

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 9, 2018

8:03 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Ivy Spohnholz  
Representative Chuck Kopp  
Representative Lora Reinbold (alternate)  
Representative Geran Tarr (alternate)

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development

James Fields - Glennallen  
Sandy Kowalski - Fairbanks  
Lorri Van Diest - Palmer

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission

Diane Kardash - Fairbanks  
Philip "Tony" Graham - Soldotna  
Kent Runion - Nome

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JAMES FIELDS, Appointee  
Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development

Glennallen, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as appointed to the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development.

SANDY KOWALSKI, Appointee

Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as appointed to the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development.

LORRI VAN DIEST, Appointee

Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as appointed to the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development.

DIANE KARDASH, Appointee

Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as appointee to the Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC).

PHILIP "TONY" GRAHAM, Appointee, Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC)

Soldotna, Alaska

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

KENT RUNION, Appointee

Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC)  
Nome, Alaska

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

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:03:21 AM](#)

**CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Representatives Parish, Johnston, Talerico, and Drummond were present at the call to order.

#### **CONFIRMATION HEARING(S):**

**Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development**  
**Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission**

8:03:58 AM

CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the only order of business would be the confirmation hearings for appointees to the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development and the Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

8:04:34 AM

JAMES FIELDS, Appointee, Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development, said he is the regional educational attendance area (REAA) representative for the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development ("the board") and has served on the Copper River School District board for nine years. He said he was appointed to the board by Governor Sean Parnell and kept on by Governor Bill Walker, and he has served on the board for five years, the last three of which he has been the chair. He said Governor Walker has appointed him for another five-year term. He said he has enjoyed both his local and statewide roles in the education system of Alaska.

8:06:08 AM

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Mr. Fields why he wishes to continue in his capacity on the board for another term.

MR. FIELDS answered that he thinks it is important to keep a nucleus on the board for consistency in forward momentum. He said he thinks it is an exciting time in education and he would like to be a part of it.

8:07:26 AM

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO thanked Mr. Fields for being a coach in an upcoming tournament.

8:08:08 AM

SANDY KOWALSKI, Appointee, Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development, stated that she is the director of Indigenous Programs in the Rural Community and Native Education Office within the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). She said she has been in her present position for two months and, before that, served in K-12 education for 28 years as a teacher, school administrator, and district administrator - most recently as superintendent for the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. Ms. Kowalski stated that it pleases her to be an

appointee because she is inspired by the work done by Alaskans in response to the state's education challenges. She opined that the board serves "a vital role in meeting the commitments and recommendations laid out in the report," and she expressed her hope that her experience in both tribal and public education would help to lead in this effort. She continued as follows:

The recommendations outline initiatives that will more meaningfully engage students in learning and help prepare students for a future we cannot see and design ourselves. The recommendations also impress upon leaders the importance of cultural relevance and interest-based student-centered learning for all Alaskan students. I am excited to work with the board ... and the Department of Education & Early Development as we work to ensure equity of access to high-quality learning experiences for all students.

[8:09:42 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND said she is impressed with Ms. Kowalski's experience and looks forward to her service.

[8:09:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH noted that in the conflicts of interest section of Ms. Kowalski's submitted information, it is written that it is possible Ms. Kowalski, or any family member, would benefit financially by any decisions made by the board or commission.

MS. KOWALSKI said that is likely a typographical error. She clarified that she does not believe there is a conflict.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH noted that having a conflict of interest is not a barrier to serving; it is expected that there will be conflicts of interest that members will express and recuse themselves appropriately. He said it is "curious" to see that someone has answered "yes" to potential conflict of interest but then answer "none" in explaining he financial benefit.

MS. KOWALSKI reemphasized that there is no financial conflict of interest now, but acknowledged that through the university, she would be involved with an initiative "to support teacher education development from the perspective of an indigenous constituency that wants to have a more responsive educational system that retains teachers in our Alaskan communities," and

there are going to be times when she will need to disclose some of the work she does to the board. She added, "In that regard, ... that's why it's possibly yes in one and no in the other. I don't see a financial conflict."

[8:13:06 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND expressed thanks to Ms. Kowalski and said she is excited by her experience in indigenous languages. She noted that as a member of the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee, she recently had taken part in a "spirited discussion" regarding the emergency state of Native languages in Alaska. She asked Ms. Kowalski for comment.

MS. KOWALSKI said she had heard some of the debate on line. She said she feels that Alaska Native Languages are in a state of emergency, and that is part of the work she is doing in her current position with the university.

CHAIR DRUMMOND stated support for Ms. Kowalski's appointment.

[8:14:39 AM](#)

LORRI VAN DIEST, Appointee, Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development, stated that she is a retired Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough School District educator. She said she is a lifelong Alaskan, who grew up in Seward. Her father was a teacher in the Kenai Peninsula School District for over 25 years, and she chose to follow his footsteps. She earned a Bachelor of Science in mathematics, with a teaching credential from Seattle Pacific University, and returned to Seward High School to teach. She married and moved to Palmer, Alaska, where she was one of the original staff to open Colony High School, where she taught math, became a secondary guidance counselor, and coached girls' basketball. Later she transferred to Teeland Middle School, where she was the lead counselor. She said she spent her last six years in the Mat-Su School District working as the curriculum coordinator and being an integral part of a curriculum team that established a review cycle for curriculum to review and develop guidelines for curriculum review steps. She said her job was to facilitate teacher leaders in updating and writing area standards and selecting classroom materials to assist in teaching those standards. Ms. Van Diest stated that in 2010, she retired from the district to become full-time teacher and mother to her children, and since two have completed their formal education, she has worked part-time as substitute

counselor for the Mat-Su School District and president of the local community council.

MS. VAN DIEST expressed excitement at the opportunity to serve on the board. She said she is able to offer her experience as a public educator, teacher, counselor, curriculum coordinator, and homeschool educator. She related that she has served on boards in the past and understands the importance of "hearing various opinions while remaining a team player." She said she looks forward to working with Commissioner Johnson and the staff of DEED. She thanked the House Education Standing Committee for considering her appointment to the board.

[8:17:31 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Ms. Van Diest if she has followed the development of Alaska's education challenge and could offer any "words of wisdom."

MS. VAN DIEST said she had not, but since applying to the board, she has "done a plethora of reading" and is impressed with the work that has been done. She noted that her friend, John Harmon, who previously served on the board, encouraged her to do so. She said she has been in communication with him to find out about the work that has been done. She stated, "Alaska is going in a great direction, and I want to be part of that work."

CHAIR DRUMMOND noted that a lot of talent is being lost from the board this year.

[8:19:09 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND noted that the committee would next hear from the appointees to the Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

DIANE KARDASH, Appointee, Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission, stated that she is currently a faculty member of the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), with the School of Education's Elementary Program, and she is also serving as an accreditation coordinator for the school. She said she has been a teacher for almost 30 years in California and Alaska. She and her husband have lived in Fairbanks for 22 years. Ms. Kardash said she taught in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District in grades K-1 through 3, then transferred to UAF, where she teaches classes related to literacy development, as well as courses related to assessments, foundations, physical education,

and health. She said she assumed the higher education representative's position on PTPC last May to complete a term, and she looks forward to the legislature's confirmation, so she can continue to serve. She stated her strong support for "the professional and ethical expectations the State of Alaska has for its teachers." She said the School of Education strives for young teachers to understand not only their pedagogical teaching responsibilities but also their professional and ethical responsibilities. She said testing season is approaching, and having teachers understand what their professional responsibilities are to make that testing experience go well for students is important. Ms. Kardash expressed appreciation for the opportunity to serve.

[8:22:02 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND noted that Ms. Kardash had declared in her written information that she may have a potential conflict of interest should her husband be brought before the PTPC. Chair Drummond stated, "I understand that you would need to recuse yourself. I don't imagine there's any additional benefit."

MS. KARDASH responded no. She said her husband has taught in Fairbanks for the last 22 years, and they have two children who have gone through the school system in Fairbanks, one of whom attends UAF.

CHAIR DRUMMOND told Ms. Kardash [the committee] would pass her name on to the full body.

[8:22:57 AM](#)

PHILIP "TONY" GRAHAM, Appointee, Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC), stated that he has been the principal at Soldotna High School, in the Kenai Peninsula School District, for three years, and before that he was the assistant principal for six years. Before moving to Alaska, he served as a superintendent for six years and a K-12 principal for a few years - an administrator for 16 years total and an educator for 20 years total. Mr. Graham said he was humbled to be selected as appointee. He emphasized that every decision he makes is for the children in the school. He said he loves his work because of the children, and he is looking for ways to protect and serve those children.

[8:24:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH thanked Mr. Graham for his work, and he asked him if he is confident that he would be able to serve the full term to which he has been appointed.

MR. GRAHAM said he is.

[8:25:12 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Mr. Graham if he works at the same school where James Harris earned the title of teacher of the year.

MR. GRAHAM answered yes and said he has worked with Mr. Harris for eight years.

CHAIR DRUMMOND said she is excited by the experience Mr. Graham brings to the position on PTPC, and she said Mr. Harris certainly knows his teachers.

[8:25:51 AM](#)

KENT RUNION, Appointee, Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC), stated that he has been an educator for 14 years and has taught social studies at Nome-Beltz Junior/Senior High School for eight years. He has worked in the district in the area of teacher rights. He stated that he believes in the mission of the PTPC and thinks "it is an important vehicle for protecting students, teachers, and the teaching profession." He said he has enjoyed his time on the PTPC for the last year and is honored to be re-nominated.

[8:26:46 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND surmised the work is interesting, and she asked Mr. Runion if he would like to share any information he is allowed to share regarding the cases that he has adjudicated.

MR. RUNION responded that the work is always interesting, and each case is unique. He said cases come before the commission because they are "in ethical gray area" that a district "cannot decide" or that a PTPC director "does not see as clear cut." There is often a lot of nuance to the cases. He relayed that PTPC looks at the evidence available and takes into consideration how best to protect students and elevate the teaching profession while arriving at a reasonable decision. In response to a follow-up question from Chair Drummond, he said that since his time on the commission since last January, PTPC has addressed approximately 15 cases. Also during that time,

PTPC has reviewed the code of ethics and "other ethical issues that have come up with teaching and the teaching profession." He explained that PTPC is in charge of the teaching code of ethics and refers to it for all its cases.

CHAIR DRUMMOND expressed appreciation for Mr. Runion's recent service, and she said the committee would be passing his name on to the full body. She asked Representative Parish for a motion.

[8:29:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH read the following statement:

The [House] Education [Standing] Committee has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointees and recommends that James Fields, Sandy Kowalski, and Lorri Van Diest should be forwarded to a joint session for consideration to the Alaska Board of Education; and Diane Kardash, Philip Graham, and Kent Runion should be forwarded to a joint session for consideration to the Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission. This does not reflect the intent of any of the members to vote for or against ... [these individuals] during any further sessions for the purposes of confirmation.

CHAIR DRUMMOND stated, "This is not something that the committee gets to vote on. We're simply passing the names on to the full body, and actually the joint session of the legislature, for final confirmation. Thank you. And we'll sign paperwork right after we adjourn today."

[The confirmations for all appointees were treated as advanced.]

[8:31:49 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 8:32 a.m.