

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 15, 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. 194

"An Act providing for a school improvement and revitalization procedure in the Department of Education and Early Development; establishing advisory councils for school improvement; and requiring reports to the legislature."

- HEARD AND HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 169

"AN ACT PROVIDING FOR EDUCATION FUNDING FOR DISTANCE DELIVERY COURSES OFFERED BY A SCHOOL DISTRICT."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 194

SHORT TITLE: PROCEDURES FOR LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

SPONSOR(S): EDUCATION

02/08/12	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/08/12	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/13/12	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/13/12	(S)	Heard & Held
02/13/12	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/15/12	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

MURRAY RICHMOND, Staff
Senator Joe Thomas
Co-Aide
Senate Education Standing Committee
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information on changes made to SB 194 and answered questions.

BARB ANGAIK, President
National Education Association-Alaska
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 194.

CARL ROSE, Executive Director
Association of Alaska School Boards
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 194.

BYRON CHARLES, representing himself
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Did not state a position on SB 194.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding SB 194.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:00 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, Davis, Co-Chair Meyer and Co-Chair Thomas.

SB 194-PROCEDURES FOR LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

[8:04:27 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS announced the continued consideration of SB 194. He noted that many states have struggled with the low-performing schools and some states had initiated active plans to help their schools. He said the intent of this bill was a collaborative effort to work with the community, district and the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to make sure low-

performing schools get back on track. He said the state cannot afford to stand idly by and allow low-performing districts to struggle.

[8:05:52 AM](#)

MURRAY RICHMOND, staff to Senator Joe Thomas, Alaska State Legislature, and co-aide to the Senate Education Standing Committee, said changes were made since the last committee meeting. He noted that Senator French requested clarification in terminology by adding the phrase "degrees of" to provide measurement means to audit activities pertaining to high standards, collaboration, family involvement and community involvement. He said the changes included a focus on schools rather than districts and allowing collaborative changes to be optional rather than mandatory.

[8:08:28 AM](#)

He emphasized that governance councils would function on an advisory capacity and the name had been changed from "governance council" to "revitalization advisory council" (RAC). He noted that the number of school board members serving on RAC would be increased from one to three members. He said a change was also made to allow a school board to partially accept RAC recommendations.

[8:11:33 AM](#)

He said the bill takes a proactive stance towards low-performing schools, defines support roles and offers continual help for the bottom 3 percent. He said DEED would be provided with specific responsibilities and audit parameters. He said RAC would provide teachers, principals and parents with input to help their schools. He said schools would have every opportunity to make changes before an intervention becomes necessary.

[8:13:55 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked how effective advisory councils were in working with school boards in other states.

MR. RICHMOND answered that Connecticut and Georgia had shown success with advisory councils. He noted that in Alaska, Kodiak's advisory council had worked very well in their schools. He said advisory councils were successful when school boards accepted its defined role and listened to its recommendations.

[8:16:03 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER noted that school board members could face not being reelected if they do not listen to an advisory council's recommendations.

MR. RICHMOND answered correct.

[8:16:59 AM](#)

BARB ANGAIK, President, National Education Association-Alaska (NEA-Alaska), Juneau, said the bill called for councils to be set up to provide input and advice from parents, teachers, administrators and school board members. She said elected school board authority and responsibility would not be taken away. She recommended that DEED include National Board Certification (NBC) for teachers.

[8:20:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS commented that school boards were made up of community members and the bill would broaden representation.

SENATOR FRENCH asked what NEA-Alaska's position was on offering a \$5000 incentive to attract highly qualified teachers and principals.

MS. ANGAIK answered that NEA-Alaska was in support and encouraged NBC for teachers.

[8:22:28 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH asked if NBC was required for "highly qualified" consideration and \$5000 grant eligibility.

MS. ANGAIK answered that she did not know. She noted that NEA-Alaska was convinced that the rigorous standards for achieving NBC would provide for the highest quality of teacher.

SENATOR STEVENS asked if NEA-Alaska had a problem with RAC participating in the school board's responsibility to hire principals.

[8:24:15 AM](#)

MS. ANGAIK answered that a struggling school may need to look at a different method for making sure the very best person was hired.

SENATOR STEVENS asked for clarification regarding RAC being involved in principal hiring.

MR. RICHMOND responded that the Fairbanks School District involved their community in the principal hiring process, but the school board was ultimately responsible for hiring. He addressed Senator French's question regarding the definition of a "highly qualified" teacher and said the bill allowed DEED to make that designation.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS commented that the intent was not to usurp the school board's authority to hire principals or dictate that only NBC teachers were considered "highly qualified."

SENATOR FRENCH asked if the bill would only pay a \$5000 grant to attract new teachers or be used for teachers already inside the district.

[8:26:38 AM](#)

MR. RICHMOND answered that the grant would be used to attract new teachers. He said there could be a problem for teachers who were already serving and changes would be addressed with DEED.

SENATOR FRENCH asked who had the authority to award the \$5000 grant.

MR. RICHMOND answered that DEED would work with the school board and superintendent to address how teacher attraction grants would be awarded.

[8:28:51 AM](#)

CARL ROSE, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), Juneau, said school board members were people who contributed to communities and provided a tremendous voluntary service. He said school board members dispersed over \$1 billion per year and were the only people authorized to spend that money. He said the bill addressed low performing schools by providing added assistance and direction.

[8:31:20 AM](#)

MR. ROSE said changing the governance council to RAC was appreciated. He advised limiting school board member participation to avoid a quorum within RAC. He said the bill authorized community collaboration and may satisfy another piece of legislation in the Alaska House of Representatives that takes issue with the school intervention process.

[8:34:38 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked how effective RAC would be in a rural area. He commented that rural school districts had a limited pool of people to select from.

MR. ROSE answered that school districts in the Rural Educational Attendance Area were required by law to have advisory boards in place. He said the bill would change how RAC members were chosen in addition to expanding advisory responsibilities. He said the greatest logistical challenge came from dealing with vast areas with no road access. He said adding a provision to allow less RAC members was important to rural communities.

[8:38:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS commented that the intent was not to add more bureaucracy, but to create something that was helpful and brought people together.

SENATOR STEVENS said he appreciated the change to RAC. He addressed the requirement for DEED to decide changes to be made if a school board and RAC would not be in agreement. He asked if AASB had concerns if DEED was given the authority to dictate changes.

[8:41:35 AM](#)

MR. ROSE answered that a disagreement should be dictated through the school board election or recall process. He noted that a school board's extensive duties permitted the body to be sued. He said RAC functioned in an advisory capacity and language in the bill involving DEED was not necessary.

[8:43:16 AM](#)

BYRON CHARLES, representing himself, Ketchikan, said new technology would play an important role for increasing student interest in school.

SENATOR DAVIS said she would like to receive input from DEED.

[8:46:25 AM](#)

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, Juneau, said the department felt strongly that communities should be engaged in their schools. He said he did not see anything in the bill that was not workable. He said the fiscal note was constructed to allow for adjustments.

[8:48:09 AM](#)

MR. MORSE addressed Senator French's question regarding the new teacher grant. He said DEED envisioned a process where RAC would

write for a grant to do something innovative to attract teachers. He said grant incentives could be in the form of a bonus, loan or professional development support. He said DEED had been working on operational logistics and would work with the committee to make all of the pieces work.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked if there was anything in the bill that was bothersome to DEED.

MR. MORSE answered that using the term "highly qualified" to describe teaching candidates was a legal term and suggested that another term be used.

[8:50:15 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS asked if DEED supported SB 194.

MR. MORSE answered that the bill was in draft form and a statement in support would be premature.

SENATOR STEVENS commented that electing school boards was an important part of a democracy and the election process was ingrained in our society. He said he was concerned that an unelected department could trump the elected school board. He said he liked the RAC concept to assist low-performing schools and advised being very careful of trampling on the responsibilities of elected officials.

[8:53:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS said he agreed that legally they were treading on an area that was not purview to change.

[8:54:35 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS said SB 194 would be held in committee.

[8:56:29 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Thomas adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 8:56 a.m.