

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT MEETING
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 29, 2017

8:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Shelley Hughes, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens
Senator Cathy Giessel
Senator John Coghill
Senator Tom Begich

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Harriet Drummond, Chair
Representative Justin Parish, Vice Chair
Representative Zach Fansler
Representative Ivy Spohnholz
Representative Jennifer Johnston
Representative Chuck Kopp
Representative David Talerico
Representative Lora Reinbold

MEMBERS ABSENT

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

All members present

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Geran Tarr

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: ALASKA STATE SCHOOL BOARD

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JAMES FIELDS, Chair
Alaska State Board of Education
Glennallen, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the State School Board.

SUE HULL, First Vice Chair
Alaska State School Board
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the State School Board.

JOHN HARMON, Second Vice Chair
Alaska State School Board
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the State School Board.

BARBARA THOMPSON, Member
Alaska State School Board
Douglas, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the State School Board.

WILFRIED ZIBELL, Youth Advisor
Alaska State School Board
Noorvik, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the State School Board.

CHARLES MICHAEL, Youth Advisor - Elect
Alaska State School Board
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the State School Board.

REBECCA HIMSCHOOT, Member
Alaska State School Board
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the State School Board.

LT. COLONIAL JASON TOOLE, Military Advisor
Joint Base Elmendorf
Alaska State School Board

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the State School Board.

DR. KEITH HAMILTON, Member
Alaska State School Board
President
Alaska Christian College
Member
Alaska Commission on Post-Secondary Education
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the State School Board.

KENNY GALLAHORN, Member
Alaska State School Board
Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the State School Board.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:03:42 AM](#)

CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND called the joint meeting of the Senate and House Education Standing Committees to order at 8:03 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Begich, Giessel, Coghill, Stevens, and Chair Hughes, and Representatives Kopp, Fansler, Johnston, Spohnholz, Talerico, and Chair Drummond.

PRESENTATION: Alaska State School Board

[8:05:03 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND announced a presentation by the Alaska State School Board. She noted that all seven voting members were present, as well as the military advisor and both student members. She said it will be a very informal meeting and Mr. Fields will act as moderator.

[8:06:21 AM](#)

JAMES FIELDS, Chair, Alaska State Board of Education, presented information on the State School Board. He introduced himself.

CHAIR DRUMMOND noted the presence of Commissioner Johnson and that Representative Parish joined the meeting.

[8:07:09 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS thanked the committees for the opportunity to be here today. He was grateful for the chance to collaborate with both Education Committees. He related that the State Board of Education has been working toward a plan with the goal of transforming the way student learning happens in the state. The next step in the plan is the Alaska Education Challenge with five strategic objectives. He said Commissioner Johnson is forming committees to dive into providing "an excellent education for every student every day," which is the Board's mission statement.

MR. FIELDS related that with committee members from a wide variety of stakeholder groups, including legislators, administrators, local school board members, parents, teachers, business leaders, the Board is hopeful that transformative ideas and action steps will come forward and have widespread support to then move forward and be implemented throughout Alaska. He noted there are pockets of transformative work in the state, and the goal is to take those ideas and allow them to be used throughout the state.

MR. FIELDS pointed out that the Education Committees are critical in the process and the Board wants to hear their concerns, comments, and ideas related to the Alaska Education Challenge. The Board looks forward to having committee members join the various committees Commissioner Johnson is forming.

He introduced members of the Board.

[8:08:59 AM](#)

SUE HULL, First Vice Chair, Alaska State School Board, presented information on the State School Board. She said she has been active in education for years and served on the Board in the 80s. She said she is excited to be a part of the Alaska Education Challenge. There is a hunger for transformation in education among education stakeholders and the public. She said the Board is strong and energetic and is focused on kids.

[8:09:57 AM](#)

JOHN HARMON, Second Vice Chair, Alaska State School Board, presented information on the State School Board. He said he is from the Mat-Su Valley and his family has been in Alaska a long time. He practiced law for many years and then returned to Alaska and has worked as a high school principal. Next year he will teach high school English.

[8:10:38 AM](#)

BARBARA THOMPSON, Member, Alaska State School Board, presented information on the State School Board. She said she has been in education about 40 years in various roles; adult education, Department of Education, and at the national level with the Education Commission of the States. She is pleased to serve on the Board and excited about how the Alaska Education Challenge will impact student achievement and teacher preparation and effectiveness.

[8:11:16 AM](#)

WILFRIED ZIBELL, Youth Advisor, Alaska State School Board, presented information on the State School Board. He said he is a high school senior and is an honor to have served on the Board. He is looking forward to the Alaska Education Challenge.

[8:11:44 AM](#)

CHARLES MICHAEL, Youth Advisor - Elect, Alaska State School Board, presented information on the State School Board. He said he will be the next Youth Advisor on the Board.

[8:12:01 AM](#)

REBECCA HIMSCHOOT, Member, Alaska State School Board, presented information on the State School Board. She said she is a teacher and is she is grateful to serve on the energized Board. She recognized two former students in the room.

[8:12:38 AM](#)

LT. COLONIAL JASON TOOLE, Military Advisor, Joint Base Elmendorf, Alaska State School Board, presented information on the State School Board.

[8:12:45 AM](#)

DR. KEITH HAMILTON, Member, Alaska State School Board, President, Alaska Christian College, and Member, Alaska Commission on Post-Secondary Education, presented information on the State School Board. He said he is grateful for the unified Board which is moving ahead with the Alaska Education Challenge.

[8:13:45 AM](#)

KENNY GALLAHORN, Member, Alaska State School Board, presented information on the State School Board. He said education is important to him and his family. He represents the rural districts. He appreciated the work the Education Committees does. He said he is result oriented.

8:15:03 AM

MR. FIELDS shared that he is from the Copper River School District and has served on the local school board there for seven years and the State Board for four years. He said he is the REEA member to the Board.

CHAIR HUGHES said she is delighted that the whole Board is here. She asked about their work ensuring that graduates are ready to attend the university and not needing remediation. She referred to an article about students with high GPAs needing remedial course work.

8:15:54 AM

MS. HULL said she chairs a joint committee of the State Board and the University Regents which is charged with nine elements: creating a culture of education, reducing developmental course work, expanding concurrent enrollment, improving educative preparation, expanding Alaska educator recruitment, ensuring educator retention, simplifying the transfer of credit, and ensuring smooth transitions.

She stated that education needs greater systems of accountability, and the use of today's technology as a method to ensure that quality is tracked all along. Both the Board of Regents and the State Board are aware of the remediation problem. Several of the Alaska Education Challenge committees are focused on student achievement and accountability and will come out with recommendations.

8:18:04 AM

CHAIR DRUMMOND noted the presence of Representative Reinbold.

MR. FIELDS assumed that student achievement would be included in all five of the Alaska Education Challenge priorities.

8:18:41 AM

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON commented that students who did not do remedial courses had a greater success rate than students who were put into remedial courses. She asked how they planned to raise the bar for those students.

MS. HULL responded that the goal is that students not have to take remedial classes at the university level.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON clarified that maybe bright students were being put into remedial classes and didn't belong there. Expectations for success were not there.

MS. HULL said she believes that Representative Johnston suggested accelerating remedial classes. She said the emphasis should instead be on not having to take remedial classes. The way to do that is to ensure that grades reflect actual achievement.

[8:20:45 AM](#)

MS. HIMSCHOOT added that defining "remedial" should come first. She also commented on the need to have students reading by third grade or they would need remediation all the way through school.

[8:21:35 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND followed up on the comment about reading by third grade and how critical that is, as is pre-K education. She asked where pre-K is on the Board's priorities. She emphasized that it is the Department of Education and "Early Development."

MS. HIMSCHOOT noted there is a lot of interest and importance placed on pre-K education and it will be addressed in the Alaska Education Challenge in every committee. She stressed that working with parents is important, as is high quality pre-K education.

[8:23:25 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH recommended looking at the early education bill to be heard on the Senate Floor today.

[8:24:24 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS pointed to the importance of community involvement in pre-K education.

SENATOR BEGICH noted there is a specific component for cultural and community collaboration in the bill.

[8:24:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH said he attended the Juneau School Board meeting yesterday and heard their budget process. He asked what support the legislature can provide to the State School Board.

[8:25:47 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS replied that a sustained fiscal plan for local school districts and certainty in the state budget are critical. He shared his viewpoint as a business owner. Governor Walker

proposed \$250,000 for the Alaska Education Challenge to move it forward. He maintained that the state has the right leadership in place and the right alignment between the Governor and the legislature to invest in education. Also, there is a strong State Board and buy-in with stakeholders around the state to move the plan forward.

[8:27:23 AM](#)

MR. HARMON said a quote from John Kennedy comes to mind when he is asked that question, "Children are our most valuable resource and our best hope for the future." He opined that the state's priority should be to invest in children.

[8:28:25 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND said, from her experience being on a local school board, the timing of the budget is of the utmost importance. She pointed out that the state's budget begins on July 1, and the longer the legislature waits to finalize a budget, the harder it is for communities to write theirs.

[8:29:08 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS spoke of concerns about dual credit - high school/college credits. He wanted to ensure that those credits are at college credit level.

[8:29:51 AM](#)

MS. HULL said in Fairbanks the same teacher teaches a course at the university and at the high school. She suggested having teachers with good credentials and evidence of performance for students. She sees a need to pursue dual credits in order to save money.

[8:30:54 AM](#)

DR. HAMILTON said that Alaska is behind in the dual credit program. The Alaska Education Challenge can change that.

He noted the transfer of university credits is still a problem. He provided an example of credits earned from Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) colleges that do not transfer to the UA system. He suggested continuing to look at how to take the barriers down between the dual credit and credit transfer issues.

[8:32:52 AM](#)

MR. ZIBELL agreed with the previous comments. He described what is done in his school district; students can take online courses

from the university. He suggested to forge partnerships between the university and districts.

[8:34:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP followed up on the need for remediation and integrating K-12 and post-secondary education. He agreed with a stronger integration of standards and a unified approach. He asked if the discussion is leading the Board to encourage K-12 to be less focused on a graduation rate and more focused on rigorous courses and aligned standards that match expectancy of the university system.

[8:35:28 AM](#)

MR. MICHAEL said part of the Board's goal is to have local control over curriculum. An example is that in the Mat-Su they are updating the history curriculum to better reflect what a college history course will be like.

[8:36:24 AM](#)

MS. HULL did not want to get away from caring about graduation rates. She thought students being prepared was also important. She used the state of Virginia as an example of how students choose a track to follow for post-secondary preparation - differentiated diplomas.

[8:37:39 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS said the Board has had training in standardized learning and aligning all standards so every student can be successful at all levels. Defining success is important.

[8:38:43 AM](#)

MR. HARMON said Representative Kopp asked a great question. Something exciting in education now is the implementation of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which will give more control back to the states in all areas. It will provide an opportunity to be innovative and to solve some of Alaska's challenges.

[8:39:37 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND voiced concerned about what is going on in Washington, D.C., in terms of ESSA. She has heard that it has been paused and asked what that means regarding the September deadline.

[8:40:04 AM](#)

MS. HIMSCHOOT said she is serving in a fellowship on the National Science Foundation for a year. Their focus is on ESSA and there is no pause, only a repeal of Obama regulations.

States are allowed to respond to the law and Alaska is on track. There has been a lot of stakeholder engagement. She maintained that ESSA and the Alaska Education Challenge fit well together.

[8:41:59 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked what the Board is doing to ensure enough, and the best, teachers. There is a national shortage of teachers, the cost of teacher turnover is very high, and there is loss of student learning. She stressed the importance of family involvement and great teachers in a child's education. They have been looking at virtual education which would provide access to great teachers statewide. She asked what the Board is doing in those areas.

[8:43:27 AM](#)

MS. THOMPSON said one of the major focus areas of the strategic plan is ensuring educator excellence; it also will be a focus of the Alaska Education Challenge. The mentoring program no longer exists as it was. They anticipate working with the university on teacher preparation and alternative methods of certification.

[8:45:22 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND said she is fascinated by Representative Kress-Thompkins' bill on the limited teacher certificate. She asked whether the Board is aware of HB 102, which the House Education Committee passed out of committee.

[8:46:04 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS said he was updated on the bill, but the Board does not have a position on it. Any time they can help improve teacher proficiency and increase the number of teachers they will. This issue is on the Board's priority list. It is critical that the Alaska Education Challenge committees come up with ideas and action steps, so the Board can implement them.

[8:47:21 AM](#)

MS. HIMSHOOT drew attention to the issue as a nationwide problem of recruiting and retention of teachers. She pointed out that looking at alternate pathways to becoming teachers needs to be a conversation with all stakeholders involved. She wants to see a comprehensive conversation to ensure that the quality of teachers is maintained.

[8:48:53 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND suggested ensuring excellent educators be a part of the five priorities.

[8:49:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH said he went to a hearing on the proposed defined benefits program for state workers. He provided an example of a teacher who was leaving Alaska for a defined benefits pension in another state. He also knows of a police officer who said the same thing. He opined that Tier 4 state workers are incentivized to move from the state after five years. He asked if a defined benefits option might retain teachers.

[8:50:49 AM](#)

DR. HAMILTON said absolutely. He pointed out that "home-grown educators" are retained in Alaska. The investment in those teachers is vital because they will not leave Alaska.

[8:51:41 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND pointed out that the state is not producing enough teachers and the Anchorage District will be laying off 99 teachers. She suggested making a connection there.

[8:52:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER said there has been a focus on cooperative opportunities between districts and the use of broadband for education. He asked for options to bridge the gap for broadband disparity and for suggestions about the advantages of distance education.

[8:53:29 AM](#)

MS. HULL agreed that there are significant broadband issues. The key is finding how to enable districts to use what bandwidth they have. All districts should be looking for opportunities to expand access to bandwidth. She agreed there are inequities.

[8:55:00 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS commented that Valdez and Glennallen have used federal grant money for fiber optic expansion. He suggested collaboration between schools and businesses.

[8:56:01 AM](#)

MS. HIMSHOOT added that with digital learning the relationship with the teacher is the number one factor for success. Teachers often provide stability for students not available at home.

[8:56:46 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND agreed.

[8:56:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER stressed the importance of cultural integration into the curriculum, including in teaching methods. He asked for recommendations in that area.

[8:57:53 AM](#)

MS. HIMSHOOT agreed it was important. She said the Southeast Regional Resource Center is doing outreach throughout the state to support cultural competencies. She noted the importance of including all cultures. She said that the Educator Excellence Committee would be looking at that.

[8:58:53 AM](#)

MR. ZIBELL agreed. He shared that they have culture camp for all new teachers in his district.

[8:59:58 AM](#)

MS. THOMPSON said curriculum development and execution takes place at the local level and the Board encourages that. The members of the Alaska Education Challenge support that it is an important way to get students to learn and have learning be relevant.

[9:00:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON spoke of great innovation and entrepreneurial work taking place in many districts. They are beginning, on their own, to do some cross fertilization. She asked how the Board plans to amplify this direction.

[9:01:43 AM](#)

MS. HULL said the Board has to encourage collaboration and innovations. She thought it would be one of the Board's recommendations. She mentioned digital possibilities to make people aware of what is available. She thought the Board could provide a unified system of support while ensuring quality programs.

[9:04:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON said she sees innovation already happening around districts. She understood that the commission and the department could act as a clearinghouse, but she also wants to allow for growth and innovation to continue.

MS. HULL agreed and gave an example a way to do that - using a model of choices related to professional development.

[9:06:00 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS said the goal is to have districts choose to do that. He said leadership matters and he opined that good leadership is in place and he thought stakeholders were aligned. He was hopeful that it could be done.

[9:07:22 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS brought up the need for, and importance of, civics education to create student citizens.

[9:08:14 AM](#)

MR. MICHAEL said he is on the curriculum council in his district. They have been working on the social studies curriculum with the goal to make good citizens, starting with Civics and ending with U.S. Government. He opined that it is not the place of the state to tell districts to create citizens. There is a need to focus on local control.

[9:09:47 AM](#)

MR. HARMON shared that the Board adopted a new vision that all students can succeed in their education and work, shape worthwhile and satisfying lives for themselves, exemplify the best values of society, and be effective in improving the character and quality of the world around them. He said it is a priority as it relates to civics and society.

[9:10:50 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stressed that it is not enough to say, "let the local community take care of it." He recalled when he was a student he studied current events, history, and wanted to vote. He thought it was the Board's job to ensure that every child in Alaska has an understanding of his or her responsibility as a citizen.

[9:11:36 AM](#)

MS. HULL offered that a practical tool is looking at what is expected of graduates. She said that she and Ms. Thompson will be chairing the Student Achievement Committee and will propose to define what is expected from graduates. A graduate profile will include content knowledge, but also communication, collaboration, and civics. Students today don't have clear expectations of those other skill requirements.

[9:13:33 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked Mr. Michael what he hopes to accomplish on the Board.

He echoed Senator Stevens' comments about civics. He said democracy fails if we don't educate students. Currently, school success is measured by content area success, but that is a failed approach to education. We don't teach critical thinking. We have gone the wrong direction.

He agreed that digital learning requires a quality teacher in the classroom. Teacher retention requires treating teachers well and paying them well. He opined that Alaska-raised teachers do not remain in the state. He stressed the need to address teacher pay and teacher retirement benefits.

He noted, in the process of this and next legislative sessions, several issues may pass into law before the Alaska Education Challenge has been met. He asked what the Board needs from the legislature in terms of policy education.

[9:17:47 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS responded that he has looked at SB 96 and there are many great elements in the bill that will be touched on by the Alaska Education Challenge.

SENATOR BEGICH clarified that he is not asking about any specific bills, but about how the legislature might address issues of policy that are important to the Board.

MR. FIELDS requested time to get through the Alaska Education Challenge process and then support for it. He reiterated that leadership and timing matter and they are in place. He pointed out that the legislature will participate on the committees and will have a say. In December 2017 the Board will have action steps.

[9:19:20 AM](#)

MR. HARMON recommended the legislature consider "an excellent education for every student every day" as the primary lens.

[9:20:23 AM](#)

MR. GALLAHORN thanked Senator Begich for his comment about treating teachers well. He stressed the importance of having good teachers and paying them well by using part of the budget.

[9:21:56 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked outgoing student, Mr. Zibell, and incoming student, Mr. Michael, what their experience has been on the Board and how it has changed how they views their schools.

[9:22:43 AM](#)

MR. ZIBELL said he has had the opportunity to shape policy, provide input, and help direct plans, in a very real way. It has been a validating experience to show that students are valued and are the first stakeholders in education. He believes that the education system in Alaska will persevere.

MR. MICHAEL said it is nice to see people working hard to make Alaska education the best it can be. He replied to Senator Begich's question saying he will serve on the Modernization and Finance Committee for the Alaska Education Challenge.

In response to the civics question, he said his school now offers three Advanced Placement World History courses online that are at the college level.

He concluded that he hopes to help make education the best it can be for students in Alaska.

[9:26:11 AM](#)

MS. THOMPSON responded to the question regarding what the legislature can do to help the Board. She noted what comes out of the Alaska Education Challenge, no matter when it is done, requires a sustainable fiscal plan.

She referred to the question on civics education, and pointed out that the Civics Education Task Force has done an amazing amount of work. Their recommendations are directly applicable to the Board and DEED in many ways. She maintained that their goals can be achieved by many methods, such as updating the standards. She promised that civic education goals will not get lost.

[9:28:15 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL made announcements, as did Chair Drummond.

[9:30:18 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Drummond adjourned the Joint Education Standing Committees at 9:30 a.m.