

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

February 22, 2017

8:02 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 Lora Reinbold (Alternate)  
Representative Geran Tarr (Alternate)

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Dan Ortiz

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY (REL) AT EDUCATION NORTHWEST AND THE ALASKA STATE POLICY RESEARCH ALLIANCE (ASPRA)

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

DAVID STEVENS, PhD  
Research Manager  
Regional Education Laboratory (REL)  
Portland, Oregon

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the overview by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) and the Alaska State Policy Research Alliance (ASPRA).

ASHLEY PIERSON, PhD  
Alaska State Policy Research Alliance (ASPRA)  
Portland, Oregon

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the overview by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) and the Alaska State Policy Research Alliance (ASPRA).

DAYNA JEAN DEFEO, PhD  
Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER)  
University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Responded to questions during the overview by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) and the Alaska State Policy Research Alliance (ASPRA).

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:02:45 AM](#)

**CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND** called the joint meeting of the House and Senate Education Standing Committees to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Drummond, Kopp, Parish, Fansler, Johnston, Spohnholz, and Talerico; and Senators Coghill, Giessel, Stevens, Begich, and Hughes were present at the call to order. Also present was Representative Ortiz.

**REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY (REL) AT EDUCATION NORTHWEST and  
the ALASKA STATE POLICY RESEARCH ALLIANCE (ASPRA)**

[8:03:37 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the only order of business would be a presentation from the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) at Education Northwest and the Alaska State Policy Research Alliance (ASPRA).

[8:04:04 AM](#)

DAVID STEVENS, PhD, Research Manager, Regional Education Laboratory (REL), said the report was compiled, based on origin data, as gathered from Alaskan schools, in order to fulfill the mission of the Alaska State Policy Research Alliance (ASPRA), which is to produce and share evidence on Alaska education issues. The leadership team is comprised of professionals from the Department of Education and Early Development (EED), Dr. Susan McCauley, the Alaska Superintendents Association (ASA), Dr. Lisa Parady, the University of Alaska (UA), Dr. Steve Atwater, and the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL), Drs. Pierson and Stevens. He explained that there are 10 REL regions and Alaska is included with four other states: Washington, Idaho, Oregon, and Montana. The goal of the REL program is to assist states and districts in the use of data when addressing important policy issues and improving educational practices. The services are provided locally via research alliances such as ASPRA. A collaborative group, ASPRA engages in four primary activities: convening Alaska's educational stakeholders, supporting stakeholders in the use of data and evidence findings, conducting original research, and disseminating evidence to facilitate decision making in educational practices. The work is organized within four specific work groups: state policy - working with EED to support the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and other agency identified topics; superintendents - facilitating a learning community among the state's superintendents; educator pipeline - networking with a myriad of stakeholders; and early childhood - supporting the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Committee Council in attaining and analyzing data on early learning. The report today is in response to questions that arose out of the superintendent's working group that identified three primary concerns: the characteristics of Alaska's small schools; educator turnover rates in Alaska and how these compare to national averages; and how well course work is preparing K-12 students for entry into the UA system.

[8:10:43 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL asked who funds the service.

DR. STEVENS said the funding is provided through the department's Institute of Educational Sciences. A competitive bidding process is held to select organizations to run each of the 10 regional laboratories. Education Northwest has held the lab in the northwest region for 50 years. He explained that the awards are for five-year increments, thus, the 2012-17 contract has just finished, and the new lab is beginning.

[8:11:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked which eleven districts are included in the data used for the presentation

[8:12:06 AM](#)

ASHLEY PIERSON, PhD, Alaska State Policy Research Alliance (ASPR), named a few of the ASA districts represented by the superintendents and chaired by Ty Mase of the Lake and Peninsula District. She offered to provide the full list to the committee. Beginning her part of the presentation, she said Alaska's smallest schools are those with 10-24 students, contrasted with schools that have 25 and more students for the purpose of this analysis. The funding floor is for a school to have a minimum of 10 students. Based on 2015-16 figures, 58 brick and mortar schools, or 13 percent, of Alaska's schools have been identified as small. The comparison here is between brick and mortar schools and does not include correspondence, alternative, or [Division] of Juvenile Justice operated facilities. The grade by grade analysis findings are: 60 percent of students in small school are elementary age and attend grades K-5; 20 percent attend grades 6-8; and 20 percent attend grades 9-12. The total attendance of the small schools was 955. She provided three state maps illustrating the locales of small schools based on enrollment numbers: 10-14, 15-19, and 20-14. Nearly every district, save the far north, have at least one small school. She directed attention to the handout page labeled, "22 of 54 districts have schools enrolling less than 25 students," to point out the list of districts that host small schools.

[8:17:40 AM](#)

DR. PIERSON the enrollment shifts were scrutinized, and it was found that most schools experience changes in enrollment each year. A shift of only one student can have a dramatic effect on a small school. Thirty percent of the schools had a change of 25 percent or more. She pointed out that current policy does

not consider enrollment fluctuations, which she suggested might be policy to consider for revision. Referring to the handout page labeled, "Most schools with less than 25 students are accessible only by air," she compared the accessibility of small versus larger school as reached via air, ferry, or the road system, followed by a state map to further illustrate the findings. Continuing, she said the Alaska School Performance Index (ASPI) is based on the facilities attendance rates, student test performances and improvements in writing, reading and math, the graduation rates, and student scores/participation on college entrance exams. Directing attention to a chart in the handout, labeled, "Schools with 10-14 students had highest ASPI star rating," she reviewed the age range data for the small schools and the overall rate for all other schools to show that the highest ratings were awarded to small schools with 10-14 enrollees; followed by a state map to illustrate the locations. The small schools were compared for racial make-up and economic health, with the analysis showing that these schools have a predominately Alaska Native population and a high rate of poverty. In summary, small schools can be characterized as follows: comprise 13 percent of schools in most regions of the state; 41 percent of districts host small schools, or 22 of 54; 60 percent of students are enrolled in grade 5 or lower; the majority are remote and accessible only by air; represent both high and low performing schools; have a populace of historically disadvantaged students.

[8:25:26 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL asked about the fluctuation percentage in the school size and whether there was any further analysis that would prove helpful from that study.

DR. PIERSON said the percentage was taken from the study of 58 schools, which showed that 17, or 30 percent, had a change of 25 percent or more in enrollment numbers. She offered to provide additional information to further detail the statistics.

[8:26:17 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES noted that K-12 comprises thirteen grade levels and the analysis shows that 60 percent of the students are in 6 of the lower grade levels, while 40 percent are in the seven top grade levels. She asked for an accounting of the discrepancy and pondered if students are leaving to attend boarding school, dropping rates, or for other reasons.

DR. PIERSON said the high school cohorts were not analyzed to account for the difference in the numbers, nor were drop-out rates scrutinized. She offered to provide further information.

[8:27:21 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS referred to the impact of the poverty rate on the ASPI standing and asked if comparisons were made with urban schools. Anecdotally, he said it's been reported that students living in poverty perform poorly in both rural and urban locales, and he asked if that was found to be true.

DR. PIERSON responded that Native students tend to have a lower success rate across the state, as indicated by graduation rates. The ASPI rating was not analyzed on that point of comparison; however, she offered to have the statistics applied to the question and provide the information.

[8:28:26 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND noted the report that current policy doesn't account for enrollment fluctuations in small schools and asked whether it is her recommendation that the policy be revised.

DR. PIERSON answered that several options could be considered, such as implementation of rolling three-year averages to ease the effects.

[8:29:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP pointed out that a hold harmless provision does exist in statute [a part of the school funding foundation formula], for this reason.

[8:29:58 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked if information was gathered on the ratio of teachers to students in small schools.

DR. PIERSON answered that the broadband survey data used on teacher ratio data was not considered accurate enough to prepare as part of the report.

[8:30:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked about the significant difference of the higher ASPI star rating that schools with 10-14 students hold over those with enrollments of 15-19.

DR. PIERSON speculated the cause to be the result of the sampling size. She said when statistical categories are comprised of small numbers, slight fluctuations can alter the averages dramatically.

[8:32:06 AM](#)

DR. PIERSON turned to educator retention and said the analysis was based on nationally published research, EED statistics, and original analysis produced by ASPRA. Prior to beginning the report, she established that the percentages for turnover and retention represent contrasting factors and tenure is considered as the number of years an employee has remained at a school or in a district. She highlighted the 2016-17 turnover statistics produced by EED, to report that 22 percent of the teachers were new to their school; 10.5 percent were inter-district and 12.8 percent were intra-district. Further, of the 584 administrators hired, 177, or 30.3 percent, were new.

[8:35:44 AM](#)

DR. PIERSON offered a comparison of turnover rates from across the nation to put Alaskan statistics in context. In 2013, the national turnover averaged 14 percent. She offered state percentages for comparison: Alaska 17, Hawaii 21, Idaho, 13, Montana 19, Oregon 12, and Washington 10. The national principal turnover rates vary from 15-30 percent across districts and one report had Alaska ranked as the third lowest for tenure. Superintendent turnover is about 15 percent annually, on a national basis, with about 45 percent exiting within three years.

[8:37:01 AM](#)

DR. PIERSON turning to ASPRA statistics, reported that 800 Alaskan educators were new to the state, out of a teaching force of 8,000, and that this 10 percent rate has remained static for the last five years. In the 2012-13 school year, principals new to the state were at 13 percent, which was reduced to 7 percent in 2016-17; 27 new principals of the 397 positions. Only one superintendent was new to the state in 2017. She said school level turnover rates have proven to be steady during the five-year study period. Percentages for the five years 2013-2017

show: principals = 22, 27, 25, 26, 23; and teachers = 18, 20, 19, 22, 18. Dr. Pierson said defining rural and urban schools is a challenge in Alaska, and the federal government doesn't provide a useful classification system. Thus, REL created four modified categories: urban = off-road locales encompassing areas such as Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau; urban/rural fringe = on and off-road locales encompassing areas such as Palmer, Seward, and Sitka; rural hub/fringe = on and off-road locales encompassing areas such as Bethel, Healy, and Unalaska; and rural remote = off-road locales encompassing areas such as Adak, Arctic Village, and Yakutat. The rural remote schools had the highest turnover among principals and teachers for 2016-17, she reported and compared principal/teacher percentages as follows: urban 21/14; urban/rural fringe 12/16; rural hub/fringe 21/22; and rural remote 32/31. Similar to schools, the district principal/teacher turnover percentages were also steady over the same five-year time period, but by including superintendent turnover a dramatic contrast is evident. Thus, five-year principal/teacher/superintendent turnover numbers respectively read: 16/12/4, 16/13/19, 16/12/43, 13/13/28, and 12/12/24. She pointed out that 72 percent of the districts experienced a superintendent turnover in the last five years.

[8:45:33 AM](#)

DR. PIERSON provided the caveat that not all turnover is considered negative, and discussed strategies to increase retention, as found in national publications: grow-your-own staff and leadership; improve onboarding of new staff through assisting them to connect within the community and other staff; build incentives to stay in contracts such as offering a bonus after two or three years in a district; encourage networks within and across districts, which is key for rural settings and can be accomplished through virtual or in-person contacts.

[8:48:37 AM](#)

DAYNA JEAN DEFEO, PhD, Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), explained that there are many costs incurred due to, or otherwise associated with, teacher turnover.

The committee took an at-ease from 8:50 a.m. to 8:52 a.m.

[8:52:07 AM](#)

DR. DEFEO continued with the costs of teacher turnover, beginning with teacher preparation including course work, field placement, and certification requirements. Secondly, when an experienced teacher leaves there is a productivity, or performance productivity loss, ultimately seen through student learning and educational outcomes. The third cost is separation and the expenses incurred when a teacher terminates, which may include: exit interviews, payroll closeout, building security changes, and website/database updates. Recruitment is required, and costs associated with that category include: advertising, job fair attendance, and outreach at colleges. The next cost category is for hiring and includes: screening applications; interviewing candidates; background and reference checks; licensure assistance; payroll and benefit system updates; and computer access and technology resources. Finally, the new teacher requires orientation and training. The analysis requested was for the costs incurred for new teachers leaving/entering a district, not in-district transfers. Data for this analysis was gathered from 37 of the 54 school districts, including Mt. Edgecombe. Costs not included in the analysis include teacher preparation and teacher productivity. However, the indirect costs of productivity losses have been researched by other entities and determined to be 40 percent of the cost of teacher turnover. She said a conservative approach was taken in arriving at the estimates being presented. In the categories calculated the cost of wages were included but not benefits and the average, typical scenario was used for the purposes of this analysis. Thus, using the included variables for separation, hiring, orientation, training, and recruitment, the calculated cost for each teacher position being overturned is \$20,431.08. The \$20,400 cost can be attributed, in percentages, as follows: 1.0 - separation; 12.0 - separation that includes refreshing the housing; 24.0 - hiring a new educator, or about \$4,900 per teacher; 55.0 - orientation or \$11,100 on average; and 9.0 - recruitment that includes material costs but not hours or wages at \$1,900. She said a detailed report will be provided to the committee, in the coming weeks, which will include consideration of additional costs not included in this preview. Some of the costs represent an investment, and may help to reduce the turnover rate, she pointed out; however, reducing turnover will allow reallocation of costs to the service of student learning.

[9:00:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON stated her understanding that the national retention rate for superintendents is five or six years and asked if there might be advantages to turnover.

DR. PIERSON responded that there is a national trend for a superintendent to change every three to four years, and the evidence varies as to the potential effects. The further away from the school, the lower the impact is on student learning. That is, principals are the second most important figure next to teachers; superintendents are further removed. She offered to provide further information.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked if there is a national trend for principal tenure.

DR. PIERSON answered that the national average for principal turnover is 15-30 percent, with an average tenure of about three years. She added that Alaska has the third lowest rate in this category. The turnover rates become higher in Alaska's rural districts, where teachers and principals tend to move away from high poverty/rural districts and into urban/suburban areas.

[9:02:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP commented that terminology can be subjective and some locales being referred to as high poverty are subsistence areas, where, although there is no economic base, the people don't consider themselves poverty stricken. The setting of these areas is foreign to many people, if they haven't experienced a similar life style, and a rural boot camp could prove beneficial, he suggested. A teacher considering locating to a village could have a one- or two-week mandated residency for familiarization purposes to include speaking with the elders and meeting the exiting teachers. The perspective teacher would have the opportunity to realize whether the situation is suitable for them, prior to making the commitment. He said recruitment needs to include preparation on the front end for teachers to understand what they are going to find when they arrive in a subsistence village or isolated town.

[9:05:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked whether including the 40 percent for productivity loss would place the burden of teacher turnover closer to \$30,000.

DR. DEFEO said productivity loss was not factored in as it is a difficult figure to extrapolate, representing a loss of student learning. The reported 40 percent is a conservative figure that was located in, and used from, other research. If that estimate was included, the suggested \$30,000 could easily be reached. Additional costs to the state, that will be factored into the final report is teacher preparation, which is a significant and high cost element, and the recruitment costs reported here as a rough estimate.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked for a ballpark figure of the overall cost to the state for the loss of a teacher.

DR. DEFEO answered that it could be as high as \$50,000. The other costs to be reported will be teachers moving between districts.

[9:10:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER returned to the principal/teacher retention rate fluctuations, which are basically aligned for the five-year reporting period, and asked about the correlation and whether it represents a national trend or something that is seen primarily in Alaska.

DR. PIERSON responded that national evidence indicates the principal as the primary factor for a teacher remaining at a school.

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER asked if statistics are available on retention in the rural hubs/fringe locals contrasting home-grown versus Outside hires.

DR. PIERSON answered, no; however, anecdotal reports indicate that someone with strong ties to a community is more likely to remain.

[9:14:02 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH noted that the Yupiit School District has held a boot camp, for the last three years, similar to what Representative Kopp described, and suggested that the superintendent be asked to provide the committee with an overview. He reported that it has served to cull candidates out immediately.

[9:14:51 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said the monetary cost is certainly a concern but of equal, or more, concern for the state is the loss of student outcomes. She reported that one district is experiencing a 70 percent turnover, and she asked if there is any means to receive some analysis specific to Alaska.

DR. PIERSON deferred comment.

DR. DEFEO offered that the final report will indicate some of the research and outcomes. Teacher turnover impacts the entire school when the team effort is interrupted. Teachers reach their maximum effectiveness in the first five years. It would be important to retain the teachers for those effective years, which is also when they're at the lower end of the pay scale. However, new teachers also take some time to orient and develop strategies in order to be effective. She agreed that a culture camp is helpful for new teachers entering rural areas.

[9:18:55 AM](#)

DR. PIERSON continued with the presentation and said developmental education was also identified as a topic of concern, given the intent that Alaskan graduates be college and career ready. National and Alaskan research was used to prepare the report. The developmental education courses occur in a college setting, are non-credit bearing, and help prepare students for college level math and English classes. The students who take developmental courses tend to have low college completion rates, possibly a result of the time and money involved. High school graduates may be enrolled in these courses because of the graduation and college entrance requirements not being in alignment, or due to a lack of rigorous coursework. Another possibility is a misaligned placement process determined via a college placement test, which may not be the best means for predicting whether someone is a good candidate for completing college. Finally, some students take these classes as refresher courses.

[9:22:13 AM](#)

DR. PIERSON reported that strategies to reduce the developmental education rates include: shorten the required math sequence for students not seeking a degree in a math-focused field; increase high school rigor and offer college prep courses; allow co-enrollment for students to take simultaneous developmental and college level courses, to provide the support a student needs

without extending the timeframe for earning a degree; or universities could change placement policies to better understand the needs of individual students. She said that developmental education rates are higher at community colleges, than four-year universities, perhaps attributable to the open-access enrollment where grade point averages of enrollees are not considered. On a national basis, the 2003-04 statistics show that 68 percent of students entering a community college attended developmental courses, versus 39 percent at a public four-year college. A more recent report from Oregon, showed that 75 percent of high school graduates enrolled in community college developmental courses. Published analysis from the University of Alaska (UA) reports figures similar to the national community college rates: 61 percent of first-time students between 2008-2012 were recommended to take developmental courses and, like the rest of the country, the need for math was much higher than for English; and in 2014, 71 percent of incoming UA students required the courses. She noted that the UA is an open-access institution, and offers both two-year, four-year, and graduate degrees.

[9:27:09 AM](#)

DR. DEFEO outlined the Center for Alaska Education Policy Research (CAEPR) work that is being focused around Alaska's education policy and identifying means to improve college readiness. Strategies being explored include: piloting an early college placement test; completion of a state of the state teacher report; and high school seniors' aspirations and plans are being compiled to provide a sense of what Alaska's young people are interested in pursuing.

[9:29:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON cited a recent study published in an Anchorage newspaper, which said despite student tests showing a need for remedial work, those who didn't attend the remedial courses had far higher graduation and success rates than those who did.

DR. PIERSON offered to compile research on the topic and offered that it aligns with what she stated earlier regarding placement policies and the lack of relevance or accuracy in the placement tests.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked whether student aspirations are considered.

DR. PIERSON said some evidence indicates that it can be disheartening for a student who considers him or herself ready for college to then be told remedial work is necessary.

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER asked for further information on the misalignment of high school courses, and how, despite being top, local performers, a student is still lacking necessary skills when they arrive at college.

[9:33:52 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked the participants and announced the next meeting of the House Education Standing Committee.

[9:34:08 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES announced the next meeting of the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[9:35:55 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 9:36 a.m.