

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 6, 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 Scott Kawasaki

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Sharon Cissna

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Chris Tuck

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): SUPERINTENDENT~ JUNEAU SCHOOL DISTRICT

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 145

"An Act establishing the parental choice scholarship program to be administered by school districts for the purpose of paying the cost of attending grades kindergarten through 12 at public and private schools; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 16

Proposing amendments to the Constitution of the State of Alaska relating to state aid for education.

- MOVED OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 143

"An Act providing an increase and an inflation adjustment to the base student allocation used in the formula for state funding of public education; requiring a review and recommendation for

future adjustments to the base student allocation; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 1(EDC)

"An Act requiring the state Board of Education and Early Development to provide an annual report to the legislature."

- BILL HEARING CANCELED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 145

SHORT TITLE: K-12 SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) KELLER

02/09/11	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/09/11	(H)	EDC, FIN
03/25/11	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/25/11	(H)	Heard & Held
03/25/11	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/04/11	(H)	EDC AT 5:00 PM CAPITOL 106
04/04/11	(H)	Heard & Held
04/04/11	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/06/11	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HJR 16

SHORT TITLE: CONST. AM: EDUCATION FUNDING

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) KELLER

02/09/11	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/09/11	(H)	EDC, JUD, FIN
03/25/11	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/25/11	(H)	Heard & Held
03/25/11	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/04/11	(H)	EDC AT 5:00 PM CAPITOL 106
04/04/11	(H)	Heard & Held
04/04/11	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/06/11	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HB 143

SHORT TITLE: ADJUST BASE STUDENT ALLOCATION: INFLATION

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) PETERSEN

02/04/11	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/04/11	(H)	EDC, FIN

04/06/11

(H)

EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

GLEN GELBRICH, Superintendent
Juneau School District
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a PowerPoint overview of the Juneau School District.

JOHN ALCANTRA, Government Relations Director
NEA-Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 145.

ROD McCOY
NEA-Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 145 and during discussion of HB 143.

REPRESENTATIVE WES KELLER
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during discussion of HB 145, as the sponsor of the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE PETE PETERSEN
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced HB 143, as the sponsor of the bill.

DAVID DUNSMORE, Staff
Representative Pete Petersen, Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the fiscal note for HB 143, on behalf of the bill sponsor, Representative Petersen.

BABES HUDSON, President
Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
North Pole, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 143.

PETE LEWIS, Superintendent
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 143.

SUE HULL, Member
School Board
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 143.

BRETT GILLAND, Teacher
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 143.

JACOB BERA, Teacher
Eagle River High School
Anchorage School District
Chugiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 143.

ANDREA LANG, Teacher
Eagle River High School
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 143.

STEWART MCDONALD, Superintendent
Kodiak Island Borough School District
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 143.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:05:06 AM](#)

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

PRESENTATION(S): Superintendent, Juneau School District

[8:05:48 AM](#)

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

[8:06:25 AM](#)

GLEN GELBRICH, Superintendent, Juneau School District, presented a PowerPoint overview titled "Juneau School District." [Included in members' packets] He reported that the school district was the fifth largest in Alaska with 4977 students, 780 employees, and 12 schools with 4 other options, including a charter school, a home school, a Tlingit Culture Language and Literacy, and a Montessori program. He detailed the demographics of the student population to include 23 percent Alaskan Native, 9 percent Asian, and more than 50 percent White. He lauded Lorrie Heagy, the current Alaska Teacher of the Year, and reviewed her music program for integrating multiple arts into the core classrooms. He directed attention to the handout, "2010-2014 Strategic Plan." [Included in members' packets] He stated that far too many students did not graduate. He pointed out that resources were becoming more limited, and this required a change in strategy. He explained that the strategic plan focused on student achievement, formative assessments to monitor student progress, and professional teacher development. He highlighted some of the changes: early learning, which was a pre-kindergarten pilot program; pre-school integrated with special needs students; short assessment of kindergarteners to identify which students would benefit from a summer kindergarten camp; all day kindergarten; and, a staggered Kindergarten school day which allowed for more personalized learning time.

MR. GELBRICH established that the instruction started with "clearly defined world class standards" or targets. He said that these were supported with professional development to build common, but not uniform, instructional practice. He mentioned that instructional coaches were used, with the initial focus on literacy, then math and science. He explained that the teaching staff teams met for an hour every other Monday to discuss progress and possible interventions, and that the goals of these Professional Learning Communities (PLC) included: what do we want students to know; how will we know if they know; and what will be done right away if they don't know. He directed attention to another handout, "Tech Prep agreements with UAS and UAA," which listed technical preparation courses. [Included in members' packets] He declared that the opening of the second high school, as well as the alternative high school, allowed for smaller, more personalized learning environments for students.

[8:15:26 AM](#)

MR. GELBRICH elaborated on the career pathways, where projects such as building a house were accomplished. He noted that apprenticeships had been established with engineers, local plumbers, architects, and other professionals. He discussed a new program, AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) which helped talented, but underperforming, students learn good study habits, and prepare for college or other post-secondary options. He reported that six of the schools met the ADP (Adequate Yearly Progress) in 2010, with modest gains in reading, writing, and math. He noted that both the comprehensive high schools had an increase in graduation rate, with a decreased rate in the alternative high school.

[8:18:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if the staggered kindergarten classrooms applied to all the kindergartens.

[8:19:21 AM](#)

MR. GELBRICH explained that this was the first year, and there were three different model classrooms. He said that results were being monitored.

[8:20:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON, referring to the PLC meetings, asked what techniques were used to determine lack of progress and what action was being taken.

[8:20:52 AM](#)

MR. GELBRICH indicated that these meetings made apparent any need to re-focus and teach differently. This allowed for intervention instruction on an early recognition basis. He predicted that the process would allow teams an opportunity to share the work efforts and results regularly among the other staff and administrators.

[8:22:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON requested that the assessments and progress reports be made available to the committee.

[8:23:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked about the logistics, including transportation, for the split shift kindergarten.

MR. GELBRICH replied that he would provide further information.

[8:24:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON reported that kindergarten had once been a full day program, and she questioned any difference in effect.

[8:25:04 AM](#)

MR. GELBRICH, in response to Chair Dick, described the Tlingit Culture Language program as K-5 at Harborview Elementary School, and that it was a self-contained program.

CHAIR DICK asked if there were any non-Native students in the program.

MR. GELBRICH replied that there were.

[8:25:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON, referring to the 70 percent graduation rate, noted that 30 percent were not graduating and he stressed the need for individual student advisors. He explained that a volunteer individual student advisor for every student in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District had increased the graduation rate by 12-15 percent, with no additional cost. He pointed out that the Governor's Performance Scholarship Program required institutions to have counselor/advisors in order to receive the scholarships, and he suggested it be part of the strategic plan for all school districts.

[8:29:14 AM](#)

HB 145-K-12 SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
HJR 16-CONST. AM: EDUCATION FUNDING

[8:29:24 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 145, "An Act establishing the parental choice scholarship program to be administered by school districts for the purpose of paying the cost of attending grades kindergarten through 12 at public and private schools; and providing for an effective date." and HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 16, Proposing

amendments to the Constitution of the State of Alaska relating to state aid for education.

8:30:00 AM

JOHN ALCANTRA, Government Relations Director, NEA-Alaska, stated that the members of NEA-Alaska strongly opposed HB 145 and, by extension, HJR 16. He declared that the Alaska State Constitution clearly stated:

The Legislature shall by general law establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the state and may provide for other public educational institutions. Schools and institutions so established shall be free from sectarian control. No money shall be paid from public funds for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution.

MR. ALCANTRA pointed out that discussions with the supporters of the bill had indicated that the legislation did not ensure that religious or private schools would accept all Alaskan children, did not ensure that teachers would be certified, and did not ensure the same testing requirements as public schools. He referred to earlier testimony from Cook Inlet Academy which stated that it was necessary to screen applicants, as the school did not have the facilities for students with serious special needs. He stated that public education was provided for all who wished to attend, regardless of religious affiliation, learning styles, or physical needs.

The committee took an at-ease from 8:32 a.m. to 8:34 a.m.

8:34:00 AM

ROD McCOY expressed his belief in America, the Constitution, and democracy and pointed out that, as a teacher, he had taught these values to his classes. He stated his belief for the value of maintaining a separation of church and state, not to disregard the importance of church, but to maintain this distance as dictated by the writers of the Constitution. He declared his passion and protection for his religion, and he endorsed the guidance for a rational approach to state affairs. He expressed his disagreement with an earlier statement that "there would be an equitable opportunity for both private schools and public schools." He declared:

That is entirely untrue. The public schools under the scenario there would be required to keep each and every student. The private schools in [HB] 145 would have no such requirements.

MR. McCOY observed that there was not a structure to require the private schools to retain any students. He stressed that segregation would occur. He reported on research by Money magazine that compared like circumstances, and had stated that investments in private education did not result in any greater "bang for their buck." He offered his belief that change for change sake did not guarantee improvement. He asked that the legislators "walk slowly" in consideration of change to the Alaska State Constitution.

[8:38:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WES KELLER, Alaska State Legislature, reiterated that proposed HB 145 would provide public funding for the cost of attending grades kindergarten through 12 at any school of the parent's choice. He offered to answer any questions.

[It was clarified that Version D was in front of the committee.]

[8:39:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT asked to clarify that HJR 16 would be put on the ballot so the people of the state could vote to change the constitution.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER agreed and explained the remainder of the process through the legislature.

[8:40:40 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked for an explanation of how the school district would have the responsibility to administer the program and yet not have the authority for monitoring performance.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER explained that any school must comply with AS 14.45.030 or AS 14.45.100 - 14.45.130. [Statutes that govern religious or other private schools] He listed the necessary records to maintain exemption from other provisions of law pertaining to education.

[8:42:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked for more information to the educational responsibility of the school districts.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER replied that the school district would have information about the participating schools.

[8:44:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked to clarify, should the [private] schools which received funding not perform as well as the public schools, would there be a report to the parents. He asked if there was any accountability or mechanism for the school district to stop the funding to the [private] schools.

[8:45:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER expressed "a lot of faith in the fact that the parents would not choose a school that is doing a bad job, and that's the whole point is to get that information out there and the parents are the ones to make the choice." He stated that "the market will work."

[8:45:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON reflected that if private schools had to follow the same regulations as public schools, then the screening process at private school would not be allowed.

[8:46:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER replied that participating schools would have independence and that laws prohibited discrimination.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked again if the screening processes would be stopped. She referred to earlier testimony from a private school principal that there was a screening process, and that the [private] school could choose the students. She pointed out that the public school was not allowed this choice.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER replied that the private schools could not "pick and choose based on race, gender, beliefs, what have you, that's part of the state law."

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked for Representative Keller to put on the record that there would be no screening.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER declared that the decision was based on choice and if a school provided a statement of faith, parents would make the choice whether or not to sign such a document.

[8:48:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER, in response to Representative P. Wilson, agreed that it would be the parent's choice.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked for confirmation that the school would not turn away a student.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER replied:

There may be supplements in the application that somebody will not go to the school, will choose to not go to the school, because of the requirements that are there, but I think it's pretty clear that we want to leave those choices to whatever school is participating.

[8:50:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON offered an example of a student with a handicap, and a private school might indicate that it was not prepared to deal with that handicap. She pointed out that public schools were not allowed to turn students away.

[8:50:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER, in response, said that as a parent, he would choose the school that would best serve the child.

[8:50:58 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK interjected that this was a discussion of minutiae, and he reflected on the difficulty for projecting the final outcome. He posed that it was not necessary to discuss details, and that moving proposed HB 145 out of committee would allow further scrutiny. He stated that this was a nationwide issue. He announced that the issue would "end up in front of the people of Alaska, and I think that's really where the dialogue needs to take place." He expressed his desire to allow the discussion to continue beyond the committee. He stressed the importance that this decision be made by the people of Alaska, and not by those in government.

8:53:42 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI directed attention to Version I, which stated that districts would approve the participating schools and it "specifically cited that the discrimination in admission and hiring practices was part of this bill." He noted that Version D did not include this statement, but that it stated "they would admit students based on a random selection process, but could apply the preference for siblings." He offered his belief that Version D specifically allowed discrimination against students to continue. He opined that this was the proper venue to discuss policies of discrimination against students. He announced that he would not support to move the bill out of committee.

8:55:00 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON pointed out that the proposed HB 145 would not go to a vote of the people, as it was currently unconstitutional. He directed attention to HJR 16, which would allow a vote on proposed HB 145 by Alaskans. He emphasized that a job of the committee was to get into the minutiae of a bill.

8:55:58 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER, indicating Version D, page 2, lines 14-17, observed that the intent of the sponsor was that the school district may participate in the option of student transportation. He reported that "it leaves the option up to the good will of the district based on the money they received on that program."

8:57:24 AM

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT expressed his concern with perception of the word "may." He declared his concern with the fiscal accountability for the transportation clause of the proposed bill. He indicated that the transportation cost should be borne by the parents of the student.

9:00:16 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER, in response to Representative Pruitt, said that the burden for transportation was placed on the district, but that the proposed bill did not require expansion of the current transportation beyond 100 percent of that allocated to "a similarly situated student."

[9:01:14 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:01 a.m. to 9:06 a.m.

[9:06:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER, in response to Representative Pruitt, offered to remove the transportation language from the proposed bill.

[9:07:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT asked to clarify that the legislative intent was not to provide transportation for every child, and that the parental choice of schools would include the parental responsibility for the student's transportation to the school.

[9:08:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if it was the intent of the sponsor of the bill that the district would provide transportation to some private schools, but not to other private schools.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER replied that the school district would have the choice to provide transportation.

[9:09:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON stated, for the record, that the intent was to allow a school district to supply transportation for some students to schools within the district, but not to all students to all schools.

[9:10:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON expressed her concern that a parent may bring a law suit if the school district does not transport equally.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER said that the bill was not specific, and that the intent of the sponsor was "to give the district the choice based on good sense of what to do."

[9:11:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked what the intent of the sponsor was for transportation.

[9:12:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER apologized and stated that his intent was to allow a school district the option for student transportation. He said that the bill wording was not that specific.

[9:13:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON maintained her concern for this issue.

[9:13:24 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK said that HB 145 would be held over.

[9:13:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT moved to report HJR 16 out of committee with individual recommendations.

[9:13:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI objected for discussion.

[9:14:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON stated his support for HJR 16, as it would need to be passed by the legislature and the people of Alaska.

[9:15:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI maintained his objection.

[9:15:31 AM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Feige, Pruitt, P. Wilson, Seaton, and Dick voted in favor of HJR 16. Representative Kawasaki voted against it. Therefore, HJR 16 was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee by a vote of 5-1.

[9:16:41 AM](#)

Representative Keller pointed out that HJR 16 and proposed HB 145 could not ultimately be separated. He encouraged support for HB 145.

[9:17:09 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:17 a.m. to 9:21 a.m.

[9:21:13 AM](#)

HB 143-ADJUST BASE STUDENT ALLOCATION: INFLATION

CHAIR DICK announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 143, "An Act providing an increase and an inflation adjustment to the base student allocation used in the formula for state funding of public education; requiring a review and recommendation for future adjustments to the base student allocation; and providing for an effective date."

[9:21:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PETERSEN, Alaska State Legislature, presented HB 143, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

House Bill 143 would protect our students and school districts from having to pay for inflation with fewer education opportunities. Inflation happens every year, and if the Base Student Allocation is not adjusted to cover annual losses to inflation then local districts have to make up the losses by cutting services or through increased municipal taxes. For many districts increased taxation is not a legally available option.

The Base Student Allocation and the foundation formula are the primary means of providing state support to local K-12 education in Alaska. Over the last three years there have been statutory increases to the BSA which have allowed school districts to operate with knowledge of how much state support they would receive through these three years. This bill will also allow for better multi-year planning, since districts will know that the BSA will be protected from inflation.

During this three year period the Department of Education would be tasked with conducting a

professional study of the true changes in costs for K-12 education and the department would submit a recommended BSA amount for consideration before the 2014 regular legislative session. This will allow the Legislature to consider any changes to the costs of providing education in Alaska that might not be reflected in the Consumer Price Index.

Alaska has many complicated issues that must be addressed to improve our education system, and I know that this committee has been hard at work on many different bills this session. I certainly don't think that this bill solves all our problems, but I know that if we make our students pay for inflation through fewer educational opportunities that this will only make things worse.

There has been some suggestion that school districts should not receive an inflation adjustment because people are not satisfied with efforts to increase graduation and student performance. In Anchorage our district has been making steady progress at increasing graduation rates over the past decade and has the lowest dropout rate of Alaska's five major urban school districts. Anchorage has implemented several innovative programs to improve graduation, including the successful graduation coach program, and these programs can find themselves on the chopping block when the BSA loses ground to inflation.

I urge you to support this bill to allow school districts to perform better multi-year budgeting and ensure that our students do not have to pay the cost of inflation by having fewer educational opportunities.

[9:24:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PETERSEN pointed out that school supplies were not fully covered and teachers would often seek contributions to fill the gap.

[9:25:41 AM](#)

DAVID DUNSMORE, Staff, Representative Pete Petersen, Alaska State Legislature, presented the fiscal note, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, and explained that Section 1 raised the

Base Student Allocation (BSA) to \$5,838, an increase of \$158 over the current amount, but only effective for the upcoming fiscal year. He said that Section 2, Subsection 1, established that the Department of Education and Early Development (EED) would annually adjust the BSA for fiscal years 2013 and 2014 to reflect the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for Anchorage. He directed attention to Section 2, Subsection 2, which required EED to review the actual changes in educational cost per student in each district, and would give the legislature information about education specific factors not necessarily reflected in the CPI. He reported that Section 2, Subsection 3, required EED to submit a report to the 28th Legislature, prior to the 2014 regular session, to recommend an amount for the BSA for fiscal year 2015. He noted that Section 3 established July 1, 2011 as the effective date for the proposed bill.

[9:28:01 AM](#)

BABES HUDSON, President, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), stated support for HB 143. She said that she was the parent of three special needs children, and that the proposed bill would provide assurance for the continuation of the necessary financial support for education.

[9:30:07 AM](#)

PETE LEWIS, Superintendent, Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, stated that the proposed bill was forward thinking with the tie to the CPI, and that the study of the BSA would continue. He expressed support of the bill.

The committee took an at-ease from 9:30 a.m. to 9:33 a.m.

[9:33:01 AM](#)

MR. LEWIS concluded that the bill allowed forward thinking for school planning.

[9:33:41 AM](#)

SUE HULL, Member, School Board, Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, stated support for HB 143 and stressed the need for the BSA adjustment. She opined that this was an important investment in the future of Alaska, as it was important to do more for kids and not to cut the budgets.

[9:35:11 AM](#)

BRETT GILLAND, Teacher, Anchorage School District, described the enrollment size of the math class which he taught, and the difficulties in meeting the needs of the students. He pointed out that he was teaching an additional class during his scheduled planning period, to allow for smaller classes. He encouraged communication with the school districts as the responsible means toward change when inefficiencies were recognized. He stressed that "shorting funding to schools throughout the state" was not a responsible means of change, as under funding would not reduce the inefficiencies, but would exacerbate them. He pointed to the difficulty of offering the necessary individualized instruction in classrooms that were overcrowded.

[9:39:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON, referring to the consumer price index (CPI) which currently indicated zero inflation, asked how funding would be decreased if this became negative inflation.

MR. GILLAND replied that his comments had been directed to the minimum obligation for funding, and he asked for a reason to budget for low growth.

[9:41:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON, noting that the proposed bill was based on the CPI, asked if the CPI was a good index as 85 percent of the school district budget was based on wages and not on supplies.

MR. GILLAND deferred.

[9:42:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked what was the expectation for class size.

MR. GILLAND replied that it was 32 students, although even that was large.

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked about Mr. Gilland's experience as a teacher.

MR. GILLAND replied that class sizes in Alaska were as large as any he had taught. He relayed that he had taught for three

years in Oklahoma and three years in Alaska. He reported that 20 students was a reasonable number for a class if he expected to offer any individual interaction. He stated that more students than this resulted in a lecture hall approach. He opined that if Oklahoma could maintain smaller classes, then Alaska should be able to do as well.

[9:43:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked where the efficiency would result, as a student base allocation allowed for more money with more students.

MR. GILLAND replied that decreasing class size from 30 students to 20 students would mean an increase of 50 percent to the teaching staff.

[9:44:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE proposed to make more staff positions into teaching positions.

[9:45:15 AM](#)

MR. GILLAND replied that the school board was responsible to its constituency.

[9:46:04 AM](#)

JACOB BERA, Teacher, Eagle River High School, Anchorage School District, stated support for HB 143, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read [original punctuation provided]:

My name is Jacob Bera. My wife and I both teach for the Anchorage School District, and we have a 2 year old son, Leif, that will eventually attend Anchorage Public Schools. I would like to speak this morning in favor of House Bill 143. I believe Alaska has the capacity and resources to create the strongest educational system in the nation. We all agree in the importance of education, especially early education, in setting young Alaskans on a path to success in life. My school, Eagle River High School, is full of strong teachers who give everything they have to our students. Our graduation rate is 89%, well above the district ave, teachers volunteer to serve on a 9th grad success committee that tracks freshmen as they

start their high school career, and we pride ourselves as a staff on eating our lunches not in the staff lounge, but a desk with our students helping with homework. Yet every year we're being asked to do more with less. I am the only art teacher at my school, and where most teachers are asked to lead no more than 3 different, I teach 5 different groups including an Advanced Placement course in order to provide a complete curriculum. As a department chair and member of my schools leadership committee, we're constantly trying to keep class sizes at a reasonable level as we're asked each year to cut positions. I believe this bill is a step in the right direction towards providing more financial security, now & in the future for Alaskan schools, and the best possible educational opportunities for my son our Alaskan students.

[9:47:51 AM](#)

ANDREA LANG, Teacher, Eagle River High School, Anchorage School District, explained her role as the choir, theater, and guitar teacher, and she detailed the ongoing success of a number of her students. She pointed to the difficulty of showing success in the arts, as it was not reflected in the usual performance based tests. She expressed her support for HB 143. She reflected on the difficulties encountered with large classes and the lack of materials and supplies. She read from a prepared statement: [original punctuation included]

During my time here I have spoken to a number of legislators for & against the BSA. Though the issue may seem rather complicated to you... this is what I know: My kids need my time- I know my kids need to be in a class w/ a manageable # of students My kids need materials...My kids need the best education that a state flush with money can provide.

And while politicians debate on giving 2 billion dollars a year back to corporations that raked in an average of 1.7 billion dollars net profit for last year under ACES.

She requested that the committee pass HB 143.

[9:51:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON expressed her understanding of the situation.

[9:52:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON agreed that the committee recognized the situation and the importance of the arts for keeping kids in school.

[9:53:34 AM](#)

STEWART MCDONALD, Superintendent, Kodiak Island Borough School District, stated support for HB 143 and included statements of support from other small districts. He pointed out that the only flexibility within his budget, if funding was cut, was for teachers and programs. He declared the need for future funding increases as it was imperative to provide the technology needed to keep the remote schools competitive.

[9:57:02 AM](#)

ROD MCCOY, NEA-Alaska, provided a collection of statements in support of the bill. He stated that he was from a family of educators, and that his wife and his children were teachers. He emphasized that raising knowledgeable children was imperative. He disagreed with the statement that education was fully funded.

[10:00:30 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK stated that public testimony would remain open, and that HB 143 would be held over.

[10:01:12 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:01 a.m.