

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 7, 2011

8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Alan Dick, Chair
Representative Lance Pruitt, Vice Chair
Representative Eric Feige
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Sharon Cissna

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Paul Seaton
Representative Scott Kawasaki

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): VIEW FROM WESTERN AND INTERIOR ALASKA

- HEARD

SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

- HEARD

OVERVIEW: DISTANCE EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

BOB CRUMLEY, Superintendent
Chugach School District
Tatitlek, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a presentation of the Chugach School District.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:42 AM](#)

CHAIR ALAN DICK called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Dick, Pruitt, Feige, and P. Wilson were present at the call to order. Representative Seaton was excused, and Representative Cissna arrived while the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION(S): View from Western and Interior Alaska

[8:04:14 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 8:04 a.m.

[Chair Dick passed the gavel to Vice Chair Pruitt.]

[8:06:55 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK noted the disparity in the educational experience existing throughout the state. He stated his belief that some districts are confident that they are succeeding, while others know they are not and may view the system as broken. Examples of the system not working include schools with dropout rates of 40 percent, or higher, and the need for remedial classes at the University of Alaska. He reported an account of one village that cannot remember the last time a student graduated, and opined that the fact that a student remains in school does not ensure that the experience will be deemed worthwhile. Observing various classroom settings, he estimated that many teachers expend 80 percent of teaching time in an attempt to engage and motivate students. He stated his belief that the two key components to alter this scenario are relevance and role models. A problem has existed for decades in Alaska, due to the use of text and materials from the Lower 48, filled with unfamiliar illustrations and using non-relevant examples. The native Alaskan and Alaskan Native, being independent and practical minded, require an education that is relevant in order to "buy in," he said. A relevant based curriculum has three components: it demonstrates the connection to community and future goals; aligns with state standards to careers as well as higher education; and utilizes theme based instruction, aligning themes to real life interests. He provided an example of required gear for a beaver trapping expedition to demonstrate necessary versus useless items, and said:

If we don't show students the relevance of academic concepts, they figure it is [useless]. 'What do I

need this for?' is a question worthy of a respectful answer. They are just asking that we make sense.

8:10:46 AM

CHAIR DICK stressed the need to use familiar examples to teach new concepts that relate the student to their community. Additionally, teaching material should provide the student with a direct connection to a visible, future goal. He stated:

We make associations with things we already know. For many village students, they are learning new concepts with foreign examples.

CHAIR DICK opined that teaching new concepts while using examples unfamiliar to the student does not provide a solid base for learning, or instill a sense of connectivity. Educators make an assumption that students will someday be able to incorporate abstract academic disciplines into a meaningful future aspect of their life; through instruction that is primarily void of models. Using an example of a hunter sighting in on a target, he indicated how the education track from kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) does not provide a similarly clear target, but rather an unknown.

8:13:37 AM

CHAIR DICK underscored the need for relevancy by screening the video titled "Why Math" which he produced for the Cook Inlet Tribal Council. He said the target audience was Native students in the Anchorage area, being encouraged to enter the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP).

8:21:01 AM

CHAIR DICK suggested that the process by which the state educational standards for science were developed may have been flawed, and provided reasons to substantiate his belief. The select group of people involved predetermined the outcome; lacking contributive insights from representatives of other scholastic disciplines as a form of checks and balances to the process or the possibility of veto power. The foundation was already unstable, built on previously established, unrealistic standards. He recalled one stipulation, which was to require that every student understand the theory of relativity, but the ways and means for having this science concept taught were not taken into account. Also, the standards were used as a basis to

develop grade level equivalents (GLE's), which, he recalled, as a very difficult process. The superstructure for student assessment and curriculum standards has been developed on top of a flawed foundation, he opined. Teachers are highly skilled at delivering information, the "how" of education, but may not be the best source for "what" information is necessary. However, he said, "There's still good news. We can use and meet standards. We don't have to rewrite the standards."

[8:25:05 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK demonstrated how the numerical digits one through nine can be organized in a variety of ways, such as low to high, high to low, prime, even, odd, and as multiples of other numbers. He explained that the current standards could be handled in a similar manner; reorganization rather than reinvention. One approach is theme based instruction, evolved from community interests, which have been embedded in the curriculum. Within any interest area, every required course can be taught in a manner that would be engaging and relevant to a student's life. He elaborated on how standardized subjects, such as math, science, reading, history, and language skills, could be related and taught around a central theme, such as weather studies. While meeting the current standards, this method also serves as a model for a lifetime of learning by teaching to interesting themes. He said:

Think about it: the only entity that organizes information in the way schools do is schools. For example, state government, business, sports, etc. all organize differently.

CHAIR DICK pointed out that thoroughly mastering individual classes for individual subjects, such as sawzalls, hammers, tape measures, or circular saws, would not provide the integrated knowledge necessary to understand how to build a house. He suggested that in the same manner, a graduate of math, science, or social studies may not be able to apply the mastered scholastic principles to life. The necessity to model how this information can be practicably integrated and implemented is fundamental. He asked rhetorically, what does a student see when looking down the K-12 educational track; do they see career opportunities and a clear path to a chosen goal. The road to higher education lies directly ahead, but how many can discover the path leading to a career interest. He opined that some students are able to make the connection, "but often they

don't." Continuing, he projected a slide titled "Answer" and read [original punctuation provided]:

Align State Standards with career destinations.

- What academic skills are requested by industry
- What personal skills and attributes are desired
(WorkKeys)

Involving target industries in the alignment process. Educators alone are not able to do this. We are preparing students for the future, but there were not people "from the future" in the standards development meetings.

Include an entrepreneurship component in developing standards.

STOP. If no real life examples and applications exist for the content we are teaching, we should STOP teaching it. There's enough information that needs to be taught. Much of our curriculum is anachronistic. Our mission is to prepare students for the future, not the past.

Align our curriculum with the **students'** perception of their future - it doesn't matter as much what we see as what they see.

CHAIR DICK elaborated on two of the above points; stressing the importance of teaching to student goals; the role of small business in our economy and the need for educational offerings regarding entrepreneurship. He then introduced the idea of formulating a website to be called Alaskapedia, similar to the online application Wikipedia. The Alaskapedia site would allow Alaskans from all professions to volunteer information regarding the academic concepts required for a student to pursue a like career. He speculated that the site could provide real life applications for study topics including: ratio and proportion; a persuasive letter; trigonometry; applications of history to today's issues; and use of the arts in science or science in the arts. If taken up as a volunteer based project, the need for a fiscal note would be minimized. Additionally, e-books should be considered a possibility for replacing textbooks with locally relevant examples, illustrations, and content. The digital technology of today could be used to expedite this process and negate concerns for rewriting the existing curriculum.

[8:36:18 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK emphasized the need for education to be focused on relevance and the need for a living component to be "embedded in every lesson in every community." Further, he underscored the need for role models, observing that many community members who could serve as positive role models have left rural areas, but digital technology could retain the connection. If every day teachers could present a five minute video interview with a "successful" person from the local area, student hopes and performance would soar, he opined.

[8:38:36 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK provided a viewing of a video titled "Personal Vision," which he produced, in conjunction with the previous video, and targeted at Anchorage district Native students bound for a career in engineering.

[8:45:12 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK summarized the presentation, paraphrasing five bullet points, which read [original punctuation provided]:

Problems. The biggest educational problems exist because students do not see the connection between what is taught and their perceived future.

Answer. Make curriculum relevant by:

-Aligning curriculum with students' view of their future.

-Aligning State Standards with: community references (local level). We will NOT tell Districts how to teach; Meaningful themes (state and local level); Careers (state and local level).

Answer. Reconnect role models with home communities by digital interview.

Relevance and role models are a HUGE component of correcting ills in remote communities. When education is a ladder to a visible hope, young people will climb it. Dropout rates will drop, and suicide rates will follow.

Districts that are now "succeeding" will experience greater success.

[8:47:38 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:46 a.m. to 8:52 a.m.

[Vice Chair Pruitt returned the gavel to Chair Dick.]

School District Superintendent

CHAIR DICK announced that the final order of business would be a presentation from the Chugach School District superintendent.

[8:52:35 AM](#)

BOB CRUMLEY, Superintendent, Chugach School District, described the district situated in Prince William Sound (PWS) serving 250 students in Chenega Bay, Tatitlek, and Whittier, as well as a growing home school program. He stated that the district has gone through a dramatic overhaul, during the last 15 years, using a reform system that synthesizes community input to formulate a plan, which is then implemented, evaluated, and refined. The result has been the establishment of a community shared purpose, to wit: empowering student ownership of learning and success. The core values, which support the shared purpose, are: open and honest communication; continuous improvement and innovation; trust and teamwork; performance based learning; valuing stakeholders; resiliency; agility; and shared leadership and responsibility. He said that this effort has created a working, collaborative system, which has supplanted the loosely coupled programs of the past. It is comprised of five focus areas which are: student; staff; leadership; community and communication; and finance and facility. He addressed these points in order beginning with the student focus, stating that relevant local standards, covering content and process, were developed for preschool through high school, providing a skeletal framework for the entire system. A balanced instructional model is implemented, which requires application of knowledge and skills. He reported that a diagnostic/prescriptive assessment was developed in the district, along with a meaningful reporting system referred to as AIMS (aligned information management system). A federal grant provides the funding for AIMS, which allows administrators, parents, and students to access pertinent information regarding individual progress. Senior students must present a report to the school board, prior to graduation, and

include a "school to life plan." Student support programs include a laptop one-to-one program, a nutritional breakfast, and a focus on early childhood. He reported that a partnership grant with Parents as Teachers has been very effective. Additionally, teachers are required to provide thematic instructional units, and every student has an ILP (individual learning plan). The final student focus point, titled Voyage to Excellence, is a year round hybrid residential program based in Anchorage, which provides students with the opportunity to shadow professionals and enter internships. There is a wait list on this highly successful program, which boasts a 98 percent graduation rate.

[9:01:20 AM](#)

MR. CRUMLEY addressed the next focal point, staff, and said the district provides three times the number of training days required by the state. A performance evaluation process has been honed to improve teacher effectiveness, which includes the previously mentioned incentive/merit pay program. In recent years teacher retention has been high; reaching 100 percent. He attributed this to the value placed on the teachers, and the thorough hiring process, which requires candidates to visit the village and meet with the community. He moved to the slide regarding leadership focus. Student leadership training is conducted via the VOICE program. It is an expansion of the traditional student council model and provides participants to focus on areas of personal interest. Within the ranks students hold titles such as athletic director, communications director, nutrition director, and technology director; each with the authority to implement ideas relevant to the student body. Routine external evaluations are sought, and are often accomplished via an award program offered through a corporation; a process which provides valuable feedback. He reported having personally completed a superintendent survey in 2010, and the resultant evaluation based on interviews with community members. The district's strategic planning method is intended to be user friendly and accessible on a daily basis. Addressing the topic of community and communication focus, he said community engagement is essential, challenging, and a continuous effort. Regarding the final focal point, finance and facility, he stipulated that the district resources are prioritized as: people, time, and money. He said that frugality is practiced in order to satisfy financial obligations, while going to every length possible to meet the needs of the students.

[9:09:42 AM](#)

MR. CRUMLEY presented a chart titled "Why Assertively Search for Outside Resources?" and said extensive time is allocated for the pursuit of funding. He explained that February is the time of year when he is required to commit to teacher contracts; however, information regarding the district's budget will not be available from the state for another year; there continues to be a one year lag time. He directed attention to the column headed "2008," as an example of the difficulties embedded in the state provided budget. In 2008, the base student allocation (BSA) remained status quo, with zero increase, but inflation rose, as did the number of graduates statewide. He said:

We're producing more graduates, but, from year to year, our buying power, our spending power, is erratic at best. And we don't have any control over that so we have to look elsewhere.

[9:11:18 AM](#)

MR. CRUMLEY directed attention to the Chugach School District Fact Sheet that indicated prior and post school reform statistics. He offered that there is still room for improvement but pointed out the dramatic change which occurred when reform was instituted. He finished stating that the district priority is to remain student oriented.

[9:13:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked for an example of how Chugach has incorporated the local cultural resources.

MR. CRUMLEY said that the district held cultural meetings with the village elders, and other interested parties, and it became apparent that implementation would be required; returning to the status quo was not an option. One example of how this has manifested is the cultural week, held in Tatitlek, when the district sets aside the normal schedule for an immersion into the Native experience. For over twelve years, community members, as well as culture bearers from across the state, have been providing this meaningful program; the popularity of which has resulted in other schools sending students and staff to Tatitlek to participate. The district supports the program but it is planned and run by the community.

CHAIR DICK referred to the districts performance evaluation and merit pay system, and asked how subjectivity was eliminated from the process.

MR. CRUMLEY said the system works very well and the educators "love it." The evaluation utilizes a balanced, 11 point scorecard for assessment versus the standard system of basing teacher merit strictly on student performance. The leading indicators include: developing individual learning plans for students; becoming a mentor, or mentee; tutoring students; gaining credential status as a highly qualified teacher; the final consideration is student performance. Participation in the program is voluntary and this year resulted in \$10,200, above base, being paid to participating teachers.

[9:21:18 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK inquired whether possibilities/opportunities for interaction with other superintendents are cultivated.

MR. CRUMLEY said Chugach partners with four other districts, which have implemented the same model to varying degrees, and he pledged openness to any districts requesting assistance.

CHAIR DICK asked about the scope of the district's correspondence program.

MR. CRUMLEY responded that it is a statewide program.

OVERVIEW: Distance Education Opportunities

[9:24:45 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK announced that the scheduled overview on Distance Education Opportunities would be postponed to a future date; and he announced the upcoming meeting.

[9:26:18 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:26 a.m.