

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
March 29, 2012  
2:06 p.m.

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CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Stoltze called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 2:06 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Bill Stoltze, Co-Chair  
Representative Bill Thomas Jr., Co-Chair  
Representative Anna Fairclough, Vice-Chair  
Representative Mia Costello  
Representative Mike Doogan  
Representative Bryce Edgmon  
Representative Les Gara  
Representative David Guttenberg  
Representative Reggie Joule  
Representative Mark Neuman  
Representative Tammie Wilson

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Emily Cotter, Staff, Office of the Mayor, Municipality of Anchorage; Jerry Covey, Managing Partner and Professional Services Provider, JSC Consulting, LLC; Les Morse, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development; Representative Alan Austerman.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Dan Sullivan, Mayor, Municipality of Anchorage.

SUMMARY

EDUCATION SUMMIT OVERVIEW  
Mayor Dan Sullivan, Anchorage

PRESENTATION: SAVING ALASKA'S SMALL OFF-THE-ROAD SYSTEM  
HIGH SCHOOLS

OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION

Department of Education and Early Development:  
Les Morse, Deputy Commissioner, Department of  
Education and Early Development

^EDUCATION SUMMIT OVERVIEW

EMILY COTTER, STAFF, OFFICE OF THE MAYOR, MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE, discussed that a video would be shown related to the recent mayoral education summit.

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DAN SULLIVAN, MAYOR, MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), discussed results from the Mayor's Education Summit that was held in November 2011. He relayed that economic reasons had been the instigator for his involvement in the issue, given that the local school district budget had doubled to over \$800 million (with the same level of enrollment) during his nine years on the Anchorage assembly. The increase had led him to wonder whether tax payers were getting the results they deserved out of the education system. In response, he convened the summit and invited 100 participants including union members, principals, teachers, administrators, school board members, assembly members, business community leaders, university members (University of Alaska Anchorage Chancellor Tom Case and Alaska Pacific University President Don Bantz), private school directors, legislators, homeschoolers, and other.

Mayor Sullivan communicated that seven of the country's top education reform leaders had attended the summit as guest speakers; the guests either had proven records of taking underperforming school districts and improving them dramatically or were experts in education who had studied proven ways to improve school systems. Summit participants had concluded that significant improvements in the Anchorage School District were needed. He stressed his desire for the district to be the best in the nation. His intent was to improve the Anchorage school system. He did not intend to tell statewide education leaders how to deal with education throughout the state; however, he believed

some of the ideas from the summit could be shared by other areas.

Mayor Sullivan observed that Alaska was an international venue that traded with various Asian countries (e.g. Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, and other), but its educational standards and results were not as high as those in the Pacific Rim countries. He stated that he wanted the school district to compete with the countries in the education arena in addition to the economic arena. The summit had produced four primary recommendations that had been taken to the general public during six sessions in February 2012; the original participants of the summit would reconvene in June 2012 in order to develop an action plan with the goal of becoming the best school district in the nation. Recommendations included setting higher academic standards and getting the finest teachers into classrooms. Another recommendation aimed at offering more choices for parents. He explained that some of the area's highest performing schools such as Chugach Optional and Birchwood ABC had long waiting lists. He opined that the successful environment should be created in more schools to help with demand. The final recommendation was to involve the community at a high level. He stated that making changes in areas like education was difficult and would not be possible without community involvement.

Co-Chair Stoltze made a comment about the education panel.

Mayor Sullivan remarked that Representative Mia Costello, Representative Charisse Millet, and Senator Kevin Meyer had all attended the summit.

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Ms. Cotter started a video titled "Mayor's Education Summit: Anchorage 2011-2012." The video included a panel of various members of the education community who spoke about current challenges facing the education system and ideas for improvement.

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Mayor Sullivan believed that the video did a good job summarizing the summit. He detailed that Kati Haycock, President of The Education Trust, had presented sobering statistics on Alaska's ranking at the state and Anchorage

School District levels. He remarked that the bar had been set low in the district; therefore, low performance resulted. He was pleased that involved participants were looking at establishing higher standards; Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) Commissioner Mike Hanley and Anchorage School District Superintendent Carol Comeau were working to set a higher bar. He furthered that the department was setting its own standards and that the district was implementing Common Core standards that had been adopted by 45 states. He discussed that statistics continually ranked Alaska last in the nation. As education funding was considered by the legislature he did not believe that the goal was to continue to increase spending while remaining last in the nation. He furthered that the relevant question was how to improve the system. He planned to have suggestions at the local district level in June 2012 and believed that the issue should be ranked as one of the top priorities at the state level going forward. He wanted to see Alaska become an example of a successful system that ranked as one of the top one or two performers in the world (along with Finland and other nations).

Mayor Sullivan shared that the U.S. had been number one in the world in education 35 to 40 years earlier; it had subsequently slipped to 23rd in the industrialized world. He found the change unacceptable. He acknowledged that he could not change the nation or the state, but he wanted the Anchorage system to become a successful model. He discussed that approximately 30 years earlier Finland had decided that its population would be the best educated (the country lacked other attributes such as strategic location or mineral and oil resources of neighboring Norway). As a result Finland had decided that all classroom teachers would hold a master in teaching degree. Additionally, the country had eliminated a variety of teaching colleges that did not live up to the country's high standards. He noted that in the U.S. a teaching degree in comparison to other master's degrees could be relatively easy to attain.

Mayor Sullivan pointed to lessons that could be learned from the Finland education system. The country had elevated the teaching profession to a high level on par with doctors, architects, and other; the profession was revered in Finland - teachers were paid well, long waiting lists to enter the profession existed, and schools demanded the best of their teachers in every classroom. He acknowledged that there was a significant challenge ahead of the state and

the Anchorage School District, but he was confident that significant progress could be seen in 10 to 15 years if the community supported some changes that had been successful in other jurisdictions (ensuring that the \$800 million to \$1 billion cost was money well spent).

Co-Chair Thomas supposed that Mayor Sullivan had been included on the "bad boy" list with the governor and himself because they had lumped the education system into one group and had not recognized any of the successful schools in the state. He furthered that reports provided did not distinguish stellar schools from those with low performance; he believed there were 12 high performance school districts in the state. He remarked that "we're only as good as the information that we're given."

Mayor Sullivan responded that there were "pockets" of excellence throughout the Anchorage and state systems; consistent excellence was lacking and the goal was to make every school a high performing school. The head of the Pacific Northern Academy had asked why there were not more schools like Chugach Optional if it was performing so well. He pointed to Birchwood ABC as another high performing school and agreed that similar schools should be made available.

Co-Chair Thomas communicated that the committee had requested copies of the video that had been shown.

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Representative Gara agreed that master's level teachers were more effective. He wondered whether the city could require its teachers to hold master's degrees (rather than waiting for the state to change the law). Mayor Sullivan replied that the community was not waiting on the state.

Representative Gara asked whether the school district would require a master's level teacher in every classroom. Mayor Sullivan answered that he did not run the school district. He explained that his job was to provide information to ensure that the school board and superintendent had the tools they needed to make choices. He shared that his job was to gather and present the best information and success stories (national and international) in order to help lead the effort with the school administration and school board to affect positive change. He stated that it was not his

role to tell the school board what standards to set. He hoped the school board would work towards the master's requirement and he believed the board members who had participated in the summit felt that they would like to work on the strategy going forward.

Representative Gara relayed that he was an advocate for increased school funding, but he believed that teachers with master's degrees would need to be paid more, which would increase the amount of funds needed.

Mayor Sullivan responded in the affirmative. He believed top professionals needed to be paid accordingly. He opined that it would be worth paying an increased salary to teachers with master's degrees who would help to elevate the school district to a superior status and to produce superior students who were ready for college and the workplace.

Representative Gara agreed. He pointed to statistics that ranked Alaska as 45th in the nation in terms of third grade reading level. He asked whether Mayor Sullivan agreed that the availability of pre-kindergarten classes should be expanded.

Mayor Sullivan replied that he did not know. He communicated that his job was to gather and contribute as much information as possible related to successful examples. He was hesitant to be specific about all details until the summit reconvened to develop its action plan in June.

Co-Chair Thomas referred to the discussion on a master's degree requirement and believed Alaska already had quality teachers who were paid a good salary. He compared the issue to a story about commercial fishing. He shared that in the past fish had been delivered without ice. At some point ice had been made mandatory and fishermen wanted to know whether they would be paid more; they had been told no because they were already marketing to provide a quality, number one fish.

Vice-chair Fairclough wondered how individuals on the wait list in Finland were prioritized in the teacher selection process. She asked if a copy of the criteria was accessible. Mayor Sullivan responded in the affirmative. He planned to travel to Finland in the current year to obtain

more detail on how the best teachers were selected and which qualities were looked for. He furthered that once a master's teacher was hired there was a structured mentorship program that required senior teachers to work with new teachers to enable them to develop top teaching skills. He understood that Finland and the U.S. were different culturally, but he believed Finland had found and hit the right targets related to teaching.

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Vice-chair Fairclough asked whether the report from the summit had been released. Mayor Sullivan replied that the summary of the initial summit was available and had been presented to the community dialogue. The final report would be available after the summit reconvened in June 2012.

Vice-chair Fairclough had talked with multiple school districts about excellence that districts were striving for and the idea of developing a pilot program. She discussed that it would be difficult for the entire state to move to a system requiring a teacher with a master's degree in every classroom. She urged the consideration of a pilot program when options were discussed and presented to Anchorage and the state.

Representative Guttenberg referred to Mayor Sullivan's testimony on providing superior programs and bringing in teachers with more excellence. He asked what factors, in addition to quality teachers, contributed to excellence. Mayor Sullivan referred to the four recommendations that had been offered by the summit. One of the recommendations had been to set a higher academic standard for students on a level of top countries; a high bar would not be exceeded without being set high. Another recommendation included strong principal leadership; one guest presenter had shared that great teachers did not want to teach in schools lacking a great leader. Additionally, school program choice needed to be offered; more successful programs should be offered if there was a demand.

Representative Guttenberg pointed to successful programs that had been mentioned and asked what Chugach Optional had that other schools did not. Mayor Sullivan could not answer for an individual school. He discussed that optional schools had parent involvement with a more informal methodology compared to other more traditional successful

schools such as Northern Lights or Birchwood ABC (the schools were more similar to elementary schools from the 1950s and 1960s in their structure and discipline); the schools had long waiting lists. He stated that successful programs should be emulated and unsuccessful programs should be eliminated.

Representative Wilson asked whether the Anchorage School District had done a white paper on why the mentioned examples were successful and what it would take to replicate the programs in other Anchorage schools. Mayor Sullivan did not know.

Representative Wilson pointed out the distinction between a master's in teaching degree and a master's degree in another field. Mayor Sullivan agreed.

Representative Wilson discussed that many teachers pursued a master's in teaching when completing courses to achieve advancement in the "columns" section of a salary scale. She believed support for teachers to continue a classroom education was lacking. She supported the mayor's ideas and thought it would be helpful to have information on what was working in the more successful schools that other districts could potentially apply. She did not believe it was necessary to "reinvent the wheel" and felt that there were great models to refer to.

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Co-Chair Thomas asked about teacher salaries in the successful school examples compared to teacher salaries in public schools. Mayor Sullivan replied that the elementary schools mentioned (Birchwood ABC, Northern Lights, and Chugach Optional) were all under the same pay scale. Salaries increased depending on the length of time a teacher had taught at the school, the pay scale step, and if an advanced degree had been obtained.

Co-Chair Thomas believed it was not necessary to have a master's degree be a quality teacher. Mayor Sullivan agreed. He noted that it was not necessary to have a master's degree to be a master teacher. He added that a master's degree in teaching was the minimum requirement to become a teacher in Finland.

Representative Gara discussed that he and the mayor had been present when Chugach Optional had been recognized for receiving a presidential award for excellent schools in the current year. He shared that the school had one of the highest rates of parent involvement in Anchorage with a significant number of college educated parents. He observed that better schools attracted better teachers who wanted to teach high performing students. He stated that it was difficult to determine what to do about schools where parent involvement was lower and students did not perform as well.

Mayor Sullivan responded that demographics should not be an obstacle; Katy Haycock had made the point at the summit. He shared that there were many examples of high performing schools at lower socio-economic levels. He elaborated that Dr. Ben Chavis had visited recently; he had been the head of the American Indian School in Oakland, CA. He explained that the school had been the worst performing in the California system and it had been turned into the highest performing district despite the low socio-economic status and lack of parent involvement. He urged the committee to look at Dr. Chavis's website and resources. He expounded that the presentation had been impressive and had showed that it was possible to achieve excellence in low income neighborhoods facing challenges that other districts did not have.

Representative Costello thanked the mayor for the opportunity to participate in the summit. She provided additional detail about the summit. She believed that the one thing people could agree on in education was that it really matters; it was the one thing that could change a person's future. She discussed that her generation was the first to attend college in her family. She opined that bad news could motivate people, which had happened in Finland. Finland used to have one of the worst education systems in the world, but it was now the best. She stated that it was through honest conversation that progress could be made. She shared that one of her children had recently been accepted at a lottery school and emphasized that choices parents have really make a difference.

Representative Costello discussed things she had learned at the summit. She stated that high expectations should not be feared; school districts that had high expectations got results. She had learned that demographic should not be an

excuse for poor performance; teachers mattered. She referred to Polaris High School (grades 1 through 12) that focused on the relationship between students and teachers. She shared that materials provided by the summit were all online and noted that students were not sitting in any of the photos showing schools in Finland; the model showed students outside or doing hands-on real-world activities. She did not believe all schools had to be like schools in Finland, but she acknowledged that if she could go back to high school she would attend King Career Center because of its hands-on approach. She observed that kids graduating from the Finland school would have marketable skills for a future job. She queried where people could go to learn more about the summit and to get involved.

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Mayor Sullivan directed the committee to [www.muni.org/educationsummit](http://www.muni.org/educationsummit) [[www.muni.org/Departments/Mayor/Pages/Mayor'sEducationSummit.aspx](http://www.muni.org/Departments/Mayor/Pages/Mayor'sEducationSummit.aspx)]. He elaborated once the action plan had been developed it would take great community involvement; part of the plan would include methods to engage the community at all levels.

Representative Doogan referred to the mayor's discussion about the change in the quality or the outcomes of education in Anchorage over the years. He believed that the system had produced a higher number of educated and involved people in years past. He asked the mayor to share his own experience and anything he may have learned that could be helpful for committee members.

Mayor Sullivan responded that he had gone to a parochial school during his first two years of school in Fairbanks and nuns had ruled the classroom with an "iron hand"; students had learned because they feared the consequences. He had moved to the Anchorage public school system in third grade and had been about one grade level ahead. He shared that he had eight brothers and sisters and recalled that the homework his younger siblings had turned in did not meet the level of quality that students had turned in during his time in early school years. He had seen the standards slipping first hand, but did not know what had caused it.

Representative Neuman asked what type of discussion had been held related to the impacts of vocational education

and learning. He referred to statistics from DEED showing that 7 percent to 8 percent of students completed a four-year college program. He expounded that there were great life opportunities for plumbers, mechanics, refrigeration and heating workers, woodworkers, etc. He discussed that a difficult subject like math was easier to learn through hands on experience. There were applied sciences where the importance of math and reading was learned.

Mayor Sullivan responded that there had been significant discussion about vocational education at the summit. Many of the world's superior education systems had vocational education well defined. For example, after 8th grade in Germany a student could take a test to move to an academic high school or to trade school in various areas (he noted that German trade schools were some of the best in the world and produced incredible mechanics and carpenters); the country recognized that not all students were interested in an academic path. Trade schools taught students skills in math, reading, and other that were specific to the trade and resulted in highly skilled and paid tradespeople. He shared that if a person in Germany decided they were interested in the academic path they could take 8th grade and the test over again; Germany also had a night school system that allowed students in trade school to earn degrees. He recalled a conversation he had had with a superintendent in years past that Anchorage needed several more King Career Centers because he had felt that the system was forcing students through high school who did not want to be there, but wanted to learn skills to be successful.

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Representative Neuman asked for additional detail related to the concept that Dr. Ben Chavis had presented on.

Mayor Sullivan responded that Dr. Chavis used very traditional methodology in his schools; calculators and computers were not used. He had suggested laptop computers to Dr. Chavis who had replied that in Oakland a laptop could be stolen from a car, but that books would not be taken. He believed Dr. Chavis provided proof that any demographic or neighborhood with the right system could provide a good education.

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Co-Chair Stoltze asked about the cost of the budgets for the Municipality of Anchorage and the Anchorage School District. Mayor Sullivan replied that the city budget was approximately \$430 million and the school district budget was approximately \$830 million.

Co-Chair Stoltze shared personal feelings about local government and IRS taxes.

Mayor Sullivan clarified that the school district had adjusted their budget for the current year; grant funding had been removed from the budget. Subsequently, the current budget was approximately \$700 million or more compared to the prior year's budget of \$830 million.

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RECONVENED

^PRESENTATION: SAVING ALASKA'S SMALL OFF-THE-ROAD SYSTEM HIGH SCHOOLS

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JERRY COVEY, MANAGING PARTNER AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES PROVIDER, JSC CONSULTING, LLC, discussed that his background was in small, rural, off-the-road high schools; he had started his career in education in Alaska in 1976 at the creation of REAA [Regional Educational Attendance Areas] school districts. He had begun as a principal and recalled that the state had been fully committed to building high schools and delivering quality education to Alaska Native students in rural areas. He had worked in one school district for 15 years and had been a principal, teacher, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. He had worked as a consultant for the past 12 years; most of his clients were rural school districts.

Mr. Covey discussed that the off-the-road high school system had been in place for 36 years and that there was a significant amount of evidence regarding the success of the schools. Evidence showed that the schools were not as successful as was hoped or envisioned. He observed that it was not possible to predict the future related to state

policy changes, demographics, costs, economic factors, and other; all of the items had impacted education in a significant way. He did not believe that it had been intentional for policy changes to disable or substantially impact the opportunity the rural schools had; however, it had happened.

Mr. Covey communicated that he had taken a sampling of 131 high schools that varied from below ten students to up to 60 students. It was difficult to gather academic achievement data from very small schools because students would be identified; therefore, it was necessary to look at Standards Based Assessment performance for schools or districts as a whole. The data showed that with very few exceptions, most of the schools were underperforming schools on the road system in both graduation rates and achievement levels. He pointed to examples of ways to address the issue and provide additional opportunities for students in the small schools in his report titled "Saving Alaska's Small Off-the-Road System High Schools."

Mr. Covey cited four programs in his report. The first was a program operated by Chugach School District called Voyage to Excellence. The program had been running for 15 years and had served over 1,700 students. Eight years back the school had begun tracking the success rate of the students attending the program; 97 percent to 98 percent of the students graduated from high school. He detailed that the program served students from six rural school districts (many of the schools were off-the-road). He furthered that 92 percent of the students went to work, joined the military, or went to college directly after graduation. The program had a large number of business partners from the private and public sector. He detailed that the program operated entirely outside of the public education system.

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Mr. Covey continued to discuss the Voyage to Excellence program that was funded by grants and private sector support. The program had grown and found ways to serve other students. He expounded that the program brought students in for two or three week sessions during the winter and operated a summer program in conjunction with the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) and Alaska Pacific University (APU) for a longer three to four week period. Students were exposed to academic rigor and many skills

(e.g. vocational, career and technical education) that resulted in student success.

Mr. Covey discussed a second program that was smaller and much newer operating in the Lower Kuskokwim School District called RANSEP [Rural Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program]. The program was operated outside of the public education system and was funded by a grant from the Rasmuson Foundation to the school district; the program also worked in a partnership with ANSEP [Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program] at UAA. The program reached out to small schools via distance delivery in the Lower Kuskokwim district and delivered advanced courses to junior high and high school students. During students' junior and senior years they went to a residential boarding home in Bethel for a semester each year. Students attended the ANSEP program during the summer between their junior and senior year and upon graduation from high school they were prepared to attend the ANSEP program.

Mr. Covey highlighted a third program called the Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center (NACTEC) in Nome. The center had operated for years and ran short-term programs for students from Nome and Bering Strait School District. The center was a partnership program that operated on private and grant funding outside of the public education system.

Mr. Covey touched on a fourth program in development at the Northwest Arctic Borough School District called Star of the Northwest. The program was a magnet school for grades 11 through 14 and was operated by a federal grant. The program would target three different rural career areas including education, health care, and process technology of resource development. He emphasized that all four of the programs provided outstanding opportunities for rural schools and had all been developed outside of the public education system. He noted that in other parts of the state the same types of opportunities for students were publicly supported as part of the education system.

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Mr. Covey discussed a television advertisement related to a bond issue in Anchorage pointing out that 14,000 students in Anchorage were engaged in career and technical education programs. He furthered that most of Alaska's students would

end up in careers that did not require a college education. He expounded that due to the small size of the rural schools, their remoteness, and diseconomies of scale the districts were unable to deliver career and technical education programs. He relayed that the program examples he had provided could be replicated throughout the state at a very low cost by establishing residential facilities in hub communities that already had infrastructure including large high schools, college campuses, adult vocational and technical centers, apprenticeship opportunities, and major employers. He continued that the residential facility Bethel was looking at was approximately \$5 million; the facility that Kotzebue was looking at would serve 100 students and would probably cost around \$15 million to \$20 million to build. For comparative purposes he noted that remodeling a small school cost \$15 million and a large rural high school would cost \$70 million or more.

Mr. Covey believed that economically it was far more practical build additional residential facilities, to utilize existing infrastructure, and to work closely with people at the local level to help design programs that would serve students' needs. He stressed that thousands and thousands of students were being short-changed; the same students who were needed in the future workforce to contribute to the state's success.

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Representative Neuman referred to regional learning centers and asked whether Mr. Covey had looked at the Galena program and what he thought about it. Mr. Covey responded in the affirmative. He had visited all of the residential high schools in the state including Galena, Nenana, Mt. Edgecumbe, and Bethel. He noted that the programs were all highly successful. He referenced his report and communicated that the residential programs all had a much higher performance levels than those seen in small high schools. He advised the committee to keep in mind that the students in the residential programs were coming out of the same small high schools. Residential programs provided an environment of high support and high expectation that enabled students to blossom. He furthered that student achievement and career and technical education opportunities could be positively impacted simultaneously.

Representative Neuman discussed that teacher retention was difficult in small schools. He wondered whether Mr. Covey's data agreed with comments by principals of regional learning centers that the centers had high teacher retention. Mr. Covey responded in the affirmative. He added that teachers were also more highly qualified in the regional learning centers.

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Representative Wilson asked which program allowed students to spend part of their time in their local high school and part of their time in another location. Mr. Covey responded that the program was the Voyage to Excellence.

Representative Wilson asked how the level of coursework was monitored at the different locations. She liked the idea of keeping students engaged in their home towns.

Mr. Covey replied that the Voyage to Excellence program brought students in for periods of two to three weeks at a time. Students were prepared through course work prior to their arrival at the program that allowed them to job shadow and to engage in specific activities; the program was very deliberate. Students returned to their schools, took more coursework to learn more, and had an opportunity to return to the program at a later time to gain more experience. Summer programs provided academics, career and technical education, and provided activities such as camping and climbing. He relayed that the RANSEP program was operated by and available to one school district. The instructional program was choreographed to be in sync and provide students with opportunities.

Representative Gara was intrigued by the idea of residential dorm space. He asked for verification that it worked well for students to leave home for a few weeks at a time as opposed to for an entire year. Mr. Covey replied in the affirmative and noted that the scenario was preferred in many parts of the state. The issue was one of the foremost concerns in the Lower Kuskokwim School District where communities did not want their kids away for long periods of time; therefore, the program had been built with the issue in mind. With the combination of semester residencies and distance delivery to small sites the program was very successful.

Representative Gara supported the idea. He discussed the small village of Igiugig near Lake Iliamna that had a school with approximately 14 students. He observed that people seemed very well educated in the area. He asked whether there were examples of successful small schools and if there was insight into what made them succeed. Mr. Covey replied in the affirmative; there were successful schools spread throughout rural Alaska. He expounded that the schools lacked infrastructure, but two to four great teachers in a village would provide 20 years of great education. Hopefully when those teachers moved away other great teachers would take their place, but that was not always the case. Community expectation and demand in urban areas was more consistent related to educational quality and outcomes. He stressed that strong families and strong communities had strong schools. He believed it was unlikely that the quality of education would decrease in a place like Igiugig because the community would not put up with it.

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Representative Joule relayed that Mr. Covey had been the Commissioner of Department of Education and Early Development under former Governor Walter Hickel. He referred to the concept of regional boarding schools and noted that the discussion had not been easy because it changed the current structure with children living at home with their families. He noted that family was very important; however, people valued quality education and were sending their children to places like Nenana, Galena, and Mt. Edgecumbe. He believed if the option was available closer to home that it would be the first choice. He stressed that ultimately school populations needed to be high enough to obtain the necessary teachers who could provide depth and quality instruction and could use digital learning technology. He believed that the issue was about a quality of life.

Representative Joule pointed to Mr. Covey's testimony that the magnet school in Kotzebue focused on career areas including health, education, and resource development. He relayed that Maniilaq Association ran the community's health and social services and provided 500 jobs; the Northwest Arctic Borough School District provided approximately 350 to 400 jobs; and Red Dog Mine provided 500 jobs. He emphasized that the area was importing more

workers than it was producing. He stressed that the economies existed and that qualified people were needed to take the jobs in the regional centers. He addressed the issue of homesickness and shared that four of his children had gone to regional boarding school. He remembered that his children's experience had been hard at first, but they had ultimately loved their education and experience at the schools. He continued that his daughters had made lifelong friends and had developed high self-expectations. He understood that change was difficult, but if the state's natural resources declined as predicted, the state may not be able to continue to pay more for the current system. He stressed that there was currently an opportunity to consider how to consider the kinds of changes that the state may be faced with in the near-term.

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Co-Chair Thomas pointed to SB 36 that had been heard in 1998. He recalled that residents of the North Slope Borough had been very upset because the inequities of the foundation formula forced them to send their children to regional schools; around 100 students had gone to Mt. Edgecumbe. He pointed out that the issue needed to be addressed to ensure that the state (rather than communities) was paying for education.

Representative Neuman had sent his son to the IDEA [Interior Distance Education of Alaska] correspondence program. He relayed that with an enrollment of 3,300 students the school was the largest in the state; it delivered education at 80 percent of the base. He relayed that the school had cost approximately \$4,600 per year for his children. He shared that his son had attended and loved the regional boarding school in Galena. He had lived at the school with the kids for several days and the students had all told him that they wanted to learn and to improve their lives; there was a waiting list because students wanted to be there to learn. He stressed that the graduation rate was 100 percent. He emphasized that there were ways to make the education system successful. He furthered that the boarding school helped prepare kids for the military and college because they learned that they were able to be independent. He discussed the idea of removing the stigma associated with the term "boarding school" by referring to the schools as "regional learning schools"; the stigma existed because

in the past the government had forced children to attend boarding schools.

Co-Chair Thomas thanked Mr. Covey for his time and presentation.

^OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION

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LES MORSE, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT, thanked the committee for spending a week on education issues. He shared that the commissioner was currently in Sitka and would be visiting Mt. Edgecumbe High School. He acknowledged Esther Cox, Chair of the State Board of Education for the direction she provides to the department, school districts, and board members. He highlighted multiple takeaways from the week beginning with the need for higher expectations in schools. He communicated that the department currently had standards out for public comment that would set a higher bar. The department was taking public comment very seriously and would be meeting with industry across the state over the upcoming weeks to obtain more specific feedback related to the standards. Other important issues involved instruction and measuring performance; higher standards would not be effective if the bar continued to be set low with the current exam. He stressed the importance of high quality educators in every classroom. He believed mentorship should be offered for the first two years and principal coaches were needed to support strong leadership in all schools.

Mr. Morse continued to address key elements related to improving education including high quality intensity of high school courses; increased quality would support the Alaska Performance Scholarship. Additionally, increased quality meant that approaches needed to change and that schools may not look the same in the future; alternative approaches may be used including correspondence schools, boarding programs, broadband internet. The conversation that needed to occur was substantial and would take place over time. The department was available for questions and had provided a memo to the committee in response to earlier questions.

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Representative Neuman referred to a prior conversation related to accounting for GEDs in graduation rates. He was working with the department to make sure the students did not fall through the cracks. He noted that statutorily it would be difficult to move the adult education program from Department of Labor and Workforce Development to DEED, but work was underway to determine the numbers of students obtaining GEDs who then went back to high school to get their diploma. The detail would be provided to the committee when it was available.

Co-Chair Thomas referred to the foundation formula and believed it was time to put people back in parity. He believed education funding was the responsibility of the state and should not fall on communities.

Representative Joule appreciated the time spent on education throughout the week. He noted that frequently the legislature got stumped on the funding levels. He referred to teacher salaries ranging from \$59,000 to \$72,000 and observed that the issue was not so much about what teachers were getting paid but about expectations, how much those expectations were valued, and how much they were worth. He thought it was important to determine what the right questions were. He provided a seatbelt analogy; he told passengers in his car that they may not like it, but he cared enough about them to make them wear their seatbelt. He believed the same was true for education.

Representative Edgmon pointed to discussions related to the university. He referenced statistics that 40 percent of incoming freshman were engaged in distance delivery. He observed that institutional change related to education had existed in the past but needed to be greater due to an increasing cost curve, new technology, and the state's declining performance. He pointed to the education model in rural Alaska that needed to be changed significantly.

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Representative Doogan had been baffled by the subject for years because a lot of people had varying views on solutions that were needed; many of the solutions were expensive and had uncertain results. He stated that it was difficult to match funding with the results to get a coherent picture of how things were working and changes that needed to be made. He told a personal story related to

two of his aunts who had been nuns who taught in rural Alaska for their entire careers. He shared that standards had been made up on the spot and most of the support had come from the Catholic Church; the state had not been very involved. The people that had been produced from the system had for the most part been better educated, but it had not cost a significant amount of money. He believed it was a problem that everyone had great ideas about what to do, but that they all cost a significant amount. He stressed that it was not always a matter of financing; other elements included the dedication of parents to send their kids away to school, the dedication of the teachers, and other. He continued to be stumped by the issue and did not know how to incorporate all of the factors: which were the right ones, what kind of costs should be paid, and how to match the cost to the result. He appreciated the time spent on the issue, but expressed that he was still as baffled as he was previously.

Representative Gara asked Mr. Morse to get back to the committee on Mr. Covey's idea related to regional dorm space. He pointed to a notion that would save money. He began by explaining that the children of uninvolved parents cost the school system a disproportionate amount of the schools' money. He noted that it would be great if the department had ideas to increase parent involvement. He relayed that some schools had outreach staff who contacted parents when kids appeared to be in trouble and parents did not seem to be involved. He surmised that money could be saved on teachers and remedial coursework with outreach to parents. He added that some parents were not possible to reach, but others were. He asked the department to think about the issue.

Representative Wilson asked for verification that Mt. Edgecumbe High School admitted students through an application process. Mr. Morse replied in the affirmative. He elaborated that there were requirements to meet and an application deadline.

Representative Wilson asked for clarification on what the requirements included. Mr. Morse answered that applications were ranked in order to determine which 100 students to admit. Qualifications included completion of the application (teacher reference letter, scores submitted by the student's school, and other); subsequently areas were ranked and students were accepted. Students were also

accepted in the middle of the year to fill any vacant spots.

Representative Wilson observed that most public schools admitted any student. She pointed out that when comparing public schools to boarding schools it was important to remember that the student population was not always the same, given that some boarding schools had an application process. She moved on to discuss teacher mentoring. She referred to a clinic in Unalaska where doctors only stayed around a couple of years; therefore, the system had been constructed keeping turnover in mind. Due to the cost of living in rural areas she wondered whether the department had ever considered a pilot program related to curriculum. She provided an example related to iPads and teacher mentoring. She discussed that some school districts may have more success controlling set curriculum than on efforts towards teacher retention. She noted that there were some amazing programs in existence that involved taking control over things that could be controlled.

[4:00:17 PM](#)

Co-Chair Thomas remembered school discipline and told a personal story related to his uncle.

Representative Wilson observed that when teachers changed the curriculum may change as well; students may not have consistency related to curriculum. She was curious to know whether something could be done to address the issue.

Representative Guttenberg discussed that his experience in school had been very different than others in the building, but in some ways it had been similar. There had been 5,000 students in his high school; the school had a triple shift and he attended class from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. He remembered teachers who had been influential in his learning. He believed that one of the most important things was providing empowerment to teachers, which was not always financially or program related. He referred to Mr. Covey's testimony about successful teachers impacting schools. He believed that the empowerment of parents was also a critical component. He discussed the importance communicating to teachers and administrators the value and honorability of the profession; the acknowledgment of value would transfer to students and the system as a whole. He referred to an adage - only 15 percent of the population is

in school, but 100 percent of those kids are our future. He observed that the questions and answers related to education did not get simpler but became more difficult as more was known. He believed a better understanding of the issues was important and he appreciated the participation of the teachers who had testified in front of the committee during the week.

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Vice-chair Fairclough recalled her educational experience. She pointed to Unalaska that was scoring high in math and language arts. She had attended school in Unalaska in 1975 and had taken a boat back and forth to school. She had been in a graduating class of 6 and she had lifelong memories and friends as a result. She had also had some great educators (and some who were not so great) in Anchorage. She believed Alaska was a great state with many different ways to deliver education. She opined that improvements could be made to the system. She concurred with remarks by others that some of the homework her children had turned in would not have been a passing grade when she went to school. She noted that grammar was changing for children at a social level, which presented a challenge for teachers as well as elected officials related to impacts on career futures. She was up for the challenge and stated that she and all of her legislative colleagues wanted student success and appreciated work by teachers and administrators to work on the problems.

Co-Chair Thomas noted that the military youth academy had not been discussed. He had seen stellar examples of troubled youths who were working successfully following the completion of the academy. He discussed the schedule for the following day.

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ADJOURNMENT

[4:09:53 PM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 4:09 PM.