

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 1, 2012

8:04 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

SENATE BILL NO. 169

"An Act providing for education funding for distance delivery courses offered by a school district."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 169

SHORT TITLE: FUNDING FOR DISTANCE DELIVERY EDUCATION

SPONSOR(S): EDUCATION

01/20/12	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/20/12	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/01/12	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

MURRAY RICHMOND, staff
Senator Joe Thomas
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented SB 169.

BERNISE JOSEPH, Vice Chancellor
College of Rural and Community Development
University of Alaska-Fairbanks
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supports SB 169.

DANIEL SOLIE, Assistant Professor
College of Rural and Community Development
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supports SB 169.

ELIZABETH NUDELMAN, Director
School Finance
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Neutral on SB 169, responded to questions.

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Neutral on SB 169, responded to questions.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:03 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOE THOMAS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators French, Stevens, Co-Chair Thomas and Co-Chair Meyer.

SB 169-FUNDING FOR DISTANCE DELIVERY EDUCATION

[8:04:39 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS announced the consideration of SB 169.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS, bill sponsor, said SB 169 would provide education funding through distance delivery for students who do not have access to courses needed for the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS).

[8:05:26 AM](#)

MURRAY RICHMOND, staff to Senator Thomas, co-aide to Senate Education Committee, said some high schools are not able to offer courses required for APS qualification. He said the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) and the University of Alaska (UA) have worked on distance delivery programs. He said UA's College of Rural and Community Development (CRCD) offers distance delivery programs for students to take dual-credit classes that count towards high school graduation, APS qualification and college credit. He said

the CRCD currently offers 292 technical preparation and dual-credit high school courses.

[8:07:16 AM](#)

MR. RICHMOND said the bill would be funded from the Base Student Allocation (BSA) used in the formula for state funding of public education. He said the primary reason to tie into the BSA was to maintain perpetual funding for the program.

[8:07:37 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS joined the committee.

[8:07:50 AM](#)

MR. RICHMOND said the bill would change the Average Daily Membership (ADM) used by school districts to determine funding. He said a distance delivery course student would be counted as a student and a half in a district's ADM.

He said high school students currently have to pay for CRCD courses. He said tuition ranges from \$430 for a three credit math course to over \$800 for a six credit science course. He said the bill assures districts and students would not have to pay for the classes.

[8:10:20 AM](#)

MR. RICHMOND said eligibility requires a distance delivery course to be a prerequisite for APS qualification, accessed online and offered via an accredited postsecondary institution within the state.

He said a committee substitute (CS) has been recommended to further refine eligibility, primarily to discourage districts from discontinuing courses. He said a CS would specify that a distance delivery course be allowed if an APS required course was not offered onsite for two or more years.

[8:12:53 AM](#)

He said students would have to take onsite courses that satisfy core curriculum requirements prior to distance delivery course consideration, e.g., a student must take an onsite physics course versus a distance delivery astronomy course.

[8:13:29 AM](#)

MR. RICHMOND said the bill's fiscal note was indeterminate until the number of distance delivery course students was determined. He said the 2010 Governor's Performance Scholarship Report indicated that 80 secondary schools did not offer the full

complement of mathematics and science courses required for APS eligibility.

He said studies have shown that high school graduates who attend college with previous college credits tend to avoid remedial courses and perform at a higher level.

[8:16:24 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS commented that further refinements would be required prior to determining the bill's fiscal note.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked how distance delivery courses related to the department's Advanced Placement (AP) courses and how classes were paid for.

MR. RICHMOND answered that schools offer and pay for AP courses.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if an AP course was an actual class that awarded college credits when students passed.

MR. RICHMOND answered correct.

[8:17:56 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER commented that DEED recommended distance delivery programs for rural areas when the APS was adopted.

SENATOR STEVENS commented that he was in favor of rural schools having distance delivery course access. He noted multiple UA campuses were located throughout the state and asked why students living near a campus would be required to take a distance delivery course.

[8:19:16 AM](#)

MR. RICHMOND answered that the bill was primarily intended for rural students.

SENATOR STEVENS asked if there were non-rural schools that did not offer all of the courses required for APS eligibility.

MR. RICHMOND answered that a student who takes a course at a nearby college would not have their tuition paid for. He said the Senator's reimbursement concern would be addressed to allow students to take a dual-credit course at a nearby campus when applicable.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS said involving nearby campuses made sense under certain circumstances.

8:20:36 AM

SENATOR FRENCH asked to verify that the intent of the bill was to offer courses to students who attended schools that were not offering all of the courses required for APS eligibility.

MR. RICHMOND answered correct.

SENATOR FRENCH asked to verify that school districts would be reimbursed an additional 50 percent of BSA for a distance delivery student.

MR. RICHMOND answered correct.

SENATOR FRENCH asked if the additional 50 percent of BSA would be allocated even if a student takes one distance delivery course.

MR. RICHMOND answered correct.

8:22:06 AM

SENATOR FRENCH commented that the funding formulation seems to give a strong incentive to push students to distance delivery courses that cost under \$500 while district reimbursement would be several thousand dollars.

MR. RICHMOND answered that "one size fits all" funding for tuition ranging from \$430 to \$2500 could be an issue.

SENATOR FRENCH commented that he knew how difficult it was to write down the wide variety of experiences that rural school districts faced. He said children from smaller communities deserved the exact same chance that students in larger districts had to qualify for APS.

MR. RICHMOND said the intent was to provide rural districts with a simplified funding system.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS commented that the intent would be how to refine funding that reflects actual costs versus strictly formula driven.

8:23:27 AM

BERNISE JOSEPH, Vice Chancellor, College of Rural and Community Development, University of Alaska-Fairbanks, Fairbanks, said there were 15 community campuses in the UA system with six under the UAF-CRCD authority. She said CRCD dual-credit courses

provided a great head-start for high school students to both earn college credits and meet graduation requirements.

She said 548 rural students graduated in 2011 from schools with less than 11 graduates. She said dual-credit courses were offered interactively via internet to rural secondary students. She noted that some regions' high school math teachers have received additional CRCD training to better assist students.

[8:28:31 AM](#)

MS. JOSEPH said UA tuition costs are a barrier for rural students. She said rising heating costs was having a major impact on rural family budgets.

[8:29:36 AM](#)

DANIEL SOLIE, Assistant Professor, College of Rural and Community Development, University of Alaska Fairbanks, said students from small schools are often at a disadvantage with math and science preparation. He said the dual-credit course was developed to improve rural students in math and science for college.

He said the key to success was real-time interaction between student and instructor with a focus on problem solving. He said CRCD courses were tailored to fit the lifestyle of students from rural Alaska with colloquial language used in subject matter to make courses relevant and interesting.

[8:32:43 AM](#)

MR. SOLIE said CRCD courses were structured with flexibility to take rural issues into account, e.g., hunting season, winter school closings and regional graduation schedules. He said an important part of the distance science program was a laboratory kit provided to students to create a real experience outside of the online training.

[8:34:47 AM](#)

He said reusable lab kits cost approximately \$500 and were grant funded. He said students received additional support from online classmates and visiting itinerant teachers. He noted that an itinerant teacher also worked with other students to foster more interest in science.

He said distance delivery courses had no boundary limits and he noted that successful modules from one course could be used in other courses.

[8:38:53 AM](#)

MR. SOLIE said he encouraged groups of students in a particular school to take distance delivery courses to reduce the overall cost and make the funding model more effective. He said many rural schools can only offer certain courses once every two or three years and noted that some courses were not at the level needed to prepare students to transition into college.

[8:40:29 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked why some districts paid for high school students taking dual-credit courses and others were not.

[8:41:41 AM](#)

MS. JOSEPH answered that no two districts were alike. She said the Northwest Artic Borough used a "one third model;" the student, school district and CRCD each paid one third of the cost. She said some districts split the dual-credit cost with the student.

[8:42:47 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS commented that he would like to find out the fiscal issues related to districts that paid for students taking college courses and those that did not.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS said the challenge was finding out what programs were available, how they would be delivered, what the costs were and how the program could be expanded.

[8:44:35 AM](#)

MR. SOLIE said the variability of payment for students was an issue and leveling the payment field for all students was important.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked that the CRCD and districts provide additional input on funding. He said a real challenge would be the physical aspect of establishing connection with rural areas.

[8:47:24 AM](#)

ELIZABETH NUDELMAN, Director of School Finance, Department of Education and Early Development, Juneau, said the department's foundation formula distributes funding to districts as discretionary funding in one pot of money. She said funding does not follow a student and the challenge would be how to follow a student with categorical funding.

[8:48:43 AM](#)

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, Juneau, said AP courses were offered by districts and noted that additional training was required for AP teachers. He said AP students paid for their test fees.

[8:50:23 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS commented that foundation formula funding was discretionary and not fair. He said the costs associated with a special education student versus a regular academic student were not equal. He said districts were responsible for making sure students had access to the classes they required. He said he would be concerned if a district's responsibility to their students was diminished.

[8:51:22 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER said there has always been a concern with rural schools not providing students with an opportunity to qualify for the APS. He asked what the department would suggest if the distance delivery course program was not used.

[8:52:01 AM](#)

MR. MORSE answered that the department contacted superintendents from 13 districts that did not have APS eligible graduates in 2011. He said the superintendents commented that limited course availability was not an issue.

He said the department was about to introduce a distance delivery option through the Alaska Learning Network (ALN). He said the intent for the ALN was to provide access to advanced courses for APS qualification. He said ALN should not be the only solution and recommended additional programs to augment the APS qualification process.

[8:55:07 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER commented that he wanted to make sure there was a mechanism in place to guarantee all students receive equal opportunities for the APS without an additional program.

SENATOR FRENCH asked rhetorically how every Alaskan student would be assured a fair chance for an APS. He said the ALN sounds like a good idea and asked what entity would provide course material for ALN.

[8:55:59 AM](#)

MR. MORSE answered that the department was involved with designing courses with a goal to offer 30 ALN courses within two years. He said an outside vendor provided initial program

content with Alaska teachers hired to present the ALN courses. He said the first course offered on ALN was produced from an existing Alaska Studies course from the Anchorage School District.

[8:57:09 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH asked how students would access ALN courses.

MR. MORSE answered that ALN would be offered via online, live video or e-learning modules. He said certified teachers would be available to answer questions.

[8:58:32 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH commented that ALN was going in the right direction. He said he would have preferred using UA for the initial ALN programming, but conceded that an outside vendor may have been more cost effective. He said 548 rural students need help and spending \$1000 a year per student was not a huge amount of money. He said the hope was that every Alaska high school student had access to qualify for APS by the end of the year. He said you cannot offer the APS and not offer the courses to qualify.

[8:59:37 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said he wanted to correct a prior statement where he stated foundation funding per student was "not fair," he meant "not equitable." He said in a perfect world foundation funding would cover cost discrepancies between individual students and was hopeful that the proposed BSA increase would help. He said in principal, distance delivery course funding belonged in the foundation formula.

[9:00:41 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS stated that he would hold SB 169 in committee for further discussion.

[9:01:01 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Thomas adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 9:01 a.m.