

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 26, 2011

9:05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Alan Dick, Chair
Representative Lance Pruitt, Vice Chair
Representative Eric Feige
Representative Paul Seaton
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Sharon Cissna
Representative Scott Kawasaki

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW(S): CONTINUATION OF DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

ACTING COMMISSIONER LES MORSE
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the continuation of the overview from the Department of Education and Early Development (EED), begun at the regular meeting of the committee on 1/24/11.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:05:08 AM](#)

CHAIR ALAN DICK called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Present at the call to order were Representatives Dick, Feige, Wilson, Cissna, Seaton, Kawasaki, and Pruitt.

[The regular meeting of the House Education Standing Committee was taken up immediately following the joint session, and included a statement by Chair Dick that any outstanding House committee questions would be compiled and presented to the council or SESA for response. This included a request by Representative Seaton to receive any correspondence from the governor's office indicating funding support.]

OVERVIEW(S): CONTINUATION OF DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

[9:07:54 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK announced that the only order of business would be hearing the continuation of the overview from the Department of Education and Early Development, begun at the regular meeting of 1/24/11.

[9:09:13 AM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER LES MORSE, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), continuing the presentation from the previous meeting [January 24, 2010], read statistical characteristics of the schools/districts [committee packet handout labeled "Acting Commissioner Les Morse Testimony House Education Committee," dated January 26, 2011], which included categorical information regarding the number of schools, the number of districts, and enrollment numbers.

[9:16:53 AM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER MORSE addressed the challenges and opportunities that face EED and opined that the challenges could be considered opportunities. Academic growth is an ongoing issue, and means are continually being sought to better support students. Additionally, the department is working on fine tuning in the areas of regulatory directives and curriculum alignment. He explained that the state establishes educational standards, and the districts align the curriculum accordingly. Another focus area is subject integration, for which the department has been mapping curriculum. Academic growth is also pursued in the area of career and technical education (CTE) integration, which is taken up as a partnership effort with the University of Alaska (UA) and the Department of Labor (DOL). The department undertakes all of these steps to ensure the success of students exiting the K-12 system.

[9:21:47 AM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER MORSE introduced the second major area: refining standards and assessments. The department is working on raising the standards to ensure that students can enter the work force directly or continue to college without the necessity for remediation. During the last year, formative assessment tools have been made available on-line in the areas of science and writing; heretofore only available for math and reading. This allows students to informally make assessments of progress, on an on-going basis. The availability of these tools will enable students to be successful candidates for the Alaska Performance Scholarship, he opined. Regarding the topic of effective use of instructional time, he said the department is taking two approaches. The first has been to conduct a regulatory review to identify standards not required in statute and recommend elimination to the state board of education. In response to a committee member, he said that pertinent statutory requirements would be brought to the committee for consideration.

[9:26:36 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK acknowledged the need to prepare students for a vocational/technical path, or for continued education, and stressed that students should also have classes made available for preparation as entrepreneurs.

ACTING COMMISSIONER MORSE agreed, and offered that aspects of small business education are contained in the work being done around CTE.

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA stressed the need to provide curriculum for business management and entrepreneurialism.

[9:29:57 AM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER MORSE returned to the topic of effective use of instructional time, and said that the area of technical assistance is a focus. The department employs 27 teacher mentors, and 15 principal coaches, to provide direct support in the schools on a monthly basis; a cadre of 42 field agents. Between onsite visit dates, contact is maintained using the computer application Skype, along with other technological resources such as e-mail and video conferencing.

CHAIR DICK interjected that he has received widespread, positive, feedback regarding the effectiveness of the mentor program.

9:32:00 AM

ACTING COMMISSIONER MORSE said the department has also built a state system of support for the contract hiring of experts in particular content areas, which include: reading, math, science, and art. Underperforming students are the target for these teachers; however, assistance is also afforded to schools in the areas of professional development and implementation of effective programs. The variety of approaches and tools used to this end also includes uniquely designed webinar conferences. He added that the contract employees are primarily retired educators. Acting Commissioner Morse said that three recently funded positions have allowed the department to hire content experts. The content experts provide headquarter based support and resources, for the field agent mentors, in the subjects of science, math, and literacy. Additionally, the content expert's coordinate with teacher specialists in the districts. Supporting teachers in these ways and promoting efficient use of classroom time, helps create instructional leaders.

9:37:19 AM

ACTING COMMISSIONER MORSE addressed the final and fourth challenge, which is complying with federal laws. The line item for student and school achievement has a staff of 70, of which, he estimate, 68 will deal with federal program compliance. A significant issue is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which will be reauthorized in the next three years. Also, the Title I school improvement grants have become a challenge due to the way in which the funding is now being allocated. Administration of every funding source requires attention on an ongoing basis.

9:40:33 AM

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA opined that the most important criteria for scholastic success are a student's social and behavioral health, an area in which Alaska ranks poorly. The health issues are primarily preventable, and yet they exert a major impact on the classroom experience. She asked how the department is approaching this topic.

ACTING COMMISSIONER MORSE agreed, and said it is being addressed by the department through the governor's initiative titled DVSA

(domestic violence and sexual assault). Under this initiative, EED was authorized to hire a coordinator to develop and promote a comprehensive health education and training program. Although this position is new and in the beginning stages, he reported that it has been filled by a well qualified, experienced, employee, and work has begun. In addition, the department is refocusing an existing position to address the area of school counseling and address suicide prevention.

[9:46:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI asked whether Alaska participated in the federal Race to the Top funding program.

ACTING COMMISSIONER MORSE responded that Alaska did not apply to participate in the competition. He added that no state west of the Mississippi River, save for Hawaii, was a recipient of the funding. Although Alaska did not assist in developing the common core standards, representatives were present at every meeting. As a result, EED chose not to adopt the federal program but to interface common core aspects with Alaska standards; ensuring a rigorous, and relevant program.

[9:48:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE recalled how the state's high school students once migrated to, and boarded in, hub cities, allowing a concentrated, consolidated, effort of education to take place. He asked whether there is any consideration being given to resurrecting this approach.

ACTING COMMISSIONER MORSE pointed out that there are three boarding schools in the state: Mt. Edgecombe, Galena, and Nenana. There is not a policy measure in place to consider this step, however, if these schools are at capacity it could be a question, he said.

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE opined that implementing vocational training can be difficult when the programs are run by college trained professionals, who may not have a direct relationship to vocational skills.

ACTING COMMISSIONER MORSE pointed out that the CTE plan does address the issue, and allows experts in various vocations to be hired on a contract basis. He acknowledged that a systematic method could prove useful.

9:54:18 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON interjected that the method identified as the most effective for promoting graduation rates nationally, and in Alaska, is the implementation of an advisor/advocate program. He noted that the department does not appear to be promoting these programs, although some districts have taken up the practice.

ACTING COMMISSIONER MORSE deferred, and agreed that it is important to recognize approaches that are effective and discover ways and means for implementation.

9:56:39 AM

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON voiced her interest to have health issues brought to the fore. Teacher education should include training to identify symptoms of domestic abuse or other trauma that a child might display in the classroom.

ACTING COMMISSIONER MORSE agreed.

9:58:58 AM

CHAIR DICK announced the upcoming meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:59 a.m.