

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT MEETING
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 8, 2013

8:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

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

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Peggy Wilson

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Bert Stedman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND
EARLY DEVELOPMENT

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JIM MERRINER, Chair
State Board of Education & Early Development
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the Annual Report of the State Board of Education and Early Development.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Responded to questions during the presentation of the Annual Report of the State Board of Education and Early Development.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:01:14 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the joint meeting of the House and Senate Education Standing Committees to order at 8:01 a.m. Present at the call to order from the House Education Standing Committee were Representatives Gattis, Drummond, Seaton, Reinbold, and Saddler; Representative LeDoux arrived as the meeting was in progress. Present from the Senate Education Standing Committee were Senators Stevens, Huggins, Gardner, and Dunleavy.

Presentation: Annual Report of the State Board of Education and Early Development

CHAIR STEVENS announced that the only order of business would be a presentation of the Annual Report of the State Board of Education and Early Development.

[8:02:15 AM](#)

JIM MERRINER, Chair, State Board of Education & Early Development directed attention to the committee handout titled "State Board of Education & Early Development Report to the Alaska Legislature January 2013," and said he would address selected sections beginning with the mission statement, as presented on page 1, which read: "To ensure quality standards-based instruction to improve academic achievement for all students." He emphasized the inclusion of "standards-based

instruction" as being a key element to this statement and asked members to turn to pages 8-9 of the handout. In June 2012, the board adopted new standards, which for the first time span K-12 and also increase the level of rigor. The new standards are "close enough" to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), as adopted nationwide by 46 states and the District of Columbia, to allow the use of off the shelf curriculum and assessments based off the common core. He emphasized the goal of the new standards, paraphrasing an excerpt from page 9, which read: "Alaska's graduates will be able to compete with graduates nationwide for higher education and jobs," and, he added, "internationally."

[8:07:40 AM](#)

MR. MERRINER, returning to page 3, directed attention to the fourth paragraph and paraphrased the language, which read [original punctuation provided]:

Responding to recommendations from a statewide group of K-12 and college educators called the Teacher Quality Working Group, the State Board adopted amendments to 4 AAC 04 and 4 AAC 19 that would require districts to assess whether teachers, principals and special service providers (such as school psychologists) are exemplary, proficient, basic or unsatisfactory in each of the state's professional content standards and in overall performance. Districts must consider the state's standards for culturally responsive educators, as well.

MR. MERRINER exhibited a power point page, which the commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development (EED) used in a recent presentation to further describe the changes that were made to the content of the performance standards. Listed were eight original standards, and one was removed while another was added. Paraphrasing, he read the new standard as: "A teacher helps students grow academically as measured by learning data." He said assessments will be made to determine what growth a student has achieved in a classroom setting under a particular teacher.

[8:08:58 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked for clarification regarding administration of the common core assessments.

MR. MERRINER responded that the state expects to adopt the Smarter Balance Consortium assessment. To a follow-up question he said these assessments will replace the standards-based assessments (SBAs) and High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE), commencing 2015.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY queried whether there would be cut scores to determine proficiency/advanced proficiency.

MR. MERRINER deferred.

[8:10:07 AM](#)

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), explained that the U.S. Department of Education funded two consortia to develop assessments around the common core. The Alaska standards are similar enough to the common core that using a tailored assessment would be appropriate, and Smarter Balance is being considered. Regarding cut scores, he said that because 46 states will be adopting one of these two assessments, Alaska's cut scores should be similar to the rest of the nation. To a follow-up question, he said the Smarter Balance is a criterion based assessment and will align with the actions of the other states.

MR. MERRINER clarified that the new assessments will first be administered in spring of 2015 or 2016; to be determined.

[8:12:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON noted that not all districts in Alaska have adopted the common core standards. The common core have been primarily adopted in the urban areas, and the rural areas have adopted something similar; a somewhat different Alaskan standard. He expressed concern for assessment alignment using two standards systems. Determining how these two standards compare and whether the desired academic results are achieved

will cost the state millions and take many years to complete, he opined, and asked how this will be handled by the State Board.

MR. MERRINER responded that the Alaska standards are not far enough off of the common core to make a significant difference; which is why the board has confidence in this approach. Further, he named the state agencies that have vetted the Alaska standards, including the University of Alaska (UA).

COMMISSIONER HANLEY added that it would be erroneous for the department to consider an assessment that doesn't measure what is being taught. He said the state had reasons not to adopt the common core standards, foremost being that changes were not allowed. The department received stakeholder input and any areas that differed from the common core were scrutinized by the common core development team, ensuring that rigor was maintained. He provided an example of how a second/third grade patterning skill required in the common core, has been, and will continue to be, taught to Alaskan children at the kindergarten level. Also, the term "with support" was added in regards to beginning reading skills. These are two examples of the type of relatively small alterations that preclude Alaska being officially considered a common core state but, in practice, the same standards apply. He expressed confidence in using the Smarter Balance assessment as a good means to measure what will be taught in the schools.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON maintained his concern for alignment of the percentage of schools that are not teaching to the common core. He asked how comparisons will be drawn between districts teaching to different standards, and what the implications will be regarding the assessments.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said that 4 of Alaska's 54 districts have adopted the common core standards. He then assured the committee that essentially these standards are not different and assessments should not present an issue. The curriculum has not been altered but some verbiage was changed based on stakeholder input, which disallows the retention of the name CCSS.

MR. MERRINER interjected that the four districts that have adopted the common core are also required to teach in accordance with the K-12 state standards.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY offered to provide the side by side standards comparison, which would indicate the semantics that were altered.

[8:21:32 AM](#)

MR. MERRINER directed attention to page 4 of the handout, and said the requirements for the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS) have been changed. The minimum WorkKeys scores for the gold standard have been changed, as it was determined that the requirements were the equivalent of having a Bachelors of Arts (BA) degree. The requirement is now aligned with current industry expectations. He opined that the new scoring system may open the door for more APS recipients.

[8:24:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked if the APS can be used outside of Alaska.

MR. MERRINER replied, no.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX further inquired whether the scholarship can be applied towards attendance to any institution in Alaska, or only state operated facilities.

MR. MERRINER answered that it includes such institutions as Alaska Pacific University (APU) and Western Baptist.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked how this aligns with providing state vouchers to religious schools for primary education.

MR. MERRINER said, "I don't really have an answer for that.

[8:25:10 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER commented that the APS was designed as a carrot to encourage students to excel and to ensure that districts provide the necessary courses for students to attain academic goals. She expressed concern that the changes water down the standards of the scholarship.

MR. MERRINER defended the need to lower the requirement, stating that it was determined to be what is required to attain a BA.

SENATOR GARDNER asked to have documentation provided to support the change.

[8:27:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND questioned how a qualifying score for the APS could equate to a BA college degree.

MR. MERRINER deferred.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY explained that WorkKeys has established a score correlation with qualifications for career placement. The scores don't equal a BA, but align with careers that require a BA. He said the legislature chose to have a career track as well as a college track, for the APS. Lowering the score requirements aligned with what is entailed to achieve a high level career. The scores required to pursue a BA are assessed using the ACT (American College Testing) and SAT (Scholastic Achievement Test).

[8:30:03 AM](#)

MR. MERRINER finished the APS section on page 4 stating that high school level courses can be taken in middle school and counted towards the scholarship program, such as Algebra I. Additionally, International Baccalaureate® (IB), courses will also be allowed, and handled similar to advanced placement (AP) courses.

[8:30:51 AM](#)

MR. MERRINER said districts must spend at least 70 percent of operating funds for instruction, including teacher salaries. Waiver requests are not uncommon, especially from smaller districts; an example being the need to cover an unexpected rise in fuel or travel costs. Recently the board denied a waiver to the Yupiit School District; an unusual action. He said the State Board discussed the benefits of the 70 percent requirement and voted to rescind resolutions submitted previously to the legislatures of 2007 and 2009, requesting reconsideration of the statute. The board now appreciates that the law allows a means for scrutiny of the financial practices of the districts. He reported that the board passed two resolutions: one in honor of Cynthia Curran, retiree from service as Director of Teaching and Learning Support; and one in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of the 1913 Denali Expedition Team, honoring Eric Engman descendant of a team member.

[8:34:46 AM](#)

MR. MERRINER reported on the dates that the State Board met with EED and UA officials to collaborate on alignment of the educational process, from K-12 to P-20W. The UA has determined that entry level college classes could be offered on-line at no cost, such as MATH 107. If the student passed and took a proctored exam, the credit could be purchased; opening the door of opportunity to massive open online courses (MOOCs). Finally, the collaborative group is reviewing the UA teacher education programs, and a teacher education consortium has been organized.

[8:36:36 AM](#)

MR. MERRINER directed attention to page 13 and commended the legislature on passage of SB 137, which requires suicide prevention education in all schools. He then moved to page 16 to acknowledge the recent ground breaking for construction of the State Library Archives Museum (SLAM) project, which will replace the Alaska State Archives and Records and Information Management building, and also house the new state library and museum. He then turned to page 24 to review the annual recommendations, and said the board considers the implementation of the new English and math standards, as well as educator-

evaluation regulations, to be the key for increasing academic achievement of all students. Further, the board recommends passage of the Governor's K-12 education budget.

[8:38:51 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS referred to the governor's recent State of the State address, calling for improvement of graduation rates to the 90 percent level, and for Alaska to "become the poster child of the digital world," and asked how the board is approaching these goals.

MR. MERRINER said, "I'm not immersed in the details." However, he reported, there is a high level of excitement for the Jobs for Alaska's Graduates (JAG) program, that is receiving an \$800,000 allocation in the governor's budget. The JAG program targets at-risk high school students and in the 33 states which have implemented it, the research results have been encouraging.

[8:40:39 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked whether the HSGQE should be continued.

MR. MERRINER said, "That would be a good conversation to have."

[8:41:18 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS referred to the focus on early learning and the approaches that encourage early literacy and parental involvement, to ask what level of commitment the board holds for providing support to young children.

MR. MERRINER responded that the board is committed to assisting students in the best possible way, and said the state has a voluntary pre-kindergarten program. The data gathered from the Pre-K pilot programs, operating the last 3-4 years, indicate measurable effectiveness; which the board fully supports.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if there is an effective means to engage parents of pre-school age children to take measures that could ensure readiness when the child enters school. He recalled

programs, used in some states, which provide packets to parents of children younger than three years olds.

MR. MERRINER offered that there are programs in the state geared for parents of pre-school age children, but he said, "I don't know the details."

[8:43:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND questioned the speaker's previous statement that Alaska is a voluntary Pre-K state, and expressed her belief that it is one of the few states that doesn't have voluntary Pre-K programs. Clarifying, she said that Alaska does not offer Pre-K as an option to all parents in every school.

MR. MERRINER concurred.

[8:44:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked what assessments are administered to ensure that children are reading by the end of third grade.

MR. MERRINER said the districts are allowed the latitude to select appropriate assessments.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY interjected that there is an overall screening tool, used on a statewide basis to assess the developmental profile at the kindergarten level; not necessarily for literacy. He said there is a \$320,000 proposal in the governor's budget to implement a statewide, universal screening tool, for early identification of needs. It would be available for use in kindergarten through third grade levels.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX queried whether a third grade student assessed as reading below level, would be precluded from advancing to the fourth grade.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said that the assessment is not a retention tool. Literacy is continually tracked to allow for early intervention. Further, he said mandatory retention is not in use.

[8:46:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD continued on the topic of early literacy and the importance of reading by third or fourth grade, to opine that mixed data exists on early intervention and effectiveness of early learning programs. She said that Alaska ranks last on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores. Sweden is a country that does have outstanding national educational results, and school doesn't begin until the age of seven. She asked if the Swedish model has been scrutinized by EED.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY cautioned against isolating certain aspects of another societal approach, and taking components out of context; although the possibility exists that certain aspects could be adopted. He offered that Swedish society includes universal health care, along with other norms that don't exist in Alaska.

[8:48:55 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS inquired about UA's use of the Accuplacer exam, when is it being used, and what is the funding source.

MR. MERRINER responded that the university system funds the Accuplacer for juniors and seniors, who participate voluntarily. Consideration is currently being given on whether to allow sophomores to take the assessment. The university uses it for math and English placement purposes. The rationale is to provide additional information to students prior to graduation.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked when a decision will be made whether to allow sophomores to participate.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said a collaborative decision will be made with the university, which has expressed interest in having the assessments offered earlier.

[8:52:14 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS referred to Moore, et al. v. State of Alaska, 3AN-04-9756 CI, (2010), and asked how the board is responding to achieve the court's ruling.

MR. MERRINER the board is aware of actions that EED is taking, and informational updates are provided on a regular basis.

[8:53:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON addressed the topic of the HSGQE and asked why the board has not made a recommendation on whether to retain or alter this assessment.

MR. MERRINER answered that it has not been a topic at the board meetings in the last year.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON stressed that it has been a long lived topic in the legislature and suggested that the topic be brought forward at the board level.

[8:55:38 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committees, the Joint meeting of the House Education Standing Committee and Senate Education Standing Committee was adjourned at 8:55 a.m.