

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 3, 2015
3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

ESTER COX, Chair
State Board of Education
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the Report to the Legislature from the State Board of Education.

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions related to the State Board's report.

ACTION NARRATIVE

3:30:14 PM

CHAIR MIKE DUNLEAVY called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to

order were Senators Huggins, Giessel, Gardner, Stevens, and Chair Dunleavy.

State Board of Education Report to the Legislature

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY announced the business before the committee was a report from the State Board of Education.

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ESTER COX, Chair, State Board of Education and Early Development, said she was here to report to the legislature as required by SB 1. She noted that every governor, legislature, and educator would like to see fewer regulations; however, with the passage of HB 278 there are a multitude of new regulations. She noted the detailed report and advised that she would follow the handout.

She said the first topic is HB 278 and the changes it makes. She explained that every regulation goes through the Board, but also goes out for public comment which can result in changes made. The first change HB 278 makes is to repeal the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE). The second change eliminates the mandate for 11th graders to take WorkKeys and replaced it with the choice to take SAT, ACT, or WorkKeys, one of which will be paid for by the state. She opined this will result in a better turnout for the test due to the affordability of it. The bill also addressed deferred jury duty for for teachers in a one-star or two-star school.

She related that another accomplishment of HB 278 is students' ability to challenge courses. The district or teacher will design an assessment of the course and charge a nominal fee. It is up to the district whether or not to give a grade. Residential school applications are also addressed in HB 278. The bill sets an annual period for residential school application and a flexible count date for variable-term residential schools.

She said the bill also speaks to charter schools. It deals with bus transportation to charter schools and also says that if the local board rejects the charter application there is an appeal process. The bill also provides for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) grants for underserved middle school students under two programs: Alaska Native Science Engineering Program (ANSEP) and the Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRC). Other regulations are a new state law regarding

restraint and seclusion of students and a requirement of three math credits to graduate.

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MS. COX discussed the Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP). There are two tests for grades 3-10, language arts and math, which are geared toward the Alaska Academic Standards. There are fewer questions on the tests and the 2015 AMP will be used as a baseline. The expectation is that the scores will be lower because standards are more rigorous. Students will have access to practice tests before the computer-based test is administered. Paper and pencil is an option in certain circumstances. She explained that teachers will use "dipsticking" to check student progress toward goals. She said students will be expected to analyze the question, perform multi-step tasks, solve problems, and apply what they know to new situations. She noted that the latter is probably the most difficult. Test result data will be distributed to districts, teachers, and parents, but no individual scores will go to the federal government.

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MS. COX reviewed the Alaska School Performance Index (ASPI), the new 5-star rating for schools. This year 501 schools were rated and 97 percent of students attend 3-star schools or better. The ASPI measures student progress and achievement in reading, writing, and math, graduation rate, student performance in college, and career assessments; SAT, ACT, and WorkKeys. Alternative and small schools are more difficult to rate and the scoring system was altered to accommodate this. Reward Schools must meet specific criteria; all schools can meet this criteria.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if anyone had any questions.

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SENATOR GARDNER noticed an increase in requests, from 5 districts to 23 districts, for the state waiver that says 70 percent of district funding be used for instruction. She asked why that happened.

MIKE HANLEY explained that there are two counts during a school year and most schools come in on the first count. The waiver requests did not triple and normally range in the 20's. Those five districts thought they would make it, but didn't, and with assistance were able to succeed at a later date.

SENATOR GARDNER asked about contracting out for an assessment to go with the new standards and the timeline.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY explained that DEED put out an RFP and the procurement team reviewed the proposals. The Achievement and Assessment Institute (AAI) of Kansas was the high-scoring vendor. The department is currently working with AAI to develop the new assessment, which will begin in March of this school year. Practice tests that provide dipsticks are already in place and are optional.

SENATOR STEVENS expressed concern with the potential for lower scores. He asked if there is a way to prepare for that.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said messaging will be critical and information has already gone out to the public, school districts, and school administration. There is a new baseline with higher expectations and there is no way to compare the previous assessment with the new one. He anticipates that students will do better than in the past, but will not reach the higher bar yet. He pointed out that fourth through eighth grade students previously were 70 percent to 80 percent proficient on state scores, but they weren't that high on a national test. The new testing will be better aligned with national testing.

SENATOR GARDNER asked about students who dropped out of school in anticipation of not passing the HSGQE and did not finish graduation requirements. She asked if the Board or department has discussed how to help these students get a diploma.

MS. COX said that student has not been a topic of conversation but probably should be.

SENATOR GARDNER said the Barrow School District estimated 136 students in the region fit the category.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if the students are under the age of 20.

SENATOR GARDNER said some may not be.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said that is problematic because after the age of 20 they cannot enroll in high school.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said it's 22 for special education students. He stated that there are no prohibitions for students to come back and earn credits until they are 20. A school could set up opportunities for students to earn the credits.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked how a school qualifies as a Reward School under ASPI.

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MS. COX related that a Reward School is a school in Alaska that is in the highest ten percent in the performance index for grade levels, includes grade 12, and for the two most recent years had a graduation cohort of ten students or more, and a combined graduation rate over the two years of at least 85 percent. If there are fewer than ten students, all but one must graduate during those two years.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked where the criteria came from.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY responded that the department wanted to recognize schools that were doing very well. The department also recognizes high progress schools - the top ten percent in growth - as Reward Schools.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY restated the question.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the regulation was developed by DEED and adopted by the State Board.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY advised that 4-star and 5-star schools should be rewarded by being left alone. He maintained that resources are limited and there is no point in the extra focus. Rather, focus on the 1-star and 2-star schools.

MS. COX said they do leave them alone. She saw Reward Schools as an incentive.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said he feels they are required to do something that consumes resources in a climate of diminishing resources.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY suggested looking at specifics because DEED doesn't interject itself into schools very often. He offered to have a follow-up conversation.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY suggested looking at laws and regulations that might free up more resources. He said he isn't sure what that might be, but he's started asking school districts to submit suggestions.

He asked how ASPI came about.

MS. COX recalled that before ASPI there was Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and it was punitive. It had 37 categories and if a school missed in one category, it failed. The idea behind ASPI was to build a rating system that had a built-in incentive. The U.S. Department of Education was asked if ASPI would be permissible and the state got the go ahead to implement it. She concluded that ASPI builds incentives and makes students feel good.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if ASPI is a waiver to AYP under NCLB.

MS. COX said yes.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY summarized that the waiver was as a result of the state's relationship with the federal government's NCLB. He asked for the remediation plan for a 1-star school.

MS. COX described the State System of Support (SSO S). She said SSOS coaches are contracted to do monthly five-day visits to a school and to do distance coaching in between visits. They work on an improvement plan with the school. The department designates districts as Tier I, II, or III to determine what level of support SSOS will give. She described the differences between Priority Schools and Focus Schools.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked how long the remediation will take.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the responsibility resides with the local school board and school leadership. The department's job is to assist them to make the improvements.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY recognized that State Board members Sue Hull from Fairbanks and Kathleen Yarr from Ketchikan were online.

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MS. COX returned to discuss SSOS.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the department is working directly with Priority and Focus Schools.

MS. COX discussed the Alaska Learning Network (AKLN). It is run by the University of Alaska - Southeast's School of Education and has partners with all 54 Alaska districts. The districts pay enrollment fees and grant credits. The curriculum requirements are there as well as a broad variety of other courses. The fall enrollment was 376 students and AKLN is a lifesaver for small schools that have a limited curriculum bank.

SENATOR GARDNER said AKLN serves all levels of students, but she is concerned about the \$850,000 state cost. She asked if the 376 number is classes or students.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said it is the number of enrollments in classes, so the 367 could represent fewer students.

SENATOR GARDNER did the math and highlighted that it's expensive per student.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY countered that AKLN does more than offer and teach courses, including the training of Advanced Placement teachers, the development of courses, and the development of an Alaska Studies class. He noted that last year the legislature put intent language in place for AKLN to be self-sustaining and the department is working on that.

SENATOR GARDNER said it is a valuable program, but the cost is a concern.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY pointed out that some things will go away due to the current \$3.8 billion deficit.

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MS. COX mentioned the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project, a teacher mentoring program that began in 2004-2005. This year there are 36 mentors. It works because it is teachers talking to teachers. She said the teacher retention rate while using mentor teachers rose from 68 percent to 79 percent. Half of new teachers in the U.S. quit in the first five years. In Alaska, 94 percent of mentored teachers are still in the field five years later. She said she didn't have the fiscal note.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if there is data on teachers who stay and weren't mentored, versus those who were, and how their students performed.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said DEED has that data. Statewide assessments showed that students in classes of a new teacher scored significantly lower than their peers in a seasoned teacher's classroom, but they scored similarly with mentored teachers. He said UA has a grant to study this issue, so there will be hard data a year-and-a-half from now.

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MS. COX noted that Mt. Edgecumbe High School is very successful. The State Board is the school board for Mt. Edgecumbe, which is a 4-star school, and is currently undergoing a curriculum review. In fall 2014, students from 107 villages were represented with an attendance rate of 96 percent and a five-year graduation rate of 98.5 percent. It is a school to be proud of.

SENATOR GARDNER recalled that in the fifth year the kids get certificates.

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LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), answered questions related to Mt. Edgecumbe. He said he is unaware of a certificate, but the school partners with UAS for Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming.

SENATOR GARDNER offered that students often stay at Mt. Edgecumbe for five years because they are engaged in the CTE programs.

MR. MORSE said he'd look into it.

SENATOR STEVENS asked if Mt. Edgecumbe could be used for variable terms or for summer programs like ANSEP, when the school is unoccupied.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said it is a possibility there and at other schools statewide in order to maximize resources.

MS. COX added that Mr. Edgecumbe picks up students in January, but it is difficult for them to catch up.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said a report on Mt. Edgecumbe will be presented to the committee at a later date. He asked if the State Board is the school board for Mt. Edgecumbe.

MS. COX said they were; the other board an advisory board.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked what chance a student in a 1-star school would have to go to Mt. Edgecumbe.

MS. COX said she didn't have an answer, but the board should decide whether the opportunity should be extended to students in 1-star and 2-star schools. She pointed out that a student from a district without a high school gets rated higher in the

application than a student in a district with a high school. She said there should be a discussion about whether that should be extended to districts with low-performing schools.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY commented on ways to make a student in a low-performing school whole. He also questioned what happens to a school's score if high performing students leave.

SENATOR STEVENS said the other question is what happens to the remaining students.

MS. COX assured that will be a conversation for the board.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said the concepts of best practices and equity are longstanding, but sometimes the seasoned teacher is teaching the high-performing students while the aide is teaching the low-performing students. He questioned what public education should be about and opined that the subject will make for a good discussion.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the department has had this conversation and the superintendent of Mt. Edgecumbe is looking at the 107 villages to determine the star rating of the schools there.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY referenced page 2, paragraph 3, in the State Board's report and questioned when the provision "Alaska regulations do not require school district superintendents to have a superintendent endorsement on their administrator's certificate" came about.

MR. MORSE thought it was in the mid-90s. He offered to check on it.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked the status of the \$5 million investment to improve Internet speed in public schools.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY reported that districts have applied and the department has identified which districts will be getting the funding. The goal is bring every school up to 10 megabits.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked for a list of who won the grant and how much it was for.

MR. MORSE said Chair Dunleavy's staff has the report.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY directed attention to page 3 - restraint and seclusion of students. He said he is getting feedback that this provision is a cost to school districts, such as for training.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY agreed there is a cost for training.

SENATOR GARDNER requested the course completion rate for people who enrolled in the AKLN program.

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SENATOR HUGGINS asked about "homegrown" teachers.

MS. COX said that's for Native teachers to get involved in education.

SENATOR HUGGINS stressed the importance of teacher preparation.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY agreed and added that one area where the board and the university collaborate is in teacher preparation programs to ensure quality teachers. To have a quantity of teachers requires incentivizing students to move into the profession.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked how much the governor proposes to cut DEED and the impact it will have.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said the request was to cut 5 to 8 percent - \$32 million for this year. In order to cut beyond that the department will have to go "into the formula." The impact will be felt by students, schools, and communities. In four districts it will impact the amount of the local contribution, as well.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked about the cost of professional development programs. He requested an overview of the programs and what was purchased.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said they'll get that information. The requirement is for 10 professional development days and they vary widely.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if schools have to file their staff development plans with the department.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said they do not have to do that anymore.

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SENATOR GARDNER asked about the push for early grade teachers to take classes on strategies of teaching reading. She asked if there is a benefit to that.

MS. COX said reading has to happen in the early grades and the board has instituted a screening for early childhood. If the school policy is that students don't start school until first grade the school can apply for a waiver from the screening until second grade. The board looks at the strength of teacher instruction in lower grades and she believes it should be looked at in all grades.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said most people would support expertise in reading in the early grades. He pointed out that it will take resources to implement literacy instruction.

SENATOR STEVENS asked about the status of the Ketchikan lawsuit on local contribution. He said communities he is associated with are proud to "fund to the cap." He inquired how much money is contributed to education statewide by local communities.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said the lawsuit is ongoing and he assumed the commissioner would speak in generalities.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY agreed. The state has appealed and has asked for a stay. He described the suit in generalities regarding dedicated funds. Local contribution impact on education last year was just over \$220 million. The judge did not declare that local contributions were unconstitutional, but the method in which they were collected was. He termed it a "dedicated fund," which is not allowed. He also said the state is not required to fully fund education. Considerations on the table are whether the state will replace the local contribution and whether to change the way local contributions are collected.

SENATOR STEVENS asked when the stay ruling is expected.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said he didn't know. They asked for an expedited response, but he did not know if that would be granted.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY referenced page 9 and asked for an update on the Alaska Digital Teaching Initiative, a three-year, \$15 million demonstration project.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY corrected that it is a \$5 million program and the update is on page 10. The idea was for each of the three schools to reach beyond their boundaries and partner with a small, remote school districts to provide resources. A component for the digital teaching academy is still being considered.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY referenced page 11 and asked if Tier III schools are left alone.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied that they are recognized as Reward Schools; nothing is added or taken away.

SENATOR GARDNER said maybe it's working.

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SENATOR HUGGINS asked about scoring intensive needs students.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said that's been cleared up. There was a spike several years ago in the number of intensive needs students with no increase in population. An audit was done and only a few cases were challenged.

SENATOR STEVENS asked about the timeframe for the teacher mentoring program results and if the program is rural, versus urban.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY replied it does not speak to urban or rural, just teachers who stayed in Alaska. Currently, all new teachers are mentored and there is no control group. Anchorage is beginning a new study with a control group.

SENATOR STEVENS asked what year it was when the retention rate was 68 percent.

MR. MORSE thought that was current data based on research up through last year since the beginning of the program in 2004-2005. He offered to verify that information.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY concluded that 68 percent was at the beginning of the program.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked for closing comments.

MS. COX highlighted that Commissioner Hanley embraced articulating K-16 and the State Board is meeting with the Board of Regents. Topics of discussion are dual credit, CTE, a program

from Washington called Running Start, and teacher preparation. She asked the members to carefully review career and technical education on page 12, especially regarding grants. The departments of education, labor, and UA are partners in the plan.

She noted school and student data on pages 17 and 18. She said the four-year graduation rate is 71 percent and the five-year graduation rate is 76 percent. Since 2004-2005, the dropout rate has declined from 6 percent to 4 percent. She concluded that something good is happening in public education.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY commented on the variety of stakeholders in education and the unprecedented drop in revenue. He maintained that everyone will have to work together to get through the revenue shortfall in order to have a quality program. He suggested that the state will have to address regulations and laws and look at federal grant mandates. The goal is to help shepherd this crucial state service through these difficult times, politics aside.

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There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Dunleavy adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 5:04 p.m.