

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 5, 2015

3:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Gary Stevens

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 3

Designating January 25 - 31, 2015, as Alaska School Choice Week.

- MOVED CSSCR 3(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

PRESENTATION: ANSWERS (ALASKA NAVIGATOR: STATEWIDE WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION-RELATED STATISTICS)

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SCR 3

SHORT TITLE: AK SCHOOL CHOICE WEEK

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STOLTZE

01/26/15	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/26/15	(S)	EDC
02/05/15	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

**WITNESS REGISTER**

SENATOR BILL STOLTZE  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Sponsor of SCR 3.

Stephanie Butler, Director of Operations  
Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE)  
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented information on ANSWERS.

Diane Barrans, Executive Director  
Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education Commission (ACPE)  
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided information on ANSWERS.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:30:07 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, and Chair Dunleavy.

#### **SCR 3-AK SCHOOL CHOICE WEEK**

[3:30:56 PM](#)

**CHAIR DUNLEAVY** announced the consideration of SCR 3.

**SENATOR BILL STOLTZE**, Alaska State Legislature, as sponsor, introduced SCR 3 which designates a School Choice Week. He said the resolution is about the broad concept of school choice that exists in our public schools - charter schools, technical schools, home schools, and combinations thereof, serving parents and their families. He mentioned the Mat-Su School District's variety of school choices, systems of education that are best for the students and the parents while meeting the requirements of education. He noted that Mr. David Boyle requested this legislation in order to celebrate that educational choices exist. He reiterated that the educational system that best serves the student and family should be the primary reason for the program.

[3:35:41 PM](#)

**SENATOR STOLTZE** praised the great teachers in the state. He noted the date of the resolution has passed and may be altered. He said the resolution has no cost. He reiterated that the primary purpose of the educational system is to best serve the student and family.

**CHAIR DUNLEAVY** noted no fiscal note.

SENATOR GIESSEL voiced appreciation for the resolution.

SENATOR GARDNER said she likes the resolution. She remarked that public schools often are alternative schools and she does not see them reflected in the resolution.

SENATOR STOLTZE said they are fully recognized in the resolution. He commented on waiting lists for public school charter schools.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY applauded the resolution and said he would add his name as sponsor. He said he was a believer in education and agreed there were a number of choices in Alaska. He opined that choice does not have to be controlled by the government.

[3:40:32 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS moved to delete "25-31, 2015" on page 1, line 1, and insert "24-30, 2016" in its place. He instructed to do the same on page 2, line 6.

There being no objection, the Amendment 1 was adopted.

SENATOR HUGGINS commented that most charter schools would not like to be considered as alternative schools.

SENATOR STOLTZE agreed that school choice is different than alternative school. "Choice" is the accurate descriptive word.

SENATOR HUGGINS moved to report SCR 3, as amended, from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note. There being no objection, CSSCR 3(EDC) was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[3:43:51 PM](#)

At ease

**PRESENTATION: ANSWERS (Alaska Navigator: Statewide Workforce and Education-Related Statistics)**

[3:45:27 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY announced a presentation on Alaska Navigator: Statewide Workforce and Education-Related Statistics (ANSWERS).

Stephanie Butler, Director of Operations, Alaska Postsecondary Education Commission Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), introduced herself.

Diane Barrans, Executive Director, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE), Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), introduced herself.

[3:46:53 PM](#)

MS. BUTLER began by stating the mission of Alaska Navigator: Statewide Workforce and Education-Related Statistics (ANSWERS), which is to deliver outcomes information to Alaska stakeholders to assess, evaluate, and improve the state's education and career development spectrum. She said the presentation will emphasize the privacy and security of the program. She pointed out that P-20W SLDS means "preschool through grade 20 and workforce statewide longitudinal data system." Alaska received a federal grant of \$4 million over 3 years which ends on June 30, 2015. The money was distributed to the University of Alaska (UA), DEED, Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD), and ACPE.

She discussed roles of the ANSWERS project: APCE is the project manager, DEED is the fiscal agent, and the other partners work within their expertise areas. She related that ACPE has had a long-term interest in coordinating statewide activities that promote access and success and also has authority and responsibility to do so. Additionally, the program would solve the challenge of access to data, in particular, longitudinal data, to measure outcomes.

[3:50:00 PM](#)

MS. BUTLER discussed why Alaska needs a cross sector P-20W longitudinal data system. It would allow Alaska leaders to transform the way programs and outcomes are measured. Currently, ACPE is only able to measure program input and is not able to answer if programs make a difference long term and are effective.

[3:51:07 PM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked how programs are selected and which ones are currently being measured and studied.

MS. BUTLER replied that ACPE surveyed stakeholders to find out which programs were priorities. The targeted priority will be to determine how K-12 students are performing in the workforce and what wages they receive.

She continued to explain that another reason for a cross sector longitudinal data system is to protect confidential student and citizen data and protected information.

[3:53:27 PM](#)

MS. BUTLER explained the privacy and security approach with the emphasis on protecting individual privacy and security throughout planning, development, and implementation of ANSWERS. It is a conservative design approach that prevents the identification of individual students.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if there is an assumption that all students will be a part of the data gathering. He asked if there is an opt-in choice for parents or an adult student option to opt out.

MS. BUTLER replied that there is no opt-in or opt-out policy because the data has already been collected by partner organizations. There is an impact on the ability to use the data if it is missing certain populations. Also, students would have to be identified in order to let them opt in or out.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY thought the program might be a problem for Alaskans due to hacking concerns.

MS. BUTLER turned to the project timeline. The project is in stage 4 - data reporting - and is customized for Alaska. She described the objectives and operating principles of the data collection. The first principle is linking current cross-sector data using transparency and security. The second principle is maintaining the sharing of data while ensuring privacy of individual unit records. The third principle is the protection of individuals' privacy. These operating principles were formally adopted by the agencies' four CEO's.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked who the four CEO's are.

MS. BUTLER answered the president of UA, the commissioners of Labor and Education, and the executive director of ACPE.

She returned to the operating principles of data collection. The fourth principle is that data contributors own their data. Fifth, is that the data value is increased through common understanding and use, and sixth, that the ongoing ANSWERS system design and maintenance is able to expand as needed. The goal is to have a long-life system.

[3:59:51 PM](#)

MS. BUTLER said operating principles guide the parameters of the system design. Data is de-identified and aggregated. Someone in the community could not identify a specific student. It does not replace or usurp existing data systems. It uses subsets of data from various partners' data systems as appropriate to answer critical questions and use cases. It is based on multi-agency governance structure requiring input, review, and agreement by the four founding partner organizations. It addresses cross-sector queries that cannot be answered by individual partners. Finally, the output is based on best practices and individual privacy protections.

[4:02:19 PM](#)

She talked about the multi-tiered governance structure which operates on a consensus model. Each CEO appoints a data/project manager from their partner organization and an implementation team. She stressed that stakeholder committees and advisors guide the project.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked for the names of the stakeholder groups.

MS. BUTLER replied that one of the stakeholders are parents.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked what the parents' role is.

MS. BUTLER explained that parents provided information about what educational outcomes they value. They requested to know which programs and activities are most successful.

She added that teachers, legislators, administrators, school boards, general public, and board of regents are also stakeholders.

SENATOR GARDNER said this is the first time she has heard of ANSWERS and is not aware of outreach to legislators.

MS. BUTLER spoke of significant outreach to a variety of organizations throughout the state, such as PTA. She termed it very challenging.

[4:06:14 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked for two wishes for the program.

MS. BUTLER answered that it would be heavily used and provide value and the information would be useful to students and parents so that they can make informed choices.

SENATOR HUGGINS commented that he is not convinced it will be of use.

SENATOR GARDNER said she feels the same. She acknowledged that data is very powerful. She asked if the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) and DOLWD do the same thing with workforce information data, or if ANSWER would take ISER's data, for example, and use it in a different manner. She questioned if it was necessary to have this much data.

MS. BUTLER replied that it is appropriate for a number of organizations to collect workforce data and ANSWERS is designed to be a resource for a number of those organizations.

SENATOR GARDNER inquired if ANSWERS is setting up a template or storage area for information.

MS. BARRANS said that is exactly the goal. She agreed that the data is found elsewhere. She predicted that workers are experiencing success in varying degrees and the goal is to find out why; which programs and districts produce success. She concluded that ANSWERS takes a granular look at successes and failures.

SENATOR GARDNER asked how success is defined - by pay scale, job satisfaction, or employment.

MS. BARRANS responded that it depends on the questions asked.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked for the federal government's bottom line as the grantee.

MS. BUTLER said that the requirement was that the state build a longitudinal data system.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if the federal government could access the state's data base.

MS. BUTLER said it was not a requirement of the grant and there is no intent or design to provide information to the federal government.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY repeated the question.

MS. BUTLER stated that the federal government has no legal right to any information.

[4:13:05 PM](#)

MS. BUTLER highlighted the governance structure that would exist after the grant ends. She turned to the roles of high-level policy questions Alaska developed by the four partners in 2009 and revised in 2012. These questions are designed to identify high-level information needs, not currently available without linked data. They determine which data elements are included in ANSWERS and they require Executive Governance Board approval to change.

She added more detail regarding privacy and security. An example of the privacy/security tradeoff was a question posed to ANSWERS about an individual child in an intervention program. That information could not be sought because it would require identifying the child. What is allowed is a look at the sum total of students who went through a program and then measure their success.

She discussed the privacy and security protocols. ANSWERS is designed to separate identifying information from incoming data so it cannot be exposed, derived by users, or identify individuals. She shared design considerations to ensure this happens.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if the commission would support stiff civil and criminal penalties for any entity or individual that broached the security.

MS. BARRANS said she was not associated with the Department of Law, but would consider extra measures or safeguards.

[4:18:12 PM](#)

MS. BUTLER showed a diagram of privacy and security systems. She said the first system is the partner data system where specific elements are extracted from the identifiable data; the second system records the de-identified data, and the third aggregates the data before it is displayed to the public in the fourth system. She emphasized that the information is isolated and safeguarded and very segregated.

MS. BARRANS added that transparency is a critical component of ANSWERS. It is very important that public data elements are written in plain language so they are very easy to understand.

MS. BUTLER reported that ACPE applied for, and received, money from a second grant that allowed for research of other state approaches to similar data systems. She noted that states vary

in their approaches. She described two similar state approaches and provided examples from Mississippi - LifeTracks, and from Arkansas - strong privacy protection and research use of data. Arkansas is actively assisting Alaska with ANSWERS. She used the Alaska Performance Scholarship Outcomes Report as an example of the kind of product that could come out of ANSWERS, but involve much less work.

MS. BUTLER pointed out that the grant ends on June 30, 2015. In order to achieve sustainability, the goal is to transition from a project to a program with a Program Management Office (PMO) that would ensure that ANSWERS adheres to all privacy and security practices and governance policies, and develops and updates public reports, identifies emerging stakeholder needs, and proposes new information products. She noted that it will be a modular structure and could be used in a variety of agencies. It is currently scheduled for a three-year incubation period at ACPE, funded by the Alaska Student Loan Corporation (ASLC) within ACPE's operating budget with annual costs estimated at \$1.2 million. She concluded that documentation of program success is more often needed in times of budget crunching.

[4:26:30 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY thanked the presenters. He noted the \$1.2 million cost and requested more information about the source of those funds.

MS. BARRANS replied that the money is from ASLC receipts and will absorb costs for the next three years.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if it was required in the grant to maintain the program after three years.

MS. BARRANS said the grant required a commitment to seeking a sustainable model to maintain the function of the system. She concluded that there are no guarantees.

SENATOR HUGGINS questioned the use of data from Arkansas and Mississippi. He wondered if this program will make a difference in 20 years.

MS. BUTLER said she hopes that in 20 years it can be said that ANSWERS was used to direct resource and policy decisions in such a way that it was the most efficient, effective use of funds to serve students.

SENATOR HUGGINS shared that a school board often does not know how graduates do.

MS. BUTLER noted that an ANSWERS product has been designed to provide a district feedback report that will show how students are doing in the workforce and in post-secondary education. This program has been demonstrated to several districts with extremely positive feedback.

SENATOR HUGGINS gave an example of inaccurate graduate/dropout statistics.

MS. BUTLER could not give assurance that 100 percent of students will be reached, but she felt confident that there would be vastly improved information, significantly more timely information, and more students brought back on track.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY mentioned students from out of state and in various alternative programs. He asked if the fact that not all Alaskans would be part of the program had been considered. He revisited the op-in concept. He inquired if federal guidelines provide that private school and home school students would be included in the future.

MS. BUTLER said there was nothing in the federal guidelines relative to that. The Alaska System design is if the student has at any point during their life touched the Alaska System, the student's data would be included.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said more constituents are opting out of the public school system so they will not be tracked. He cautioned that future bills might address this issue.

[4:35:02 PM](#)

There being nothing further to come before the committee, Chair Dunleavy adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 4:35 p.m.