

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

February 26, 2015

3:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Cathy Giessel

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 1  
Relating to a legislative task force on civics education.

- HEARD AND HELD

PRESENTATION: SECONDARY SCHOOL BOARDING STIPEND PROGRAM

- HEARD

PRESENTATION: DISTRICT OPERATED RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL OPTIONS

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SCR 1

SHORT TITLE: CIVICS EDUCATION TASK FORCE

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

|          |     |                                 |
|----------|-----|---------------------------------|
| 01/21/15 | (S) | READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS |
| 01/21/15 | (S) | EDC, FIN                        |
| 02/26/15 | (S) | EDC AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205    |

**WITNESS REGISTER**

SENATOR GARY STEVENS  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Sponsor of SCR 1.

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

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented information on SCR 1.

SAM STONE, Executive Director  
Civics Education Initiative  
Joe Foss Institute  
Scottsdale, Arizona

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SCR 1.

MICHAEL POLIAKOFF  
Vice President of Policy  
American Council of Trustees and Alumni  
Washington, DC

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SCR 1.

STUART THOMPSON, representing himself  
Meadow Lake, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SCR 1.

ELIZABETH NUDELMAN, Director  
School Finance & Facilities  
Department of Education & Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented information on Alaska statutes that authorize three residential education school options.

ANNMARIE O'BRIEN, Superintendent  
Northwest Arctic Borough  
Kotzebue, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Addressed the goals of the Northwest Arctic Borough School District's Magnet School and its corresponding boarding home.

DOUG WALRATH, Director  
Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center (NACTEC)  
Nome, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented information on NACTEC's mission and opportunities.

BILL HUTTON, Superintendent  
Mt. Edgecumbe High School  
Sitka, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided an overview of Mt. Edgecumbe High School.

DAN WALKER, Assistant Superintendent  
Kuskokwim Learning Academy  
Lower Kuskokwim School District  
Bethel, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided information about programs in the Lower Kuskokwim School District.

DOUG BOYER, Principal  
Kuskokwim Learning Academy  
Lower Kuskokwim School District  
Bethel, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided information about programs in the Kuskokwim Learning Academy.

JANELLE VANASSE, Director  
Secondary Education  
Kuskokwim Learning Academy  
Lower Kuskokwim School District  
Bethel, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided information about the STEM Ready Program.

ERIC GEBHART, Director  
Nenana Student Living Center  
Nenana School District  
Nenana, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided information about the Nenana Student Living Center.

CHRIS REITAN, Superintendent  
Galena Interior Learning Academy  
Galena City School District  
Galena, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided information about the Galena Interior Learning Academy (GILA).

STEPHANIE BURGOON, Head Teacher  
Voyage to Excellence (VTE) Residential School  
Chugach School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided information about the Voyage to Excellence (VTE) Residential School.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:30:13 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 Stevens, Gardner, and Chair Dunleavy.

**SCR 1-CIVICS EDUCATION TASK FORCE**

[3:30:37 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY announced the consideration of SCR 1.

[3:31:04 PM](#)

SENATOR GARY STEVENS, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of SCR 1, began with a historical overview of the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and a story about the people's responsibility to "keep the Republic." He opined that too many young people have little understanding of civics and the value of liberty and equality, individual worth, open-mindedness, the ability to collaborate with those with differing opinions, and to work toward a common goal for the good of the country.

He stated that those qualities must be passed on to children by parents and in schools by means of classes in government, history, economics, and democracy, and include discussions on current events and controversial issues. Many Americans agree that these courses and methods are very important to prepare children for a democratic life.

He maintained that civic education does not get the attention it deserves in public schools. On the National Association of Educational Progress tests recently, only one-third of students scored proficient or above on civic knowledge. He stated that preparing for active citizenship was a foundational principle of public education in America from its beginning.

He concluded that civic education strengthens the democracy, it provides an understanding of current events, and encourages participation in voting, volunteering, and public speaking. He said SCR 1 is a pathway to help children become full and effective citizens.

[3:35:32 PM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, provided an overview for SCR 1. He said America is facing a quiet epidemic of apathy and ignorance amongst students. For decades the focus has been on science, math, reading, writing, and increased testing. He questioned the goal of that focus.

He said that other states have adopted some version of a civic curriculum. The only civics-related bill in Alaska, HB 19, was adopted in 2000 and required the Pledge of Allegiance in schools. He discussed a movement that uses a 100-point quiz from the U.S. Immigration Department as part of the school curriculum. He gave examples of some of the questions. He said that 92 percent of immigrants pass the test. In Arizona only 3 percent of high school seniors could pass the test.

He explained that SCR 1 would establish a task force to look at civics education currently in Alaska and in other states and decide on better options for Alaska students.

[3:38:56 PM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if the recommendation from the task force will result in a civics graduation requirement.

SENATOR STEVENS answered no. He addressed funding challenges and costs to districts. He pointed out that Massachusetts used business and industry-sponsored workshops for teachers in order to increase students' knowledge of civics within existing classrooms.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if the task force expires in a year.

SENATOR STEVENS answered yes.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY announced the arrival of Senator Huggins.

[3:41:07 PM](#)

At ease

[3:41:53 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY called the committee back to order.

[3:42:25 PM](#)

SAM STONE, Executive Director, Civics Education Initiative, Joe Foss Institute, discussed their work on promoting the civics quiz mentioned by Mr. Lamkin. He said the goal is to see states adopt the quiz as part of their civics curriculum. He pointed out the declining levels of informed and engaged citizens and the critical challenges of reversing that decline. He related that two-thirds of the population can't name the three branches of the government and one-third can't name one branch. Social studies teachers across the country are frustrated by their reduction of class time due to science, engineering, technology, and math courses and time for testing. He said many other states

have enacted task forces to study this issue. Free resources are available that would not tax a state's budget, such as iCivics. He stressed that promoting civics would be beneficial long-term to the strength of America.

[3:45:29 PM](#)

MICHAEL POLIAKOFF, Vice President of Policy, American Council of Trustees and Alumni, testified in support of SCR 1. He said his organization has been deeply committed since 1995 to the imperative of making sure citizens understand America's free institutions. He maintained that the founders were aware that the lifespan of liberty was not likely to be very long without well-informed participating citizens. He emphasized the necessity of setting civic requirements and mandates because they set clear expectations.

MR. POLIAKOFF shared statistics on America's historical illiteracy. He said the community service part of civic education is an important quality that characterizes the nation. Schools and colleges are essential for civics education and are the only ones that can fill the civics gap.

[3:49:13 PM](#)

STUART THOMPSON, representing himself, testified in support of SCR 1. He stated that he is petitioning the committee to do a presentation on civics.

SENATOR STEVENS noted an article by Mr. Thompson in The Frontiersman.

[3:51:22 PM](#)

At ease.

[3:51:55 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY called the committee back to order. He requested that Mr. Thompson speak for three minutes and then send the committee a copy of his whole presentation.

MR. THOMPSON said, "The volume of true citizen participation in government of, for, and by the people is probably the most reliable test for the effectiveness of public education that could ever be." He explained that America's founders researched different forms of government. He ended with a statement on the importance of civics education.

[3:54:41 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY thanked Senator Stevens for bringing the resolution forward. He noted the importance of how civics is taught.

SENATOR STEVENS summarized that the resolution will initiate a task force that will research how to improve civics education.

[3:56:06 PM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER questioned why there were no minority members on the task force. She asked the sponsor if he would accept an amendment that would ensure a member from each caucus having a seat on the task force.

SENATOR STEVENS replied that he would accept that amendment and opined that the task force should be as large a group as is affordable and encompass all Alaskans.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked that Mr. Thompson's amendments be considered.

SENATOR STEVENS replied that if there is a task force he hoped for Mr. Thompson's involvement, as well as participation from the other two speakers.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY held SCR 1 in committee.

[3:57:24 PM](#)

At ease

**PRESENTATION: SECONDARY SCHOOL BOARDING STIPEND PROGRAM**

[3:58:48 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY called the committee back to order to hear a presentation on residential schools in Alaska.

[3:59:43 PM](#)

ELIZABETH NUDELMAN, Director, School Finance and Facilities, Department of Education & Early Development, presented information on Alaska statutes that authorize three residential education school options. The three options are the Secondary Boarding Stipend Program, Mt. Edgecumbe State Boarding School, and school districts that operate residential schools. The administration of each option differs.

MS. NUDELMAN addressed the Secondary Boarding Stipend Program, which was established in 1966. Currently, the boarding stipend serves approximately 20 to 30 students across approximately six

to eight districts. The approximated cost is \$185,000 annually. She said a typical example of this program may be a student from a small community with only one or two high school students. The program allows the student, through their school district, to find a boarding stipend placement in a neighboring community.

[4:02:32 PM](#)

MS. NUDELMAN turned to school districts that operate residential schools and discussed changes to the program that occurred in 2013. The program began to include a variable term component, which are programs approved to fund the same number of students throughout the school year, but the actual students housed change to provide sessions of residential instruction to different groups of students.

[4:03:28 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if the school receive a one-FTE placeholder.

MS. NUDELMAN answered correct.

SENATOR STEVENS asked how much the stipend is under the Secondary Boarding Stipend Program.

MS. NUDELMAN replied that the stipend is a monthly rate of about \$500. A small portion of travel is also provided for.

SENATOR STEVENS spoke in favor of the program.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if each zone has a rate.

[4:05:31 PM](#)

MS. NUDELMAN replied that each zone does have a rate. She offered to provide those rates.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY noted the history of the program and his experience with it.

MS. NUDELMAN noted the stipend rates by region for residential schools.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY summarized the presentation so far.

MS. NUDELMAN pointed out that the most recent program change was enacted through HB 278 which sets into law an annual period of application for residential schools. She provided a list of the

five additional approved residential schools. She showed a list of school districts that operate residential school programs.

4:08:03 PM

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if a student can attend any school under the secondary school stipend.

MS. NUDELMAN replied that a student has a choice of the school to attend and the district assists the student to find the best fit.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if a student from near Fairbanks could attend a school in Kodiak and the Kodiak district would receive foundation funding and the stipend.

MS. NUDELMAN said that was correct except that the stipend would go to the persons boarding the student.

4:09:16 PM

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if the foundation formula allowance remained with the original school.

MS. NUDELMAN said that is true for school districts operating residential schools. Under the variable term program, residential schools cannot claim the foundation funding.

4:10:40 PM

SENATOR GARDNER asked how the school that offers the variable term receives foundation funding if it remains with the home school.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY clarified that there is an amount that is allotted for the variable term school.

SENATOR GARDNER said that regional stipend rates are for variable term student spots and includes housing and tuition.

MS. NUDELMAN explained that the regional stipend consists of total funds provided to the variable term district. The expectation is that it is for the residential portion and can be used for needs beyond that. Some of the programs are for career and technology and could have grant funding, also. The programs could also enter into a tuition agreement with another school district.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if that is what Chugach's Voyage to Excellence program does.

MS. NUDELMAN answered correct.

SENATOR STEVENS asked about cost comparison of the various residential programs.

MS. NUDELMAN answered that she did not have the cost amounts in hand, but said that the cost of one over another does not stand out.

[4:14:18 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked about Mt. Edgecumbe.

MS. NUDELMAN specified that Mt. Edgecumbe is defined by statute as a unique residential opportunity.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY reviewed the various boarding opportunities.

[4:17:03 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS noted the value of the stipend program. He asked if schools with less than ten students could lose funding.

MS. NUDELMAN answered that when a school has less than ten students they are not funded with a base as a separate school. Students are funded in the smallest school in the district, which is a lower amount of funding.

SENATOR STEVENS provided a scenario where a school has only one high school student.

MS. NUDELMAN said she is not familiar with the aforementioned scenario.

SENATOR STEVENS stated that the issue will be faced by more communities.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY provided a scenario and funding variables.

[4:19:50 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS noted a small school is specified as less than 10 students. He requested information about funding in that situation.

MS. NUDELMAN reiterated her previous answer.

SENATOR HUGGINS clarified his question.

MS. NUDELMAN replied that she did not understand the question.

SENATOR HUGGINS provided an example of a charter school. He asked Ms. Nudelman to get back to him on the answer.

**PRESENTATION: DISTRICT OPERATED RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL OPTIONS**

[4:22:11 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY announced a presentation on district operated residential school options.

[4:23:11 PM](#)

ANNMARIE O'BRIEN, Superintendent, Northwest Arctic Borough, thanked the members of the committee for hearing the presentations. She addressed the goals of Northwest Arctic Borough School District's Magnet School and its corresponding boarding home. She quoted Jerry Covey, former Commissioner of Education: "Lack of access to opportunity is the largest single factor impacting the success of students in small remote rural high schools." She said the goal of STAR of the Northwest Magnet School is to increase access to opportunities.

MS. O'BRIEN shared the results of a survey of 88 high school students across the district that showed students' lack of goals after graduation, but hope to live in the region. STAR's goal is for students to experience firsthand the high-paying, high-demand career opportunities available in the state and to engage in a career track beginning in grade 11 and extending into industry certifications and associate degrees.

[4:26:10 PM](#)

MS. O'BRIEN said STAR includes a coordinated effort by NABSD, the Alaska Technical Center, the University of Alaska, and industry partners to offer an articulated and comprehensive high school and post-secondary program designed to strengthen Alaska's workforce, and career-focused programs in culinary arts, education, health care, and process technology.

She listed current industry partners. She noted the residential component of the program was recently opened. The dormitory is designed to hold 40 students total. She concluded that STAR represents opportunities for rural Alaskans.

[4:28:07 PM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if the residential dorm was full.

MS. O'BRIEN said housing only opened two weeks ago and in March the application process will open.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if there is an enthusiastic interest level or if it will take a while to accept.

MS. O'BRIEN opined that a new concept will take time.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY announced that the video will be presented at another time.

[4:31:19 PM](#)

DOUG WALRATH, Director, Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center (NACTEC), presented information on NACTEC's mission and opportunities. He said NACTEC has been in existence for thirteen years and was built on a partnership between Nome Public School District and the Bering Strait School District to provide career and technical education opportunities. NACTEC's mission is to prepare students for the world of work by assisting in the development of life skills, work readiness skills, academic skills, and career awareness. Students will develop work ethics and employment skills to become capable of independent living while sustaining a healthy cultural identity.

He shared the priority industries where training is provided: health care, construction, transportation, seafood harvesting and processing, hospitality, and tourism. He showed graphs of where NACTEC funding comes from and its budget by category.

[4:34:57 PM](#)

MR. WALRATH shared data regarding student enrollment. There has been a 64 percent enrollment increase over the years. Students come from over fifty villages and ten districts. He discussed the impacts of NACTEC programs and the 28 percent increase in the graduation rate. He concluded with the correlation between NACTEC participation and graduation.

[4:40:52 PM](#)

BILL HUTTON, Superintendent, Mt. Edgecumbe High School, provided an overview of Mt. Edgecumbe High School. He related his history as a teacher in Hoonah and the opportunities Mt. Edgecumbe provides. He gave examples of innovative programs in the high school curriculum and the variety of reasons students attend Mt. Edgecumbe.

[4:46:43 PM](#)

MR. HUTTON summarized that Mt. Edgecumbe is about high expectations for learning and living, it provides unique challenges and opportunities, and builds life-long relationships.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if there is a wait list.

MR. HUTTON answered yes. He specified that at the start of the school year, approximately 184 students were on a waiting list.

[4:48:05 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked why students from larger communities attend Mt. Edgecumbe.

MR. HUTTON answered that the students fall into several categories; parents of students who have a strong tradition of attending Mt. Edgecumbe, and students who have financial challenges or lack of family support.

[4:50:03 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if there is criteria for selection.

MR. HUTTON answered that there are broad and specific criteria.

SENATOR STEVENS noted that 34 students are from Sitka.

MR. HUTTON said those students live at home.

DAN WALKER, Assistant Superintendent, Kuskokwim Learning Academy, Lower Kuskokwim School District, provided information about programs offered in the Lower Kuskokwim School District.

[4:53:16 PM](#)

DOUG BOYER, Principal, Kuskokwim Learning Academy, Lower Kuskokwim School District, provided an overview of the Kuskokwim Learning Academy (KLA). He said KLA is a 9 - 12 high school located in Bethel that is focused on at-risk students. The Academy has zero tolerance rules on drugs, alcohol, and harassment. He described the schedule, typical students, and the enrollment process. He read the mission statement and showed the budget breakdown and funding sources.

[4:57:01 PM](#)

MR. BOYER noted attendance trends and cost per student. He spoke of the full-time social worker who helps with student retention.

[5:00:23 PM](#)

MR. BOYER discussed where KLA students came from: Fairbanks, Anchorage, Bering Straits, and a majority from the Delta Region. He shared that KLA increased ASPI scores by five points. Most of the students at KLA who take the ASPI test have dropped out of school and have not attended for several years. This is reflected in six-year or more graduation rates and has an impact on the ASPI score. He noted that KLA's academic growth score increased. He said KLA is a one-star school and missed going to a two-star school by 1.2 points.

[5:02:43 PM](#)

MR. BOYER described the Class of 2015. It has five students who will graduate after attending high school for four years, six students are five-year graduates, 12 students are six-year graduates, five students are seven-year graduates, and one student was in high school for eight years. It is the largest graduating class ever at KLA.

He listed the courses available to KLA students this year and next, as well as in the STEM Academy. He described the work-based learning electives.

[5:04:58 PM](#)

JANELLE VANASSE, Director, Secondary Education, Kuskokwim Learning Academy, Lower Kuskokwim School District, described the STEM Ready program, a model for college and career readiness for rural Alaska schools. It was developed through support of the Rasmuson and Gates Foundations. She said Bethel Regional High School (BRHS) is the hub of the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta Region and the program brings students from surrounding villages into BRHS for upper level courses. The vision is that students who are connected with their home and culture and academically strong are the most college ready. The program consists of a semester during the junior and senior years, as well as a summer program of which Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP) is the primary program.

MS. VANASSE concluded that the program has a 70 percent retention rate, 65 percent are college bound, and 95 percent are ready for college math.

[5:09:14 PM](#)

ERIC GEBHART, Director, Nenana Student Living Center, Nenana School District, related that the Nenana Student Living Center is not a boarding school, but a dorm for students who then attend Nenana City Public School (NCPS) with local students. He referred to the course offerings at NCPS, which include music,

STEM, CTE and the arts. The student body is made of up students from a variety of places. He shared application considerations and mentioned who is accepted into the school.

[5:13:17 PM](#)

MR. GEBHART continued with NSLC budget information for the resident hall. He shared data about student enrollment. The building capacity is 120, but only 88 are funded. NSLC has requested funding for 105 in FY 16.

[5:15:31 PM](#)

MR. GEBHART listed the villages represented at NSLC and concluded with information about retention, test, and graduation rates.

[5:16:38 PM](#)

CHRIS REITAN, Superintendent, Galena Interior Learning Academy (GILA), Galena City School District, described the history behind GILA's beginnings and how the former Galena Air Force Base became the Academy. He describe the facility and lack of classroom space. He said 78 communities are represented by GILA students. The main focus of GILA is a vocational program with a strong academic component. He referred to the CTE courses available. He said 16 classes provide dual credit with the University of Alaska - Fairbanks, and 149 students earned dual credits last year.

[5:19:56 PM](#)

MR. REITAN shared breakdowns of instructional costs and revenue. He provided information about GILA's graduation rate and ASPI score. He said half of graduates go on to vocational programs at the university. He noted a stronger partnership with AVTEC.

MR. REITAN summarized that currently 200 students attend GILA and the goal is to have 220 students. Another goal is to increase instructional space.

[5:22:42 PM](#)

STEPHANIE BURGOON, Head Teacher, Voyage to Excellence (VTE) Residential School, Chugach School District, shared program selections, including career education and urban living skills at VTE. She shared VTE's admission criteria. She listed the school districts, corporations, and businesses VTE works with. She spoke of the exchange with AVTEC.

She related that VTE enrollment is about 230 students per year in grades 7 - 12. Currently, there are 24 students with capacity

for 28. Funding is from a variety of sources and includes many grants, boarding stipends, donations, and tuition. Tuition is \$100 per day per student and is paid by school districts.

She shared several success stories of students who return every year to increase their skills. She noted a 30-day summer program is also offered.

[5:25:49 PM](#)

MS. BURGOON concluded that VTE is fortunate to have the opportunity to work with students from all over the state and provide opportunities for them in an urban setting. She said it is VTE's goal to spark an interest that results in students choosing careers and making great life choices.

[5:27:17 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY thanked all the presenters for information related to what education in Alaska is going to look like over the next couple years.

[5:27:57 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Dunleavy adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee hearing at 5:27 p.m.