

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 20, 2012

8:02 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: DELTA GREELY SCHOOL DISTRICT

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 242

"An Act relating to funding for digital learning as a component of public school funding."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 8

"An Act relating to questionnaires and surveys administered in the public schools."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 242

SHORT TITLE: PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING: DIGITAL LEARNING

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) P.WILSON

04/17/11	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/17/11	(H)	EDC, FIN
02/20/12	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

BILL: SB 8

SHORT TITLE: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES AND SURVEYS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) DAVIS

01/19/11	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/7/11
01/19/11	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/19/11	(S)	EDC, HSS
02/16/11	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/16/11	(S)	Scheduled But Not Heard
02/21/11	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/21/11	(S)	Heard & Held
02/21/11	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/25/11	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/25/11	(S)	Heard & Held
02/25/11	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/28/11	(S)	EDC RPT 3DP 2NR
02/28/11	(S)	DP: THOMAS, DAVIS, FRENCH
02/28/11	(S)	NR: MEYER, STEVENS
02/28/11	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/28/11	(S)	Moved SB 8 Out of Committee
02/28/11	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/16/11	(S)	HSS AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/16/11	(S)	Moved SB 8 Out of Committee
03/16/11	(S)	MINUTE(HSS)
03/18/11	(S)	HSS RPT 2DP 1DNP 1NR
03/18/11	(S)	DP: DAVIS, EGAN
03/18/11	(S)	DNP: DYSON
03/18/11	(S)	NR: MEYER
04/01/11	(S)	TRANSMITTED TO (H)
04/01/11	(S)	VERSION: SB 8
04/04/11	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/04/11	(H)	EDC, HSS
01/27/12	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
01/27/12	(H)	Scheduled But Not Heard
02/20/12	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

DUNCAN WARE, Superintendent  
Delta/Greely School District  
Delta Junction, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented a PowerPoint titled "Delta/Greely School District."

CARL ROSE, Executive Director  
Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during discussion of HB 242.

BOB WHICKER, Director  
Consortium for Digital Learning (CDL)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during discussion of HB 242.

THOMAS OBERMEYER, Staff  
Senator Bettye Davis  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced SB 8 on behalf of the prime sponsor, Senator Bettye Davis.

EMILY NENON, Alaska Government Relations Director  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 8.

WARD HURLBURT, M.D., Chief Medical Officer/Director  
Division of Public Health  
Central Office  
Department of Health and Social Services  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during discussion of SB 8.

RYAN KAUFFMAN  
Sitka, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 8.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:02:42 AM](#)

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

[8:04:02 AM](#)

[Due to technical difficulties, the committee took an at-ease from 8:04 a.m. to 8:08 a.m.]

**Presentation: Delta Greely School District**

[8:08:55 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK announced that the first order of business would be a presentation by the Superintendent of the Delta Greely School District.

DUNCAN WARE, Superintendent, Delta Greely School District, introduced the "Board of Education," slide 1, and shared that the Board was comprised of seven stakeholders within the district, as well as a student representative and a military representative. He moved on to slide 2, "Delta Greely's Schools," which listed the seven schools in the district, including a homeschool and a cyber-school. Slide 3, "Delta Greely School District Demographics," listed the enrollment of 919 students for all the schools, and the corresponding breakdown by grade structures. He directed attention to slide 4, "Delta Greely's Students," depicting a pie graph showing the enrollment by ethnicity, and he noted an increase for the Hispanic student community.

[8:10:48 AM](#)

MR. WARE showed slide 5, "Early Learning," and described the Pre-K program use of typical peers, the all-day kindergarten program, and the emphasis on early literacy skills. He described slide 6, "Instructional Supports," and stated that the district utilized the Measuring Academic Progress (MAP) testing program to measure academic progress, IPass for math intervention to identify the skills needing development, and Six Traits Writing and Cross-curricular Writing to focus on a yearlong writing program. He spoke about the district's substantial curriculum mapping process which reviewed Alaska standards and looked for additional resources to identify the priorities and direction for the district. He shared that Title I was utilized for students needing additional assistance with remedial reading and writing.

[8:12:49 AM](#)

MR. WARE visited slide 7, "Special Areas of Instruction," and said that these special areas of instruction included welding, auto-CAD, robotics, bush physics, accounting, and a radio station.

[8:13:40 AM](#)

MR. WARE shared slide 8, "Student Activities," explaining the importance of the student activities, which included the unicycle program and athletics, and had participation by 95 percent of the student body.

[8:14:24 AM](#)

MR. WARE discussed slide 9, "Community Connections," and stated that the Partners for Progress Delta worked in coordination with University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), the Fairbanks Community and Technical College, Alaska Works, and the Alaska Department of Labor. He stated that this program allowed for teaching the operation of heavy equipment, construction trades academies, and certified assistant nursing courses. He described the partnership with Fort Greely allowing use of the swimming and bowling facilities. He listed the rocketry club and the Engineers in Classrooms programs that occurred in partnership with Boeing Corporation. He mentioned that the school district also worked in conjunction with the Delta Chamber of Commerce, the Youth Hockey Association, and the Delta Community Library.

[8:15:46 AM](#)

MR. WARE reported on slide 10, "Special Projects," detailing the weatherization of the Delta High School, a biomass boiler for the high school complex, iPads for Literacy, and efforts to bring the high school into a better position to serve as a community emergency shelter. He shared that additional projects included improvement for instructional space usage, an upgrade to the kitchen facilities, an emergency generator, improvement of the science room complex with a shared lab, and creation of a fine arts classroom.

[8:17:59 AM](#)

MR. WARE reported on slide 11, "HD 6 iPad Literacy Project," which depicted the results of this project with third grade pre and post test results. He then shared slide 12, which graphed the results of this project with third graders. He reported on the significant increases in results for both grade levels.

[8:18:55 AM](#)

MR. WARE, slide 13, explained the three year, 2009-11, proficiency reports in language arts, mathematics, and graduation rates for the five schools. He reported that the

Delta Cyber School, a statewide, on-line school through the service center in the Anchorage area, served a large number of at risk students. He explained that the New Horizons High School was an alternative high school program, within the Delta High School building, with small groups and individualized instruction.

[8:20:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON, referring to the New Horizons High School, asked if they were included in the Delta High School graduation rate.

MR. WARE replied that they were not included in the Delta High School graduation rate, as it was a school of its own.

[8:21:26 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK asked if MAP testing was sufficient and additional testing was not necessary.

MR. WARE opined that MAP provided sufficient information to make immediate decisions regarding student achievement.

CHAIR DICK asked for a description of the bush physics course.

MR. WARE replied that it was through UAF.

[8:23:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked when parent teacher conferences were conducted.

MR. WARE replied that these conferences were held at a variety of times, primarily to meet the schedule needs of the parents.

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked if the school was closed during these conference times.

MR. WARE confirmed that the school did close for parent teacher conferences.

[8:24:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked if remedial instruction was required for the military children upon their enrollment, or did they arrive "up to par" with the other students.

MR. WARE replied that most students from military families were where they needed to be. He pointed out that a majority of the military families were assigned for extended placements in Delta.

[8:25:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked how the iPad was distributed to students.

MR. WARE explained that the iPads were on a mobile cart for use in the school, and did not, typically, go to a student's home.

**HB 242-PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING: DIGITAL LEARNING**

[8:26:29 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 242, "An Act relating to funding for digital learning as a component of public school funding."

[8:26:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON presenting HB 242 as the prime sponsor, paraphrased from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

House Bill No. 242 establishes a "digital learning funding factor" in law to assist school districts in implementing a full range of digital technology.

The bill proposes to multiply the Average Daily Membership (ADM) by 1.005 to create a new digital learning factor. The new factor should provide about \$6 million per year to spread across the state. Funds can be used to acquire a range of technologies, such as mobile devices, tablets, notebooks or smart boards, plus software and services like professional development and technical support. School districts will retain complete flexibility to use the funds based on local priorities.

We have heard a lot of rhetoric around the building about education and how there is resistance to just increasing the Base Student Allocation. The bill provides the direct method for change that will

improve our educational outcomes. The digital Learning program has been proven with the "Leveling the Playing Field" Pilot Program. I think it fits the goal of spending funds to get measureable improvements in outcomes.

I have been asked by the Association of Alaska School Board's Consortium for Digital Learning (CDL) on digital learning, the implementers of the pilot, to introduce this legislation. I believe the Digital Learning program could be one of the tools we need to engage our students and help keep them in the classroom.

There are Consortium for Digital Learning members present that will be able to answer your questions relating to this program much better than I. Mr. Chair, with your permission, I ask that they come forward and answer program questions the committee may have.

[8:29:25 AM](#)

CARL ROSE, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), directed attention to the committee handout titled "Transforming Alaska Education through Digital Learning" [Included in members' packets] and indicated how quickly the change had progressed since 2006. Referring to Representative Wilson's testimony, he declared that the infrastructure to support this rapid advance was necessary to ensure that the network would work. He shared that curriculum apps were now on line, and that the infrastructure support was growing as connectivity became available. He opined that the impetus behind proposed HB 242 was to sustain this effort for technology seed money.

[8:32:52 AM](#)

BOB WHICKER, Director, Consortium for Digital Learning (CDL), stated that the proposed bill accomplished some necessary sustained program funding. He detailed that it would enable new projects, expand existing projects, and refresh other programs.

[8:34:51 AM](#)

MR. WHICKER reported that, since his iPad demonstration during the past year, the Consortium for Digital Learning had

progressed to become a service organization which provided aggregate ordering, broad reaching professional development, leadership training, projects, and a library of courses based on Alaska themes.

[8:36:58 AM](#)

MR. WHICKER directed attention to the Consortium's latest project, detailed in the HD6 IPADS4LITERACY handout [Included in members' packets], which described that nine school districts had received a total of 600 iPads, targeted at the third grade level. He said that the data results of the program were still being received. He indicated page 3 of the handout, "Have the iPads changed your instruction?", noting the overwhelming affirmative response. He referred to an additional handout titled "Rationale for Inclusion of Digital Learning in Education Foundation Support" [Included in members' packets] and stated "we're in a place of change right now where all the efforts that you see with these [digital learning] projects are starting to move to ... change." He opined that proposed HB 242 would encourage this forward movement.

[8:40:05 AM](#)

MR. ROSE, referring to page 2, line 8 of the proposed bill, explained that the funding factor of 1.005 equaled \$5.9 million from the state to be used as "seed money." He opined that "when districts have skin in the game, they pay close attention to what they're doing." He suggested the three funding options for sustainability to be the general fund, grant processes, and capital budgets. He declared that this was a model for all schools to follow, and this seed money would create opportunity and impetus.

[8:41:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON, directing attention to the aforementioned ratio for 1 to 1 distribution of the iPads, asked why the devices were left in the classroom. He relayed that other reports indicated that it was educationally beneficial when the devices were taken home by the students. He offered his belief that some of the gains for extending the educational day were being lost if this optional use was not allowed. He asked if the consortium was considering an expansion to the usage.

[8:43:21 AM](#)

MR. WHICKER voiced his agreement, stating that research supported the expanded use outside of the classroom. He pointed out that, since 2006, the laptop take home policy was strongly encouraged, even though each district made its own determinations for management of the devices. He reported that the iPad program policies were not scrutinized and, referring to the graph in the aforementioned handout titled "Rationale for Inclusion of Digital Learning in Education Foundation Support," he declared that the adoption of change in schools did not come as quickly as the change in technology. He professed his strong support for the use of iPads outside the classrooms.

[8:45:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON, addressing concerns for the breakage of technology when taken from the classroom, reported that the students were very responsible and protective of the devices. He pointed out that the apps on the devices allowed for use without connection to the internet.

[8:47:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI, directing attention to page 4 of the aforementioned HD6 IPADS4LITERACY handout, asked to clarify why Fairbanks had such a small number of users. He opined that tying proposed HB 242 to the average daily membership (ADM) student count would not allow for the necessary program seed money in all the school districts, and he asked how to ensure equity among all the school districts.

[8:49:02 AM](#)

MR. ROSE explained that the 53 school districts were each governed by a local school board, which allowed for different policies and approaches. He gave examples for different means of implementation by the districts, and pointed out that smaller school districts had more flexibility for change. He explained that funding was from a block grant.

[8:50:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked how the technology interfaced with culture and local knowledge.

MR. WHICKER, in response to Representative Cissna, said that students were able to use the laptops to record cultural activities, including the filming of dance groups, conferences,

and oral histories by the elders. He said that CDL had helped bring people together around a common infrastructure, which brought many different projects to light.

[8:53:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA offered her belief that built-in incentives were motivators, and she asked whether the separate school boards were involved, especially as mentors to each other.

[8:54:34 AM](#)

MR. ROSE replied that the diversity of the school districts was broad and that, although the technology and information was shared with each of the districts, it was necessary for each district to determine its local need and to find the money to invest.

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked if legislators were invited to the AASB meetings.

MR. ROSE extended an invitation to the annual conference.

[8:57:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON, referring to the handout [included in members' packets] titled "Transforming Alaska Education through Digital Learning" and read: "The challenge is that all children do not have access to an equitable education experience." She expressed her agreement with the statement, and continued reading:

Additional designated funding will help school leaders meet that responsibility. Adding funds to the foundation formula and collaboration between individual legislators and school districts to expand digital learning opportunities for students can transform education in Alaska. For us to miss this opportunity to change the face of teaching and learning now would be a tragedy.

She offered her belief that it was necessary to recognize this as a sustainable opportunity and for the legislature to make it happen.

[8:59:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE stated his support for the advantages of digital learning. He questioned whether enough money was being requested in the proposed bill.

MR. ROSE replied that the requested amount was a starting point, but that it could be larger. He opined that it was better to ask for an amount that would be accepted rather than rejected as too large.

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE remarked that technology, as it changed, required an ongoing capital investment. He suggested that it would require more funding to accomplish what was necessary. He asked if there were controls in the proposed bill to ensure that the funds were spent on digital learning.

MR. ROSE expressed agreement that definitions for accountability should be included.

[9:02:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if the Alaska apps were free to the school districts.

MR. WHICKER replied that all the content at iTunes U was free, and that CDL was continually working with partners to "help to fill that repository." He noted that other groups were also working to collect and distribute information, and he stated, "That's a good thing in that this is too big of an issue for any one entity to take on by themselves."

[9:03:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON referenced a report from a school district that district purchases of iPod Touch were double that of iPads. He reflected that the iPod Touch offered the same applications, was smaller, and was less expensive. He asked if iPads were more effective for increasing education.

MR. WHICKER replied that the proposed bill allowed each individual school district to select its device. He agreed that, although there was a lot of current excitement about the iPad, many devices were available and that proposed HB 242 allowed funding for a variety of devices to meet the differing needs. He stated that there was no explicit advantage to any of the devices, but rather it was "a decision of form factor."

[9:07:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked to clarify that the consortium would offer a comparison of each technology, instead of focusing on a single piece, to ensure the best results for each user group.

[9:08:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT asked what controls would be implemented to allow that individual users would not be distracted by other uses.

MR. WHICKER, in response to Representative Pruitt, explained that each school loaded different apps on the iPads, based on its instructional strategy, and that the distractions were a result of work online. He shared that schools had installed filters to support established policies and were offering professional development for teachers to learn how to teach with this technology. He suggested that kids would often use the tools for their own learning enhancement.

[9:13:26 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK relayed that Dell was developing a system to allow teachers to monitor each student's use of the device.

[9:13:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRUITT asked if there was a way to ensure that teachers were ready to integrate these technologies, even though some teachers were resistant to change.

MR. WHICKER offered his belief that professional development and training for the use of these tools were the most necessary fundamentals, and that funding was usually the key to both of these.

[9:16:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON indicated that the technology had to be synced with the school computers which could erase any unauthorized applications.

MR. WHICKER confirmed this, and he pointed out that future technology allowed for easier management, noting that the iPads had teacher, rather than tech, managed solutions.

[9:18:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON directed attention to page 2 of the fiscal note, and read: "this legislation will need to be updated to include new vocational education factor, or CTE, which passed in the 2011 legislative session and signed by the governor into law." She asked if the committee would like this included.

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE opined that the House Finance Committee would request it.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON, directing attention to page 2, line 8 of the proposed bill, asked if the funding factor of 1.005 eliminated the 1 percent which had been passed during the prior year.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON replied that that the 1 percent had been a one-time distribution.

MR. ROSE offered his belief that this was now 21 percent in the block grant, and he agreed that it was ongoing.

[9:20:15 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK announced that HB 242 would be held over.

**SB 8-STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES AND SURVEYS**

[9:20:36 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK announced that the final order of business would be SENATE BILL NO. 8, "An Act relating to questionnaires and surveys administered in the public schools."

[9:20:45 AM](#)

THOMAS OBERMEYER, Staff, Senator Bettye Davis, Alaska State Legislature, stated that this bill would return the administration of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to passive parental consent from active parental consent. He read a statement from the Department of Health and Social Services website:

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey is part of a national surveillance system developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to assist with

assessing and addressing the health risk of youth. It is conducted in Alaska every other year by the Department of Education and Early Development and the Department of Health and Social Services in cooperation with public schools.

He shared that the survey was given in the spring of 2011 to 1327 students from 40 high schools, scientifically selected to represent all public high schools and public high school students in grades 9 - 12, excluding boarding, alternative, correspondence, correctional, and home study schools in Alaska. In addition, 969 students from 16 alternative high schools in Alaska, defined as serving high risk students, were correspondingly given the same survey, with the results for both surveys posted on the website. He paraphrased from the sponsor statement [original punctuation provided] [Included in members' packets]:

The purpose of SB 8 is to increase participations in the national biennial Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in order to meet the minimum 60% participation level required by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for the results to be validated and published along with other states. There have been years when the state has not met minimum participation levels. Failure to obtain survey information adversely affects the ability of educators, planners, policy makers, and parents to understand and address the important health and social issues that affect students' happiness and success in the future.

To help achieve this objective SB 8 changes the parental consent requirement for the YRBS from active to passive, that is, from written to implied consent if parents are given notice at least two weeks in advance of the survey by U.S. mail, or home delivery; the opportunity to review the entire survey at the school or the district's web site; and a form with return envelope to deny permission in writing.

Parents who do not want their children to participate usually notify the school immediately at registration in the beginning of the school year, or after notice and before the YRBS is given early in the spring semester. It is the attention of the other parents SB 8 is designed to reach. Failure of parents to return written consent forms in the past has been found often

to be the result of lack of attention rather than refusal. Since the biennial survey is only given to a representative number of the 53 Alaska School District and only to a representative sampling of high school classes, many parents and students will never be involved with the survey.

Students are not forced or required to participate. They may independently decline to participate or to answer specific questions in this completely voluntary and anonymous survey. If they do participate, absolute privacy and anonymity are maintained by strict administrative procedures and the return of individual surveys in private and secure sealed envelopes to CDC.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey helps guide and evaluate important health and prevention programs in both the public and private sectors. Local, state, and federal officials, schools, state and federal agencies, public and private grant programs, and nonprofit health organizations rely on these surveys to educate, allocate resources, and compare trends concerning safe behaviors. These include injury prevention, tobacco prevention and control, obesity prevention, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke prevention, safe and drug free schools, substance abuse prevention, violence and suicide prevention, HIV and STD prevention, and connectedness to teachers, parents and other adults.

In short, SB 8 simply makes it easier to obtain information on youth risk behaviors without violating students' or parents' rights to privacy, nor diminishing the ability of parents to supervise their children. At the same time SB 8 increases parental notice with ample opportunity, instructions, and forms to opt out.

He pointed out that SB 137, suicide awareness and prevention training for teachers and other school personnel, had been introduced for attention as a result of the YRBS.

[9:26:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON, directing attention to the sectional summary of the proposed bill from Division of Legal and Research

Services, dated January 27, 2011, [Included in members' packets] read from Section 3, "Adds specific questions and process for a student and parent to refuse to participate in a student survey by submitting a written denial of permission." He pointed out that the proposed bill did not state that a student had to provide a written denial of permission, but that, per Section 3(e) of the proposed bill, a student "may refuse to answer specific questions [on] or participate in a questionnaire." He offered his belief that a parent could provide a written denial, but that the student could, on their own authority at the time of the survey, refuse to answer certain questions or participate in the survey. He asked to clarify that the wording in the proposed bill took precedence over the sectional summary.

MR. OBERMERER confirmed that Section 3 of the proposed bill was correct.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON suggested that the sectional summary be revised to avoid confusion.

[9:29:17 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK asked who designed the questionnaire. He expressed concern that the questions could be changed in the future to appear to endorse certain behaviors, rather than inquire or identify as risky behavior.

MR. OBERMEYER, in response to Chair Dick, stated that the survey was designed by the CDC and the exact same questions had to be on each survey when given nationwide every two years, in order to validate the results. He pointed out that a person or legislature could contact the CDC with concerns for the questions, and that CDC desired that every state be involved in order to obtain knowledge regarding risky behavior nationwide. He shared his observations that participation in the survey did not induce thoughts about or endorse any specific behavior, as students faced these matters daily. He declared the survey to be an identification bank of information from nationwide schools. He directed attention to the 2011 summary, titled "Healthy Alaska," [Included in members' packets] which indicated that smoking, drug use, and suicide were all prevalent, relevant issues.

[9:32:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked to clarify that these surveys were necessary for other organizations, such as the American

Lung Association, to prove that their techniques were effective and to obtain funding.

MR. OBERMEYER replied that the survey materials tracked the increase and decline within each behavior specific area. He noted that a "fairly high rate" for smoking continued, even as the overall rate had decreased.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON, referring to the 2011 summary, declared that smoking had decreased, though not as much in the alternative schools which illustrated that those students were at a greater risk. She pointed out that these surveys offered information and assessments without any cost to the schools.

MR. OBERMEYER confirmed that alternative schools had higher percentages for risky behaviors.

[9:36:17 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK asked how Alaska benefited from these surveys. Offering his belief that many non-profit organizations needed this data in order to obtain funding, he asked which non-profit groups benefited from these surveys.

MR. OBERMEYER offered to provide a list of the non-profits which benefited from this survey. He declared this to be an informational issue for schools, in order to deal with high risk behaviors. He pointed out that there was a zero fiscal note for SB 8, and he acknowledged that private funding was raised to get more participation in the survey. He expressed his belief that the CDC process was not driven by nonprofit organizations looking for increased funding. He declared that the only way to deal with high risk student behaviors was "to know what they're doing and this is probably the very best way that we've been able to come up with."

[9:38:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA observed that proposed SB 8 addressed the issues for comparing Alaska to other states, with a focus on the appropriate spending of public money. She offered her belief that the worldwide philanthropic organizations donated huge amounts of funding to Alaska based on data from surveys such as YRBS.

MR. OBERMEYER pointed out that the survey results provided extensive details, allowing Alaska the opportunity to review the

risk behaviors in other states. He clarified that the handout was merely a thumbnail sketch for Alaska.

[9:40:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON declared that the survey was most helpful to Alaska and the legislature for determining where efforts needed to be concentrated.

[CHAIR DICK opened public testimony.]

[9:42:11 AM](#)

EMILY NENON, Alaska Government Relations Director, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, assured the committee that the American Cancer Society encouraged the efforts of the Division of Public Health in the schools. She explained that the YRBS gathered necessary information in order to "measure the effectiveness of all of the programs that we support," and for recognition of the emerging issues. In the last decade, although youth smoking had decreased by 50 percent, it was still an issue to be addressed. She clarified that proposed SB 8 addressed a problem with logistics, as current law tied the hands of the school districts for implementation of the survey in a manner that worked best for each district. She reported that, pre-1999, there was a vague definition to the means for in-school surveys; whereas, in 1999, the law was more protective for parent and student information. She clarified that these protections and details were maintained and expanded in proposed SB 8, but the logistical hurdle of implementation by school districts was made easier. She declared support for proposed SB 8 in order to protect parental engagement, better serve youth, and monitor the state investments.

[9:45:35 AM](#)

WARD HURLBURT, M.D., Chief Medical Officer/Director, Division of Public Health, Central Office, Department of Health and Social Services, corroborating the testimony of Mr. Obermeyer, declared that the YRBS was important to the schools, school districts, the Department of Health and Social Services, CDC, and the Department of Education and Early Development. He shared that experience indicated that 10 percent of parents would decline, and an additional 20 percent of parents would not return the survey, even after multiple attempts to contact them. He pointed out that the survey required 60 percent participation for statistical significance, and that the governor acknowledged

the importance of the survey. He reported that about 25 of the 106 survey questions were submitted by the state. He clarified that questions could be changed over the years, and that some of the questions were put in the context of presumption that youth engaged in behavior that many other young people did not engage in. He explained that the reason for the context of presumption was to elicit honest response. He stated that the governor was committed to strengthening Alaskan families, did not support passive permission, and did not support SB 8, as he felt active consent was necessary to engage parents with their children.

[9:48:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA reflected that there had not been testimony from the parents, and she opined that parent response was critical to obtain data, as Alaska leads the nation in many aspects of behavioral health risks.

MR. OBERMEYER pointed out that parental consent was requested during student registration, and again prior to the questionnaire.

[9:51:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI asked about the value of the data collected by the survey.

DR. HULBURT, in response to Representative Kawasaki, stated that the data was quite valuable as it addressed many issues of youth behavior that could present risks, and that the governor also agreed with the value of the data.

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI asked how the governor wanted to obtain compliance in order to reach the necessary 60 percent of participation.

DR. HULBURT agreed that the participation rates were greater with passive consent; however, he opined that the governor wanted to strengthen families in the state and preferred the current method.

[9:53:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked to clarify that the data was not scientifically defensible if there was not 60 percent participation. He asked if the Division of Public Health used the data regardless.

DR. HULBURT explained that, in years when they had not achieved 60 percent participation, the data was informative but not conclusive for statistical significance, and "a handicap to us in obtaining grants for some of the important programs that we believe can benefit Alaska's youth." He reported that, in 2011, participation was almost 63 percent.

[9:55:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA offered her belief that it was important to know what was happening with the school districts.

[9:56:22 AM](#)

RYAN KAUFFMAN stated that he was representing himself on his own time, and that he supported youth and the efforts to reduce their risk behaviors and increase their success. He reminded the committee that the survey was completely anonymous and confidential, and that it was an evaluation tool which allowed relevant and consistent services for risk behaviors experienced by Alaskan students. In response to Chair Dick, he pointed out that addressing high risk behaviors at a younger age was a benefit to Alaska as it lowered the risk behaviors in the adult population, thereby reducing fiscal costs and increasing the quality of life for Alaskan residents. He offered his belief that there was a fiscal benefit to passage of proposed SB 8, as the data ensured that the increasing number of prevention programs were effective. He described that his role with the Sitka School District for coordinating the YRBS had required an extraordinary effort to collect the minimum 60 percent by necessitating active parental consent. He declared that it required multiple mailings to parents, sending permission forms home with students, and following up with door to door visits to homes and work places. He pointed out that the current system operated to accommodate the 10 percent of parents who actively opted out of participation. He encouraged support of proposed SB 8.

[10:00:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE expressed his belief that 60 percent participation seemed high for scientific validation, as a typical sample was often for much lower participation. He asked what standard deviation was scientifically valid and what sample size was necessary.

10:01:28 AM

CHAIR DICK said that public testimony would remain open.

[SB 8 was held over.]

10:02:01 AM

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:02 a.m.