

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 6, 2012

8:04 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

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

REPRESENTATIVE Bob Herron

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SUPERINTENDENT PRESENTATION - DILLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOUSE BILL NO. 256

"An Act repealing provisions relating to the power and duties of the Department of Education and Early Development to intervene in a school district to improve instructional practices."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 256

SHORT TITLE: REPEAL STATE INTERVENTION IN SCHOOLS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) DICK

01/17/12	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/6/12
01/17/12	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/17/12	(H)	EDC, FIN
01/25/12	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
01/25/12	(H)	Scheduled But Not Heard
02/01/12	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/01/12	(H)	Heard & Held
02/01/12	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)

02/03/12 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106  
02/03/12 (H) Heard & Held  
02/03/12 (H) MINUTE(EDC)  
02/06/12 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

#### **WITNESS REGISTER**

BILL MCLEOD, Superintendent  
Dillingham School District  
Dillingham, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided a presentation of the Dillingham School District.

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified, during the hearing on HB 256.

KIM LANGTON, EdD  
Assistant Superintendent for Instruction  
Yupiit School District  
Akiachak, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified, during the hearing on HB 256.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:04:13 AM](#)

**CHAIR ALAN DICK** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Present at the call to order were Representatives Dick, Kawasaki, P. Wilson, Seaton, and Feige. Representatives Pruitt and Cissna arrived while the meeting was in progress.

#### **Superintendent Presentation - Dillingham School District**

[8:04:45 AM](#)

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

The committee took an at-ease from 8:06 a.m. to 8:14 a.m.

[8:14:39 AM](#)

BILL MCLEOD, Superintendent, Dillingham School District, provided a slide presentation to introduce the district, beginning with the demographics of the area. Dillingham is a hub community that serves a region entirely off the road system; accessible via plane or boat. The population is about 2,500, which doubles in the summer, during the fishing season. The district has 472 students attending the K-12 system, facilitates alternative and correspondence programs, and is funded by an annual budget of about \$9.2 million. The elementary school is a K-5 program, serving 214 students. A variety of after school and intermural programs are offered for students. He reported that the attendance has been high, over 90 percent, and academic achievements have been good. The parents take an active role, particularly in the elementary school, he said, and contribute substantially to student experiences. The alternative and correspondence school serve 37 and 10 students respectively. He said these programs are individualized self-paced, and place a strong emphasis on the world of work. Many of the alternative high school students attend classes for half of the day and work the other half. The public school places a strong emphasis on reading and writing with a goal for students to be at proficiency levels by the end of third grade. A universal screener is utilized to monitor and evaluate achievement data and provide guidance for improved instruction. Positive progress trends are evident in the scores, and he reported, the third grade reading proficiency has increased from 54 percent, in 2005, to 78 percent in 2011. The three year trend line goal is to reach 80 percent, and thus, the two year report is very encouraging; referred to locally as the bubble of success. The third grade writing proficiency skills have also improved, also at 54 percent in 2005; it reached 70 percent in 2011. School wide, a target was established to reach "safe harbor" levels for AYP (average yearly progress) for No Child Left Behind (NCLB) compliance, and he reported that the target has been attained. Every program, K-12, alternative, and correspondence programs, has moved 10 percent of the non-proficient students to proficiency in one year, and met the standard. He continued, reporting that the buildings are in good condition due to the local passage of a \$15 million bond measure to provide renovations. He moved onto the district's challenges, which he said this year is primarily fiscal. The employee health insurance has experienced a major increase, 24 percent, representing about \$224,000. Also, the negotiated teacher contracts require annual wage increases. A major draw is the skyrocketing cost for rural energy. The flat funded BSA (base student allocation) was difficult last year, he said, and if it is not increased this year a significant budget problem will

ensue. The student population trends indicate a continued declining enrollment. Instruction/student achievement is also a challenge, he reported, and said it has been a struggle to meet AYP in the elementary and middle schools, which are at Level 5 - Year 2, and Level 5 - Year 3, respectively.

8:22:36 AM

MR. MCCLEOD a number of restructuring efforts are being worked out with EED regarding this challenge. Despite the local bond measure for renovations, the buildings still require work on the infrastructure, including: sections of some roofs particularly cannot be upgraded, and require replacement; new bleachers are needed for the gymnasium; and the building, which was housing the alternative high school, dates to territorial days, and requires major work. Faculty recruitment and retention challenges are centered primarily on the remote locale, as well as the high cost of living. Regarding the restructuring effort a research based strategy is being implemented, with an emphasis on content experts. Two intervention specialists have been added to the K-3 program, one to the 3-5, and one to the secondary program. Steady progress has been observed in the students, which he said can be attributed to these efforts. High school students, who require credit recovery, or other particular assistance, have the option of attending an extended day class; staffed by three teachers. A tutorial program has been established through a partnership with a local agency and through the receipt of a CanDu/Safe grant. The grant has provided staffing positions which include: one Success Liaison, half of the high school Interventionist, and peer to peer supervised tutoring. Through the restructuring efforts, he said the district has voluntarily joined with the department in the STEPP (Steps Towards Educational Progress and Partnership) program to meet AYP; forming multiple committees with members from the school board, community, and school staff to identify goals and objectives. Through this process the district realized that the curriculum was not in alignment with the state standards. A year long process has corrected the situation, and the content areas of every grade are now aligned. A positive behavior intervention support program has been implemented to ensure that good cooperation exists, schools remain safe, and teachers are alleviated from discipline issues that distract from teaching time. The plans for restructuring the career and technical training programs includes emphasis on strong core academics, and high rigor to provide students a clear path to postsecondary studies, or the ability to enter the trade work force. He reported that a dropout prevention program is being

implemented to address what has been a major problem. A number of factors effect dropout levels and daily/weekly monitoring is helping to turn the tide. The dropout rate ranges from 8-10 percent. The graduation rate has been as low as 13 percent, 2004, and as high as 70 percent, 2009. The positive trend that had occurred declined in FY10 and was the catalyst to bring additional concern and effort to bear. He stressed the need to have an increase in the BSA to meet budgetary needs, and he emphasized the critical financial situation of operating remote schools. An increase is essential, he stressed.

[8:32:03 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK addressed the dropout rate, and asked if there are any specific reasons for students leaving, which are not directly related to, or controlled by, the school.

MR. MCCLEOD responded that community issues are high, which create challenges for the students and may manifest in a dropout situation. Contributing conditions include a high unemployment rate, substance abuse, and family problems. Students reflect the struggles that occur at home. Additionally, the weather plays an important role, as many students rely on the bus. He said sometimes it's just difficult to get children to school.

[8:34:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA reported having visited the district in 2006, and she noted that since that time a decline of 150 students has occurred. She inquired whether the school lunch program, with fish supplied by local fisherman, is still in operation. Additionally, she asked whether attendance has been affected by placement of children in foster care, or divisions in families.

MR. MCCLEOD replied that the Fish for Kids program is a long standing partnership with the local fishing industry and salmon is on the lunch menu every Friday. He said that along with [state provided] children's services, several local/regional organizations, such as the Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA), have partnered with the district to expand support options. The CanDo/Safe program is a district wide, community based program and addresses issues that impact the schools. He said foster care placement tends to bring children into the community.

[8:39:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether the Level 5 intervention with the department has been a good experience.

MR. MCCLEOD assured that the working relationship with the department has been good and the restructuring has proven helpful; collaboration has ensued.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether the alignment with the state standards have been helpful and if a relevant curriculum has been maintained.

MR. MCCLEOD explained that the problem appeared to be a dated curriculum. He said excellent hands on activities are a major aspect of the studies and provided an example of recent whale studies.

[8:42:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE inquired whether any teaching positions have been eliminated since 2006.

MR. MCCLEOD said that in the two years of his tenure, no positions have been lost. Prior to his arrival, he said positions had been cut annually, due primarily to budget constraints, and said with the ensuing fiscal challenges it may occur again.

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE said that the funding is based on the student counts, and asked if the timing of the count, in October, has any effect.

MR. MCCLEOD answered no, and said the timing is not critical, but stressed the helpfulness of a consistent date.

[8:44:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI referred to the handout, page [5], and asked about the graduation rate fluctuation. The graph begins in 2004, indicating a low of 13 percent, and he asked what it was prior to that year, as well as what caused it to increase in 2005 to nearly 60 percent.

MR. MCCLEOD said historical data was not available to him, prior to 2004. He conjectured that it may have been an anomaly, as it has not been that low otherwise.

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI reviewed the options that are currently being considered by the legislature for increasing the BSA, and asked what impacts are anticipated by the district regarding the increase.

MR. MCCLEOD responded that staff will be cut if no increase is received. Any increase will help, but a onetime increase, he opined is shortsighted and acts primarily as a bandage. The BSA formula is crucial, he said, and it is essential to forecast several years ahead; forward funding is a great benefit.

**HB 256-REPEAL STATE INTERVENTION IN SCHOOLS**

[8:48:50 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 256, "An Act repealing provisions relating to the power and duties of the Department of Education and Early Development to intervene in a school district to improve instructional practices."

[8:49:20 AM](#)

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), suggested that the role of leadership is a function of responsibility versus authority. He said he accepts full responsibility for the decisions regarding district intervention that have occurred since being appointed commissioner on 2/2/11, and acknowledged that, however thoughtful, some actions may have been distressing. The three primarily beneficiaries, of the department's focused mission, are the students, schools, and educators. Citing Moore, et al. v. State of Alaska, 3AN-04-9756 CI, (2010), he said the initial premise was that the State of Alaska was not fulfilling the constitutional obligation by not providing funding to adequately educate the children. In the Moore decision, the court defined the constitutional obligation of the state, which is to establish and maintain, then stipulated a four prong approach necessary to meet the requirements: a set of standards or goals for the students; a means for assessing the students in regards to the standards to establish progress; proviso for adequate funding; and adequate accountability and oversight practices. The court reprimanded the department for negligence in areas of accountability and oversight. The department, he reminded, establishes the standards, but the districts are allowed the latitude for how to present a relevant education to meet those standards; an important aspect in a state, as diverse as Alaska. He pointed out that the Yupiit School District is not synonymous

with intervention, but it has been prominent in recent committee discussion.

[8:53:54 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY drew attention to page 6, of the committee handout titled "Department of Education & Early Development Testimony Regarding HB 256 February 1, 2012," and reviewed the chart measuring the progress in the intervention districts from 2005-2010, according to the SBA (standards based assessments) rating for reading proficiency. The Yupiit school district was represented on the bottom line, indicating that about 25 percent of the students have measured proficient in reading skills for the past five years. He moved to page 7, to indicate the math and reading data, similarly charted. The Yupiit School District again measured the lowest proficiency rating, with a beginning rate at 9 percent, when intervention began in 2005, a spike to 25 percent in 2007, and a leveling out by 2010 at 20 percent; one out of five children are proficient. Continuing to page 8, he explained that the data collected from the 2011 third grade MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) assessment, demonstrates that 77 percent of the students are in the first to tenth percentile for reading, which he termed scary and heartbreaking. What is not shown, he explained, is that within the first to ten percentile, 80 percent are in the one to two percentiles, which indicates a significant number of children who are not even close to being proficient. He said growth is occurring and that the latest advances are not yet chartable. He credited the entire intervention team for the progress that is being made. In 2007 when the court decided, under Moore, that the state was negligent in oversight duties, it was found that the students in the Yupiit district were not being exposed to the material required in grades 8-10 to pass the required High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE). The opportunity to study material for the HSGQE didn't occur, the students could not be tested, and hence the high school diploma could not be contingent on the exam. The situation has been corrected and the HSGQE is now a valid aspect of the district. Returning to page 3, he referred to an excerpt from the Moore decision, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

For the State to fail to take a considerable more directive role in the face of chronically poor performance, at least for the children in Yupiit, amounts to an impermissible 'legislative abdication' of the State's constitutional responsibility to maintain public schools in this state.

8:59:48 AM

COMMISSIONER HANLEY opined that the department has been slow to react to the needs of the children, and offer assistance and oversight when and where needed. The primary intervention strategy is the role of the content coach who works directly with teachers and principals. Coaches work to build capacity within the school for teachers to provide continuity of learning throughout the grades, helping students meet the standards. The primary tool is installing Best Practices [in Teaching]. The coaches are only able to visit a school for one week per month, sometimes a few days, and he said the need exists to have them there for longer periods of time. Referring to a letter from Lance Jackson, Principal, Tuluksak Schools, undated, the commissioner read the following [original punctuation provided]:

I think a lot of people want me to say that the state intervention teams and assistance didn't help - but that is not true. They did help. They were able to help us when we were short in manpower, short with necessary ideas and they were able to provide the necessary leadership in critical areas like reading, leadership, organizational skills and state needed requirements.

Now, I cannot speak for the schools or speak for the district and the states help in those areas. All I can do is talk about Tuluksak.

Molli and her crew were able to provide some support, advice, and a lot of necessary skills that we at the time needed. It was and is a good relationship for us to have them in our building.

After a while they were just part of the school and the staff and they were almost part of the community. The kids knew them, the staff welcomed them and our facilities were open to them. It was easy to have them here and it was easy to have them assist us. I would dare to say that there was a significant level of trust between both of our organizations.

So, as I mentioned - the state team helped. It worked for us. Thank you for your help.

9:02:03 AM

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said that the reaction to intervention described in the letter is the department's goal, but whenever an outside entity is imposed in an area the potential for friction exists. Other intervention strategies, along with coaches, include: technical assistance; grant writing help; curriculum alignment; curriculum development; professional development; and an assigned trustee. He explained how the Yukon Flats District, an intervention district, did not have a science curriculum of any type, but with urging, and grant funding, the district was able to develop a relevant program. Professional development training opportunities are also provided, and last year a week long literacy institute was held in Anchorage. One district, Yupiit, has an assigned trustee to provide oversight. Yupiit has a SIG (School Improvement Grant), and the trustee ensures compliance for funding purposes.

[9:04:59 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY directed attention to page 5, of the department's committee handout, and read an excerpt from the Moore decision as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Even at schools in which student performance has been extremely poor, and has shown no improvement for many years, the State has failed to provide an adequate oversight role with respect to either the considerable State funds that it disburses or with respect to the delivery of instruction to the children in those schools. In short, the State has failed to take meaningful action to maximize the likelihood that the children in those troubled schools are accorded an adequate opportunity to acquire proficiency in the State's standards when a school has demonstrated an unwillingness or inability to correct this situation on its own.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY stressed the importance for the state to ensure appropriate oversight, and said the department has been reactive versus proactive. The Superior Court directed the state to take a more active oversight role, specifically in Yupiit, thus a trustee was assigned. He acknowledged that having a presence of this type may be inherently difficult. However, the role of the trustee is not to give directions, but to provide suggestions to the district. One of the decisions from the department has been to develop an exit plan for the

trustee by request of, and in conjunction with, Yupiit Superintendent Howard Diamond.

CHAIR DICK agreed that it is important for the districts to receive help from the department, and said the question is how intervention assistance can be accomplished in a collaborative, cooperative manner.

[9:09:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA underscored the difficulty of working in both the rural and urban settings of the state; two separate worlds. She suggested that the thought processes may need to be altered to view the situation differently, and called for scrutinization of the lessons that have been gleaned through the process. She noted that the department presentation did not include what has been learned, and asked for reflective comments.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the value of the indigenous culture has been recognized, and cultural standards are embedded in the curriculum. He emphasized the importance for allowing decisions to be made at the local level. The states responsibility is to establish the required standards and means for assessment, which then affords the latitude for districts to develop curriculum to meet the local interests. He reported having met in small groups with members of AASG (Alaska Association of Student Government), with representatives from rural areas, and said he asked them what they expect from education. The students expressed interest in being able to be employed beyond the borders of their districts, and many have goals that reach beyond the traditional subsistence life style. It is incumbent upon the state to provide an education which allows any student to attain their goals, he stressed. The department develops the goals to be attained which will allow students to be successful in whatever they choose to pursue, and the local district determines how the standards will be met.

[9:14:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON agreed that particularly rural areas may have difficulty receiving help from an outsider. The presence of an appointed trustee, not from the area, who observes and monitors versus assisting, could be perceived to be a policing figure. She asked whether the role of trustee could be metamorphosed to create a more workable relationship, and suggested that a change of personality might prove helpful. She

agreed with the commissioner, regarding what the court mandated, and the need for the department to take necessary action. Further, she asked whether the science curriculum, developed for the Yukon Flats district, has been made available for other schools.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said it is available.

[9:16:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI noted that the commissioner has been on the job for one year and four days, that this is the third hearing of HB 256, and that it is the first opportunity for the department to respond on the proposed legislation. He said:

The sponsor of the bill, and at least one other school district, has said that the department has not worked collaboratively and has violated the spirit and intent of SB 285. The member from Bethel region [Representative Herron] ... said that there is perhaps an institutional bias against Western Alaska. ... [Please] address those two ... claims.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that the coaches have been well received and appropriate collaboration was been reported. The concern is primarily focused on the trustee, he noted. The trustee has helped in several ways, he does not direct staff, but he has helped to provide materials. The trustee has also collaborated, he said, and offered several examples: SIG grant oversight; procurement and introduction of MAP materials for consideration by the district; insights into hiring the new principal in 2011; and the trustee offers feedback to the district superintendent following each visit. Regarding the question of bias towards Western Alaska, he said a facility may not conform to the department's growth model and be named an 872 School, cited in EED regulation 4 AAC 06.872 (c)(1)(2)(3). These regulations provide indicators, outside of NCLB or AYP, to identify whether a school is moving in the right direction. Regulations contain specific parameters for how the desk and instructional audits are to be conducted and the data utilized. The audit results provide a basis for consideration of further action, and the department maintains a comprehensive file on every district to track schools in this manner. He maintained that the process is very deliberate, and based on the requirements of SB 285. The department's decisions for action can be quantified through the 872 School data file.

[9:21:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI recalled the sponsor's further concerns, and said:

It seems that every school might be on the path to intervention and ... the department ... only has a subjective process in which to intervene.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered that his previous comments address the intervention process that is in place. Adequate Yearly Progress, based on the NCLB act is not the tool the department utilizes, because the department recognizes that in the year 2014, Alaska will not have attained the required 100 percent level. Thus, NCLB is an erroneous tool to use. Under SB 285, the department is required to notify the legislature if intervention or redirection of funding is to occur in any district; stipulating collaboration on the legislative level prior to departmental action. He maintained that the decisions are not truly subjective based the data.

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI noted that the content coaches are reportedly helpful, well received, and could be used more, he then queried reasons for the brevity of the coach visitations: scheduling issues; funding needs; or other considerations.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY clarified that the coaches are not the primary players, and provide limited assistance and insight. He said that if a district needs a fulltime position, contracts and funding would need to be considered and allocated. The personal welfare of the coaches is also a concern. Many villages do not have available facilities and the coach may have to campout on the floor of the school. It can be difficult to maintain a lengthy visit for some people, given these conditions. Also, efficient use of the coaching staff is maximized to target the appropriate schools.

[9:25:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE opined that the Yupiit situation appears to be a leadership issue. Establishing respect is a first requirement in leadership, he noted, then asked how credibility and experience is established when intervention is necessary. Additionally, what experienced personnel are available and being drawn on, at the department level, to enter an intervention district and command respect and fellowship in a rural area. Citing the Moore case, and the directive to do more, he noted

the pyramid management structure of schools: school board, superintendent, principals, and teachers. He asked where EED enters into this management structure for intervention purposes; perhaps in place of the school board, or does a structural change need to occur.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that the state and federal law allows EED the opportunity to clean house and replace boards, staff, and superintendents; however, removing local control would not have a positive impact on any community, he opined. A workable model is required, and it is important to bring strength to what exists.

9:30:30 AM

CHAIR DICK interjected that Mr. Sanborn's role as trustee may not be a good fit. He reported having read the biographies of all of the coaching teams, and said rural experience varies from coach to coach. Also, the coaching requirements contain no mention that participants be competent to utilize, demonstrate, or implement the cultural standards. He offered that cultural understanding is the only element that will bring success in the village schools. The depth of experience required does not exist within the department, he opined, and integration of the culture has not occurred.

9:32:30 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON recalled the competitive school improvement grants, which provided two years of funding to create working models in the schools. The intent was to collect research on comparative models in similar school districts and determine successful approaches. He noted that there are some very successful rural schools, and asked if the department is comparing the working models to what is occurring in the intervention districts.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied yes, and said the growth table that was a part of the performance pay model is part of what is used today to identify low performing schools. He said a best practices model is what is being considered fundamental; an upward adopted curriculum.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON reworded his question to ask whether the successful rural school characteristics are being considered in order to address similar issues in the intervention schools.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said yes, several aspects are comparably important, which include direct connections to the community's vision, support needs, and expectations. Other contributing factors are outside of the department's control, which include socio-economic challenges. He said a lack of vision and community involvement plays a huge role.

[9:36:37 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said in wrap-up that a moral and legal obligation exists, but the best model for attaining the goals remains nebulous. Also, the department may need to be doing more in the districts rather than less. Regarding the personality of the trustee, he reiterated that an exit strategy is being devised.

[9:38:35 AM](#)

KIM LANGTON, EdD, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Yupiit School District,

I am the assistant superintendent of instruction for the Yupiit School District. I served as a principal for fourteen years in two Utah districts and a private school in Honduras. I have been superintendent over Iditarod, Kuspuk and Denali Borough School Districts. All schools in Denali made AYP during my tenure there. Several of the schools in Kuspuk and Iditarod made AYP, and continue today. I was president of CEAAC at the time Moore was filed. Before the announcement that Yupiit School District would be assigned a trustee, I was hired to oversee instruction in the Yupiit School District. I also direct the SIG grant.

Much of the conversation last week focused on the lack of collaboration in the intervention efforts of DEED. The following points were made:

1. Judge Gleason in Moore vs. State argued that additional support was needed, particularly in the Yupiit School District,
2. She stated that the support be done in a collaborative manner,
3. We heard testimony that the state provides experienced, capable content coaches,
4. The "plan" of support was and is being devised while the plane is in the air,

5. The "plan" was/is devised in Juneau, specialists were and continue to be hired and assigned by Juneau, and direction comes from Juneau with minimal YSD input.

We believe that DEED had and has the best intent. However, the history of which I am aware, and the reality I have experienced in the past year and a half, gives a clear indication that the intervention process was implemented with a strong philosophy that the best way to turn a "failing" school district around is to give mandates, create a plan from afar, discount local efforts, programs, and training, and to superimpose your vision on the district. Years ago, I remember hearing about how intervention schools were being treated by educators in the state, and recall finding it hard to believe. Roger Sampson was the commissioner, and was someone I deeply respected due to his success in the Chugach School District, arguably the finest educational system in the state. That district earned its reputation not from top down efforts, but from a collaboration of bottom up, top down, and side-to-side efforts. Time and funding was spent getting people together to study research-proven best practices from wherever they could find them, and all taking responsibility for effective implementation of the plan about which all had a say.

The result was a turnaround success that serves students in supporting dynamically increased achievement, preparing students for work and life, preparing them for and helping them get into Job Corp, Avtec and colleges and universities, and overall preparing them for bright futures. The changes in the district were made in all aspects of their operation, from the business office to the maintenance program. This resulted in earning the Baldrige Award, presented by President Bush in early 2001. From scores of Chugach folks I have known over the years, this was accomplished through the collaborative involvement of folks throughout the organization.

This should be Alaska's model for a turn-around district. It was and is collaborative, which not only gives insight to its success but to its sustainability as well. Nowhere in the turn-around literature are there examples of a state taking over a district or

intervening in a top down manner with success. Years ago the state determined that Yupiit's scores were low, and put it on intervention status. From that time the staff and leadership at Yupiit were treated as if they had nothing to bring to the table, little expertise of value to add to the discussion, and were left virtually out of the discussion. Perhaps if Commissioner Sampson had applied his Chugach experience of utilizing, trusting and empowering his staff and leadership with intervention districts across the state, we would not be here today, and Yupiit would be achieving at far higher levels. The world offers a metaphor. DEED has operated in a manner reminiscent of "nation building", where much money is spent, quality expertise is focused, local expertise is ignored, and the results are negative, despite the huge cost.

Regarding the content coaches, we have asked that these expert folks come and live with us, serve with us, to truly enable them adequate time to work as coaches with our teachers so that they could have a deep and lasting effect on instruction. Commissioner LeDeux and his deputy replied to our requests that we would not be having any "boots on the ground." The hiring of the trustee, especially given the timing, was the wrong support for our teachers, especially given his price tag, and the fact that he came, according to him upon arrival, simply to observe. Not to work with the teachers. Not even to work with district leadership in the challenging work of turning around the district. No boots on the ground, despite paying for a trustee with boots on the ground for weeks out of the month. No boots on the ground despite receiving \$7,000,000 from the legislature at the end of the 2010 session, earmarked for intervention districts. We would have welcomed that money spent on more time with the coaches to enable them to actually make a difference. The only change we saw after the money was allocated was a trustee sent to observe us.

Our principals, curriculum director, and district leadership team are evaluating data, talking to teachers and observing instruction. We determine together what our needs are. We ask content specialists to work with staff and provide specific

support. We often encounter resistance, our requests unmet. When we fail to collaborate, instruction suffers, students pay the price. If we are to make full use of these content coaches, we need to work collaboratively in how they are directed and utilized.

Why is collaboration so important? It obviously is critical for building the kind of professional relationship necessary to be successful. We are told from the business world that we should be teaching children to work collaboratively in groups to solve problems. We certainly should be able to model what it is we expect our students to do. Beyond that, it is pragmatically recognizing the value of the experience and expertise of those closest to the children, the culture and the community where the students live. If you discount the perspective and insight gained there, you will fail.

In 2008-2009 Akiak had 40 percent of its students proficient in language arts. In 2010-2011 only 32 percent were. In 2007-2008 47 percent were proficient in math; in 2010-2011 25 percent were proficient. Akiachak has remained desperately low in language arts, from 15 percent proficient in language arts in 2007-2008 to 14 percent in 2010-2011. Academic achievement, while low enough to earn a spot on the intervention list, has gone progressively lower since intervention. Our MAP (Measures of Academic Progress assessment by Northwest Evaluation Association, NWEA) scores show that over 70% of our students fall in the 1-10%ile in the RIT [Rausch Unit] scores. I do not imply or believe it is all the state's fault. Much of what they have done has value. We all take responsibility for increasing academic achievement for our students. I could spend hours talking about the efforts we are making with the input and direction of our new Curriculum director. But the case can and must be made that the top down intervention process experienced by Yupiit has failed.

Outside of intervention, interactions with the state are very positive and productive. The leadership of the current commissioner has given us hope. I personally believe that had Mr. Hanley been commissioner at the beginning, it would have been initiated in a much more collaborative and mutually

respectful manner. The intent of this testimony is to give statute an objective face that will serve students, regardless the personalities serving at DEED.

This is a situation where simple cooperation would go a long way to better preparing our teachers for the students they serve. The structure of intervention needs to be fixed so that the district has a chair (or two) at the table. We need mutual respect and coordination. It is a shame that so much money has been wasted due to poor planning, poor implementation, poor or lacking organization, and an overall top-down philosophy. We could argue forever over strategy, research proven practices, what should the plan or vision be, etc., but what cannot be argued is the failure of the current effort. It can be fixed, but only if everyone is at the table equally, fairly, working together collaboratively to improve our schools for our kids.

It is not so much a question of what, but how.

[9:47:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT regarding trustee Sanborn, asked whether it would it be helpful to have a larger presence with more interaction.

DR. LANGTON responded that the school board members, and others, would like to see more apparent, intentional, interaction. It would be a plus if he were to be more hands on in his approach.

[9:49:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON noted that many of the comments have been made in review of the intervention, and asked whether it will be possible to build on the progress that has been attained to and continue forward in a cooperative manner.

DR. LANGTON said it would be important to know what the content specialist agendas will be when they arrive, and to have input into the agenda. Recently a local teacher identified a specific need, which could have been addressed by one of the specialists, but it was not on the agenda, and could not be taken up despite a number of e-mail exchanges. He said it reminds him of the old saw "too many chiefs," but conceded that the situation has

improved with Commissioner Hanley. It would be important for the district to have a seat at the table for decision making. Statute defines how the intervention is to be handled, which can be a complicating factor at times.

[9:52:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON opined that the trustee is being asked to act as a co-superintendent and the coaches to become parallel teachers. He said it is not clear what is being requested in the way of collaboration.

DR. LANGTON maintained that the district has not experienced added value from the presence of the trustee; not even in the context of MAP or SIG. One issue is that new hires make up the majority of the teaching staff, primarily arrivals from the Lower 48. Each is a first year teacher finding their way in a new locale, culture, and climate, as well as trying to adjust to the challenges of turning a school around. He said these teachers require direct, intensive, well modeled coaching. The modeling takes time and the content specialists are available on a limited basis, effecting minimal impact. Further, the district has little say, and no pre-communicated understanding, regarding what the specialists will address whenever they arrive. It's a bit of a mystery, he finished.

[9:56:13 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK explained the need to fashion appropriate legislation that creates a safe environment for districts coming under intervention and to assist the department in the recovery endeavor, regardless of the individuals involved.

[HB 256 was held over.]

[9:58:47 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

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