

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 1, 2013

7:59 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Mike Dunleavy, Vice Chair
Senator Charlie Huggins
Senator Berta Gardner

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bert Stedman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 17

"An Act extending the special education service agency; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSSB 17(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

PRESENTATION: WE THE PEOPLE OF ALASKA

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 17

SHORT TITLE: EXTEND SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) STEVENS

01/16/13	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/13	(S)	EDC, FIN
01/23/13	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
01/23/13	(S)	Heard & Held
01/23/13	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
01/30/13	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
01/30/13	(S)	Heard & Held
01/30/13	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)

WITNESS REGISTER

TIM LAMKIN, Staff
Senator Gary Stevens

Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented changes to SB 17 on behalf of the sponsor.

PATRICK PILLAI, Executive Director
Special Education Service Agency (SESA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information related to Special Education Service Agency (SESA).

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SESA.

ELIZABETH NUDELMAN, Director of School Finance
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SESA.

NILS ANDREASSEN, Executive Director
Institute of the North
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information related to "We the People of Alaska."

PAMELA ORME, Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of "We the People of Alaska."

ACTION NARRATIVE

[7:59:43 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 7:59 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Dunleavy, Huggins, Gardner, and Chair Stevens.

SB 17-EXTEND SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY

[7:59:59 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced that the first order of business would be SB 17, which extends the sunset for the Special Education

Service Agency (SESA). He noted it was the third hearing of the bill. He stated his intention to move the bill out of committee.

[8:00:55 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY moved to adopt the CS for SB 17, labeled 28-LS0289\C, as the working document.

CHAIR STEVENS objected for discussion purposes.

[8:01:16 AM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, explained the changes to SB 17 on behalf of the sponsor. He reviewed that the bill addresses three policy areas the committee was encouraged to consider. The first was whether or not to extend SESA's date; the second was to consider the manner in which SESA is governed and structured, in light of the audit; the third was the funding of SESA. He noted a fourth area of consideration in the new CS that would address language changes.

He stated that it appears that the committee wishes to extend the sunset date, to leave the structure of SESA in place, and to not take up the funding issue at this time.

MR. LAMKIN addressed extraneous language in Section 1 of version C, lines 10-14. He said he noticed the language did not make sense and that it has been "on the books" since 1986. The language appears to say that the Department of Education will pay into TRS and PERS on behalf of SESA and will withdraw those funds from SESA in order to reimburse itself. He noted that is not the way DEED does business. He said after contacting the Division of Retirement and Benefits, the Department of Law, DEED, and SESA, they all agreed the language was extraneous and should be repealed. He referred to two statements of support in members files.

CHAIR STEVENS said the committee would return to the topic of extraneous language later in the meeting.

[8:03:51 AM](#)

PATRICK PILLAI, Executive Director, Special Education Service Agency (SESA), agreed that the language can be eliminated from the statute.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if Mr. Pillai had further comments on SB 17.

MR. PILLAI thanked the committee for understanding the critical need that SESA provides. He hoped that the Senate Finance

Committee would consider increasing funding to SESA. He said the continuation of SESA until 2021 will provide a critical service to school districts.

[8:05:42 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS agreed that the structure of SESA should remain in place.

MR. PILLAI commented that school administrators and special education directors appreciate the extra services SESA provides, especially for multiple disability students and unexpected service needs.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Mr. Pillai for his efforts with SESA.

[8:07:52 AM](#)

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), testified in support of SESA. He said he was available to answer questions.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Mr. Morse to address the status of SESA's structure.

MR. MORSE replied that the current system works well as long as everyone is actively engaged. He explained that he and Ms. Nudelman reviewed statutory requirements of SESA and ensured that DEED has an appropriate two-year plan and budget and that the state's special education administrator is an active member of SESA's board.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if Mr. Morse was in agreement with removing the extraneous language.

MR. MORSE said he was.

[8:10:07 AM](#)

ELIZABETH NUDELMAN, Director of School Finance, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), testified in support of SESA. She said the department concurs with the removal of the language. The department does not make payments for SESA's employer contributions.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if SESA employees are under TRS.

MR. MORSE said yes.

CHAIR STEVENS noted no further public testimony.

SENATOR GARDNER voiced appreciation for SESA's services and its importance.

[8:12:05 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS removed his objection; therefore, version C was before the committee.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY moved to report CS for SB 17, version C, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note. There being no objection, CSSB 17 was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[8:12:45 AM](#)

At ease.

PRESENTATION: WE THE PEOPLE OF ALASKA

[8:18:52 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the next order of business was a presentation. He welcomed Mr. Andreassen.

NILS ANDREASSEN, Executive Director, Institute of the North, provided information about "We the People of Alaska." He explained that over the course of the last year, the Institute has been developing a program to engage students with Alaska's rich history and critical issues facing the state today. The program is geared to become a part of Alaska Studies high school curriculum, which lacked materials and relevance. He referred to a national program called "We the People" from which the Alaska program is modeled.

[8:21:17 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked for a brief explanation of the Institute of the North.

MR. ANDREASSEN explained that the Institute is a nonprofit organization founded by Governor Hickel fifteen years ago. Its mission is to inform public policy and cultivate and engage citizenry, consistent with a focus on the North and the belief that its resources should be managed for the benefit of individual and community prosperity.

He related that the Institute has three focus areas: arctic infrastructure, Alaska resource and economic development, and engaging the future generation in citizenship. He said the Institute has a meeting in Talkeetna every year called the

Alaska Dialogue and has recently gone to Norway and Iceland. There is also a strong Emerging Leaders program.

CHAIR STEVENS agreed it was a great organization.

8:22:42 AM

MR. ANDREASSEN continued to explain about "We the People of Alaska." He noted that a standard statewide Alaska Studies curriculum was lacking, as was support and resources. He said a goal of the program is to encourage Alaska students to care about state issues. The Institute believes that place-based learning connects young citizens to where they live and promotes civic engagement.

8:25:00 AM

MR. ANDREASSEN listed the goals of "We the People of Alaska." They are to promote stronger civic and political engagement, provide a foundation for students to gain a greater understanding of the current issues facing the state, inspire students by their own learning and investigation, and develop teamwork skills through problem solving. Students will be able to demonstrate critical thinking skills by working in teams.

MR. ANDREASSEN related that the program consists of six units: citizenship, natural resources, Alaska Native governing entities, the economy, and the Alaska model. For each of these, students can choose to respond to three questions. He showed examples of the types of questions asked. Students must research the questions and connect the history with present-day issues and form an opinion about their place relative to the question. Mock legislative hearings are used to present the information.

8:27:19 AM

MR. ANDREASSEN said the curriculum is a supplement to the Alaska Studies program and is not more work for teachers. He noted that "We the People of Alaska" covers 40 percent of the Alaska Studies program in the Anchorage School District. He said the response from teachers, students, parents, and the community has been positive. It allows current Alaska leaders to participate in teaching aspects of the program and act as judges in the competition. He said the classroom experience is needed and has been positive.

8:30:21 AM

MR. ANDREASSEN stated that the goal is to implement the program throughout the state beyond Anchorage. He said the legislature can help with this by providing the funding to do so. Last year

the legislature provided a one-time capital request for \$50,000 to get the program going. The Institute will support DEED to implement the program in classrooms around the state by providing resources and a recognition program.

MR. ANDREASSEN stressed the importance of having a more formalized approach to having the program available to all teachers and allowing students to have a connection to current legislative issues.

[8:32:07 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if the program focuses on high school students.

MR. ANDREASSEN said it is designed for the Alaska Studies class, grades 9 - 12.

SENATOR GARDNER commented that it is for schools that already offer an Alaska Studies course.

MR. ANDREASSEN said yes, because that was an area that needed development.

SENATOR GARDNER asked what percentage of students takes the Alaska Studies class.

MR. ANDREASSEN replied that it was a required course.

CHAIR STEVENS commented that he was involved in developing the Alaska Studies course. He agreed that a new delivery mode was needed. He asked for more information about the mock legislative session.

[8:34:19 AM](#)

MR. ANDREASSEN explained that mock sessions are made up of teams of three or four students who take six minutes to present their findings to an audience and then answer questions from a panel of judges for another four minutes. There is also an opportunity for a more formal presentation to the legislature or to other organizations.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked for an example of how the best teacher in Anchorage might present the program to students.

MR. ANDREASSEN responded that the program was a fundamentally different way to teach Alaska Studies. Teachers are introduced to the program through the social studies curriculum coordinator

and have all the resources. The teachers encourage students to form teams and then choose the questions to research, followed by weekly practice rounds. All responses are public, lending to a community of learning.

[8:37:14 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS commented favorably about a program called "Legislators in the Classroom." He thanked Mr. Andreassen for his efforts.

MR. ANDREASSEN pointed out that the program was a wonderful opportunity for the state and for the Alaska Studies program. He stressed the importance of formalizing the integration of "We the People of Alaska" into the social studies curriculum.

[8:38:25 AM](#)

PAMELA ORME, Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator, Anchorage School District, testified in support of "We the People of Alaska." She expressed gratitude for the Institute of the North and their involvement in improving the social studies curriculum in Alaska. She shared her personal experience with "We the People" and how important and valuable it is because it incorporates so many useful skills, such as critical thinking.

[8:42:58 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Ms. Orme for her enthusiasm. He asked how teachers see this curriculum.

MS. ORME answered that the curriculum strengthens the learning process in the classroom and provides excellent resources so it is seen favorably by teachers.

[8:45:55 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS hoped to implement the curriculum throughout the state.

MR. ANDREASSEN pointed out that the program is a great example of a potential public/private partnership. He concluded with a summary of the benefits of the program.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Mr. Andreassen for his work.

[8:47:17 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Committee at 8:47 a.m.