

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 2, 2012

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

CONFIRMATION HEARING

UA Board of Regents

Dale Anderson - Juneau

CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

PRESENTATION: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT
REPORT BY COMMISSIONER MIKE HANLEY

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

DALE ANDERSON, Appointee
University of Alaska Board of Regents
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Alaska Board of Regents.

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented DEED report.

ACTION NARRATIVE

8:02:08 AM

CO-CHAIR KEVIN MEYER called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stevens, Thomas, and Myer. Senators French and Davis arrived soon thereafter.

Confirmation Hearing: UA Board of Regents

8:03:10 AM

CO-CHAIR MEYER announced the first order of business would be the confirmation hearing of Dale Anderson to the University of Alaska (UA) Board of Regents. He asked Mr. Anderson to tell the committee about himself and his interest in serving.

8:03:56 AM

SENATOR FRENCH joined the meeting.

DALE ANDERSON, Appointee, University of Alaska Board of Regents, said he grew up and attended school in Juneau and subsequently graduated from Oral Roberts University in Tulsa Oklahoma. His work experience in both the public and private sector provided a wide body of life experiences and different perspectives would add to the board deliberations. He relayed that he had worked in the financial services industry for the past 10 years. Before that, he served as a legislative aide, as commissioner for the Limited Entry Commission, and as a member of the City and Borough of Juneau Assembly.

8:05:03 AM

SENATOR DAVIS joined the meeting.

SENATOR STEVENS asked what university issues or problems needed attention in the next few years.

MR. ANDERSON answered that he would like to build on the progress he had seen with regard to the university working together as a whole; in the past there appeared to be undue competition between the campuses. He would also like to address graduation timelines, because that added a lot of cost to an education. Another area of interest was unification of programs and ensuring that the courses offered were meeting industry needs and requirements for jobs. He specifically mentioned engineering and fisheries jobs. The number of students who need remedial classes was another big picture issue to address.

[8:10:30 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH asked what his views were on student aid and whether the state did enough to make college affordable.

MR. ANDERSON responded that it was very important to ensure that getting an education was affordable for Alaskan students. He said there should be a way of providing financial aid to those students who need it and were qualified.

SENATOR FRENCH said it was troubling that young Alaskans were being saddled with huge education debt that could not be discharged even though the state had ample resources to help. He expressed hope that Mr. Anderson would use his position on the Board of Regents to advocate for more state aid for students.

MR. ANDERSON said he looked forward to working together on that issue.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked if UA should expand its role with industries that supply so much revenue to the state, particularly oil, fishing, and tourism.

MR. ANDERSON offered his belief that industry trade education was one of the most important aspects of the university's role. He said he was a strong advocate of trade education and emphasized the importance of developing effective partnerships between DEED, the university, industry, and communities in order to put young Alaskans into the workforce.

[8:17:02 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER found no objection and stated that Mr. Anderson's name would be forwarded to the joint body for consideration. He reminded members that this did not reflect intent by any member to vote either for or against the confirmation of the nominee during the joint session.

[8:17:39 AM](#)

At ease from 8:17 a.m. to 8:18.

Department of Education and Early Development Report

CO-CHAIR MEYER announced the next order of business would be a report from Commissioner Mike Hanley. He highlighted that the Anchorage School District recently adopted the Common Core Standards for curricula, and asked Commissioner Hanley why DEED developed and was proposing different standards for Alaska. He

noted that the Chair of the House Education Committee opined that one reason for the high dropout rate was relevance and that even the Common Core Standards focus on the 30 percent of students who go on to college. He asked if the current standards focus on the elite 10-15 percent of students that go to college and ignore, in particular, the 30 percent that drop out.

[8:21:11 AM](#)

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), explained that the dropout rate is computed on an annual basis and the graduation rate is the cohort of ninth graders that graduate in four years. In an apples-to-apples comparison, the dropout rate is about 20 percent and the graduation rate is about 68 percent. Fifth and sixth year seniors are not counted in the graduation rate and neither are students with severe cognitive difficulties who transition to life skills after four years or students who receive a certificate of achievement.

SENATOR STEVENS asked how the dropout rate in Alaska compared to national statistics.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY acknowledged that Alaska had a slightly higher dropout rate than the national average.

He said that when he came to the commissioner position he questioned why Alaska was not going to adopt the Common Core Standards, which were developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). He learned that one of the key reasons was that the Common Core Standards were very rigid and could only be added to up to 15 percent. Nevertheless, the proposed Alaska Standards heavily reference the Common Core Standards. He said his instructions were to make sure that the Alaska Standards did not drop below the level of rigor represented in the common core. The result is that the proposed Alaska Standards are more similar than not to the Common Core Standards, but they are more flexible.

He said the CCSSO recently conducted a side-by-side analysis of the Alaska Standards and the Common Core Standards and agreed that they were very similar and equal in rigor. The standards are sufficiently similar that Alaska should be able to access commercial curricula and assessments that are aligned with and developed for the common core.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY reviewed some of the differences between the two standards. Alaska Standards have patterning skills in math

in first and second grade instead of starting at third grade. Some of the common core examples were changed to be more relevant to Alaskans; travel by sled dog, for example, instead of by trolley. He emphasized that the standards are essentially the same, but the Alaska Standards provide flexibility.

[8:27:47 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if adopting the national standards precluded the Anchorage School District from making any changes, and if that was cause for concern.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered that it was not a concern because every school district was responsible for aligning its curricula to the state standards and assessing according those standards. He noted that three other school districts were moving towards the Common Core Standards.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if business, unions, and the trades were represented when the state developed its standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said that DEED solicited input from about 40 organizations across the state and about six actually stuck with it provided ideas. DEED sent the standards to the state board in December and asked for an extended public comment period. Meetings are scheduled statewide so that businesses can review the standards and provide input, all of which will be presented to the State Board of Education.

[8:32:04 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS said it was her understanding that a state that did not adopt the Common Core Standards would be precluded from receiving any assessment data.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said DEED attends the meetings of the consortia, but cannot vote in the development of assessments because Alaska is not a common core state. He said he fully anticipates that the state will be able to access that data because the program was developed with federal funds for states to use.

SENATOR DAVIS questioned why DEED did not adopt the Common Core Standards if the two were substantially similar and the state could make 15 percent upward changes. She noted that Alaska was in the small minority of states that had not adopted the national standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY acknowledged that Alaska was one of five states that had not adopted the Common Core Standards. DEED felt the changes, such as including patterning in the first and second grades were important, but they were not the 15 percent upward changes. He reiterated his belief that Alaska would have access to everything that the common core curricula would offer and allow adjustments to the standards as needed.

SENATOR DAVIS asked if the standards would be implemented in 2015.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that if the standards were adopted in June, they would go to the school districts in the fall; the same time that the Anchorage School District would implement the Common Core Standards.

SENATOR DAVIS asked what support the teachers and staff had received to help adapt to the new standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said it was difficult to put funding in place for training when the standards had yet to be adopted, but he did agree that it was critical to fund training for teachers statewide. The new standards raised the bar for both students and teachers.

[8:37:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS reviewed the high school mathematics standards that included knowledge of the properties of dilation, and emphasized the importance of relevance.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said that concern was one reason that DEED was doing so much focused work with employers. He noted that the standards that had a plus alongside indicated it was a standard for those students who intend to continue in a particular track. He acknowledged that DEED may add a few more pluses, but the strength of the standards was that they were designed for alignment for K-12 and they would provide more than base skills for one career path.

[8:42:52 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS said he understood the need to set standards, but he hoped that they would be practical and not be a cause for students to become discouraged.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said relevance comes in the classroom with the curriculum. The standards represent the target and the curriculum is the vehicle for attaining the goal.

SENATOR FRENCH asked who had the final say on adopting the standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied the State Board of Education.

SENATOR FRENCH asked when the decision would be made.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered that the last public comment would be May 17 and the board meeting would be on June 8 and 9.

SENATOR FRENCH asked if he thought the state board would adopt standards that were different than the Anchorage standards, for example.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that the Anchorage School District was adopting the Common Core Standards and he anticipated that the State Board of Education would make a decision on whether or not to adopt the proposed Alaska Standards.

SENATOR STEVENS cautioned that attempts to "Alaskanize" the standards may be more difficult than anticipated. For example, changing a question about trollies to one about sled dogs may be equally incomprehensible to some students. Kids in Kodiak may not understand either reference.

[8:47:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked if the University of Alaska was adapting its teacher certification programs to align with the proposed Alaska Standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered that the DEED was working directly with the university, and President Gamble had voiced support. The Institute of Social and Economic Research (CAEPR) at the university was vetting the proposed Alaska standards, comparing them to the credit-bearing courses required in the university's two and four-year programs. The State Board of Education was scheduled to meet with the Board of Regents in June and conversations about teacher preparation programs were on the agenda.

SENATOR DAVIS asked how many students there were statewide.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered that there were about 130,000.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if the distinction of the 30 percent number was that it included both students who dropped out of school and

students who for a variety of reasons did not receive a diploma after four years.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said yes. He added that he views fifth and sixth year seniors as success stories, but they are not counted in the graduation rate.

SENATOR DAVIS asked if the public comments would be available for review.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered yes.

[8:51:22 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER mentioned the proposal the committee heard from CAEPR at the last meeting, and asked if the administration might be interested in funding a UA Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) study to look at different ways to fund education.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said he reviewed the testimony and handouts and was concerned that the study suggested a formulaic approach that did not include new research, because it might not give the right picture. He relayed that he was meeting with Dr. Hirshberg today and intended to raise those questions. He offered to provide feedback after the meeting.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said the committee would like the feedback.

[8:55:11 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER found no further questions or comments and adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 8:55 a.m.