

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

March 19, 2015

4:01 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

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

Rebecca Himschoot
Dr. Martin Laster
David Legg

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development

Esther Cox
Dr. Keith Hamilton

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

DAVID LEGG, Principal
Chugiak High School
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as a Professional Teaching Practices Commission appointee.

REBECCA HIMSCHOOT, Teacher

Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as a Professional Teaching Practices Commission appointee.

DR. KEITH HAMILTON, Founding President

Alaska Christian College

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development appointee.

ESTHER COX, Former Principal

King Career Center

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development appointee.

DR. MARTIN LASTER, Associate Professor

University of Alaska Southeast

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as a Professional Teaching Practices Commission appointee.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[4:01:23 PM](#)

CHAIR MIKE DUNLEAVY called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Giessel, Huggins, Gardner, and Chair Dunleavy.

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS:

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY announced that there would be confirmation hearings on nominees for the Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC) and the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development. He announced the arrival of Senator Stevens.

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

Rebecca Himschoot

Dr. Martin Laster

David Legg

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DAVID LEGG, Principal, Chugiak High School, testified as a Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC) appointee. He shared his professional background as a teacher for 18 years. He

said he is interested in being on the commission because it is a vital aspect of the checks and balances in the education system. He considered it an honor to serve on the commission.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said PTPC requires teachers to be certificated as instructors of higher learning, administrators, or counselors. The composition of PTPC is made up of five classroom teachers, one principal, one superintendent, one representative from the Office of the Commissioner, and one representative from an institution of higher learning.

MR. LEGG said he is representing the administrative designation.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY stated in accordance with AS 39.05.080, the Senate Education Committee reviews the nominees and recommends their appointments to PTPC and to the State School Board for consideration. The nominations are not decided in this committee, but are forwarded to joint session for confirmation.

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SENATOR GARDNER thanked Mr. Legg for serving. She noted his 2009 presentation on data analysis and mentioned ANSWERS, which collects and analyzes data to explore impacts of educational programs. She asked if it is possible to use data in a way that is disaggregated and does not put student privacy at risk.

MR. LEGG replied yes. He said he was overseeing the ANSWERS program in Kenai and used data that was stripped of personal information.

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SENATOR HUGGINS asked Mr. Legg what he would delete and add to the district in Chugiak as principal.

MR. LEGG said he would get rid of the lack of autonomy as it related to the delivery of programs.

SENATOR HUGGINS spoke of Erin's Law, which could be added to districts.

MR. LEGG stated that the greatest need for any teacher or administrator is time. He said he would have to consider any addition thoughtfully.

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SENATOR HUGGINS asked what Mr. Legg considers his legacy to be.

MR. LEGG replied that he "cared about kids and he made a difference in their lives."

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REBECCA HIMSCHOOT, Teacher, testified as a Professional Teaching Practices Commission appointee. She shared her educational experience. She said she is a long-term Alaskan who loves her profession.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if she teaches science.

MS. HIMSCHOOT said she is a science specialist in elementary school.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if she teaches other subjects.

MS. HIMSCHOOT said she teaches only science.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if there is a science bee.

MS. HIMSCHOOT replied that there is a National Ocean Science Bowl in middle school, but none in elementary school.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked Ms. Himschoot why she wants to serve on the commission.

MS. HIMSCHOOT spoke of her dual role of protecting students and ensuring fair and due process for teachers.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY turned to the nominees for the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development.

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At ease

[4:20:07 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY read the statute regarding the State School Board. He said the board consists of seven members, with no more than four from the same political party as the governor. The governor considers recommendations for the board and appoints one member from each of the four judicial districts and three from the state at large, with at least one member representing regional education attendance areas. The members serve overlapping five-year terms.

Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development

Esther MS. COX

Dr. Keith Hamilton

[4:22:02 PM](#)

DR. KEITH HAMILTON, Founding President, Alaska Christian College, testified as an Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development appointee. He shared his professional background and described the Alaska Christian College's mission.

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SENATOR STEVENS said he is impressed with Dr. Hamilton's credentials and work with Native students. He asked about the future of education for Native students.

DR. HAMILTON spoke of the importance and advantages of regional schools, the difficulty and expense of one-site school districts. He opined that it will take a big overhaul to move ahead with improving Native education. He noted that few teachers are Alaska Natives.

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SENATOR HUGGINS asked about Dr. Hamilton's experience in Mexico and Central America.

DR. HAMILTON said he felt at home in bush Alaska and in Indian Reservations after living in Mexico. He listed some of the similarities.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked about problems with drug cartels in Mexico.

DR. HAMILTON said he has never has an issue in 25 years.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked whether Dr. Hamilton has to concern himself with the separation of church and state.

DR. HAMILTON said Alaska Christian College is a faith-based institution.

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SENATOR GARDNER thanked Dr. Hamilton for his service. She commented that his resume is interesting and includes his Myers Briggs Personality Type.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked why he wants to serve on the board.

DR. HAMILTON explained that had been invited to be on the Board of Regents, but decided to accept the offer to be on the School Board because he is a "bridge person" between K-12 and college. He said he loves students and is dedicated to education.

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SENATOR STEVENS asked about tying teacher evaluations to student test scores.

DR. HAMILTON said he is still getting caught up on that issue. He opined that it was necessary for the two to be connected and accountability is important.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked about Common Core.

DR. HAMILTON related that he has only heard about Common Core since January and, since reading about it, he has some concerns. He said he struggles with the data mining associated with it. He noted that Alaska Standards are similar to the Common Core.

SENATOR HUGGINS said we need to be sensitive to all views. He requested that Dr. Hamilton keep the legislature informed.

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SENATOR GARDNER asked if Dr. Hamilton's concerns about Common Core are about the standards or the process and assessments.

DR. HAMILTON said he has concerns about the process and the outside influence of federal government.

SENATOR GARDNER noted there were different points of view concerning the process. She asked if he has concerns about the standards. She asked him to look at the standards if he gets a chance.

DR. HAMILTON replied that he glanced at them and wondered what was missing.

SENATOR GARDNER said she is interested in that, too.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if he has children in public school.

DR. HAMILTON said yes.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if he has any concerns about public school curriculum.

DR. HAMILTON said no. The Kenai School District has tremendous teachers and principals.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked about Dr. Hamilton's view of school choice.

DR. HAMILTON said he wants his child to have the best education possible. If a choice is available, including vouchers, he would take it to get the best education. He said, generally, there are many options for students. He said he would like to see vouchers go forward.

SENATOR HUGGINS spoke of role models his children had.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked about parental rights within the public school system.

DR. HAMILTON said the children belong to him and parents have the right to excuse their children from things.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if the state spends enough money on public education.

DR. HAMILTON said he does not know. He emphasized that teachers are not compensated enough.

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SENATOR HUGGINS provided a hypothetical situation of future education.

DR. HAMILTON said technology is going to run the future of schools. He voiced concern about "high tech/low touch." He hoped that teachers would still interact with students, face-to-face, and find ways to introduce the greatest education possible.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked about home schooling.

DR. HAMILTON thought it was appropriate in some instances.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if the state or parents should decide if the student is home schooled. He explained the two types of home schooling, those that are a part of the public system and those that are not.

DR. HAMILTON didn't know that independent home schooling existed.

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SENATOR STEVENS asked if technology is the answer.

DR. HAMILTON said it is only a part of it. There has to be face-to-face integration.

SENATOR STEVENS asked how that would work at the K-12 level.

DR. HAMILTON thought there should be a mentor in students' lives that connect with them, even though they are learning via technology.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY inquired what goal of public education should be.

DR. HAMILTON said America has provided education to those who could not afford it. Public education should be for everyone.

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SENATOR STEVENS said Ben Franklin wanted to create citizens. He questioned why less people are voting and involved in their communities.

DR. HAMILTON said there has been an erosion of patriotism and volunteering, and entitlement is expected. Colleges have changed and do not address citizenship.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY thanked Dr. Hamilton.

[4:50:55 PM](#)

ESTHER COX, Former Principal, King Career Center, testified as an Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development appointee. She shared her background and her professional experience. She said she brings a wide range of experience and expertise to the board and has a passion for education.

SENATOR STEVENS asked about her work on the transition to Alaska Standards and how she got others got involved.

MS. COX said DEED brought the group together. She related how she got involved. She talked about a meeting with two entities and her view that Alaska needed to come up with its own standards. She said Alaska State Standards are similar to Common Core, but represent how Alaska saw the need for additional rigor. She said the university vetted the standards, which is key. The process was more expensive, but the standards belong to Alaska.

[4:56:45 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS called Ms. Cox the "Mother of Common Core in Alaska." He shared a story about math in Anchorage. He asked about Race to the Top.

MS. COX replied that Race to the Top did not include Common Core. She said she is the mother of five children and that's all.

SENATOR HUGGINS spoke of textbooks as they relate to Common Core.

MS. COX said many textbook companies are trying to meet Common Core. She pointed out that school districts choose their own books.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked about the future of Alaska Standards.

MS. COX said she does not deal with Alaska Standards except through the Board, which accepts Alaska Standards.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked how Anchorage buys textbooks for Common Core.

MS. COX did not know.

SENATOR STEVENS asked for clarification of who is responsible for standards vs curriculum.

MS. COX explained that by state law, DEED and the State Board set the standards. Many districts use their own curriculum, but align it with Alaska Standards. She pointed out that there was a suggestion that perhaps there should be a state curriculum available to small districts, but not mandated.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY voiced concern about Common Core. The State School Board adopts standards, but doesn't implement them. He asked how Anchorage, which has adopted Common Core, can have standards that differ from the Alaska Standards.

MS. COX said the State Board does not mandate that districts use Alaska Standards. She opined that Anchorage jumped the gun.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked how public education has changed and if the outcomes have gotten better.

MS. COX said schools know more about how to achieve outcomes and technology has made a difference. She said she is not sure the outcomes have changed.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if she would be a teacher again under today's regulations.

MS. COX said there are not many positives in education from the federal government; however, unfunded mandates, such as for special education, have been for the better for some populations. She maintained that local control has been lost somewhat; the Constitution remands education to the states.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked for her opinion about sharing personal student data.

MS. COX said it concerns her. She mentioned identity theft as an issue these days. She saw advantages of sharing data about a particular student, but not at the loss of the right to privacy.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY inquired about parental rights versus the rights of the state.

MS. COX said she has had this conversation with many parents. She gave examples of policies that encompass every student in Alaska and believed that parents have the right to opt out of some. She opined that parents do not abdicate their rights to schools.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if parents should be allowed to opt out of assessments.

MS. COX said yes. She said she would try to convince parents to allow their kids to take them, but she would not make them.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked about home schooling.

MS. COX admired parents who want to home school. She said she worries about home-schooled students that are not tied to a district.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if her concerns would affect policy.

MS. COX said no, she would not make a policy call. The state policy meets a need and is very effective. There are many families signed up for home schooling by choice. Those students are tied into a program with standards.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY noted concerns about how standards were adopted. He inquired if there should have been a re-calibration regarding how things were done.

MS. COX said no. The process was comprehensive and informative.

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SENATOR HUGGINS spoke of the feminization of boys in schools.

MS. COX opined that the defining of roles is going the other way; girls now have all kinds of opportunities they didn't used to have.

SENATOR HUGGINS shared a story.

MS. COX said there is anti-bullying training in schools.

[5:28:11 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY stated in accordance with AS 39.05.080 the Senate Education Committee reviews the nominees and recommends their appointments to the Alaska State School Board for consideration: Esther Cox and Dr. Keith Hamilton. The nominations are not decided in this committee, but are forwarded to joint session for confirmation. There being no objection, it was so ordered.

[5:29:15 PM](#)

At ease

[5:30:34 PM](#)

DR. MARTIN LASTER, Associate Professor, University of Alaska Southeast, testified as a Professional Teaching Practices Commission appointee. He shared his professional background.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if he was a reading instruction specialist.

DR. LASTER said yes.

SENATOR GARDNER asked about the national movement to improve reading skills. She inquired if Dr. Laster was familiar with that program.

DR. LASTER said he is familiar with it and supports it.

SENATOR GARDNER noted there are two schools of thoughts about retaining elementary students or not.

DR. LASTER opined that the use of retention should be selective and the individual needs of the student should be considered.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if most teacher training programs provide adequate training to identify reading deficits and to respond effectively.

DR. LASTER said UAS feels strongly about specialization in both reading and math.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY stated in accordance with AS 39.05.080 the Senate Education Committee reviews the following and recommends their appointments be forwarded to a joint session for consideration to PTPC: Rebecca Himschoot, Dr. Martin Laster, and David Legg. This does not reflect the intent by any members to vote for or against the confirmation of the individuals during any further sessions. There being no objection, it was so ordered.

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There being nothing further to come before the committee, Chair Dunleavy adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 5:37 p.m.