

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 30, 2018

8:06 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Harriet Drummond, Chair  
Representative Justin Parish, Vice Chair  
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky  
Representative Ivy Spohnholz  
Representative David Talerico

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Jennifer Johnston  
Representative Chuck Kopp  
Representative Lora Reinbold (alternate)  
Representative Geran Tarr (alternate)

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 7

Recognizing the importance of safe school environments for students, staff, and their families; and supporting improvement of school safety measures.

- MOVED HR 7 OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HR 7

SHORT TITLE: SUPPORTING A SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

SPONSOR(S): EDUCATION

04/26/18	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/26/18	(H)	EDC
04/30/18	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

GEORGE ASCOTT, Staff  
Representative Harriet Drummond  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During the hearing of HR 7, presented the resolution on behalf of the House Education Standing Committee, Representative Drummond, Chair.

KAREN GABORIK  
Superintendent of Schools  
Alaska Superintendent Association President  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During the hearing of HR 7, testified.

DEANNA BECK, President  
Alaska Council of School Administrators  
Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals President  
Northwood ABC Elementary School Principal  
Anchorage School District (ASD)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During the hearing of HR 7, testified.

DANIEL WALKER, Superintendent  
Lower Kuskokwim School District  
Bethel, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During the hearing of HR 7, testified in support of the resolution.

BOBBY BOLEN, Superintendent  
Bering Strait School District  
Unalakleet, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During the hearing of HR 7, testified in support of the resolution.

TIM PARKER, President  
NEA-Alaska  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During the hearing of HR 7, testified in support of the resolution.

SHAWN ARNOLD, Superintendent  
Nome Public Schools (NPS)  
Nome, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During the hearing of HR 7, testified in support of the resolution.

KERRY BOYD, Superintendent  
Yukon-Koyukuk School District (YKSD)  
Koyukuk, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During the hearing of HR 7, testified in support of the resolution.

DAN CARSTENS, Principal  
Nikiski Middle/Senior High School  
President, Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals  
Nikiski, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During the hearing of HR 7, testified in support of the resolution.

LISA SKILES PARADAY, Executive Director  
Alaska Council of School Administrators  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During the hearing of HR 7, testified in support of the resolution.

SANA EFRID, Deputy Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During the hearing of HR 7, testified in support of the resolution.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:06:09 AM](#)

**CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. Representatives Parish, Zulkosky, Spohnholz, Talerico, and Drummond were present at the call to order.

#### **HR 7-SUPPORTING A SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

[8:06:45 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 7, Recognizing the importance of safe school environments for students, staff, and their families; and supporting improvement of school safety measures.

[8:07:08 AM](#)

GEORGE ASCOTT, Staff, Representative Harriet Drummond, Alaska State Legislature, introduced the resolution and advised that HR 7 will help keep school safety at the forefront of education policy discussions. Children cannot protect themselves, and it is a fundamental responsibility of society to keep children safe, particularly when entrusted to our care at school. He pointed to the committee packets and offered that there are

numerous examples of the types of dangers the state must try to anticipate and then prepare to prevent or mitigate any incidents. The packet includes examples of quick thinking and great selflessness in defense of children.

MR. ASCOTT reminded the committee that on the morning of May 7, 2001, four children at Mountain View Elementary School, in Anchorage, were stabbed by a man wielding a filet knife. Swift action by a brave teacher, the Mountain View Volunteer Community Patrol, and a heroic sixth-grader held the man off until he could be subdued by a massive response of the Anchorage Police Department (APD), and all of the children survived.

MR. ASCOTT reminded the committee that in 1998, a gifted boy, who had been bullied at an Anchorage middle school, attempted to take his own life and was left permanently brain damaged. Dennis Maloney, the family's attorney, later spent \$30,000 of his own money to host a nationally recognized anti-bullying conference in Anchorage.

MR. ASCOTT reminded the committee that in 2015, a Noatak school worker, Harry Nevack, was hailed as a hero after he disarmed an upset student who was carrying a rifle and attempting to harm the school principal.

[8:08:45 AM](#)

MR. ASCOTT commented that sometimes the public does not hear much about positive circumstances, such as in the Fall of 2015 at West High School, APD School Resource Officers were able to successfully de-escalate a situation in which an armed man was seeking to enter the school.

MR. ASCOTT commented that Alaskans are ready to do their part to keep our children safe, and it is important to be vigilant and resourceful in order to identify any potential problems and find solutions before tragedy takes place. To that end, he said, the House Education Standing Committee invited the top education officials and members of the public from around the state to update this committee as to their efforts to keep children safe, and to advise how the legislature may assist in that endeavor.

[8:09:48 AM](#)

KAREN GABORIK, Superintendent of Schools, Alaska Superintendent Association President, thanked Speaker Bryce Edgmon for inviting the Alaska Council School Administrators to participate in a

public school safety roundtable that took place during a recent legislative "fly-in." She noted her understanding that this resolution grew in part from that dialogue, and offered her appreciation for the comprehensive approach put forth in this resolution for the security of facilities, community-wide preventions measures, training for district employees, and coordination with law enforcement, which are all critical for any effective school district safety plan. The legislative appropriation in 2014 for school safety upgrades for districts was critical for Fairbanks as it used those funds to install cameras and upgrade the communication systems across the districts. She advised that those funds paid for hardware and staffing to install and implement hardware that they otherwise would likely not have been able to fund. Due to that legislative support, Fairbanks has systematically addressed specific gaps across its entire system, although other gaps continue to exist. In a challenging fiscal climate, limited resources are almost always prioritized toward teacher staffing in order to keep class sizes as low as possible. While the ability of a teacher to nurture their relationships with students is one way to create a positive school culture and enhance school safety, it is not the only answer. Teachers alone cannot meet all of the social/emotional needs of students today; therefore, counselors, nurses, school psychologists, and school resource officers are necessary. All educators in the entire system need training in areas ranging from how to address adverse childhood experiences, to how to respond in serious crisis situations, she pointed out.

[8:11:53 AM](#)

MS. GABORIK noted that in Fairbanks, it would be most helpful if a facilities analysis would include: school building needs; what resources are available; and what would be most effective to secure all of the schools' exits to make sure that the entrances to Alaska's school are safe. Schools where the entrance is located in such a manner that the main office staff is unable to monitor that entrance in order to maintain security. She suggested that the security may include door buzzers, cameras, a formal check-in system, and additional staffing at the school entrances. Every school administrator in Fairbanks is asking for more cameras, both interior and exterior, she advised. The Fairbanks school system has been able to install a minimum level of security surveillance, but the coverage is not complete, and it needs to provide anti-harassment and anti-bullying training for all of the students in the districts. Fairbanks schools attempted to get at that type of training with Title 1 funds at

the elementary school level, but that is not enough. That limited funding for Fairbanks effectively reaches approximately nine elementary schools, with no funding for the middle schools and high schools. The school districts cannot continue to rely on federal grants to train a small portion of the students, and that a systemic approach with adequate resources is necessary, she stressed. There must be a focus on the secondary school age children and an investment in district-wide training explaining how to respond in an active killer situation. In partnership with the local Fairbanks law enforcement agencies, Fairbanks is moving forward with Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate (ALICE) training, and while the hope is that an active killer situation will never happen in Fairbanks, it is a potential reality that their school community faced one week ago. On Friday, she advised, the Fairbanks Daily News Miner reported that on April 20, the day of the nation-wide anti-gun violence walkouts, in which a few of the high schools participated, a high school student brought a gun and ammunition onto campus in his personal vehicle. The student's aunt called the Alaska State Troopers to report that several guns were missing from her locked gun safe, she believed her nephew had taken the firearms, and that something bad would happen due to the events scheduled at school that day. The Alaska State Troopers responded and arrested the student and impounded his vehicle, she advised.

[8:14:11 AM](#)

MS. GABORIK put forth that there are many things that keep a school superintendent up at night, the safety of the children she serves is definitely one of them, and it is especially stressful not having the resources to do the job as it should be performed. There are many influences outside of the six hours each day the students are in attendance that educators cannot control. This resolution, she stated, will help with policy and will hopefully also give the school districts the resources to address the issues that are within their purview. She thanked the committee for this resolution and that she is hopeful it will shine a spotlight on what is necessary to proactively support safe school environments.

[8:15:21 AM](#)

DEANNA BECK, President, Alaska Council of School Administrators, Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals President, Northwood ABC Elementary School Principal, advised that she recently she participated in the Anchorage School District Facility Review and the most important issues include: a

thorough update of the schools, which includes surveillance systems (indisc.); looking at (indisc.) systems; limiting the exits and entrances; looking at school renovations, which include office relocations at the entrances; and possibly perimeter systems. The over-arching issue taken from the meeting was to be sure they balanced making schools welcoming places and that schools are safe. Safety is important in order for learning to take place and for community members and students to feel welcome in the schools, but they do not want their schools to be prisons. Fifty percent of students entering middle school are survivors of trauma, abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. The legislature needs to look at what it can do to ensure that Alaska's students have the opportunity to access counselors, social workers, and other mental health providers, and the state must build schools that prevent any outside risk and are internally supportive of students experiencing trauma in their lives, she expressed.

[8:18:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked that if as a school administrator she had complete discretion to spend \$300,000 per year, whether the lives of her students would be better and safer by putting the money into hard investments, such as fencing, more cameras, closer access doors; or soft investments like a lower pupil-teacher ratio or an additional counselor.

MS. BECK answered that currently, she is fortunate to have some discretionary funds, and she prioritizes having a (indisc.) "at my school with my Title 1 son. I keep it at .5 already, and then I fully fund it to a .5. And, I was trying to do everything I could for next year in order to fully fund a social worker and I just don't have enough funds to do that." She explained that her students need those people to make those connections when they come to school so she would highly support lower class sizes. During the first semester of this year, she had up to and over 30 students in her kindergarten through third grade classrooms. (Indisc.) additional teacher, second semester the class sizes were reduced to approximately 25 students which has made a huge difference in the lives of those students, they are more able to attend to learning because their needs are being met in making connections with adults. She reiterated that she does fully fund the counselor in order to have her available, and she would welcome social workers (audio difficulties).

[8:21:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked whether she would agree that reducing the pupil-teacher ratio and having a counselor is likely to have an impact on the long-term health of students by building resilience, thereby resulting in reduced suicides and the other traumas associated with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

MS. BECK responded that she would agree with that statement and noted that her school is currently in the third year of rolling out Trauma-Informed School Practices. The 2016-2017 data from the sixth graders is that the number of students who can name five or more adults at school who they felt connected to was 50-79 percent, in one year that was a 29 percent increase of adults making critical connections with our students, and when students feel more connected to people who care about them, the more likely they are to succeed.

CHAIR DRUMMOND commented that she finds it encouraging that when the focus is on Trauma-Informed School Practices, that Ms. Beck has seen improvements in the student body.

[8:23:16 AM](#)

DANIEL WALKER, Superintendent, Lower Kuskokwim School District, commented that there is a challenge to keeping our schools safe, from the 1997 school shooting at Bethel Regional High School to the attempted school shooting two years ago in Noatak. Bethel's teachers and staff are on the front lines of this, he stressed. For over 20 years, the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) has employed an entire social work department with 10 master's level social workers that travel to the 27 schools in the Lower Kuskokwim Region. These social workers are on the front line of issues, such as suicide prevention and the wellbeing of its over 4,100 students. He remarked that he knows of no other school district that employs this number of social workers and yet, that only touches the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the social/emotional wellbeing of the students in the region. Recently, the school district had a strong focus on school climate, connectedness, and expanding its tribal connections, and one of the most important actions the state could take to help increase student academic achievement is to evaluate and fully fund social and mental health services. These services would include the Office of Children's Services, and probably most importantly, law enforcement in rural Alaska. He related that most communities have no one to turn to in the event of a crisis so the principals and teachers are definitely on the

front line. Currently, he said, the LKSD is continuing the following: training for staff to include new efforts to mitigate potential threats to the schools; consistently upgrading and adding security cameras as a priority; and coordinating among other agencies in the region, which is incredibly important and helpful when a crisis takes place. He related that all of those efforts are continually challenged by the lack of law enforcement resources in rural Alaska. He then offered his appreciation for the resolution because it is shining a bright light on the issues of school safety.

[8:26:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY referred to Mr. Walker's statement that not having public safety officials sometimes exacerbates school safety challenges in rural Alaska, and asked him to highlight the top priorities for making sure the rural schools are safe.

MR. WALKER responded that the discussion returns to how important it is for every child to have a connection with an adult who cares for them and is able to check on them. He noted that they perform a lot of work in that area with the school climate and connectedness, and they emphasize the relationship the school staff makes with students, parents, and the communities. The number one thing that could be done as a state, would be to fund local law enforcement in rural communities in particular. He stressed that he simply could not list the number of times he has been on the telephone with a principal trying to coach them through a situation where someone in the community, who is possibly intoxicated and walking around with a loaded firearm, and they are possibly shooting the firearm. In those situations, the community may not even have a law enforcement person to respond to those events, and that pressure and stress is added to the lives of staff, principals, teachers, classified staff, and most importantly, to our students, he expressed. The social service agencies in rural Alaska are absolutely overwhelmed, they have so much intake they cannot address all of those needs, thereby putting the added burden on the schools to intervene in many of those incidents. He commented that law enforcement and social services are suffering from the huge gaps currently.

[8:29:16 AM](#)

BOBBY BOLEN, Superintendent, Bering Strait School District, advised that the Bering Strait School District encompasses 80,000 square miles, with approximately 1,900 students spread

across 15 schools. Although, he related, the school district has not had any serious incidents in recent history, school safety in Bush Alaska faces big challenges. Only 5 of the 15 remote communities currently employ a Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO), and only one of the 15 villages has access to the Alaska State Troopers. Each day, he related, the students, teachers, and staff, go to work with no backup plan for professional assistance should a serious incident occur, they can only practice and drill for active shooters and dangerous situations so many times. In the event of a real life emergency involving safety and the potential loss of life in the schools, there would be no relief coming soon and it could be days before law enforcement and medical care could reach some of the villages, he advised. The Bering Strait School District has actively participated in the Culturally Relevant Education and Social/Emotional Learning (CRESEL) grant program the last two years, he remarked. This grant, he explained, allowed the school district to educate its students about possessing the ability to work through the many challenges they bring with them to the doorsteps of their schools. He related that life outside of the doors of the schools can be challenging and unless the whole child can be taken of, oftentimes learning comes to a halt. As with all schools across the country, the incidents of bullying still occur in our schools, the districts have programs in place to report and address bullying, but unfortunately, the definition of bullying and its effects on the children are still difficult to get across to the students. He offered that what is teasing and what is bullying is a fight he still has, not only in the communities but with staff members. Schools must develop plans that offer support in raising the awareness of bullying, and the schools must have the resources to educate everyone as to the negative effects of bullying. He said that he has spent all 10 years of his administrative experience in the Bering Strait School District, and he has been to numerous communities and traveled to all 15 school sites. As a superintendent, he said he has received calls wherein someone in the village was shooting a rifle and they lock the doors and secure their outdated schools hoping they can keep all of their students safe until law enforcement might be able to fly in from Nome or Unalakleet.

[8:31:38 AM](#)

MR. BOLEN advised that he has also received calls from principals when a student posted on Facebook that they were being bullied and no longer wished to be alive, or when a student committed suicide, and then listen to the blame game as

to who was at fault. In reality, he pointed out, it is everyone's fault, it is everyone's challenge and it is everyone's responsibility. In Bush Alaska, people live with guns around them because guns are their way of life when hunting for their subsistence way of life. It is not uncommon to see school age children with those guns in a variety of situations, and for the most part, children have been raised to use those gun appropriately and for good. Each day when the school doors are opened, the responsibility falls on all of us to provide our students with a safe, welcoming and learning environment, he advised. There are no school resource officers in Bush Alaska, there's no response team coming from down the street to assist in an emergency, there are only the students themselves, the teachers, and possibly a community member that happened to be in the right place at the right time. He asked the committee to consider the challenges of Bush Alaska when considering options, currently class are often without certified teachers because the ability to find a substitute is limited to non-existent. The answer, he pointed out, is not across the street at the local service agency and it is not necessarily about another program being mandated to teach. The answer is about being able to help provide the necessary resources to those schools already overburdened with educational needs with the financial ability to provide a safe learning environment to all community members.

[8:33:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked the largest threat to the lives of the children in Mr. Bolen's school district, and what the legislature can do to help.

MR. BOLEN responded that suicide is definitely the number one killer of youth in Bush Alaska. Unfortunately, he said, currently there are five open counselor positions, and he has attended approximately 15 job fairs across the country, advertised on (indisc.), and his school district cannot get school counselors to apply and move to the district's schools. In reality, he remarked, they have one counselor who may serve 2-3 schools, which means they are only able to services those students every third week, every fourth week, and it may be even longer. He stressed that the problem is not necessarily a financial issue because they have the money to hire counselors. Although, he noted, most of the finances are with grants and as grants come and go, the school district loses those opportunities. He lamented that it would be nice to have a sustainable manner in which to have counselors in the schools, but most counselors end up spending their time with high school

students, getting them ready for college, and preparing them for other opportunities. It is absolutely critical for the younger students to receive an early education about social/emotional learning and how to deal with their thoughts and feelings. Definitely, anything that can be done to provide those resources for the younger students is extremely important, he expressed.

[8:36:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked what the legislature can do to help.

MR. BOLEN replied that the school district needs help funding and recruiting counselors and then sustain the hiring of those counselors. Grants are used to seed programs and get the counselors hired, but in reality, with the funding they have, they have to make sure their teachers are in the classroom first. Funding for counselors to provide social/emotional, suicide, bullying, prevention type programs to the younger children is most critical, he pointed out.

[8:37:16 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND commented that the University of Alaska should take note of this need and help to educate counselors as a pipeline directly into the state's rural schools.

MR. BOLEN replied that school counseling programs would be critical but there is not such a program in the State of Alaska. He advised that in reality, it is hard to convince those graduating from college to leave their families and move to a village that is still without running water, and still without reliable transportation should an emergency occur. The big picture is, there are many challenges and roadblocks in getting staff into Bush Alaska or all across the state, and it does not help that there is not a positive school counselor program within Alaska, he reiterated.

[8:39:20 AM](#)

TIM PARKER, President, NEA-Alaska, advised that he is a high school English teacher in Fairbanks, he supports the resolution, and that NEA-Alaska appreciates this focus on safety and increasing the public discussion on this important issue. Last year, NEA-Alaska participated on the Alaska Education Challenge Safety Committee and the issue of Maslow's hierarchy of needs was addressed. [Maslow's hierarchy of needs - a person's needs lower down in the hierarchy must be satisfied before the person

can attend to their needs higher up. The needs are: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization.] From an educator's standpoint, he pointed out that learning cannot take place without first addressing these safety needs, such as the physical needs, address their psychological needs, and their belonging and friendship needs. He explained that once those needs are addressed, educators can then move on to the learning, that is in the standards, and trying to help the students achieve.

MR. PARKER then divided school safety into the two different forms that must be addressed, as follows: threats from outside the school by people who often have no connection to the school and those safety needs involve cameras, safety personnel, and so forth. There are also the safety needs of our children, which comes into play when trauma is a daily situation for them, the buildup of stress and the circumstances that are part of their lives, he said. Educators and specifically teachers see these stressors intimately almost every day, depending on the site of the school, and educators feel deeply about the students they are charged with teaching and they work hard on nurturing those relationships. Speaking as a teacher, he related that he knows he is one person, amongst many, who can work with students on those needs and counselors, psychologists, nurses, even school safety officers, and para-educators, all have relationships with students. Unfortunately, he pointed out, the budget has often been cut for those personnel, and fewer of those particular personnel now work in the schools. That, he stressed, is a real concern and that issue is something to keep "our eye on" because teachers do not have the ability to do everything that is needed for our students in order for them to learn. He further stressed that personnel assisting in student psychological needs, safety needs, and their health, must be addressed.

MR. PARKER offered appreciation for the continued support of the Alaska Education Challenge, and noted that the committee met last summer to develop assistance, such as the three commitments. This resolution speaks to the three commitments, and one of those commitments is to cultivate student safety and well-being, all schools will be safe, and the students nourished, he advised.

[8:43:35 AM](#)

SHAWN ARNOLD, Superintendent, Nome Public Schools, offered that his testimony is supported by the Nome School Board and they strongly support HR 7. He pointed out that this resolution is

one of the tools that will help keep schools safe in these upcoming years. After college, he noted that he entered the military, both the United States Army and United State Airforce, he was part of a hostage rescue team, and for many years he was part of an anti-terrorism response force. He advised that he was part of the teams deployed on rapid deployment from Fort Richardson and Fort Carson, Colorado, he is well versed in safety procedures and is comfortable in a stressful environment. Although, he commented, those experiences do not play out within the schools today because the focus is in instruction and learning, without thoughts of violence or worry that anything may happen to a school. Students are impressionable, young, our precious commodities, and their thoughts should not be that they are going to be harmed, their thoughts should be on instruction in a safe place to learn. Those, he stressed, are the number one needs the state must address as it is the state's responsibility. He pointed out that the Nome teachers and principals are not trained to counteract any type of violence that may occur and they rely on the available resources, thereby making their jobs easier to keep the schools safe. He said, not just like (indisc.), the physical properties, such as stolen cameras, security (indisc.) into the buildings, but also the supports local law enforcement agencies can provide.

[8:46:08 AM](#)

MR. ARNOLD pointed out that HR 7 includes first response training that can be provided to educators, thereby, offering peace of mind and the ability to respond in the worst case scenarios. He referred to the ALICE training that has taken place around the state, and noted that out of the districts testifying today, his district is one of the smallest and probably the least funded. He pointed out that ALICE training is usually a blanket cost of approximately \$10,000, and for a small district, like Nome, it does not have the ability to find those funds so it would have to cut some sort of instructional training simply to provide the funds for the ALICE first responder training. He offered concern in that regard and stated that the district does what it can with the resources it has but it lacks the funds for training, although it does consult with the Alaska State Troopers and Nome's local law enforcement. As to the areas of mental health and support services, Nome is fortunate to have "an amazing hospital" that serves not just Nome but the Bering Straits Region with its large behavioral health office. This support is not something a math or reading teacher, for example, can fully perform because teachers are not psychologists or law enforcement and they

cannot meet those needs. Unfortunately, he pointed out, it is the nature of the lack of funding and lack of staffing that Nome's behavioral health services locally are overwhelmed and there are fewer and fewer opportunities to have the students referred, which puts more stress on the schools. He explained that it is not due to the lack of staff, but the lack of funds. The lack of funds is impactful because usually the counselors are the first pro-active line of defense in providing social and emotional learning supports, and the school district struggles with that problem. He referred to the school safety measures, and reiterated that for the emergency planning, the funds in his small district are limited and it struggles to offer whatever support possible. The Nome school district has seen a rise in the number of students who move from disengaged to disruptive, and there is increasing concern from the staff that the school district is not doing enough. School safety is always the priority for the district, he pointed out, and any support from the state for resources, and better ideas, will "kind of go that little bit further."

[8:50:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked that if school funding was to keep up with inflation, whether it would help keep students safer in the long-term from violence, bullying, suicide, and a number of other issues.

MR. ARNOLD responded that keeping up with inflation would help because schools would not have to re-allocate funds from the "peripheral cuts." He explained that the cuts might not be direct cuts from the classrooms for teaching reading, writing, and math, but it is the support specialists, such as counselors, aides, that might be able to work with more students, and one-on-one. When looking at those cuts it appears the district has not put in the necessary efforts because while a crisis situation has not happened, and everyone is hoping it won't happen, if the district did not have those supports available, it would not be good, he described.

[8:52:42 AM](#)

KERRY BOYD, Superintendent, Yukon-Koyukuk School District, advised that she has been the Superintendent of the Yukon-Koyukuk School District for approximately 11 years, the school district covers 70,000 square miles with 10 rural and remote schools, and those students fly in except for 2 [students]. She offered support for HR 7, which highlights the need for school

safety. Over the years, she said she has experienced many different occasions when there have been school safety concerns, and many are (audio difficulties), and the impact to students when they get to school. The Yukon-Koyukuk School District (YKSD) employs two guidance counselors and she said she is highlighting the word "guidance." The school district has been advertising for additional counselors for 1.5 years to no avail, although, they have hired counselors but they leave mid-year. A counselor was recently hired so the school district will have three counselors for next year and it is excited, she said, and those three counselors will travel to all 10 sites. The school district uses video conferencing to help with its needs and partners as best it can with the local agencies, but they too are over-burdened with mental health and other issues. The Yukon-Koyukuk School District needs social workers and clinical counselors to deal with the trauma "that is happening" as it has little to zero law enforcement. The Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) will sometimes travel to the district as a reaction, but few villages have a VPSO officer and the officers are not available in the villages for months. As the schools are updated for major maintenance, cameras are being added throughout, and she commented that the schools have not had any real incidents other than the four times in the last ten years where a lock-down was necessary. Most of the problems take place before the students arrive at school partly because the proper training does not take place in the communities, for law enforcement, and there is no proper social services and mental health and positive lifestyles training, she advised. She thanked the committee for anything it could do and its support, and that the YKSD will work on its end.

[8:55:38 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND referred to Ms. Boyd's statement that the YKSD performs video counseling, and asked where the counselor is located that performs the video counseling, whether the video counselor can reach all of the schools in the district, and whether the necessary technology is available.

MS. BOYD answered that the school district has excellent technology and it is fortunate in that regard, it is limited to the ten megabits. The technology has been "pretty good" depending on the location of the counselors, for example, right now it is snowing in the villages "and one of them is having to stay extra." Counselors can counsel using the school district's video technology from any classroom, and every classroom is set up with that ability. Thereby, allowing for private individual

counseling when needed no matter the location in the school district, it is just that sometimes it is necessary to counsel in-person because the students need that contact. She advised that the technology has helped and that the school district has utilized this type of counseling for several years with good feedback.

CHAIR DRUMMOND noted that she was happy to hear about the good feedback and while she knows video counseling is not the answer to everything, it is better than no counseling at all.

[8:57:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked whether YKSD has ever contracted the services of counselors via video counseling outside of the YKSD region or in a hub community.

MS. BOYD replied that they actually have and have tried to partner with the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) and the local agencies there. The YKSD has contracted outside of the district, but a lot of the counseling the children need is above and beyond what a traditional school counselor could offer. She described it more as social work and social/emotional counseling, the district's counselors are trained the best it can, that is, she remarked, for the counselors who have stayed with the district long enough to receive that training.

[8:58:30 AM](#)

DAN CARSTENS, Principal, Nikiski Middle/Senior High School, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) President, Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals, noted that Nikiski is in serious need of mental health support from all levels. He suggested that the focus should be put on the elementary level because children go through all sorts of adverse childhood experience (ACEs), and it is genuinely important to provide support at that age. In that regard, he said, benefits will be reaped by starting at that age group rather than trying to react to it at a secondary level. Mr. Carstens advised that the district contracts with outside services to provide counseling within the schools so it does have a school counselor here, but not necessarily as many counselors as necessary. The school counselors have to worry about schedules, college, and career readiness for the students. Except, he pointed out, counselors are torn "in so many different ways" because they are not always able to provide the social/emotional needs of every student. Although, if the

counselors are able to provide that support, something else is dropped and it has to be picked up some place else. He remarked that the last time he hired a student counselor only three people applied for the position because it is not an easy position to fill, but it is a truly important position to fill. Another issue that needs addressing is the state's educator shortage. This resolution represents an issue "on all of our minds" and it is something to address in a preventative manner, not in a reactive manner, he pointed out.

[9:01:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked what the legislature can do to assist in that endeavor.

MR. CARSTENS responded that there are many things, such as: the rehire of quality education retirees or rehires; provide avenues for social/emotional type counselors into the schools; provide a focus on social/emotional learning (SEL) needs of the students; and so forth.

[9:03:02 AM](#)

LISA SKILES PARADAY, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACS), advised that the ACS represents superintendents, elementary and secondary principals, school business officials, and other school administrators. She related that the focus is on improving the safety and wellbeing of students through partnerships, families, communities, tribes, which has been the overall theme and hopefully it will continue to be developed in moving forward with the Education Challenge. During a recent roundtable, two themes emerged as follows: secure facilities, with the need to perform an external audit/gap analysis of the school facilities as to what is needed to ensure that the public school facilities are safe, and the Department of Education and Early Development is looking at those issues. Prevention is genuinely key as an investment in the social/emotional needs of all of Alaska's students in the form of school counselors, nurses, mental health support, all of the issues testified to today, and another important piece is to ensure that every educator and student has access to appropriate training. During this roundtable, there was a tremendous amount of discussion about strengthening regional and community partnerships as well as working with the University of Alaska, College of Education, to make sure that the pre-service training for teachers is inclusive of these items as well. She related that there was a follow-up discussion with Speaker Bryce Edgmon,

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky, and Commissioner Michael Johnson to discuss what the next steps could be in terms of moving forward with some of these needs. That, she related, in some ways is where we are today in terms of bringing the resolution forward. Clearly, she noted, there are financial needs that would accompany some of these items, and there is the hope that the districts could share with the legislature and lay the ground work for a potential request around public school safety.

[9:06:40 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked whether flat funding has any effect on the safety of children.

DR. PARADY answered that clearly, flat funding over time results in cuts to these service professionals, in terms of nurses and counselors who may not be in the classroom but are cut first because all districts are trying to focus on protecting instruction in the classroom. She related that safety is first and foremost for every educator, they own the question of safety, every single educator is about taking care of the students. Having said that, she offered, as districts have experienced cuts, some of the school counselors, nurses, and mental health professionals have been cut as a result. She said, "The answer is, yes, we need full funding, adequate funding to support these positions."

[9:08:32 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND opened public testimony on HR 7. After ascertaining no one who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HR 7.

[9:08:59 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:09 a.m. to 9:10 a.m.

[9:10:39 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND reopened public testimony on HR 7.

[9:10:49 AM](#)

SANA EFRID, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, noted that the members of the committee participated in Alaska's Education Challenge as a top priority

of Alaskans working together to identify recommendations around safety and the wellbeing of Alaska's students. She stated that the Department of Education and Early Development supports this resolution, and the department is excited to see that it encompasses three different areas: physical safety of the schools; training for teachers and other school personnel; and the support of other staffing that must take place to support Alaska's students within the schools and not simply counselors but nurses and other mental health clinicians. She offered appreciation for HR 7 because it focuses on the safety of students, which is a top priority for the administration and the Department of Education and Early Development.

[9:12:43 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:12 a.m. to 9:13 a.m.

[9:13:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH moved to report HR 7 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HR 7 was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee.

[9:13:57 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:14 a.m.