

**HOPE ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 23, 2011  
8:05 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**

PRESENTATION(S): SUPERINTENDENT~ CORDOVA SCHOOL DISTRICT

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 198

"An Act relating to the special education service agency."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 199

"An Act amending the funding for statewide residential educational programs."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 198

SHORT TITLE: SPEC. EDUC. SERVICE AGENCY FUNDING/SUNSET

SPONSOR(S): EDUCATION

03/16/11	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/16/11	(H)	EDC, FIN
03/23/11	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HB 199

SHORT TITLE: FUNDING FOR STATE BOARDING SCHOOLS

SPONSOR(S): EDUCATION

03/16/11 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
03/16/11 (H) EDC, FIN  
03/23/11 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JIM NYGAARD, Superintendent  
Cordova School District  
Cordova, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an overview of the Cordova School District.

SHEILA PETERSON, Staff  
Representative Alan Dick  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced HB 198, on request of the House Education Standing Committee, of which Representative Dick is the chair; introduced HB 199, on request of the House Education Standing Committee, of which Representative Dick is the chair.

NANCY NAGARKAR, Executive Director  
Special Education Services Agency (SESA)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Responded to questions during testimony on HB 198.

ERIC GEBHART, Superintendent  
Nenana City School District  
Vice Chair  
Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education  
Nenana, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 198.

PAT DAVIDSON, Legislative Auditor  
Legislative Audit Division  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Responded to questions during testimony on HB 198.

ELIZABETH SWEENEY NUDELMAN, Director  
School Finance and Facilities Section  
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the fiscal note and responded to questions during the hearing on HB 198; presented the fiscal note and responded to questions during testimony on HB 199.

BRUCE JOHNSON, Executive Director  
Alaska Council of School Administrators  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 198.

LUCIENNE SMITH  
Special Education Services Agency (SESA)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Responded to questions during testimony on HB 198.

MARGIE BROWN, President and CEO  
Cook Inlet Region Incorporated (CIRI)  
Alaska Native Corporation  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 199.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:05:35 AM](#)

**CHAIR ALAN DICK** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. Representatives Dick, Feige, Seaton, and Kawasaki were present at the call to order. Representatives P. Wilson, Pruitt, and Cissna arrived as the meeting was in progress.

[8:06:02 AM](#)

#### **PRESENTATION(S): Superintendent, Cordova School District**

[8:06:41 AM](#)

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

[8:07:22 AM](#)

JIM NYGAARD, Superintendent, Cordova School District, presented a PowerPoint, entitled "Welcome to Cordova-Alaska." He reported

that Cordova had about 2500 people, with a student population of 350. He noted that, although the adult population had remained stable, the student population was decreasing. He shared that the summer population in Cordova could reach 10,000 people. He announced that the school was a blue ribbon school, and had been selected by US News and World Report as one of America's best schools. He addressed the graphs which compared that the proficiency levels of the Cordova School were all higher than the national minimum standard for No Child Left Behind. He pointed out that the school had always met the AYP (adequate yearly progress), but that it was a constant challenge. He shared that the math scores were a struggle, and he stated that local data for whom, what problems, and what curriculum at what level were all tools he used to monitor and resolve the difficulties. He cited the Cordova Department of Education website as a resource for students.

[8:11:27 AM](#)

MR. NYGAARD stated his education philosophy, "Learning by doing promises longer retention, as understanding future application makes the learning relevant and provides the energy necessary to motivate these kids to go to the next level of understanding." He commented on the winter vegetable growing program, utilizing the by-product of the methane digesters. He spoke about the abundance of methane gas around Cordova, and the school programs developed around its use. He discussed the aluminum boat building program. He directed attention to the laptop program, which allowed each student to receive a laptop computer for use from the 7th to the 12th grade, and reported that technology was the link to the competitive world. Upon graduation, each student could choose to purchase the laptop for \$1. He discussed the pre-loaded information program, Discovery Learning, for the school servers. He explained the elementary school computer instruction, which allowed the students usage and training. He pointed to the graph, Laptop Proficiency, which compared 17,000 eighth graders nationally with Cordova students, and reflected on the higher proficiency for Cordova students. He summarized that a Cordova community goal was to be energy independent, and he listed programs for decreasing consumption, especially in the school facilities, and the subsequent savings.

[8:19:15 AM](#)

MR. NYGAARD described the Cordova School District summer lunch program, stating that there were not any eligibility

requirements, and that the school delivered more than 13,000 meals to the kids. He detailed some other programs, which included: Innovative Learning Program (ILP) to ensure graduation; peer helpers class for students to turn to each other prior to approaching an adult; student lead energy audits throughout the city; and the Annual Alaska Association of Student Government (AASG) to be hosted by Cordova in the spring.

[8:22:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked if the peer helpers class resulted in a higher graduation rate.

MR. NYGAARD replied that high expectations in the community, the veteran teacher staff working with the peer helpers, and the ILP helping students to maintain their dignity as they worked to attain their diploma all combined for a higher graduation rate.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked how many students were in the peer helper class, and if there was more than one teacher.

MR. NYGAARD replied that there was only one teacher, and that the participation fluctuated throughout the year, for a total of 75 students per year. This included students who fell behind due to family circumstances.

[8:25:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked how the credit recovery program was integrated.

MR. NYGAARD offered to provide information to the committee.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if it was a challenge course.

[8:26:43 AM](#)

MR. NYGAARD replied that it encompassed a wide path. He explained that if a student had dropped out, and chose to re-enter, the credit recovery program offered counseling for the necessary requirements to graduate. There was a similar approach for students who had missed extensive schooling, due to illness, to catch up their coursework. He pointed out that a student requiring an extra class for graduation could enter the ILP program. He emphasized that no student should go without a high school diploma. He estimated that this program rescued 6-8 students from dropping-out each year.

8:29:09 AM

**HB 198-SPEC. EDUC. SERVICE AGENCY FUNDING/SUNSET**

CHAIR DICK announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 198, "An Act relating to the special education service agency."

8:29:53 AM

SHEILA PETERSON, Staff, Representative Alan Dick, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HB 198, paraphrasing from the sponsor statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

House Bill 198 removes a sunset requirement and increases state funding to the Special Education Service Agency (SESA), a not-for-profit organization established in statute in 1986. SESA is governed by the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education and its own independent board of directors.

The Special Education Service Agency assists local school districts to provide needed special education services. Sometimes districts cannot fully serve students that have low-incidence disabilities with their existing personnel and resources. SESA has a pool of educators trained to give support to teachers and administrators who work daily with students who are *deaf, deaf-blind, mentally retarded, hearing impaired, blind and visually impaired, orthopedically disabled, health-impaired in other ways, and severely emotionally disturbed . . .* (AS 14.30.630 (b)(1)).

The Special Education Service Agency receives state support based on a funding formula adopted in 1998. Each year the Department of Education and Early Development allocates to SESA not less than \$15.75 times the number of students statewide. Although local school districts have received an increase in state funding since 1998, SESA has not. Under HB 198, the multiplier increases as the base student allocation increases. Currently the computation (.4 percent of \$5,680) equals \$22.72 which approximates the impact of inflation from 1998 to 2011.

The Special Education Service Agency is set to expire on June 30, 2013. During previous performance audits, both the Department of Education and the Legislative Auditor recommended removing SESA from the sunset process. House Bill 198 repeals the sunset requirement and thus allows SESA to plan long-term.

Thank you for your support of this legislation.

[8:33:06 AM](#)

MS. PETERSON stated that the Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education would become the oversight committee should the sunset audit requirement be removed.

[8:33:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON, citing the lack of a fiscal note, asked what would be the increase over the years, and what the plan was for the extra funding.

MS. PETERSON read from the handout, "Benefit of Increased Funding," [Included in members' packets] and stated that:

A benefit of increase would be to enhance the district services; to provide more distance delivery and online [courses]; increase staff, so they could meet with more individual students; and then increase training for regular and special ed teachers.

She estimated that the current state funding was \$2-\$3 million under the current formula for \$15.75.

[8:35:44 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON directed attention to Recommendation No. 1 in the December 18, 2003 Audit Report [Included in members' packets] which suggested that "SESA should transition to videoconferencing as the norm for the delivery of its service." He asked whether that recommendation had been implemented.

[8:36:28 AM](#)

MS. PETERSON offered her belief that there was work in that direction. She deferred to Ms. Nagarkar and Ms. Davidson for clarification.

[8:37:05 AM](#)

NANCY NAGARKAR, Executive Director, Special Education Services Agency (SESA), said that the agency currently received \$2.021 million and, in response to Representative Seaton, she stated that there was a lot of videoconferencing, although some school districts did not have the equipment. She explained that Skype was also used, noting that both of these were "value added."

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON pointed out that this House Education Standing Committee meeting was not videoconferenced. He explained that the committee might be "behind the curve, as well," noting that it would be helpful to see the testifiers.

[8:39:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked how many additional staff would be hired, and how much revenue that would generate.

[8:39:51 AM](#)

MS. NAGARKAR offered her belief that at least eight experienced staff would be hired. She said that the revenue estimate would depend on the child count, and she deferred for an actual estimate.

[8:41:24 AM](#)

ERIC GEBHART, Superintendent, Nenana City School District, Vice Chair, Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, stated his support for HB 198, and said that almost half of SESA's funding was derived from grants, and that the additional revenue from HB 198 would ensure that the mission of SESA could be met. He pointed out that SESA was interested in increasing the technology; however, due to the special nature of disabilities, a physical presence was often required. He emphasized the importance of removing the sunset clause in order to negotiate long term leases and offer assurances to the staff.

[8:45:02 AM](#)

PAT DAVIDSON, Legislative Auditor, Legislative Audit Division, said that four reviews had been conducted on SESA over the past 20 years, and that the majority of recommendations had been for operational issues and service delivery, which included the teleconferencing currently being discussed. She relayed that the teleconferencing recommendation had sprung from the

expansion of tele-medicine. She pointed to the audit review of 1995, and stated that the recommendation had been to extend SESA for 10 years or to remove SESA from the sunset process. She acknowledged that the sunset process allowed for a periodic evaluation; however, she pointed out that an audit could be requested through the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee.

[8:47:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if the legislative audit was supportive of the recommendation to expand videoconferencing.

[8:48:02 AM](#)

MS. DAVIDSON replied that, with changing technology, it would be necessary to have a follow up audit for an accurate response.

[8:49:08 AM](#)

ELIZABETH SWEENEY NUDELMAN, Director, School Finance and Facilities Section, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), addressed the EED fiscal note. She reported that HB 198 would increase the SESA funding by \$901,000, as it would change the allocation from \$15.75 multiplied by the statewide average daily membership (ADM) to .4 percent of the base student allowance (BSA) multiplied by the ADM. She opined that the SESA increase would be included each time there was a BSA increase. She noted that the BSA increase was "directly attributed to the school districts for their public school funding formula" and that each BSA increase would require a new SESA fiscal note from EED. She pointed out that, alternatively, the increase could be placed in statute. She stated that EED was in support of an extension for the sunset provision.

[8:51:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked what time frame was suggested for the sunset extension.

MS. NUDELMAN replied that EED supported an extension for as long term as was allowed by the Legislative Audit Division.

[8:52:06 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK, referring to the graph titled "While School Districts have had their Base Student Allocation increased... ," [Included in members' packets] pointed out that SESA funding had

remained flat for the past 10 years, while CPI (Consumer Price Index) and BSA had increased, which indicated a necessity to "be linked with something sensitive to the cost."

[8:52:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked what SESA would do with the extra funding.

[8:52:54 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK directed attention to the "Benefit of Increased Funding:" [Included in members' packets]

[8:53:37 AM](#)

MS. NAGARKAR, in response to Representative Feige, relayed that additional specialists would be hired to provide increased services to students; travel costs and distance delivery would be funded; and on-line courses for additional training to regular teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals throughout Alaska would be offered.

[8:54:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked if SESA received the e-rate subsidy.

MS. NAGARKAR replied that it had been awarded.

[8:54:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON, directing attention to another recommendation, asked if SESA had investigated the necessity to file tax returns and pay excise taxes.

[8:55:07 AM](#)

MS. NAGARKAR replied that SESA had done this.

[8:55:14 AM](#)

BRUCE JOHNSON, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators, stated his support for HB 198. He said that some Alaska school districts hired school psychologists from the Lower 48, but that this was not possible for the smaller school districts. He opined that SESA was a good use of resources, and

an essential service, required by state and federal law, for young people. He stated that SESA was a valued organization and service.

[8:57:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked if there had been an increase in the number of special education students since SESA had started.

[8:58:32 AM](#)

LUCIENNE SMITH, Special Education Services Agency (SESA), replied that the SESA caseload had increased by 39 percent since FY2001.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON suggested that this large increase should be reported early in testimony during subsequent hearings.

CHAIR DICK announced that public testimony would remain open.

[HB 198 was held over.]

#### **HB 199-FUNDING FOR STATE BOARDING SCHOOLS**

[8:59:28 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 199, "An Act amending the funding for statewide residential educational programs."

[9:00:02 AM](#)

SHEILA PETERSON, Staff, Representative Alan Dick, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HB 199, pointing out that the proposed bill affected three school districts with residential high schools, all of which were operating on January, 1, 2005. In 2006, the Alaska State Legislature had authorized small stipends to these three school districts. The intent was to assist funding for the boarding schools, yet not fully fund the incurred costs. She listed the three school districts, Nenana, Galena, and the Lower Kuskokwim, and added that they served 260 students from 50 Alaskan communities. She stated that proposed HB 199 would double the funding intended for room and board.

[9:01:28 AM](#)

MS. PETERSON explained that this funding increase was for two years, allowing for time to discuss the best means for high school education in rural Alaska. She reported that these three boarding schools, along with Mt. Edgecumbe High School in Sitka, served about 650 students. She pointed out the loss of revenue to the home school districts for these students, when they transferred to boarding schools. She announced that it was important for these three school districts to receive additional funding, and it was important for all Alaskans to discuss the best delivery method for education in rural Alaska.

[9:03:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked if there had been a formal study for the short and long term benefits of this educational process.

[9:04:00 AM](#)

MS. PETERSON, in response to Representative Cissna, referred to a Department of Education and Early Development (EED) study in the early 1990s, as well as a study by the Alaska State Legislature in the late 1980's, both of which reviewed the benefit of boarding schools. She directed attention to the follow-up studies by Mt. Edgecumbe High School of their students. She noted that this issue "has been wrestled with for 20 years, as far as I know, and possibly longer than that."

[9:05:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON, referring to proposed HB 199, page 1, lines 7-8, read: "a district may claim room and board expenses for reimbursement," and he noted that there was not a limitation to the three aforementioned districts. He asked where the restriction was listed.

[9:06:12 AM](#)

MS. PETERSON, referring to line [6], said that AS 14.16.200(b)(2) set up the residential educational boarding school program, and determined that it was necessary for operation to have begun by January 1, 2005, for eligibility to the stipend. She shared the concern for the operation of boarding schools without a statewide educational plan for rural Alaska, hence the legislation was limited to the aforementioned three boarding schools.

[9:07:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if there were other boarding schools not included in this bill, and if this special condition should be maintained just for these three school districts.

[9:08:32 AM](#)

MS. PETERSON replied that no other school district had requested inclusion, although Northwest Arctic Borough School District had a boarding school.

[9:09:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked whether the Voyage to Excellence program in the Chugach School District, which had participation of students from other school districts, would qualify under the conditions of the proposed bill.

MS. PETERSON deferred to EED.

[9:10:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI asked the reason for doubling the funds.

MS. PETERSON replied that the school districts had requested to have the stipend tripled, and that the decision was made to discuss doubling the funding.

[9:11:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked if there was evidence to indicate that this was a better educational approach.

MS. PETERSON suggested that the school districts share their success stories. She pointed out that the test scores, the course offerings, the interaction with a highly qualified teacher for a specific course, and the social interaction at a residential program were all benefits.

[9:13:04 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK expressed concern for the effects on families who were not sending children to a boarding school.

[9:14:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA commented on the lack of a comprehensive understanding of the schools systems, especially in rural Alaska, and how the educational programs could be presented. She opined that courses delivered in a short, intense format, designed to reach many people, would be good to research.

[9:16:11 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK shared that a task force was being considered.

[9:16:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked to hear about the different approaches from each of the three aforementioned schools.

[9:17:36 AM](#)

ELIZABETH SWEENEY NUDELMAN, Director, School Finance and Facilities Section, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), presented the fiscal note for HB 199. She explained that the bill doubled the stipends currently in statute which was payable to the three school districts included in the residential program.

[9:18:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked for the number of occupied beds in each school program.

[9:18:54 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK responded that the count could fluctuate slightly as students arrived and left the program.

[9:19:14 AM](#)

MS. NUDELMAN, in response to Representative Feige, indicated that Galena reported full capacity of 192 students, the Lower Kuskokwim was below its capacity of 35 students, and that Nenana was almost at its capacity of 88 students, as reported in the October student count. She offered to provide the exact counts to the committee.

[9:20:35 AM](#)

MARGIE BROWN, President and CEO, Cook Inlet Region Incorporated (CIRI) Alaska Native Corporation, said:

I am not a professional in the education business. I am a product in part of the State of Alaska, and its education system in earlier years. But I am very interested in this issue in particular, and I note that the materials that I sent to the chairman actually have been distributed to you. These are my views about the time and the need, urgent I believe, to address how students are educated, particularly in rural Alaska. I'm involved with several advisory boards and committees at the University of Alaska in Anchorage, and have been alarmed by the statistics that show that 70 percent of the students that arrive at that university campus require some form, sometimes even several years, of remedial education before they can begin their college level classes. I think that is ominous and it should send alarm signals in all of our brains, that we are producing a generation of students that appear to come to the university system, those that choose to go to the university system, unprepared for university level classes. So, what is the issue, particularly in rural Alaska? I am a believer that, now 39 years past the monumental Molly Hootch lawsuit and the Tobeluk decision that followed that established schools in small villages throughout Alaska, that it's time for us to think, look back, [and] analyze what it is that is very good about those lawsuits, and the following legal actions, and the action by the State of Alaska to comply, and what is it that is not working so awfully well. I am from Takotna. I am from a family who chose to leave the village because there was no school opportunity for me and my siblings. I was going into the third grade when the school closed for lack of school population. This, of course, is territorial days and long before the Molly Hootch decision. So I know that sacrifice that my family made, to pick us up from the life that they loved and move us to where we could get an education. To the extent that the litigations, and the state's actions, and the establishments of schools in small villages for grade school children, and even middle school children, has come about, I think that is a good thing. I think grade school children need to be with their parents and the opportunity to do that [attend school] and stay in your village, I think, is very important. But I do believe that we need to look more carefully when children get older

and get to the high school age. I know we have this issue about what happens when students go to residential schools and what happens to their villages, and what happens to their school in their villages, and I think that's because we are trying to do both. I'm not certain that we can do that [both] and not, as you suggest Chairman Dick, harm the students that stay back in the village. I think that two years, and I'm just now becoming familiar with this particular piece of legislation, and I think the dialogue around having these two years to look very carefully at how we organize our school system is totally appropriate, and to the extent that this gives these three schools better breathing room, I'm all for that. But I am mostly for this dialogue. I sit atop a corporation that is doing a lot of tremendously exciting things in the state, and I would like to look out to the people who were raised and educated in Alaska, and look to a gainfully employable work force of shareholders, of people who live in urban centers, of people who come from rural Alaska. I think this idea that we must now look at some systemic change is totally appropriate, and I encourage the dialogue. I would welcome, I would be happy to participate if you would like me to do so. I do think that this is not about changing the formula, [or] arguing about the formula, this really has to be about systemic change, and we do, as you suggest, need to get about that [change]. I fear we are going to leave a whole generation of young people behind because they exit our school system undereducated.

[9:27:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked if the CIRI Native Corporation had considered starting a private high school for its shareholders.

MS. BROWN reported that the Cook Inlet Tribal Council, a CIRI affiliated non-profit organization, was working to establish a residential facility for 40 high school students, in Anchorage near Bartlett High School. She said this may also serve to address the issue of young homeless students from villages who needed a safe educational environment. Bartlett High School currently afforded space to the tribal council for a school within a school program, and this would be incorporated into the residential plan. She concluded that, in the Anchorage area, a

particular population of Native students was receiving attention from CIRI.

9:28:42 AM

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE queried whether other Native regional corporations were considering similar action.

MS. BROWN stated that her agenda for the day included a meeting with the presidents and CEO's of the twelve regional corporations, and a meeting with the governor. She said that education reform, and the concepts she had mentioned, would be on the agenda. Two years ago, at a similar CEO meeting, this concern had been expressed, and a call had been made for change to the education delivery system in Alaska. She stated that it was a systemic issue, not an argument for formula and funding. She said:

We all recognize, and we've been using this term 'boarding school' an awful lot, even in this hearing, and I'm trying to move away from that term, because we know, as Alaska Native leaders that there has been a lot of harm fostered on people in past years through the boarding school concept; where the desire was to actually remove people from their Alaska Native culture. We recognize that, I acknowledge it. I know in putting this paper out [speaker raised an article titled, "Alaska must improve education options" reprinted from the January 2011 issue of "Raven's Circle"] that there is some risk that people will be offended. However, I do believe our conditions are such that we have a different kind of society now and I believe we can find a way to have these schools and actually empower, and encourage, and nurture Native culture, as opposed to trying to damage it. I believe the other CEO's are there, too. They said that two years ago, and I think they'll say it again today to the governor. We know that this has to be a careful dialogue where you engage the local community. This is not something that can be forced down on people. This is something where you really are truly going to have to have buy-in, and you are going to have to engage the Alaska Native community in a very, very heartfelt and sincere way. But I believe if we do that, we can get there, because everybody wants their children to have the best opportunity, and that is good for the state, and that's good for those

communities, and that's what parents want throughout the state. So, I think we can get there.

9:31:40 AM

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked if there was a possibility that a funding partnership with the corporations could be formed.

MS. BROWN reported that tribal and Native organizations had access to private funding sources. However, she questioned whether regional corporations should step up and do the work of the state. She expressed that a cooperative effort to educate employable people was in everyone's interest.

9:34:04 AM

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA encouraged a continuation of the conversation to build better communication regarding the basic necessities.

9:36:12 AM

MS. BROWN emphasized that children's education and the social impacts to the villages was a highly charged issue. She concurred that for this to succeed the local elders and the children needed to buy-in to the idea and feel ownership. She provided an anecdote to illustrate her point. She continued, stating:

We are trying to do everything. We're trying to do the residential schools, still keep a few kids in the high schools, and you really do not want to create a system of haves and have not's. I like the idea of going to school year around, I like the idea of perhaps two or three weeks in your residential regional center, and maybe a week back home; but for that you go year around with some time off for subsistence activities. Obviously we want children to understand and value their subsistence activities. But I think these are all part of the dialogue, where you can keep kids engaged with their village, and back in their village, and back with their parents. Maybe it's not for the full four years; maybe it's for the last two. There are so many options that need to be considered, that we ought to be able, with all of our collective thoughts here, to figure out a program that doesn't diminish the villages anymore than they are

now, and yet provides these rich opportunities for students. I believe that you have to have a student body of some size to really deliver a high school experience, and that doesn't happen when you have 72 schools with less than 10 students in high school, that just doesn't happen. I think there are a lot of formulas that could be looked at, and a lot of different ways you could organize school, including year round school, that would allow time back in the village and also to participate in a regional experience.

9:40:02 AM

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE offered his belief that the good students would leave the villages while those who remained did not place as high a value on education. He said that many of those in current leadership positions in the Native Corporations were educated in boarding schools, evidence that a good education was available at these schools. He acknowledged the "cultural stripping" that had occurred at the boarding schools, and he stressed the importance for the Native corporations to now utilize their influence for affecting educational change.

9:42:34 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON, noting the lack of successful school district models, pointed out that local school districts had control of the curriculum. He cited the St. Mary's City School District, which had a 90 percent graduation rate, with 87 percent of the postsecondary students requiring no remedial classes, as a successful model. He pointed out that the legislature was not able to impose specific curriculum on particular districts without creating state operated schools. He expressed his belief to the difficulty of a one-size fits all education plan, as it would affect the already successful schools. He announced his concern for the restriction to only the three school districts in proposed HB 199, and he pointed to the futility of another task force, which would meet for two years, and report to a potentially new House Education Standing Committee. He asked why the legislature should agree to another two year extension to study these three boarding school models. He asked whether the question was about boarding schools or toward effective versus non-effective rural schools. He concluded by asking how to change an ineffective school system with an efficient statewide model.

[9:46:47 AM](#)

MS. BROWN responded that the conversation should occur within the next two years and not be delayed. She suggested that the legislature should also use its own "bully pulpit" to instigate the dialogue and implement change. She declared it to be the responsibility of the State of Alaska to scrutinize the entire school district system to ensure consistency and opportunity in education. She agreed that there were huge challenges for urban versus rural school districts. She stated her belief that quality education was not achievable until high school students were congregated in a large enough group for "a high school experience." She opined that the larger group allowed for a more meaningful curriculum of consistently higher quality. She expressed her desire for action, and not just dialogue.

[9:50:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA suggested that the timing was now excellent for a video/teleconference to involve the students.

[9:51:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT underscored the importance that the Native corporations and the state were now acknowledging the need for long term effective change.

MS. BROWN expressed her agreement.

[9:52:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON offered his belief that the two year time frame was wrong, as it was most effective to work with a consistent committee. He explained the difficulties of spanning two interims and then bringing the topic to a new legislature, with a possible change in committee leadership and membership. He encouraged a request be made through the governor's office to compel action within this current legislative session.

[9:53:46 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK announced that public testimony would be held open.

[HB 199 was held over.]

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:55 a.m.