

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

January 20, 2017

8:01 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Shelley Hughes, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens  
Senator Cathy Giessel  
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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator John Coghill

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Geran Tarr

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Senator Natasha von Imhof  
Representative Daniel Ortiz  
Representative Steve Thompson

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & EARLY DEVELOPMENT

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an overview of the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED).

HEIDI TESHNER, Administrative Services Director  
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented information about the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) budget.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:01:26 AM](#)

**CHAIR SHELLEY HUGHES** called the joint meeting of the Senate Education and House Education Standing Committees to order at 8:01 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stevens, Giessel, Begich, and Chair Hughes, and Representatives Kopp, Parish, Fansler, Johnston, Talerico, and Chair Drummond. Representative Spohnholz arrived shortly thereafter.

**OVERVIEW: ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & EARLY DEVELOPMENT**

CHAIR HUGHES began the meeting by paraphrasing from the Alaska Constitution, Article 7, Section 1:

The legislature shall by general law establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the State, and may provide for other public educational institutions. Schools and institutions so established shall be free from sectarian control. No money shall be paid from public funds for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution.

She noted that Section 3 establishes the University of Alaska, which is governed by the Board of Regents.

[8:03:46 AM](#)

Chair Hughes welcomed Representative Spohnholz. She recognized the presence of Representative Thompson and Senator von Imhof.

She stressed that it is a pivotal time in Alaska and emphasized the importance of education. She said education is the key to Alaska's children's future and very much a part of the American dream. It unlocks doors for children as a way to improve their circumstances.

She requested that each member of the committee share their background in education and a reason why they think education is important. She shared personal experiences with the public school system as a parent of four children. She said one child attended a private school for several years and she homeschooled her children briefly. She said she has lived in multiple school districts throughout the state and has a statewide perspective of rural and urban schools. She related that she attended the University of Alaska. She concluded that she brings the perspective of families, students, and parents to the committee.

[8:06:13 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL said she has been on the Education Committee for two years. She related her background as a mother of three children who homeschooled her children for 12 years during their elementary years. Her children attended public school after that. She has served as a School Board member and her husband is a teacher. She wished to continue the committee's work to increase the effectiveness of public schools. She stressed the importance of reading.

[8:07:23 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS shared that he taught at the University of Alaska for 25 years as a history professor and served as the president of the Kodiak School Board for three years during a time of extreme budget cuts. He said a bill he sponsored created the Senate and House Education Standing Committees. He concluded that he is dedicated to public education and wants to ensure that the state provides the best education possible.

[8:08:04 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH shared his experience as a graduate of Anchorage Public Schools and the University of Alaska, and as a peer teacher. In his private business he worked with Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children on both the Kasayulie and Moore lawsuits. He has done strategic planning for

school districts. He said he hopes to continue to build and strengthen education so that it will make people want to stay in Alaska, allow students to achieve goals of further education or careers, and attract people to the state.

[8:09:12 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES noted Senate members have a wealth of experience. She added that she taught four years at a private school and instructed in a prison setting. She believes education is key to unlocking opportunity and hopes the committee can help increase the quality of education, protect funding in the classroom, and streamline administration.

CHAIR HUGHES turned the gavel over to Chair Drummond.

CHAIR DRUMMOND assumed the gavel and introduced the LIO moderator and Senate Records secretary. She recognized Representative Daniel Ortiz.

[8:12:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO shared his background in education. He reported he served on the Upper Railbelt School Board and worked with schools during his time as the Denali Borough mayor. He was also a high school basketball coach at Tri-Valley for five years. He said he and his wife, and many family members are graduates of Tri-Valley High School.

[8:12:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH shared his background as a public school student in Juneau, plus one semester of home schooling. He attended the University of Alaska - Fairbanks and then taught English in France for about a year. He attended University of Alaska - Southeast and then studied in China for a year and taught English there. He returned to Juneau and worked as a substitute teacher and then became a para-educator for two years.

[8:13:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON shared that she is a mother of three children who have gone through both the Fairbanks and Anchorage school systems. She said she was an outdoor educator in the Anchorage School District and also with Cook Inlet Tribal Council. She serves as a board member of Education Matters, which came out of the Mayor's Education Taskforce and an ARISE board member under the Cook Inlet Tribal Council. She spent nine years on the Anchorage Assembly. She wants to ensure that

Alaskan children get an education and state funding goes to education.

[8:15:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER said he was a math teacher at the Kuskokwim Campus of the University of Alaska - Fairbanks in Bethel. He said education is a priority and he wants to have an effective and comprehensive education system pre-K through post-secondary education.

[8:15:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ said she went to the Anchorage School District and took advantage of the many options in school choice. She is the mother of three daughters in the school system, one who has special needs and two who are in gifted programs. She understands the challenges of public schools to meet all students' needs. She worked at the University of Alaska - Anchorage to help attract private funding to the university through endowments and scholarships. She shared that her family values public education. She said she is interested in innovative programs in rural Alaska.

[8:20:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP said he has had a diverse educational background and his parents were educators in rural Alaska. He spoke of the importance of rural schools. He said he attended a variety of types of schools and has strong beliefs in sports programs.

[8:22:27 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND noted members' talents and passion for education. She related her experience visiting rural schools. As a mother she became involved in schools when her son was in relocated classrooms in Anchorage. She was on the Anchorage School Board nine years when there was a surge of building new schools. The Alaska Association of School Boards hosted a conference in Anchorage and she said she was able to meet members from around the nation. She said she has a strong interest in school facilities. Her goal is to make sure kids continue to receive a world class education and to move forward in spite of budget cuts.

[8:26:16 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND invited the presenters to begin the overview on the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED).

[8:26:42 AM](#)

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner of Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), presented a department overview of Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). He said as the new commissioner he hopes to provide answers and clarity to the Education Committees so that they can make good decisions on students' behalf. He thanked the committees for beginning the meeting by stating their backgrounds in education and their hopes. He said he is excited about his role and the chance to work with committee members.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON shared that he came to Alaska while in college to work at a summer camp and then began his career in education as a special education aid in the Copper River School District. He became a teacher there, a principal, and then a superintendent. He opined that there are many reasons to be excited about educational opportunities for Alaska students and that the opportunities far exceed the challenges.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON introduced Sana Efird, Deputy Director of Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), who was present in the room.

[8:29:09 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON shared the objectives of the presentation:

Provide basic Alaska education facts and information

Provide a broad overview of department functions along with statutory references for each function

Provide an overview of basic information regarding DEED's budget

Answer committee members' questions

He shared the DEED's vision and mission statements:

Vision Statement

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 about them. AS  
14.03.015

Mission Statement

An excellent education for every student every day.

[8:31:09 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON listed the State Board of Education & Early Development's Strategic Priorities:

Amplify student learning

Inspire community ownership of educational excellence

Modernize the education system

Ensure excellent educators

Promote safety and well-being

He said the Board will continue their strategic planning process at the January meeting next week.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON provided a broad overview of Alaska's schools. He related that there are 53 school districts, plus Mt. Edgecumbe High School. There are currently 507 operational schools. The public school system includes traditional, alternative, charter, correspondence, and residential boarding schools. There were approximately 130,000 K-12 students on October 1 of 2015 and 9 percent were enrolled in public correspondence schools.

[8:33:05 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON referred to the Alaska Constitution, Article 7, Section 1, which requires that the legislature establish and maintain a public education system. He read Section 1. He read the State Education Policy, AS 14.03.015: "The purpose of education is to help ensure that all students will succeed in their education and work."

CHAIR DRUMMOND noted that questions will be taken at the end of the presentation.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON showed DEED's Organizational Chart. He noted he is working with department staff to restructure the department, as recommended in the performance review that was conducted under HB 40. He is working to make the department effective in accomplishing its mission and vision. He noted that in 2016 the department had a significant change in leadership and is working hard to be able to meet legislative needs.

[8:35:35 AM](#)

HEIDI TESHNER, Administrative Services Director, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), presented information about the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) budget. She explained that the department is made up of five divisions and three boards and commissions. She described the structure overview and function of each division and board/commission and paraphrased from the following slides throughout her presentation.

Office of the Commissioner

- 5 full-time budgeted positions
- 0.1% of DEED's FY2018 Operating Budget Request
- \$1,037.0 total budget request (\$1,014.6 UGF)
- Provides policy direction and support to Alaska's school districts, schools, students, parents, teachers, and department programs that increase student achievement.

Administrative Services

- 15 full-time budgeted positions
- 0.2% of DEED's FY2018 Operating Budget Request
- \$3,661.4 total budget request (\$2,182.0 UGF)
- Provides centralized administrative management and financial, budget, procurement, human resources, and information technology support services to the department divisions; and state facilities rent.

School Finance and Facilities

- 11 full-time budgeted positions
- 0.1% of DEED's FY2018 Operating Budget Request
- \$2,203.4 total budget request (\$1,307.6 UGF)
- Allocates and accounts for resources distributed to Alaska school districts and Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School and provides services that promote safe facilities which support quality education programs.

[8:39:13 AM](#)

MS. TESHNER described various types of funding that programs receive, as set in statute: the foundation funding formula, pupil transportation program, boarding home grants, youth and detention program funds, and special schools funds.

[8:42:23 AM](#)

MS. TESHNER continued with the Division of Teaching and Learning Support, the largest division.

- 65 full-time budgeted positions

- 14.6% of DEED's FY2018 Operating Budget Request
- \$237,609.6 total budget request (\$17,783.2 UGF)
- Provides support through federal program funding and compliance; academic standards, academic assessment and accountability; state system of support to increase school effectiveness; and active partnerships.

[8:45:31 AM](#)

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

- 2 full-time budgeted positions
- 0.0% of DEED's FY2018 Operating Budget Request
- \$303.0 total budget request (\$0.0 UGF)
- Serves as a preventative and positive force in working to enhance the professional performance of all educators, and ensures that members of the teaching profession in Alaska are qualified and ethical educators.

[8:46:38 AM](#)

Alaska State Council on the Arts

- 5 full-time budgeted positions
- 0.2% of DEED's FY2018 Operating Budget Request
- \$2,768.5 total budget request (\$692.8 UGF)
- Promotes and fosters the development of the arts for all Alaskans through education, partnerships, grants, and services.

[8:48:05 AM](#)

Mt. Edgecumbe High School

- 56 full and part-time budgeted positions
- 0.8% of DEED's FY2018 Operating Budget Request
- \$13,336.7 total budget request (\$4,758.8 UGF)
- Provides a successful comprehensive residential high school for Alaskan students.

[8:48:54 AM](#)

Libraries, Archives & Museums

- 53 full, part-time, and non-perm budgeted positions
- 0.8% of DEED's FY2018 Operating Budget Request
- \$13,326.2 total budget request (\$8,084.2 UGF)
- Provides the public with access to government information; collects, organizes, preserves, and makes available materials that document the history of the state; and promotes the development of libraries archives and museums statewide.

[8:50:42 AM](#)

MS. TESHNER turned to the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education found in DEED for administrative support only.

- 86 full-time and non-perm budgeted positions
- 2.8% of DEED's FY2018 Operating Budget Request
- \$45,635.9 total budget request (\$0.0 UGF)
- Promotes access to and success in education and career training after high school; increases Alaska's physician workforce by providing public medical education to Alaskans and by providing residency training for medical school graduates (WWAMI Medical Education); Alaska Performance Scholarship Awards; and the Alaska Student Loan Corporation.

[8:52:51 AM](#)

MS. TESHNER turned to a slide on the FY2018 Governor's Budget, which is a little over \$1.6 billion. She listed the K-12 formula programs and agency and program operations by fund source. She said 80 percent of the budget is for K-12 programs: foundation formula, pupil transportation, boarding home grants, youth in detention and special schools. She noted that 82 percent is general funds (GF) and unrestricted general funds (UGF), 15 percent is federal funds, and 4 percent is other funds.

[8:53:53 AM](#)

She addressed the budget by line item. The total budget including all funds was \$1,621,976.2 of which 95 percent is from grants. The remaining 5 percent is made up by personal service - 2 percent, and other lines - 3 percent.

[8:54:20 AM](#)

She related information about the UGF budget which totals \$1,394,483.0 and is made up of 98 percent grants, 1 percent personal services, and 1 percent other lines.

[8:54:45 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON recalled Governor Walker's comments during the State of the State address when he said the state needs to rethink its entire system of public education. Commissioner Johnson commented that, "Though many students in Alaska receive a great education, far too many do not. We need to make sure the system of public education in Alaska works for all of our students." He invited each member of the committees to become directly involved in the restructuring process. He said, "In 2017 we can be better and we can be more efficient." He hopes in the future to share many examples of how districts are being more efficient and innovative in delivering education. He

concluded that he looks forward to working with, and learning from, committee members, to meet Alaska's education challenges.

8:56:06 AM

CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked Commissioner Johnson and opened the meeting for questions.

SENATOR STEVENS requested that Commissioner Johnson invite the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development to a Senate Education meeting.

CHAIR DRUMMOND recalled that the Board chair only presents to the legislature once per session. She noted that the legislature approves Board appointments, as well as Board of Regent appointments.

8:57:17 AM

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON commented that she is excited about what she has heard. She encouraged that the new strategic plan be measureable as to its effectiveness. She commented that in her work she's never met a student that was not very bright. She added that there are many bright students who have not had educational opportunities. She hopes the new plan will be funded in a way that reaches every student.

8:58:22 AM

SENATOR BEGICH asked whether the positions of Director of School Finance and Administrative Services Director will be combined.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said yes.

SENATOR BEGICH noted that the Board has established and is moving forward with the Strategic Plan. He suggested that the Board involve both House and Senate Education Committees in the planning process. He shared more information about his education background noting his wife and sisters, as well as his parents, were educators.

CHAIR DRUMMOND noted that Senator Begich's wife was present.

9:00:21 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP congratulated Commissioner Johnson and Deputy Commissioner Efirid. He said he is excited about the future of education in Alaska. He suggested establishing another residential high school similar to Mt. Edgecumbe and consolidating some districts. He spoke of directing money to teachers in classrooms in order to arrive at efficient outcomes.

[9:01:14 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES thanked Commissioner Johnson and said she is excited about innovation in education. She shared a strong interest in improving education in rural Alaska. She said when she was living in rural Alaska, lack of good education was a reason her family left. She stressed that she has an obligation to ensure that there is a focus on successful education in rural areas. She mentioned the need to "transform", not reform, education. She suggested taking advantage of innovative technology to increase opportunities for rural schools. She requested ideas from communities, families, parents, and schools for new possibilities. She noted the Commissioner could bring ideas from his experiences.

[9:04:09 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON restated that during 2017 there will be incredible opportunity to provide quality education in ways Alaska has never been able to do before. Many districts are already doing some exciting projects. He hoped soon there would be discussions between school districts and committees.

He shared problems at Kenny Lake School in the Copper River School District due to loss of enrollment. He described the challenge there to provide students with a great education. He stressed that this is happening all over rural Alaska. He pointed out that technology and other innovations are solutions to delivering great instruction to rural areas. He concluded that he looks forward to sharing innovative ideas with the committees.

[9:06:24 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES said her previously mentioned story was from the 1980s and she has deep admiration for rural teachers. The committee will be focusing on the issue of exploring new delivery models to the classroom. She gave the example of learning a foreign language. She voiced appreciation for Commissioner Johnson's leadership. She concluded that a goal is to transform education and promote teaching in a different kind of way.

[9:09:40 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH echoed the enthusiasm for reforming and transforming education. He asked where the state is with broadband access in rural areas and what the legislature can do to ensure there is access.

[9:10:45 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON offered to get that data and share it with the committees. He noted the department has been having conversations with the Alaska Association of School Boards (AASB) and Alaska School Administrators (ASA) on this topic.

[9:11:58 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS brought up the conversation on citizenship in public education. He opined that kids don't understand civics and citizenship. He suggested keeping citizenship as a key point in education.

[9:13:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER agreed that Western Alaska does not have access to broadband and is at a disadvantage. He also suggested more curriculum development that integrates Native cultural norms into the curriculum.

[9:14:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ echoed concerns about lack of broadband. She shared an example of doing distance education - an integrated delivery of university nursing courses. She said a similar model in rural areas could be implemented.

She agreed with Senator Stevens about the need for civics education in the curriculum. She stressed the importance of hands-on local involvement.

[9:19:39 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL appreciated the discussion on broadband in distance education. She shared her experience in two rural areas that had excellent distance education. She maintained that the reason distance education was available was due to resource development in the areas. She concluded that "the best social program is a good job."

[9:22:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked what is being done to retain teachers in Alaska.

[9:22:47 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied that last year there was over a 12 percent turnover rate for Alaska teachers, a significant problem. He emphasized that the quality of the teacher is so important, even with distance education. He said he expects to engage in frequent discussions on this topic during the state's educational restructuring.

[9:23:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO asked about the progress of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). He wondered if Alaska's draft plan was available.

[9:24:44 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said that the state's application to the federal government is being drafted and is on-going and there continues to be community meetings on the topic. He hoped to have a draft this spring for the public to comment on. The department is scheduled to submit Alaska's application on September 18. He noted other states have published drafts to view.

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP commented on the high rate of teacher turnover in rural Alaska and hoped that particular issue is looked at. He stressed the importance of the teacher. He also agreed with Senator Stevens on the need for civics education in schools. He quoted the "American's Creed" which he had to memorize in his elementary school classes.

[9:28:21 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES said there will be committee hearings on technology in rural areas and teacher retention and an ESSA update. She invited committee members to submit other topics of interest.

She agreed that civics and cultural learning would benefit students.

[9:30:18 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND voiced appreciation for everyone's comments and the department's presentation. She recalled that last year the standardized test was cancelled due to technology issues. She cautioned that Alaska is a very complex place and needs to have a backup plan to technology.

CHAIR HUGHES suggested the committees might meet again jointly for further discussion.

[9:32:23 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the Senate and House Education Committees, Chair Drummond adjourned the joint Senate and House Education Standing Committee meeting at 9:32 a.m.