

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 27, 2010
8:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Kevin Meyer, Co-Chair
Senator Joe Thomas, Co-Chair
Senator Bettye Davis, Vice Chair
Senator Charlie Huggins
Senator Donald Olson
Senator Gary Stevens

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 221

"An Act establishing an advisory task force on higher education in the legislative branch of government; and providing for an effective date."

HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 221

SHORT TITLE: LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON HIGHER ED

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

01/19/10	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/19/10	(S)	EDC, FIN
01/26/10	(S)	EDC at 8:00 AM in Fahrenkamp 203
01/27/10	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM FAHRENKAMP 203

WITNESS REGISTER

Tim Lamkin, staff to Senator Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information about the SB 221.

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

Denver, CO

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a presentation on improving higher education.

CARL KRUEGER, Policy Analyst

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)

Boulder, CO

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 221.

MARK HAMILTON, President

University of Alaska

Fairbanks, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 221.

WENDY REDMAN, Executive Vice President

Statewide University

Fairbanks, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 221.

JOHN ALCANTRA, Government Relations Director

NEA-Alaska

Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 221.

DEB JOHNSTON, Dean of Administration and Finance

Alaska Pacific University

Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 221.

KELLY SMITH, Dean of Students

Pacific University

Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 221.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:00:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR KEVIN MEYER called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Davis, Huggins, Olson, Stevens, Thomas and Meyer.

SB 221-LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON HIGHER ED

8:01:07 AM

CO-CHAIR MEYER announced consideration of SB 221 establishing an advisory task force on higher education in the legislative branch of government.

SENATOR STEVENS said he brought the bill forward as a direct result of having read the book Crossing the Finish Line by William G. Bowen. Although Senator Stevens was a professor at the University for 25 years, he was shocked to read the statistics and conclusions Bowen makes regarding college completion in this country. Our universities, including the University of Alaska for which the legislature has enormous responsibility, have been dedicated to equal opportunity and affordability; they've played a crucial role in building our country's human capital. It is a sobering fact however, that less than 60 percent of the students who enter a four-year college in America today are graduating. The taskforce created by this bill will be charged with finding out why this is happening and what we can do about it here in Alaska.

Almost the first sentence in Bowen's book is "Educational attainment in the United States today is highly consequential." There are enormous consequences from getting an education and more from failing to do so. People with Bachelor's Degrees earn 60 percent more during their lifetimes than those who have only a high school diploma, which means higher tax revenues to the country. College graduates also live healthier and longer lives. They rely less on the social programs that we spend so much money on like welfare and Medicaid, saving the state and the nation significant amounts of money. They participate more in civic activities such as voting, running for the legislature, giving to charities and donating blood. By improving college access and success, Alaska will increase these individual, economic, and societal benefits.

8:04:14 AM

Crossing the Finish Line is a great title for this book. It is an analogy that getting a postsecondary education is like running a foot race; many compete but some 40 percent fall by the wayside. They do that for good and valid reasons. Some are simply not prepared for college life, they haven't the reading skills or the English or the math to compete in college. They may lack the intellectual support from their families; they may come from a family that has no history of education and consequently does not support a child going on to college. They may have insurmountable financial difficulties, or it may be a

simple matter of not knowing how to manage their time. There are a lot of reasons that students don't cross the finish line.

SENATOR STEVENS concluded, what they are trying to do with this task force is to identify those reasons and frankly, he doesn't expect any surprises. Remedial education is certainly important to make up for what students missed in high school or even grade school, but helping students to prepare for college by taking classes that don't count toward college graduation is expensive to them and to the state. Counseling and advising is another problem; preparing students for what they're going to face and integrating them into the social life on campus is very important in order for them to be happy and successful. All of those things are important to helping students stay in college and cross the finish line. So not only do we want to identify the reasons students don't graduate, we want to find the solutions, to analyze the trends here in Alaska and the data on student success, to create a plan to decrease the need for remedial education, and to increase student retention and graduation. The hard work of the proposed task force, he said, should help the educational community prepare Alaskan students for their future which, quite frankly, is our future.

[8:06:50 AM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, staff to Senator Stevens, explained that SB 221 establishes a task force comprised of 13 members: the Governor, the executive director of the ACPE, the Department of Education, the president of the University of Alaska, the School Boards, NEA-Alaska, the chair persons of both the House and Senate committees with jurisdiction over education, a member who represents private colleges in the state, members representing postsecondary educational institutions not affiliated with the university, and three members who have specialized skill or knowledge in the area of remediation. The task force will assemble at least every three months over the next year and compile a report on March 1, 2011. It will sunset at the end of the next fiscal year.

[8:08:35 AM](#)

BRENDA BAUTSCH, a Policy Specialist with the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) focusing on higher education issues, offered a presentation on how Alaska compares to other states and the nation regarding retention and graduation rates.

MS. BAUTSCH recognized that Alaska serves a very non-traditional student population. Slide 2 shows statistics from the University of Alaska, Anchorage, where 55 percent of students are full-time

and 45 percent are part-time. That is a very high percentage of part-time students. Ten percent of students are American Indian or Alaska Native and 44 percent are over the age of 25. That is a very high number of older students. The University of Alaska is an "open access university", which means that the campus might be serving students who don't have sufficient academic preparation and may need remedial course work.

[8:10:22 AM](#)

MS. BAUTSCH said slide 3 depicts the retention rate by state for first-time college freshman returning for their second year at a four-year institution. The U.S. average is 75.5 percent; Alaska's average is 66.6 percent, putting Alaska fifth from the bottom in the state ranking of retention rates for students at four-year institutions.

[8:10:53 AM](#)

Slide 4 reflects retention rates for both full-time and part-time students at two-year institutions. For this statistic, the U.S. average is 53 percent and the Alaska average is 47.6 percent, putting Alaska sixth from the bottom.

[8:11:20 AM](#)

Slide 5 shows three-year graduation rates for Associate students, taking into account only first-time, full-time students. The U.S. average is 27.8 percent and the Alaska average is 24.1 percent, putting us in the middle of the pack on this statistic.

[8:11:52 AM](#)

MS. BAUTSCH said that the six-year graduation rate for Bachelor's Degree students on slide 6 shows the U.S. average is 56.1 percent, while Alaska is at the bottom in the state ranking with only 22.4 percent of students graduating with a Bachelor's Degree within six years. The eight-year statistic jumps up to around 30 percent.

[8:12:36 AM](#)

Alaska is not the only state with problems; every state has its own battle and many have created higher education task forces to tackle the problem and find solutions.

[8:12:53 AM](#)

Slide 8 lists some examples of recent legislative higher education task forces in: Arizona, Arkansas, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota and South Carolina. She noted that NCSL had its own task force in 2006, the Blue Ribbon Commission on

Higher Education, which was comprised of 12 legislators from different states. These task forces all vary in their focus. For example, South Carolina's focus was very broad, covering all things related to higher education, whereas Minnesota's was specific to funding for their public institutions.

[8:13:38 AM](#)

MS. BAUTSCH said that because this bill is modeled on the Arkansas task force, she included some information about that on slides 9 and 10. The Arkansas Task Force was focused on higher education, remediation, retention and graduation rates. It was formed in 2007 and held 16 meetings at which various stakeholders presented members with comprehensive testimony and information. From all of those hearings, a final report was developed and released in August 2008.

The task force chair was Representative Johnnie Roebuck, who did a great job of following up on the recommendations and keeping track of the results. So far, 22 Acts have been signed that are related to the task force recommendations, and several policies and programs not requiring legislation have been implemented.

[8:14:38 AM](#)

Slide 10 presents an excerpt from Arkansas' spreadsheet of efforts addressing task force recommendations. The way they have followed through is quite impressive.

[8:15:18 AM](#)

MS. BAUTSCH concluded by providing her contact information on slide 11 and offering to answer any questions the committee may have going forward.

[8:15:35 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER opened the meeting to general questions from the committee.

SENATOR OLSON asked what the committee can expect to find that hasn't already been found by all of the other task forces nationwide that have been looking at this issue. He questioned the expenditure of money for a task force to find answers they may be able to get from the work of other states.

[8:16:35 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS admitted Senator Olson is right; many other studies have come up with the conclusion that students have to spend too much time taking remediation classes in college. That tells him that colleges and universities have to be aligned with

the high schools and even middle schools; that is why the Commissioner of Education is on this task force. They need to work with public education to find out how to align the university's requirements with what is happening in high school.

There are many ways to involve students when they go to college. Some universities have a month-long program during the summer before college to do remedial education, help students learn how to manage their time, and teach them how to study. Some others have an orientation week before classes start. The biggest problem is that students drop out most often after their first year, but also after their sophomore and junior years. The important thing is to learn what the issues are here in Alaska, whether they are the same as those in other states and, even more, what it will take to get those kids across the finish line.

SENATOR STEVENS pointed out that one thing they haven't dealt with is how the country compares with the rest of the world. At one time the U.S. brought a lot of scientists in from foreign countries; the U.S. was a beacon to graduate students around the world, but that isn't true any more. The U.S. is going to have to produce its own engineers, scientists and mathematicians.

8:20:01 AM

He summarized, that there will be few surprises regarding what they need to correct; they have to figure out how to go about it. This task force is made up of pretty outstanding people who can hopefully come up with solid recommendations; maybe it will require money. He read a report in the Seattle Times that said a husband and wife graduating from the University of Washington medical school would graduate with \$500,000 in debt. What jobs can new physicians consider, he wondered, with that amount of debt to cover. He thinks one result of this will be that they have to take a serious look at how they can help students pay for college.

8:21:10 AM

SENATOR OLSON commented that the makeup of the task force includes a lot of very successful people. He wondered if any consideration has been given to including someone on the task force who has dropped out and can provide a different perspective.

8:21:59 AM

SENATOR STEVENS conceded that Senator Olson has a good point. He said he met with Larry LeDoux, Commissioner of Education,

yesterday about the makeup of this task force and Mr. LeDoux's initial comment was "You don't have a student on this." He based this task force on the Arkansas model, but said there is no reason it can't be modified.

[8:23:14 AM](#)

SENATOR OLSON asked if the averages Ms. Bautsch provided for first-time college students returning for a second year represent Alaska students in total or only those attending the University of Alaska. He pointed out that a large number of students go outside the state for college.

[8:24:00 AM](#)

MS. BAUTSCH answered that these figures include only students studying in Alaska's two and four-year public institutions.

[8:24:20 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN said part of this task force's mission is to try to address tracking for this type of information.

[8:24:48 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS said there is the opportunity in the bill for designees to the task force. He also opined that a factor contributing to our poor position in the ratings might be Alaska's challenges in communications.

[8:26:09 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS responded that he wants to make perfectly clear that this is in no way critical of the University of Alaska. Open enrollment does put us at a disadvantage in the statistics, but he feels that it offers greater opportunity to older students and others and does not think that should change.

[8:27:40 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asserted that the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education has some of the traits of the proposed task force and asked if they had considered giving Diane Barrans the money to take this on.

[8:28:31 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN directed Senator Huggins's attention to page 1, line 13 where it specifies the director of the ACPE or the director's designee as one member of the task force.

SENATOR HUGGINS interjected that is his point; ACPE is similar to the body they are proposing to create and Ms. Barrans is already listed as a member of the task force. He wondered if

there has been any discussion of expanding the breadth and depth of the Commission's responsibilities to include this task.

8:29:14 AM

SENATOR STEVENS said he'll be interested to hear what Ms. Barrans has to say about that.

8:29:47 AM

SENATOR DAVIS thanked Senator Stevens for bringing this forward. She was stunned by Brenda's presentation and the fact that we are at bottom of the statistics for graduation in six years from a four-year university. There is a great need for some input and ideas. She believes that it is not as necessary to have people on the task force who were not successful in college as it is for the task force to solicit their input.

SENATOR DAVIS suggested that the committee consider an amendment to include a student member on the task force. She also asked if anyone could provide the numbers of students who graduated within four years from a four-year university.

8:32:08 AM

SENATOR STEVENS commented that many of his students in Kodiak were Coast Guard who were fully employed and working toward a college degree. It took them many years, but he found it admirable that they stuck to it and finished their degrees on line and still considers these people successful.

He asserted that creating a position on the task force for someone who is a "failure" doesn't seem like a good idea, but did see the import of bringing in people with a lot of different perspectives to testify. He also agreed that it is a good idea to add a student representative.

8:33:51 AM

SENATOR DAVIS clarified that her request for numbers regarding graduation within four years refers specifically to traditional students coming right out of high school and going to college full-time.

8:34:32 AM

CO-CHAIR MEYER said he appreciates Senator Davis's recommendation for an amendment, but would like to hear from the public first.

SENATOR OLSON noted that the \$14,000 fiscal note seems quite low for a large task force meeting every three months.

SENATOR STEVENS asked Mr. Lamkin to explain the fiscal note.

MR. LAMKIN explained that the fiscal note is based on the assumption that there will be six meetings and two of them will be teleconferenced. The institutions and agencies sending representatives will pay their share of the cost for participating in the task force, so the \$14,000 reflects primarily plane tickets for the chair persons of the Education Committees and affiliated staff.

[8:36:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER said it appears that schools, particularly those out of state, are trying to deal with their budget deficits on the backs of the students, which he thinks is a serious mistake. Tuition for colleges in California has gone up almost 15 percent each year for the last couple of years and will probably continue to do so. Also unfortunately, not many colleges are accepting students on the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) program, so this subject is timely.

He opened the meeting to public testimony.

[8:37:25 AM](#)

CARL KRUEGER, Policy Analyst, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), Boulder, Colorado said he just got back from Alaska where he was working with an ACPE project that is using funds from the Access Challenge Grant to launch a peer-mentoring pilot program. He hopes it will someday be in high schools across state, but right now it is only in the Anchorage School District. It is all about college readiness, particularly for low income and first-generation students.

MR. KRUEGER continued, Arkansas is really the best model, but there are a couple of other examples the committee might want to look at. Tennessee's Developmental Redesign Initiative is a collaboration between the Commissioner of Postsecondary Education and six pilot institutions in the state; the focus is to redesign the delivery of remedial education in the state to cut down on the number of students who need it and the costs of the program. Washington State wrote a college-readiness plan into their master plan that also bears looking at. Lastly, the California University system has something called an "Early Assessment Program" that tests high school juniors in math and science to see how they line up with college entrance requirements. Those same students are allowed to work on any

deficiencies during their senior year, so by the time they enter college they do not need any further remediation.

He stated that everyone at WICHE is fully in support of SB 221.

8:41:20 AM

CO-CHAIR MEYER thanked Mr. Krueger and said the sponsor or his staff will be in touch to follow up on his recommendations.

8:41:47 AM

MARK HAMILTON, President, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska, said he welcomes this kind of task force and can provide an enormous amount of data. He knows some of the things that improve college retention rates. One program is the Rural Alaskan Honors Institute (RAHI) which allows high school students to attend college during the summer for credit and has been going on for 28 years. Attendance at that kind of a program has proven to double students' chances of obtaining a degree. He thinks they can do a very good job of helping the legislature determine what magnitude of fiscal note will move them in the right direction, because the University has introduced a student success initiative for the last four years; although they haven't gotten funding for it yet, they have defined the costs.

He stated that retention across the board in every category and sub-category has improved for the past decade, so Alaska is now last by less. He stressed that Alaska is very, very different in its student body. In a comparison of classic first-time freshmen directly out of high school, Alaska's retention rates to the sophomore year are absolutely in line with the national average. That tells him that Alaskan students are prepared pretty well.

MR. HAMILTON agreed with Senator Stevens that the biggest issue regarding remediation is that individuals become frustrated when they have to spend the first year or year and a half in college taking remedial courses that don't get them any nearer to a degree. The University considers remediation successful if the student ultimately gets a C or better in the standard course. In English, he said, they do pretty well, but math is a challenge; if a student needs remediation in math the chance of getting a C or better in math 107 is almost none. The key is preparation early on.

8:49:03 AM

SENATOR OLSON thanked Mr. Hamilton and asked if those students who aren't graduating in six years are more likely to be in liberal arts or in sciences. He contended that 1 + 1 is always 2

and ought to be an easy concept, but dealing with English grammar is not so clear-cut.

MR. HAMILTON insisted that the stumbling block in every state in the nation is math.

[8:51:36 AM](#)

SENATOR OLSON mused that the U.S. system of measures with feet and inches and fractions is harder to grasp than the metric system. He asked Mr. Hamilton if he sees that as a factor.

[8:52:27 AM](#)

MR. HAMILTON responded that he has no information about that. He admitted that he wishes the U.S. had made the conversion a long time ago; he can barely handle centigrade to Fahrenheit himself.

[8:53:04 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER excused those members who have to attend other meetings at 9:00 a.m.

[8:53:52 AM](#)

WENDY REDMAN, Executive Vice President, Statewide University, Fairbanks, Alaska, said Statewide University has a lot of experience teaching practical math successfully. A couple of the highs schools including King Career Center and Hutchison Career Center, have developed models to bring kids quickly up to the state high school standards, so they know how to do it; it just hasn't permeated the school system yet.

She stated that what educators want is for kids to come out of school either college-ready or work-ready; the skills are the same. While this bill is really focusing on college, with a few tweaks it could focus on getting students work-ready as well. She said she would like to see that kind of rhetorical change.

[8:56:33 AM](#)

JOHN ALCANTRA, Government Relations Director, NEA-Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, said they support SB 221 and thanked them for hearing this legislation. He assured them that NEA will be happy to pay their share of the cost to be involved.

[8:57:58 AM](#)

ELDON DAVIDSON, Executive Director, Southwest Alaska Vocational and Education Center (SAVEC) expressed support for SB 221 and agreed with the testimony by Wendy Redman and Mark Hamilton. He suggested adding a rural component or regional training center representative to the task force.

[8:58:40 AM](#)

DEB JOHNSTON, Dean of Administration and Finance, Alaska Pacific University, Anchorage, Alaska, said they support bill and would welcome the opportunity to participate. Alaska Pacific University faces many of struggles that this legislation is intended to address; many students require remediation even though APU is not an open campus, particularly among first-time and returning older adults.

KELLY SMITH, Dean of Students, Pacific University, Anchorage, Alaska, said it is pretty clear that students are under prepared. Being part of a statewide effort would help their students and the interests of the state.

[9:01:01 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER closed public testimony and said he would hold SB 221 over and intends to take up amendments on Friday before moving the bill out of committee.

[9:03:04 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Meyer adjourned the meeting at 9:03 a.m.