

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 14, 2014
8:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Lora Reinbold, Vice Chair
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux

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

PRESENTATION: General Education Development (GED®)

- 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
02/07/14	(H)	Heard & Held
02/07/14	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/10/14	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/10/14	(H)	Heard & Held
02/10/14	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/14/14	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information specific to the Technical and Vocational Education Programs (TVEP) Sections 17-20 of HB 278, and responded to questions.

DIANNE BLUMER, Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DLWD)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information specific to the Technical and Vocational Education Programs (TVEP) Sections 17-20 of HB 278, and responded to questions.

JAMES HARVEY, Director
Division of Employment Security
Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DLWD)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the General Education Development (GED®) program.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Responded to questions, during the General Education Development (GED®) presentation.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:27 AM](#)

CHAIR LYNN GATTIS called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Representatives Gattis, P. Wilson, Drummond, and Seaton were present at the call to order. Representative Saddler arrived as the meeting was in progress.

[8:04:46 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 discussion would be restricted to the language specific to Technical and Vocational Education Programs (TVEP), Sections 17-20.

HB 278-EDUCATION: FUNDING/TAX CREDITS/PROGRAMS

[8:05:32 AM](#)

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), said that the Technical and Vocational Education Programs (TVEP) component is educational and also fits in with the Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DLWD).

[8:06:12 AM](#)

DIANNE BLUMER, Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DLWD), presented the department's role regarding TVEP, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

We have long recognized that college is not the only avenue to success especially in Alaska - Of the more than 350,000 workers in Alaska's labor force, only one in five holds a job that requires a four-year degree or higher.

However most do require post-secondary training - and that requirement will only increase with the fruition of oil & gas and other industrial projects on our horizon.

Alaska's commitment to career & technical education is critical to our ability to build a local workforce trained to meet the needs of such projects.

Alaska is Unique in that the Legislature authorized a dependable source of funds for career and technical education training.

In 2000 we created TVEP, the Technical Vocational Education Program, to provide grants to statewide job training institutions.

In the bill that is presented here today our Governor has focused on more education opportunities to meet the needs of all Alaskans- this bill will reauthorize the Technical Vocational Education Program through 2024 and expand dual credit options for high school graduation and certification in a career field.

As we walk you through SB 139 and HB 278 I am sure you will be as encouraged as I am about the new opportunity for our future workforce.

[8:07:57 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY clarified that the governor's bill is comprised of two components. One extends the sunset date for 10 years, and the other establishes accountability levels for the

purpose of allowing high school students to receive dual credits.

[8:08:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON referred to page 9, lines 16-25, listing eligible vocational institutions receiving an allocation percentage [derived from the Alaska Workforce Investment Board, formerly known as the Alaska Human Resource Investment Council]. Noting that the distributed percentages are proposed to continue through [June 30,] 2024, for the current institutions, he asked about the procedure for including other vocational education facilities that would like to participate. He surmised that the percentages indicated are based on the current programs, and that reallocations would occur with the addition of other facilities.

COMMISSIONER BLUMER concurred.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON stressed that the percentages, as listed, are subject to change.

[8:11:15 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS inquired about how a private agency initiating a vocational program would be handled; could it be added to the list prior to 2024 and be included in the distribution. She asked if there is an open application period or date for institutions to apply for a percentage of the allocation.

COMMISSIONER BLUMER answered that a facility could make a request through the legislature for funding, during the next 10 years, prior to 2024.

[8:12:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked if accreditation of programs is a focus, and whether the records of the listed facilities track the number of certificates issued, job placement statistics, and job retention rates. Data of this type would be helpful in

understanding regional and state needs for training in specific skill sets, she suggested.

COMMISSIONER BLUMER pointed out that four statutory measures require the TVEP funding recipients to maintain records regarding the number of participants served, employment placement upon the completion of the program, and wage statistics. The fourth statistical requirement has been difficult to capture, she said, which are the satisfaction levels of the participants and employers. She said that employers are not particularly responsive to the training facility follow-up telephone surveys. The articulated agreement, to be formalized under HB 278 and which some facilities already have in place, includes the gathering of this detailed information. Additionally, the proposed language establishes a consequence for non-compliance, lacking in current statute, which could result in the loss of funding. To a follow-up question, she offered to provide information regarding accreditation.

[8:15:35 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS opined that if an employer has hired an outstanding employee from a facility, the telephone inquiry would not go unanswered. Reluctance to respond, she said, "may be a message in itself on maybe how we're doing." Additionally, providing information to the public encourages competitiveness, as potential students choose which facility to attend based on training success, employment placement, and satisfaction rates, she finished.

[8:16:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON directed attention to Section 18 [pages 9-10, lines 26-17], which contains performance reporting requirements. He pointed out that the satisfaction surveys are responses to the training facility, not to DLWD; clarifying the use of the term "we" in the previous opinion.

COMMISSIONER BLUMER confirmed that it is the institution that is required to conduct surveys and report information to the department.

[8:17:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON paraphrased from page 9, lines 27-31, which read:

(e) The institutions receiving funding under (d) of this section shall provide an expenditure and performance report to the department by November 1 of each year that includes the

(1) percentage of former participants in the program who have jobs one year after leaving the program;

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON said that the current departmental report indicates that this requirement is not being fulfilled by the facilities. The importance for submitting this information may need to be clarified with the institutions receiving the funds, she suggested.

[8:19:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON directed attention to page 10, line 23, to point out that the proposed funding penalty is expected to act as an incentive.

COMMISSIONER BLUMER concurred.

[8:19:30 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS stated that it is important to report on employment in the field of training versus whether a person is employed, and asked if that is being differentiated.

COMMISSIONER BLUMER replied, no.

[8:20:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON paraphrased page 10, lines 3-5, which read:

(3) percentage of former participants who were employed after leaving the program who received training under the program that was related or somewhat related to the former participant's jobs seven to 12 months after leaving the program;

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON interpreted this language to mean that employment is expected to be in the field of training, and asked if further clarification of this requirement is needed for reporting purposes.

COMMISSIONER BLUMER agreed that the language could be honed to differentiate and provide further details. Currently the regional training centers report on trainees "employed in Alaska one year after leaving the program."

CHAIR GATTIS agreed that detailed reporting for employment related to the training is needed, as that is the goal.

[8:22:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked to have the administration suggest amendment language to address the reporting requirement as discussed and presented on page 10, lines 3-5.

[8:23:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON agreed that an amendment is needed. Further, she requested to know whether funding has historically been decreased due to non-compliance or inadequate reporting.

COMMISSIONER BLUMER answered that the department does not have statutory authority to withhold funds. Apparently, confidentiality issues come into play for receiving and reporting some information; however, the current report is a good reflection of what the region training centers are accomplishing. She clarified that HB 278 proposes to authorize the department to withhold funding for non-compliance.

8:26:21 AM

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND said that she has recently had the opportunity to tour the Alaska Vocational Technical Center (AVTEC). Located in Seward, this training facility receives the second largest percentage of the funding, 17 percent. The program director reported to her that graduates are in demand and the center cannot keep pace with the placement requests. She speculated on the reasons, which included: capacity issues, lack of dormitory housing, low enrollment, or tuition concerns.

COMMISSIONER BLUMER acknowledged that AVTEC has a high placement rate, with requests often exceeding the number of graduates and she offered to provide further information.

8:28:06 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON disclosed that he attended AVTEC to learn diesel engine mechanic skills and graduated as a commercial fisherman. He pondered how this type of graduate statistic is accounted for and suggested that self-employment data be included in the reporting information. Further, he noted that the current percentage distribution rates were statutorily fixed, and asked whether there is a departmental analysis to consider the appropriateness of the percentages, and whether a proposal is in order to consider adjustments to the list.

COMMISSIONER BLUMER said that an analysis of the percentage breakout is not part of the available report. The department works with all of the training centers in the state, TVEP recipient facility or not, and a fine line is held for listing a center. She said that if formula funding was not a factor, the money would be competitively granted out, and predicted that under the new language, if a reduction is necessary, a stringent analysis will be completed.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON opined that it would be important to understand whether adjustments need to be made based on facility performance, and he suggested the committee consider ways and means to take up the task of evaluating the facilities.

[8:31:56 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER BLUMER suggested that the TVEP report may already answer many questions.

[8:32:44 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON asked why AVTEC receives a distribution percentage that outweighs all the other centers, and also what were the originating criteria.

COMMISSIONER BLUMER opined that AVTEC is a large, well established, facility, which may be the reason for the higher percentage.

[8:33:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON said southeast has a center, SEATEC, and said there is a high demand in the area for trainees by the community. She opined that centers which are meeting employment needs of the community or state, and fulfilling other requirements, should take priority on the list.

[8:36:27 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS said public testimony will remain open and announced HB 278 was held over.

PRESENTATION: General Education Development (GED®)

[Contains discussion of HB 278]

CHAIR GATTIS announced that the final order of business would be a presentation from the Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DLWD) regarding the General Education Development (GED®) program.

[8:37:18 AM](#)

JAMES HARVEY, Director, Division of Employment Security, Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DLWD), described the General Education Development (GED®) and related educational programs supported by the Department of Labor & Workforce

Development (DLWD), paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The General Education Development (GED®) Diploma is the only high school equivalency credential recognized in all 50 states. It tests the applicant's academic skills and knowledge in the subject areas of math, reading, writing, science and social studies.

The division operates the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program; Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

The ABE program provides adult learners with:

Instruction in the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics

English as a Second Language

General Education Development (GED®) test preparation in order to prepare adults for transition into the labor market or higher academic or vocational training.

ABE is a grant program with 13 regional ABE grants, 1 ABE grant to the Dept. of Corrections, 3 volunteer literacy grants and 1 English Literacy/Civics grant.

Collectively, these programs provide the following ABE services and activities:

Instruction in the skills of reading, writing and mathematics

Workplace literacy instruction to prepare for employment

Focused instruction in math skills to enter an apprenticeship program

Instruction and practice testing in preparation to take the GED® tests

Instruction of English literacy skills in preparation for citizenship testing

[8:39:14 AM](#)

MR. HARVEY offered to address four questions posed in prior committee meetings, and paraphrased the responses from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

1. GED: what is the cost of the test (last year and this year)? How many students take the test annually? Any other relevant information?

Last year the charge for the GED complete battery of 5 tests was \$25 (\$5 ea.). Now, the cost is \$120 for the complete four batteries. The GED® has seen five versions (1942, 1978, 1988, 2002 & now 2014). Due to the multi-battery aspect of the test, it's not easy to answer the question of how many students take the test annually because some might take one test, some take two, etc. Additionally, many students start in one year and finish in a different year. Our state average is about 2,200 examinees per year (that is, people who took at least one of the five tests previously in a given year.) The number is 26,729 from the beginning of 2002 to the end of 2013. For the number of graduates; Alaska had 1,623 GED graduates in SFY13 and 1,635 as of 12/31 in SFY14. The increased rate of graduates for this year is a result of the test update/change in the new calendar year and is a testament to the students drive and desire to attain this credential.

[8:42:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked for the annual average of GED certificates issued in Alaska.

MR. HARVEY responded that spikes occur when the tests are updated, and offered recent year averages:

FY 09 - 1,641
FY 10 - 1,640
FY 11 - 1,659
FY 12 - 1,580
FY 13 - 1,623
FY 14 - 1,635 (report of the first 6 months)

[8:43:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON noted the mention of the test being updated, and asked if that means it is becoming more rigorous.

8:43:48 AM

MR. HARVEY said that the answer may become apparent and continued paraphrasing:

2. What agency (private or public) oversees the administration of a GED program? Under whose authority does it fall? Who regulates its implementation? Where does the test/program actually come from? Who owns it?

The department serves as the State of Alaska's GED program office. It is responsibilities that include maintaining permanent transcript records, issuing diplomas, responding to requests for transcripts or diplomas, and for the overall coordination of the program. The GED Testing Service (GEDTS) owns the test. GEDTS determines the content of the test and they set the cost of the test. They have designated Pearson Vue testing centers as the sites for GED testing.

3. What does having a GED provide for someone who receives one? What does it do for DOLWD? What's its value/ relevance?

The GED testing program is vital for workforce development. Millions of adults in this country do not have a high school diploma. The current GED test is aligned with high school standards and, according to the GEDTS, GED graduates earn salaries comparable to high school graduates. A GED opens the door for an individual to enter college, job training, apprenticeships, or the military so they can gain the skills and knowledge necessary to compete in the workforce.

4. Does a student with a GED count as a graduate of the public K-12 system? What are they considered a graduate of?

GED graduates would not be counted as graduates of public high schools. They are graduates of the GED testing program.

[8:44:57 AM](#)

MR. HARVEY elaborated that according to GEDTS reports, the process employed a representative sample of the 2013 graduate class taking the GED. "The desire was to norm it to the standards of that graduating class as an equivalency certificate," he said.

[8:45:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON stated his understanding that the GED is to be the equivalent of an average high school diploma and is recognized in all fifty states, as such.

MR. HARVEY replied that, specific under Alaska statute, the test is for adult learners defined as 18 years and older, as well as for emancipated minors of 16-17 years of age, or students otherwise withdrawn from the school system. The GED is defined as an equivalency certificate.

[8:46:36 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS noted the criteria and asked about an independent home school student of 16-17 years old taking the test.

MR. HARVEY offered to verify the policy regarding underage home school students, as the administrative code respects the adult age factor, emancipated minors, and parental notice for a child withdrawn from the system.

CHAIR GATTIS pointed out that a home school student may never have entered the system, and, as such, could not be considered withdrawn.

[8:47:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER referred to the Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs and asked what percentage of the GED test takers are above versus below the age of 18.

MR. HARVEY offered to provide the information.

8:47:55 AM

CHAIR GATTIS acknowledged that there is a perception that a diploma carries more weight than a GED, and queried if this is a valid assumption. She asked what restrictions might be encountered throughout life by someone who chooses to attain a GED rather than pursue a diploma.

MR. HARVEY answered that an equivalency certificate allows an adult learner to gain access to college and vocational education, apprenticeships, military service, and the opportunity to be competitive in today's occupational climate.

8:49:00 AM

CHAIR GATTIS pointed out that this dispels the myth of not being able to enter military service under a GED.

8:49:13 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER offered firsthand information regarding recruitment into the National Guard and Army Guard. Five percent of the enlistment openings are retained for GED recipients; however these enlistees must attain a high score on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude test. Thus, a limited number of openings are filled by those holding a GED versus a diploma. He said the Air Guard does not appear to have similar limitations. Referring to Chair Gattis' previous question, he asked as a follow-up:

What does a GED get you that a diploma doesn't? Is it only the time factor - if you're an adult you can get a GED, ... you can't get a diploma.

MR. HARVEY agreed with the assumption. In essence, a GED is the accepted equivalency for the adult learner.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER ascertained that the GED is a competency test with five components; four of which must be passed to attain the document.

MR. HARVEY concurred, and explained that the revised test is based on a scoring system from 100-200. A score of 150, in all four sections, is required to pass and an honors category can be achieved with a higher score.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked about the minimum score required to receive the GED; it is not an assessment it is a competency test.

MR. HARVEY responded, "Correct," and said a minimum threshold must be attained to be awarded the diploma versus receiving a copy of the transcript.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked for comment, as he opined:

This same legislation envisions eliminating the [HSGQE] which would leave a diploma with nothing more than assessments, no competency test for graduation; which is what I believe the exit exam is. So in some sense a GED is going to be a better, more rigorous certificate of achievement than a high school diploma, under the entirety of this bill.

MR. HARVEY deferred.

[8:52:31 AM](#)

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), referring to the previous question comparing these two documents, he said, "I don't think a GED gets you anything that a diploma doesn't." Further, he opined that an employer does not give a GED the same consideration as a high school diploma; a diploma gets a person more opportunity than a GED but a GED doesn't provide as many

options as a diploma. A GED ratifies the holder's skills and content knowledge. The GED opens many doors for students who lack a diploma; however, many employers and colleges require a diploma. A diploma represents a particular course of study that has been undertaken, credit requirements met, and benchmarks attained, that a GED does not. In practicality these are not the same document, he stressed.

[8:55:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON suggested that colleges routinely accept the GED for open enrollment; however, the Alaska Performance Scholarship can only be sought through attainment of a diploma. He pointed out that the discussion regarding GED attainment arose under a section of HB 278 that was not under discussion in today's hearing; the possibility that it would come into play given the repealing of the high school graduation qualifying exam (HSGQE). Current plans would see the HSGQE phased out but funded and offered through 2017. The GED does appear to provide the students holding a certificate of achievement the opportunity to attain an equivalency degree, and no student will be "left out in the cold" should the decision be made to end the HSGQE prior to 2017.

CHAIR GATTIS offered to expand the discussion, and invited comments directed to the HSGQE sections of HB 278.

[8:59:43 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS queried how many adult learners had failed to pass the HSGQE and subsequently took the GED, determining that such action was a viable "plan B."

[9:00:09 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the statistics are not available due to the combination of circumstances that could result in a person choosing to attain a GED. As one example, he said that a student may pass the HSGQE and not receive a diploma if course credit requirements are not met.

CHAIR GATTIS pointed out that it is important for students to have options for attaining a diploma and the question being grappled with is how to best retract the HSGQE requirement in a fiscally responsible manner while honoring student needs.

9:01:25 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked about the need for holding the HSGQE proctoring open for the proposed three year; representing a significant cost through 2017.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said that without extended HSGQE proctoring dates, a student will lose the opportunity to attain a diploma, beyond the standard senior graduation window. Legal implications also exist, if a requirement is held but the possibility of meeting the requirement is not made available; the time frame of three years was chosen in collaboration with counsel.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER pointed out that the student would have received several opportunities to pass the HSGQE beginning in 10th grade, possibly negating the argument of deprivation for proctoring, and opined that there is no property right to the chance to pass the test. Finally, he asked if the department considered the GED, as an alternative credential.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered no, and explained that today's revised GED is much more difficult than HSGQE, which is set at a tenth grade level, while GED exams are targeted at the twelfth grade level.

9:04:06 AM

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON referred to the spikes that occurred prior to the GED tests being changed, as reported by Mr. Harvey. She theorized that informed students, anticipating a change in proctoring opportunities, may take personal responsibility for passing the HSGQE.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY agreed with the member's observations and stressed that a moral responsibility exists to alert participants.

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON suggested the need for an ample funding allocation to allow the department to advertise proctoring changes statewide, if the three year window is not adopted under final passage.

[9:06:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON acknowledged that the GED is a tougher exam designed to determine that a person has attained the knowledge expected of an average graduating senior, while the HSGQE is taken by tenth grade students prior to completion of sophomore classes. He reported how advertising and information on this topic has been handled in his district.

[9:07:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER inquired about any connection between the HSGQE and receipt of federal education funding.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered that the HSGQE has never had any ties to federal funding. Coincidentally, it came into place at about the same time as the No Child Left Behind Act, which directly connects to the standard based assessments (SBAs) taken by the grade school students.

[9:09:01 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS asked whether the department has an ongoing contract that will incur penalties should the HSGQE be dissolved.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded yes, and explained that the fiscal note includes the ongoing costs. The assessment contractor also performs other test proctoring for the department; the request for proposal (RFP) was issued in totality - inclusive of all proctored exams. Removal of the transitional three year period will result in residual costs, which will be paid out through

completion of the contract, he noted. To a follow-up question, he said the contract will expire in 2015; the bill invokes proctoring of the HSGQE through 2017.

9:10:50 AM

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON noted that, depending on the exact expiration date, proctoring opportunities would remain intact, possibly through spring of 2015.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY offered to provide further information.

9:11:29 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON queried how other assessments, such as the SBAs, would be continued under the contract and asked about the effect of a contract extension on these other proctored tests.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY explained that the current vendor will not be the future vendor for the SBAs, as recently negotiated. The newly contracted vendor did not bid for the science component, however, and the department anticipates continuing with the current vendor for science assessment needs. To a follow-up question, he said the new vendor's contract begins in the spring of 2015. Further, he clarified that the RFP identified the new vendor, and the details of the contract are currently being negotiated. The contract is not yet signed, but the overall component costs have been determined.

9:14:10 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked about response from the business community and local agencies regarding the status of the HSGQE.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that, as part of the high school diploma, the HSGQE is not a topical question in the business community. He explained that the tenth grade student takes one test, which incorporates both the SBA and the HSGQE and generates two sets of scores; the HSGQE is subsequently proctored as a standalone test in the event of failure.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether colleges have commented on the exit exam.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said discussions with the colleges revolve around student preparation, and the standards and expectations being met by students leaving high school. He said he does not recall any conversations directly related to the HSGQE.

[9:16:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON opined that it could be wise to put out an RFP targeted to solicit science education proctors, rather than retaining the current vendor without issuing a competitive challenge.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY concurred.

[9:17:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON pondered that the prolonged extension period poses a problem, when non-current students return to take the HSGQE out of sync. He said it has been reported by school officials that the residual proctoring will place a burden on schools, and cause general, possibly costly, interference in the general operations/routines of a facility.

[9:19:39 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER HANLEY agreed that it is a valid concern, considering that about 300 individuals return to take the exam in any given year. This requires a proctor, support staff, and a classroom type setting. He said that each school handles this differently, but someone's time will be taxed to fulfill the offering.

CHAIR GATTIS, noting that a district may have only one returning adult taking advantage of the HSGQE being administered, acknowledged that the previous statements represent valid concerns for the use of district resources.

[9:21:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER pointed out that the HSGQE is based on curriculum that a student is expected to have learned, not specialized, foreign, or outside material that must be taken up separately. Learning the material that is tested in the exit exam should be part of the normal curriculum, he stressed.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the exit exam is aligned to the current standards and proficiencies, as established in the SBAs.

[9:22:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON underscored that the majority of high school dropouts have passed the exam.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said it is a fair statement; the HSGQE is not the reason that students dropout.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON reported that a longitudinal study assessed students in the Anchorage district, which followed the dropouts in detail and the majority had already passed the exam. He reminded members that a high school diploma provides graduates access to the Alaska Performance Scholarship over the GED, and reviewed the scholarship requirements. He opined that providing access to the scholarship by extending the opportunity to pass the HSGQE is not a valid argument.

[9:25:55 AM](#)

CHAIR GATTIS offered that, as a parent, she has followed the progress of the HSGQE. Districts offered practice tests to ensure that students could pass the exam and graduate. Recently, conversations have ensued regarding the dumbing down of the HSGQE, and it is no longer respected as a valid means for student assessment.

[9:27:50 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:28 a.m.