

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

March 31, 2015

3:31 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 BILL NO. 79

"An Act relating to reemployment of persons who retire under the defined benefit plan of the teachers' retirement system."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 80

"An Act relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to educational standards and assessments; relating to an educational standards and assessments review committee; and providing for an effective date."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

SENATE BILL NO. 89

"An Act relating to a parent's right to direct the education of a child; and relating to questionnaires administered in schools."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 79

SHORT TITLE: REEMPLOYMENT OF RETIRED TEACHERS & ADMIN

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) DUNLEAVY

03/18/15	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/18/15	(S)	EDC, CRA
03/26/15	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/26/15	(S)	Heard & Held
03/26/15	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/31/15	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

SHEILA PETERSON, Staff
 Senator Dunleavy
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented SB 79 on behalf of the sponsor.

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner
 Department of Education
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions related to SB 79.

MARY MCMAHON, President
 Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals
 Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 79.

LINCOLN SAITO, Chief Operating Officer
 North Slope Borough School District
 Barrow, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 79.

DR. DEANA PARAMO, Superintendent
 Mat-Su Borough School District
 Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 79.

PETER HOEPHER, Member
 Cordova School Board of Education
 Cordova, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 79.

JIM HOLIEN, Superintendent
 Klawock Schools
 Klawock, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 79.

LISA PARADY, Executive Director
Alaska Council of School Administrators and
Alaska Superintendents Association
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 79.

DR. PJ FORD-SLACK
Interim Superintendent
Hoonah City Schools
Hoonah, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 79.

ACTION NARRATIVE

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CHAIR MIKE DUNLEAVY called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Giessel, Huggins, Gardner and Chair Dunleavy.

SB 79-REEMPLOYMENT OF RETIRED TEACHERS & ADMIN

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY announced the consideration of SB 79.

SENATOR HUGGINS moved to adopt the CS for SB 79, labeled 29-LS0444\E, as the working document.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY objected for discussion purposes.

SHEILA PETERSON, Staff, Senator Dunleavy, Alaska State Legislature, presented SB 79 on behalf of the sponsor. She thanked the Division of Retirement and Benefits (DRB) for working with the sponsor on the bill. She said a change suggested by the Division has been incorporated into the bill and is found on page 1, lines 7 and 8 in version E. It clarifies that a member who retired under a defined benefits program or under the defined contribution program is eligible to be rehired under this provision. In lines 10-13 it changes the separation between the retirement and the reemployment to one year, if you are less than 62 years old, and three months, if you are over 62. This follows the guidelines of the IRS and is recommended by the Division.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY removed his objection. There being no further objection, version E was adopted.

SENATOR GARDNER asked to have Section 3 clarified. She inquired if there is there any additional fiscal impact to the state or the school district in hiring a retired teacher or administrator.

MS. PETERSON explained that the Division is finalizing the fiscal note and she doesn't have an exact answer to that question now. The intent is to have the school district be able to contract with a retired teacher or administrator at a lower cost than if it were with an active employee.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY pointed out that the purpose of the bill is to add a tool for school districts to enlarge their pool of perspective educators with those who have had a lot of Alaskan experience.

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SENATOR HUGGINS voiced concern about teachers who retired under a retirement incentive. He also did not want to prevent new teachers from being hired because experienced retirees were being hired first.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said a new teacher could bring a particular skill at a particular time and a retiree could offer other skills at a lower cost. The idea for the bill came from the Mentor Project - for veteran teachers to help new teachers overcome inexperience and become effective teachers.

SENATOR HUGGINS said it is a good idea, but the devil is in the details. He shared a story about superintendents and the need for more good ideas. He said he is skeptical of education statistics.

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SENATOR GARDNER was considering unintended consequences of the bill. She wondered if it would unintentionally squeeze the job market for new teachers.

SENATOR GARDNER opined that the idea could be a boon for a small community, but not for a bigger one.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY commented that education has a lot of rules, but he likes to seek the possibilities. He expected feedback from various groups.

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SENATOR GIESSEL asked if there are new teachers being educated in our system that can't get jobs in Alaska.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY replied that some teachers apply for jobs, but sometimes hiring profiles don't fit.

SENATOR GIESSEL was contemplating the concept that old teachers were bumping out new ones.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY opined that that would not happen. The veterans would be hired when a new teacher wouldn't fit the job description; it would be a recruiting tool.

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SENATOR HUGGINS said education is an interesting culture. In Mat-Su some teachers start out substituting or go to a less desirable school in order to get hired. He suggested training non-traditional professionals to be teachers.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said more experienced people will know if they want to go to a rural community. He mentioned a grant program that trained people with Bachelor degrees to become teachers.

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LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education, answered questions related to SB 79. He said the grant program was an alternate route teaching program called AKT-2.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked how many went through the program.

MR. MORSE thought there were 30 to 40 who did.

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MARY MCMAHON, President, Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals, testified in support of SB 79. She said the bill increases the pool of candidates to get the best teachers possible. She did not see any concerns about rehiring retirees.

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LINCOLN SAITO, Chief Operating Officer, North Slope Borough School District, testified in support of SB 79. He maintained that the bill will not bump new teachers out of the system. He stressed that the focus should be on the children - they deserve the best education possible. He said the district is still trying to get the best teachers for their kids while conserving funds. He concluded that they do not have the selection of teachers they used to have.

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DR. DEANA PARAMO, Superintendent, Mat-Su Borough School District, testified in support of SB 79. She said their district has been taking advantages of hiring retirees for part time and temporary jobs. They provide expertise and needed support during busy periods. This bill would allow for the unrestricted reemployment of retirees. Most attractive is the potential savings for school districts in terms of not having to provide insurance and retirement benefits. Mat-Su embraces created solutions and is encouraged by the benefits found in SB 79.

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PETER HOEPHER, Member, Cordova School Board of Education, testified in support of SB 79. He related how their superintendent left in July when no one was available and Rich Carlson brought calm to the district. He gave an example of when a teacher was hired that didn't work out. He noted that the pool of applicants has dwindled over the years. He saw advantages in SB 79 and agreed that experience helps.

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JIM HOLIEN, Superintendent, Klawock Schools, testified in support of SB 79. He said the idea for the bill came from a joint statement from the Alaska Superintendent Association and the Alaska Association of School Boards. He said he sees the bill as a valuable tool for hard-to-fill positions in administration and in small schools.

He noted that about 300 jobs remain unfilled after the job fair in Alaska recently. There remains a need for more teachers, especially during times of difficult finances. He did not see that the bill would result in replacing new teachers in jobs.

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LISA SKILES-PARADY, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) and Alaska Superintendents Association (ASA), testified in support of SB 79. She provided two handouts, one of which is a joint position statement by ACSA and ASA stating support for SB 79. She addressed the issue of teacher and administrator shortages in Alaska.

She said the second handout deals with the high numbers of superintendent turnover in Alaska. She shared data on the percentages of teacher and administrator turnovers. She also discussed declining education graduate numbers and the number of

jobs remaining open. The number of special education teachers has also declined.

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She pointed out that just over 60 percent of 2014 University of Alaska teacher graduates were working in Alaska schools in the fall of 2014. The Department of Labor found that 90 percent of teacher graduates work in Alaska in the year that they graduate. She said there are many efforts to increase teacher and administrator candidates and support working teachers.

She concluded that retired teachers and administrators are already in Alaska communities and are familiar with Alaska. She spoke in strong support of SB 79.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if 300 teaching positions are still unfilled.

MS. SKILES-PARADY understood that there were 467 jobs currently posted for contracts going forward.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked for the number of current jobs open.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked about a time when special education teachers were removing that endorsement from their credentials.

MS. PARADY discussed the AKT-2 program where teachers who took an alternative method to certification were hired and they were outstanding. It was an expensive program, but hugely successful.

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SENATOR HUGGINS asked if substitute teachers get preference points during hiring.

MS. PARADY answered if you are a good substitute and have experience in the district, you would receive favorable consideration for a full-time position.

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SENATOR HUGGINS asked for the name of a master teacher.

MS. PARADY said they were called "highly qualified."

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if those teachers get any bonus points when transferring to another district.

MS. PARADY replied that the highly qualified label remains with the teacher.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked how long probation is for tenure as it relates to in-district transfers.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said that's a contract negotiation item.

MS. PARADY replied it differs by district.

SENATOR HUGGINS commented on whether those items had an effect on teacher hire.

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DR. PJ FORD-SLACK, Interim Superintendent, Hoonah City Schools, testified in support of SB 79. Said she just returned from the job fair in Anchorage where her district was desperately seeking teachers, including two special education teachers. She noted the shortage of qualified teachers.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY commented that politicians sometimes add on to what teachers are supposed to do, but do not give them the tools they need. He said he is very interested in receiving suggestions from educators and parents about what can be done differently to make education a more inviting profession with good student outcomes.

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SENATOR HUGGINS said he is looking for the speed bumps in the good ideas.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY held SB 79 in committee.

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There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Dunleavy adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 4:33 p.m.