

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 25, 2013
8:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Lynn Gattis, Chair
Representative Lora Reinbold, Vice Chair
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux
Representative Dan Saddler
Representative Paul Seaton
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Harriet Drummond

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: DEVELOPMENT ON CHARTER AND CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
IN ALASKA~ FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY
DEVELOPMENT.

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

SUSAN MCCAULEY, PhD., Director
Teaching and Learning Support
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the development on charter
schools and correspondence schools in Alaska.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:01:34 AM](#)

CHAIR LYNN GATTIS called the House Education Standing Committee
meeting to order at 8:01 a.m. Representatives LeDoux, Reinbold,
Seaton, and Gattis were present at the call to order.

Representatives Saddler, P. Wilson, and Drummond arrived as the meeting was in progress.

Presentation: Development on charter and correspondence schools in Alaska, from the Department of Education and Early Development.

[8:01:58 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS announced that the only order of business would be a presentation regarding the development of charter and correspondence schools in Alaska.

[8:02:04 AM](#)

SUSAN MCCAULEY, Ph.D., Director, Teaching and Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), stated she would provide an overview on charter schools and correspondence schools in Alaska. She referred to a two-page handout in members' packets entitled, "Correspondence Schools" and "Charter Schools" dated February 22, 2013.

[8:02:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether Correspondence Schools and home schools are the same.

DR. MCCAULEY responded that for the most part, yes, especially when considering the public school option for home schooling. She referred to the handout in the members' packets, entitled "Charter Schools," dated February 22, 2013. She offered to begin her presentation with charter schools. The Charter School Act of 1995 permitted charter schools in the state. She related that House Bill 101 in the 22nd Legislature increased the number of charter schools permitted from 30 to 60 and increased the length of a charter school term from 5 to a maximum of 10 years. Senate Bill 235 in the 26th legislature released the limit, which means the number of charter schools is not limited in the state. Currently, eight school districts have charter schools and a total of 27 charter schools exist serving 5,676 students, which is approximately 4 percent of the overall student population. Individual charter schools enrollment ranges from 45 to 519 students.

[8:04:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX inquired as to whether charter schools are required to enroll special needs students.

DR. MCCAULEY answered yes; that the statutes establish enrollment policies and the expectation is that enrollment is done by lottery.

[8:05:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked how many of the 27 charter schools have extra space.

DR. MCCAULEY was unsure if any of the charter schools have a waitlist. She did not think it was uncommon to have waitlists, but she wasn't sure if all the charter schools have students waiting to be enrolled.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked how many of the 27 charter schools have intensive needs students or special education students.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that some charter schools have intensive students. She did not recall if all charter schools have special needs students. She reported that 10.2 percent of charter schools students are special needs students compared to 13 percent in non-charter schools.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked for a list of charter schools including location and the number of intensive needs students and special needs student enrolled.

CHAIR GATTIS clarified the request to gain an understanding of waitlist. She stated that she understood a Spanish immersion school in her district has a huge waitlist for kindergarten students since it is difficult for immersion students to come in at the third grade. She requested the numbers of waitlisted students.

[8:08:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX wondered if resistance to charter schools began in 1995 and if so, the source of the "push back." She further asked whether the charter school system has had any adverse effect or beneficial effect on regular public schools.

DR. MCCAULEY disclosed that her current position was taken followed her tenure as a charter school principal at the Birch

Tree Charter School at the Matanuska-Susitna school district. She explained that school districts have experienced difficulty with charter schools. The charter schools pull money out of the public school system's operating budget, which goes directly to the charter school as outlined in statutes. She emphasized that charter schools are public schools, but the perception is that they operate on a private basis. Charter schools have specific missions but they are public schools. She did not wish to characterize the difficulty as being "push back" but rather that charter schools need to figure out how to allow a charter schools to be true to the autonomy provided by in state statute for curriculum, budget, and textbooks. The challenges come to figure out how the charter schools are part of the school district while still upholding state standards for policies and procedures, which creates a tension. Charter schools exist since they are supposed to do something differently. The charter schools are structured to be innovative and have release from some policies; however, the charter schools are still part of the school district where they have been established.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX wondered whether the testimony in 1995 was against charter schools.

DR. MCCAULEY said her experience with charter schools has been in the MSBSD. She reported that there are six charter schools in the MSBSD and eight in Anchorage. She offered her belief that people are generally much more accustomed to charter schools.

[8:13:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked about the accountability and performance compared to the other public schools.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that charter schools are held to the same standards and mandates for accountability under statute and through state mandated assessments and testing under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). She characterized the accountability as being identical to other public schools in Alaska. The 2012 Standards Based Assessments (SBA) data for charter schools runs about eight to nine percent higher in proficiency in reading, writing, and math (three Rs), which begins in third grade. She compared charter schools percentages for reading to the non-charter schools, respectively, with reading at 88.5 percent versus 79.7 percent and the trends continue in writing and math.

8:15:17 AM

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether the non-charter public have sought to replicate the success.

CHAIR GATTIS reminded the committee that these are public schools and the Matanuska-Susitna school board used terms neighborhood schools, charter schools, and home schools.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether correspondence school fall under neighborhood schools.

CHAIR GATTIS answered no.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON restated her question on success in the three Rs.

DR. MCCAULEY responded that it is challenging to draw hard and fast conclusions given the number of variables that exist. In her professional experience, she has found that charter schools experience the same challenges as traditional public schools or neighborhood schools. She offered her belief that the principals share the same conversations about how to help special needs students, students not reading on grade level, students with attendance issues, and to engage families. She suggested that when parent seeks out a charter school option, they have made a conscious decision. Typically, student transportation and lunches are provided by parents in charter schools programs. Since the student enrollment is not geographic, the level of parental engagement sets the experience apart from the neighborhood schools.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON suggested that the committee needs to look at the successful schools. Despite the diplomatic response, the question remains unanswered; however, the legislature, the department, and the schools need to examine the successes. In fact, the public schools offer numerous successes and parental involvement is a major factor to student success. She wished it was possible to foster more parental involvement. In any event, she maintained the importance of examining successful schools.

8:21:50 AM

CHAIR GATTIS remarked that not only is success important, but also to consider charter schools or traditional public schools that fail.

DR. MCCAULEY responded that the mechanisms at the department address the charter schools and non-charter schools identically in terms of adequate yearly progress (AYP) and to identify those schools with a high number of proficient students. The difference is that a charter schools typically have a 5-10 year contract period and the school district could choose to discontinue operation of a charter schools for lack of meeting performance expectations. This highlights the difference in the school district's response if the failing school is a charter school.

[8:23:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked whether the funding is the same for charter schools as for traditional public schools, especially if transportation is not provided for charter schools.

[8:24:19 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY referred to the handout and read the funding information. She said the budget for a charter school is the amount generated by students enrolled in the charter school minus the administrative costs. The administrative costs are established by applying the school district's indirect rate, as approved by the EED. The amount generated is to be determined in the same manner as it would be for a student enrolled in another public school in the school district. She explained that most school districts interpret this and use the funding formula based on the average daily membership (ADM) and applying the school size cost factor, adding the multiplier for special education students, and any other variables. However, some school districts provide only the local contribution whereas some additional local contributions are passed through. The statutes allow districts this discretion, as well as with transportation funding.

[8:26:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked whether the schools receive the identical levels of funding.

DR. MCCAULEY replied that it varies school district to school district since school districts have discretionary decisions on whether to pass on local contributions above the minimum and

transportation funding. For example, the charter school she administered received both discretionary funding aspects.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked whether she knew how many charter schools did not receive transportation and food programs, which could potentially represent a huge savings to school districts. She expressed an interest in obtaining actual data since she has heard charter schools are more cost effective with better outcomes.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that she did not know which of the 27 charter schools provide pupil transportation.

[8:28:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether traditional neighborhood schools can learn from charter schools. He also asked whether traditional neighborhood schools are receptive to those lessons.

DR. MCCAULEY said there are lessons to be learned, particularly with respect to the need for parent engagement.

CHAIR GATTIS remarked that many legislators went back to their districts this past weekend and school choice is a hot topic.

DR. MCCAULEY offered that the research is clear that the parent engagement is critical to student success and will benefit students no matter which school they attend. The conscious decision, on the part of the parents, to bring their child to a specific school represents engagement. Charter schools also have a board called an academic policy committee that is almost exclusively comprised of parents. She emphasized that parents have a role in the governance of a charter school. The parent engagement piece is at work in charter schools and that is very beneficial to education. Again, in terms of her experience, when charter schools are embraced by the school district the principals are learning lessons from each other.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked how often neighborhood schools are receptive.

DR. MCCAULEY hesitated to comment on what occurs in other school districts; however, in her experience it happened.

[8:32:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND related that Anchorage has 8 of the 27 charter schools. She served on the Anchorage School Board in the 1990s. She recalled that sometimes charter schools were closed due to funding issues. The Anchorage School District (ASD) provides the local funding, but not transportation. However, what is not provided is a facility or the funding for a facility, which was frustrating since other public schools could spend the student allocation on education. Other public schools do not pay facility costs, outside of some utility bills. She said it would be helpful to have a history of charter schools. She acknowledged that many were started but closed.

[8:34:44 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS offered her observation that charter schools are routinely closed based on a lack of student performance, but the neighborhood schools are not closed even when they are failing.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON understood some school administrative fees cover rent and transportation. She stated support for funding parity for neighborhood schools and charter schools. She then inquired as to whether any charter schools failed during her tenure. She further asked if the parents continue to support the charter schools once their children graduate.

[8:36:57 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS requested that the cost of facilities be addressed first.

DR. MCCAULEY replied that the statutes allow a charter school to use public space, if available, but lacking that other facilities may be sought. Typically, charter schools lease a local existing structure and pay property taxes, although some exceptions occur; for example, in the Kenai School District (KSD) a charter school operates within another public school facility. In some instances, local contractors construct a building, lease the space, and pay property taxes.

CHAIR GATTIS commented that one charter school in her district is at the end of an expensive five-year lease. She explained that this charter school faces challenges since the buildings are not public facilities, the landlord may add on enhancements so the building can serve other purposes if the charter school fails. Further, in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB), the borough provided land for a charter school, but the ability to bond is not allowed, and building funds need to be sought from

state allocations. She characterized it as a "Catch 22." She offered her belief that the charter schools are doing a good job.

[8:41:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether the definition of availability in a school district is expansive.

DR. MCCAULEY answered the statute allows the school districts the discretion to determine availability in the local school district.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX wondered if some school districts determine space availability differently than others.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that she was unsure; however, the school districts have the ability to make the determination. She explained that typically, a school district would consider capacity, but consider other variables. For example, if a charter school is an elementary school, but the space available is in a high school, it might not be perceived as the best fit by the school founders, who are typically parents. Additionally, the geographic location may also be a determining factor.

[8:43:40 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS returned to Representative Wilson's question, which is whether parents have continued involvement at charter schools once their children graduate.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that the parent's involvement is tied to student attendance. For example, a charter schools may be K-6 or K-8. Thus the children move on to middle school or high school somewhere else. Typically, the parents take their parental involvement on to the school their children subsequently attend. She followed up with comments on the data for charter schools that closed. Since 1995, 6 of 12 charter schools were closed by the charter schools organization. Four charter schools were closed by school districts, probably in conjunction with their local school boards. Two charter schools were converted to correspondence programs, she stated.

[8:45:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON reported on a Homer charter school exists within the local neighborhood elementary school. He described the facility as having two wings and one is the charter schools and the other is the neighborhood school. He stated that the charter school has expanded into a private facility for k-2 classes. He characterized this charter school and neighborhood school as being very successful. He referred to the parental involvement commitment and asked whether charter schools have specific requirements for parental involvement.

DR. MCCAULEY answered yes; that many charter schools have an expectation that a certain number of volunteer hours will be performed. She recalled the charter school she served had a 36-hour per year annual commitment, which is fairly common.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON highlighted that the involvement factor is a major connection to better performance. He indicated some lessons learned from charter schools, which is being picked-up by traditional schools, is the theme or project-based elements. The legislature has moved forward to promote the theme and project-based schools across the school districts. For example, in Saint Marys students experience a subsistence lifestyle via hunts.

DR. MCCAULEY replied, by definition, charter schools are supposed to offer an alternative approach and not duplicate programs offered in neighborhood schools or there isn't any reason to have a charter school. However, she said she has seen examples of theme-based curriculum that has been brought to traditional schools with great success. For example, the North Slope Borough has a school district wide curriculum approach based on an Inupiat learning framework.

[8:50:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD reiterated that when parents have "buy in" for a Spanish or Japanese immersion program that the charter schools are popular. She reported that Eagle River's charter school, the Eagle Academy charter school, does not have standards provided that compare to the traditional schools. She suggested that statute may need to be altered to provide equal footing for both of these public approaches since it seems as though the charter schools are at a disadvantage [in terms of facilities and transportation.] She briefly described her own experiences. She wondered if a possible language change could be made so that "may" provide space would be changed to "shall" provide space.

DR. MCCAULEY stated that the leading voice is the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS). The NAPCS has developed a model charter school law and nationally rank each state according to model criteria. She explained that replied that the three important aspects of laws are first, equitable access to capital funding and facilities; second, equitable operational funding; and third, multiple authorizers, which allow charter schools more than one option for who permits their existence. It could be the local school district, university or non-profit organization. These three components of the model law provide the highest weighting of the law. In response to a question she restated the three components. She emphasized the importance of equitable access to operational funding and equitable access to capital funding and facilities.

[8:53:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether the national organization makes a distinction between public and private charter schools.

DR. MCCAULEY responded the NAPCS relates exclusively to public charter schools.

[8:55:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether charter schools can expel students for behavioral issues. The result would be the student would revert to the neighborhood public school.

DR. MCCAULEY explained that because charter schools are part of the public school district, the same regulatory procedures would occur for suspension or expulsion.

[8:57:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND referred to the facility funding and reported on the conditions under which some charter schools operate. For example, the Northern Lights ABC School operated for many years an old ASD building that currently houses the Aquarian Charter School. Even though this building requires major maintenance and is substandard, the Aquarian Charter School still rents it from the district; however the Northern Lights ABC School does not pay any rent for its new building. Thus, there is a need to review the school buildings. Further, the ASD offers alternative schools but transportation is not provided to its students or to students attending any immersion

schools within neighborhood schools. According to the ASD, high school graduation rates at charter schools rates are not necessarily better than the ASD's performance as a whole. In fact, the annual dropout rate is twice [the rate] and the graduation rate is ten percent less than in neighborhood schools. She further suggested the committee should review the ASD's annual report on charter schools.

9:00:56 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked in instances in which a non-profit authorizes a charter school whether the school would be considered a public school.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that this would not currently be permitted under state statutes since the local school board is the only authorizing agency; however, the national charter school commissions do provide parameters for authorizers and authorizers must meet specific criteria. For example, a non-profit would need to be an officially established 501 (c) (3) and would need to have capacity to adequately support a charter school. She explained that state charter school commissions would identify the specific capacity. For example, special education is one of the areas that this scrutiny arises, such that a commission would examine the charter school's ability to support the education of special education students since it represents a complex undertaking. She restated the charter school commission's role in assuring the charter schools can support special needs students.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON agreed that charter schools should be functional. He expressed concern that removing the challenges, such as the parental involvement for transportation and volunteering. He said wasn't interested in adding any additional challenges, but the parental involvement component is important to the success of charter schools.

DR. MCCAULEY explained the start-up of a charter school is often the biggest challenge and the parental involvement required is beneficial to charter schools, including facility considerations, transportation, and supplies; however, she questioned what is meant by equitable. She pointed out the statutory language implies the intent for equitable, but the nuances of what is equitable raise questions. No one is confused about the degree to which the BSA formula applies to a charter schools or a neighborhood school, but some confusion exists for other things. She said how to maintain the

conditions that result in the buy-in a parent feels when they make the decision to send their child to a charter school without creating unintended unequal situations. Certainly, the NAPCS developed guidelines to help communities sort through these challenges.

9:06:45 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether it is easy to find teachers and what level of teacher retention occurs at charter schools.

DR. MCCAULEY responded that teacher desire and retention depends on a number of variables. She suggested that just as parents select a charter schools, teachers also make decisions. She said that teachers are attracted to what appeals to them, professionally and personally, which could be found in a neighborhood school or a charter school. For example, a teacher may be interested in the mission of a charter school, such as the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) model or an arts-based model. The degree to which a charter school can attract teachers varies school to school. She related from that her experience as principal of a charter school she found teachers were attracted to the school.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether teachers stay longer at charter schools.

DR. MCCAULEY answered she did not know.

9:09:30 AM

CHAIR GATTIS asked how teacher selection occurs at a charter school.

DR. MCCAULEY responded that as with any school, collective bargaining agreement rights exist and transfer opportunities apply as governed by statute. She explained that unless a school has a specific waiver, and Alaska does not, the collective bargaining process applies just as it would for any school district.

9:11:06 AM

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON commented that teachers in the traditional setting may be frustrated. She suggested that the best teachers might transfer to charter schools, which could create an inequity in the school system. She asked whether the

statutes or regulations create stumbling blocks for charter schools.

DR. MCCAULEY replied the issue is probably that the statutes and regulations leave room for interpretation. She suggested that the law may not provide sufficient clarity for some of the complex issues that have arisen with the inception and increase in the charter schools. For example, many discussions occur between the school districts and the charter schools with respect to the interpretation of statutes and regulations.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON surmised that the committee may need to revisit the regulations; however, she suggested that the committee proceed with caution and not defeat the purpose for creating the charter school option. She asked what authorizing options are available.

DR. MCCAULEY acknowledged that some states authorize charter schools in different ways, which include states applying directly to the state Board of Education; a local school board, a university, a non-profit a corporation; and a charter management organization (CMO).

[9:17:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON expressed concern that the public schools are put at a disadvantage if the involved parents and the best teachers choose to select the charter school option. Further, she expressed concern that the funding is then removed from the school district to benefit a few, when the majority of students remain in the traditional neighborhood school setting.

DR. MCCAULEY emphasized that outstanding teachers exist in every setting throughout the state. In fact, she said there are many variables that contribute to how a school ultimately performs on the measurable standards. She stressed the difficulty in being an educator, with the majority of her time spent in the traditional classroom. She offered her belief teachers choose to become teachers since they have a genuine commitment to the work, which is represented at schools throughout the state. She suggested that educators can best address education by sitting together to discuss the challenges. The educators can facilitate and foster conversations in a way that makes it likely that it will happen and avoid a divisive approach to education or overly competitive feeling to it, but encourage teachers to share experiences and learn from each other. She

offered her belief the solution lies with collaboration and teamwork regardless of the school type.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked where the major responsibility lies in helping the teachers, with the school district, or the state.

DR. MCCAULEY characterized education as a partnership and the local school districts, the state, and educators each play an important role. For example, the department sponsors a curriculum alignment institute twice a year and administrative staff statewide gather to discuss the new state standards, with the department offering support and ideas to determine how the standards can be implemented. Subsequently, the school districts wrestle with specific implementation. In short, the collaboration can happen between the department and the school districts, with the school districts ultimately figuring out what will work best for them locally.

[9:23:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD questioned whether the challenge to provide lunches, transportation, and facilities attracts parents to charter schools. She offered her belief that parents make these sacrifices to obtain a style of teaching and passion for excellence. She said she is a passionate believer in charter schools. Further, the expectation of parental involvement in charter schools makes a difference. She related she has had some negative experiences with traditional schools, which are different than ones she's experienced with charter schools. In fact, in charter schools she's being asked to be part of the board and make decisions. Additionally, the parent involvement is totally different from what occurs at a traditional school, in which the school might welcome a parent bringing in cookies or doing some volunteer work. She asked a series of questions, including who decides which teachers can teach at charter schools, whether the decisions are made by the bargaining unit, if waiting lists occur, or if hiring is based solely on seniority.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that the processes for teacher selection at a charter school is identical to the ones used in traditional school. She explained that a vacancy is posted, teachers apply, and the local principal makes recommendations on the selection. In the case of a charter school, instead of the principal, a hiring committee often makes recommendations, comprised of parents, and the school makes the selection. She highlighted

that statutes require charter schools to operate according to the negotiated agreement and charter schools do not have any exemption. She reiterated that the hiring processes are set by negotiated agreement for traditional schools and charter schools.

[9:27:07 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS understood there is no preference in the hiring process for charter schools.

DR. MCCAULEY responded that is correct. She emphasized that all teachers are members of the collective bargaining unit.

CHAIR GATTIS understood the perception may exist that charter schools have the ability to select any teacher; however, the bargaining agreement allows the next teacher in line to elect to accept the position. For example, the MSBSD has a Spanish immersion school and she would anticipate the school would only hire Spanish speaking teachers; however, that isn't the case.

[9:29:14 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY clarified that there are transfer procedures that apply and out of district hiring procedures must be followed. She explained that current teachers have the opportunity to apply for positions and most negotiated agreements require those teachers be considered first, prior to the school posting a vacancy outside the school district to obtain a new hire. She restated the process of how the position postings are handled. She concluded that a charter school with a special mission does not trump the negotiated agreement procedures.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether seniority is a factor or if in-house hires have priority. She further asked about tenure.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that she is not a human resources manager; however she described the process used. She explained that when a vacancy occurs, tenure isn't the first consideration. Instead, the first consideration is to consider teachers who are currently employed by the school district prior to considering hiring someone out of the school district. In instances in which a layoff situation arises, the school district could decide to layoff all teachers without tenure. Teachers can transfer to vacant positions and certain skill sets may be outlined for the vacancy, including fluency in Spanish; however,

the skill set does not trump the hiring processes unless the charter school has a specific waiver at the local level to hire outside of the procedure.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON surmised that numerous teachers within the ASD may speak Spanish. She asked whether a Lower 48 teacher who has specific experience teaching in a Spanish speaking country would not qualify ahead of someone in the school district.

DR. MCCAULEY answered yes; that is correct.

[9:34:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON said the traditional local schools in Homer welcome parental involvement on a daily basis. In terms of lessons learned, he wondered whether it's possible to accentuate and encourage parental involvement in every school since it seems to be a strong component for success. He asked whether charter schools will have an advantage as the state moves to common core or Alaska standards testing with more complex analysis necessary. He suggested that the unique missions of charter schools may allow them to better meet these assessments.

DR. MCCAULEY did not characterize charter schools as ones that would be more effective or less effective on testing. Instead, the testing would depend on the cohesiveness of curriculum, good resources, textbooks that support teaching the curriculum, and strong, effective teachers. She did not think charter schools programs are more likely or less likely to attend to the increase in complexity than traditional public schools. She concluded that there is every potential the new standards can be attended to effectively in both traditional and charter schools.

[9:37:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX further questioned whether a school with a need for a teacher with specific talents, such as a Spanish teacher must hire a senior teacher who does not speak Spanish.

DR. MCCAULEY replied that the variables include whether the position will be hired outside the school district, in which the school district would list the specific requirements for Spanish, certainly applicants with specific skills will be prioritized over applicants without the skills. However, when a vacancy occurs and an internal senior teacher holds transfer

rights, the school district must consider whether the skill set or transfer rights apply. In fact, hiring rights need to be very clear and followed consistently to justify the position. She restated the process for the external hiring process, including it must identify specific skill sets.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX questioned how fluency in Spanish would not be the top criteria used when filling a position in a Spanish immersion school.

DR. MCCAULEY said it might depend on the specific position and whether the position absolutely necessitates Spanish language teachers, noting it would be hard to argue that Spanish language isn't an essential skill for a third-grade teacher in a Spanish immersion school. However, if the position is for a specialist position, such as a music or art teacher, it may be less arguable that fluency in Spanish is a required skill.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether the actual language teaching would be by a Spanish teaching professional.

DR. MCCAULEY answered yes.

[9:42:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND imagined that all the Anchorage language immersion classes probably require teachers with an ability to speak and teach the language. She stated that the current lottery system has always raised issues about leaving children's education to chance drawings which was seen as a disservice to children. Additionally, teaching styles should be matched to student learning styles. Finally, with respect to funding, the middle school model is at risk due to a lack of funding, she said. She offered her belief that schools should be funded properly or ultimately damage will occur.

[9:45:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked about the transfer rights of a bargaining union member. She referred to the comment that skill set doesn't trump seniority in the hiring process. She affirmed the rights of principals, students, and parents to have the most qualified teacher. She offered her belief that the decisions should be based on supply and demand rather than a set of rigid rules. She hoped that the charter schools are not being hampered.

CHAIR GATTIS asked that questions be held to allow Dr. McCauley time to finish her presentation.

[9:46:55 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY concluded the charter school presentation, stating that the charter schools must be approved by the state school board and come to the department having been approved by the local school district and the school board.

[9:47:45 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY referred to page 2 of the handout, entitled, "Correspondence Schools," and offered to quickly review the same topic headings. She explained that the statutes require the department to exercise general supervision over the elementary and secondary correspondence study programs. The state previously operated a centralized correspondence program known as the Alyeska Correspondence Program, which was discontinued in 2003. The school districts are permitted to have a statewide correspondence program, which means the students are enrolled in the program from outside their school districts.

DR. MCCAULEY stated that 26 school districts have correspondence study programs and a total of 28 correspondence schools have enrolled students. She reported that 13 of the 28 correspondence schools allow for statewide enrollment and 11,345 students are currently enrolled in correspondence schools, which represents 8 percent of the total student population in Alaska. She reported that a small correspondence school has two students enrolled with the largest correspondence school having 3,635 students enrolled. She also reported that the special education enrollment in correspondence schools represents 6 percent of the overall student population. She stated that approval is made by the school district and the EED and a statement of assurance is on file at the EED to indicate the correspondence school agrees to follow the components in statute and regulation. For example, one statutory component requires the program must use curriculum materials reviewed by the governing body of the school district and the materials must be of equal quality. Further, the curriculum materials must be aligned to state standards and each school must have an individual learning plan on file for a student. Funding must be equal to the Average Daily Membership (ADM) multiplied by 80 percent, which means it is 80 percent of the funding for a traditional school or charter school. The funds can be used to set up funding accounts for parents to use to meet the educational needs of their children

and limits are established by regulation. She explained that students can be enrolled in two different school districts but the student may not count for more than one full-time equivalent student.

[9:50:33 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS asked for clarity on funding and whether a student can be enrolled in both the student's neighborhood school and the correspondence school.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that they can; however, there is a requirement for the number of core courses that must be taken in that situation. She deferred the department on the specific funding mechanisms.

[9:51:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked whether there is a difference between a correspondence school and a home school.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that most correspondence programs are home school programs and specifically are the state-sponsored home school programs. Parents who wish to home school their children can select a school district sponsored correspondence study program. In those instances, children will largely be educated at home with appropriate checks and balances in place at the school level and direction in statute and regulation.

[9:52:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked whether the special education student enrollment in correspondence schools is 6 percent and whether that is average as compared to neighborhood schools. She further asked whether funding correspondence schools at 80 percent of the foundation formula seemed excessive.

DR. MCCAULEY responded that the average special education across non-correspondence programs is at 13 percent. She explained that the funding at the 80 percent level is provided by statute, although she did not know the history.

[9:53:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether the correspondence school would receive 80 percent of the funding formula amount for students enrolled in a correspondence school.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that the school district would receive 80 percent of the funding through the formula funding for students enrolled in correspondence schools. However, the school district would determine how much of that funding to pass on to the correspondence school. The statute establishes the level of funding the school district receives based on the number of students enrolled in correspondence schools. She reiterated that the school district would determine the use of the funds. In further response to a question, she agreed the school district the student is enrolled would receive the funding.

[9:54:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX related a scenario in which a student resides in Anchorage, but enrolls in the Galena Correspondence program. She asked who would receive the funds.

DR. MCCAULEY answered the Galena School District (GSD) would receive the funding.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether the parents would receive the funds if the student is not enrolled in any state program.

DR. MCCAULEY answered no. She explained that in order for any funds to be released the child must be enrolled in a public program within the state. She related various public school home school options are available in Alaska, but students must be enrolled in a district sponsored correspondence study program within the district.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked how the individual education funding accounts can be spent.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that parents can establish an account, called an allotment, which can be used for a variety of items, including curriculum materials, music lessons, and physical education related activities. She referred to the courses a student would normally take in a traditional public school setting. Thus the funds could be used to support comparable courses and activities for children to attain instruction in a home school program.

[9:56:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER recalled that last year the legislature authorized home school students to participate in local

competitive activities. He asked whether these funds could be used for purposes, such as sports activity fees to participate in football or other sports.

DR. MCCAULEY said she believed so, but she was unsure. She deferred to the EED to answer the nuances of the allowable uses of the allotment funds.

[9:57:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked for the amount of the home school allotment.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that amount varies by school district. She explained the school district determines the amount in collaboration with the local correspondence school.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether the allotment is limited to parents who choose to enroll their children in a state-sponsored correspondence school.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that is correct.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX related a scenario in which the parent's home schooling includes religious teachings, but the parent's allotment is not used for religious teachings. She asked whether that would be allowed. She also asked why that would not violate the Blaine Amendment.

DR. MCCAULEY responded that this is addressed directly in statute, which does not preclude a parent from choosing the instruction, but it does preclude the use of funds for that purpose. She emphasized that it is clear that funds must exclusively be used for non-religious purposes.

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND understood the ASD charges an activity fee for most of its after school activities. She offered her belief that the correspondence or home school students would pay the same fees if they were to play football.

CHAIR GATTIS remarked that each school district would make its own decisions in terms of charging fees for its programs.

[10:00:06 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:06 a.m.