

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

January 29, 2018

7:58 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

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

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Harriet Drummond, Chair
Representative Justin Parish, Vice Chair
Representative Ivy Spohnholz
Representative Jennifer Johnston
Representative David Talerico

MEMBERS ABSENT

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

All members present

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Zach Fansler
Representative Chuck Kopp
Representative Lora Reinbold
Representative Geran Tarr

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: ALASKA'S EDUCATION CHALLENGE REPORT BY THE ALASKA BOARD OF EDUCATION

- HEARD

PRESENTATION: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR EDUCATORS. LEAGUE OF ALASKAN EDUCATION INNOVATORS

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JAMES FIELDS, Chair

Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development
Glennallen, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the Alaska Education Challenge Report.

REBECCA HIMSCHOOT, Member

Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the Alaska Education Challenge Report.

SUE HULL, First Vice-Chair

Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the Alaska Education Challenge Report.

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner

Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the Alaska Education Challenge Report.

DR. KEITH HAMILTON, Member

Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the Alaska Education Challenge Report.

BARBARA THOMPSON, Member

Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development
Douglas, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information about the Alaska Education Challenge.

KENNY GALLAHORN, Member
Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development
Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information about the Alaska Education Challenge Report.

CHARLES MICHAEL, Student Advisor
Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information about the Alaska Education Challenge Report.

SEAN DUSEK, Superintendent
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD)
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the League of Alaska Education Innovators.

CHRIS BENSHOOF, Educator
Lathrop High School
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the League of Alaska Education Innovators.

BILL BURR, President Elect
Alaska Society for Technology in Education (ASTE);
Assistant Superintendent
Delta/Greely School District
Delta Junction, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the League of Alaska Education Innovators.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[7:58:53 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the joint meeting of the Senate and House Education Standing Committees to order at 7:58 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Coghill, Giessel, Begich and Chair Stevens and Chair Drummond. Representatives Talerico, Parish, and Johnston arrived shortly thereafter.

PRESENTATION: ALASKA'S EDUCATION CHALLENGE REPORT BY THE ALASKA BOARD OF EDUCATION

[7:59:36 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the consideration of the presentation of Alaska's Education Challenge Report and the presentation Professional Learning for Educators by the League of Alaskan Education Innovators.

[8:00:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO entered.

[8:00:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH entered.

[8:01:16 AM](#)

JAMES FIELDS, Chair, Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development (DEED), Glennallen, Alaska, introduced the members of the State Board of Education in the room.

[8:02:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON entered.

[8:02:38 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS said 2017 was a busy year as the board worked on both the Alaska Education Challenge (AEC) and the accountability plan for the [federal law] Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The state board is committed to the mission and vision of the three commitments, the five strategic priorities, and the 13 recommendations in the AEC.

[8:03:07 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS said education partners have helped develop and rally around the three commitments the board hopes every Alaskan will share. The three commitments--increase student success, cultivate safety and well-being, and support responsible and reflective learners--focus the five priorities, the 13 recommendations and the ESSA accountability plan. The Board of Education has given the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) the information needed to start moving the student achievement gaps in the right direction.

[8:04:53 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked how the state will move forward with the Alaska Education Challenge.

[8:05:07 AM](#)

REBECCA HIMSCHOOT, Member, Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development (DEED), Sitka, Alaska, said the greatest outcome is unity, everyone is all moving in same direction. The three commitments will guide what happens next, which should be

determined locally, and in partnership. With AEC, the partnerships are stronger than ever.

[8:06:37 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS said the next steps are already happening with the partnerships. Everyone is on the same team to make achievement better and stronger. The board has laid out a strategic vision, and it is now up to DEED and the partners to move ahead.

[8:07:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ entered.

[8:07:47 AM](#)

SUE HULL, First Vice-Chair, Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development (DEED), Fairbanks, Alaska, said action must be done at the local level. The local school boards make decisions about things like curriculum and staffing, not the state board. The partnership notion is powerful because the work happens at the local level, with superintendents making administrative decisions and boards making policy decisions. The State Board of Education has set the policy direction. The state must change student performance in this state, and the state board cannot make it happen without partnerships.

[8:09:20 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked who the partners are.

[8:09:34 AM](#)

MS. HULL said the Association of Alaska School Boards, Alaska Council of School Administrators, NEA Alaska, the Alaska PTA, stakeholders and community members, Alaska Native regional corporations and other representatives from key groups. She hoped to involve the public generally to change expectations because school boards cannot change performance until families and communities are engaged in telling students education achievement is important.

[8:11:44 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL asked the commission or chair to explain the AEC process for the benefit of anyone who was not familiar with the AEC.

[8:12:11 AM](#)

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, said the effort grew out of dissatisfaction with the current achievement gap. Some great things are happening in the state, but too many

students are not benefitting. He added that he is optimistic that together the state can change that, raise expectations and close the student achievement gap.

[8:13:35 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said the process began by requiring five parents on every committee to represent Alaskans. Committees also involved tribal members, school and district staff, and stakeholders specific to each committee, such as health care representation on the safety and well-being committees. He expressed his gratitude to legislators who served on committees.

[8:14:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked what legislators could do to help the AEC succeed.

[8:15:22 AM](#)

DR. KEITH HAMILTON, Member, Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development (DEED), Soldotna, Alaska, said, "Money." The state is huge and the needs are huge: broadband issues in rural schools, a counselor in every school, implementation of trauma-informed practices, etc. Alaska is number one in student absenteeism rates. Resources are needed from the governor and legislature.

[8:17:22 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked the state board members to help legislators connect the dots. Most legislators and public are not familiar with the goals of the Alaska Education Challenge. He encouraged the board to proactively comment about legislation to help make consistent education policy.

[8:18:58 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND noted that HB 287 addresses early funding of the foundation funding to help districts avoid issuing unnecessary layoff notices.

[8:19:51 AM](#)

DR. HAMILTON said that type of stewardship would help the state move ahead quickly with the Alaska Education Challenge.

[8:21:44 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS responded to Senator Begich by replying that sometimes that challenge is difficult because the board does not meet often, but he said they could try to find ways to help with that effort. He thought the level of communication and

transparency between the board and the legislature is higher now than ever before in his tenure on the board.

[8:23:26 AM](#)

MS. HIMSCHOOT agreed with Senator Begich that the board's involvement as legislation is being generated is important. She asked the legislature to think of the Alaska Education Challenge partners as resources.

[8:24:11 AM](#)

MS. HIMSCHOOT said over a quarter of kids in Alaska are chronically absent. The three commitments in the AEC say that all Alaskans, not just teachers--communities, businesses, families--will change this because one group alone cannot do it.

[8:25:07 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked Commissioner Johnson to present results of the Alaska Education Challenge.

[8:25:20 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON noted that DEED was developing an accountability plan for the federal law, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), at the same time it was working on the Alaska Education Challenge. DEED received over 4,000 comments for the ESSA plan and almost 15,000 AEC comments. The result of all that work is that Alaskans support the three commitments--increase student success, cultivate safety and well-being, and support responsible and reflective learners--to do something about the student achievement gap in the state.

[8:27:00 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked the board to provide more information about the three commitments.

[8:27:28 AM](#)

BARBARA THOMPSON, Member, Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development, Douglas, Alaska, said the commitment, increase student success, redefines what a successful student looks like. It goes beyond the results on statewide assessments or proficiency in English or math. It addresses whether they are good students, good citizens, do they participate in their communities, can they work well with others. Involving students in their schools, communities, and government in new ways can lend itself to increasing student achievement. They hoped that more funding could be provided for early education because early learning can show huge benefits in the long run.

8:30:17 AM

CHAIR STEVENS said that part of success is finding a job, having a career. Last week the Alaska Air Carriers Association told them that small airplane companies cannot find pilots locally.

8:30:41 AM

MS. THOMPSON said there were many recommendations about career and technical education and growing the state's economy through its students and their goals.

8:31:14 AM

KENNY GALLAHORN, Member, Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development, Kotzebue, Alaska, said forward funding is probably more important than the amount because stabilization is needed in education. The state needs to move forward as quickly as possible in education. Rural Alaska is not doing that well, but the state now has a high level of commitment. "Let's get it done," he said.

8:32:10 AM

CHAIR STEVENS said many ways exist to solve the premature layoff notices. The house has a bill regarding forward funding and the Senate Education Committee just passed a bill with a date of April 1 for funding out of committee. He hoped the legislature would deal with the pink-slip issue that has been so hard on districts.

8:32:57 AM

MS. HULL said everyone needs to think of what kids need to know and be able to do in the future. She related that Google had always prioritized technical knowledge, but a study showed people with computer or technical skills were at the bottom of the list showing who had been successful and Google is talking about hiring liberal arts graduates. Communication, collaboration, creativity, confidence need to be part of the curriculum. "We are boring high school boys to tears . . . talk, talk, talk," she said. Other states have moved forward with innovative apprenticeships in all fields. Students should be getting credit outside of the school buildings.

8:36:04 AM

MS. HULL said to add to Dr. Hamilton's comment that more money was needed, strategic use of dollars is needed. Changes do not require more legislation, it requires alignment of focus and a sense of purpose and utilizing it in new ways.

8:37:11 AM

CHAIR STEVENS acknowledged the presence of Senator Hughes.

8:37:21 AM

CHARLES MICHAEL, Student Advisor, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, Wasilla, Alaska, said career and technical education is the most important thing to teach in high school. Three R's is not what is needed to be taught right now. So many fields that can be learned in high school are experiencing a shortage of people to hire.

8:38:19 AM

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON said the strengthening of public-private partnerships and community partnerships, which is completely different from the past, when education was looked at something provided, was a game changer. She asked for a report on what she called the biggest game changer from the Alaska Education Challenge process, tribal partnership.

8:40:17 AM

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said the partnership has the potential to be a conversation that extends beyond the tribal partnership to the educational system as a whole to create positive change. First Alaskans Institute has been a partner to discuss how to have those conversations. It may be different from past tribal compacting conversations because local school boards can talk to their tribes under the governance that already exists. Future legislation may be required if any laws hinder those conversations. There are tribes ready, willing, and able to take a greater role in the education system in their communities.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON said Cook Inlet Tribal Council has been partnering with the Anchorage School District for 12 to 15 years. It has waxed and waned over the years. Now they are focusing on bringing STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math] into schools.

8:42:02 AM

MR. FIELDS said talking about the cultivate safety and well-being commitment can be depressing, but sometimes what is wrong must be highlighted in order to take action. There are districts doing very good things, and the way they did it should be highlighted to show there are many answers in the state. The superintendents' association is surveying schools and districts about what practices work. If students are not safe and do not have a sense of well-being, they cannot learn. Getting communities, health agencies, and tribal health agencies involved is critical.

[8:43:57 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS related a story about the difficulties of dealing with the lack of counseling in his community of Glennallen.

[8:46:30 AM](#)

DR. HAMILTON said the Kenai Peninsula School District has a variety of communities--rural villages, Old Believer communities--and students on the road system. As in all of Alaska, there are huge needs and huge differences. Some children don't make it to school every day because of breakdowns in the family. If kids don't get to school, they are missing out on many opportunities--meals, teaching, career counseling, nursing. There must be some equality across the state. "That every student has got a shot at being healthy and whole and educated," he said.

[8:48:21 AM](#)

DR. HAMILTON said the state is weak at providing that equality. Caring is going to make a difference. "We stand up for every kid. We love every kid that walks through the door. We care for their families as well," he said. The state does have an amazing set of leaders in Alaska. The state does need resources for counselors, nurses, and trauma-informed practices.

[8:49:51 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said he has been thinking of the heroics of teachers who have put themselves in front of their students in active shooter situations to protect the students.

[8:50:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ said we know that kids cannot learn when they are in a heightened state of alert all the time, which happens when they have experienced a lot of trauma. A lot of research shows that kids who cannot self-regulate cannot learn. Since it is such a huge issue, she asked for some initial thoughts about how to implement trauma-informed practices.

[8:51:35 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS said there has been success with proper leadership, staffing, and planning. The state needs to replicate the success that has been shown in pockets of the state. The superintendents' association was focusing on that.

[8:52:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ asked what the board's and DEED's role is for implementing trauma-informed practices.

[8:52:56 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS said online training is available. The department's role is to highlight and be an advocate for things that are working. The ESSA plan asks schools to have a plan to address safety and well-being.

[8:53:40 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ said she recognized that there are many pockets of great trauma-informed practices. In Anchorage, Marcus Wilson is working on training other schools in the practices he implemented as the principal of North Star Elementary School. She shared that her daughter, who she adopted at the age of nine, is on the fetal alcohol spectrum. The family had to reorient itself to her reality. Teachers face this every day and sometimes must struggle with whole classrooms of people trying to get out of fight-or-flight mode into a calmer mode that allows for learning and insight.

[8:55:24 AM](#)

MS. HIMSCHOOT said as a classroom teacher, cultivating safety and well-being is very important to her. The three commitments all work together, but if a child cannot get out of fight or flight, they cannot learn. NEA Alaska has been training its members about this, and individual districts are offering training on this. One of the first steps in the challenge is to find things that work and replicate them.

[8:57:12 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL said as a nurse practitioner who practices in an Anchorage middle and high school, she knows that, sadly, a large number of students deal with mental illness and trauma. Alaska has a large cadre of many qualified mental health therapists who are restrained by some of Alaska's own laws. Changing the laws will allow qualified clinicians, mental health therapists, social workers, and others to provide these services. A few years ago, the legislature opened the door for telehealth through its work on Medicaid reform. Telehealth could provide mental health services around the state. She said she would stay in touch about progress in this area with Mr. Fields.

[8:58:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked if the commissioners of the Department of Health and Social Services and DEED could work together to effectively use the state's resources.

[8:59:36 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND said Representative Spohnholz, the chair of the Health and Social Services Committee, and herself, as chair of the Education Committee, are planning this spring to look at how the Department of Health and Social Services and DEED are providing services to children from birth through age five to focus resources across departments, so kids arrive at school ready to take advantage of the huge investment the state is going to make in them.

[9:00:43 AM](#)

MS. HIMSCHOOT said the words "responsible" and "reflective" in the commitment to support responsible and reflective learners were very intentional. Reflective students know why they are learning. Responsible students take responsibility for their learning. Responsible and reflective educators are also necessary.

[9:02:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked about the recommendation to triple the number of nationally board-certified teachers in Alaska through salary incentives.

[9:03:08 AM](#)

MS. HIMSCHOOT said that did not have to come from the legislature. The recommendation was modeled on the state of Washington, which offers a \$10,000 state-funded salary bonus for the rest of a teacher's career. The bonus is doubled for working in a hard-to-staff school. Thirty-five percent of teachers in hard-to-staff schools in Washington are now nationally board certified. Alaska has about 180 nationally board-certified teachers. The goal is to continually triple that number. Nationally board certified is the highest standard an educator can attain. Nationally board-certified teachers can support reflective and responsible learners.

[9:04:52 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said Michigan put it back on the families to change low expectations. She wondered if training is available to help excellent teachers to engage the families and whether there are models to overturn low family expectations.

[9:06:49 AM](#)

MS. HULL responded that we cannot take over for families. The more schools do the more the expectation is that schools will do everything, which they cannot. There must be an effort to strengthen families. She related a story about the Detroit News running an editorial that blamed parents for the struggling

economy because of low educational achievements. Another example is that providing breakfast is now an expectation of schools. There must be a joint effort to strengthen families.

[9:09:48 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH noted that he is sponsor of SB 99, which is about pre-kindergarten. In his work with youth advocacy groups in the past in Anchorage, they looked at a model that would have put a social worker in schools because taking on the additional role of a social worker is too much for teachers. There must be collaborative ways of merging social workers and teachers.

[9:11:22 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said we must be careful about parent blaming. Parents who are not doing a good job probably need more support than blame.

[9:12:00 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS said the Copper River Native Association is bringing in mothers and fathers early on for training on parenting skills. The Department of Health and Social Safety is key in efforts to train parents early.

[9:14:21 AM](#)

At ease.

**PRESENTATION: UPDATE ON PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR EDUCATORS BY
THE LEAGUE OF ALASKAN EDUCATION INNOVATORS**

[9:16:47 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND reconvened the joint meeting and announced the committee would next hear an update on professional learning for educators by the League of Alaskan Education Innovators.

[9:17:41 AM](#)

SEAN DUSEK, Superintendent, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD), Soldotna, Alaska, said the work of the coalition is based on the three commitments. The partners in the League of Alaskan Education Innovators are diverse and offer different professional learning. To be more efficient and effective, the group wanted all the players in the same room. The group formed spontaneously because coherence is needed to do things to improve education now. [Slide presentation shows partners are Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), Alaska Society for Technology in Education (ASTE), Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals (AAESP), NEA-Alaska, Alaska Staff Development Network, DEED, University of Alaska,

Alaska Superintendents Association, and Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals (AASSP).]

[9:18:56 AM](#)

MR. DUSEK said that the overall vision is to prepare students to be ready for life and to be highly productive citizens in the State of Alaska. After going through the Alaska Education Challenge, they started the work group. It began with basic communication--what are the groups working on, what do their members need. The group will meet a few more times this year. The legislature has been involved in important conversations about improving and innovating education. The group wants to be part of that process and help lead the innovation process to do the best for every child.

[9:20:15 AM](#)

MR. DUSEK said the group will be looking at how to scale the successful work being done in the state for any culture or to meet any need. The group work is about coordinating efforts, focusing topics, and sharing resources.

[9:21:10 AM](#)

MR. DUSEK said, as part of increasing student success, the important 4 r's to teach, along with the 3 r's, are rigor, relevance, relationships, and responsiveness. Copper River and Sitka are doing innovative school practices. High quality educators are delivering instruction in a manner that is engaging and relevant. They are looking at the innovative performance indicators from the coalition Redefining Ready.

[9:24:20 AM](#)

CHRIS BENSHOOF, Educator, Lathrop High School, Fairbanks, Alaska, the 2013 Alaska teacher of the year, noted that NEA Alaska's Delegate Assembly voted in January to support the three commitments. He noted that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs shows that students cannot learn until their physiological, safety, and belonging/friends needs have been met, which ties into the commitment of safety and well-being. Thankfully, stakeholders in Alaska are addressing the needs of safety and well-being, not just student achievement.

[9:27:06 AM](#)

MR. DUSEK said all the organizations have been focusing on the commitment to safety and well-being. The superintendents' organization has been focusing on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and trauma-informed instruction. The principals' conference had a big strand on safety and well-being and

emotional learning, as did the RTI conference. The focus of his group is on providing expertise in Alaska, not sending people out for training, to be more efficient, and then coming up with ways to implement these ideas in schools.

[9:27:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ asked him to explain RTI.

[9:28:01 AM](#)

MR. DUSEK said it means Response to Intervention. RTI is a process to provide additional supports to students as an interim step before providing special education services.

[9:28:29 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said connecting Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Bloom's Taxonomy to the three commitments is an example of how to lock in the knowledge produced through the challenge.

[9:29:40 AM](#)

BILL BURR, President Elect, Alaska Society for Technology in Education (ASTE); Assistant Superintendent, Delta/Greely School District, Delta Junction, Alaska, said ASTE examined the three commitments to see how to meet them. Creating personalized learning will take time and effort and forward thinking. Digital devices do not change brains but may open the mind or make students use their heads.

[9:32:11 AM](#)

MR. BURR said personalized learning changes and redefines what teaching and learning is, it utilizes technology, allows flexible classroom, and gives students ownership of education. They are codesigners, can work at their own pace, and find their own path. It is educators providing guidance and working with students to enable them to find their own path.

[9:34:08 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said she is excited about this subject and noted that SB 96 would promote much of what he was saying. She said an announcement had been made that Trump's capital infrastructure package will include funding for broadband. Alaska is poised to take advantage of this federal funding. She asked his group to help the legislature advocate for federal funding of broadband.

[9:36:35 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said the funding could provide rural broadband and Alaska could lead the way in educational technological innovation.

[9:37:15 AM](#)

MR. DUSEK CARRS noted that partnerships are not just among educational professional organizations. He recognized CARRS/Safeway and BP for education grants they have awarded.

[9:38:53 AM](#)

MR. DUSEK said the next steps are to increase work group representation and participation, develop long-term processes for consistency of implementation and access, and to seek opportunities to support each organization's efforts to improve instructions. The group will meet with DEED regarding ESSA and moving forward together with the Alaska Education Challenge. The only way to improve education across Alaska must be through communication and collaboration.

[9:42:09 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Drummond adjourned the joint meeting of the Senate and House Education Standing Committees at 9:42 a.m.