

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 26, 2020

8:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair
Representative Grier Hopkins
Representative Chris Tuck
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky
Representative DeLena Johnson

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 236

"An Act relating to education; increasing the base student allocation; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 236

SHORT TITLE: INCREASE BASE STUDENT ALLOCATION

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) STORY

02/05/20	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/05/20	(H)	EDC, FIN
02/26/20	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

MARY HAKALA, Staff
Representative Andi Story
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HB 236 on behalf of prime sponsor.

HEIDI TESHNER, Director

Finance and Support Services Division
Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the presentation of HB 236.

NORM WOOTEN, Executive Director
Association of Alaska School Boards
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

LISA S. PARADY, Ph.D., Executive Director
Alaska Council of School Administrators
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

TIM PARKER, President
NEA-Alaska
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

KAREN GABORIK, EdD
Superintendent
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

ANGELA HAYDEN, Teacher
Jack Egnaty Sr. School
Sleetmute, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

NEAL SANFORD, Student
Jack Egnaty Sr. School
Sleetmute, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

DESIRAE MORGAN, Student
Jack Egnaty Sr. School
Sleetmute, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

KYLIE HAYDEN, Student
Jack Egnaty Sr. School
Sleetmute, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

NATHAN FREEMAN, Educator
Joann A Alexie Memorial School
Atmautluak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

REBECCA SOZA, STEM Program Manager
Juneau Economic Development Council
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

KEENAN MILLER, Associated Student Body President
Thunder Mountain High School Student Government
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

KELLY LESSENS, Co-Founder
ASD60

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

KERRY BROWN
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

PETER HOEPFNER, Board Member
Cordova School District
Cordova, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

WINTER MARSHALL-ALLEN, Teacher
Homer High School
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

CLAIRE SMITH
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

MELODY DOUGLAS, Associate Executive Director
Alaska Association of School Business Officials
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

BESSIE WESTON, Board Member
Lower Kuskokwim School District
Mekoryuk, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

DAVID BRIGHTON, President
Kenai Peninsula Education Association
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

NATASHA GAMACHE
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

BRIDGETT WEISS, PhD, Superintendent
Juneau School District
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 236.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Representatives Zulkosky, Hopkins, Johnson, Tuck, Story, and Drummond were present at the call to order. [One seat was vacant as of 1/25/2020.]

HB 236-INCREASE BASE STUDENT ALLOCATION

[8:05:42 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 236 "An Act relating to education; increasing the base student allocation; and providing for an effective date."

[8:06:14 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY, as prime sponsor, presented HB 236. She explained that the bill would increase the Base Student Allocation (BSA), which is a key element in determining funding levels for schools in Alaska. She noted that the bill includes funding for two years, the first is an increase of \$115 in FY 21, and the second is an increase of \$110 in FY 22. She explained that the latter is calculated at 2.25 percent for inflation. She indicated that this bill recognizes the increase in costs for schools that includes healthcare, fuel oil, school supplies, utilities, and equipment. She suggested that without the increase in the proposed legislation, schools will be

subject to \$30 million reduction in funding. She predicted that such a cut would result in loss of teachers, counselors, health aides, gifted and talented programs, Career and Technical Education (CTE) or other essential programs. She asserted that Alaska schools are facing an educational crisis comprised of non-competitive teacher salaries and retirement benefits, budget cuts, a need for reading improvements, and the need to address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) among students. She suggested that strong economies in the Lower 48, when compared with Alaska's financial difficulties, have enabled other states to invest in education, while Alaska is restrained from doing so. She suggested that passage of this bill would result in an increase in certainty in school funding, which would allow stakeholders to focus on teaching and learning. She suggested that certainty in funding allows for efficiency and increase in return on investment in education. She claimed that, once adjusted for inflation, the current spend is on par with education spend in 1988. She suggested that U.S. Census data suggests that Alaska spends disproportionately more on education; however, when adjusted for cost of living and taking into consideration other unique attributes, Alaska is in the median for education spending, on a per-student basis. She noted areas of importance in education in Alaska include progress in reading, reasonable class sizes, hands-on learning materials, relevant CTE coursework, and a culture of learning and should not include a steady undercutting of capacity and resources. She postulated that building a high-quality education system is a wise investment in the state's people and its future. She encouraged all stakeholders to contribute to the discussion around this legislation.

[8:11:03 AM](#)

MARY HAKALA, Staff, Representative Andi Story, Alaska State Legislature, presented HB 236 on behalf of the prime sponsor. She outlined the contents of the committee packet including the sponsor statement, the bill itself, and sectional analysis which explains statutory changes proposed by HB 236.

MS. HAKALA drew attention to packet insert that depicts historical BSA and funding outside of the formula, the latter provided by the Department of Education & Early Development (DEED). She noted that the last line on the "Foundation Funding" chart has a typographical error and should read \$28,581.7 - not \$29,581.7. She stated that the data suggests over the last 19 years, every year except for 2018 received an increase in the BSA, or a one-time funding, or both in response

to increased costs. She suggested that given the frequency of one-time funding, it may be misleading to view it as such.

[8:13:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked what the total increase amount would be.

[8:14:08 AM](#)

MS. HAKALA explained that the \$30 million amount is an estimate based on projections for FY 21, and in FY 22 an increment increase is projected to total \$28,581,700, with the increment "rolled in" to the BSA, it would bring the total to \$58,462,600 because the bill consists of two steps, FY 21 and FY 22 BSA increases.

[8:15:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked to confirm that the total added cost is approximately \$60 million.

MS. HAKALA confirmed that in the second year, the increase would be approximately \$58 million [higher] than FY 20.

[8:15:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY characterized the inflation adjusted rate of funding at 1988 level as "sobering". She asked if any consideration has been given to implementing inflation-proofing so that BSA is not relegated to "a political football" each year.

[8:16:47 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY indicated that this bill adjusts the BSA to inflation proof the two years named in the bill, and although districts have indicated that they desire inflation proofing for the long term, this bill does not address that. She suggested that a Foundation Formula study be undertaken, and that the two years of [stabilized] funding could provide opportunity to plan and execute such a study to determine more precisely the funding needs of schools.

[8:18:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND reflected upon the two most recent prior fiscal years, with \$20 million and \$30 million respectively appropriated outside of the Foundation Formula and that were subject to governor veto and resulted in litigation to compel distribution of the funds. She asked whether schools are receiving funds timely this year, and whether, if this legislation fails to pass, it will result in a cut of \$30 million outside of the Foundation Formula. She asked whether failure of this legislation would jeopardize \$30 million in future funding.

[8:19:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY referred Co-Chair Drummond to confirm with representatives of DEED on her question of timing of release of funds this year.

[8:19:43 AM](#)

HEIDI TESHNER, Director, Finance and Support Services Division, Department of Education & Early Development, testified that the \$30 million one-time funding for current year was distributed to districts in approximately January 2020.

[8:19:59 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether the funds were distributed in a lump sum or in installments.

MS. TESHNER affirmed that funds were distributed in a lump sum.

[8:20:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked what the schedule is for BSA distribution for districts.

MS. TESHNER explained that the statutory requirement is that funds be received by districts by the fifteenth of the month, and DEED processes payments so that they disburse on or before the fifteenth of each month.

[8:20:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked whether the monthly installment schedule was based on a nine, or a twelve, month cycle.

MS. TESHNER affirmed a twelve-month cycle.

[8:20:57 AM](#)

MS. HAKALA referred to fiscal note HB236-EED-FP-2-20-20, which informs that the funds are appropriated to the Public Education Fund, from which Foundation Formula payments are made. She drew attention to the packet insert chart developed by Legislative Finance Division comparing per student inflation adjusted funding from FY 88 to present, showing no increase in inflation adjusted per student funding. She referred to packet insert produced by DEED which depicts BSA from FY 20, FY 21, and FY 22 itemized by district and assuming passage of the bill. She drew attention to committee packet insert from The University of Alaska, Anchorage Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), which summarizes spending amounts in Alaska's public education. She cited Figure 3 and suggested that the comparison of per-pupil education spending to other states using only indices adjustments made for Anchorage does not accurately reflect the disparity in spending. She suggested that when rural metrics such as school size, remote locations, and efficiencies of scale are taken into consideration, the comparison would be depicted differently, and that 13 percent of schools in Alaska are small, or less than 25 students. She explained that health care costs are one of the larger areas of expenditure that drive up costs.

[8:25:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON commented that she supports educators as the representative for the fastest growing area of Alaska. She expressed concern as to whether Alaska can afford increasing the BSA. She suggested that pooling employee healthcare could provide cost savings through economies of scale.

[8:25:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND indicated that House Health and Social Services Standing Committee is having discussions regarding the costs of healthcare. She noted that she has been contacted by individuals requesting an area cost differential study, as it is believed that Anchorage costs are actually higher than indicated. She asked the bill sponsor when the Foundation Formula was last evaluated at the request of the legislature.

MS. HAKALA referenced a study conducted by Augenblick, Pakaich and Associates in 2015 as the most recent comprehensive

analysis, she suggested that the most recent data available for geographic cost differential may be available through ISER.

[8:27:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY commented that higher costs are a reality in Alaska, and that higher costs and cuts both will have impact on classrooms, and those impacts are being felt in both rural and urban Alaska.

[8:28:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND indicated that teacher turnover is costly and the estimated cost for a single teacher turnover is estimated to be approximately \$20,000. She expressed her hope that the committee proceedings will continue to address the issue of the costs and negative impacts of teacher turnover, recruitment and retention.

[8:29:46 AM](#)

NORM WOOTEN, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards, testified in support of HB 236. He referred to existing data available for the committee's consideration. He compared and contrasted a school district budget in Alaska to an individual's household budget, and noted that cost categories fuel oil, transportation, airfares, janitorial supplies, paper products, Internet, utilities, salaries, facility maintenance, contractual services, curricular materials, food supplies, healthcare, and technology upgrades are increasing in cost year after year. He described funds received by districts outside of the BSA as unpredictable and restricted in what districts may plan for their use. He contrasted funds received through the BSA as predictable and sustainable for districts to plan and execute budgets efficiently. He suggested that investment in education is investment in Alaska's future.

[8:32:59 AM](#)

LISA S. PARADY, Ph.D., Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators, shared a PowerPoint presentation with the committee entitled "HB 236 ACSA Presentation," included in the committee packet. She explained that the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) supports Alaska Superintendents Association, Elementary and Secondary School Principals, Alaska Association of School Business Officials, and all school administrators that serve in Alaska, in partnership with

Association of Alaska School Boards and National Education Association Alaska. She shared a slide that depicted school districts in Alaska and urged solidarity when contemplating decisions that affect children in Alaska. She presented a slide with results of a public opinion poll commissioned by ACSA which depicts public support for funding public education in Alaska. She referred to the packet item entitled "2020 Joint Position Statements" that identify ACSA priorities, of which, increased funding for education is the highest. She encouraged timely and predictable funding through the BSA.

[8:36:34 AM](#)

DR. PARADY referred to the ACSA position statement of timely, reliable, and predictable revenue for schools as a cornerstone of ACSA's work with the legislature to establish forward funding of education. She remarked that teacher turnover rate and costs that have been discussed have a tremendous impact on the sites involved, and that Alaska started this school year "down by 200" teachers. She suggested that principal turnover can cost as much as \$75,000.

[8:38:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked what the total number of teachers was after the shortage was taken into consideration.

DR. PARADY will provide to the committee a verified total.

[8:39:19 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked if progress has been made in filling those 200 positions this school year.

DR. PARADY answered by explaining that districts are in a year-round recruitment cycle. She described the changing experience at job fairs wherein the recruiters outnumber the potential recruits. She offered an estimate on survey data that indicated in the Lower 48, upon which Alaska relies for teacher workforce, the number of teachers leaving the workforce in the mid-2010s citing "poor working conditions" was estimated to be 500,000, whereas teachers joining the workforce were estimated to be only 200,000. She suggested that the national teacher shortage is exacerbated in Alaska due to the challenges of recruiting for rural teachers.

[8:41:10 AM](#)

DR. PARADY explained that the rural remote areas definition which the federal government uses for studies on education was required to be modified to take into consideration the unique attributes of many Alaska communities. She indicated that half of superintendents in Alaska have less than two years of experience. She indicated that research on teacher, student, and superintendent turnover reveals a link to lower student achievement. She explained that working conditions for teachers have become more demanding, due to social emotional learning, student trauma, and ACEs among even very young students.

[8:43:34 AM](#)

DR. PARADY stated her belief that the proposed bill would improve financial certainties that would positively impact teacher recruitment and retention, and would provide for more predictable funding, which would result in more stability for each district. She described that, should the proposed bill fail, and funding conditions remain unchanged, a "Cycle of Uncertainty" would persist, which ACSA depicts in its presentation as "Groundhog Day."

[8:44:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY referenced the PowerPoint slide entitled "Social, Emotional and Mental Health" statement which read: "ACSA supports funding to enable schools to recruit, retain and increase their access to school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, nurses and mental health specialists." She acknowledged her understanding of increased demands made upon teachers in dealing with trauma among students. She asked whether the passage of HB 236 plus inflation proofing the BSA would be adequate to hire these professionals, or if additional funds would be necessary.

[8:45:21 AM](#)

DR. PARADY indicated that additional funds would be necessary. She indicated that fiscal uncertainty impacts timing of budgets, and that funds appropriated outside of the BSA cannot be adequately taken into consideration for budget planning and development, which applies both to mental health workers as well as teachers in the classroom.

[8:46:11 AM](#)

DR. PARADY explained that the "Groundhog Day" phenomenon is such since the uncertainty arises year after year for school districts in Alaska. She recounted deleterious effects of current conditions and potential effects should the BSA not realize an increase from the PowerPoint slide entitled "Impact on School Districts, which read as follows: [original punctuation included]

No increase to the BSA will lead to:

- Reductions in staff (teachers, reading specialists, paraprofessionals), less competitive salaries for teachers
- Loss of counselor positions and student intervention programs
- Cuts to academic (CTE, foreign languages, course offerings), sports, and lunch programs
- Increased class sizes in some schools
- Postponing replacement of aging textbooks and technology
- Deferment of maintenance projects, focusing only on those which are safety and health issues

DR. PARADY indicated that teachers can, and are, taking jobs elsewhere and unstable funding is a contributing factor.

[8:49:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND recalled that as a member of the Anchorage School District Board of Education, she had participated in \$25 million in cuts prior to 2003, and would like to know what that cost would adjust to with current indices. She related that University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) is cutting its clinical psychology program, and rhetorically asked if UAA is the pipeline for counselors, social workers, and mental health specialists.

[8:50:44 AM](#)

TIM PARKER, President, NEA-Alaska, testified in support of HB 236. He explained that NEA- Alaska [an affiliate of the National Education Association] consists of over 12,000 educators, on whose behalf he serves. He extolled the love and passion among educators and indicated that the fundamental purpose of their profession is student learning. He rhetorically asked the committee if all stakeholders share the caring and passion for student learning that educators in Alaska have expressed. He claimed that the meeting materials that have

been distributed to legislators regarding education in Alaska have great value and depict the challenging conditions of funding.

MR. PARKER suggested that the committee contemplate the purpose of public education and its funding. He suggested that public education is a moral obligation of lawmakers, and that budget documents could be described as moral documents. He noted that in Alaska, there are over 130,000 students in grades kindergarten through twelfth, and the responsibility in educating them to become good citizens is taken very seriously by educators.

[8:54:25 AM](#)

MR. PARKER asked the committee to recall their childhood education experience and noted that 90 percent of American children are educated through public schools. He suggested that the collective have benefitted through public education and proclaimed that prior legislative bodies identified the need and importance of public education enough to codify it into law. He advised the committee to examine the suggestion of moral obligation to continue supporting education of today's youth.

MR. PARKER offered perspectives from the classroom, stating that at the moment of his testimony, some child may learn to read, or learn about civics and the legislative process in school. He indicated that priorities among students and parents are the desire to learn, small class sizes, access to school nurses, and access to the best quality teachers and lessons. He read directly from existing statute, as follows:

Sec. 14.03.015. State education policy.

It is the policy of this state that the purpose of education is to help ensure that all students will 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.

MR. PARKER explained that students now are coming to school with a tremendous amount of emotional baggage, and that schools are serving students better than ever before with training in social emotional learning and trauma informed schools. He described the majority of Alaska students as having at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), defined as neglect, witnessing domestic violence, growing up with substance abuse, mental

illness, or having a parent incarcerated, which teachers are trained to recognize and deal with. He mentioned that Alaska's Educational Challenge prompted a change in the commitments of public educators to center on: increasing student learning, support responsible and reflective learners, and cultivate safety and well-being. He identified the third priority as having contributed to the new paradigm supporting emotionally challenged students for them to thrive. He explained that the development of these priorities was unique in that it had occurred with unprecedented unanimity. He correlated the priorities developed in Alaska's Educational Challenge to a moral obligation.

[9:00:33 AM](#)

MR. PARKER noted that the passage of proposed HB 236 would also further the goals of mental health in education. He made note of some statistics, most of which he posited the committee was already aware: five years with no increase in the BSA, inflationary reality, class size growth at unsustainable levels, and \$30 million reduction if HB 236 should not pass. He concluded that these contributing factors have led to decisions resulting in sacrifices in lieu of improvements in meeting growing needs. He stated his appreciation for the proposed increase to the BSA; however, he requested that the committee consider whether HB 236 is adequate under the current demands being made on education in Alaska. He recommended that inflation proofing should be incorporated into the proposed bill.

[9:03:56 AM](#)

MR. PARKER urged the need for fiscal certainty. He said that this is perceptible in teacher recruitment and retention, explaining that each day that passes during the legislative session in which a budget is not passed, or forward funding is not passed, is equated to another day of job insecurity for teachers. He explained that teachers are seeking employment opportunities from April to June of each year in which to secure employment, and failure to secure employment for the upcoming school year could compel teachers to leave their field. He noted that this negatively affects morale and discourages teachers from remaining in the profession.

[9:05:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked how end of year "pink slips" affect the teachers and staff he encounters.

MR. PARKER answered that there are a variety of thoughts and feelings expressed to him by employees faced with uncertainty. He explained that for the most part there is a desire for teachers to stay in their communities, as they are residents with homes and families and are rooted in Alaska. He stated that newer teachers report that at around five years of service they begin to understand that there is no retirement benefit plan, and they begin to ask questions about their long-term financial stability. He illustrated the point by sharing that the 2017 Teacher of the Year James Harris from Soldotna High School is now teaching at a school outside of Seattle. He emphasized that the recruitment of teachers is highly competitive, and Alaska is failing to compete effectively due to fiscal uncertainty.

[9:08:02 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND opened public testimony on HB 236.

[9:08:32 AM](#)

KAREN GABORIK, EdD, Superintendent, Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, testified in support of HB 236. She spoke in support of the proposed bill inflation proofing the BSA, citing rising costs of goods, services, salaries, and health care. She explained ongoing management decisions within her district resulting in cost savings despite a growing student population.

[9:11:01 AM](#)

DR. GABORIK indicated that reduced funding prohibits Fairbanks North Star Borough School District from investing in professional development in areas such as social emotional learning. She indicated that requests for safety equipment such as cameras are unfulfilled, and the district's intent to transition its discipline model away from punitive discipline towards restorative discipline is not implemented due to lack of resources.

[9:11:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked Dr. Gaborik to explain any implications of the timing of funding between the legislative appropriation of budgets, the Fairbanks North Star Borough

School District Budget deadlines, and the Fairbanks Borough budget deadlines, and how they intersect.

DR. GABORIK indicated that the school district is not informed of available funds timely to teachers trying to make plans for their employment. She explained that each year the budget deadlines are April first for the borough budget submission and early May for the school district budget submission; and legislative appropriation schedule is unpredictable. She explained that it is necessary for the district to develop a plan in mid-April to early May for staffing decisions, resulting in teacher layoffs if revenue comes in lower than its already conservative estimates.

[9:14:42 AM](#)

ANGELA HAYDEN, Teacher, Jack Egnaty Sr. School, testified in support of HB 236. She explained that Jack Egnaty Sr. School in Sleetmute, Alaska consists of 18 students in grades preschool through twelfth, and the community population is 80.

[9:15:08 AM](#)

NEAL SANFORD, Student, Jack Egnaty Sr. School, testified in support of HB 236. He spoke of the importance of school funding to support the population, to guard against homelessness, to provide opportunities later in life, and spoke of the importance of the robotics program.

[9:16:01 AM](#)

DESIRAE MORGAN, Student, Jack Egnaty Sr. School, testified in support of HB 236. She spoke of the importance of school funding to support employment of important community members, and for travel to events like robotics. She noted that she is required to lodge with another family in order to obtain her education.

[9:16:46 AM](#)

KYLIE HAYDEN, Student, Jack Egnaty Sr. School, testified in support of HB 236. She noted that an increase in the BSA is necessary to pay for teachers, FIRST LEGO League, and robotics.

[9:17:11 AM](#)

ANGELA HAYDEN explained that she has been an educator for over 20 years, with 12 years at the village in which she is currently 1 of 2 teachers. She noted three years prior, her school was in danger of closing because it consisted of only 10 students. This prompted a threat of moving one teacher to another school, leaving her to manage all the students for the school. She spoke about a high incidence of ACEs among students and explained that teaching in remote villages is difficult. She stated that her district's budgets are due in April; however, the BSA is not known at that time of the year and teachers who have been hired are at risk of losing their jobs if funding results are inadequate. She noted that relocating in and out of remote villages is difficult and expensive. She explained that small villages have no additional revenue streams and rely heavily on the BSA to create educational opportunities for the future citizens of the communities and have few or no other opportunities for educational growth and development. She explained that should the BSA not increase on pace with the increase of costs and services, cuts must be made, students become displaced, and cultures are eroded.

[9:20:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked the grade levels of each of the students.

MR. SANFORD indicated that he is in the sixth grade.

MISS MORGAN indicated that she is in the eighth grade.

MISS HAYDEN indicated that she is in the sixth grade.

[9:20:35 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether Ms. Hayden teaches a particular grade range.

MS. HAYDEN indicated that she teaches kindergarten through fifth grade and math for middle school level children.

[9:20:54 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked the students to share the robotics project details for which they have traveled to Juneau.

MR. SANFORD explained that it's a solution to the problem of individuals under the influence of alcohol in places where it is prohibited.

[9:21:22 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked how that would be accomplished through their robotics project.

[9:21:33 AM](#)

MISS HAYDEN explained that they conducted research through a blood bank and learned that law enforcement officers use flashlights as breathalyzers, which detect the presence of alcohol. The students proposed to mount these flashlight devices to railings within two feet proximity to access areas in which alcohol use is prohibited. She explained that if alcohol is detected, the doors to the location will automatically lock and a teacher would be notified.

[9:22:22 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether Sleetmute is a dry, damp, or wet location.

[9:22:38 AM](#)

MS. HAYDEN answered that Sleetmute is damp. She noted that school events are often subject to unwelcome intoxicated attendees.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND commiserated that Anchorage School District sanctioned events had also been disrupted by unwelcome intoxicated individuals.

[9:23:48 AM](#)

NATHAN FREEMAN, Educator, Joann A Alexie Memorial School, testified in support of HB 236. He stated that he is testifying on behalf of all students in rural Alaska villages. He spoke about inequities in education which ultimately led to lower graduation rates. He named lack of access to social workers and counselors, teacher turnover, and inadequate access to advanced programs for students who demonstrate greater potential. He advocated for every remote village to employ at least one full time social worker based on existing needs. He stated that itinerant social workers are employed by his district and

expressed his gratitude for their presence; however, he noted that students have difficulty developing trusting relationships with itinerants. He suggested that the legislature in Vermont faced an exigent mandate to address funding deficiencies and enacted a statewide property tax that he suggested provided more equity throughout economically diverse districts in that state.

[9:29:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked Mr. Freeman to explain the impact of BSA that is inadequate for the school's needs on a micro level as compared to the macro level that has been discussed.

MR. FREEMAN answered that suicide is a micro effect of lack of funding. He suggested that, in the aftermath of a suicide in a community, the lack of social workers contributes to a "domino effect" such as occurred in Toksook Bay. He suggested that suicide is not viewed as an educational issue; however, schools are at the social center of such events, and students require social and emotional support in the school environment. He explained that students in rural areas experience a high rate of adverse experiences including domestic violence and exposure to alcohol abuse.

[9:34:23 AM](#)

REBECCA SOZA, STEM Program Manager, Juneau Economic Development Council, testified in support of HB 236. She shared her experience in working in the education profession in various communities in Alaska, including in the FIRST Robotics Program for over ten years. She suggested that many Science, Technology, Math and Engineering (STEM) programs are being reduced or eliminated due to fiscal uncertainty. She suggested that the BSA is the appropriate vehicle by which to increase fiscal certainty, with regards to recruiting and retaining teachers and volunteers. She suggested that the budget cycles are too unpredictable for teachers to make commitments with uncertainty of employment between spring and fall of a particular year, a problem that she suggested is unique to Alaska. She explained that fiscal uncertainty leads to a cycle affecting training and retention, and negative effects are exacerbated because of their cyclic nature. She commended the witnesses from Sleetmute as a worthy example of STEM programs enabling students and citizens to work toward solving their own community problems.

[9:37:09 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether the robotics team would be exhibiting their project while in Juneau.

MS. SOZA answered that the robotics team is the nominee for global innovation for Alaska, and will be presenting at the Innovation Summit today, as well as demonstrating with other groups while in Juneau.

[9:37:38 AM](#)

KEENAN MILLER, Associated Student Body President, Thunder Mountain High School Student Government, testified in support of HB 236, and read aloud from prepared testimony as follows:

Howdy, my name is Keenan Miller, and I am here in support of HB 236 ... which will increase our statewide base student allocation. I am representing myself and the Thunder Mountain High School student government in my official capacity as Associated Student Body President. Currently, I am a senior at Thunder Mountain High School, and I have lived in Juneau for my whole life. For almost 13 years, state funding has given me opportunities and an education that I, along with Alaska's over 130,000 K-12 students, am going to build the rest of my life off of. As Alaska continues to weather budget challenges triggered by 2015's dramatic drop in oil prices and perpetuated to some extent by legislative gridlock, Alaska's students, schools, and teachers are feeling the aftershocks. Last year, school has become a pawn in the budget battle. The uncertainty of that experience, the affront of knowing that the funding for and the quality of my education, of my younger sister's education, is caught up in a petty political tug-of-war is something that I won't forget. Increasing the BSA is critical because it directly translates to certainty. School administrators can know that teacher salaries, building upkeep and maintenance costs, professional development, supplies, and the basic things that quality ... education would inherently suffer without, are guaranteed. In June of 2019, the Alaska Legislature released a \$20 or \$30 million state grant - not sure on the exact number there - to schools. This is money that schools had counted on and might have never appeared to lift them out of the red. That's shameful. Increasing the BSA

directly addresses instability and uncertainty and will only help schools use the money that they do receive, as people have brought up, more thoughtfully and effectively. It is also worth noting again that the Alaska BSA hasn't been budged in three years. For schools, flat funding means that essentially, each year, the purchasing power of the money that they do receive is decreased as a result of inflation. Though the best long-term solution for this problem is to tie the BSA directly to inflation rates, increasing the BSA now is an essential short-term solution to this unrelenting problem. So please, champion the increase in Alaska's BSA. Feel proud to do so. One hundred thirty-two thousand, five hundred and seventy-six Alaska students are counting on you. Thank you for your time and have a great day.

[9:40:39 AM](#)

KELLY LESSENS, Co-Founder, ASD60, testified in support of HB 236. She explained that the organization which she co-founded, ASD60, advocates for children to increase physical activity during the school day. She ventured that a host of problems are a result of flat funding of the BSA for several years. She recounted her experience as a parent of children enrolled in Trailside Elementary School, which has four teachers for 123 enrolled fifth and sixth graders, and class sizes are at or above 30 students; the third grade has a class size of 27, or nearly double the recommended size for kindergarten through third grade. She suggested that health education is being reduced, student contact with teachers is reduced, gifted and talented programs are jeopardized, and these are symptoms of reduced or unstable funding. She noted that individual sites may conduct fundraising through organizations such as Parent/Teacher Associations; however, such efforts do not provide for equity among all students. She suggested that increase in BSA would aid in advancing the constitutional obligation to provide an adequate education for every student in Alaska. She recommended that the committee pass HB 236, establish forward funding for education in Alaska, embrace an education "head tax," agree to tax the oil industry, inflation proof the BSA, and reevaluate the Foundation Formula.

[9:43:22 AM](#)

KERRY BROWN testified in support of HB 236. She categorized herself as both a graduate of the public-school system and a

parent of students in Alaska. She offered that class sizes are larger now than before the development of the Alaska Pipeline [and its resulting revenue]. She recommended that revenues should be increased from the oil industry and existing and future revenues be redirected to education. She suggested inflation proofing the BSA so that responsible planning for education may occur.

[9:45:25 AM](#)

PETER HOEPFNER, Board Member, Cordova School District, testified in support of HB 236. He suggested that increasing the BSA is "but a start" to address funding issues in education in Alaska, and that should health insurance costs increase by 8 percent within the next year, the BSA increase would be fully exhausted. He recounted that the loss of ferry service to Cordova has resulted in increased costs of \$150,000 that were unanticipated, as the district had planned, and budgeted, assuming ferry service would remain. He stated that the consumer price index increases have resulted in funding levels on par with 1988. He expressed concern with other proposed legislation that may redirect education funding. He spoke in strong support of increasing education funding.

[9:47:49 AM](#)

WINTER MARSHALL-ALLEN, Teacher, Homer High School, testified in support of HB 236. She suggested that unstable funding had led to a near strike of teachers and had precipitated loss of teachers to the district. She recommended that districts be subject to audit to ensure that cuts to funding are equitably distributed. She suggested that inadequate funds are collected for use in public education from the oil industry, and that additional revenue streams should be examined, including potential taxation of nonresidents. She testified that she has previously experienced layoff and stated her hope to avoid layoff in the future.

[9:50:09 AM](#)

CLAIRE SMITH testified in support of HB 236. She expressed her belief that her local school district has room for improvement on planning and budgeting, and that cuts to education diminish programs that enable students to grow and learn. She encouraged increase in the BSA which could allow gifted and talented program, IGNITE, to continue in her district, as well as funding a nurse position in a district which experiences a high

incidence of poor mental health, and could aid in the reduction of class sizes. She urged support of HB 236 and future stabilization of funding.

[9:52:24 AM](#)

MELODY DOUGLAS, Associate Executive Director, Alaska Association of School Business Officials, testified in support of HB 236. She suggested that school districts should obtain stable funding in order to plan efficiently and effectively. She stated that funding outside of the BSA is not stable funding as it is not assured and does not permit districts to commit to teachers nor long term planning for programs, staffing, and other costs.

[9:54:12 AM](#)

BESSIE WESTON, Board Member, Lower Kuskokwim School District, testified in support of HB 236. She testified representing the communities of Mekoryuk, Kipnuk, Kwillingok, and Chefornak. She met with students at Nuniwamiut School, who provided structured feedback for Ms. Weston to bring before the committee stating their top three program priorities: Native language, basketball, and Native Youth Olympics. She emphasized the importance of CTE in the district. She indicated that students are being asked to perform without adequate resources. She explained that, should the proposed legislation not pass, the \$1 - \$2 million budget shortfall will impact 28 schools among 23 communities. She echoed previous testimony on the importance of teacher retention and recruitment. She described the district's Native language program as the only one in the world that teaches its dialect.

[9:56:47 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND requested that Ms. Weston provide written testimony and provide details of the unique dialect being taught in their district.

[9:57:11 AM](#)

DAVID BRIGHTON, President, Kenai Peninsula Education Association, testified in support of HB 236. He echoed previous testimony regarding the many years that the BSA has remained flat. He noted that two, one-year, one-time funds injections over the current and prior fiscal years have led the district to a "fiscal cliff." He stated that nearly half of the district's

budget reserve is spent. He expressed his concern that lack of funds will result in teacher layoffs and program cuts.

[9:59:36 AM](#)

NATASHA GAMACHE testified in support of HB 236. She recalled an earlier question regarding micro effects of budget cuts, and indicated that students' needs are not being met, specifically special needs students who need occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech language pathologists, and special education staff. She noted that general education needs include that of school counselors. She claimed that students in Alaska suffer from the highest rates of child sexual abuse, child abuse, child neglect, and nearly the highest child removal rate. She claimed that the need for additional funding is exacerbated due to budget cuts in mental health care as well as Medicaid. She urged that anti-bullying programs are essential to the safety of her own children and shared her personal experience with the suffering of her autistic child.

[10:03:21 AM](#)

BRIDGETT WEISS, PhD, Superintendent, Juneau School District, testified in support of HB 236. She compared school budget planning from previous conditions selecting the best programs to include, to now selecting which programs to eliminate. She stated that current funding levels are not adequate to sustain the district's strategic plan. She shared a list depicting the cuts to essential programs. She expressed her dismay at feeling unable to meet the needs of students in her district. She asserted her belief that continued lack of funding increases will imperil the entire educational system.

[10:07:28 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND sought to ascertain the total number of budget cuts that had been sustained in her district.

DR. WEISS stated the cuts are estimated to be \$35 million adjusted dollars from approximately 2008.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND stated her understanding that Anchorage School District sustained \$19 million.

DR. WEISS added that Juneau School District is planning to sustain \$1.2 million in cuts currently.

10:08:17 AM

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND stated that she would leave public testimony open and announced that HB 236 would be held over.

10:08:25 AM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:08 a.m.