

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

March 13, 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. 57

"An Act relating to parental involvement in education; adjusting pupil transportation funding; amending the time required for employers to give tenured teachers notification of their nonretention; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 47

"An Act relating to boarding schools operated by school districts; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 57

SHORT TITLE: LITERACY, PUPIL TRANSP, TEACHER NOTICES

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) STEVENS

02/15/13	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/15/13	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/13/13	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 47

SHORT TITLE: STIPEND FOR STATEWIDE BOARDING SCHOOL

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) COGHILL

02/08/13	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
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02/08/13 (S) FIN
02/22/13 (S) SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED-REFERRALS
02/22/13 (S) EDC, FIN
03/13/13 (S) EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

TIM LAMKIN, Staff
Senator Gary Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced SB 57 on behalf of the sponsor.

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding SB 57.

DR. SUSAN MCCAULEY, Director
Division of Teaching & Learning Support
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Explained the fiscal note for SB 57.

DAVID MEANS, Director of Administration
Juneau School District
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 57.

AMY LUJAN, Executive Director
Alaska Association of School Business Officials
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 57.

MIKE ABBOTT, Chief Operating Officer
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 57.

DAVE JONES, Assistant Superintendent
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 57.

DR. DEENA PARAMO, Superintendent
Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 57.

KATHERINE GARDNER, Director of Human Resources
Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 57.

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director
Best Beginnings
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Section 1 of SB 57.

RYNNIEVA MOSS, Staff
Senator John Coghill
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced SB 47 to the committee on behalf of the sponsor.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding SB 47.

GARY BALDWIN, Superintendent
Lower Kuskokwim School District
Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 47.

LISA RIEGER, General Counsel
Cook Inlet Tribal Council
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 47.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[7:59:53 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 Huggins, Dunleavy, and Chair Stevens.

SB 57-LITERACY, PUPIL TRANSP, TEACHER NOTICES

[8:00:10 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced that consideration of SB 57.

TIM LAMKIN, staff to Senator Gary Stevens, introduced SB 57. He explained that the bill does three things. It is an effort to encourage parental involvement in their children's ability to read proficiently by third grade. It adjusts pupil transportation dollars annually by the inflationary index of Anchorage, which is about 3 percent. It also shifts the deadline for districts to notify faculty of layoff or non-retention from March 16 to May 15, in order to be compatible with the budget cycle.

[8:03:01 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN said that Section 4 of the bill would repeal the 1.5 percent pupil transportation amount enacted last year. Section 5 is required language to allow existing employment contracts with school districts and faculty to expire before the May 15 deadline is used. Section 6 sets an effective date of July 1, 2013.

SENATOR GARDNER joined the meeting.

CHAIR STEVENS opened public testimony.

[8:04:14 AM](#)

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, addressed the transportation component of the fiscal note. He noted in the past, Legislative Finance, along with the administration, requested the department to present fiscal notes for the public education fund addressing the cumulative effect. He said the fiscal note depicts the total amount SB 57 would cost, cumulatively, through FY 19. This is different than most fiscal notes which show a yearly increment. He suggested the fiscal note could be addressed in the Senate Finance Committee.

CHAIR STEVENS said he was comfortable with that plan.

MR. MORSE stated that the other piece pertains to where the burden would be in terms of distribution of materials, which Dr. McCauley will address.

[8:06:11 AM](#)

DR. SUSAN MCCAULEY, Director, Division of Teaching & Learning Support, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, explained the fiscal note for SB 57 with regard for the literacy component. It assumes that the department would be providing literacy resources to the parents of children in K - 3,

approximately 45,000 students. The cost reflects that the department will development and distribute the materials.

CHAIR STEVENS stated that he met with the Commissioner of Education and said it was not his intention that the department hire a staff to do all the work, but rather that they would work with districts to distribute materials.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if it would make sense for small school districts to get the materials from other districts.

CHAIR STEVENS agreed. He added that the plan was for the department to be responsible for giving the materials to the districts to distribute. He asked Mr. Morse if that was his understanding.

[8:08:11 AM](#)

MR. MORSE answered that some money would be used to prepare the publications and for updating them.

CHAIR STEVENS agreed that the department should work with the districts and provide materials.

[8:09:26 AM](#)

DAVID MEANS, Director of Administration, Juneau School District (JSD), testified in support of SB 57. He drew attention to Section 2, which discusses a cost of living increase for pupil transportation contracts. He noted that the JSD contract already contains a cost of living increase. The bill would keep state payments in line with the school district's payments to its service provider, allowing foundation monies to go to classroom expenses as much as possible.

He pointed out that in the current law there is a 1.5 percent increase for FY 14 and FY 15, but not thereafter. He noted support for Section 3, which provides for flexibility for all districts regarding reduction of tenured teachers.

He stated support for Section 1, for all partnerships between the district and parents.

[8:11:22 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS shared his experience of dealing with the non-retention date of March 16. He requested to know of concerns regarding changing that date to May 15.

MR. MEANS opined that there is less controversy than was expected.

SENATOR GARDNER asked when teachers expect to renew their contracts for the upcoming year.

MR. MEANS replied that in JSD contracts are issued after the budget process around the end of May.

[8:13:28 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER responded that it is unlikely that JSD would offer a contract in early May and then hand out a pink slip.

MR. MEANS answered that they did not want to do that. Once a contract is offered, it is irrevocable for a tenured teacher.

AMY LUJAN, Executive Director, Alaska Association of School Business Officials (AASBO), testified in support of SB 57. She noted that AASBO members deal with such things as transportation contracts. She said that last year AASBO assisted with SB 182 which revamped the pupil transportation funding mechanism.

She opined that the change to the bill goes against the intent of SB 182, which was to make sure that classroom resources would not be used for transportation. She termed SB 57 a correction to that problem. She explained that the reference to the Anchorage Cost Price Index (CPI) was included as a best practice standardization of contracts several years ago. She testified in support of changing back to the Anchorage CPI.

MS. LUJAN also testified in support of Section 3.

[8:16:36 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER inquired which contracts Ms. Lujan was referring to, the pick slips or actual contracts.

MS. LUJAN said both.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if the legislation changes the contract date or just the non-retention notification date.

MS. LUJAN said most districts hand out one or the other at the same time.

MIKE ABBOTT, Chief Operating Officer, Anchorage School District, testified in support of SB 57. He said the Anchorage School District strongly supports all three provisions of the bill.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if the Anchorage School District is already involved in supporting parent interaction in order to promote literacy.

MR. ABBOTT replied that the Anchorage School District has already made progress regarding resources for parents and childcare providers of pre-K students.

CHAIR STEVENS agreed that Anchorage is ahead of the game.

SENATOR GARDNER asked when Anchorage currently offers teacher contracts.

[8:19:45 AM](#)

MR. ABBOTT replied that Anchorage was similar to Juneau in that they try to offer contracts before the end of the school year.

DAVE JONES, Assistant Superintendent, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, testified in support of SB 57. He concurred with the previous speaker about all three sections of the bill. He described how the date for contract issuance is determined. Tenured contracts are issued by March 16 and non-tenured contracts, or pink slips, must be issued by May 15 and are dependent on state funding.

[8:23:42 AM](#)

MR. JONES commented that the date change gives the district time to decide if RIF's and teacher improvement plans are needed.

MR. JONES summarized that the Kenai School District is in full support of all sections of SB 57. He thanked the legislature for prior funding for education.

[8:25:53 AM](#)

DR. DEENA PARAMO, Superintendent, Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District, testified in support of SB 57. She thanked the legislature for focusing on the real costs associated with education of kids in Alaska. She focused on transportation budget alignment with possible state contracts.

[8:28:31 AM](#)

DR. PARAMO addressed a funding shortfall in regards to Mat-Su's transportation services due to SB 182. She spoke in support of SB 57's treatment of transportation funding.

CHAIR STEVENS voiced appreciation for Dr. Paramo's comments.

[8:30:09 AM](#)

KATHERINE GARDNER, Director of Human Resources, Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District, testified in support of SB 57. She focused her comments on Section 3 of the bill. She informed the committee about tenure law. She said Section 3 deals more with the date by which notice must be given, not by which a contract must be issued.

MS. GARDNER listed the reasons why a later contract notification date is beneficial to the district.

[8:34:08 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked how it works if a notice of non-retention is given and funds become available later on. He asked about the teacher re-instating process.

MS. GARDNER said the process is complicated. The district must first consider seniority and endorsements and the process is disruptive.

[8:36:03 AM](#)

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director, Best Beginnings, testified in support of Section 1 of SB 57. She stressed the importance of the parents' role in a child's learning to read. She recommended a multi-faceted campaign to provide accurate and useful information to parents about facilitating literacy.

[8:39:04 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked how different districts assist parents in this effort.

MS. HENSLEY replied that Best Beginnings does not have information about how specific districts might go about informing parents of children older than pre-K about early reading. She said the Anchorage School District is trying to work on the transition between pre-K and kindergarten.

[8:40:51 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS held SB 57 in committee.

SB 47-STIPEND FOR STATEWIDE BOARDING SCHOOL

[8:40:58 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the consideration of SB 47. [SSSB 47 was before the committee.]

RYNNIEVA MOSS, Staff, Senator John Coghill, introduced SB 47 to the committee on behalf of the sponsor. She thanked Senators Stevens, Huggins, and Gardner for past support of boarding schools. She noted that work on this issue began back in 2005 with HB 16 and a discussion on boarding homes. At that time there was a provision that allowed for stipends for students who were coming from communities that lacked 9 - 12 education.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if she would be discussing version P.

MS. MOSS said yes.

CHAIR STEVENS requested a motion to adopt version P for discussion purposes.

[8:42:22 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY moved to adopt [work draft CS for SSSB 47], labeled 28-LS0408\P, as the working document.

CHAIR STEVENS announced that without objection version P was before the committee.

MS. MOSS continued to explain that in 2005, the Department of Education provided a stipend of \$500 a month per student. When HB 16 was passed, regional rates the department had been using were used. She noted there has been a steady increase in the program since then. It has helped rural students attend residential boarding schools that offer more classes, vocational training, sports, band, and art.

MS. MOSS opined that boarding schools have provided an excellent curriculum for students who want to go on to college and succeed in the work force. She maintained that many of the students would drop out of school if they did not have boarding schools to attend.

She said the stipend helps the schools cover the cost of residential boarding school facilities, including meals and 24/7 supervision.

She reported that in 2011 the program was expanded with increased stipends. The legislature doubled the rate at that time, but expenses still exceed income.

[8:45:39 AM](#)

MS. MOSS explained that SB 47, version P, a requirement that boarding schools had to have been in operation before June 1,

2005, is deleted. That opens it up for more boarding schools to be created within the public school system.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if any schools have opened since 2005.

MS. MOSS replied that the provision allowed for the expansion of three additional boarding schools. A section of SB 47 adds terminology called "variable length" which allows for magnet schools.

CHAIR STEVENS asked for clarification.

MS. MOSS responded that the total participation in school would have to be for at least 180 days in order to qualify as a boarding school. The bill allows for magnet schools and schools with vocational training.

[8:47:18 AM](#)

MS. MOSS explained that Section 2 addresses the regional base rates for stipends - it triples what the base rate was in 2005. Section 3 allows public school districts to contract with private Alaska Native organizations or non-profit organizations to provide room and board services. Section 4 repeals the limit of three additional boarding schools and the definition of district operated statewide residential programs because the terminology is included in Section 1. Section 5 provides for an immediate effective date.

MS. MOSS said the sponsor is asking the committee to make a policy call and believes that the boarding schools will continue to offer high school students in small communities an opportunity to attend high school and become better prepared for college, vocational training, and the workplace. By removing the limit on the number of boarding schools, new opportunities will arise for Alaskan high school students.

She related that a school in the Kotzebue area is considering developing a magnet school, working in cooperation with Red Dog Mine to train students for future jobs.

She concluded that Senator Coghill believes that boarding schools are not the only road to success for education, but definitely one very important avenue of success. She requested the committee's support for SB 47.

[8:49:29 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER expressed excitement about the bill. She recalled efforts in previous years to promote a magnet school in Kotzebue. She recalled that Representative Reggie Joule did not wish to see the idea come from the legislature, but rather to "ferment" locally and not be imposed. She asked if local input was part of the process.

MS. MOSS replied yes. Several Native organizations and rural school districts have requested the legislation as the mechanism to offer vocational training.

SENATOR GARDNER stated that she went to a boarding school for three years.

SENATOR GARDNER asked what the rationale was for limiting boarding schools to only three schools.

MS. MOSS replied that she did not know. She noted that there was concern about displacing rural students and closing rural schools. She stressed that SB 47 is operated through the public school system.

SENATOR GARDNER asked about the provision to triple the base rate. She wondered if costs went up or if expanded services are being offered.

MS. MOSS replied that the hope was that parents and school districts would absorb some costs, but that has not been the case. Costs have gone up, especially fuel costs. She said she would provide information about the actual operating cost of the four boarding schools currently in operation: Bethel, Nenana, Galena, and Mount Edgecumbe.

[8:52:27 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked for an explanation of magnet schools.

MS. MOSS explained that magnet schools are schools that provide vocational training and educational courses. They have shorter, varied terms and include traditional education curriculum along with vocational coursework.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked how boarding school housing is funded.

MS. MOSS replied that boarding schools have housing facilities. Mount Edgecumbe is state-owned and contracts for room and board. The other schools have their own facilities and hire supervision for the facilities.

SENATOR HUGGINS recalled that debt reimbursement applies to the schooling, but not the housing.

MS. MOSS agreed that is an issue. She said she would ask the Department of Education to address it. She noted that the 70/30 reimbursement cannot be used for boarding facilities.

[8:54:38 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS mentioned the Red Dog Mine's agreement to hire 100 percent from Native corporations. He said that SB 47 would help Red Dog Mine fulfill that promise.

MS. MOSS said she was excited about that.

[8:55:30 AM](#)

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner, Department of Education & Early Development, answered questions about SB 47. He said the department recognizes the value of the changes made in the bill. He responded to the question asked regarding the limitation of boarding schools to only three. He recalled that it was previously not managed by the department. The provision was seen as a way to manage growth.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY addressed variable-term boarding schools versus year-round schools. He opined that regulations relating to year-round schools do not necessarily prohibit variable-term schools, as long as the schools operate as a school for the full school year. He noted the State Board of Education recently adopted a regulation that allows for the variable-term component, with funding mechanisms that allow for a boarding stipend. The BSA would stay with the student's home district.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY spoke of a need the department also addressed - to open up periods of public application. The open application period will be available until the end of May 2013.

[8:57:32 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if open application means new schools, as opposed to open enrollment.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said yes.

SENATOR HUGGINS inquired if boarding schools include all grades.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY answered that statutorily it is grades 9 - 12.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked why earlier programs are not offered.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that it was due to the boarding component. Schools are hesitant to board children younger than high school.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if there is any opposition to the bill.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied that he has not heard any opposition. He said a primary component begins with the boarding stipend increase. If the stipend sunsets this year, the three programs currently in place will really struggle to meet their responsibilities. He said he has only heard positive comments and suggestions regarding better ways to meet the needs of students.

9:00:09 AM

SENATOR GARDNER asked if after the open application period closes, it will be reopened on a regular basis.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that he has never heard of an open application being held before. He said the open application is based on perceived need and capacity and interest, and he anticipated it would be offered again relatively soon.

9:01:28 AM

GARY BALDWIN, Superintendent, Lower Kuskokwim School District, stated support for SB 47. He related that his district has two outstanding programs that will struggle without the passage of the bill. The first program is the Kuskokwim Learning Academy, a school of 60 students that targets dropouts. The other program is RAMSEP, which requires the flexibility in language for a variable-term district operated school and the ability to contract with a non-profit for the boarding home component. The program is currently supplemented with funding from the Rasmuson Foundation, which is running out.

He explained that RAMSEP provides Alaska Native Science & Engineering Program (ANSEP) access to village students. Bethel High School has been recently identified as an ANSEP academy school. In order for village students to have access ANSEP, the district developed RAMSEP named after Rasmuson funding. Students come into Bethel for a semester at a time to take upper level math, science, and pre-engineering classes, along with regular courses. The success rate is very high and students are eligible for college-level courses.

[9:05:19 AM](#)

MR. BALDWIN described the district's robotics program, which he described as a feeder program to engineering careers and math and science classes. The course raises academic expectations and outcomes. He hoped to expand the model to an aviation program. He stressed the need for SB 47 to pass.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if the dropout rate would increase without a boarding school.

MR. BALDWIN said yes. Both programs have been successful at preventing and recovering dropouts.

[9:07:36 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked what ages of students are in the academy.

MR. BALDWIN replied that the Kuskokwim Learning Academy serves students in grades 9 -12 and recovering dropouts include older students up to 20 years old. The RAMSEP program is for juniors and seniors in high school.

LISA RIEGER, General Counsel, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, stated that the Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) supports SB 47. She said CITC supports the increase in stipend, the school district's delivery of district-wide residential programs and the variable-term programs, and the local partnership provision.

[9:10:46 AM](#)

MS. RIEGER explained the CITC program called the Dena'ina Academy, a public/private partnership model between CITC and the Anchorage School District. She said that CITC provides the residential program and the district provides the curriculum. She said the Dena'ina Academy is designed as a culture-based leadership program. She reiterated support for SB 47.

[9:12:52 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked about the Academy's location and makeup.

MS. RIEGER explained that the Academy is in a pilot stage and is applying to the Anchorage School District during the open application period. There are two students who will test the program; one student is from Dillingham and one is from a homeless Anchorage family. The Academy will be accepting rural students, also. Currently, there are house parents residing with the students. Elders will be involved in the future.

[9:16:03 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS summarized that the Academy provides room and board and the students are enrolled in public schools in Anchorage.

MS. RIEGER said that is correct.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if that would be maintained into the future.

MS. RIEGER said yes.

CHAIR STEVENS asked what type of students would be invited to enroll.

MS. RIEGER answered that the Academy would be open to all students. Right now the targeted population is males who are juniors or seniors in high school.

[9:18:41 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS noted it was shocking to hear that half of the students who move to Anchorage do so without their parents.

SENATOR GARDNER noted three categories of students that might attend the Academy, kids who are at SAVE and Covenant House, or who are aging out of foster care.

MS. RIEGER replied that those kids have been considered as referrals.

[9:21:41 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS thanked the presenter.

CHAIR STEVENS said his intention is to set the bill aside.

MS. MOSS addressed Senator Huggins' question on elementary-age students. She said when working on SB 47, some interest in providing boarding school education for elementary students was expressed. She noted the sponsor has committed to work with Representative Gattis on that issue.

[9:23:06 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS opined that it is so important to identify students who need support early on.

He asked about a boarding school called Camp Challenge.

MS. MOSS said she was not familiar with that school. She pointed out that there are only three schools that currently receive stipends.

SENATOR HUGGINS noted that Camp Challenge is a statewide program. He suggested that it would fit the definition of a boarding school.

[9:24:16 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS held SB 47 in committee.

[9:24:22 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the Senate Education Standing Committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the meeting at 9:24 a.m.