04/10/09	(H)	NR: KELLER, MUNOZ, BUCH
04/10/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
04/10/09	(H)	Moved CSHB 215(EDC) Out of Committee
04/10/09	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/13/09	(H)	TRANSMITTED TO (S)
04/13/09	(H)	VERSION: CSHB 215(EDC)
04/14/09	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/14/09	(S)	EDC

WITNESS REGISTER

DANIEL DISTEFANO, staff to Representative Wilson
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Commented on HB 215 for the sponsor.

REPRESENTATIVE PEGGY WILSON
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 215.

EDDY JEANS, Director of School Finance
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding HB 215.

JOHN ALCANTRA, Government Relations Director
National Education Association Alaska (NEA)

POSITION STATEMENT: No position on HB 215.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:52 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR BETTYE DAVIS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stevens, Olson and Davis.

HB 215-TEACHERS' SALARIES: SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

[8:03:08 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR DAVIS announced the consideration of HB 215. [Before the committee was CSHB 215(EDC)].

[8:04:15 AM](#)

DANIEL DISTEFANO, staff to Representative Wilson, sponsor of HB 215, said it was introduced because they believe schools need additional tools to provide Alaska's kids with the best education possible.

This bill repeals salary scale limitations that were put in place during territorial days for hiring new, out-of-state teachers, and thus allowing for more competitive recruitment efforts. Current statutes limit the amount of out-of-state professional experience that may be used to establish a teacher's experience on the salary scale. No matter how long they've been teaching, out-of-state teachers with bachelor degrees can only receive credit for six years of out-of-state experience. A master's degree increases the credit to only eight years.

Hard to fill specialty positions such as therapists and special needs teachers are in high demand in school districts across the country as well as in Alaska; by repealing this antiquated statute, districts will be able to negotiate salaries on a case-by-case basis and will help keep Alaska competitive with the rest of the country when vying for needed educational professionals.

[8:05:24 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if this essentially floats a higher recruiting scale, how can there be a zero fiscal note.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON answered that each school would do this on a case-by-case basis. She explained that existing statute is left over from the territorial days and right now, if a teacher for a hard-to-fill position comes in with 20 years of experience, schools don't have the ability to offer a salary that takes that amount of experience into account. So, that creates a competitive disadvantage in hiring. If HB 215 passes, schools can decide what they can allow within their own budgets.

[8:07:17 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS said that schools are spending from the state's money and it seems as if the department would be spending more under this scenario.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON suggested that Mr. Jeans might be the person to answer Senator Huggins's question.

MR. DISTEFANO added that school funding will not change; but districts will simply have more discretion on how it gets allocated.

SENATOR HUGGINS wondered how the bill became only one line.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON explained that it originally included two subjects, one of which was dropout prevention. Because the House Education Committee is working on a bill this summer dealing with dropout prevention, they decided to remove that from this bill.

[8:08:40 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked for an example of what the difference in salary might be if this bill passes.

[8:09:25 AM](#)

EDDY JEANS, Director of School Finance, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), explained the way it works. Teachers are awarded steps based on their years of experience. The existing law dates back to territorial days when schools were state-operated and the state was paying the highest average teacher salaries in the nation, which is no longer true. There are now teacher shortages in specialty areas, so the pool of teachers out there has diminished substantially from when this law was adopted in territorial days.

HB 215 allows districts one more tool to make Alaska competitive with other states in hiring experienced teachers. He hoped that districts would adopt policies to address these hard-to-fill positions so that they are not just opening negotiating on an individual basis. He that many people were simply not aware that this law was still on the books.

SENATOR STEVENS asked for an example of the step difference in salaries.

[8:11:29 AM](#)

MR. JEANS said he doesn't negotiate salaries, and Mr. Alcantra might be able to answer that question. He added that, in response to Senator Huggins's question about the zero fiscal note, this doesn't increase the amount districts receive through the foundation program or any other state formula; it simply allows them the latitude to negotiate within their existing resources.

[8:12:00 AM](#)

SENATOR OLSON asked if there are penalties for not complying with the existing statute.

MR. JEANS answered no; the department doesn't even monitor compliance.

SENATOR OLSON asked why this law is getting changed now.

MR. JEANS replied that it's simply because they weren't aware of this limitation until it came to light when districts started recruiting for out-of-state teachers. And it doesn't make a lot of sense.

SENATOR OLSON agreed.

[8:13:19 AM](#)

JOHN ALCANTRA, Government Relations Director, National Education Association Alaska (NEA) Public School Employees' Union, thanked the committee for making time to hear bills related to education. He said that NEA has 217 positions on legislation, but none on this particular issue. This may be a very good bill, but he wondered why it was moving through the process so quickly. He thinks they should work on it through the Interim rather than rushing to judgment.

He explained that, although contracts differ from one district to another - Anchorage, for example, allows five years on the salary schedule and Juneau allows ten years on the salary schedule - but, if they were abiding by the law, a teacher coming in from outside with a master's degree would only start at step eight or with a bachelors degree at step six unless they have additional experience in the state of Alaska to bring them up to a step ten.

MR. ALCANTRA admitted that it may benefit their members to remove this antiquated statute from the books but, he opined, if he was hired as a special education teacher in Petersburg with eight years experience four years ago and was at the maximum placement on the salary schedule, and the school district hired a highly skilled special needs teacher from outside the state at a step 15, he would not be pleased.

[8:18:38 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS said he doesn't remember Mat-Su's rules, but there is some portability of tenure. His concern is that he has not been able to talk to his school district about this bill, and although it appears to be benign, he doesn't know that.

SENATOR OLSON said it seems to be straight forward, and he doesn't see why they wouldn't go ahead with this type of legislation.

MR. ALCANTRA agreed that it does have the potential to benefit school districts, but it could also be used arbitrarily; a person could cherry-pick teachers in a manner that might conflict with individual bargaining agreements. He reiterated that he doesn't understand why this is moving through the system so fast.

[8:22:12 AM](#)

SENATOR OLSON pointed out that it was just introduced on April 3rd but more importantly, when his superintendent calls and says they have a lot of hard-to-fill positions and he has found

someone he would like to hire, but he can't offer a sufficiently attractive salary, what can he tell that superintendent?

8:23:15 AM

MR. ALCANTRA admitted that the bill was introduced April 3rd and it was totally changed on Friday. He wasn't sure what he should say to that superintendent; he doesn't know that district's contract or what that superintendent has offered to induce teachers to stay. He appreciated the issue, but didn't necessarily know if this was the right solution.

8:24:20 AM

SENATOR OLSON commented that the highest turnover rate is in the western rural districts - 26 to 28 percent annually, and he represents six of those districts.

8:24:42 AM

SENATOR STEVENS said it appears this is going to have to change eventually. Either folks are ignoring it, or it is preventing people from hiring so, though he understands this isn't an "earth shaking" piece of legislation, he thought it could help.

8:25:42 AM

VICE CHAIR DAVIS closed public testimony on HB 215. She said she accepts responsibility for placing this on a fast track. It passed the House with 40 votes, which is very unusual and she believes it can be a useful tool for school districts. She stated that she is always concerned about education, but admitted that more information was needed before it reaches the Senate floor. She was inclined to pass it out of committee and hold it in Rules until they could get some additional information, but said she will leave the decision up to the committee.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON said this was heard twice in the House Education Committee, and some questions came up on dropout prevention, but that is not on this issue and she was surprised to find anyone speaking against it here. There are no hidden agendas here; the bill was introduced at the request of schools who contacted her office.

8:30:18 AM

VICE CHAIR DAVIS assured her that no one believes that she is trying to slip something past them.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON said it originally included a way for the schools to use their student counts for the current year when

they negotiate with the city for their budgets every March; that would give them a firm figure to go with for the next year. Then in the October count, if the numbers went up it could be adjusted.

8:32:08 AM

SENATOR STEVENS asked if this particular piece of the legislation was introduced at the request of school districts.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON confirmed that it was.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked which school districts requested this legislation.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON answered that Wrangell and Craig districts, but she couldn't remember the third.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked Representative Wilson what school districts testified on the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON replied that no one has testified.

SENATOR HUGGINS emphasized that he was not against this bill; he knows that districts have provisions in place for scales of experience in hiring and this would just scrap them. He isn't sure whether it is in their best interests to do that, and he thinks they need to discuss whether some other criteria should be put in place. He, too, was a little confused about the haste to move this through the process.

SENATOR OLSON moved to report HB 215 from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note(s). There being no objection, CSHB 215(EDC) moved from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

8:37:00 AM

VICE CHAIR DAVIS said when the bill goes to the Rules Committee she would ask that it not be placed on the schedule until she has provided the committee with additional information.

There being no further business to come before the committee, Vice Chair Davis adjourned the meeting at 8:37 a.m.