

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 24, 2016

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**

**CONFIRMATION HEARINGS**

**State Board of Education & Early Development**  
Rebecca Himshoot - Sitka

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

**Professional Teaching Practices Commission**  
David DeVaughn - North Pole  
Melody Mann - Wasilla  
Paul Prussing - Juneau  
Francis Roberts - Homer

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

**University of Alaska**  
Stacy Lucason - Anchorage  
Deena Paramo - Palmer

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REBECCA HIMSHOOT, Appointee

Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development  
Sitka, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as an appointee to the Board of Education & Early Development.

DAVID DEVAUGHN, Appointee  
Professional Teaching Practices Commission  
North Pole, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as an appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

MELODY MANN, Appointee  
Wasilla, Alaska  
Professional Teaching Practices Commission  
North Pole, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as an appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

PAUL PRUSSING, Appointee  
Professional Teaching Practices Commission  
North Pole, Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as an appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

FRANCIS ROBERTS, Appointee  
Professional Teaching Practices Commission  
Homer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as an appointee for the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

STACEY LUCASON, Appointee  
University of Alaska Board of Regents  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as an appointee to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

DEENA PARAMO, Appointee  
University of Alaska Board of Regents  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as an appointee to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:30:34 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 Giessel, Huggins, Gardner, and Chair Dunleavy.

### Confirmation Hearings

[3:30:55 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY announced confirmation hearings for the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development, the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, and the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

### Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development

[3:31:54 PM](#)

REBECCA HIMSHOOT, Appointee, Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development, testified as an appointee to the Board of Education & Early Development. She related that she is a science specialist in grades 2 - 5 and a gifted education teacher. She thanked the committee for the opportunity to share her qualifications for the appointment and for the work they do. She said it is an honor to be considered for an appointment to the Board. As an educator with a vast amount of experience, she believes she brings a valuable voice to the Board. She described her broad professional network.

She maintained that it is perhaps the single greatest responsibility of a society to raise and educate the next generation, and she opined the best way to do so is in partnership with families, communities, and students.

She explained that the Board has set three goals: modernizing education in Alaska, increasing local control, and ensuring the best quality teachers for every student in Alaska. She spoke of how educator quality has been one of her primary goals and she listed the awards she has received because of it. She noted that she currently serves on the Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC). She opined that every student in Alaska deserves a compassionate, skilled, knowledgeable teacher.

She spoke of her personal practice to remain on the cutting edge of quality education and to bear the highest professional standards. She concluded that there is an important role for herself as a practitioner on the Board as it seeks to achieve the strategic plan goal of providing the best quality educators for Alaska's students.

She stated with the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Alaska has the opportunity to increase local control in

schools. She welcomed the shift away from high stakes testing. She said Alaska's 53 school districts are well-positioned to navigate the shift in this new federal law, but there is much important work to do in the coming months.

She explained that reasons why she became a teacher and how she would bring her experiences as a teacher to the Board to help ensure the important discussions about education in Alaska include the classroom perspective.

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SENATOR GARDNER asked about implementing the Marzano Model in schools and what modernizing education means.

MS. HIMSHOOT replied that Senator Gardner's school district follows the Danielson Model, but in the Sitka School District the Marzano Model is used for educator evaluations. They both provide research-based information on effective teaching to schools.

She responded that modernizing education is a broad goal. She said she does not know what the Board's definition is, but she assumed each district would define it for itself. She gave an example of modernizing digital technology - electronic white boards in every classroom in the Sitka School District.

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SENATOR HUGGINS asked, with local control emphasized under ESSA, why a State Board is needed.

MS. HIMSHOOT explained that the Board oversees the Department of Education and must interpret ways to apply new statutes. She said she likes that her district can set its own policies; the Board provides oversight.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked how Governor Walker chose her as an appointee.

MS. HIMSHOOT said she applied a year ago and was chosen to serve on the PTPC. The Governor's Office reached out this year to previous applicants to apply for the Board.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked why she was chosen by the Governor.

MS. HIMSHOOT replied that she could not speak for the Governor. She said she interviewed with the Chairs and Commissions Office

and then with the Governor's Office. She did not know the Governor's reasons for choosing her. She added that the entire Board had lunch with the Governor on Tuesday.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked how outside groups influence the Board when making regulations and whether she sees herself as representing teachers.

MS. HIMSHOOT stated when making decisions she decides what is best for students.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked how she sees the legislature's role in public education.

MS. HIMSHOOT said she would like to think the legislature is a partner in education who is looking at teachers and schools as professionals and supporting families and children.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if her role was that of a regulatory maker.

MS. HIMSHOOT said her background as a teacher and her experience colors her view as a regulatory maker.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked what school choice is.

MS. HIMSHOOT replied that it means families can choose which schools their kids go to.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if she supports the concept of school choice.

MS. HIMSHOOT said absolutely.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked for her opinion of federal involvement in education. He examined his reasons for going into teaching. He referred to NCLB, now ESSA, and the change to "Alaskanize" education in terms of federal government overreach. He asked her to comment.

MS. HIMSHOOT stated she is not a complier; a "critical thinker" is more accurate. She said she must weigh where she puts her efforts because students only have one chance each year in a classroom. She opined that ESSA provides less overreach and it is a critical time for Alaska to consider what it can do. She cautioned not to fight battles "we can't win" and to fully understand what the law says.

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SENATOR HUGGINS asked where she went to school.

MS. HIMSHOOT said UAS and at the UA-Sitka Campus.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked where she taught school and how long.

MS. HIMSHOOT said four schools and 16 years.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked what contributions she made and how much better the system is for them.

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MS. HIMSHOOT she said she has developed herself as a teacher, staying current and better with time, and bringing her passion into the classroom for hands-on activities, as well as having compassion with students.

She addressing the system's improvements over fifteen years and said schools are doing better at collecting useful data to address problems.

SENATOR HUGGINS spoke of the Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP) and asked if the state should continue them.

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MS. HIMSHOOT said she cannot speak to the AMP decisions, but she thought they were a requirement under federal law. She said she looks to find a tool that provides useful data.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY argued that Alaska's Department of Education made the decision to test every year; California did not. He questioned whether the state has to do everything the federal government requires.

SENATOR HUGGINS asked Ms. Himshoot to consider seeking a waiver to the AMP and be open-minded when considering it.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY turned to the topic of parental rights as it relates to standardized assessments and other subjects. He noted the tendency away from public schools to private schools. He requested her comments.

MS. HIMSHOOT recalled the history of standards based assessment (SBA), with which teachers had input, and the resulting data

that showed their school was weak in a specific area. She said, ideally, an assessment will allow parents to see areas their child needs improvement. The AMP, in which teachers also had input, appears to have failed because of useless data.

She commented that she hopes the exodus from public to private schools is not really happening, but if it is, it could be from the fear-mongering regarding what's happening in public schools. People may not have full information. She agreed that schools are a family's choice and teachers will never know their child as well as the parents do. She emphasized that there needs to be partnerships between teachers and parents.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY noted that it is a fact that there is an exodus from public schools. He said home school programs did not exist before 1995.

MS. HIMSHOOT asked if he was referring to correspondence programs.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said yes. In response to a question, he maintained that there was another option for parents to educate their children outside of the public school. He said the student population in Alaska is shrinking and the homeschool population is growing in the Mat-Su District. He said he has no problem stating that a lot of parents don't want their kids to attend neighborhood schools.

MS. HIMSHOOT countered that national research shows that families adore their children's teachers.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said parents have not said they have left schools because they do not like their teachers; there are a host of reasons parents are taking their kids out of school. One reason is because parents were not involved in developing standards. He referred to when NCLB was adopted in 2001. There was a provision that all subgroups must be tested. Now parents do not want their students tested.

MS. HIMSHOOT said parents are in charge of their children and should make those decisions. She added that she was trained in the development of the tests and was happy to do so. She reiterated the need for partnerships.

[4:06:09 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY discussed outside groups coming into schools to teach courses.

MS. HIMSHOOT said the state board is moving in the direction of local control. She said she partners with Junior Achievement, an outside group, because they are experts. She stressed that she was always in the classroom when partnering with outside groups. Classroom oversight with experts is the way to get more done, especially in times of budget crisis.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if she would extend that to public/private partnerships.

MS. HIMSHOOT stated that the local school board can make that decision.

[4:08:28 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY spoke of the push to teach tolerance, acceptance, and embracing. He asked what the balance between what the parents and the schools should be teaching is.

MS. HIMSHOOT said it is a tough question. She said if he had asked the question in 1960 Selma, there would have been room for suggestions. She said there must be balance. Teachers are held to a higher standard and each teacher has to answer that question. If the dialogue in the family is open, it will be a learning opportunity for everyone.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said parents are taking children out because they believe the school is injecting values between them and the school. Schools are not teaching objective content, but values-based content.

[4:14:21 PM](#)

At ease

[4:15:24 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked about Common Core.

MS. HIMSHOOT explained that Common Core used to be an effort by the state to put together a set of standards and it has become an incredibly loaded, dysfunctional issue. It is a mess. However, kids in Alaska can do what other kids in the U.S. can do. She wants rigorous standards, such as the new standards are.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if Alaska adopted Common Core.

MS. HIMSHOOT said no. Alaska created its own set of standards.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if Alaska can develop more rigorous standards.

MS. HIMSHOOT said yes, but child development should be considered. The department should increase rigor in Alaska, but have its own set of standards.

[4:19:52 PM](#)

At ease

**Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC)**

[4:20:08 PM](#)

DAVID DEVAUGHN, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, testified as a nominee for the Professional Teaching Practices Commission. He shared his professional teaching background and his experience for the last three years on PTPC helping to hold the profession to a high standard.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked why he wants to be re-appointed to the Commission.

MR. DEVAUGHN related that the Commission keeps teachers aware of a code of ethics and puts good teachers in front of students.

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SENATOR GARDNER asked him to speak more about the process of keeping teachers aware.

MR. DEVAUGHN commented that every teacher in the state receives a copy of the code of ethics and links to the PTPC website. They also receive a spring newsletter that provides information on sanctions, the code of ethics, and consequences.

SENATOR GARDNER asked, after serving three years on the commission, what is different in his understanding of PTPC.

MR. DEVAUGHN replied that he has more awareness about how things can snowball for a well-meaning teacher and the ramifications and impacts of breaking rules.

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CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked about the nature of violations he has had to deal with.

MR. DEVAUGHT reported that there have been contract violations and disputes between teachers, administration, and students, and there have been social media infractions.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if there has been improper contact between teachers and student.

MR. DEVAUGHN said yes.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if there have been social media infractions.

MR. DEVAUGHN said yes.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if it is ok for children to be used for political purposes.

[4:26:30 PM](#)

MR. DEVAUGHN said there have been no issues like that since he has been there.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if the standards prohibit it and if anyone has filed a petition or violation on that issue.

MR. DEVAUGHN said it is prohibited and he has not seen any violations in three years.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked if he wonders if parents have given permission for their children's picture to be used.

MR. DEVAUGHN has not seen that and did not know if any teachers would do that.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said he was careful to protect student privacy.

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MELODY MANN, Appointee, Alaska, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, testified as a nominee for the Professional Teaching Practices Commission. She provided her background as an art teacher and her service on PTPC.

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SENATOR GARDNER thanked her for her willingness to serve again on the Commission. She asked about an NEA-Alaska award for minority leadership in education.

MS. MANN said her appointment to PTPC came through NEA-Alaska involvement. She said she took advantage of training they provided, one of which was minority leadership, and she participates in the delegation.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if she has suggestions about recruiting and retaining minority teachers.

MS. MANN said she does not.

[4:34:08 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL noted Ms. Mann is a Nana shareholder and asked where she is from.

MS. MANN said her family is from Kotzebue.

[4:35:07 PM](#)

PAUL PRUSSING Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, testified as a nominee for the Professional Teaching Practices Commission. He provided his professional background in the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) and said that the Commissioner asked him to be on PTPC. He said the intent of PTPC is to "serve as a preventative and positive force in helping to enhance the professional performance of all educators so that the public's right to the best education possible for all of Alaska's students is adequately protected." He provided the history of PTPC and described its makeup five teachers, one superintendent, one principal, one department representative, and one higher education representative.

He described his personal and family background. He stressed the importance of the professionalism of teachers. He concluded that he is honored to be a part of the Commission.

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SENATOR GARDNER asked if he is representing the department and to share about his progression from teaching to the department.

MR. PRUSSING replied that he is representing the department. He recalled his journey from commercial fishing to teaching and then to working at the department.

[4:38:53 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY asked about social media infractions in teaching professions.

MR. PRUSSING said he is aware of it and most districts have technology plans to deal with it. He pointed out that PTPC is the final stop, but most discipline actions are taken at the local board level.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY said the commission determines when a teacher's certificate should be sanctioned or revoked.

SENATOR GIESSEL noted Mr. Prussing's diverse resume.

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MR. PRUSSING said he agrees that his experience is helpful in his position at the department for the past 17 years.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY complimented Mr. Prussing and asked him to keep the issue of using children for political purposes in mind.

MR. PRUSSING said he is sensitive to it.

[4:42:55 PM](#)

FRANCIS ROBERTS, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, testified as an appointee for the Professional Teaching Practices Commission. She provided her background as a math teacher, her educational background, and her community involvement. She said she has been on PTPC for the last three years.

[4:45:00 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL asked about her background in natural resources and Youth for Environmental Action (YEA).

MS. ROBERTS spoke of her involvement in the natural resources course at Homer High School. She explained that YEA students participate in activities that help the environment, such as cleaning beaches, and speaking to the legislature about salmon fishing concerns.

[4:47:07 PM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked about the mini-farm.

MS. ROBERTS described the animals in the classroom.

### **University of Alaska Board of Regents**

[4:48:10 PM](#)

STACEY LUCASON, Appointee, University of Alaska Board of Regents, testified as an appointed to the University of Alaska

Board of Regents. She provided her experience as the student representative to the Board and her background at the university. She said she is currently in a master's program for public administration. She related that she wants to serve on the Board because of her positive higher education experience as a non-traditional student. She shared that she was the student body president last year.

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SENATOR GARDNER thanked her for her willingness to serve. She asked if she would be speaking from her own experience or if she would ask students for their opinion.

MS. LUCASON said she would do outreach to students as she did when she was student body president. She provided examples.

[4:52:44 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY thought it was critical that a student's perspective be represented on the Board of Regents. He asked what her top three issues are.

MS. LUCASON said parking and food are favorite topics of concern of students. More important policy issues are whether there should be one university or three or more. Also, important are partnerships with school districts and businesses for acceptance into college and entry into graduate programs and the job market.

[4:56:52 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNLEAVY requested she use this opportunity to make student voices heard.

[4:58:05 PM](#)

DEENA PARAMO, Appointee, University of Alaska Board of Regents, testified as an appointee to the University of Alaska Board of Regents. She provided her background as Superintendent of the Mat-Su School District. She said she was appointed to the Board last fall to replace someone who left mid-term. She said it is a good opportunity for her in her current position to serve on the Board. She understands that the university serves the state. Her goal is to facilitate partnerships with the university.

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SENATOR GARDNER complimented Dr. Paramo on her wonderful reputation. She asked about several programs: Middle College, STEM, and pre-school programs.

DR. PARAMO explained how the Middle College works - juniors and seniors can dually enroll in college and high school. The Middle College prepares students to pass the ACCUPLACER entrance exam and then earn college credits and eventually associate degrees. The goal is to be college ready.

She described the partnership with STEM and with the Math and Science Initiative, which provides opportunity for teacher training in order to reach out to more students to take honors classes. She explained how they also partnered with ANSEP at the middle school level. They sent nine teachers in to train along with the 54 students.

She described resources she uses for pre-school programs, such as Head Start.

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SENATOR GARDNER asked if every student passes the ACCUPLACER first before enrolling in college courses.

DR. PARAMO said students either pass it or they work with them to pass it.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY looked forward to talking to Dr. Paramo about safety issues on campus.

CHAIR DUNLEAVY moved to advance the following names for appointment to the full membership of the legislature in joint session for consideration and a final vote:

**State Board of Education & Early Development**

Rebecca Himshoot - Sitka

**Professional Teaching Practices Commission**

David DeVaughn - North Pole

Melody Mann - Wasilla

Paul Prussing - Juneau

Francis Roberts - Homer

**University of Alaska**

Stacy Lucason - Anchorage

Deena Paramo - Palmer

He noted this does not reflect any intent by the members to vote for or against the confirmation of the individuals during any further sessions.

5:11:17 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Dunleavy adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 5:11 p.m.