

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

March 12, 2018

8:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

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

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Harriet Drummond, Chair
Representative Justin Parish, Vice Chair
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky
Representative Ivy Spohnholz
Representative Jennifer Johnston
Representative Chuck Kopp
Representative David Talerico

MEMBERS ABSENT

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

All members present

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Lora Reinbold
Representative Geran Tarr

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: EDUCATOR WORKFORCE PILOT STUDY BY THE COALITION FOR EDUCATION EQUITY OF Alaska

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

BARBARA ADAMS, Ph.D., Education Consultant
Adams Analytic Solutions
Nenana, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented Educator Workforce Pilot Study.

JERRY COVEY, Education Consultant
JSC Consulting
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented Educator Workforce Pilot Study.

SARAH SLEDGE, Executive Director
Coalition for Education Equity
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented Educator Workforce Pilot Study.

SHAWN ARNOLD, Superintendent
Nome Public Schools
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on Research-based Educator Systems Support (RESS).

ANNMARIE O'BRIEN, Ph.D., Superintendent
Northwest Arctic Borough School District
Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on Research-based Educator Systems Support (RESS).

SCOTT MACMANUS, Superintendent
Alaska Gateway School District
Tok, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on Research-based Educator Systems Support (RESS).

SANNA EFIRD, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on Research-based Educator Systems Support (RESS).

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:00:12 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the joint meeting of the Senate and House Education Standing Committees to order at 8:00 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Coghill, Begich, and Chair Stevens and Representatives Talerico, Johnston, Zulkosky, Parish, and Chair Drummond. Senator Giessel and Representatives Kopp and Spohnholz arrived shortly thereafter.

**PRESENTATION: EDUCATOR WORKFORCE PILOT STUDY BY THE COALITION
FOR EDUCATION EQUITY OF ALASKA**

[8:00:42 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the presentation called "Educator Workforce Pilot Study" by the Coalition for Education Equity of Alaska.

[8:01:56 AM](#)

BARBARA ADAMS, Ph.D., Education Consultant, Adams Analytic Solutions, presented Educator Workforce Pilot Study.

JERRY COVEY, Education Consultant, JSC Consulting, presented Educator Workforce Pilot Study.

[8:02:39 AM](#)

SARAH SLEDGE, Executive Director, Coalition for Education Equity, presented the Educator Workforce Pilot Study. She said the Coalition for Education Equity is a statewide organization representing Alaska's school districts, organizations, and individuals to champion an equitable and adequate public education for every Alaskan child. The coalition successfully settled the Kasayulie lawsuit in 2011 and the Moore lawsuit in 2012. The coalition continues its advocacy work and uses research, policy development, and partnership to advance solutions in schools and school districts that will lead to better outcomes for Alaska's children. Legislators have heard testimony about the problems of recruitment and retention of educators, especially for rural Alaska. A recent study put the cost of turnover at just over \$20,000 per teacher. Unfilled positions put a strain on the system, and student outcomes are better when teachers stay.

[8:04:09 AM](#)

MS. SLEDGE said students benefit when teachers establish a stable bond with them, their families, and communities. Building trust, establishing connections, connecting with community, instilling cultural relevance in the curriculum, and engaging family support are all hallmarks of successful teaching

practices. This is difficult to achieve when the turnover is high. Many studies have provided insight about why teachers leave.

[8:04:43 AM](#)

MS. SLLEDGE said many teachers who leave voluntarily indicate some type of dissatisfaction as reason for leaving. Teachers who are less prepared are two to three times more likely to leave. Teachers in areas of high poverty or high minority schools leave at higher rates. Teachers who report an unsupportive administration are twice as likely to leave as those who feel well supported. In Alaska, teacher turnover is greater in rural areas, averaging around 20 percent but up to 52 percent in some schools. Some reasons for leaving are unique to Alaska: not being connected to the community, housing conditions, remoteness and weather, cultural differences, and place of preparation (in state or out).

[8:05:37 AM](#)

MS. SLEDGE said that in 2014, the coalition commissioned Dr. Barbara Adams and Jerry Covey to conduct the Educator Quality and Quantity (EQQ) study, focused on recruitment and retention of Alaska's educator workforce. The study resulted in a model and recommendations for change that addressed the many aspects of the problem in a systemic way. The committee has copies of that report. As a continuation of that work, the coalition is working again with Dr. Adams and Mr. Covey to conduct a pilot study to research educator workforce quality, satisfaction, and retention while providing direct supports to the participating districts. Research-based Educator Systems Support (RESS) is working with five school districts throughout the current school year.

[8:06:43 AM](#)

MR. COVEY noted that RESS is funded through coalition money left over from the legal settlement of the Moore case. They are doing third party, confidential, research-based exploration of teacher turnover in Alaska. They developed a survey working with the five school districts. They conduct the survey and the data remains confidential. The school districts never have information to identify responders. The survey consists of 35 multiple-choice and five narrative questions in five different sections. They share the raw data with survey takers and then they do a narrative report for superintendents that responds to the themes and trends in answers--what's strong, what's weak--and a narrative synopsis.

[8:08:42 AM](#)

MR. COVEY said the 2015 Educator Quality and Quantity (EQQ) report set the stage for Research-based Educator Systems Support (RESS). RESS fulfills the EQQ model of Systemic Approach, Cultural Relevance, and Measurable Outcomes. They are doing systemic work to understand what is happening across the public education system. Cultural relevance is a foundational part of this work, and, of course, they want measurable outcomes.

[8:09:35 AM](#)

MR. COVEY noted the expected outcomes of the RESS pilot study:

- improved communication
- actionable feedback
- workforce satisfaction
- community connection
- positive outcomes that improve teacher retention
- improved student achievement (long-term)

MR. COVEY said they asked for volunteers and selected five districts--Alaska Gateway, Kashunamiut, Nome, Northwest Arctic, and Yupiit--to represent different sizes and geographical areas.

[8:11:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON said the survey response rate looks healthy. She asked whether that was the district average and whether individual schools could have had different rates.

[8:11:47 AM](#)

MR. COVEY said that is the district response rate. He added that Barbara is the research expert and she says anything over 40 percent is good. Their response rate is far above that.

[8:12:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked if the response rate for individual schools tend to change much from survey to survey.

[8:12:30 AM](#)

MR. COVEY said the survey is always open to people who did not previously complete a survey. In some districts, the response rates have grown for later surveys.

[8:12:52 AM](#)

MR. COVEY said they do four surveys throughout the year. Previous research has been done at different times. Their survey tracks the same teachers throughout the same school year and

gets their responses continually. They provide a data analysis of the surveys within one week.

[8:13:59 AM](#)

MR. COVEY said each survey has 36 questions - 31 multiple-choice questions divided into five groups:

- Work Environment/Leadership
- Community
- Efficacy
- Quality of Life
- Strengthening the Workforce

MR. COVEY said the response options are the same for each survey.

- 6 - Absolutely
- 5 - Mostly
- 4 - More than not
- 3 - Maybe
- 2 - A little bit
- 1 - Not at all
- 0 - Not Applicable

MR. COVEY said a narrative question is at the end of each section, and they do get a high number of narrative responses.

[8:14:45 AM](#)

DR. Adams shared the overall distributions between survey one and survey two. She pointed out that the mean is the average. The mean is 4.38 for the first survey and 4.23 for the second. The standard deviation is a measure of spread. If the standard deviation is less than 1, it is a tight-knit group, people are more aligned in their thinking. If the standard deviation is greater than 1, the thinking is more diverse. [The standard deviation is 0.88 for the first survey and 0.86 for the second.]

[8:15:39 AM](#)

DR. ADAMS presented a summary of scales for all five districts averaged together. Leadership had one of the highest values for the first survey, close to 5.0, which is the "mostly" response. One of lowest value of the beginning of the year was Quality of Life at 4.2, which is still positive. Strengthening the Workforce mean was close to 4.0.

[8:17:11 AM](#)

DR. ADAMS showed how questions grew throughout the year. For example, question 23 the beginning of the year is, "Someone has recognized and valued me for what I can contribute to the school." In November, it is, "I am routinely recognized and praised for doing good work." In March, it is, "Recognition and support by colleagues has contributed to my professional growth." The questions have consistency, but development, throughout the year.

[8:17:54 AM](#)

DR. ADAMS shared a candlestick graph on slide 12. It shows the mean (the average) and the median (the middle). All the boxes are green, which means the median is higher than the mean. She noted the three scales on this slide are called internal scales, because they are things the districts and teachers have more control over.

[8:18:45 AM](#)

DR. ADAMS said the scales on slide 13 are external scales-- Community, Quality of Life, Strengthening the Work Force. They will add to these graphs as surveys three and four are completed.

[8:19:09 AM](#)

MR. COVEY showed data for Nome schools for three surveys. He said the graphs show where the surveys are trending and give a lot of information about the mean.

[8:19:50 AM](#)

SHAWN ARNOLD, Superintendent, Nome Public Schools, testified on Research-based Educator Systems Support (RESS). He said in rural Alaska, Nome comparatively has more things to offer, but struggles with attracting effective educators. Over the last few years, Nome has seen more educators leaving and fewer applicants. They wanted to see if it had something to do with salary and benefits, limitations with housing, etc. RESS is a tool to pinpoint areas to help validate the supports they have put a lot of effort into. It also helped them recognize areas of improvement--the support teachers feel in classrooms, time for collaboration, professional development resources, and connection with community.

[8:22:32 AM](#)

MR. ARNOLD said their teachers felt that salary and benefits were adequate and not an area of concern. The teachers wanted an increase in collaboration time. They didn't know this before the survey and were surprised by the outcome. They are tailoring

initiatives for the future, hoping that if they support teachers they will stay longer. The survey has been valuable. It will help them support teachers more effectively and attract others because of the levels of support they can provide.

8:23:44 AM

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked how the school district can increase collaboration time.

8:24:16 AM

MR. ARNOLD said the first thing they did was look at the quality of leadership. Nome has had a lot of turnover in school and district leadership. He was the fifth superintendent in six years. Nome was also going through a different principal every year. They made an effort to stabilize leadership, so teachers had consistent expectations from year to year. Having a clear picture of how a school is run from year to year makes a difference. A new principal may not know how to use 20 or 30 minutes at the end of the day for meetings. They have provided peer mentor support and used the Alaska state mentorship project. It is coming up with innovative and creative solutions to prioritize collaboration, including providing subs to allow teachers to work one-on-one with peers and stipends for weekends, if necessary.

8:26:57 AM

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked how the seasonal aspect of the surveys might affect responses.

8:27:25 AM

MR. ARNOLD said a surprise was that responses were still very positive, even though the survey occurred during the winter doldrums of January and February, a cold, dark period in the middle of the school year.

8:28:43 AM

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH said he noticed that the scores for the third round of surveys were lower than for previous surveys. He asked if he had any predictions for the April survey.

8:30:00 AM

MR. ARNOLD said Dr. Adams can better answer the question about adjusting the question depending on when it is asked. He anticipates many departures from the district this coming year. That might affect the response rate. In February they may have been uncertain about the future. They now know if they have contracts. Eighteen of 54 teachers are leaving. About ten

teachers who are not retiring are leaving the state. They anticipate a lower response rate. He expects response rates will probably be higher at the beginning of year.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Dr. Adams if she cared to respond.

[8:31:38 AM](#)

DR. ADAMS said this is about trying to see strengths and opportunities for growth. Anything going down is not necessarily bad. This is not an assessment. This is about measuring people's satisfaction. This gives superintendents insight they may not have had before. They wanted to gather information during the February doldrums stage to see what is most important to teachers, what are they struggling with most, and what are they most happy with.

[8:33:05 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked Mr. Arnold how he encourages community interaction with his faculty.

[8:33:31 AM](#)

MR. ARNOLD said they put a lot of focus on that. Cultures vary a lot in rural Alaska. Nome is a bit of a crossroads for Inupiaq and Yupiit cultures and also has a mining past. They try to integrate staff into local culture. For the past six years they have partnered with Bering Strait School District for a cultural camp for new staff. The state does a good job of requiring multicultural studies and Alaska history, but those courses do not prepare them for the local identity. They tailor and create hands-on involvement. Their teachers learn to seine on rivers, clean fish, and put up racks. This helps them to interact with their students better. They encourage teachers to participate in local activities and festivals. The newer staff report that they feel connected to and supported by the community.

[8:36:06 AM](#)

DR. ADAMS showed how data is reported for each question.

[8:37:20 AM](#)

ANNMARIE O'BRIEN, Ph.D., Superintendent, Northwest Arctic Borough School District, testified on Research-based Educator Systems Support (RESS). She said the Northwest Arctic Borough School District has 2,136 students in 12 schools in their 11 villages. None of their sites are accessible by road. She has worked for the Northwest Arctic School District 18 years. She was assistant superintendent for eight years, and this is her fourth year as superintendent. Her message is an affirmation of

RESS. Recruitment and retention of qualified teachers in rural Alaska is a challenge and against the backdrop of a national shortage, increasingly problematic. for the health and well-being of rural schools. With a certified staff of 187, they are already seeking to fill 40 positions for the 2018-2019 school year. Last year, for the first time in her tenure, they started the school year with five unfilled positions. They were very interested in being part of the RESS pilot. The opportunity to challenge or confirm assumptions regarding why people stay or leave provided the opportunity to collect relevant data in support of goals in the district's strategic plan.

[8:39:24 AM](#)

DR. O'BRIEN said these goals include being the employer of choice, with customer service as a focus, accessing real time information to assist with recruitment and retention of teachers, increasing communication with all stakeholders and supporting attention to data-driven decision making. Dr. Adams and Mr. Covey met with the district leadership team to cooperatively develop questions they believed would provide them with useful information. That is, facts on how teachers are experiencing their work and living environments in remote communities. The end goal was to address areas where they can offer support. The results were presented to school board and schools. At first, they were concerned these discussions would be intimidating, but the opposite occurred. The staff appreciated the feedback and the opportunity to discuss their experiences. The district team is using the information to inform recruitment and retention, professional development, school climate and safety, workplace satisfaction, and community connection.

[8:41:25 AM](#)

DR. O'BRIEN said 32 Northwest Artic students are enrolled in an online Introduction to Education class and 12 students in four of their schools are enrolled in internships. These dual-credit classes for juniors and seniors support their efforts to grow their own teachers. They continue to support these homegrown educators and they firmly believe that the RESS information from current staff will better serve to increase retention and reach the goal of being the employer of choice. They want to reduce their teacher turnover rate of 20 to 40 percent and are confident that RESS will assist with these efforts by providing accurate and timely information.

[8:42:36 AM](#)

DR O'BRIEN said the University of Alaska School of Education can use RESS information with teacher preparation. RESS information can ultimately help to improve academic success for all students.

8:43:29 AM

CHAIR STEVENS asked whether the retiree rehire bill the committee is considering [SB 185] would be of any help to her district.

8:43:56 AM

DR. OBRIEN said she has testified in support of the retiree rehire bill. It is a stopgap measure, and she does hope that it passes. Alaska retirees understand the culture and students and their ways of managing such things as curriculum and student discipline. It would be very helpful to them.

8:45:17 AM

SCOTT MACMANUS, Superintendent, Alaska Gateway School District, testified on Research-based Educator Systems Support (RESS). He said Alaska Gateway is a small Interior school district with 40 certified staff in seven communities in a district the size of West Virginia. They have a relatively low turnover rate; some attribute it to being on the road system.

MR. MACMANUS said the year he became superintendent they had a turnover of 20 staff, which is 50 percent. Last year they only needed to replace six teachers. It is about the same this year. They offered contracts January 8, the earliest date legally possible. He grew up in Ambler, which is part of the Northwest Arctic School District. The solution to getting quality schools is both difficult and extremely simple: hire and keep quality teachers and administrators. Alaska Teacher Placement is the primary clearing house for finding certified staff, but they are fighting an uphill battle with a diminished capacity. ATP has less than one full-time equivalent position. He went to two jobs fairs last year. He offered two contracts at one, but those teachers got snapped up by more urban school districts. He offered none at a Portland job fair. Good teachers are difficult to attract when they have no personal ties to Alaska. They can make the same money down south where the money goes 30 percent further and have a better retirement plan. Alaska is not an easy sell, and so they work very hard on recruitment and retention.

8:48:38 AM

MR. MACMANUS said RESS has been important to determine the approach to take with teachers. All new teachers have two days

of orientation. Part of that is about Athabascan cultural orientation. They have written a three-credit course that all teachers take their first semester. Information from tools like RESS are critical in designing those programs.

[8:50:21 AM](#)

MR. MACMANUS said teachers want to make a difference. They do not stay for money, but a competitive package doesn't hurt when you are trying to attract them. Once you have them, it is all about how districts support them. Two communities that are difficult to staff hosted welcome back dinners last year. That made a difference. Both of those communities have a 100 percent retention so far this year. RESS is important as both a marketing tool and a retention tool.

[8:51:56 AM](#)

MR. COVEY said they do see different trends and patterns in different districts. Some things are trending across the system. Teachers generally feel welcome and connected to their communities. Clarity is starting to emerge in terms of their response rates. Although the deviations are still relatively large in some districts, people are more like-minded in their answers. Incorporating culture into the classroom is a high priority for every school district, yet it is the thing school districts struggle with the most. Issues such as access to materials and opportunities to develop lessons that reflect the culture factor into that significantly.

[8:53:50 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES joined the meeting.

[8:53:56 AM](#)

DR. ADAMS said one trend is resiliency across quality of life. Even if people think this is not exactly how they want to life to be, they are feeling comfortable in it and know how to live in the lifestyle of wherever they live.

[8:54:22 AM](#)

MS. SLEDGE said it was important that the question could provide timely feedback to districts in way that was usable to them and offer quality support with the results.

[8:56:18 AM](#)

MS. SLEDGE said in addition to helping districts, the coalition wants the study to be a rich resource for statewide policy.

[8:56:51 AM](#)

SANNA EFIRD, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), testified on Research-based Educator Systems Support (RESS). She said this is important to the achievement of students. They need well-prepared teachers to be there over extended periods of time. The department looks forward to getting the outcomes, so they can look at policy decisions that may make a difference for districts. This fits in with the Alaska Education Challenge and the recommendations, especially from the Ensure Excellent Educators committee, for creating possible cohorts of teachers, professional learning academies, and ways to help new-to-Alaska teachers. The largest number of teachers are coming from out of state. This information may help with retaining teachers.

[8:58:35 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said that he was involved in the Moore lawsuit and one difficulty was quantifying these things. He said he wanted to note for the record that he is married to the head of the Coalition for Education Equity. In the final decision by the court, it was unclear what is meant by teacher retention. He asked if this has helped the department's approach to the question of teacher retention and being able to quantify it.

[8:59:54 AM](#)

MS. EFIRD said she cannot speak to the definition of teacher retention. This study will help the department to quantify information around retention of teachers. The piece DEED is most excited about it is having trends and themes to look at. The role of the department is to try to be the connector with districts to share information that can be used across all districts. The committee heard from long-time superintendents and what they are doing with this survey. Sharing and applying that information and experience to other districts will be a huge help to other districts.

[9:01:32 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said, "Collaborative work post-lawsuit. What a novel idea."

[9:01:58 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Superintendent MacManus about the welcome back dinner and the three-credit course.

[9:02:50 AM](#)

MR MACMANUS said they tried to create a cohesive introduction to the school district and authentically integrate new teachers into activities so that can get to know people. Building

relationships is critical in a new community. New teachers have a number of opportunities to participate in cultural orientation in Fairbanks or Tok. New teachers have two days of orientation as part of their contracts. The orientation is continued into the course, which is work related to classrooms. A mentor teacher from a different site is assigned to new teachers, and they meet on a regular basis. The class is offered through the university. An example of the way the course works is they give teachers opportunities to learn how to interact with parents during conferences. A rural village can be very foreign to some teachers. By providing a model, they have been effective with teachers knowing what is expected of them and knowing how to interact with others from different cultures.

[9:06:40 AM](#)

MR. MACMANUS said there is an increasing amount of interest in culture in schools and compacts. Communities are taking an increased interest in schools and they see that playing out in teacher retention.

[9:07:03 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked how is he sharing this information with other districts.

MR. MACMANUS said to be honest, they are too busy doing it. They are very busy with a small administrative staff. He does not know that they are special in their onboarding, although they may be more intensive than some districts. He cited the Lower Kuskokwim School District's extensive cultural orientation for teachers. The superintendent group is very cooperative. They share quite a bit by phone and have meetings, but they are very busy.

[9:09:27 AM](#)

MR. COVEY said four of the five districts want to continue with the survey next year. One is on the fence. They have learned that the application all happens at the building level. In the future they will put more effort into connecting with principals at the beginning of the year. They are turning the study into a project. It is about team optimizing. The way to go forward is together. It is not the hierarchy. It is collaboration using honest, accurate feedback and translating that into ways to improve education for students.

[9:11:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked what support is provided with this process to give superintendents resources for policy.

9:12:02 AM

MR. COVEY said in the pilot project goals did not include that, but they began to realize the opportunity and necessity to provide specifics. Initially they pointed out strengths and weaknesses in five categories. Now they are talking about how they might engage with people in a way that produces specific outcomes. They will transition into that to a much larger degree in the next cycle.

9:13:08 AM

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked if the intention is to continue the work with other districts.

MR. COVEY said they are making it available to all districts through the coalition. They have developed a fee structure according to district size and hope it will be attractive and viable for all districts that wish to participate.

9:13:50 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Drummond adjourned the joint meeting of the Senate Education Standing Committee and House Education Standing Committee at 9:13.