

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 23, 2011

8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION (PTA)

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

AL TAMAGNI JR., Vice President
Parent Engagement Program
Alaska Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave an overview of the Alaska PTA's Parent Engagement Program and answered questions of the committee.

PAULA PAWLOWSKI, Director
Parent Engagement Program
Alaska Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave an overview of the Alaska Parent Engagement Program 2009/2010 Annual Report and answered questions of the committee.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:20 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 Davis, French, Co-Chair Meyer and Co-Chair Thomas. Senator Stevens arrived shortly thereafter.

He noted that he would be leaving at 8:30 a.m. due to a Senate Finance Committee meeting and Co-Chair Meyer would take over the meeting at that time.

PRESENTATION: PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION (PTA)

8:03:24 AM

CO-CHAIR THOMAS announced the business before the committee is to hear a presentation on the Alaska PTA, specifically about the Parent Engagement Program.

8:03:43 AM

AL TAMAGNI JR., Vice President, Parent Engagement, Alaska Parent Teacher Association (PTA), gave a history of parent engagement in the state of Alaska. He noted that in 2009 the Alaska PTA received \$238,000 for the Parent Engagement Program from the FIE (Federal Innovation of Education Funds), to be used over a course of three years. He explained that part of the Parent Engagement Program includes an advisory committee which is made up of 14 member leaders who help design and develop the goals for the program.

8:06:17 AM

PAULA PAWLOWSKI, Director, Parent Engagement Program, Alaska Parent Teacher Association (PTA), explained that a core team of experienced individuals, who are past Alaska PTA leaders, put together four goals for the Parent Engagement Program project. The members used Harvard's family research project called, A Logic Model of Setting Goals. The 2009/2010 Annual Report lists what the program accomplished during the first year of funding [report included in document packet]. She noted that the goals were much more difficult to obtain than expected because building the foundation takes so much more time than the work it takes after this is established.

Goal I: Develop a team of parents from each school district in Alaska to provide parent-to-parent training opportunities for Parent Engagement.

She explained that Goal I was the main premise of the program; parent-to-parent discussion is much more powerful than administration-to-parent.

Goal II: Develop and publish parent engagement website.

She noted that this website is designed to reduce the amount of time parents have to spend on the internet. It is divided by age group and also provides information for grandparents and military parents.

[8:10:20 AM](#)

Goal III: Become the recognized organization for parent engagement by developing new partnerships.

MS. PAWLOWSKI said that the program has done well in this area. She explained that it works with the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Best Beginnings, Alaska Parent Information Resource Centers (APIRC), School Boards Association, Higher Education Career Readiness Task Force, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Alaska Business Education Compact, United Way and many more.

She explained that the program's project with RurAL Cap was unusual. The governor's focus on family engagement is recognized by the Alaska PTA. AmeriCorps volunteers within middle schools in both rural and urban areas in Alaska created projects that would help children connect with their school. She said that this has been a great program and there have been some successes. She noted that DEED, APIRC and the PTA have been RurAL Cap's resources.

Goal IV: Develop a parent engagement class for teacher preparation programs.

She said that in teacher preparation programs there are no classes designed to train teachers how to have a parent-teacher conference or reach out and engage parents. The Alaska PTA believes that this kind of class should always be required in teacher preparation; however, only two universities currently offer this course.

She recapped that some of the goals have been successful, while others still need more work. Overall, she said that she believes the program has done good work with the funding that it has received.

[8:15:58 AM](#)

MR. TAMAGNI said that there is educational value to having a PTA in a school, which engages not only parents but students. He noted that one upcoming project that the Alaska PTA has is the Parents as Leaders Project. The program will partner with Bridge Builders to conduct three outreach community cafes in order to listen and gather concerns on the education system from minority groups. Some of the other organizations that they are working with include the Anchorage School District Minority Concern's Committee and the Hispanic Affairs Council of Alaska. He said that the Alaska PTA represents approximately 48 percent of Alaska's students. In 2009, Alaska PTA volunteers volunteered over 143,000 hours in schools or over \$3.5 million of volunteer hours for schools, communities, and schools. There are approximately 9,500 members in the state and 141 active PTA units.

MS. PAWLOWSKI expressed concern for schools that do not have a consistent way for parents to be engaged with their child's education. She stressed that this does not mean parents should go to school solely during school hours, which is not possible for working parents. She turned to the last page of the program's annual report, which includes six different standards that the John Hopkins University, Harvard University, and the State Board of Education have followed. She explained that because the Alaska PTA is connected with the national PTA it now has an assessment guide for these six standards. The more that these standards are engaged the more systemic the practice will be. She stressed that parent engagement in a school should not depend on an individual parent, but rather the school climate and leaders.

She turned to the Family Engagement Action Plan [included in the document packet]. This is a draft report which was just recently endorsed by the State Board of Education. The report is divided into what can be accomplished on a state level and through parent engagement. She noted that the National PTA has created a new partnership with national Head Start and new materials will begin coming forward from this area. She stressed that the biggest forms of community involvement is through legislators, school board members, and on the family level.

She reiterated that the program was not funded with state money and will not seek additional funding; however the research states that family engagement helps with child success. The Alaska PTA should not be responsible for every parent in the state but available to work as a partner with DEED.

8:24:16 AM

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked what the program's annual budget is.

MR. TAMAGNI replied about \$70,000.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS referred to Goal IV of the annual report for Parent Engagement. He asked if the program deals with the University of Alaska (UA) with regard to teacher preparation.

MS. PAWLOWSKI replied that the program has not reached the university level yet. The program was asked, through partnership with NEA [National Education Association], to create this class. She said that she has promised NEA a workshop by the fall in order to make it more systemic for teacher preparation.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS noted that UA has a new president and this may be a good time to approach him about the concept. He asked if the national certification program [through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards] for teachers has elements dealing with this concept.

MS. PAWLOWSKI replied yes. She explained that even individuals who teach teacher preparation programs will say that there is a thread of parent engagement involved in everything that it does. She noted that this aspect is a work in progress and the Alaska PTA would like to see it covered in a more succinct and direct fashion.

SENATOR STEVENS thanked the PTA for its involvement in the Higher Education Career Readiness Task Force. He said when he looks at the school board in Kodiak he does not recall a Pilipino or Asian member involved. However, the recent census for the district shows that 40 percent of the population is Pilipino or Asian. He asked how to cross that cultural divide and get these parents more involved with the PTA.

MS. PAWLOWSKI replied that the Parents as Leaders Conference is attempting to address this issue. She explained that last year the National PTA moved towards this by requiring that all state PTAs need to have a plan of diversity. This means that it is up to the PTA on a state level to train individual PTA units to look at their population and make sure that minority groups are represented. Alaska PTA has worked closely together with Bridge Builders and found that every parent has the same need and want their children to succeed. She noted that next year getting minority group involvement will be part of the program's mission.

[8:30:57 AM](#)

[CO-CHAIR THOMAS turned the gavel over to Co-Chair Meyer at 8:30 a.m.]

SENATOR FRENCH asked what degree of involvement the PTA has with the "parents as teachers" efforts that is being advanced in the House.

MS. PAWLOWSKI replied that the PTA has a legislative platform that deals with different sections in education; early childhood is one of those sections. Parents as Teachers is a way to assess children early-on and begin to involve parents in their child's education right away.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said part of the challenge as parents in today's society is that both parents are often busy and they do not have as much time to be involved in their children's activities. He said within his own district some PTAs have a large crowd, while others have a very small group of members. He asked how the Alaska PTA gets parents involved given the situation in today's society where people are pulled in so many directions.

MR. TAMAGNI replied that this challenge has been seen across Alaska. He explained that the PTA is losing parents because they don't have enough time to attend those meetings. He noted that the Alaska PTA is asking individual PTAs to become "dynamic and diverse" in order to engage parents in their particular communities.

CO-CHAIR MEYER commented that it would be helpful for PTA groups if there was some way to share all of these different ideas. He said that he has noticed that PTAs change meeting times constantly.

MS. PAWLOWSKI noted that it is not just the PTA that is suffering. The rotary clubs and other private clubs are failing in membership as well. She said that Alaska PTA is trying to keep up with modern technology through Facebook, their webpage, SurveyMonkey, and more. She stressed that if PTA groups cannot create activities that don't involve families it will not work.

CO-CHAIR MEYER concurred.

[8:38:17 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked what Bridge Builders is.

MS. PAWLOWSKI replied that Bridge Builders of Anchorage was started by Mayor Rick Mystrom, during a time when the city was experiencing a lot of crime and gang activity. He brought together ministers to discuss these issues and help bring minority groups together. Bridge Builders puts together activities throughout the year that allow minority groups to meet and mingle with each other and their community.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said that some of the PTA meetings that he attends in his district are parent dominated and others are teacher-principal dominated. He asked if it is difficult to find a balance.

MR. TAMAGNI replied that typically teachers are more involved in the PTA and it is important to encourage parent involvement as well.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said that last week the committee took up SB 84, which deals with the base student allocation (BSA) increase, along with a section outside of the BSA which deals with vocational education. He said that the committee has heard from teachers, school administrators, principals, and others. However, he explained that he has not heard from many parents. He asked how to get more parents involved with the legislature.

MS. PAWLOWSKI answered that the timing of the meeting is inconvenient. She noted that a recent online survey of parents through SurveyMonkey show that about 95 percent of parents are supportive of CTE [career and technical education] and the final numbers will be released to the committee as soon as the survey closes. She explained that the concern is that in having CTE funding be a part of the BSA, this money will not necessarily go to CTE.

CO-CHAIR MEYER noted that SB 84 keeps the vocational funding separate from the BSA so that money will definitely go to CTE.

MS. PAWLOWSKI added that the legislative process is difficult for parents. She explained that the Alaska PTA does not recommend that parents support a particular bill by number or title, but rather by the concepts within the bill. She noted that following legislation is a different way to be engaged.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said a quick e-mail would also suffice.

MR. TAMAGNI asked if the committee is still look for feedback on SB 84.

CO-CHAIR MEYER replied yes.

MR. TAMAGNI said that he would make sure an e-mail gets out to the Alaska PTA's members.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said it does make a difference when parents are engaged in their child's school.

8:48:09 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Meyer adjourned the meeting at 8:48 a.m.