

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

Wasilla, Alaska

June 3, 2013

10:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Gabrielle LeDoux

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Tammie Wilson
Representative Wes Keller
Representative Shelley Hughes
Senator Mike Dunleavy
Senator Gary Stevens (via teleconference)

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: COMMON CORE OUTSIDE OF ALASKA

- HEARD

PRESENTATION: ALASKA EDUCATION STANDARDS~ THE SMARTER BALANCED~
AND THE COMMON CORE

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JOY PULLMAN, Education Research Fellow
Heartland Institute
Chicago, Illinois

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a presentation on the Common Core Outside of Alaska.

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of Alaska Education Standards, the SMARTER Balanced, and the Common Core.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified and answered questions during the presentation on Alaska Education Standards, the SMARTER Balanced, and the Common Core.

LORIE [KOPPENBERG]
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the presentation on Alaska Education Standards.

JENNIE BETTINE
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the presentation on Alaska Education Standards.

REPRESENTATIVE WES KELLER
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the presentation on Alaska Education Standards.

BARBARA [CARTER]
Willow, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the presentation on Alaska Education Standards.

REPRESENTATIVE TAMMIE WILSON
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Commented and asked questions during the presentation on Alaska education standards.

AMY [THOMAS]
(No address provided)

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the discussion of the presentation on Alaska education standards.

WAYNE OZOSKY

Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the discussion on Alaska Education Standards.

MIKE COONS

Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the discussion on Alaska Education Standards.

ANNIE REEL (ph)

(No address provided)

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the discussion on Alaska Education Standards.

REPRESENTATIVE SHELLEY HUGHES

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Commented and asked questions during the presentation on Alaska Education Standards.

BARBARA HANEY

North Pole, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the discussion on Alaska Education Standards.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[10:02:17 AM](#)

CHAIR LYNN GATTIS called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. Representatives Gattis, P. Wilson, Seaton, Reinbold, and Saddler were present at the call to order. Representative Drummond arrived as the meeting was in progress. Also in attendance were Representatives T. Wilson, Keller, and Hughes, and Senators Dunleavy and Stevens (via teleconference).

Presentation: Common Core Outside of Alaska

[10:05:12 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS announced that the first order of business would be a presentation by the Heartland Institute on Common Core Outside of Alaska.

JOY PULLMAN, Education Research Fellow, Heartland Institute, explained that the Heartland Institute is a Chicago-based think tank that focuses on state legislatures, whose goal is to research and promote ideas that empower individuals. She indicated she will outline the nationwide concerns about Common Core state standards (CCSS), or Common Core, in general and the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)].

[10:06:42 AM](#)

MS. PULLMAN said that 16 of the 45 states that withdrew from Common Core have reconsidered their decision. Some of the main reasons to do so include the origin of the Common Core, the cost it will impose on local schools, the academic quality of the standards, its connection to data-mining students, and a loss of state and local control. She explained that the Common Core, which is often referred to as "state-led", does not usually mean what people think of as "state-led." Instead the CCSS was written by a set of committees that met behind closed doors and were not subject to any open records or open meetings laws, with no elected officials involved. She said it is very unclear "who said what." She pointed out this is in clear contrast to the typical way of making state law, which is open to the public and requires transparency in many different ways. She stated that cost concerns, in particular, are raised since Common Core relates to almost everything related to education that happens inside of schools. Thus standards determine what kids will and will not learn and basically outline the content. Changes to the standards would require replacing textbooks, classroom materials, retraining teachers, and new technology. She stated that all Common Core tests will have to be administered entirely electronically by 2018. States that try to use paper and pencil until then would need to pay more to employ that option. This poses problems for many rural districts since it would require upgrading systems to have sufficient bandwidth during the test windows. She reported problems have been observed in Oklahoma, Indiana, Florida, Kentucky, Minnesota, and Ohio with servers crashing, student test information being lost and the quality of testing compromised just with existing testing. Most states have not been able to assess the impacts testing limited to electronic Common Core that will be required by 2018. She offered to provide a comparison of Alaska's new state standards and the Common Core standards. She indicated a colleague

compared the math standards for K-3 for 100 percent Common Core standards, with an additional 14 Alaska-only standards.

[10:10:14 AM](#)

MS. PULLMAN emphasized the importance for lawmakers and citizens to understand what is happening in the state and to compare all the standards for comparison between the state's standards and the national Common Core standards. She said, "If they are essentially the same, or essentially the same as all the other states that are allowed to add 15 percent of Common Core, then it is also as if the state has adopted the Common Core standards and not just the testing."

MS. PULLMAN, referring to academic quality, which is the area in which people have expressed the most concern, noted first, the Common Core does not have any track record, but is based on theories adopted by committees on what children should know. Second, internationally recognized experts in math, English, and early child development have questioned the academic quality of the Common Core standards. For example, a Stanford University math professor - the only mathematician who sat on the Common Core committee - offered his belief that adopting Common Core standards would disadvantage students such that they will lag behind international peers by at least one grade level in elementary school and two grade levels by high school. Dr. Sandra Stotsky, who has written the best standards in the country, said the English standards provide empty skill sets, which would not be helpful for teachers or students. She highlighted one problem with the SMARTER balanced testing that Alaska students are set to face are the constructed response questions. This shifts from multiple choice tests to more open-ended essay types of questions that must be graded by hand. She indicated that other states have experienced problems with accuracy. For example, Kentucky has had the system in place for several years and recently the system collapsed so the state "threw out" all of the constructed response questions. So far there hasn't been any evidence that the format is effective or that it provides the type of information children need to learn. She pointed out some concerns exist about data mining, which she offered to discuss later.

MS. PULLMAN expressed concern with the loss of state and local control. She said the Alaska Constitution gives the legislature the right to establish and monitor public education. If the state or legislature has "signed over" certain testing to national testing groups, it removes the rights and

responsibilities given by the Alaska Constitution. In fact, all of the states involved with SMARTER Balanced have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU). Alaska's MOU promises, that the state will address areas in state law, statute, regulation, and policy to implement the proposed assessment system and to address any such barrier. Basically, the state has promised to change state law, in accordance with the testing the consortium thinks is necessary to implement those tests, but no definition exists for what is necessary. This presents further problems since Alaska has signed on an advisory state in SMARTER Balanced, but does not have any vote in the consortia's decisions. Thus, it is unknown what data SMARTER Balanced will require of states or if any statutory or regulatory changes in Alaska will be needed in order to comply with the agreement because the tests are not final and have not yet been released. However, some things SMARTER Balanced has said in its agreement with the federal government includes that it may test students for "self-management skills" such as time management, goal setting, self-awareness, persistence, and study skills. Generally, these are "softer" skills that many parents are uncomfortable with having placed in their children's files.

MS. PULLMAN said the agreement with the federal government indicates SMARTER Balanced will have full access to all the data that it obtains from states. Further, the federal government has currently been reviewing test items. Due to a recent federal change in student privacy laws, the federal government or any agency or any district can share information without parental consent or knowledge. This provision ties into some of the "data mining" that nationally parents have been concerned about in terms of Common Core standards. Lastly, she said that in violation of federal law, SMARTER Balanced is an entirely federally-funded model curriculum for states to use with Common Core, which has specifically been designed to influence daily instruction.

[10:16:14 AM](#)

MS. PULLMAN said, specifically, SMARTER Balanced comes not just with end of course tests, but tests are designed to be given every couple of weeks under the federally-constructed curriculum.

Presentation: Alaska Education Standards, the SMARTER Balanced, and the Common Core

[10:16:43 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS announced that the final order of business would be a presentation on Alaska Education Standards, the SMARTER Balanced [Assessment Consortium], and the Common Core [State Standards].

[10:17:56 AM](#)

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), offered to compare and contrast Alaska's standards to ones adopted in other states throughout the country. He said Alaska is fortunate that the governor has been willing to stand up for Alaskans' rights and ability to control its educational system, resources, and control our own destiny. He offered to share the same message with the committee that the EED has used to brief stakeholders around the state, including legislators, school districts, and superintendents.

[10:20:26 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY gave an overview of the state's education standards. He compared the state's standards with respect to the similarities of Common Core [State Standards] and the current Alaska education standards. First, Alaska's new education standards are similar to the Common Core [State Standards] with respect to the expectation of students. Certainly, Alaska's students need to be competitive, in the state, the country, and globally to obtain jobs. The state has that obligation and if students are not prepared they may not be able to find jobs outside their own community. The new standards [and Common Core State Standards] are similar for students. For example, by the end of kindergarten, students should know letter names and sounds; by the end of fourth grade students should be able to master capitalization and punctuation of sentences; and by the eighth grade students should understand algebraic concepts. Thus, the expectations are similar, but the difference is the ownership of the standards. The Common Core rules allow teachers to add up to 15 percent of [the curriculum]. He questioned who dictates this and who will tell the state what Alaska will put in its standards. In other words, the authority and ability to determine the state's standards should occur in Alaska. The Common Core "club" requires following the rules, which the EED is not interested in; however, the EED is interested in making certain students are competitive. In sum, there is a big ownership difference between the Common Core [standards] in

states using them and Alaska's educational standards. In particular, standards are designed to help make students competitive and successful and both standards do this; however, a vast difference occurs depending on who makes the decision about what to include or exclude in the standards and who "owns" the standards. Therefore, the department and governor are not willing to grant this to the people who own the Common Core standards. He said two organizations are credited with developing the Common Core [State Standards]: the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers; however, some questions exist with respect to behind the scenes decisions and who is making them. Again, he said he's not willing to relinquish these decisions to other states' commissioners. The EED has never hidden that the Alaska educational standards are rigorous.

[10:26:08 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY explained the significant difference between standards and curriculum. Standards set the target while the curriculum is up to local school districts via decisions made by local school boards and superintendents. For example, by the end of kindergarten a student should be able to know their letters and sounds. The standard doesn't indicate any methodology or pedagogical strategies or designate specific textbooks. Another standard would be to indicate that in eighth grade a student should know some algebraic concepts. While schools may choose to use standards to set goals, the curriculum is up to local school districts via decisions made by local school boards and superintendents. He also offered some regional examples. He clarified that lesson plans and methodology of teaching are not part of standards, but standards consist of targets to aim for.

[10:28:40 AM](#)

SUSAN MCCAULEY, Ph.D., Director, Teaching and Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), stated that she came to the department in January, but prior to that time held the position as principal of Birch Street School in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District (MSBSD) for two and a half years. She said that she and her staff spent last summer working on the school's curriculum, being informed by the new math and English standards. Certainly, teaching those standards looked very different than any other school in the district; however, the reason parents chose this charter school was to obtain a different teaching style. She reported she taught 308

students and to attain math standards one method was to incorporate knitting since it is a "big deal in a Waldorf method school." She also determined what standards could be used to incorporate art in the school; the point being that curriculum and teaching methods vary between schools, but the same standards are used. Again, the standards inform what kids should know and be able to do and the school had complete autonomy in the decision process of how to attain the Alaska education standards.

[10:30:12 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said that often the EED receives questions about curriculum but parents are directed to the local school board and decision-makers since they determine the school's curriculum. Furthermore, the Alaska standards have been in place for some time and although the standards have changed, they are systemically the same. Again, local districts determine how to address the current standards, he said.

[10:30:55 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY provided the background and history for adoption of Alaska's new English language arts and math standards. She reported the process took two years to review and develop. During this time, stakeholders from around Alaska worked on Alaska's standards, including representatives from K-12 teachers, the university, from career and technical education labor, and industry - totaling 229 people. The process included reviewing and identifying whether the current standards were as rigorous as the Common Core standards. The aforementioned new standards were sent out for public comment in December 2011. As previously stated, the new Alaska education standards share similarities to the Common Core standards, but differ in two primary areas. First, Alaska's stakeholders added language to the education standards to achieve clarity since the Common Core standards were not found to be sufficiently clear in some areas. Second, some standards were omitted by the Common Core standards that the Alaska group felt should be retained, primarily in the elementary grades in math measurement standards. An extended public comment period was held for six-months with the comment period ending in May 2012. She reported that 106 groups were invited to review and comment, including universities, Rotary clubs, Chambers of Commerce, and Native corporations. In the spring 2012, community meetings were held. For example, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District (MSBSD) meeting was held on April 9, 2012. Meetings were also held in Fairbanks,

Bethel, and Juneau in February and March 2013. Subsequently each state Board of Education member met with House Education Standing Committee members. The original education standards were changed using feedback from public comment. For example, the original standards omitted English language arts standards for social studies, science, and technical subjects, which are included in the Common Core standards. However, public comment overwhelmingly supported their inclusion so the new Alaska standards were revised and subsequently approved by state Board of Education and Early Development in June 2012. She added that 10 webinars were hosted by the EED that were disseminated via a public newsletter, with 18 different notices to solicit public comment. She characterized the process as a thorough local process. Additionally, the process included a standard-by-standard analysis of the rigor of the previous education standards as compared to the new education standards. In fact, the previous standards were far less rigorous than the new ones, she said.

[10:35:33 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY said she recently reviewed the math standards for grades 3-10, and found only found 68 of 358 standards were more rigorous in the Common Core standard than Alaska's prior educational standards; however, only 10 instances occurred in which Alaska's standards were more rigorous. Additionally, 81 standards were taught at a lower grade level in Common Core [standard] than in Alaska's prior standards. Further, Alaska educators reviewing the prior Alaska standards strongly supported changes. In fact, the educators felt that what had been happening across the country was to embrace far more rigorous standards and Alaska's educators felt something needed to be done to raise the standards to an acceptable level for Alaska's kids.

[10:36:33 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the new Alaska standards were submitted to University of Alaska (UA) Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), and were vetted and confirmed. He advised that the UA has been a primary stakeholder that found kids were typically not prepared for the university system. He reported that 64 percent of students required at least one remediation course, prior to taking college-level courses. Statistically, the university has found that the more remediation courses required, the more dramatically the chance for graduation also declines. Employers, such as Red Dog Mine, have reported that

Alaska's kids still need to know more. The biggest comment from educators has been that, "Wow, we are going to have to up our game a little bit."

[10:38:45 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY reported one other thing that reviewers found were that the standards were "first generation standards." The standards were good to provide direction, but needed coherence and clarity. The old standards were considered bulky and inconsistent. Therefore, it wasn't just content, but the old standards lacked clarity.

[10:39:46 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said district adopted the new standards about one year ago and these new Alaska standards were sent to every teacher and administrator in all 53 school districts. He characterized the scope as one that is currently being narrowed and deepened. Specifically, the number of standards that should be taught has been narrowed, with a better level of continuity. For example, the standards require integration and application of the knowledge, as well as analysis instead of memorization of facts. While content knowledge is critical, more importantly, how to use the knowledge has been incorporated. The EED has been offering training for teachers and leaders to help them change strategies in their classrooms. Further, five districts have requested the EED provide additional training this fall prior to school starting. He suggested that the department may request additional funding from the legislature to provide additional training. In Alaska, a few districts have adopted the Common Core [standards] since these school districts thought the current standards were not high enough, including Anchorage, Copper River, and Juneau. He recently spoke to the aforementioned districts and advised them that even though they have adopted the Common Core standards these districts still have the responsibility to meet state standards as per Alaska's statutes and regulations. Again, all school districts must adhere to the Alaska standards even if they differ from the Common Core standards. He characterized the districts as being in the mode of "shifting gears" with some seeking to modify their current curriculum and change their strategies and make adjustments from the old to the new standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY spoke about data mining. He characterized this as a separate conversation, which has come up with respect to SMARTER BALANCE, which he offered to touch on.

10:45:43 AM

DR. MCCAULEY stated that the current assessments are standards-based assessments, which will be similar to new assessments. She said the department worked with the Alaska Commission of Postsecondary Education, the UA, and the Department of Labor & Workforce Development around longitudinal data that helps the department better understand how kids are doing when they leave the K-12 system. She emphasized the importance of knowing whether the system has adequately prepared students to work in the workplace. Currently the department's data systems are not effective in providing that information. She said the department hears discussions with regard to remedial rates, but the department has not been able to look at specific contributing factors. In fact, the department does a lot of guessing right now since the information on K-12, the university system, and the workforce are completely disconnected systems. When people question what has contributed to a high remedial math and reading necessity for university freshman, the department cannot provide any data. The EED has been working with Alaska organizations to better assess when the educational system is adequately preparing people for college and life.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY pointed to the Alaska performance scholarships, which have been in place for several years. The department has been interested in knowing if the kids who qualify for the awards at the highest level are educated well enough to be successful. One way to provide that analysis is for the department to combine the data from the university and the K-12 system in order to make that determination.

10:49:28 AM

DR. MCCAULEY referred to page 25 of the English language arts standards, which indicate the foundational skills for K-5 classes. She stated that in grade 1, students should be able to distinguish between long and short vowel sounds in spoken single syllable words. Students should be able to decode regularly spelled one-syllable words and know final e and common vowel team conventions for representing long vowel sounds. In grade two students should be able to decode words with common prefixes and suffixes. She characterized these as very traditional and extremely important early literacy skills for kids. Moving to middle school, referring to page 46, she indicated that students must understand the elements of literature.

[10:50:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked for the specific reference.

DR. MCCAULEY responded that she is on page 46 of the document in members' packets entitled, "ALASKA ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS AND MATHEMATICS STANDARDS."

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the standards Dr. McCauley has referenced are the basic standards for learning to read.

[10:52:04 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY again referred to page 46. She provided an example of middle school standards: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; restate and summarize main ideas or events, in correct sequence, after reading a text. She said these are the elements of literature. She indicated this builds in complexity from 7th and 8th grade [as listed in columns 2 and 3]. She referred to page 48-49 to the grades 9-10 and read the standard: "Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]." She then referred to grades 11 and 12, and read the standard: "Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics."

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said prior to developing the new Alaska education standards, Alaska did not have any 11th or 12th grade standards.

DR. MCCAULEY turned to math, noting that the kindergarten standard speaks to adding and subtracting up to five and in first grade adding and subtracting up to 10; the second grade standard speak to adding and subtracting up to 20 and knowing single-digit sums from memory. She indicated that the standards have increased specificity of what a child should be able to do at each level. She indicated that it is not random and is very clear of what is expected at each grade level.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY pointed out that the means for teaching the standards were left to the local districts. Instead, standards set an expectation for the end of the grade.

10:55:31 AM

COMMISSIONER HANLEY provided background on state assessments. To begin with, he said the department's responsibility as a state is to establish and maintain a system of education for all students. To accomplish this, the department has defined four components. The first component sets standards for students. The second component assesses students on their proficiency and measures growth towards proficiency on the standards. The state developed the standards-based assessment (SBA) to measure growth on the previous standards. As the standards shift, the department looks to find an assessment to compare to the new standards. Typically, several options are available, including that the state can develop its own assessment or it can review other state assessments and seek one that aligns with the standards and measures of what is being taught. For example, the Iowa Basic Skills is a test the state used years ago, and while some believed the test aligns with Alaska, the company disagreed. Since the current tool did not align well with the new standards the state was faced with either developing an assessment or using an existing one. Certainly, the legislature has indicated that it's important to be able to compare students.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said currently, one assessment is used biennially to test fourth and eighth grade students, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). While this test doesn't align well, it is administered across the country. Alaska's standards are similar to the Common Core standards. Thus, the department decided the two assessments being used for the Common Core standards would provide valid and reliable results were the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and SMARTER Balanced. He described the difference between the two, such that one is based on multiple exams on end of unit and the other is based on a summit exam, given once a year. The department determined that SMARTER Balanced was a better fit for Alaska so the state joined in April as an advisory state. The department, the Board of Education, and the governor signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which allows the state to obtain an ability to get assessment for what is being developed, but the state has not paid or received any funds. The state has not purchased the scoring from SMARTER Balances, nor has it fully committed to the consortium. Instead, the state will be committing to purchase an assessment. He detailed that the assessment would provide item development, test construction, and analysis of the item. The state would receive an assessment, including an item bank

laid out in an adaptive format - either technology-based or "paper and pencil" format. The assessment would provide a tool to assess the growth of Alaska's students on the standards. However, SMARTER Balanced provides an assessment, which does not impact standards or curriculums - which is teaching. Instead, the assessments measure how effective teaching has been. He emphasized that the standards are separate, but the department seeks measurements on the state standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY clarified that there is not any curriculum tied to the standards since setting the curriculum is a local decision. Again, the state has not fully committed to the SMARTER Balanced consortium, although the department supports its work. He reported that the MOU other states signed required states to adopt the Common Core [standards]. However, Alaska omitted or "crossed off" that provision when it signed the MOU. The state indicated it will have adopted college and career ready standards, which is the target for kids. Furthermore, the state added a few sentences to the MOU unique to Alaska. He referred to page 3 of MOU, under responsibilities of states in the consortium, and read what was crossed out, "Each state agrees to adopt college and career ready standards and to which the consortium's assessment system will be aligned." However, Alaska added a statement to indicate that Alaska did not adopt the Common Core state standards, but has adopted new content standards that are college and career ready and sufficiently similar to the Common Core state standards that will provide valid and reliable results. In response to a comment from an unidentified person, he offered to speak to "Race to the Top" later.

11:06:17

COMMISSIONER HANLEY stated that nothing in the MOU requires the state to commit to any costs. However, the state spends \$50.43 for assessment per student to operate the assessment system, which totals about \$4 million. He pointed out that to purchase item development, test assessment, and analysis from SMARTER Balanced [Assessment Consortium] ranges approximately \$20 per student; however, the department recognizes that it will need to continue to provide project management and scoring. He estimated the total cost of participating in SMARTER Balanced [Assessment Consortium] will be about \$49.24, for a \$400,000 in savings. He anticipated the need for a paper and pencil test [in some districts], which would offset these savings. In fact, the department did not request an increment since it anticipates a wash.

11:08:24 AM

COMMISSIONER HANLEY explained that teachers can give less formal tests to measure how well students are progressing towards the end of the year tests. He advised that this information is for teachers and is not reported to the department. He was unsure of whether the district or the department would pay for these tests. He indicated the reporting would not change. He reported that the department currently uses a test company, Data Recognition Corporation (DRC). He turned to the technology component, noting one of the strengths of the SMARTER Balanced [Assessment Consortium] is that it is adaptive test. He predicted that if students know the answers, they will quickly move through the exam. If the student misses a question, the test will give a follow-up question for clarification of actual knowledge. For example, on math exams the question will hone in on the level of understanding of the basic math concept. Currently, testing has been conducted statewide for 11th grade students through WorkKeys. In short, the state has been able to successfully do this; however, he anticipated some new challenges. All states are moving to on-line testing and Alaska will also need to do so. The state needs to recognize how to accomplish this for all school districts, in particular, by identifying bandwidth, speed and capacity in all districts. He anticipated the department will know by the fall of 2013 which districts will be able to do on-line testing and which ones will continue to use paper and pencil tests. He questioned the validity of any test that the state is not able to give to all students. In fact, the state won't accept that and commit to get an assessment which will reflect how kids are doing on the standards, he said. He characterized this as the "bottom line" and one reason the state has selected SMARTER Balanced [Assessment Consortium], as well as to have insight in how the testing is developed. The department may have a chance to field test the assessment if districts are willing to do.

11:13:32 AM

COMMISSIONER HANLEY stated the state wants the best test available. He acknowledged that many testing companies are working on new tests, including ACT. He understood Alabama has adopted the test and Alaska will continue to carefully monitor it. He estimated that the ACT test would cost approximately \$1 less than the SMARTER Balanced tests. However, Alaska has a short window of time to give tests. He offered his belief that since an on-line assessment is much quicker, the window would be

expanded, but bandwidth represents a challenge. He provided some examples of how testing could occur using one computer lab for various grades.

DR. MCCAULEY added that numerous districts use measures for testing in math, in which a harder or easier question is given. These types of on-line tests have been used effectively in rural Alaska, including the Northwest Borough.

[11:16:39 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY discussed the federal "Race to the Top (RTT)" grants. One of the biggest "red flags" that emerged during the first round tied Common Core to funding. First the Common Core meant someone else would determine standards. Secondly, the department envisioned federal funding would be tied to the Common Core and the state said, "No thank you." In the second round, recognition was given for college and career ready standards and Alaska did not apply. In the third round, with the Early Learning Challenge, the state again did not apply. The state recognized that for significant amounts of money, some very strong strings existed, which forced states to take different directions. For example, the Early Learning Challenge had some good ideas, but was not a direction for state. Furthermore, the program required the state to implement things it was not willing to implement, and once the funds were depleted, Alaska would be committed to spend \$10 million annually. Therefore, the state did not apply for the "Race to the Top" since the cost was too high with significant federal overreach. He offered his belief the state is better off not participating, which he viewed as "leveraging our souls" to access federal funds.

[11:19:30 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY pointed to significant stakeholder input. He reported that he just returned from a conference and other commissioners indicated they quickly applied for federal grants. However, Alaska decided it was "not playing in your sandbox." Instead, Alaska has chosen to work with its stakeholders. He offered his belief that Alaska standards and expectations match up very closely to those in the Lower 48. He said the biggest difference is who will make the determination and content of the standards. Furthermore, Alaska wanted an assessment without the Common Core "strings". SMARTER Balanced [Assessment Consortium] has no strings attached, which allows Alaska flexibility and freedom, but uses Common Core [standards] as a tool to assess

students. He related that he has supported Alaska's position at Lower 48 meetings and is now hearing some states express that they wished they had vetted the standards before adopting them. Thus, he is comfortable with the decision for Alaska in terms of its standards. He predicted the new standards will be good for the educational system.

[11:23:37 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS understood that the state did not adopt the Common Core curriculum. Therefore the state did not receive any "Race to the Top" funding attributed to adopting the Common Core curriculum. She noted the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District (MSBSD) also did not adopt Common Core curriculum. She asked whether the Anchorage school district has adopted the Common Core curriculum.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said that the Anchorage School District adopted the Common Core state standards. He pointed out that there isn't any Common Core curriculum.

CHAIR GATTIS asked whether Anchorage school districts received any money for adopting the Common Core standards. She further asked for an explanation on the Anchorage School District's status.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered that the department does not track grants to school districts. However, he said that the "Race to Top" funds were very competitive and only a few states received funds. He offered his belief that he would have heard if Anchorage had received the funds.

CHAIR GATTIS asked what advantages school districts obtain for adopting the standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that the original reason was that some school districts adopted the Common Core standards before the state adopted its new standards. The Anchorage School District and the Juneau School Districts raised the bar over the previous standards. He was unsure if the school districts signed anything. He said that school districts have the responsibility to meet the state standards that have been adopted by the State Board of Education and in regulation. He indicated that school districts can adopt other standards but the districts must make certain the standards meet the minimum state standards.

CHAIR GATTIS agreed that is what she heard at the beginning of the testimony. She offered to summarize the commissioner's testimony, such that the Alaska state standards are similar to the Common Core standards; however, the curriculum is decided on locally by school districts and school boards. She further understood that the cost for assessment for the state for SMARTER Balanced has not yet been formalized. She said, "We haven't jumped off the cliff and connected our self with SMARTER Balanced, where it just escalates and escalates." She acknowledged cost over time is a concern. She related her understanding that the state has not particularly agreed which standards the state would adopt.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY clarified that Alaska has joined SMARTER Balanced [Assessment Consortium], which he characterized as being the "front runner" and the direction the EED is taking. However, he indicated that the state will continue to monitor other standards since the state has until 2015 to decide.

CHAIR GATTIS appreciated highlighting the distinction between the standards and assessments and a briefing on the state's decisions and directions on assessments to date.

[11:29:53 AM](#)

LORIE [KOPPENBERG] understood the commissioner to state that Alaska has joined the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium, which means Alaska has given up its sovereign voice to a group that is led by a Washington State group. She asked for an analysis of the Common Core standards document entitled, "Cooperative Agreement" which she identified as an agreement between Alaska, Washington, and the EED. She further understood the state is collectively a recipient of the "Race to the Top" funding. This would require synchronizing the test between (indisc.) which is illegal under the 10th Amendment. She expressed concern about sharing data collected by these tests and that any involvement with Common Core standards will allow the federal government access to information in state and local schools. She further expressed concern about the lack of process [in adopting standards.]

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said that state had not given up anything. He said the state has not accepted any "Race to the Top" funds, which are being used to develop the assessments. He clarified that Alaska has not paid for anything and SMARTER Balanced [Education Consortium] does not have any access into Alaska unless it purchases an assessment.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTIS indicated numerous parents have been involved in the process and this will be an ongoing discussion. She said she appreciated Commissioner Hanley being a part of this process.

[11:32:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAN SADDLER, Alaska State Legislature, asked how many states were advisory to the SMARTER Balanced [education] consortium and how it works to only be partially committed. He further asked if it would be possible to obtain statistically relevant comparisons between Alaska's performance and other states.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that as advisory state, Alaska has had a say in conversation, but not a vote. He did not know how many states were advisory members versus members. He suggested that the EED would need to examine the standards, but he estimated that the state's new standards and the Common Core standards are very close, probably 95 percent similar. He anticipated that the test will be valid and will provide accurate results.

[11:34:56 AM](#)

JENNIE BETTINE, who also serves as the President of the Conservative Patriots Group of Alaska, began by asking about the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which she said also is the document that requests federal grant funds. She asked whether Alaska is requesting federal funds by submitting the systems grant application to implement the program. Additionally, she understood the testing is limited to English and math, but does not cover American history. She offered her belief that 24 states are now questioning whether their states should be involved in Common Core standards, noting these are not proven standards. She characterized this as "leaping to the federal government" and while she heard testimony that Alaska is not giving up any rights, she surmised that the curriculum would ultimately be affected.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered that Alaska is not seeking federal funding to implement the test. He said the EED's funding for assessments is adequate to implement the standards.

DR. MCCAULEY, with respect to the comment that standards might inappropriately drive local curriculum, responded that if the

expectation is that students will know their multiplication facts by third grade, teachers will do what they can to make sure kids know them. However, what doesn't happen is the ability to dictate how that will occur. For example, she recently worked with the North Slope Borough School District (NSBSD), noting the NSBSD has a very integrated approach to curriculum - which isn't happening anywhere else. The NSBSD's curriculum has been driven by the content standards for English language, arts, and math and the Inupiat learning framework, which was locally developed and contains the concepts the communities on the North Slope want their children to know and perform. In particular, the curriculum has been influenced by the local Inupiat culture. She said she reviewed the curriculum map and the NSBSD's direction to teachers in the region to show how the students will learn the content and meet the curriculum. In fact, she has found that the local culturally informed expectation and the curriculum is very different than any in the country. She highlighted that her example emphasizes that standards inform content and local control over curriculum. Certainly, a local district may choose to adopt a textbook series as a primary way to teach children, in part, to allow mobility between schools in the district and consistency between schools. However, she concluded that these decisions are local decisions and local school boards make the decisions.

[11:39:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WES KELLER, Alaska State Legislature, asked how much responsibility the EED has in terms of whether students learn. He further asked whether the department receives money to ensure that children learn. He suggested this issue is a distraction since the standards have existed for a long time. He recalled that National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicated students have a 35-percent proficiency level.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY acknowledged that the EED has the responsibility, since the department sets the standards and assessments for districts. He agreed the department has responsibilities for support and oversight; however, he cautioned that the department does not teach students.

DR. MCCAULEY said she spent time this past week with school officials. She reported that school districts often request more assistance from the department and she often must clarify the department's role and statutory obligations. She also said she works to outline the parameters to ensure stakeholders have

adequate input so they know how to proceed to ensure the outcome based on local preferences.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY gave an anecdote, but also agreed that the department cannot support one vendor over another.

[11:43:22 AM](#)

BARBARA [CARTER] said she attended a meeting on Common Core training in Fairbanks that didn't make sense to her. She expressed concern about Lower 48 money being spent to influence education standards in Alaska. She stated that it seemed as though the West End and University of Maine were involved.

[11:46:09 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY recalled attending a department's meeting on Common Core training that didn't make sense to him either. He suggested that someone just put together a flyer and put Common Core training on it. He asked Dr. McCauley to respond.

MS. CARTER asked whether the responsibility rests with the commissioner and again, she expressed concern with Lower 48 funds in entities affecting Alaska's educational standards.

DR. MCCAULEY interjected that the Alaska Administrative Coaching project is entirely an Alaska program that mentors principals and superintendents during their first two or three years in administrative positions in the state. She said there is no affiliation with [any other organization]. It's affiliation with the University of Maine [Center for Research and Evaluation at the University of Maine has administered an annual evaluation for the Alaska Administrator Coaching Project since 2008]. She related that the university conducts a survey for \$2,500 per year given to participants in the coaching program to determine the degree to which it is has or has not been helpful to increase the skills they think are necessary as administrators in Alaska. She reiterated that the AACP is entirely a State of Alaska initiative similar to Alaska Statewide Mentor Project that supports teachers during their early years in Alaska to reduce turnover in Alaska. She then referred to the training in Fairbanks and indicated the reason the flyers read Common Core was because there were administrators from Anchorage present. The initial advertisement said, "Alaska Standards/Common Core" but when it came to the department's attention, it was corrected. Finally, the program is an EED program and the department feels no responsibility to be training people in

Alaska with respect to the Common Core standards; instead, the department trains about its standards. The department has given clear direction that EED sponsored events are not to reference Common Core standards.

[11:50:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD said the House Education Committee did not adopt Common Core [state standards] and was not consulted on it, nor does the committee have anything to do with SMARTER Balanced [Assessment Consortium]. She expressed four concerns. First, she was glad to see the state adopted Alaska standards and not the Common Core standards. However, she is still a skeptic regarding Common Core. She said that on February 20, 2013 a MOU between the Department of Administration (DOA) that talks about federal content standards and gives the state the ability to do the SMARTER Balanced; however, the funding was through the U.S. Department of Education. She expressed concern about federal overreach. She offered her belief that this appears to be a massive federal undercurrent. She said the MOU discussed aligning the assessments with the Common Core standards. Additionally, she referred to page 6 of the aforementioned MOU signed by the department and governor about "becoming part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), which is also a federal program. She referred to page 8, which she said discusses Washington being the lead state, which she found alarming. She recently attended the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) meeting. She said she asked where the funds would be going and was advised the University of California - Los Angeles (UCLA), which she found to be a red flag. Finally, she said she attended a STEM program last week. She expressed concern that too many red flags are being raised that Alaska is not establishing its own program. She asked for assurance not to lose state sovereignty when the MOU says that each state agrees to identify any existing barriers in state law, statutes, regulations, or policy noting the barrier and how it will remove the barrier.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTIS asked to have the statement held in order to take more questions.

[11:53:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON directed attention to page 7, of the MOU, which outlines the responsibilities of an advisory state. He pointed out that the MOU was written for all participating states, but the addendum outlines the responsibilities of an

advisory state. He asked members to review the MOU carefully and look at the commitment to an advisory state with respect to the commitments. He further asked how the new Alaska standards narrowed the previous standards.

CHAIR GATTIS asked the department to hold its responses to allow for public testimony [since time is short.]

[11:55:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked about item development, which SMARTER Balanced would assess. He next asked if EED would have an additional assessment based on the 14 additional items for comparison. Finally, he asked if there would be mini servers to allow each of the school districts to increase their bandwidth and participate.

[11:57:40 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TAMMIE WILSON, Alaska State Legislature, speaking as the Chair of the Finance subcommittee on Education, said the committee has been conducting its own test and test scores. She said that the districts can adopt more rigorous standards. In addition, school districts have the ability to apply for federal funding without the blessing of the state. She related her understanding that the department would be looking at a test consistent with those in other states. Otherwise, she wondered how the state will be able to compare Alaska's students to students in other states. She further asked about the "cut scores" and if they will be set by the consortium or the state.

[11:59:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked specifically about any personal questions on the test since parents don't necessarily want their children to disclose personal information. She further asked whether the state has any control over this.

[12:00:28 PM](#)

AMY [THOMAS] stated she is a grandmother who is very interested in the educational system and she is a former teacher. She offered her belief that the state is looking at the wrong subject. She said the state already has standards and the students haven't been meeting the lower standards so why would the state move to higher standards. She questioned the reason

there isn't any discussion on why students can't meet the lower standards. She hasn't heard anything about this from anyone.

12:01:13 PM

WAYNE OZOSKY said he was representing his daughter. He understood the department supports the Common Core standards. In response to a comment, he agreed it was the Common Core curriculum. He asserted that the department is setting up students and teachers to fail. He offered his belief that teachers are being blocked from speaking publically about Common Core standards and wondered why this is so since this isn't Germany in 1933. In fact, teachers can't even discuss this. He expressed concern that his daughter is not learning math. In response to a question, he indicated his daughter is in the Eagle River, which is the Anchorage School District.

CHAIR GATTIS understood his concern about the curriculum. She clarified that there is a difference between standards and curriculum, as previously stated by the commissioner. He suggested that Mr. Ozosky talk to some of the Anchorage legislators, such as Representative Drummond, who previously served on the Anchorage School Board.

12:03:26 PM

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON also understood Mr. Ozosky's concerns. She said that some schools have been teaching subjects very well, but others have not. She asked how the commissioner ensures that the school district is doing what it is supposed to do.

CHAIR GATTIS noted questions will be held for the commissioner.

12:04:27 PM

MIKE COONS asked about the elephant in the room. He said this issue has been raised because Common Core which has been compiled by leftists. He offered his belief kids are not more intelligent now than previously, but some are "right brained" or "left brained" and learn differently. He opined that these ideas are coming from "leftists" including President Obama.

12:06:34 PM

ANNIE REEL (ph) stated she is from the Matanuska-Susitna valley and does not have any children. She asked about the impact of

the program for the good of the country and students. She expressed concern that the SMARTER Balanced and Common Core [standards] don't contain education on history or the U.S. Constitution. She said she thought it was scary. She has listened to some of the SMARTER Balanced videos, which she found sickening. She asked how this [decision on standards] will affect students. She wondered about data mining and cautioned against students answering personal questions. She indicated she did not like the direction this is going in. She appreciated the committee's efforts and while she understood that the state is not yet committed she expressed her concern, especially since this [SMARTER Balanced and Common Core] is nationwide. She offered her belief that all of this needs to be scrubbed and students need to be brought up to the standards, noting the state has been failing in this regard.

[12:10:03 PM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS noted that many people had travelled to testify since this is an important issue.

[12:10:31 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SHELLEY HUGHES, Alaska State Legislature, encouraged members to listen to the videos on the data being given. She asked for clarification on the five percent difference between the Alaska Education Standards and SMARTER Balanced and Common Core standards. Secondly, she expressed concern that [personal] student data will be revealed. Finally, she expressed interest in whether the department has made any commitment on scoring through SMARTER Balanced. In closing, she reiterated her interest in what type of data will be released so she can assure parents that information on their children won't be released [to the public or federal government].

[12:13:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER offered his belief that standards are important. It's important for policymakers to establish where Alaska [students are] in comparison to other states. He wanted to validate the concerns people have had that standards become curriculum, which becomes textbooks. He appreciated parents and grandparents spending time to attend an education meeting during the interim. He also commended Representative Keller on his bill to teach constitutionalism in schools.

CHAIR GATTIS reminded testifiers that the department would not have an opportunity to respond to questions today since the committee is about out of time.

[12:14:14 PM](#)

BARBARA HANEY stated she is an economist and was previously an educator at the state and university level in Alaska. She expressed concern about the data that is available through the EED. (Indisc.) The American Institute for Research (AIR), which she has a copy of, is a company that has done a lot of work on mental health, transgender education, and {indisc.} technology. She was curious on the governor's (indisc.). (Indisc.) She said it's been a problem in other states and she's deeply troubled by it. She found some things to be incredibly deceptive.

[12:16:44 PM](#)

MS. KOPPENBERG said she was a Matanuska-Susitna valley resident. She asked who made the decision to start pursuing changes to the Alaska Education Standards. She asked whether it was the commissioner or from Governor Parnell. She understood that Anchorage has adopted the Common Core standard. She also understood that something was happening at the Matanuska-Susitna School District level that will be implemented that is very similar. She expressed concern and said parents could participate and stop this.

CHAIR GATTIS asked for her question by e-mail so she could pass it on to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District superintendent.

[12:18:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON clarified that the Alaska State Legislature and House Education Standing Committee determined that Alaska Education Standards were not rigorous enough to support teachers to challenge students, especially as compared to other states. Thus the emphasis for change [in standards] began with the legislature. Given the lack of a longitudinal data base, elementary school student records did not follow students to high school or to college. Further, many administrations - not just Governor Parnell's administration - have been trying to improve education in Alaska. In fact, the Alaska legislature did not think education would be improved by making standards weaker or by not using longitudinal data. He

indicated that Common Core is a group of standards developed in part by the Governors' Associations in the Lower 48. However, Alaska was already moving in the direction of creating a longitudinal data base to assist students as well as working to increase standards with the goal to prepare Alaska's students once they leave school. He stated that the proposed changes are not ones made by a single person, but represent changes to standards that have evolved as Alaska has addressed improving the educational system in Alaska. Finally, the committee has held many hearings to tackle how to improve education.

[12:21:37 PM](#)

MS. KOPPENBERG stated that some personally identifiable information has not been yet sent but has been formally requested by several websites including the national data collection model, the data quality campaign, and the common educational data standards sites. She asked who will determine at what point the Alaska will release personally identifiable information, including names, social security numbers, health and psychological information to the federal government. She recalled that at a recent federal event it was said that Common Core [standards] represents the glue that makes all the data collection possible. She offered her belief that "rigorous" also needs to be defined.

[12:23:50 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES asked the department to examine the political agenda so the legislature is informed if anything in the Alaska Education Standards and whether it is coming through to the curriculum chosen at the local level as opposed to the standards.

[12:24:25 PM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS recalled discussions in other committees and asked to "piggyback" on this. With respect to resource development, she said that the legislature [and the state] acknowledges that it is a resource development state so an anti-resource development curriculum certainly goes against what many Alaskans believe.

[12:24:53 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 12:24 p.m.