

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 7, 2014

8:05 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

HOUSE BILL NO. 278

"An Act increasing the base student allocation used in the formula for state funding of public education; repealing the secondary student competency examination and related requirements; relating to high school course credit earned through assessment; relating to a college and career readiness assessment for secondary students; relating to charter school application appeals and program budgets; relating to residential school applications; increasing the stipend for boarding school students; extending unemployment contributions for the Alaska technical and vocational education program; relating to earning high school credit for completion of vocational education courses offered by institutions receiving technical and vocational education program funding; relating to education tax credits; making conforming amendments; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 220

"An Act repealing the secondary student competency examination and related requirements; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 1

Proposing amendments to the Constitution of the State of Alaska relating to state aid for education.

- MOVED HJR 1 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 245

"An Act repealing the required local contribution to school funding; making conforming changes; and providing for an effective date."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 278

SHORT TITLE: EDUCATION: FUNDING/TAX CREDITS/PROGRAMS

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/24/14	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/14	(H)	EDC, FIN
02/03/14	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/03/14	(H)	Heard & Held
02/03/14	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/07/14	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HB 220

SHORT TITLE: REPEAL SECONDARY SCHOOL EXIT EXAM

SPONSOR(s): HIGGINS, MILLETT, GARA, GATTIS, T.WILSON, THOMPSON

01/21/14	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/14
01/21/14	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/21/14	(H)	EDC
02/05/14	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/05/14	(H)	Heard & Held
02/05/14	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/07/14	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HJR 1

SHORT TITLE: CONST. AM: EDUCATION FUNDING

SPONSOR(s): KELLER

01/16/13	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/7/13
01/16/13	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/13	(H)	EDC, JUD, FIN
02/22/13	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/22/13	(H)	Heard & Held
02/22/13	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)

03/01/13 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/01/13 (H) Heard & Held
03/01/13 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
02/07/14 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with official support for HB 278 sections specific to repealing the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE); and responded to questions.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Responded to questions, during the hearing on HB 278.

THOMAS STUDLER, Staff
Representative Pete Higgins
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Explained the proposed Committee Substitute (CS) for HB 220, on behalf of Representative Higgins, Prime Sponsor.

MIKE COONS
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HB 220 and specifically Sec. 2 of HB 278.

DAVID NEES
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HB 220 and specifically Sec. 2 of HB 278.

MARY NANUWAK
Chevak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments on the importance of education, during the hearing on HB 220

POSIE BOGGS
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concern for state reading levels, during the hearing on HB 220.

JIM POUND, Staff
Representative Wes Keller
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HJR 1, on behalf of Representative Keller, Prime Sponsor.

TOM COBAUGH
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 1.

BOB GRIFFIN
Eagle River

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 1.

BETHANY MARCUM
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 1.

MEGAN LOCKARD
(No address provided)

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

MICHAEL CHAMBERS, Chair
Alaskan Libertarian Party
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with official support for HJR 1.

ELIZABETH MANNING
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

MIKE PRAX
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 1.

MARITZA BLADA
Sterling, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 1.

MARY TOUTONGHI
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

BILL LIGHT
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 1.

MIKE COONS
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 1.

KRISTINA JOHANNES
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 1.

MARTHA FREEMAN
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

LISA PAESANI
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

TERRIE GOTTSTEIN
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

HOPE FINKELSTEIN
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition for HJR 1.

LADAWN DRUCE, Representative
National Education Association of Alaska (NEAA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with official opposition to HJR 1.

STEPHEN O'BRIEN
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

JOE BOYLE, President
Matanuska-Susitna Education Association
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

ALISON ARIANS
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

ANDY HOLLEMAN, President
Anchorage Education Association (AEA)

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with official opposition to HJR 1.

MEGAN RICHOTTE

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

DEENA MITCHELL

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

DAVID NEES

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 1.

DANNA GRAMMER, Business Owner

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

DON GRAY

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

MARY GRAHAM

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

ANN FULLER

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

MARY HAKALA

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with opposition to HJR 1.

ANDREA STORY, Member

Juneau School Board

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with official opposition to HJR 1.

SUSAN SIMMONS

Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 1.

ACTION NARRATIVE

8:05:12 AM

CHAIR LYNN GATTIS called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. Representatives Gattis, Seaton, Drummond, Saddler, Reinbold, LeDoux, and Reinbold were present at the call to order.

HB 278-EDUCATION: FUNDING/TAX CREDITS/PROGRAMS

[Testimony for both HB 278 and HB 220 were taken simultaneously, during the hearing on HB 220; the second agenda item.]

8:06:03 AM

CHAIR GATTIS announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 278, "An Act increasing the base student allocation used in the formula for state funding of public education; repealing the secondary student competency examination and related requirements; relating to high school course credit earned through assessment; relating to a college and career readiness assessment for secondary students; relating to charter school application appeals and program budgets; relating to residential school applications; increasing the stipend for boarding school students; extending unemployment contributions for the Alaska technical and vocational education program; relating to earning high school credit for completion of vocational education courses offered by institutions receiving technical and vocational education program funding; relating to education tax credits; making conforming amendments; and providing for an effective date."

CHAIR GATTIS established that today's hearing would deal exclusively with the bill sections addressing the repeal of the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE); in concert with HB 220 to be heard sequentially.

8:06:34 AM

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), described the original intent of the exam, and testified with official support for the repeal of the HSGQE requirement, as addressed through the pertinent sections contained in HB 278.

8:08:10 AM

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether the HSGQE has been used to track accountability regarding school performance or student attainment of proficiency standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY clarified that a high stakes assessment is a tool for the student to prove competency; however, all assessment are a reflection of school performance, as well, due to the integral nature of the educational system.

[8:09:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX noted that the standards may have changed, since the inception of the HSGQE, as a minimal proficiency indicator, but stressed the need for continued testing to measure the knowledge a student has garnered during their school career. She suggested the elimination of all school exams, if the concern is that some students may fail.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the HSGQE is unique in that it is a high stakes exam; failure to pass this exam precludes a student from receiving a diploma. Other assessment tests remain available to indicate student achievement levels, such as the Standards Based Assessments (SBAs), administered in grades three through ten. He said employers will still be able to review a student's transcript scores but this legislation will remove the practice of having a test requirement connected directly to the receipt of a high school diploma.

[8:11:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked how necessary it is for the exit exam to be aligned with education standards. He conjectured that there is naturally some overlap in reading, writing, and other studies.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said, "We assess what we teach." It would be erroneous to assess something that has not been taught; however, currently the HSGQE is geared to assess what is now taught in middle school rather than the high school curriculum; in that respect it is important for the test to be aligned with what is being taught.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER questioned whether it stands as an indictment of the student or the test standards, if there is failure to pass.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY established that concern is raised if, by the twelfth grade, a student is unable to pass the HSGQE considering it is targeted to test skills that are expected to be learned in the eighth, ninth, and tenth grade levels. He added that student failure can result in scrutiny of a school's practices, along with other factors.

[8:13:14 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY moved onto the other two components of the Alaska Education Opportunity Act pertinent to repealing the HSGQE. A critical aspect is the transitional language, intended to address students who have graduated without passing the exam and instead of a diploma received a Certificate of Achievement; having achieved all other graduation requirements. Under this component, those specific students may retest and earn a diploma within a three year window; through 2017. The second component is the inclusion of assessments that best meet the needs of students and will provide them with an opportunity to qualify for the Alaska Performance Scholarship. It also includes the necessary information for other potential career steps beyond high school. The assessments would be taken during the last two years of school, eleventh or twelfth grade, and allows options for taking the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT), American College Testing (ACT), or WorkKeys. He noted that employers are using the WorkKeys assessment on a greater scale, and colleges and universities continue to refer to the SAT and ACT scores for entrance criteria. He said this section intentionally shifts the requirement from the need to pass a high stakes exam to taking a readiness/competency assessment that will act as an informative tool for students, parents, colleges, and employers. It's a shift of focus from state accountability to providing useful information to the student.

[8:16:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX said it appears that administering a high stakes examination to a high school student is inappropriate, and asked if that impression is correct.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said high stakes exams are not necessarily inappropriate, and eight other states have implemented the practice. However, by tying the test to earning a diploma it is imperative that it be done intentionally, correctly and administered with a sense of fairness for the students. He said the HSGQE is not providing what the department desires, and is no longer warranted.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether the test could be revised for applicability to what is being taught; what would be wrong with making that adjustment.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY stated his belief that, with the new standards and new assessments, the educational system has the ability to measure proficiency, engage and meet the needs of students, without a high stakes exam.

[8:17:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON noted that HB 278 proposes to repeal existing statute that requires the WorkKeys assessment be taken by every student in the eleventh grade, with the option to retake in the twelfth for an improved score, and the results become part of the student's transcript. Thus, employers can evaluate the skill status of a potential hire via access to the transcripts. He pointed out that this measure was a policy established through this committee, and received support of the full legislature, and opined that eliminating this assessment would prove problematic. Through a series of theoretical situations, he illustrated how a student without the WorkKeys score on their transcript might be disadvantaged, to wit: if college is not pursued or completed and the young person seeks work, someone with an assessment score could be considered a more desirable applicant for hire than someone whose transcripts did not contain the WorkKeys ranking information. Further, he pointed out that SAT and ACT scores are not available or used in the same manner by potential employers as the WorkKeys assessment information. He requested:

I want your frank opinion on whether exempting all kids that are going to college from taking, and having WorkKeys on their transcripts, actually degrades in the minds of high school students, the value of the WorkKeys test and also what employers are going to do with kids that think they're going to go to college and then don't complete [their degree].

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the WorkKeys assessment would not be eliminated, but it would no longer be a requirement of every student. The transmittal and content of transcript information is not expected to change under the proposed section of HB 278, and he offered to review the language for further assurance. He said the intent is to provide students access to tools that will assist them in pursuits beyond high school. Some students may

not take the WorkKeys assessment seriously, he opined, if they don't feel it is applicable to the direction they have chosen, particularly a definite postsecondary path; however, any student would still have the option to take the WorkKeys assessment.

8:23:03 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON recalled that the original act required the WorkKeys score to be included on the transcript and HB 278 does not delete the language from statute. Thus, if employers across the state, who have begun to rely on the WorkKeys information as a hiring tool, notice it not being on a transcript, it would cause question and put a student without a score at a distinct disadvantage. He maintained concern for not having all eleventh grade students complete the WorkKeys assessment and opined that junior year students are typically incentivized to apply themselves to their remaining semesters of high school study in order to achieve higher, final, WorkKeys scores that become a permanent part of their high school transcripts. Removal of the requirement will cause the loss of this incentivizing effort for continued rigorous study. Current law requires a WorkKeys score as part of a student's transcripts, and HB 278 does not indicate that SAT or ACT information will be required. He acknowledged that a well-crafted resume could satisfy an employer, but the information would not be verifiable without this information on a transcript.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY pointed out that the WorkKeys assessment can be taken at any time by anyone through the state work placement centers. He pointed out that HB 278 proposes to have the state fund the cost for the administration of two assessment exams of the student's choice. Thus, a student might choose the WorkKeys one year and the SAT, or ACT, for another year, scores that could prove personally useful, without additional expense. He said this provides an opportunity to receive scores to support either choice of technical/workforce or college pursuit, rather than an elimination of an option.

8:25:49 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER acknowledged that the HSGQE is no longer considered a good assessment tool and should be eliminated. He opined that clarity of the terminology is important, and stated his understanding: a test indicates a pass or failure of a minimum score, with appropriate consequences attached, in this case a diploma versus a Certificate of Attendance; the term

assessment indicatives a student's standing on a continuum ranging from absolute perfection to utter failure; and a standard provides the benchmark against which a student is tested. He asked if there are standards and minimum performance levels attached to the achievement of a diploma that would provide useful, measurable information; beyond warming a chair for four years.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY named many of the requirements that are necessary to graduate and receive a diploma, which include attendance, designated courses of study with specific credit requirements, achievement of total credits, and completion of the state SBA examinations. He reviewed how HB 278 removes the high stakes test score requirement for receiving a diploma, while leaving in place specific requirements and formative assessments to track student proficiency. He assured that testing still occurs in order to receive credit in required classes.

[8:28:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND noted the previous mention that the WorkKeys assessment can be taken by a job seeker at any time, at a local job center, and asked about the cost to the individual to have it administered.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY deferred.

[8:29:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX agree with the previous members statements regarding the need for testing as a means to establish student standing, and added that it acts as a guard to the general public; the bar exam for example.

[8:30:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON recalled that at the time WorkKeys was made a requirement there was consideration given to eliminating the HSGQE, with the expectation for removing the high stakes exam while providing employers with a useable reference for the skill sets that an applicant would have achieved. He opined that HB 278 represents a retreat from the principle of the statute that was established to provide this meaningful, universal skillset indicator, as a reference for employers.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that, if it is the intent of the legislature to maintain the WorkKeys assessment requirement and also have the state pay for an SAT/ACT exam, the goal to provide students an opportunity to test for vocational as well as college careers, would still be intact.

[8:34:30 AM](#)

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), clarified that the State School Board oversaw the WorkKeys assessment requirement written into the department regulations, 4 AAC 06.717, but it does not appear in state statute.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON maintained that the mission was to ensure that a student would leave high school with something more than a disparate graduation diploma. As proposed, HB 278 would eliminate the HSGQE, and WorkKeys would remain as the only assessment information on the transcript. He opined that two actions occur: uniformity of knowledge regarding what a diploma represents is lost; and a two tiered system is delineated in which anyone planning to attend college would not be required to take the WorkKeys assessment, with resulting unintended consequences.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the bill allows the student to choose the appropriate tool for their future use, and does not alter teaching standards, or student preparation, expectations and requirements.

[8:37:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER noted the \$500,000 savings by not administering the HSGQE, and inquired about the cost to proctor the SAT, ACT, or WorkKeys per time, per student; what will the cost difference be for eliminating the HSGQE and administering one other three exams.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the department anticipates a cost of \$52.50 per person for the SAT, and given the cohort of 10,000 students across the state, the cost in one year should be approximately \$525,000. The WorkKeys cost is about \$2.7 million. A contractual obligation also exists with the vendor who provides the HSGQE assessment and, thus, the cost cannot be entirely removed from the fiscal note. Additionally, the department is negotiating with the contractor to continue to provide the HSGQE, on a smaller scale, over the next three

years. He finished, explaining the details of the negative \$900,000 fiscal note. To a follow-up he estimated that it could cost \$1.3 million, per year, to exit the contract and continue administration to a handful of students over a three year period. He further clarified that the HSGQE is administered at a cost of roughly \$2.7 million, and the WorkKeys carries a cost of \$411,000 to the mentioned cohort.

[8:41:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND agreed with needing to repeal the HSGQE, and cautioned that the move away from administering too many exams may result in requiring too few.

[8:43:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked how many students receive a certificate of attendance versus a diploma, each year. He said spending money to maintain a routine for proctoring an examination, when a student has not fulfilled other graduation requirements would be difficult to justify.

MR. MORSE responded that numbers range from a high of 410 to a low of 265, with a total of 2,963 overall who have received a certificate of achievement since the exam has been in place. To a follow-up question, he clarified that the statistics represent the number of individuals who received a certificate of achievement, since 2004. The number who have achieved the goal of receiving a diploma is about 160 in recent years, and some will be proctored multiple times in order to pass all parts of the test. He offered to provide additional, specific data.

[8:47:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked for an explanation of the GED.

MR. MORSE said it is a general education diploma, which was introduced following World War II to allow veterans who had not completed high school a means to attain a diploma equivalency and enter the workforce on an equal footing with peers who were graduates. It has changed over time and is administered by the Department of Labor and Work Force Development.

CHAIR GATTIS announced HB 278 was held over.

HB 220-REPEAL SECONDARY SCHOOL EXIT EXAM

[8:47:21 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 220, "An Act repealing the secondary student competency examination and related requirements; and providing for an effective date."

CHAIR GATTIS added that testimony for both HB 220 and the preceding bill, HB 278, would be taken jointly; as the topic in both pertains to the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE).

[8:48:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD moved to adopt the proposed Committee Substitute (CS) for HB 220, labeled 28-LS0947\U, Mischel, 2/6/14.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON objected to hear the proposed changes.

[8:49:02 AM](#)

THOMAS STUDLER, Staff, Representative Pete Higgins, Alaska State Legislature, pointed out that the CS makes two changes to the original bill. First, a section has been added to allow a sunset period for completing the test, until 2017; secondly the effective date has been changed from 7/1/2014, to 9/1/2014.

[8:49:41 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS noted that this is the transitional language, alluded to by the EED Commissioner, Mike Hanley, during the previous bill discussion on HB 278.

[8:49:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON removed his objection. Without further objection, Version U was before the committee.

[8:50:13 AM](#)

MR. STUDLER said that HB 278 includes comprehensive discussion of school examinations, beyond the scope of HB 220; however, two sections are identical.

[8:51:22 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS recapped that HB 220 is titled to address the HSGQE only, whereas HB 278 includes considerations of other tests and assessments, including the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT), American College Testing (ACT), or WorkKeys.

[8:51:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON expressed plans to offer an amendment to remove Sec. 6 of HB 278, effectively removing the three year transitional language, and cited that approximately 80 students per year might benefit by the legislation, at a cost of \$1.3 million. Alternatives to accomplish the same end exist, such as the availability of the general educational development (GED), he said, and underscored the need to consider fiscal responsibility.

[8:53:13 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS asserted that the test is a state mandate for every graduate. She acknowledged the high cost of offering the extended exam period and pointed out that it is also expensive, monetarily and socially, for anyone who doesn't hold a diploma. She said it is a challenge to equate the balance.

[8:53:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND recalled the discussion regarding the contract that exists with the provider of the test, and suggested a more timely elimination may not be possible depending on the terms of agreement.

[8:53:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX pointed out that current statute may already include proviso for re-testing, and the effects will need to be considered. Additionally, she commented that a retroactive effective date may solve the issue. Agreement appears to exist that at some point the HSGQE ceased to serve its intended purpose, she observed, and suggested awarding everyone a diploma that from that established point forward.

[8:54:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON agreed that either a transition period or a retroactive date could be necessary or a legal challenge may arise.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON stated his understanding that only students from the current school year would be a concern, and they would have notice to accomplish any re-testing within a plausible time frame; 9/1/14.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked why not eliminate the HSGQE immediately, rather than go through the complete exercise in May, 2014.

MR. STUDLER said, "Good point."

[8:57:00 AM](#)

MIKE COONS stated opposition to HB 220 and Sec. 2 of HB 278, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I am in favor of the vast majority of HB 278, however, I do object to Section 2. I oppose HB 220 transitional aspects.

I propose changing Section 2 to read:

Lines 12-18 change to read: Sec. 14.03.075. College and career assessments.

(a) A student shall be issued a secondary school diploma upon completing all required course study throughout High School with a 2.0 GPA or higher.

(b) A student who fails to qualify for the issuance of a diploma under

(a) of this section will be held back so the student can retake the needed courses to meet the 2.0 GPA requirement, upon successful completion the diploma will be issued.

I have spoken to this in the exit exam bills, both House and Senate opposing transition and my proposal here mirrors the proposal for changing transition in SB 111.

To Rep LeDoux and Seaton. Administration last week testified that last year 700 kids did not pass the exit exam. If I'm not mistaken, this was not failures by handicapped. These kids are in the workforce and

I'm sure not having a sheep skin is giving them some problems, but if they are smart they will get the transcripts of High School and give to employer's. Lastly, my last employer had nothing asking for WorkKeys test results, just if graduated High School. Remember, these young adults are entry level employee's and not seeking jobs that are in need of high level of knowledge, education and experience. If I take a WorkKeys, at age 61 along with 42 years of work experience that will have a bigger impact on employment over that of a 18 year old with no work experience and a foundation of education.

[9:00:11 AM](#)

DAVID NEES stated opposition to HB 220 and Sec. 2 of HB 278. He said a high school diploma is a document that is often requested when a person applies for work or enlists in the military. He recalled that the initial installation of the test occurred in 1998, but with only 50 percent of the high school seniors able to successfully pass, it was re-normed in 2002 to the current standard. Reading skills have gone from 29 percent non-proficient to 16 percent, indicating a good level of progress. However, writing and math continue to be areas where students struggle to grasp the concepts, as indicated by low test scores. The seven years period, 2005-2012, has seen graduation rates increase by eight percent, from 61-69, which does not appear to directly co-relate to the HSGQE. The State Board of Education is charged with improving academic achievement for all students; however; he opined, eliminating this exam does not accomplish that goal, rather it dilutes the test. He rhetorically asked, "Do you really want to go to a doctor or a lawyer who has not passed their exam?" He maintained that the HSGQE is the exam that answers the question, "Do you know what it takes to be a high school [graduate]?" Studies, he noted, indicate that student assessment scores from fifth grade, directly reflect high school graduation assessment scores. Reviewing the 2013 statistics for the total Alaska graduates taking the HSGQE, he reported that for the last 15 years, an average of 200 students do not pass this test. The majority of the students do pass and employers and military recruiters understand these percentages. However, the University of Alaska system indicates that 30 percent of continuing education students require remediation; lacking skills in math and writing, the very areas showing no improvement across the state for the last 15 years. This is the only legislation setting an educational floor as required under the Moore, et al. v. State of Alaska, 3AN-04-9756 CI, (2010)

decision, unless the Legislature sets an education floor other than the HSGQE.

[9:04:54 AM](#)

MARY NANUWAK expressed support for education in general and said the combined federal, state, and local efforts are important.

[9:07:06 AM](#)

POSIE BOGGS questioned the state reading assessment standards in comparison to the national standards, which appear to require greater proficiency. She expressed concern for state reading levels and suggested that an investigation of the discrepancy in the test scores might be in order.

[9:08:45 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS closed public testimony on HB 220, and stipulated that the public testimony would remain open on HB 278.

[9:09:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON moved Conceptual Amendment 1 to Sec. 6 as follows:

Page 4, lines 23-29:
Delete all language.

CHAIR GATTIS objected for discussion.

[9:09:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON explained that the students have adequate time to retake the test, additionally, the provider contract is ending. He said extending the contract for an additional three years is an expensive undertaking and there is an alternative pathway for students to receive an equivalency diploma via the GED exam.

[9:10:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked for clarity from the department regarding contractual obligations.

The committee took an at-ease at 9:11 a.m.

[9:11:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON withdrew Conceptual Amendment 1.

[9:12:36 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS announced HB 220 was held over.

HJR 1-CONST. AM: EDUCATION FUNDING

[9:12:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GATTIS announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 1, Proposing amendments to the Constitution of the State of Alaska relating to state aid for education.

[9:13:31 AM](#)

JIM POUND, Staff, Representative Wes Keller, Alaska State Legislature, recapped the previous hearings and reviewed the points of HJR 1, as it was held over during the interim.

[9:15:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND asked about fiscal impacts.

MR. POUND answered that the fiscal impact is zero.

[9:15:33 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS opened public testimony.

[9:16:03 AM](#)

TOM COBAUGH stated support for HJR 1 and said this would level the playing field and invite public debate. He suggested it would correct the current economic disparity that exists, where only parents of means can gain open access to educational opportunities beyond public schools. Further, the possibility could result in a competitive school system, and he opined that competition, in our society, creates a healthy environment.

[9:17:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked witnesses to include a statement in their testimony regarding parental status and the educational situation they have chosen for their children.

9:18:13 AM

BOB GRIFFIN stated support for HJR 1 and said it would be important for residents to be allowed to vote on this important issue. He opined that school choice improves student outcomes and reduces costs; as proven through peer reviewed empirical data gathered from 23 other states.

9:20:08 AM

BETHANY MARCUM stated support for HJR 1 and said it would be important for residents to be allowed to vote on this issue, and express their wishes.

9:20:42 AM

MEGAN LOCKARD stated opposition to HJR 1 opining that educational choice already exists. As a parent of six children, she said she can choose home school, charter school, or public school. She said the cost of the private school she looked into would not be covered by the proposed voucher amounts. Further, those who choose private school can already afford it and this bill would not provide enough in tuition to allow low income families to enroll their children.

9:23:19 AM

MICHAEL CHAMBERS, Chair, Alaskan Libertarian Party, testified with official support for HJR 1, on behalf of the Alaskan Libertarian Party, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I have one child who attended and graduated from West High and is currently attending UAA on a full academic scholarship. I was a public school teacher in Delta Junction and currently I am the Chair of the Alaska Libertarian Party. In this capacity, I am the official voice of approximately 9000 registered libertarians. The vast majority of us are in support of HJR1 because it removes the prohibition of legislation to actively engage in future educational choices of Alaskan children. I have heard many "scare tactics" from citizens opposed to this constitutional amendment. One issue they are concerned about is the "loss of accountability" in other educational settings, hut as you know, the Department of Education

is currently engaged in vacating the high school exit exam, which is in fact, a measure of accountability in the current educational monopoly. Additionally, you know support of HJR 1 merely establishes only two issues going forward.

1. It allows all registered voters of Alaska to cast a vote. This issue reaches into virtually every household in Alaska and should be settled by the citizens themselves and not the legislature.

2. If approved by the citizens, this passage would allow our elected representatives the opportunity to consider and legislate school choice options in a representative environment instead of the current environment of "special interests." Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

[9:25:01 AM](#)

ELIZABETH MANNING stated opposition for HJR 1 and said it would siphon needed funds away from an excellent existing public school system. Choice already exists, she opined. She reported that her children currently attend Government Hill Elementary.

[9:26:42 AM](#)

MIKE PRAX stated support for HJR 1 to maximize choice for everyone, as lack of choice causes conflict. He reported that his two children home schooled and also attended public high school. He urged passage of the bill to allow a statewide vote.

[9:28:11 AM](#)

MARITZA BLADA stated support for HJR 1, stressing the importance to allow residents an opportunity to vote on the issue.

[9:28:56 AM](#)

MARY TOUTONGHI stated opposition to HJR 1, paraphrased from a prepared document, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I observed the invited testimony of the Senate Finance Committee on Monday, February 3, [2014], would like to share some observations and concerns regarding that

meeting and the Senate Joint Resolution 9 which was under discussion.

My first concern was that no one with alternative points of view was invited. I sincerely hope that as you acquire information you explore both sides of the issues to be sure you are making an informed decision rather than a preformed decision.

Another concern was that prior to spending public monies you have a workable end goal and a protocol for exit effectiveness. If you are offering money to an entity to educate children, how are you breaking down your goals and measuring effectiveness?

It is difficult to consider what is expected without common standards that involve thoughtful planning backed up with appropriate data. It is not clear what Senator [Dunleavy] meant when he [said] (paraphrased) everyone should have their own standards in utilizing the public monies for education. We use goal setting and evaluation processes with every other aspect of our planning for state activities, roads, construction, etc. Why should State standards for the education of our children not be planned with goals and exit criteria for all those who utilize public allotments, (i.e. vouchers) that affect our most precious assets, our children.

Following this thought it has been my observation that the plan to draw public allotments (vouchers) been carefully developed and choreographed with backup plans of various types. (Changing the State Constitution, bringing the issue to the voters, etc.) The actual plan to spend the funds extracted from the educational budget of the public schools is amorphous: no goals, no criteria, no evaluation.

In addition the Governor mentioned the use of white boards as a wonderful opportunity for many of our children. With the cuts in personnel, who are the people who will form the goals and objectives to make these experiences a truly educational one?

It is clear that the individuals in our legislature have carefully planned their goals for this session. They are clearly choreographed to produce certain

outcomes. Since this is a body that has sworn to provide for the common good of the people in the State of Alaska, why are the State's children offered such a poorly planned and implemented education?

As a mother, grandmother, educator and speech language pathologist, I would certainly hope for a better planned educational program for the children of the State of Alaska.

9:32:04 AM

BILL LIGHT stated support for HJR 1 and said it is an American traditional to have choice and discussion. He urged the committee to send the issue to the polls.

9:32:52 AM

MIKE COONS stated support for HJR 1, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

First off HJR 1 is not about vouchers. All HJR 1 and SJR 9 does is refine the Constitution as to education and how the State can dispense funds and then to give We the People the ability to debate, research, find the truth, vs the lies, and then go to the voting booth and vote for or against the Constitutional Amendment, period. In direct response to comments made that those in the legislature who feel that since they have a college education, that they are the only ones able to make such a decision, I say thanks but no thanks! I as a responsible citizen and voter not only can, but will make a valued decision on this subject and will not give up my God Given rights to anyone to cast a vote for me! If people cannot understand the issue, don't have the time to research, debate and listen to the facts, then I say, don't vote! For to vote No or Yes means you have weighed the facts and made a decision.

Secondly, our nation and State are not a democracy, we are a REPUBLIC.

Third, all private/secular/religious schools will have to meet all existing standards and laws. The accusation of segregation that is sadly pervasive by

the NEA and NAACP is racist in form, function and nature and I will do all I can to point that out! In point of fact, it is a sad fact that when the left is losing a battle, they revert to pulling the race card or personally attacking people! That is repulsive and I will continue to fight back!

Fourth, the continual attack that this is somehow violating "separation of Church and State" is another red herring. President Thomas Jefferson for far too long has been misquoted and I'm sure he is rolling in his grave with the progressives using his words in vain! "Congress shall make no law respecting establishment of religion", that is from the First Amendment and is clear as clear can be to those who have even a 5th grade reading comprehension! No where is a "separation of Church and State" even inferred! All it is saying is our government cannot force us to be any religion, nor making a State religion as it was in England.

In closing, I ask only that We the People are able to vote this Constitutional Amendment up or down and if NEA and NAACP or other progressive people and organizations want to vote against it, fine. For I will be voting YES!

[9:34:03 AM](#)

KRISTINA JOHANNES stated support for HJR 1, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I live in Representative Lindsey Holmes' district. I am the mother of four adult children who at various times were homeschooled, public schooled and private schooled. I represent myself. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

I urge you to support HJR1 and let the people vote on this important issue.

HJR 1 is about whether or not we should eliminate language in our constitution that we now know has an anti-Catholic pedigree.

The United State Supreme Court has made it clear that this language is not necessary. I feel very strongly that if it is not necessary to have particular language in our constitution it is necessary that we not have it.

As a Catholic I would prefer that my constitution not contain language derived from an animus against my religious ancestors.

As to those who fear removing this language is an attack on public education, let me reassure them. If HJR 1 passes, the education section of our state constitution will still say, "The legislature shall by general law establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the State, and may provide for other public educational institutions. Schools and institutions so established shall be free from sectarian control."

Again, I urge you to pass this amendment and let the people vote on this issue.

[9:35:33 AM](#)

MARTHA FREEMAN stated opposition to HJR 1, opining that the difficulty for school success is poverty based. She paraphrased from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I'm a resident of Anchorage, and have two children in Anchorage public schools.

I have two points to share regarding HJR1 and the use of public funds for private schools.

First, our public schools are providing an excellent education for most students. With a daughter in college and another in 8th grade, I've been consistently impressed with the quality of their experience, thanks primarily to many outstanding teachers. Students that are succeeding in our public schools don't need vouchers - they already have access to a fine education.

Second, vouchers won't help the students who aren't succeeding. Several years ago I attended a parent

assembly meeting to hear a presentation by the Anchorage School District's testing specialist. He stated that if you know the percentage of students at a school that qualify for school lunch subsidies, you can predict that school's average test scores within a few percentage points. Why? Because school lunch subsidies are an indicator of poverty. Poverty is correlated with a host of other problems from transience to poor nutrition to weak English language skills. These are the real challenges that make it so difficult for some children to succeed in school. Sadly, vouchers don't address any of those problems.

In short, most students succeed within our public schools without a voucher system, and vouchers won't help those who don't. The real goal for us as a city, a state, a democracy is to address the poverty that undermines school success, so that our public schools can provide a great education to all students.

[9:37:18 AM](#)

LISA PAESANI stated opposition to HJR 1, testifying as a parent of three children. She opined that it would siphon funds away from Alaska's excellent public schools and a voucher system may create a segregated atmosphere. She said choice exists, that her children attend Romig, and that there is a healthy diversity represented in the student body. Having attended an information meeting on this topic, she reported that there is more to consider than tuition cost, as logistics play a large part in having a child attend a school outside of the neighborhood. Additionally, comparing Alaskan needs statistically to the contiguous states is incongruent.

[9:39:23 AM](#)

TERRIE GOTTSTEIN stated opposition to HJR 1, and said she is thankful that her two children were able to attend the public school system and are currently succeeding at the college level. The proposed bill would allow state funding for private and religious education, which goes against separation of church and state mandates. At a time of decreased public school funding, this type of action could decimate the current system. The legislature will be held accountable, should a dismantling of the state education program occur, as a result of this constitutional amendment passing. She suggested that those in support of this measure could bring the topic to the ballot via

a grassroots petition, and opined that such action would eliminate outside funding of the issue. Finally, the full fiscal impacts need to be further investigated and understood.

9:42:26 AM

HOPE FINKELSTEIN stated opposition to HJR 1 and said it is important to uphold the current constitution. She thanked the committee for their public service and reminded them that they are elected to uphold and protect resources, as state stewards. She cautioned that it is important for the members to refrain from manifesting personal interests, while in office. She said her two children attended charter schools. Choice exists, and for her family it meant relocation. To a member's question, she indicated that her children have attended Romig Middle and West High schools.

9:46:21 AM

LADAWN DRUCE, Representative, National Education Association of Alaska (NEAA), testified with official opposition to HJR 1, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I am speaking on behalf of NEA Alaska and the over 13,000 members who work in our public schools.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify because constitutional changes should be considered very carefully. HJR 1 if passed would start the dialogue which would lead to the greatest change in public education in the state of Alaska since statehood.

To date there has been no relevant data or information presented what would suggest our state needs to open the constitution for this purpose.

If "choice" is the concern; I would ask, "Is the public aware of the numerous choices we currently have within our public school structure today?"

I would also ask; "What is our state trying to address with this type of action?" If the answer is "greater accountability in education", then what evidence is there that opening the constitution and allowing public monies to follow the student to "undefined

educational choices" would result in students being better educated in our state?

There is no evidence that HJR 1 would result in students having a better educational experience and greater opportunities than they currently have. Please consider the following: Access in rural Alaska would be limited at best, it would not expand their education and would in fact dilute it. Outside money will pour into this state if this is on the ballot. Americans for Prosperity, members of ALEC, and the NEA will spend millions to convince our citizens this would be good for our state.

With school districts and the state facing budget deficits, we should not gamble on an expense this large and should instead invest in all of our students' education.

Please do not pass HJR 1.

[9:47:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked how many polled members were being represented by her statement.

MS. DRUCE responded that no poll had been conducted.

[9:48:36 AM](#)

STEPHEN O'BRIEN stated opposition for HJR 1, and stressed the need to proceed with caution. He paraphrased from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

My primary concern [regarding] HJR 1 is its vagueness and lack of accountability. With this potential re-allocation of state resources how will these expenditures be monitored? Who will oversee the curriculum? Will the teachers be certified? Administrators? How will budgets and expenditures be monitored? What discipline protocols be determined? How will student admission requests be handled? Will these students be eligible for buses? I am very concerned about the lack of accountability.

Our country was founded on the cry "No taxation without representation." From my perspective this Amendment would jeopardize the public's right to monitor these public expenditures.

9:50:00 AM

JOE BOYLE, President, Matanuska-Susitna Education Association, stated opposition for HJR 1, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I'm the president of the Mat-Su Education Association and the father of two Wasilla High School graduates. I am speaking in opposition to HJR.

Our goal as stakeholders in public education is to provide a quality education to every child.

We need to provide that education to every child because the health and prosperity of our republic depends on it.

When Horace Man and others advocated for universal, public education in the 19th century, their intent was to unify our increasingly diverse population. And it worked! When I was a little boy reciting my lessons about George Washington, I had no idea that my relatives came to this country long after the Revolution. George Washington was the father of my country, and it didn't matter when my ancestors arrived on these shores.

Even today, it's a wonderful thing to hear little boys and girls, some with distinct accents, talking about our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution as if they were there when they were written.

That's what public schools do. They continue to unify our ever more diverse people. Because of public schools we celebrate our diversity and our unity at the same time. This is one of the things that make our country exceptional - it's not that common around the world - and we have public education to thank for it.

I don't know why some people want to weaken and dilute universal, public education, but I know if they succeed, our children and grandchildren will regret it and ask us why?

I support public schools; I support the idea of a people united; I don't support the dividing and sorting of American children, and I don't support HJR 1.

[9:51:52 AM](#)

ALISON ARIANS stated opposition to HJR 1, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Sometimes when I've listened to the debate on this bill, I've wondered whether it's really worth arguing about. "So what," I think. If people want to risk sending their kids to unaccredited schools that might spring up to take advantage of their stat-sourced funds, well, that's not my problem. Lots of people have had bad experiences in the Lower 48, with unscrupulous school owners taking off with their money, or just not educating their children properly. But my child will be safe in our public school system. Why should I bother weighing in?

The reason is that I have listened to what teachers have to say about this bill. I am not a teacher, nor have I ever been a member of the NEA [National Education Association]. But I have great respect for the teachers in our schools. They are doing a wonderful job educating our children.

Some legislators seem to feel that teachers' testimony on this resolution is worthless. But teachers are the very people we should be asking about this bill. Let's acknowledge teachers' expertise. If we were instituting a change in oil policy, of course we would ask the oil companies their opinions.

When I listen to what the teachers are saying, I hear a resounding NO on this resolution. Will this resolution have a negative impact on the kids with plenty of parental involvement and economic resources? That's not clear. What is clear is the negative

impact on the kids without it. Lots of kids don't have the option of having mom or dad driving them around town to a school other than a neighborhood school. And if resources are bled from those very neighborhood schools educating our poorest students, they are shortchanged even more.

Please be responsive to what our public school teachers have to say. Thank you.

[9:53:35 AM](#)

ANDY HOLLEMAN, President, Anchorage Education Association (AEA), testified with official opposition to HJR 1, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I'm president of the Anchorage Education Association, representing 3500 educators in the Municipality of Anchorage.

I'm in Representative Lynn's district, and I have one son that went to private kindergarten. In the ASD he was in an alternative school, an optional program, a neighborhood school, a program within a neighborhood school, an ASD charter school, and a private/public partnership his senior year.

I am a member of the NEA. I'm speaking against HJR 1.

I'm also a happy resident of south Anchorage, and it's a fine part of town. I've lived there for decades, and taught there for some time as well. We're pretty independent. We do some of our own road maintenance, and some of our neighborhoods have their own individual or community well and septic. We take care of a lot of things on our own. We tend to be pretty well mannered and cooperative. And yes, we chip in for police and fire and the all kinds of stuff all over Anchorage even if we don't use so much of it ourselves.

I've often thought how nice it would be for us to be our own school district. If we were smaller and more nimble we could do things we cannot now. We have a lot of parental support in the neighborhood, and that would add a big boost to us as a compact district. If

we as a community wanted to run our own schools, we'd do a great job. We'd just need some of our property tax money and the money you currently give to the Anchorage school district.

But there's a reason we shouldn't ask you for that, and there's a reason you should say NO to us if we did.

Yes, we would do a great job with our children. But YOUR job is to see to the education of ALL children...not just ours. That we are "in" with the rest of Anchorage makes a lot of sense, and even if we want to draw a line around ourselves, and take this on...well, we could do that, on our own. But you shouldn't fund it.

Similarly, although the logic is inviting, when you fund individuals to make choices about their own children, you may have made them happier, but you have not met YOUR responsibilities to the State of Alaska as outlined in the Constitution. You have a responsibility to educate all children. That includes the students with great parents, the students of parents that aren't doing so well, and the students that have no parents at all.

If you try to solve education problems by handing vouchers to people to spend on their own children, you don't fulfill your mandate to educate Alaska's children. Make Alaska education the best you can, and leave people free to make their own choices.

[9:56:08 AM](#)

MEGAN RICHOTTE stated opposition to HJR 1, agreed with the previous speaker and said the conversation needs to be fully explored and expanded. She said harm could occur, such as in the Copper River Basin school district. The area once had seven schools, but three have been closed in recent years. As a parent, she has one child at Roger's Park Elementary and one in pre-school.

[9:57:34 AM](#)

DEENA MITCHELL stated opposition to HJR 1, stating that it would be naïve to expect no impact to the public schools. She said

her three children have been attending the public system for the last three years, having arrived from an area in Chicago that has received national recognition for school quality. A non-partisan study shows that an immediate \$100 million would be drained from the Alaska public system, should the voucher system be adopted. Oversight of the voucher system would be costly or possibly lost, and she opined that the vetting process on the entire bill appears to be weak. Statistics from a poll, recently released by the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, indicate strong community support for the public schools. Further, she maintained it is the responsibility of the legislature to use their resources and time to vet issues of this nature. She said:

To say that you should put it to the voters for a choice, to me, is very disingenuous. ... Only if you think it is in the best interest of Alaska, and your stewardship, for all our ... children, should you release this to a vote by the general public; which is going to be greatly influenced by money from the Lower 48.

CHAIR GATTIS clarified that it was the recent National Education Association (NEA) poll, which indicates how 90 percent of the parents throughout the state would recommend their public school.

[10:02:30 AM](#)

DAVID NEES stated support for HJR 1 by making four points. First, he said the state constitution has been continually amended since it was written; by both legislative action and citizen initiative. Secondly, the term "voucher" does not appear in the language of HJR 1. Thirdly, the religious school argument is false, he opined and read language from the bill, which states, "... will be free from sectarian control." Fourth, an [education] task force member has stated that the discussion, for too long, has been between three groups: unions, legislators, and EED; it is time to bring parents, teachers, and business into the discussion. He said HJR 1 would bring the absent voices into the discussion. Finally, he added, no Title I charter schools exist, and the working poor have no options for education. He said they want the best for their children also, but trust the legislature to provide a quality system; having no time to leave their jobs and lobby for themselves.

10:05:10 AM

DANNA GRAMMER, Business Owner, stated opposition to HJR 1, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I am a small business owner and single mother living in the Anchorage School District. So to say that I do not have the time to be here today is putting it politely. However, I am here because I'm very afraid of how our state is proposing to handle our current public education system. My daughter attends Government Hill Elementary School and is registered in the Spanish Immersion program. She has been given the gift of a second language through this program. What I call a "gift" of a second language is actually mandatory in most developed nations throughout the world. So I am thankful that the Anchorage School District offers this program so my daughter has an additional skill that she can use when she is an adult and faces having to compete in a very competitive global economy.

I am here to testify in opposition to the [HJR 1] bill currently under consideration in the Senate to eliminate the part of the Alaska State constitution that specifically states that public funds will not be used to fund private schools.

I understand the proposed bill is only to take this to a vote of the people. However, why are we even considering such a measure when our public schools are facing harsh budget cuts such as increased class sizes in already overfull class rooms, less funds for school supplies when many teachers are already purchasing supplies out of their own pockets, less extracurricular activities that contribute to overall develop of a child, less school counselors to help assist and guide our students to a better future, and the list goes on. I would like it if our elected public officials would spend their time and energy into fixing the problems in public school system rather than trying to fund private and religious schools. I know there are some legislatures that are working toward that goal and I do appreciate your efforts.

The Alaska education system is not without its flaws as is how the state of Alaska appropriates the funds in its budget. However, it should be a mission of ALL members of the legislature of this state to continue to work on those flaws and improve public school education--NOT pass off this responsibility to privately run schools or schools based on a particular religious philosophy that is only going to benefit a small segment of school age children in Alaska. With 90% of Anchorage school age children (and 90% of Alaska school age children) attending public school, this bill does not accomplish that mission. It is my belief that this bill undermines that mission.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my concerns today. It is my hope that what I have said today will encourage you to prioritize the education of the majority of Alaska's children who attend public school.

[10:08:12 AM](#)

DON GRAY stated opposition to HJR 1 stressing that the public schools would suffer economic harm through the process being proposed. He said his two children graduated from the public schools and both had successful college careers, as well, who have produced two grandchildren now attending Anchorage area charter schools. This measure would dilute the public funds and remove schools from democratic control of a locally elected school board.

[10:10:13 AM](#)

MARY GRAHAM stated opposition to HJR 1, stressing the negative effect that occurred in her home town in Wisconsin, which, once a model system, is now being decimated by this type of action. She urged the committee to consider what has happened in that area. Additionally, she clarified that the previously mentioned poll was funded by the NEA but designed by the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce and United Way. She urged the need to have a discussion about supporting public schools, not a constitutional amendment.

[10:11:58 AM](#)

ANN FULLER stated opposition to HJR 1, stating that her child attended public school. She said she has taught for the Bureau

of Indian Affairs and acknowledged that it is a challenge to educate children throughout Alaska. Funding a public school system open to all children is the job of this committee, she finished.

[10:12:38 AM](#)

MARY HAKALA stated opposition to HJR 1, and said her school career was in the Juneau public school system, as were three of her children. When the Juneau Community Charter school formed, she was one of the founders; volunteering many hours to help offer a unique opportunity as an improvement on the public system. She suggested focus be brought to improve the existing public school system, and said the amendment would be an act of violence on the state.

[10:13:43 AM](#)

ANDREA STORY, Member, Juneau School Board, testified with official opposition to HJR 1, paraphrasing from a prepared document, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I am a member of the Juneau School Board and I am testifying today on behalf of the Board. The Board is in opposition to HJR 1.

The intent appears well meaning to give more choices to families in education and to make improvements to education. But in examining what has happened in other states, this is not the case.

It appears that this gives a false choice to many parents and community members. It assumes a significantly better education for their children and the community's children than public schools.

In looking at information on evaluation of student performance in current voucher programs, research and evaluation have found little of no difference in voucher and public school student performance. Vouchers from D.C. to Cleveland to Milwaukee have not raised student achievement.

Another false choice to parents and community members is that vouchers give choices to all families. Vouchers give choices to private schools, not parents. Private schools decide if they want to accept

vouchers, and how many students they want to admit. Private schools can discriminate against students on the basis of disability and economic status or reject students with poor academic performance. Students may qualify for a voucher but may never be able to use it because private schools may choose not to accept them. Public schools are not to discriminate against families based on any circumstances, if they do, there are grave consequences.

Public education is a building block to our society. It brings our youth and families and community together, it is a basis of our democratic system. Our families of different faiths, ethnicities, and financial backgrounds come together and learn to work together and respect our diversity and see how alike we all are.

Public schools are accountable to their communities and state. Elected school board members and school staff are working very, very hard to improve student achievement. Higher standards have been adopted, attention to professional development, monitoring student progress and providing choices within the public schools. Budgets are scrutinized

[10:16:02 AM](#)

SUSAN SIMMONS stated support for HJR 1, and said she is the mother of four children who were home schooled as well as attended charter and public schools. The charter schools in the area have long wait lists and a voucher system could prove helpful, even to low income families. In some states, this type of move has been helpful; she finished, urging passage of the bill.

[10:17:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD moved to report HJR 1 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX objected for discussion.

[10:17:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX said she remains conflicted on this topic and postulated at length on both sides of the issue, mentioning legal as well as public considerations, and the existing educational options. Finally, she said, although it does not necessarily represent any future vote, at this point she will support moving the bill from committee.

[10:21:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON recapped that the committee's responsibility calls for consideration of the fiscal constraints prior to passage of the bill. He said fiscally it would be difficult to support this proposed legislation, and he reviewed the funding requirements and the possible negative impact on public school allocations. Further, accountability must be considered. Referring to a section of previously drafted legislation, labeled committee substitute (CS) for HB 145, 27-LS0223\G, which preceded HJR 1, and passed this committee, he paraphrased the language which states:

(b) Nothing in this chapter authorizes the department to regulate a participating private school except as necessary to carry out the program.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON pointed out, that given this language, there is no criteria that can be used for oversight by the state to ensure teacher/curriculum quality and standards. He reminded the committee that a two-thirds floor vote is required to amend the constitution, and such restriction is imposed to ensure that the legislature takes the time to understand all facets and effects in detail. He said that given the current level of discussion, and seeing no benefit to the public education system by passage, he would not be supporting moving HJR 1 from committee today.

[10:24:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said moving the bill out of committee will not be the final word, but will serve in allowing the process to continue.

[10:25:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD reiterated that the Blaine Amendment was a bigoted, anti-Catholic, antireligious measure and enabling legislation was forwarded to ensure that federal territories planning to become states included this, or similar, amendments

in the development of constitutions; every state formed after 1876 has included the Blaine Amendment. The passage of HJR 1, she opined, will allow the voters of Alaska to have a voice in the question of whether to alter the state's founding document.

[10:26:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON commented that other states hold their own counsel, and all are attempting to improve their local public schools. No silver bullet exists, nor is there evidence that state funding of private schools is effective, and she said it is important to consider unintended consequences. The base result of this legislation is that the state will be charged with funding private schools. She maintained that the committee should have the opportunity to delve further into the possible ramifications and fiscal implications, and opined that passing the bill from committee today would be premature.

[10:28:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND said the feedback to her office has been overwhelming opposition for this bill. Further, she opined that it would be remiss, and irresponsible to release the bill from committee without further investigation regarding fiscal impacts.

[10:29:17 AM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives LeDoux, Saddler, Reinbold, and Gattis voted in favor of HJR 1. Representatives Drummond, Seaton, and P. Wilson voted against it. Therefore, HJR 1 was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee by a vote of 4-3.

[10:30:02 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS thanked the committee for continuing through to the day's session call.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.