

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

February 1, 2017  
8:00 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Geran Tarr (Alternate)

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Dan Ortiz  
Representative Lora Reinbold

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: SYNCHRONOUS DISTANCE LEARNING IN ALASKA

- HEARD

PRESENTATION: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT:  
EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JEWEL FLECKENSTEIN, Student Member  
Alaska Close Up  
Alaska's Educational Resource Center (SERRC)  
Interior Distance Education of Alaska (IDEA)  
Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided a student presentation on  
Synchronous Distance Learning in Alaska.

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced the departmental presentation of  
the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

SUSAN MCCAULEY, PhD  
Education Policy Coordinator  
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the departmental presentation of  
the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

8:00:40 AM

**CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND** called the joint meeting of the House and Senate Education Standing Committees to order at 8:00 a.m. Representatives Drummond, Kopp, Parish, Fansler, Johnston, and Talerico; and Senators Coghill, Giessel, Begich, and Hughes were present at the call to order. Representative Spohnholz and Senator Stevens arrived as the meeting was in progress. Also present were Representatives Ortiz and Reinbold.

[Chair Drummond passed the gavel to Senator Hughes]

**PRESENTATION: SYNCHRONOUS DISTANCE LEARNING IN ALASKA**

8:01:20 AM

CHAIR HUGHES announced that the first order of business would be a student presentation on Synchronous Distance Learning in Alaska.

8:03:55 AM

JEWEL FLECKENSTEIN, Student Member, Alaska Close Up, Alaska's Educational Resource Center SERRC, Interior Distance Education of Alaska (IDEA), said the cost of operating schools in rural areas is unsustainable, considering the current budget. One of the consequences, she noted, is that a variety of classes may not be available for students and suggested distance education may be a part of the solution; available to all Alaskan students. She explained that two types of distance education exist: asynchronous - accessing materials remotely and learning on an individual schedule/pace; and synchronous - accessing resources actively with other classmates albeit in a virtual classroom setting. The characteristics of a virtual classroom that conducts synchronous courses include allowances for: live online classes; live chat access; video /web conferencing; the teacher being in a different physical locale than the students; utilization of programs such as Collaborate, Elluminate, Zoom, and Adobe Connect. She reported that three examples of synchronous classrooms can be found in Alaska. The largest implementation may be Kodiak Island School District (KIBSD), which connects 13 schools via on-line classrooms. The University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) also offers on-line courses for students to work from home while attaining a degree. The third is Williamsburg Academy that unites teachers and students from across the state and the nation. She quoted former Superintendent Gary Baldwin, Lower Kuskokwim School District, who said: "The most powerful thing in a traditional classroom is the connection between the teacher and the student. And that connection happens over two-way video." The Windsor Academy, government economics class she is enrolled in has been an inspiration and helped to bring her to the Capitol and before the committee today. Describing the program applications that are used by the academy, and elaborating on the interface possibilities, she paraphrased from a written statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Canvas is our learning management system (LMS). It's the platform we use to deliver all our courses.

Canvas is where students will receive and submit assignments, complete some of their studies, collaborate with classmates, and access their course syllabi and assignments. Each class has its own dedicated area within Blackboard.

Blackboard Collaborate is software used to conduct live online class meetings or to view recorded lectures. Collaborate meetings and recordings are accessed through Canvas.

Zoom is the backup video software used when Blackboard Collaborate is not functioning. Same principle as Blackboard Collaborate.

Student Information Services (SIS), is the online system parents use to create an account with us, register and pay for courses, view snapshots of their student's academic progress, and access transcripts and grades for completed courses. Parents create their own SIS accounts first, then add students individually. Only one parent SIS account is required per student, but both parents can create their own account if they wish.

She opined on the high quality of education that she believes she is receiving and the level of participation, including the viewing opportunities, enjoyed by the students. It has been a great experience, she finished.

[8:12:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked whether the Williamsburg program is affiliated with William and Mary College in Williamsburg, Virginia. Additionally, she queried what bandwidth is needed to access the program.

MS. FLECKENSTEIN said a standard device is sufficient and no special connections are required; based on her experience.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked about limitations for class size, and the level of school choice that it allows.

MS. FLECKENSTEIN responded that she's had up to 100 in a class, and that the possibilities provided are exciting and require a healthy level of personal engagement.

[8:13:16 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL asked about tuition costs and financial arrangements for payment.

MS. FLECKENSTEIN answered that the course she is enrolled in was \$300.00 which was handled via self-pay.

**PRESENTATION: Department of Education and Early Development:  
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**

[8:14:22 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES announced that the final order of business would be a presentation from the Department of Education and Early Development (EED) on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

[8:15:02 AM](#)

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), offered introductory remarks and reported that, in his travels throughout the state, he has stressed that ESSA is not an agenda for Alaska's education. The state is establishing what it deems necessary, and ESSA does not drive that effort. Alaska's educational system is a reflection of the ESSA guidelines.

[8:17:49 AM](#)

SUSAN MCCAULEY, PhD, Education Policy Coordinator, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), directed attention to the committee handout, titled "Joint Meeting of the House & Senate Education Committees, page 3, to explain the inception of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) passed in 1965 with the goal to improve the quality of education for low income students and the stipulation for it to be periodically reauthorized by Congress, which has occurred twice: first as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), 2002, and now as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), 2015. She described the NCLB reauthorization, stating, "That was perceived as, and in fact was, a very cookie cutter, ... top down, heavily mandated, piece of legislation." The ESSA reauthorization was passed with a high level of bipartisan support.

DR. MCCAULEY said the focus of the presentation is on three key elements, tied to Title I, which impacts every school in Alaska in terms of what is developed for the state application of ESSA.

In order of address, these elements are: standards and assessments; accountability; and school support and improvement. The specific, statutory requirements for each element will be presented, followed by whatever differences ESSA represents from NCLB, and finally a review of the state's current status for compliance.

[8:20:38 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY, beginning with the component for education standards, said ESSA requires assurance that states have adopted challenging academic content standards in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science, and that the adopted standards are aligned with public college and relevant Career Technical Education (CTE) entrance requirements. The intent is that some degree of alignment exists to ensure that a high school graduate can be ready for postsecondary education. The major difference between ESSA and NCLB, throughout, is what the U.S. Department of Education (USED) is no longer allowed to mandate. Thus, for this element, it prohibits the Secretary of Education from: exercising authority over states' standards, requiring states to submit their standards for review, or incentivizing the adoption of any particular set of standards. Alaska's current status shows that ELA and mathematics standards were adopted in 2012 and science standards and grade level expectations were last revised in 2006. The state's science standards will require review and some revision, but otherwise Alaska is in good standing on this element.

[8:24:58 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY, regarding the component for assessments, explained that the law requires annual content assessments for ELA, mathematics, and science. The ELA and math assessments are to be conducted annually in grades 3-8, and at least once in grades 9-12. The science assessments are to be administered at least once in grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12. The differences from NCLB are: states can use a single summative assessment or multiple interim assessments to produce a summative score; districts may choose to use other "nationally-recognized high school assessments" rather than a state sourced assessment - with EED permission; states are allowed to establish their own laws regarding "opt-out" provisions for testing - an action Alaska has already legislated; and ESSA maintains a 95 percent assessment participation rate, with consequences for not meeting the requirement to be determined by the state. Alaska's current status shows that assessments are being annually administered in

ELA and mathematics in grades 3-10 and in science in grades 4, 8, and 10. Thus, continuing the status quo meets the requirements of ESSA.

[8:28: 38 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY continued with the handout, page 12, to address the second key element: accountability. She pointed out that significant changes have been adopted under ESSA, beginning with allowing every state the independent latitude to determine and implement an accountability metric, whereas NCLB made specific prescriptions. Whatever method the state chooses, it must "meaningfully differentiate" schools based on individual qualities and student performance ratings. She explained that should Alaska's star rating system be retained, and every school aspired to a four-star rating, the federal requirement for a method of differentiation would be considered unmet. Further, it requires ambitious, state designed, long-term goals for all traditional students and subgroups, but does not define "ambitious," nor does it include specific goals. Five indicators are required to be considered under the accountability system. The first is a measure to determine academic proficiency via annual state assessments, which was the sole NCLB standard and an emphasis that has been retained under ESSA. Secondly, elementary and middle schools are to have an additional measure of academic performance, such as growth from year to year to indicate a student's movement towards proficiency, or if already proficient, their continued growth. High school graduation rates are to be factored into the indicators and are to include improvement goals. The fourth indicator to be factored into the metric is a measure of progress for English learners. The fifth measure is for school quality or student success based on a non-academic, non-standardized measure; responding to a perception of the over emphasis that NCLB placed on standardized testing as the only accountability requirement. She said that under ESSA, there is an understanding that many factors impact student learning. The measures to be used are not prescribed under ESSA and many considerations are being discussed throughout the educational system, such as chronic absenteeism, suspension/expulsion data, high level course offerings, completion of career pathways, school climate/safety, student/parent engagement, and any number of other possibilities, to be decided at the state and district levels. The hurdle, she cautioned, is that a means for measurement needs to be devised. The non-academic factors may not be easily measured; thus, the state will make determinations in this realm. The law allows states the discretion of

including other indicators, but the five presented, are required. Accountability must be measured annually, and each school differentiated based on all the indicators. Finally, a participation rate of 95 percent must be a part of the equation. Pointing out the differences from NCLB and the NCLB waiver, she said the entire accountability metric under NCLB required the submission of adequate yearly progress (AYP) reports and having 100 percent of the students attain proficiency of the standardized metric by a date certain - 2014. No longer are aspects of the accountability system allowed to be prescribed by the U.S. Secretary of Education, allowing every state the autonomy to design appropriate systems. Alaska currently addresses accountability by using the Alaska School Performance Index (ASPI), and a summative star rating for schools on a scale of one to five. The ASPI elementary/middle school indicator percentage weightings for students in grades K-8 are: school progress 40, academic achievement 35, and attendance rate 25. The high school facility percentages are: school progress 40, academic achievement 20, graduation rate 20, college and career ready 10, and attendance rate 10. She said retaining a star system will meet ESSA requirements; using attendance as the non-academic factor. Conversations are still ensuing throughout the state as to whether this is an acceptable standard.

[8:38:35 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY said the final components of the third key element are the requirements for school support and improvement. The law directs the state to identify schools that require comprehensive support, and these will be Title I facilities that rank in the lowest fifth percentile, as well as any high school with a graduation rate of less than 67 percent. Schools must also be identified for targeted support, which are facilities that have a consistently underperforming subgroup of students. Here again, ESSA does not define the terms or prescribe the remedies, allowing the state to make determinations; another major departure from NCLB. The strategies the state chooses to fulfill these requirements are to be evidence-based and cannot be random suggestions. The departure in this area from NCLB is also significant, in moving from a threshold of a research-based to an evidence-based approach, which will allow the implementation of a less formal means to recognize and adopt innovative improvements. Research-based mandates required adherence to strict protocols that were developed based on extensive studies. The evidence-based approach allows flexibility to adopt innovative ideas that have a likelihood of being effective. Alaska's current status for this area, she

explained, is that the agency has been identifying "focus and priority schools," monitoring school improvement funds, and using the State System of Support coaching model to assist the lowest performing schools. All of this was put in place to comply with NCLB requirements and to be consistent with the NCLB waiver. Continuing the status quo would likely meet ESSA requirements or a new model could be adopted, which is currently under discussion, she reported.

[8:43:55 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY discussed the decisions that are still being determined, which include: should there be a move towards testing one grade in high school, as now required, versus the two grades that Alaska currently tests; what are the appropriate considerations for determining the n-size for subgroup accountability, which can have a major impact on Alaska's small schools; what should be used as a non-academic factor for measuring school quality and student success; what supports are perceived as most helpful by the districts and what will be the qualifiers; and what innovative approaches can be implemented to address Alaska's unique opportunities and long standing challenges.

[8:47:12 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY explained that there appears to be no appetite for revisiting ESSA by the newly elected congress. The law enjoyed a high level of bipartisan support, it institutes necessary guardrails while allowing states appropriate flexibility, and, thus, the sentiment is to allow it to be implemented and be proven. She reported that the department responded to the USED draft regulations last fall, in concert with other states. The national feedback resulted in the USED pausing the implementation of the accountability aspect due to the perception that it is not in keeping with the intent of the law regarding flexibility allowance for the states. Alaska is developing state plans in compliance with ESSA and monitoring changes in the U.S. regulations as ESSA is being finalized.

[8:50:09 AM](#)

DR. MCCAULEY described the process used for developing Alaska's state plan, which includes: incorporating work generated from ESSA stakeholder groups comprised of tribal organizations, school districts, parent groups, and associations; consistent agency consultation with a broad representation of education

stakeholders; use of focus groups at various events/meetings across the state; and formation of topic specific work groups to identify ways and means for meeting the new requirements. The draft plan is anticipated for completion by April 2017. The department is continuing efforts to seek input to complete the draft including engagement of, and approval by, the board regarding necessary regulations; and consultation with the legislature, as required by law. The second submission window, for state plans, is September 2017, and Alaska is on track for that date. Finishing, Dr. McCauley provided images of the EED website and described how to access the ESSA information page, which the department is maintaining for the public's edification and comments. She pointed out a newly included "tool kit," that provides access to materials.

[8:53:08 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked about the final decision timeline, and who is included in the use of the term "stakeholders."

DR. MCCAULEY responded that the goal is to have the final decision points addressed by April. The stakeholder groups have included practitioners, principals, parents, Native tribes, the legislature, and the State Chamber of Commerce; the reach has been broad, as required under ESSA.

[8:56:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER asked what is being referred to in the statement, "maintain 95 percent participation requirement."

DR. MCCAULEY answered that it refers to 95 percent of the students enrolled, at the school wide level; having participated in an annual, required assessment.

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER asked about accessing the ASPI cumulative rating outcomes.

DR. MCCAULEY responded that the latest published results are from two years ago and are available on the department's website, under the assessment and accountability section.

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER asked for further elaboration regarding the weightings chart and the use of the word growth.

DR. MCCAULEY said, "That [section of the law] identified seven levels of growth for which a school would receive credit, in

terms of moving students from one to another." As an example, she explained that a student who is not proficient, as shown by a state assessment, but is moved from level 1 to level 2, allows the school to receive credit for the move. Additionally, if a student is proficient and moves from level 5 to level 6, the school receives credit, as well, even though the student had, and continued to be proficient; demonstrating continued growth in their learning.

[8:59:38 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH reported having had a hand in writing the social studies standards, when Governor Walter Hickel was in office, and asked whether there have been revisions in the social studies standards since that time.

DR. MCCAULEY stated her belief that there have been no revisions since that time, and added that Alaska has no provision for, nor does ESSA require, social studies assessments. She offered to provide further information, including the last revision date.

SENATOR BEGICH noted that the Moore, et al. v. State of Alaska, 3AN-04-9756 CI, (2010), settlement funds are expiring, funds that were targeted to support schools that met the lower proficiency standards, which ESSA appears to address. He asked whether there are departmental plans for continuing any level of targeted support in the spirit of ESSA and the Moore settlement, which speaks specifically to Alaska constitutional obligations, and whether the final Moore reports could prove helpful in identifying approaches to meet ESSA requirements.

DR. MCCAULEY suggested that the answer to both questions would be yes and elaborated to say that irrespective of the federal requirements the state statutes require that Moore be followed. Federal law and state statute are consistent regarding requirements directing EED to identify schools in need, and provide appropriate support, based on student achievement. The Moore settlement reports have been helpful as a review of improvements and interventions that were deemed useful or not for improving student learning, she reported.

SENATOR BEGICH suggested using a percentage to determine the n-size, then asked about including the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), and the School Climate and Connectedness Survey, as methods for measuring school qualities and student success.

DR. MCCAULEY recollected that the n-size stipulation may need to be a required, consistent number across the state for each subgroup, negating the possibility of using a percentage. She offered to review the requirements and provide further information. The USED issues guidance statements, as well as regulations, and currently the n-size is allowed to be no higher than 35. Regarding the YRBS and School Climate and Connectedness Survey, she said the surveys, or selected sections, could be used; ESSA allows that type of flexibility.

[9:05:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked what assessments/testing is scheduled for 2017.

DR. MCCAULEY answered that a vendor has been identified, who will be providing a statewide assessment in spring, 2017, proctored to students in grades 3-10.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON expressed concern regarding the lack of ability to mine student data on a consistent, year to year basis, and asked whether districts are being encouraged to mine data.

DR. MCCAULEY clarification is being brought around the purpose and usefulness of statewide assessments, as questioned by parents and administrators across the state. The department will make every effort to generate useful reports based on data received. School assessments and statewide assessments certainly differ significantly regarding what is expected and how the data is used. She deferred further comment to Commissioner Johnson.

[9:07:34 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON noted that part of the restructuring of the department, following adoption of HB 30, reflects the understanding that data should inform decisions being made. Thus, the data shop is being made a unit within the department and new focus is being placed on how the data is received and distributed. The measure is being taken to ensure that data is being put to optimum use and informs instruction for the students.

[9:08:44 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS expressed concern for EDC to be appropriately manned to handle the changes that are being asked of it, given that it's a modest sized department; what impacts are expected.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON reported that the efforts to comply with ESSA is taxing the department. The current staff have absorbed the duties for developing compliance measures along with their regularly assigned duties. Many of EDC staff working on K-12 issues are federally funded workers; however, that creates a challenge in the effort to ensure that the agency is an Alaska, agenda driven department. He deferred further response to Dr. McCauley.

DR. MCCAULEY added that the reductions have certainly had major impacts. About 23 positions have been removed, which included subject content specialists. The reductions represent a number of support staff that educators leaned on heavily, on a regular basis, which were situated throughout the districts. In the agency's administrative office staff has stepped up to absorb additional duties. She assured the committee that the federal requirements will be met, while putting Alaska's vision for education first.

[9:12:55 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL expressed hope that state's rights will be recognized under ESSA, as is expected. She noted the requirement to measure school quality and student success indicates a qualitative aspect that can be focused on individuals via qualitative research. She opined on the importance of this approach and applauded the quality indicator, stating that she looks forward to seeing how this will be implemented.

DR. MCCAULEY said parents have been asked to respond to the question: What makes a great school and what qualities do you want in the facility that your child attends every day? She reported that parents care about a wide spectrum of things that were not included in NCLB's qualitative design but are now reflected in ESSA.

[9:16:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked whether there has been research gathered regarding the effects of testing on overall student achievement. He recalled that in schools where he has worked, regular classroom activity was temporarily shut down, during

assessment periods. He expressed apprehension for taking time away from the regular teaching schedule.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said studies of that nature have not been done, as far as he is aware. The process for selecting this year's assessment began with the department asking the question, "Why does the state give an assessment." The answers that arrived included: the ability to inform policy makers, the public, and educators regarding school performance; be able to make informed improvements; and ensure equity of equal opportunity for students statewide. Based on these reasons it was determined what type of assessment would be useful. The result was that a minimally intrusive assessment, with low impact on the classroom, would be proctored, and fulfill the goals. He pointed out that schools may assess at the district level for local reasons. The state assessment will provide accountability to meet federal requirements and continue federal funding, without major interruption while providing appropriate information.

DR. MCCAULEY added that anecdotal evidence exists regarding the perceptions that surround assessments. However, ESSA appears to respond to those perceptions and places assessments appropriately. The new law does not ascribe assessments as the be-all/end-all driver of a school accountability system. Further, the commissioner has indicated that duplication and complication of assessment methods will not be brought to districts. The state assessment will not detract from, compete, or supplant whatever tests are administered locally. Local tests can provide immediate results to inform classroom instruction. The department, statewide assessments serve to comply with legal obligations both state and federal.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH reviewed the high school testing status and requirements to ask about the statewide level of participation in the SAT's as well as the comparative time and money obligations associated with the proctoring.

DR. MCCAULEY offered to provide further information.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON added that the past reason for assessing two grades in high school was to comply with regulation. The requirements and options for how these assessments will be handled in the future are now different, under ESSA, and currently being reviewed.

[9:23:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP returned to the topic of accountability and measurements for school quality and student success, and suggested, as one index to weight, the percent of satisfied parents; those who indicated approval of the facilities that their children attend.

DR. MCCAULEY noted that parent satisfaction is an important factor.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON assured the committee that as late as this morning, the state department is pausing the ESSA technical assistance to states regarding the plan, which may mean ESSA regulations are in flux and the delayed implementation could bring further flexibility.

[9:25:54 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES announced the next Senate EDC meeting.

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND announced the next House EDC meeting.

[9:26:32 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committees, the joint meeting of the House Education Standing Committee and Senate Education Standing Committee was adjourned at 9:26 a.m.