

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 26, 2010  
8:03 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. 224

"An Act establishing the governor's performance scholarship program and relating to the program; establishing the governor's performance scholarship fund and relating to the fund; relating to student records; making conforming amendments; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 283

"An Act relating to the legal age for attending school; and providing for an effective date."

- BILL HEARING POSTPONED

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 224

SHORT TITLE: POSTSECONDARY SCHOLARSHIPS

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/19/10	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/19/10	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/03/10	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
02/03/10	(S)	Heard & Held
02/03/10	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/15/10	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

02/15/10	(S)	Heard & Held
02/15/10	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/19/10	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/19/10	(S)	Heard & Held
02/19/10	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/22/10	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/22/10	(S)	Heard & Held
02/22/10	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/26/10	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

**WITNESS REGISTER**

LARRY LEDOUX, Commissioner  
 Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)  
 Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on version E CS for SB 224 as compared to the original bill.

DIANE BARRENS, Executive Director  
 Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education  
 Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions and provided information about SB 224.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

8:03:06 AM

**CO-CHAIR KEVIN MEYER** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stevens, Huggins, Davis, Olson, Thomas and Meyer.

**SB 224-POSTSECONDARY SCHOLARSHIPS**

8:03:31 AM

CO-CHAIR MEYER announced continuation of consideration of SB 224. It was heard previously; committee substitute (CS), 26-GS2771\E was adopted on 2/15/10 and amendments to the original bill were discussed on 2/22/2010. Today, he said, the committee would hear from the commissioner.

8:05:14 AM

LARRY LEDOUX, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), said he will briefly review topics related to the CS and address the questions that were submitted to the department yesterday. Describing the alternative requirements provided in the CS as interesting, he said he has no objection

to this proposed change. He recounted that the governor's bill requires four years of mathematics, four years of science, four years of language arts, and three years of social studies. Alternatively, the CS requires three years of mathematics, four years of language arts, three years of science, three years of social Studies, and two years of a foreign language or Alaska Native language. He opined that the alternative requirements would provide a rigorous college curriculum and he particularly likes that the foreign language requirement includes the option for Alaska Native language. Also, many college-bound students already study a foreign language and many colleges list that as a requirement.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX said he does have concern that the CS removes the standardized test requirement because they validate the student's grades and the rigor of the courses, reduce the circumstance of grade inflation, and provide insurance that students are prepared. Observing that the ACT and SAT are accurate predictors of how successful a student will be in his/her first year of college, he pointed out that a primary goal of this program is to ensure that Alaska schools are sending to the university young people who will succeed. Students need to be ready to compete and the standardized test ensures that they're ready.

He said he's also very concerned that the CS provides only one performance scholarship. To qualify a student must have a 3.5 GPA or higher in rigorous academic courses. That's the only scholarship a student can get by working hard without showing needs. There's no B+ scholarship without needs and there's no C+ scholarship without needs. The next two tiers [opportunity and career scholarships] have a needs-based qualification, but if a student doesn't have a need, he/she isn't qualified for these. This is very different than the governor's scholarship as originally proposed, which is an invitation to all students to participate. The goal of the program is to invite students as early as sixth grade to think about course choices and work with parents to encourage their children to work hard to prepare for college.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX noted that the other body has accepted a needs-based amendment to the governor's program that puts the need after the merit so that all students can qualify, but if there is a financial need once they qualify then the need could be met. That is consistent with the challenge for excellence that we're sending to young people, he said. We're saying that if a student works hard and makes the right choices in school,

the state will help with higher education. The needs-based component helps students whose families can't pay for college in Alaska.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX expressed concern about lowering the standard for the career scholarship and noted that most career and technical education specialists warn against lowering standards. These students work hard and they'll achieve a high standard if one's set. He cited the results from a recent survey of courses offered in schools statewide and said that the performance scholarship will have the effect of ensuring that students in every school in the state will have access to rigorous courses. He noted that some schools aren't delivering the program that students need to be successful in college regardless of the scholarship, and he believes that should change immediately.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX summarized that the biggest difference between the two bills is the needs before merit. That's not acceptable, he stated.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said he appreciates the comments about the ACT and SAT.

[8:17:12 AM](#)

SENATOR OLSON asked if the ACT and SAT are available and currently offered to students in the smaller high schools like Diomede, Shaktoolik, and Savoonga.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX replied any school in the state can become a test center and the tests will be offered if there's a student that needs to take them. He added that he assumes that if a community wasn't able to offer the test that the student would be flown to the appropriate location to do so. Students wouldn't be denied the opportunity to take the tests.

SENATOR OLSON observed that this would likely add stress and put those students at a disadvantage.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX said that's correct, but he believes that most schools, regardless of size, offer the tests in the community.

SENATOR STEVENS observed that grade inflation would be a real disservice to students and standardized tests address this issue and keep everyone honest.

[8:18:51 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS described the scholarship program as an agent for change in schools and mused about how quickly schools will be able to conform to the new standards. He clarified that he isn't looking for an answer today, but it is an important piece to understand.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX said it's important to understand that implementation of the requirements will be phased in and the law allows for that. He noted that other states have phased in over four years.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked about the monetary impact as they move toward full implementation.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX replied they have some predictability models with regard to scholarship use.

[8:21:08 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS asked how many schools are in the state.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX replied he's been told that the survey included 339 high schools in the state and that there are over 500 schools in the state, but he'll verify those numbers.

SENATOR OLSON asked if the numbers include private schools

MR. LEDOUX replied he understands that the survey included just public schools.

[8:23:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if he'd like the bill to specify the courses or if he'd prefer to keep it general so DEED could specify the courses.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX replied he would prefer that DEED specify the courses to meet the goals of the program. If it's specified in the law it would be necessary to return to the Legislature as university requirements change, whereas the state Board of Education could respond more expeditiously.

[8:24:37 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if his assumption is accurate that this will be easier for correspondence and home school students to conform to.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered yes.

SENATOR HUGGINS questioned how this will be communicated to home school students.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX replied most home school students in this state are affiliated with a school district or state-sponsored correspondence programs so it wouldn't be difficult. The home school students who aren't affiliated with anyone generally monitor what the Legislature and DEED does, but they would also receive communications through the public information process.

8:25:51 AM

DIANE BARRENS, Executive Director, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, informed the committee that the commission has a robust outreach unit that uses the PFD database to send age-specific information directly to households. She added that the governor's scholarship program would certainly be a keystone of that outreach if it were to pass.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked why the governor's bill lowers the monetary amount for vocational students to \$3,000 when it's recognized that vocational schools can be just as expensive as the university.

MR. LEDOUX said they're looking at whether \$3,000 is too low, but they know that most programs at the Alaska Vocational Technical Center (AVTEC), for example, cost between \$1,600 and \$2,500. The tuition for a licensed practical nurse is the most expensive program and it costs \$5,000. He noted that the other body amended the needs-based component making career technical students eligible for needs-based based on room and board and other reasonable costs of attendance. That body also proposed an amendment that would allow students who qualify under the academic scholarships to transfer the award to a career technical school.

8:28:54 AM

SENATOR OLSON asked if vocational students are required to take the ACT or SAT.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX replied they anticipate that vocational technical students could qualify through either the ACT or the WorkKeys job skills assessment.

CO-CHAIR MEYER opined that the ACT and SAT are both good assessment tools, but he recalls that the original bill set rather high standards for students to meet.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX clarified that the bill does not set standards, but the inference was that the state Board of Education would set standards. He said he wouldn't want the standards to be any higher than necessary in order to validate grades and predict success in college. He offered to provide data relating to minimum ACT scores that are predictive of college performance and historical performance data on both the SAT and ACT tests. These show that our students generally perform, he said.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said he would appreciate the information. He added that he believes that it's important to look at how a student scores on both the SAT and the ACT because they're very different tests.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX observed that many programs accept either test because they cross-correlate. He said it would be easy to use either test as a qualifier because they're both predictive of success during the first year of college.

[8:32:05 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked, assuming that this passes, if DEED has the ability to track students sufficiently to know that this has worked or if they will have to wait to hear from the university about the number of students who actually get a degree.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX explained that an Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education applied for a grant to do longitudinal studies to determine student performance at the university. As currently written, the bill requires DEED to submit an annual report informing the Legislature about the status of the scholarships and what's happening at the university. He opined that this program has great potential to change education in the state so it will be important to have good data to monitor the evolution of the program and ensure that it meets the goals that are set.

[8:33:38 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked Ms. Barrens if she would like to comment on the bill.

MS. BARRENS said the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education is excited about the prospect of having a program that offers equal opportunity to Alaska students to advance to postsecondary education and training. She related that the commission has been involved in the development of the bill and

she believes that the provisions are mindful. For example, the six-year framework that the bill proposes is designed to incent students to proceed from secondary to postsecondary schooling as quickly as possible because there is a direct correlation between waiting and the ability to succeed. She noted that in a written response to prior committee questions Ms. Butler pointed out that students who delay pay more and their chance of success is diminished. Most states that have similar programs require students to continue within a year of graduation from high school. Responding to Senator Davis's observation that her packet didn't contain correspondence from Stephanie Butler, she related that a letter dated 2/23/10 was sent to the co-chairs.

CO-CHAIR MEYER assured Senator Davis that she would receive a copy.

8:36:39 AM

SENATOR STEVENS said he agrees that students who delay take longer to get a degree, but he isn't sure it makes a difference if a student starts college at age 18 or age 25 if the goal is to educate the workforce and get more people to get a college degree.

MS. BARRENS said she agrees with his statement, but financial aid programs for adult students are outside the scope of the proposal. The structural objective of this program is to create a sense of urgency in students to proceed to postsecondary education and training and complete it quickly. She noted that the governor's proposal allows for half-time attendance, but statistics show that they have a lower expectation of success.

SENATOR STEVENS said some people need a longer time to mature to be ready for college and he believes that issue needs to be addressed at some point, perhaps outside this bill.

8:39:48 AM

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked at what grade students begin to get information about higher education and training programs.

MS. BARRENS explained that the earliest outreach effort that the postsecondary commission has is second grade. It's a joint activity with the University of Alaska. In fifth and sixth grades they have a program called "I'm going to college" that starts the students thinking about careers and includes a trip to the local university campus. The university sends information directly to high school freshmen about planning a preparatory

curriculum. In the junior and senior years the commission sends information to students promoting going to college in Alaska.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked if school districts have embraced the use of the information.

MS. BARRENS answered yes; the schools have enthusiastically welcomed the outreach because there had been a vacuum for this sort of information. She offered to provide specific information about the districts that participate in the various initiatives, but this year they anticipate that more than 2000 fifth graders will participate in the "I'm going to college" program. The direct mailings go to all students of a certain age regardless of whether they're in the school system.

[8:43:48 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked if there is outreach to parents as well.

MS. BARRENS explained that the commission sends cards to the parents informing them of what was sent to their child and asking for input, but the caveat is that all the information is in English. The outreach unit, which is based in Anchorage, engages faith-based organizations, Boys and Girls clubs, YMCAs.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX added that the implementation of the GPS program will include a regulation requiring six-year education plans beginning in the sixth grade. A school official will meet annually with the student and parent to review the plan so the parent can receive information about choices, scholarships, and pathways. Also, the state is in the final stage of approving a new CTE plan that calls for the development of grade level expectations in career and technical education starting in kindergarten. There's a lot of effort in this area, he said.

[8:46:51 AM](#)

SENATOR OLSON recalled that in the '70s lots of high school graduates who went to the North Slope to work on the pipeline never returned to school and he sees the same cycle potentially repeating itself with the natural gas pipeline. The proposal is on the right track; students should proceed to postsecondary education and training sooner rather than later.

SENATOR STEVENS reiterated his belief that it would be a shame to pass a scholarship bill that leaves out non-traditional students.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked how the current scholars program will be affected by this proposal.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX replied he can't comment on the future of the scholars program going forward, but he hopes it continues because the two are compatible although very different. The scholars program provides funds to all students in the top 10 percent of their graduating class as opposed to the governor's proposal that demands a rigorous curriculum, a certain GPA, and a certain validating test score.

[8:51:28 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked how the governor's proposal will help address current shortages in the professional workforce in Alaska.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX said there has been no discussion about extending the program to professional preparation programs, but a student who receives a BA down south could return to Alaska and still have two years of eligibility that could be used for graduate or professional school.

SENATOR HUGGINS suggested that the committee meet with the university, high schools and DEED to talk about an integrated tracking strategy for students.

[8:55:21 AM](#)

MS. BARRENS explained that the grant application the commissioner referenced is for a state longitudinal data system that proposes to do that working with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Department of Education and Early Development, the University of Alaska, and potentially the Department of Health and Social Services, and the Department of Corrections. The idea is to track students who are successful and those who fall through the cracks. You can't understand the benefit of education without identifying the cost of not being educated, she said.

SENATOR DAVIS said she too has grave concern about ignoring non-traditional students, particularly after listening to the recent testimony about their needs. She asked if the department would consider amending the bill to accommodate these students in some way.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered that the goal of the governor's proposal is to inspire young people who are in the system to work harder and develop a vision for success. While he

recognizes that non-traditional students need support, opening this program to anyone who decides to go back to college would change its focus entirely.

[8:59:21 AM](#)

MS. BARRENS related that the AlaskaAdvantage need-based grant program is available to anyone in need as long as funds are available, but the funding source is very small. After 2011 the program will either stop or the commission will be back asking the Legislature for consideration for funding.

SENATOR DAVIS asked if AlaskaAdvantage is entirely state funds.

MS. BARRENS replied they received some non-recurring corporate funds this year. There is a little over \$100,000 in federal dollars and the Legislature appropriated in the capital budget in FY09 funding that they are spreading over three years.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if the governor's original bill required the FAFSA.

MS. BARRENS replied the bill doesn't specify that it's required, but the commission would intend to use it. Without that information they couldn't tell the socioeconomic status of students who receive the scholarship funds. Responding to a question, she said that filing the FAFSA is an annual process.

[9:02:54 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS commented that they've made progress today, but he and Senator Davis want to make sure the committee addresses the issue of non-traditional students.

CO-CHAIR MEYER agreed that the issue should be addressed and said he believes that the committee has a better feel for the bill and is ready for another CS.

SENATOR DAVIS suggested that it would be helpful to get a written response to the questions that were asked previously.

[9:05:55 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX committed to respond by Monday. He added that he can answer question 16 right now. It asks if this is too much to do in one year and the answer is no. We can do it, he affirmed.

SENATOR STEVENS said he assumes Ms. Barren is comfortable making merit the first stage and needs the last and that she'd make the unmet needs portion of the FAFSA work.

MS. BARRENS answered yes and added that "It would be unfortunate to set a lower standard for economically disadvantaged individuals and see them succeed at lower rates than everyone else."

[SB 224 was held in committee.]

9:07:44 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Meyer adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee hearing at 9:07 a.m.