

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 20, 2015

8:04 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Wes Keller, Chair  
Representative Lora Reinbold, Vice Chair  
Representative Paul Seaton  
Representative Liz Vazquez  
Representative Harriet Drummond  
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Jim Colver

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: POSTSECONDARY COMMISSION ON EDUCATION REGARDING  
THE ALASKA NAVIGATOR: STATEWIDE WORKFORCE & EDUCATION-RELATED  
STATISTICS (ANSWERS) PROGRAM

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

DIANE BARRANS, Executive Director  
Postsecondary Education Commission  
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Participated in the presentation of the  
Alaska Navigator: Statewide Workforce & Education Related  
Statistics (ANSWERS) program, and responded to questions.

STEPHANIE BUTLER, Director  
ANSWERS Project  
Postsecondary Education Commission  
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the presentation of the Alaska  
Navigator: Statewide Workforce & Education Related Statistics  
(ANSWERS) program, and responded to questions.

KERRY THOMAS, Manager  
ANSWERS Project  
Postsecondary Education Commission  
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Participated in the presentation of the Alaska Navigator: Statewide Workforce & Education Related Statistics (ANSWERS) program, and responded to questions.

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner  
Office of the Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Participated in the presentation of the Alaska Navigator: Statewide Workforce & Education Related Statistics (ANSWERS) program, and responded to questions.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:04:05 AM](#)

**CHAIR WES KELLER** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Representatives Keller, Seaton, Vazquez, Drummond, Kreiss-Tomkins, and Reinbold were present at the call to order.

**PRESENTATION: POSTSECONDARY COMMISSION ON EDUCATION REGARDING THE ALASKA NAVIGATOR: STATEWIDE WORKFORCE & EDUCATION-RELATED STATISTICS (ANSWERS) PROGRAM**

[8:04:40 AM](#)

CHAIR KELLER announced that the only order of business would be a presentation from the Postsecondary Commission on Education, regarding the Alaska Navigator: Statewide Workforce & Education Related Statistics (ANSWERS) program.

[8:05:08 AM](#)

CHAIR KELLER explained the tension that exists for gathering test and data information regarding students. Many factors are involved, with some relating to constitutional rights, accountability for teachers, budgetary concerns, and the requirement for legislative oversight. Programs, such as

ANSWERS, which are not state generated, can add to the frustration and tension. He stressed the importance for maintaining an open dialogue and for everyone to be heard.

[8:13:42 AM](#)

DIANE BARRANS, Executive Director, Postsecondary Education Commission, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), introduced the presenters for the ANSWERS project, and remained available for questions.

[8:14:52 AM](#)

STEPHANIE BUTLER, Director, ANSWERS Project, Postsecondary Education Commission, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), directed attention to the committee packet and the three page letter dated 2/19/15, addressed to the Honorable Wes Keller, Chair, Education Committee, from Diane Barrans, Executive Director, containing four questions from the committee, and the responses from the Postsecondary Commission, with supporting documents. She paraphrased the first question and response, which read [original punctuation provided]:

What relationship is there between Alaska's request for a No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver and a requirement for the state to participate in a P-20 SLDS [pre-school-20 years of age statewide longitudinal data system] (Rep. Reinbold)?

In accordance with your direction that this question should be addressed to the Alaska Department of Education and early Development (EED), I have forwarded the information request to the EED Commissioner's office. I am advised that the NCLB waiver does not require Alaska develop or participate in a P-20W SLDS.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD ascertained that a P-20W SLDS was not a pre-requisite for the NCLB waiver.

[8:17:56 AM](#)

MS. BUTLER paraphrased the second question and response, which read [original punctuation provided]:

What are some examples of relevant questions or concrete analyses that ANSWERS could produce, and when might such information be available to inform policy development or decision-making (Rep. Seaton)?

As noted in the ANSWERS presentation to the House Education Committee, information requests must: 1) be relevant to evaluating Alaska's education program outcomes; 2) require linking of cross-sector data; and, 3) ensure there is no privacy violation of the population being reported on. Attached is the ANSWERS policy questions handout, with samples of concrete information requests or products listed after each. One of the first stakeholder outreach projects for the ANSWERS program director and his staff will be contacting legislators to solicit their specific informational interests and information requests. The goal of this process will be to identify the issues which are of the greatest interest to the legislature and other policy makers and use this information to develop a reporting agenda and related reporting timeline to support informed decision-making.

[8:19:41 AM](#)

CHAIR KELLER asked who will make the determination of the criteria.

MS. BUTLER responded that the responsibility will be under the purview of the project manager, to ensure that report requests conform appropriately. The Executive Governance Board will have oversight of the project manager and set the policies that will direct the ANSWERS staff activities. The board seats the commissioners of Education and Labor, the University of Alaska (UA) President and the Executive Director of the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE).

CHAIR KELLER inquired whether P-20 is currently functioning, and whether valid requests have been submitted.

MS. BUTLER answered that P-20 is in the development mode and reports are not yet being generated. She it is expected to begin functioning sometime in the summer of 2015.

[8:21:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND stated her understanding that cross-linking of the cross-sector data allows the data maintained in independent silos, by state agencies, to be jointly shared. Further, the available data will be used to generate reports that may assist the legislators, when making decisions. She asked whether P-20 can generate information, at this time.

MS. BUTLER answered that the program is still under development, with the existing data residing in four unlinked silos. The ANSWERS program will combine the data to provide long term citizen success reports to the state policy makers, thus significantly expanding the ability of policy makers to evaluate the education pipeline. It is currently possible to link the information; however, it is an expensive, time consuming, manually laborious process. The ANSWERS program will retrieve sub-sets of information from the four silos, and de-identify the data to ensure a secure environment. The information that is stripped from the data is the personally identifiable information (PII), as defined in the Alaska Personal Protection Law (APPL).

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND suggested that a future vision may be to include data from the Department of Corrections (DOC) for analysis purposes. It may provide insights to reason for the high incarceration and recidivism rates in Alaska, she conjectured. In response to prompting from the chair she expanded that personal information from the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) may also be helpful in many ways. Having information in separate agency silos does not provide a full picture.

CHAIR KELLER acknowledged that the goal is to make informational data available, and asked whether reports are available now, and what are the standards for who has access; could he, as an

elected official, receive a password and gain access to the system.

MS. BUTLER explained that cross sector reports are currently generated; however, compilation is handled manually. An example is the annual outcomes report that is created for the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS), and she directed attention to the committee packet handout labeled, "APS Statistics at a glance 2015," published by the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education. The data used to generate this report links data from K-12 and postsecondary, as well as the workforce. The report is required by the legislature, as a means for policy makers to understand the return on investment when allocating funds for the APS. She pointed out that the infographic illustrates the number of students qualifying for the scholarship, college remediation levels, actual use and payout of the funding, as well as postsecondary and employment performance. Basically, she said it allows an understanding of whether the program is fulfilling the long term intent. To the access question, she said compliance is handled by each agency that is responsible for collection and maintenance of data, regarding both state and federal applicable laws. She assured the committee that no individual would be allowed a password for access to any of the information.

[8:33:44 AM](#)

CHAIR KELLER surmised that the K-12 data can easily be accessed by the commission to produce the referenced outcomes report, as well as being available to anyone in EED. He asked whether data from the Department of Law was used, for compiling the report, and if so, what steps were postsecondary staff required to take to access that agencies data.

MS. BUTLER explained that the Department of Law information is not accessed by the commission. The cooperating agencies, provide data under a memo of understanding (MOU), which requires an arduous process to link the data for each research project requested.

[8:34:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked about the pre-kindergarten data, how it will be assembled, and whether legislative action is required to gain information for the P-20 Workforce database on this age group.

MS. BUTLER confirmed that the state's K-12 data contains limited pre-kindergarten data, and suggested that invitations to providers, to share information voluntarily, may be one possibility. She then deferred.

[8:36:03 AM](#)

KERRY THOMAS, Manager, ANSWERS Project, Postsecondary Education Commission, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), added that the P-20 is a general term used nationally, and available information does vary between states. The scope of the grant is to develop the program, and future information may be included, once the longitudinal data system is up and running.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON confirmed that the system is being designed to efficiently add on additional databases, without requiring reconfiguration.

MS. THOMAS said, "Correct."

[8:37:19 AM](#)

CHAIR KELLER clarified that the grant application included four state agencies, and did not indicate that other agencies might be added to the system.

MS. THOMAS said the grant is limited to linking the four partnered agency databases. Plans do not exist for bringing in other databases, but the scope of the system will allow for that possibility, should the need arise.

[8:38:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD said that as a member of the postsecondary education board this area is of particular interest. She cited a document titled, "U.S. Department of Education, APPLICATIONS FOR GRANTS UNDER THE Statewide, Longitudinal Data Systems, CFDA#84372A, PR/Award R372A120007, Grants.Gov Tracking#: GRANT11025793," (U.S. Longitudinal Grant) and asked whether postsecondary is familiar with the grant.

MS. BUTLER responded yes.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked for comment on the Unity Project, after paraphrasing from page 16 of the U.S. Longitudinal Grant, which read [original punctuation provided]:

In FY06, DEED received a \$3.5 million award from the IES to build a statewide K-12 longitudinal data system. This fueled a statewide effort to meet NCLB's present and future challenges regarding education data by unifying over 20 disparate data collection, involving schools using myriad reporting methodologies, into one unified data structure, utilizing uniform reporting methods, and delivering accurate, timely and accessible K-12 student-level data to stakeholders.

MS. BUTLER deferred to the department for details regarding the grant.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD continued paraphrasing from the grant document, which read [original punctuation provided]:

The next logical step is linking the increasingly robust OASIS (Online Alaska School Information System) data sets with postsecondary and workforce data so Alaska can answer pressing policy question to determine what works and better allocate increasingly scarce resources to maximize student opportunity for success.

MS. BUTLER confirmed the goal to link the postsecondary and workforce databases.

[8:40:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD, providing background information and posing a related question, paraphrased from a prepared statement, which read [original punctuation provided]:

In 2011, ACPE applied for a grant to create the P-20W. The CFDA is 84.372. It has three priorities, and Alaska applied under the third priority - to link Work Force and Higher Education Data to K-12 data.

One technical requirement of that grant listed on page 2 of the RFP states that the data will include "Yearly test records of individual students with respect to assessments under section 1111(b) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965;"

Is this the Standards Based test, or the [AMP] test that Alaskan students will be taking in March, or is this some other test? How will this data be accessed and included in the database?

MS. THOMAS concurred that the assessment referred to is the Alaska Measures Progress (AMP).

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked how the data be will assessed and included in the data base.

MS. THOMAS responded that it would be incorporated via the EED secure upload application, de-identified, and loaded into the longitudinal data system.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD said that the technical specifications refer to college and career readiness exam results, and asked for further identification of the tests.

MS. THOMAS said that the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT), WorkKeys, and the ACT, Inc., exam scores, as received from the national providers, will be included.

[8:43:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD pointed out that another aspect of the grant is data on students not being tested, and asked what type of information this includes, as well as how it will be sourced.

MS. BUTLER said examples of excluded data would be students who are not in the educational pipeline and not taking the standard tests.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked if any information could be collected on students outside of the system.

MS. BUTLER replied that data would be gathered if a student entered the system at the postsecondary level, studied for the GED test, or entered the technical workforce system.

[8:44:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VAZQUEZ asked for a further explanation of the de-identification of data.

MS. BUTLER reviewed that specific identifying factors are striped from the data, upon entry into the ANSWERS system, including: names, birthdates, and addresses. The PII is then transmitted to a repository, held separately from the ANSWERS, reportable database.

REPRESENTATIVE VAZQUEZ queried what type of safeguards exist to ensure that the PII is maintained separately and is secure from hacking efforts.

MS. BUTLER explained that an automated system separates the PII from the analysis data, with built-in system audits and logs, as well as anticipated manual audits to ensure appropriate privacy law compliance. Additionally, separate servers will be used to house these two components.

REPRESENTATIVE VAZQUEZ questioned the type of training required for the users and maintainers of the databases.

MS. BUTLER said background checks will be conducted, and all state requirements be met. Additional requirements will be implemented for staff directly using the data that includes demonstration to an institutional review board an understanding

of the complexities and issues involved when handling this type of information.

REPRESENTATIVE VAZQUEZ asked for the statute references that relate to any consequences resulting from the misuse of the data.

MS. BUTLER offered to provide that information. Additionally, an overarching MOU is anticipated, that will include consequences; a document that is under development.

[8:48:22 AM](#)

CHAIR KELLER noticed that a number of contractors have been identified and pondered that the one chosen to build the ANSWERS system may also contract with multiple states. He suggested this may cause some level of concern for whether the data is driving the policy of the state, or the policy is driving the data. The procurement method and standards of the contracts are important, he stressed, notwithstanding the agency MOU.

[8:50:22 AM](#)

CHAIR KELLER directed attention to the handout labeled, "EXHIBIT 9. Feedback Data Sources," which represents one page from the grant application. He qualified the exhibit as a microscopic view of a large document; however, it clearly indicates the four agencies that are contributing data to the ANSWERS program, and the feedback loops that will be generated. If the goal is to mine the feedback loops, what will be the standards upheld by the individuals who will have direct access to the information.

[8:51:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD paraphrased a question from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

In June 10, 2014, ACPE gave an executive briefing. The slides are on line and ACPE's website. One slide indicates cross state data sharing. The last time ACPE was here, it was indicated that data didn't get

shared across state lines. Is this a policy that changed since this executive briefing?

MS. BUTLER responded that an initiative exists for sharing of information across state lines via the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE). Alaska has been invited to participate but is not, as yet. Agreement for such action would be provided through the Executive Governance Board.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD noted that student's with college loans are tracked across state lines and assuming that the data is linked, she asked how the K-12 data is protected.

MS. BUTLER concurred that the student loan borrowers are tracked state to state. Relative to sharing workforce data, if it were deemed appropriate to share that data, specific elements would be segregated for that purpose.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD maintained concern for the possibility that linked data could cross state lines.

MS. BUTLER responded that, if so directed, it could be done; however, it would not be an easy process.

[8:55:07 AM](#)

CHAIR KELLER indicated concern for a breach of data, and asked if such action occurred who would at risk; could the legislature or members be implicated for lack of due diligence.

MS. THOMAS said that the ANSWERS director would manage any type of misuse or breach; however, the four partner organizations own the data, as well as the responsibility for that data, and would bear any recourse either singularly or together depending on the circumstance.

CHAIR KELLER interjected that statutory guidelines may be helpful.

[8:56:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON reviewed his understanding that the ANSWERS system would be accessed to satisfy approved informational requests, and to generate applicable reports from de-identified data, versus sharing/dumping, the entire database. Further, the access would be restricted to ANSWERS staff, and he asked whether he is comprehending this correctly.

CHAIR KELLER said that knowledge of the sharing standards is important, as well as realizing that computer hacking is a real concern.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON agreed that it is necessary to maintain a secure database with access restricted to the ANSWERS staff. However, requests for information that is best answered through the integrated information, does not allow anyone access, but allows the generation of reports that may prove helpful.

CHAIR KELLER suggested that comment by a third party vendor may be useful, to understand the security of the P-20 system as it currently exists.

MS. BUTLER confirmed Representative Seaton's understanding of the process for accessing the information, and underscored that data dumping would not occur. Approved research questions would be posed and responded to appropriately, she said.

[9:02:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD referred to the Alaska State Constitution, Article 1, Sec. 22, and read the privacy article, amended in 1972, which states:

The right of the people to privacy is recognized and shall not be infringed. The legislature shall implement this section.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD opined that data mining is a concern and protecting privacy is important. She reported having accessed the Online Alaska School Information System (OASIS) system, with seven domains available for access. Upon selecting a domain tab labeled "Students," then further selecting "Health Records," she had the opportunity to know how much weight a student's mother

had gained, during pregnancy. The type of data being collected is disturbing, she stressed, and questioned the need for such information.

MS. THOMAS deferred comment regarding why EED collects that information; however, she confirmed that the ANSWERS policy questions do not require that type of data, nor would it be part of the sub-set of data that would be submitted by EED for use in ANSWERS. The contributing data owners select the data for submission, to ANSWERS, which does not include all of the information collected for specific purposes and requirements of that agency.

[9:05:31 AM](#)

CHAIR KELLER referred to the handout, "EXHIBIT 9. Feedback Data Sources," and directed attention to a list of information in a box with the heading, "K-12 Data from DEED," to state that this is the information being contributed to the database by EED, and the agency has been invited to comment.

[9:06:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD continued, and asked whether the online information contained in OASIS will be linked to ANSWERS.

MS. THOMAS responded that it will not be linked, but an extracted sub-set of OASIS data, that has been de-identified and is relevant to the ANSWERS policy questions, will be transmitted, processed, and stored in the longitudinal information system.

[9:06:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND referred to the committee packet five page handout titled, "ANSWERS Frequently Asked Questions-Alaska's P-20W SLDS; Updated February 19, 2015," the third page, and paraphrased the question and response, which read [original punctuation provided]:

What is the Federal Law that governs what student information may be released?

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), as amended, or 20 USC 1232g (implementing regulations are 34 CFR Part 99). There are not exceptions that permit the release of data that could result in an individual's identity becoming publicly known. Exceptions are allowed for certain non-public program evaluation and research purposes, subject to detailed agreements, research structures, data destruction policies, and similar privacy protections.

[9:08:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD maintained her concern for the possibility of private information being breached. She stated her understanding that FERPA, as originally passed, would never have allowed this information to be used in this way and asked what was changed in the law; has a Presidential Executive Order (EO) been enacted.

MS. BUTLER responded that FERPA provides for officials and departments of education, to use school data for the purpose of analyzing outcomes.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD opined that the ANSWERS system is illegal on both federal and state levels. She cited "2003 US Code, Title 20 EDUCATION, CHAPTER 70 STRENGTHENING AND IMPROVEMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS, SUBCHAPTER IX GENERAL PROVISIONS, Part E Uniform Provisions, subpart 2 other provisions, Sec. 7911 Prohibition on nationwide database, to paraphrase the information, which read [original punctuation provided]:

Nothing in this chapter (other than section 6398(b) of this title) shall be construed to authorize the development of a nationwide database of personally identifiable information on individuals involved in studies or other collections of data under this chapter.

[Further citation notes: Pub. L. 89-10, Title IX, §9531, as added Pub. L. 107-110, Title IX, §901, Jan. 8, 2002, 115 Stat. 1984. Prior Provisions: A prior section 7911, Pub.

L. 89-10, Title IX, §9211, as added Pub. L. 103-382, Title I, §101, Oct. 20, 1994, 108 Stat. 3804, set out administrative provisions, prior to the general amendment of this subchapter by Pub. L. 107-110. See section 7516 of this Title.]

MS. BUTLER offered that the grant to build the ANSWERS system is from the DOE, which administers FERPA, and ensures all activities are compliant.

MS. THOMAS added that the member's reference is to a federal database. She pointed out that ANSWERS is a state database and does not share data with the federal government.

[9:11:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND noted the previous comment that, in many states, the health and social services and corrections data is included in the longitudinal system, and asked whether it would be possible to access the information generated from those P-20 programs and view the results.

MS. THOMAS answered, "Yes." She offered to provide the links and contact names for the states that have available information. To a follow-up question, she said many states are far ahead of Alaska, such as Florida that has been doing longitudinal data work since the early 1990's.

[9:13:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD stated her concern regarding the amount of data being gathered and the links being made and reporting that security breaches have occurred in Kansas. She paraphrased further from the U.S. Longitudinal Grant, page e16 which read [original punctuation provided]:

Alaska Data Systems

Alaska has longitudinal data systems within each of the four participating agencies (DEED, ACPE, UA, and DOLWD) for this project. These will serve as the foundation blocks for the Alaska SLDS. The system will integrate data from these four sources. This initiative is well-timed given the recent amendments

to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The revised regulations provide guidance to the SLDS project by clarifying Alaska's abilities to share data across agencies, and the responsibilities the state assumes by doing so. The clarification of FERPA occurred at an opportune time as we work to build an efficient powerful and protected system to perform longitudinal research in the state.

MS. BUTLER clarified that no new data is being collected. The ANSWERS system is being built using sub-sets of extracted information, which exists in the separate silos maintained by the four participating agencies. The data is being de-identified, encrypted, and protected within the same secure, state maintained environment, where it has existed since being collected.

[9:17:06 AM](#)

MS. BUTLER paraphrased the third question and response, which read [original punctuation provided]:

What legal authority compels collection of data that may be linked in ANSWERS (Rep. Keller)?

The data being linked through ANSWERS are subsets of data already collected and maintained by various state programs relative to student participation in a publicly funded program such as the Alaska K-12 system, University of Alaska programs, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education programs, or Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development programs. Collection of student and workforce member data is a condition of participation in certain publicly-funded programs. Individuals may opt out of these data collection by attending private schools or home-schooling, or by being self-employed in the case of employment data. I have forwarded your question to EED Commissioner's office and requested citations to the specific laws applicable to K-12 student data collection. Specific to employment data, the authority is the Employment Security Act, Alaska Statute 23.20.

MS. BUTLER paraphrased the fourth question, which read [original punctuation provided]:

What is the interoperability between the data sets that will be linked in ANSWERS (Rep. Reinbold)?

MS. BUTLER deferred the response.

[9:18:35 AM](#)

MS. THOMAS paraphrased the fourth response, which read [original punctuation provided]:

Relative to the ability of the different information technology systems and software applications used by each of the four data providers to exchange data in such a way that the information was both secure and usable, interoperability was a prime focus of ANSWERS design. To that end, because the systems and their data do not reside on a single technological platform, data extract, transformation, and load (ETL) algorithms were developed for each selected data element, to ensure common formats. For example, in different systems, the data element "gender" may be male, female, and unknown. In another it may be M, F, and O. In a third, it may be represented by numerals such as 1, 2, and 3, etc. When designing the process by which each system's data is loaded into ANSWERS, the source system values will be maintained and a transformed value created to standardize across all data sources for ease of use in reporting. In accordance with ANSWERS commitment to transparency, a data dictionary with plain-English descriptions of data elements is scheduled for publication on the ANSWERS website when the system goes live.

The attached Alaska Performance Scholarship infographic illustrates that, although the data may currently be used for cross-sector analyses, the data used for those current analyses cannot be de-identified upon ETL, it must be manually extracted and linked, and then loaded into another system for analysis under parameters set out in a project-specific MOU between data providers, who normally rely upon each other to destroy the extracted data and associated personally identifiable information (PII) upon completion of the project. ANSWERS will allow for the existing data to be used for cross-sector analysis without the risk of PII proliferation, and

without identified data ever leaving the state's protected environments. The result is greatly enhanced reporting capacity, significant reporting efficiency gains, and substantial improvements to data security in the process.

9:20:17 AM

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD referred to the funding aspect, and paraphrased from a prepared statement to pose a question, which read [original punctuation provided]:

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act our state received funding from the U.S. Department of Education in the form of a Phase II state Fiscal Stabilization Fund Grant in exchange for the State's commitment to advance education reform in key areas as outlined by the U.S. Department of Education (SFSF, pg3).

The grant application state that the creation of a "crosswalk" between the various data systems in place throughout Alaska will be a significant project that will undergird the architecture and development of the ANSWERS SLDS. "Accordingly, Alaska will devote significant project resources, human and otherwise, to ensuring this key infrastructure piece is developed..." (SFSF, pg. 90)

It is stated in the grant that the last three phases of this process will be completed using state funds. How much has Alaska spent on this project to date?

MS. THOMAS responded that the grant referred to is not the P-20W SLDS, because all six outcomes of the grant project are scheduled to be funded through the federal grant.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD inquired about the funding source that pays for the salaries and benefits of those working on the ANSWERS project.

MS. THOMAS explained that the \$4 million grant funding pays the majority of the ANSWERS project workers. In-kind contributions from the partner agencies does occur, but is absorbed by those departmental budgets; a minimal amount.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD questioned what aspect is covered by state funds.

MS. THOMAS said the in-kind contribution is a state expense, and offered to provide further information.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD requested a rough estimate.

MS. THOMAS estimated less than \$500 thousand.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked to have the amount calculated from 2006 and projected into the future for 10 years.

[9:25:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD moved to the question of privacy, to ask for an explanation of data marks. She paraphrased from a prepared statement, which read [original punctuation provided]:

In the Phase II State Fiscal Stabilization Fund Grant it was stated that the creation of this data system would facilitate "data marts" that would allow for research and analysis by not only our state Department of Education but also "non-education individuals" who wish to access the datasets for their own research (SFSF, pg. 91).

MS. THOMAS said the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund Grant does not relate to the work being done on the P-20W SLDS.

MS. BUTLER added that there would be an opportunity, in the system, for a research company such as the McDowell Group, to access data that is de-identified and aggregated.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD inquired about the responsibility of the governing board, and requested a copy of the policies; specifically policy related to data access by research groups.

MS. BUTLER reported that the staff of ANSWERS have been directed by the governing board to develop the policies to ensure guarded access; the policies are in the early stages of development.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD asked who is directly involved in creating the policy and for a copy to be forwarded to the committee.

[9:29:07 AM](#)

CHAIR KELLER identified that a weak point in the development of the P-20 system is the lack of a legislative liaison.

[9:30:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON reflected on why this system is being built. He recalled that ANSWERS was developed due to a direct request from the legislature, as a means to identify student outcomes and improve the state educational system. A method for measurement and accountability of the students, during formative years as well as outcomes at the postsecondary/workforce levels, was deemed necessary in order to evaluate programs and educational approaches. Without this ability, he opined, the legislature is sitting blind. Thus, the use of de-identified information to drive an integrated mechanism for better understanding must be considered. In the past, the effects of the state funded programs have not been tracked in a meaningful way. It is important to clarify the details, he finished.

CHAIR KELLER added that the legislative intent also includes other elements for consideration, which have recently taken on new meaning. In addition, student success ultimately lies with the parents, and not through the legislature overseeing a series of tests, bars and hurdles. He suggested, that the picture has changed, since the ANSWERS system was authorized.

REPRESENTATIVE REINBOLD opined that the resources being spent on data collection should be directed to the classroom. Security breaches are a major concern and big government does not belong in the classroom.

[9:37:21 AM](#)

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), said the data is collected by the department through multiple methods, primarily the On-line Alaska Student Information System (OASIS); the program used to comply with statutory requirements, which focuses on demographic information. Each district provides information for entry, which is used for generating reports to satisfy both the state and federal interests. He explained that OASIS was implemented as a means to streamline the collection of district information required to be filed on each program; Title as well as state sponsored programs. In doing so, duplication of effort was also eliminated. Referring to the handout titled, "EXHIBIT 9. Feedback Data Sources," he said some information in OASIS is provided by other sources, such as student test scores from vendors, and all of the data combined is used to fulfil the list headed "K-12 Data from DEED." The reports generated are the means for the department to meet accountability requirements under state and federal law to ensure educational standards are being met.

[9:41:07 AM](#)

MR. MORSE moved to the handout titled "Alaska Statewide Assessments, Updated February 2015," and stated that the assessment information listed in the handout does not automatically become part of the ANSWERS database, even though ANSWERS receives the benefit from some of data indicated. As an example, he said the standards based assessments (SBAs), now referred to as Alaska measures of progress (AMP), would be included in ANSWERS; however, other assessments listed in the handout are not made part of that database. He suggested it may be helpful to understand the individual assessments, where the data is stored, and to know that the data only becomes part of ANSWERS if it is necessary for use in generating a response to a research inquiry. He reviewed each of the six column headings, which read: Purpose; Assessment Dates; Grade Level; Content Area; Statute and Regulation; and Where is Data Securely Stored.

[9:44:11 AM](#)

MR. MORSE began with the first assessment category, titled "Kindergarten Developmental Profile," and explained that this is strictly a state requirement, using protocol methods to assess a child's abilities prior to entering school. One example would be to observe if a child is able to prepare to read a book: identify the front of the book, hold it right-side up, and open it appropriately. The data is held within the district and submitted to the department where it is aggregated to produce reports; as required by law. Germaine to all of the aggregated reports, when a district or school reports only a few students in a grade level, the report does not provide information regarding performance and automatically substitutes an asterisk. This omission of information prevents the data from being reported at these levels, thus ensuring privacy protection for small facilities.

[9:45:52 AM](#)

MR. MORSE continued with the state and federally required "Standards based assessments (SBA)," which also comprise part of the new AMP. The information is held by the district, the department, and the contracted vendor working on behalf of the state. The vendor supplies the assessment and makes reports to all the concerns, including: students, parents, schools, districts, and the department. He pointed out that this is the largest assessment proctored, and an alternative format is available to any student with severe cognitive disabilities.

[9:47:59 AM](#)

MR. MORSE said the next category, "English Language Proficiency Assessment," is required by federal law and state regulation. It is also handled by a contracted vendor and handled similarly to the SBA. He moved to the next listed heading, "National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)," which provides a clear picture for comparing how Alaskan students perform in relation to schools across the nation. The NAEP is required by federal law and state regulation, and is administered by a federal agency. The data is held at the National Center for

Educational Statistics and the state has limited access; primarily to receive aggregated results.

[9:49:43 AM](#)

MR. MORSE moved onto the category headed, "College, Career Ready Assessments," to note that these are the WorkKeys, ACT, or SAT assessments, as governed under state statute. The vendors proctor the tests, and maintain the data, providing it to the students, who give permission and direct where the results are to be submitted. The department receives the information for accountability purposes, and as part of the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS). The final category, "Early Literacy Screener," is required under regulation, in compliance with education authority laws; AS 14.07.020 and AS 14.07.060. The screening began through a request from the legislative. The department grants money to districts, which then select an assessment from several available choices, in order to accomplish the screening. The district maintains the data and provides it to the department.

[9:52:09 AM](#)

MR. MORSE explained how the securely stored data from each of the described assessments is shared: into the ANSWERS system, or in response to other legitimate requests. He said that, in accordance with FERPA, school officials have the right to collect data for program/performance evaluation purposes; a long standing provision. Data use for research purposes has recently been clarified under FERPA, for the benefit of the state. If the governing body for ANSWERS requested the SBA assessments, prior to authorizing the data submission, the department would review four specific criteria under FERPA: purpose, scope and duration; purposes for the study and how it relates to a written agreement; restriction agreements for the staff that could view the information; and finally the destruction criteria for all identifiable information. At the conclusion of the project, the information must be destroyed. In practicality, for example, a district might request information on how a schools third grade students eventually performed on a 10th grade assessment. The request would result in an agreement for a study, with a

duration time of nine months. At the conclusion of nine months, all the data provided must be destroyed, and only the aggregated, de-identified, report remains. This is the standard protocol for how many reports are currently generated regarding educational initiatives. Throughout the process, assurances and agreements must be in place to protect the concerned interests. In finishing, he assured the committee that legal oversight is part of the process, stating that anytime an MOU is entered into, the department attorneys, as well as those at the Department of Law, are involved.

[9:58:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND referred to the assessment handout, and noted that NAEP is administered to selected students on certain years. She questioned whether all fourth and eighth grade students take the test, and followed-up to ask how the participating student sample is selected.

MR. MORSE explained that not all students are tested. A statistical sample size is used to provide a state performance number. In Alaska, it requires about 50 percent of the students to participate, in order to meet the sample requirement. He said that information on every student is included in the potential pool, along with the demographic information, to choose the representative assessment group. A school will only be excluded if the school sample is deemed too limited, or the location prohibitive due to remoteness, and if a similar sample can be proctored in another locale.

[10:01:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked about the requirement for WorkKeys results to be included on the high school transcripts, and whether that has changed, as it is not indicated as such in the assessment handout.

MR. MORSE noted that it is an error on the handout, and he clarified that the high schools do receive that data.

[10:02:56 AM](#)

CHAIR KELLER announced the next meeting, and thanked the day's participants.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the House Education Standing Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 10:03 a.m.