

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 28, 2011

8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Kevin Meyer, Co-Chair
Senator Joe Thomas, Co-Chair
Senator Hollis French
Senator Gary Stevens

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bettye Davis, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 3

"An Act providing for funding for school lunch and breakfast."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 3

SHORT TITLE: FUNDING FOR SCHOOL MEALS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) WIELECHOWSKI, ELLIS, DAVIS, EGAN, FRENCH,
KOOKESH, MCGUIRE, MENARD, PASKVAN, THOMAS

01/19/11	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/7/11
01/19/11	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/19/11	(S)	EDC, FIN
01/28/11	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 3.

CHRISTY HARVEY, Staff
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions related to SB 3 on behalf of the sponsor.

CARL ROSE, Lobbyist
Association of Alaska School Boards
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 3.

BRENT ROCK, Doctor and
Director
Student Nutrition Department
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 3.

DAVE JONES, Assistant Superintendent
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 3.

JORDIS CLARK, School Nurse
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 3.

CAROL COMEAU, Superintendent
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 3.

ELIZABETH NUDELMAN, Director
Division of School Finance
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the fiscal note for SB 3.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:22 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOE THOMAS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators French, Stevens, Co-Chair Meyer, and Co-Chair Thomas.

SB 3-FUNDING FOR SCHOOL MEALS

[8:02:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS announced the consideration of SB 3. He informed the committee that the original bill had a typographical error.

8:03:25 AM

CO-CHAIR MEYER moved to adopt [the committee substitute (CS) for SB 3] labeled 27-LS0020\B, as the working document. There being no objection, version B was before the committee.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS explained that there was a one word change on the first page, replacing "or" to "and".

8:04:21 AM

SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI, sponsor of SB 3, said that this bill passed the Senate Education Standing Committee last year, but was hung up in the House Finance Committee.

He said that numerous studies have documented that eliminating hunger in children increases school attendance and performance and decreases school violence and obesity. Alaska is one of twelve states that does not provide a state match to the federal free and reduced price school lunch and breakfast program. SB 3 would provide a state match for schools participating in this program and encourage more schools to provide nutritious meals for underprivileged children.

He explained that for every free and reduced priced breakfast or lunch the federal program funds, the state will provide a match under this bill of 35 cents per breakfast and 15 cents per lunch. Most school districts will receive some additional assistance through a funding formula based on the applicable School District Cost Factor for each district. He said that he believes that while SB 3 will cost the state in the short term, Alaska will be better off for making this investment in the short and long term. Dealing with these problems now will prevent problems that will be much more costly to society in the future, he added.

He continued that this bill has support from numerous school districts and hunger groups, which include: the Anchorage School Board, the Fairbanks School Board and Association of Alaska School Boards, the Cordova School District, the Kenai Peninsula School District, the Chugach School District, the Alaska Food Coalition, the Food Bank of Alaska, and the Alaska School Nutrition Association.

8:07:00 AM

CHRISTY HARVEY, staff to Senator Wielechowski, sponsor of SB 3, said the purpose of the bill is threefold:

- To try and get the program adopted by more schools.
- To get more children into the program where the program has already been adopted.
- To have more nutritious food available.

She said there is a need for legislation like this in Alaska. The most recent statistics from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) show that during at least one point of the year, one out of eight Alaskan families struggle to put food on the table. The Food Pantries have statistics that show that 4 out of 5 households who rely on food pantries for their food have children under the age of 18.

She said she understands that one of the duties the legislature is tasked with is being good stewards of the state's money. For this reason this bill is twofold. The short term immediate results include better school performance, feeding hungry kids, and maintaining classroom order. The long term results include lower obesity patterns and getting children on the right path to move forward.

She noted that she has a large bibliography that supports research behind this study. The bottom line is when children are hungry they do a little worse in school and when they are fed they do a lot better. She said the research she found most compelling was the affect of school breakfast in improving test scores and achievements. For example, there was a study from the American Journal of Diseases in Children which showed that scores on standardized tests improved significantly when larger percentages of children ate breakfast. Other tests showed improvement in math, language, reading, general attention and memory function. When people are fed they concentrate better. The USDA evaluation of the school breakfast program found that kids that eat in the morning have a decrease in oppositional scores. These are the scores, she explained, that measure whether students are more likely to break rules, oppose authority, or are quicker to anger in comparison to kids in the same age bracket.

[8:10:43 AM](#)

MS. HARVEY said a separate study found higher rates of attendance and lower rates of chronic tardiness. When food is provided in school, more kids are going to show up to partake in those meals and stay for class. Finally, she explained, studies

have found that eating school breakfasts lead to better health and lower obesity rates. This was especially the case in families that do not have enough to eat and where cheap food tends to be higher in fat, sugar, sodium, and chemicals. Recent studies project that if the national weight problem continues as it has been, obesity is projected to cost the United States an estimated \$344 billion in medical related expenses by 2018.

She added that Alaska spends about \$49,000 per year on prisoners who enter the prison system. It has been correlated that individuals who have not graduated from high school are a larger percentage of the prison population. It seems, she said, that there is a causal link in keeping children in school and looking at some of these long term solutions.

She urged the committee to reach out to teachers to get more information.

[8:12:41 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked how many school districts currently do not have a lunch or breakfast program.

MS. HARVEY replied that there are currently six school districts that do not offer either the lunch or breakfast program. Twenty percent of the school districts that participate in the school lunch program do not offer breakfast, which impacts about 22,000 Alaskan children. Of these 22,000 children, 7,000 are from low-income families. Currently, it costs the schools in total \$58 million in outlay for the lunch and breakfast program, of which \$32 million is reimbursed by the federal government. Most of the rest of the cost is made up by students who pay either full or reduced price; however, there is still a gap of over \$2 million. The schools then have to bring in money from other programs in order to fill this gap. She added that the additional outlay for many small or rural schools is a struggle.

[8:14:55 AM](#)

CARL ROSE, Lobbyist, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), testified in support of SB 3. He said that recently the Chicago Public Schools passed a breakfast program for all students. The anticipation of children being able to go to school and get food is being received well in Chicago. There were 1,100 people who signed a petition in opposition to this effort. By chance, those who signed the petition came from schools where less than 20 percent of the children qualified for free or reduced lunches. He explained that these individuals' concern was that it would take out of instructional time. He said that 80 percent of

Chicago Public School students qualify for free and reduced lunches and those that oppose a program like this come from affluent districts.

He said that students' abilities in the classroom are enhanced greatly, especially in young students, by spending more time in school even if it is for meals. He continued that, in general, all indicators point to the importance of focusing on early childhood and elementary age students because the benefits will follow children throughout the system.

8:19:19 AM

BRENT ROCK, Doctor and Director, Student Nutrition Department, Anchorage School District (ASD), testified in support of SB 3. He noted that much of his testimony is in a letter which he and Superintendent Carol Comeau drafted and sent to President Stevens. He explained that even with Alaska's wealth and opportunity some families still struggle. Often it is the children that struggle the most and the meals that are offered at their schools are the only meals they receive for the day. The funds included in this bill will make it possible for schools to enhance or add to an existing program or start a new one. He said that ASD pledges to use all funds offered through this legislation to enhance the food purchased for student meals.

8:23:13 AM

SENATOR STEVENS asked how ASD avoids stigmatizing children who receive breakfast and lunch for free, rather than paying for it.

DR. ROCK answered that he believes most districts go about this in a similar manner as ASD. In his school district a student punches in their student number so there is no way to differentiate between a student who pays for a meal and a student who receives a meal for free or at a reduced price. He explained that though some students may tell others kids about receiving meals for free, ASD keeps the information completely confidential.

8:24:39 AM

DAVE JONES, Assistant Superintendent, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, testified in support of SB 3. He said the Kenai Peninsula has over 9,000 students, of which 40 percent are eligible for free or reduced cost meals. Over the last few years, that percentage has been increasing by about 2 percent each year. He said that across the state districts are subsidizing student nutrition services with a transfer from

their general fund. The reason that the Kenai Peninsula School District has historically done this is because it believes there is strong evidence of improved academic performance related to school meals.

He said that with SB 3 the district would receive approximately \$60,000 in breakfast reimbursements and about \$80,000 in lunch reimbursements.

[8:27:26 AM](#)

JORDIS CLARK, School Nurse, Anchorage School District, testified in support of SB 3. She said as a health professional she knows how critical to health and education it is to receive adequate and nutritious food. She explained that from a physiological point of view a brain needs energy to function, which works best on energy from a recently eaten meal. Otherwise, the brain has to rely on stored energy, which takes longer to metabolize and is more readily absorbed by muscle tissue. This means, she explained, that a child that does not eat breakfast is losing the opportunity for an optimally energized brain.

She pointed out that poverty is the leading determinate of both health and educational outcomes. Having a lower educational level and economic level means there is less availability to food. Getting food to children at school is critically important so that they can have the best physiological position to be able to absorb their education. She noted that her school, Sand Lake Elementary, began a breakfast program two weeks ago and they are serving over 100 meals per day. Already the kids in the morning are calmer, more ready to go, and settling down faster. Their educational day is beginning better and the program will be beneficial in the long term.

[8:32:57 AM](#)

CAROL COMEAU, Superintendent, Anchorage School District, testified in support of SB 3. She said that the schools in Anchorage who have the breakfast program really benefit from it. ASD would like to offer this program to more schools but the funding issue has a substantial impact on them.

[8:34:28 AM](#)

ELIZABETH NUDELMAN, Director of School Finance, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), presented the fiscal note for SB 3. She said the fiscal note for the bill includes the dollars calculated for the match for the existing federal meals that are currently being served. It also includes the

dollars for the consumer price index (CPI) as directed in the fiscal note. She said for FY2012 the cost would be \$2,143,000.

8:35:56 AM

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked what the federal contribution is and whether it is a month-to-month match.

MS. NUDELMAN replied that for eligible students the federal program matches the eligible federal meals. She explained that with SB 3 the state would contribute 35 cents for breakfast and 15 cents for lunch where there is an eligible federal meal.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said it would be good to know what the federal funding contribution is. He explained that his concern is if the federal government were to decide to cut back on funding then the state would have to make up for that amount.

SENATOR FRENCH noted that the fact sheet from the bill sponsor states that the federal government is now spending \$32 million dollars on the program in Alaska.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked Ms. Nudelman if she had heard whether there was any jeopardy of losing federal funding.

MS. NUDELMAN answered no.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked if she would be prepared to explain how some of the existing expenses come from the boroughs.

MS. NUDELMAN replied that she could give an overview.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked if she could break down how the money would be used.

MS. NUDELMAN answered that currently the breakfast programs are in a special revenue fund, which are funded by receipts from paid meals and reimbursements from the federal program. School districts also transfer money from their operating fund into the special revenue fund for child nutritional services if there is a need. Statewide, \$9 million is transferred from the operating fund into the child nutritional funds. The spreadsheet for the fiscal note for SB 3 also includes an estimate of the total breakfasts served.

She explained that the breakfast differential adjustment takes the current cost factors that are used in the foundation formula and reduces those by dividing by four. This gives a smaller cost

factor that is unique to each district. The calculation was done based on the number of meals currently being served and applying the cost factor in the bill in order to see what it would cost for the state match.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS said any other information or further examples of how this breaks down would be helpful, especially when it goes to Senate Finance.

[8:41:36 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH asked if the administration has taken a position on the bill.

MS. NUDELMAN answered no.

SENATOR FRENCH asked if the bill is exactly the same as last year's.

MS. HASTY replied that there is one small change. The original bill legally said 35 cents for breakfast or 15 cents for breakfast. This is the legal way of saying that a school would not have to do both. However, there was concern that this could be misconstrued down the line so "or" was replaced with "and".

SENATOR FRENCH asked if this changed the fiscal note.

MS. HASTY replied no.

[8:43:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS closed public testimony and announced he would hold SB 3 in committee.

[8:44:14 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Thomas adjourned the meeting at 8:44 a.m.