

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

March 25, 2013

8:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Bert Stedman
Senator Charlie Huggins
Senator Berta Gardner

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Mike Dunleavy, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 82

"An Act providing for public school funding for telecommunications or Internet services."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 82

SHORT TITLE: BROADBAND DISCOUNTS FOR SCHOOLS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) OLSON

03/19/13	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/19/13	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/25/13	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

DAVID SCOTT, Staff
Senator Donny Olson
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on SB 82 on behalf of the sponsor.

EVA KINNEEVEAUK, School Board Member
North Slope Borough School District
Point Hope, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 82.

ARNOLD BROWER, JR., School Board Member
North Slope Borough School District
Barrow, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 82.

STEVE NOONKESSER, Technology Coordinator
Southwest Region Schools
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 82.

PEGGY COWAN, Superintendent
North Star Borough School District
Barrow, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 82.

WASSILLIE GUST
Southwest Regional School District
New Stuyahok, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 82.

PAM LLOYD, representing herself
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 82.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:01:17 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 Gardner, Stedman, and Chair Stevens.

SB 82-BROADBAND DISCOUNTS FOR SCHOOLS

[8:01:38 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced that the only order of business would be SB 82.

DAVID SCOTT, Staff, Senator Donny Olson, Alaska State Legislature, presented SB 82 on behalf of the sponsor. He related that the intent of the bill is to have the state pick up the local share of broadband that is not covered under the current federal E-Rate Program. The E-Rate Program picks up anywhere from 20 percent to 90 percent of all modern telecommunications - internet - for schools.

[8:02:23 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the arrival of Senator Huggins.

He asked if E-Rate applies to all districts.

MR. SCOTT explained that it affects most districts. He referred to a list that shows which districts qualify, including Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and many rural school districts.

MR. SCOTT continued to explain SB 82. He addressed the 200 megabyte cap explained on page 1, line 9. He said the reason for the cap is to prevent "gaming the system." He noted that the fiscal note is indeterminate. The sponsor will work with the Department of Health and Social Services on a more narrowly defined fiscal note.

[8:04:29 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS requested a clear fiscal note prior to moving the bill out of committee.

MR. SCOTT agreed.

[8:05:21 AM](#)

EVA KINNEEVEAUK, School Board Member, North Slope Borough School District, addressed the positive impact of internet services on the district. She testified in support of higher speed connectivity for their region.

[8:11:13 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked about Ms. Kinneeveauk's connection with education.

MS. KINNEEVEAUK said she was a school board member. She invited committee members to visit the villages.

[8:12:25 AM](#)

ARNOLD BROWER, JR., School Board Member, North Slope Borough School District, testified in support of SB 82. He agreed with the former speaker's testimony and spoke of the advantages of having broadband services in remote communities.

[8:14:51 AM](#)

STEVE NOONKESSER, Technology Coordinator, Southwest Region Schools, spoke in support of SB 82. He spoke of the issue of equity in rural Alaska and how technology lags behind. The current problem is lack of enough bandwidth and the cost to buy more. Adequate bandwidth will be required for new online standards-based assessment.

[8:19:09 AM](#)

PEGGY COWAN, Superintendent, North Star Borough School District, testified in support of SB 82. She thanked Senator Olson for sponsoring the bill. She said she believes that every district in the state gets E-Rate, both rural and urban. She agreed that broadband availability is an equity issue. She noted the intent of the bill was to have the state pick up the local match for the E-Rate.

She spoke of other financial challenges districts are facing. She pointed out that the bill would result in districts being able to leverage federal money.

[8:21:19 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked if the local match comes out of the district's budget.

MS. COWAN said yes. It comes out of the general fund for telephone bills, internet, and email services.

CHAIR STEVENS asked what the North Star Borough School District's costs have been for the match.

MS. COWAN replied that internet service costs were \$540,000 this year.

[8:22:32 AM](#)

WASSILLIE GUST, Southwest Regional School District, testified in support of SB 82. He pointed out that most internet services in the villages are located only in the schools. Expanding broadband services would benefit the communities, as well as the schools.

[8:24:51 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER noted that schools are closed in the summer and libraries and gyms are not available to local communities. She asked if that was true in New Stuyahok.

MR. GUST said when the schools shut down the community must rely on local offices for internet access.

[8:26:00 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER stressed the importance of the internet when doing taxes.

CHAIR STEVENS agreed.

[8:27:26 AM](#)

PAM LLOYD, representing herself, testified in support of SB 82. She spoke of research she did regarding online resources in rural schools. She described the technological inequities in rural Alaska.

[8:29:55 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked if SB 82 would provide any financial benefits for Anchorage schools.

MS. LLOYD answered yes. She noted that she was the technology coordinator for the Anchorage School District six years ago. At that time, the E-Rate match was about \$1 million per year. Every district in Alaska receives some E-Rate funding, depending on the level of poverty - free and reduced lunches.

CHAIR STEVENS held SB 82 in committee. He noted the committee would await a new fiscal note before passing the bill out of committee.

[8:31:17 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the Senate Education Standing Committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the meeting at 8:31 a.m.