

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 4, 2013

8:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bert Stedman

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Fred Dyson

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 41

"An Act relating to student participation in interscholastic activities; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED SSSB 41 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PRESENTATION: ALASKA'S LEARNING NETWORK

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 41

SHORT TITLE: SCHOOL SPORTS/INTERSCHOLASTIC ACTIVITIES

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) DYSON

01/30/13	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/30/13	(S)	EDC
02/15/13	(S)	SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED-REFERRALS
02/15/13	(S)	EDC
02/25/13	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/25/13	(S)	Heard & Held
02/25/13	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/04/13	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

CHUCK KOPP, Staff
Senator Fred Dyson
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information about SB 41 on behalf of the sponsor.

JOSHUA BANKS, Staff
Senator Fred Dyson
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Offered to answer questions regarding SB 41.

KELLY SORENSEN, Registrar
Alaska's Learning Network (AKLN)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information about Alaska's Learning Network.

STEVE NOONKESSER, Technology Coordinator
Southwest Region School District
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding Alaska's Learning Network.

ROXANNE MOURANT, Coordinator
Education Technologies
Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding Alaska's Learning Network.

TRYSON NYGUEST, Student
Thorne Bay School
Thorne Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Shared his experience with AKLN.

DAKOTA WALKER, Student
King Cove School
King Cove, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Shared her experience with AKLN.

PEYTON KEZAKIN, Student
King Cove School
King Cove, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Shared her experience with AKLN.

TRU TIPPLE, Student
Thorne Bay School
Thorne Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Shared his experience with AKLN.

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner
Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding Alaska's Learning Network funding.

MICHAEL BYER, Superintendent
Haines Borough School District
Haines, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Shared the way AKLN is offered in Haines.

NEVADA BENTON, Teacher
Haines High School
Haines, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed the AKLN program in Haines.

CHRIS TURNER, Student
Haines High School
Haines, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Shared his experience with AKLN courses.

EZEKIEL FRANK, Student
Haines High School
Haines, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Shared his experience with AKLN courses.

DR. SCOTT BUTTERFIELD, Superintendent
Chatham School District
Angoon, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Explained Chatham's involvement with AKLN.

DR. ROBERT THOMASON, Superintendent
Petersburg Borough School District
Petersburg, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed Petersburg's plan to move to AKLN in the future.

ELAINE PRICE, School Board Member
Southeast Island School District
Thorne Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Described Thorne Bay's involvement in AKLN's Introduction to Mining Occupations class.

THERESA KEEL, Superintendent
Cordova School District
Cordova, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed Cordova's involvement with providing AKLN courses and the plan to offer AKLN courses for its students in the future.

LISA SKYLES PARADY, Assistant Superintendent
North Slope School District
Barrow, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Emphasized the value of AKLN to Alaska's rural districts.

BILL MCLEOD, Superintendent
Dillingham School District
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Stated that AKLN fits into Dillingham's school-wide improvement effort.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:01:32 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:01 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Huggins, Dunleavy, and Chair Stevens.

SB 41-SCHOOL SPORTS/INTERSCHOLASTIC ACTIVITIES

[8:01:51 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced that the first order of business would be SB 41. He said it was the second hearing of the bill and he intended to move the bill from committee. [SSSB 41 was before the committee.]

SENATOR DUNLEAVY moved to adopt [SSSB] 41, labeled 28-LS0392\U as the working document.

CHAIR STEVENS objected for discussion purposes.

CHUCK KOPP, Staff, Senator Fred Dyson, related that SB 41 amends current statutes to make participation in interscholastic activities at a non-public school available to a larger number of students who are otherwise not eligible to participate. This is a continuation of legislative work that began in 2012 in SB

119 by Senator Meyer. SB 119 allowed for home school students to participate in interscholastic activity at public schools, and SB 41 adds private schools to that option.

[8:03:22 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER joined the meeting.

JOSHUA BANKS, Staff, Senator Fred Dyson, offered to answer questions related to SB 41.

CHAIR STEVENS noted that public testimony was closed.

SENATOR HUGGINS thanked the sponsor for drawing attention to the situation. He shared an incident from Chugiak High School.

SENATOR GARDNER asked why a private school would want to accept outside students into their programs and incur the costs of those students.

MR. KOPP clarified that the bill is more about parents of home schooled children wanting their children to be able to participate in activities in a non-public school. The bill makes that partnership possible.

[8:06:04 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked why the state should tell a non-government school that they have the option to accept students who are not enrolled in their program. She inquired how the costs of the programs are handled.

SENATOR DYSON joined the meeting.

MR. KOPP explained that the bill is permissive; it does not mandate that private schools must accept home schooled students in their programs. It simply makes sure that the law is not standing in the way, should the private school wish to accept those students into their activities.

SENATOR HUGGINS referred to the commentary sent to the committee by Grace Christian School voicing similar concerns. It was pointed out to the principal that the bill allows students to participate, but does not mandate that private schools must accept them into their programs.

[8:07:27 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS spoke of the cost of transporting teams for competition. He pointed out that a private school would make the decision whether or not to accept students into their programs.

MR. KOPP agreed. He said the language in SB 41 is similar to that in SB 119 and is permissive. He gave an example of how a school might decide how many students to accept.

[8:09:15 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY commented on the difficulty of dividing students into two classes, public school and private school.

CHAIR STEVENS removed his objection.

[8:10:44 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY SENATOR moved to report SSSB 41, version U, from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note. There being no objection, the motion carried.

[8:11:09 AM](#)

At ease

PRESENTATION: Alaska's Learning Network

[8:13:03 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS turned to the presentation on Alaska's Learning Network.

KELLY SORENSEN, Registrar, Alaska's Learning Network (AKLN), presented information about Alaska's Learning Network. She recognized the superintendents and business partners present at the meeting.

MS. SORENSEN showed a photo of bubble-net feeding whales and used an analogy about the wise use of time and energy. She said the best use of time and energy is valued in education and is something that AKLN does. She shared AKLN's motto: "Making Education Accessible."

[8:15:38 AM](#)

MS. SORENSEN showed a video that introduced AKLN. She explained that AKLN is a coalition of 53 school districts, is managed by a board, and provides distant on-line classes for high school students. The classes are targeted for the Alaska Performance Scholarship.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if AKLN existed before the passage of the Alaska Performance Scholarship or was AKLN a response to it.

[8:17:25 AM](#)

STEVE NOONKESSER, Technology Coordinator, Southwest Region School District, answered questions regarding AKLN. He explained that AKLN is the culmination of a 20-year effort to provide distance education to students across the state. It did exist prior to the Performance Scholarship. The roots of the current effort began in 2009.

MS. SORENSEN continued to explain that AKLN is targeting classes that apply to the Performance Scholarship because there are rural district that cannot provide those courses. She showed a representation of the AKLN Board and the locations of schools and students.

She explained that AKLN offers professional development for teachers who are developing courses and a digital repository of resources. She said AKLN works in partnership with schools and districts so the funding for the Base Student Allocation does not get touched. The fees go back to the district that provides the class. She provided an example of a math teacher in Cordova who teaches distance students from around the state. His district can collect the \$300 fee for each distant student, or his students in Cordova can take an AKLN course.

[8:20:16 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS shared a story about a student from Cordova who was proud of his teacher and his math course.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if professional development is in person or online.

MS. SORENSEN replied both.

She continued to explain the partnership between AKLN and the school district. She described how students are assisted by a teacher when they are having difficulties with a course.

MS. SORENSEN said that AKLN courses are rigorous, quality, and vetted by the International Association for Online Learning, as well as by an E-content specialist and the Performance Scholarship reviewers. The courses are dual credit; for both high school and university credits. AKLN is looking to develop more Career Technical Education (CTE) Career Pathways classes.

CHAIR STEVENS requested more information about the college credits.

MS. SORENSEN explained that all of the University of Alaska schools will allow university credit.

[8:22:40 AM](#)

ROXANNE MOURANT, Coordinator, Education Technologies, Department of Education & Early Development, explained which courses are for dual credit.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if those credits are accepted at any of the UA campuses.

MS. MOURANT said that is the goal. Three classes AKLN is working on are "still in the works."

MS. SORENSEN showed the 2013 fall course listing. Those courses qualifying for the Performance Scholarship are marked.

MS. SORENSEN introduced a recording of the mining class, "Introduction to Mining Occupations."

[8:26:34 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS noted the enormous amount of technology used in the class. He asked if any assistance is provided to the teacher.

MS. SORENSEN explained that there is an onsite supervisor at every site.

SENATOR GARDNER asked how many school districts don't have adequate bandwidth or access to the necessary technology.

MS. SORENSEN replied that some places require calling in on an audio bridge where the visuals are loaded onto the website. She said most districts are able to stream the class or access it through their library.

[8:28:58 AM](#)

MS. SORENSEN described the high quality of AKLN teachers. She provided an example from the North Slope.

She addressed student data, enrollment numbers by class, the dropout rate, and reasons for dropping out. She reported a 91 percent success rate.

[8:31:17 AM](#)

MS. SORENSEN concluded that the remainder of the presentation would be by AKLN students.

TRYSON NYGUEST, Student, Thorne Bay School, shared his experience with AKLN. He said he is enjoying taking the mining class and getting to know other students from around Alaska.

DAKOTA WALKER, Student, King Cove School, shared her experience with AKLN. She said she likes making projects and presentations as part of the coursework.

[8:33:21 AM](#)

PEYTON KEZAKIN, Student, King Cove School, shared her experience with AKLN. She liked that the coursework will help her prepare for college and earn credits.

TRU TRIPPLE, Student, Thorne Bay School, Shared his experience with AKLN. He said he likes the mining class and the potential to get a job in mining.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Mr. Tripple if he thought the coursework was difficult.

MR. TRIPPLE replied that it is an easy way to earn a credit.

MR. NYGUEST said it takes work to earn a credit.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if either one has used a course to gain college credit.

MR. TRIPPLE said they are earning three UAS credits for the mining course.

SENATOR GARDNER asked where the funding comes from.

[8:35:56 AM](#)

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner, Department of Education & Early Development, replied that the infrastructure of the program originally began with some stimulus funds. Last year the funds were not renewed so department general funds were used. AKLN is a current item in the governor's budget.

SENATOR GARDNER asked about a challenge with CTE courses; many of the activities are hands on. Smaller classes and specialized equipment are sometimes necessary. She asked if those were limitations to distance education.

MS. SORENSEN replied that she has been hearing that a blend of strategies works; some place-based content and some online coursework.

[8:37:33 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked how long it takes for teachers to prepare for AKLN courses.

MS. SORENSEN said that AKLN encourages teachers to "flip their classroom." They take all content and make a digital video in the summer and then the prep work is done before the course begins.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked what the average student/teacher ratio is.

MS. SORENSEN said she does not have that exact number. She added that most classes were between 2 to 25 students. The mining class has 72 students and four instructors.

CHAIR STEVENS asked about how the cadre of instructors is developed.

MS. SORENSEN replied that they are starting a mentorship program so that experienced online teachers can train new teachers.

SENATOR HUGGINS commented on the success of the Performance Scholarship and the use of innovative teaching techniques to provide required coursework. He assumed an online teacher would be on an extended contract in order to prepare during the summer.

[8:40:07 AM](#)

MS. SORENSEN said that was correct, plus the teachers are paid \$4,000 and given an iPad for designing a class.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if there are any communities that cannot be served due to limited technology.

MS. SORENSEN answered no. She noted there were some problems with bandwidth that have been solved by sending out a hard drive with all the material loaded on it.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked what the ultimate goal of AKLN is.

MS. SORENSEN replied that AKLN would like to see all courses be Alaska-made and available statewide in rural areas.

MICHAEL BYER, Superintendent, Haines Borough School District, described the AKLN program as it exists in Haines. He said there are currently two AKLN teachers with a third pending. The courses are implemented in the Independent Learning Center.

[8:42:17 AM](#)

NEVADA BENTON, Teacher, Haines High School, described how the Independent Learning Center delivers AKLN. Students work on college credit courses, make up credits, and take intervention programs. There is a teacher and a peer educator in the room. Good value courses are used, as well as career courses, AKLN courses, and other online courses.

MS. BENTON addressed classroom management and expectations, how students are introduced to the program, and how they plan their semester. She spoke of the strengths of the Center. There are 35 high school students enrolled, of which 14 are taking college preparation classes.

[8:46:49 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked what types of courses are offered.

MS. BENTON replied that Japanese, French, and Spanish are offered, as well as Algebra II, and calculus.

MS. BENTON shared student demographics and the results of the student survey, which were positive.

[8:48:08 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if some students were not happy with the program.

MS. BENTON replied that one student was not successful with online learning technology and several students did not like non-AKLN courses.

CHAIR STEVENS wondered why some students are more successful with online learning.

MS. BENTON explained that the classroom is very structured and expectations are clear and there is good peer modeling.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked for an explanation of Aventa courses.

MS. BENTON replied that Aventa is an online content provider with highly qualified teachers.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the district purchases some of those courses.

MS. BENTON replied yes.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked how much AKLN courses cost.

MS. BENTON said they cost between \$150 and \$250.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY inquired if the courses are open to students not enrolled in the Haines School District.

MS. BENTON did not know.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered that there are currently no restrictions to do so.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY stated that AKLN courses are open to all students in Alaska.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY agreed. The courses are offered through school districts.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the department is set up to receive payment for the courses.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied that school districts could accept payment and have the ability to charge for the courses.

[8:51:45 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if there are other online service providers.

MS. BENTON answered yes. The goal is to use Alaska-based courses and have small classes, which AKLN has.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the courses have end dates.

MS. BENTON replied that it depends on the policy of the online provider.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if school districts pay all of the fees for the courses. She wondered if some students take classes only for the college credit.

MS. BENTON responded that in the Haines School District, there is an application process for funding. Only \$4,000 is available for college credit courses. Sometimes a student pays a portion and is reimbursed when they pass the course.

[8:53:51 AM](#)

CHRIS TURNER, Student, Haines High School, stated that AKLN provides many learning opportunities for all high school students, from obtaining college credits to retrieving credits. It offers more courses than small schools can provide, is very project based, and prepares students for jobs and college. There is a lot of interaction with the instructors.

CHAIR STEVENS asked what AKLN courses Mr. Turner has taken.

MR. TURNER replied that he has taken computer literacy for dual credit, Algebra II, and astronomy.

[8:57:29 AM](#)

EZEKIEL FRANK, Student, Haines High School, shared his experience with the AKLN mining course. He spoke highly of the course, the personal instruction, and the dollar value of the experience.

CHAIR STEVENS stated that the Haines School District should be very proud of these two students.

SENATOR HUGGINS spoke highly of the students' testimony and their comfort with technology.

[9:00:39 AM](#)

MR. FRANK agreed that today's students are very comfortable with online learning; however everyone learns differently.

SENATOR HUGGINS said he was impressed that Mr. Frank knew that the funding mechanism for education was called the Base Student Allocation. He complimented and thanked the testifiers.

[9:02:15 AM](#)

MS. BENTON related that the program uses the Learning Modality Survey to see how their students learn best and Gardner's Eight Intelligences Survey to get to know more about their students. She shared the advantages that AKLN provides.

[9:04:07 AM](#)

MS. BENTON summarized, "You don't want to put your students in a box. The goal is to meet individual student needs."

CHAIR STEVENS asked if Ms. Benton supervises the learning center as well as instructs classes.

MS. BENTON said she is a special education teacher, runs the learning center, is the on-site supervisor for the mining class, and will be teaching an AKLN course.

CHAIR STEVENS asked how she does it all.

SENATOR GARDNER wondered if textbooks are becoming obsolete and if they are used with any of the online classes.

MS. BENTON explained that textbooks are not becoming obsolete; many classes use textbooks.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked the presenter.

[9:06:00 AM](#)

DR. SCOTT BUTTERFIELD, Superintendent, Chatham School District, explained his district's involvement with AKLN for the last several years. He said that he has two schools with AKLN courses, but students are able to take courses taught from around the state.

[9:08:06 AM](#)

DR. BUTTERFIELD explained that ALKN is supported by many and has partnerships with the university system, Sealaska Heritage Institute, Hecla Greens Creek Mine, Alaska Humanities Forum, Alaska Association of School Boards, Alaska Staff Development Network, Alaska Council of School Administrators, Alaska Society of Technology and Education, and GCI.

He stressed how affordable AKLN is. He listed AKLN's advantages.

[9:10:21 AM](#)

DR. BUTTERFIELD asked the committee to support AKLN.

CHAIR STEVENS asked how AKLN classes in Chatham District are offered.

DR. BUTTERFIELD related that one teacher in Tenakee Springs manages the program there. He said that Spanish was offered by an Alaskan teacher online. Students in Angoon are also accessing AKLN courses.

[9:12:15 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS pointed out that AKLN offers relief for the pupil/teacher load.

DR. BUTTERFIELD agreed that it would in larger schools, but not in his small district. He noted that AKLN offers relief to the problem of teaching to a variety of learning styles.

[9:14:54 AM](#)

DR. ROBERT THOMASON, Superintendent, Petersburg Borough School District, related that his school district currently offers VHS courses and a teacher. He said VHS is based in Massachusetts. He noted he was excited about moving over to the AKLN system. He said it costs about \$6,700 a year to subscribe to VHS, plus the costs for one period of a district teacher. He pointed out that AKLN is more cost effective.

He said that Petersburg has excellent technology and has been offering advanced placement English and Spanish, which can now be offered by AKLN. He described a learning commons in the library where online coursework is done. He concluded that students today are entering a world of online learning. He thanked AKLN for its efforts. He urged the committee to support AKLN.

[9:18:29 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if Alaska Studies is a required course for teachers.

DR. THOMASON answered yes.

SENATOR HUGGINS wondered if teachers can take the class online.

DR. THOMASON said the course can be taken through the Alaska Staff Development Network.

SENATOR GARDNER requested clarification about the cost of VHS.

DR. THOMASON said it was \$6,750 for the subscription.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if AKLN would be a cost savings.

DR. THOMASON said yes.

CHAIR STEVENS commented that libraries look different today.

DR. THOMASON agreed.

[9:20:36 AM](#)

ELAINE PRICE, School Board Member, Southeast Island School District, described her district's involvement in AKLN's Introduction to Mining Occupations class. She said the program is affordable and a great opportunity for students to receive career guidance and skills for future jobs.

THERESA KEEL, Superintendent, Cordova School District, related that Cordova provides one of the AKLN courses. The district expects that AKLN will provide benefits for its students in the future when it signs up for the program, since it is a declining enrollment district. She said she is also looking forward to developing more courses for AKLN and the opportunity to trade courses.

[9:24:41 AM](#)

LISA SKYLES PARADY, Assistant Superintendent, North Slope School District, emphasized the value of AKLN to Alaska's rural districts. She stressed that AKLN provides equity to rural students who often lack technology. She requested support for AKLN.

[9:27:07 AM](#)

BILL MCLEOD, Superintendent, Dillingham School District, stated that AKLN fits into Dillingham's school-wide improvement effort. It has increased educational proficiency in the district, as well as the graduation rate. Students are accessing AKLN for credit recovery and for Performance Scholarship requirements. He described the lab where the courses are offered.

[9:29:55 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked what was done to increase third grade proficiency.

MR. MCLEOD replied that the school is using research-based best practices, additional staff, and staff development.

[9:30:47 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS voiced appreciation for all the testifiers.

[9:31:00 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the Senate Education Standing Committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the meeting at 9:31 a.m.