

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 4, 2020

8:02 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair  
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair  
Representative Grier Hopkins  
Representative Chris Tuck  
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky  
Representative Mike Prax

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative DeLena Johnson

**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
02/26/20	(H)	Heard & Held
02/26/20	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/04/20	(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  
Representative Story, prime sponsor.

DEENA BISHOP, Ed.D. Superintendent  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

MEILA NEELEY, Student  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

KRISTIN RUTLEDGE  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

KAY ANDREWS, President  
Southwest Region School District School Board  
Alaknagik, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

ROBIN JONES, President  
Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals (AASSP)  
New Stuyahok, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

PATRICK MAYER, Superintendent  
Aleutians East Borough School District  
Sand Point, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

JIM ANDERSON, CFO  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

PEGGY COWAN

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

TOM KLAAMEYER, President  
Anchorage Education Association  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

PENNY VADLA, President  
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Board of Education  
Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

DEENA MITCHELL, Board Member  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

BETH SHORT RHOADS  
Sitka, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

ANDY HOLLOMAN  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

MARGO BELLAMY, Board Member  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

SEAN CONE  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

CRIS EICHENLAUB  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to HB 236.

HERMAN MORGAN  
Aniak, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition of HB 236.

RALPH WATKINS, Superintendent  
Hoonah City School District  
Hoonah, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

SEANNA O'SULLIVAN  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

BILL BJORK  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 236.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:02:45 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR STORY** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Prax, Zulkosky, Hopkins, Tuck, and Story were present at the call to order. Representative Drummond arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**HB 236-INCREASE BASE STUDENT ALLOCATION**

[Contains discussion of HB 181.]

[8:03:45 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR STORY** 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."

**CO-CHAIR STORY**, as prime sponsor, presented HB 236. She stated that HB 236 would amend the Base Student Allocation (BSA), which she described as a key element in determining the amount of state education funding. She explained that under HB 236, the fiscal year 2021 (FY 21) the BSA amount per pupil would increase by \$115; it would incorporate the FY 20 \$30 million allocation

into the formula, and the FY 22 BSA would increase by \$110. She explained that the amounts were derived using a 2.25 percent increase, which is the standard inflation proofing rate used by the Alaska Permanent Fund Corporation in its projections. She noted that the two increases in HB 236 represent flat funding on FY 21, and inflation adjusted spending in FY 22. She explained that should HB 236 fail to pass, Alaska schools and students would endure a reduction of \$30 million in funding.

[8:05:17 AM](#)

MARY HAKALA, Staff, Representative Andi Story, Alaska State Legislature, provided information on HB 236 on behalf of Representative Story, prime sponsor. She explained that the items included in the committee packet include a revised sectional analysis correcting a typographical error; a revised school funding background document correcting a typographical error; and an analysis of funding for public education published by the University of Alaska, Anchorage Institute on Social and Economic Research (ISER). She noted that the committee packet also included public testimony submitted by 75 individuals. She expressed that any additional written testimony provided for HB 236 would be distributed to the committee. She remained available to answer any questions.

[8:07:01 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the committee would hear public testimony [originally opened on 2/26/20] on HB 236.

[8:07:25 AM](#)

DEENA BISHOP, Ed.D. Superintendent, Anchorage School District, testified in support of HB 236. She stated that HB 236 would provide the first increase to BSA since FY 16/17, and that inflationary costs coupled with flat funding have resulted in challenges to maintaining class size and student outcome strategic plan execution. She noted that funds received in addition to the BSA have softened the impacts of flat funding of the BSA; however, one-time funding has created uncertainty. She explained that the Anchorage School District (ASD) budget

deadline takes place in early March, which necessitates the Anchorage School Board to adopt a budget in February. She explained that increased demands on ASD, including that of special education, had resulted in cuts to general education programs. She noted that ASD had used 27 percent of its available reserves in an attempt to maintain services; however, the community expectation of ASD is that students should demonstrate growth. She explained that ASD is endeavoring to identify efficiencies and realize cost savings wherever possible and has made cuts to all programs apart from special education.

DR. BISHOP cautioned against the public perception that administrative costs at ASD are too high, noting cuts to administrative costs have resulted in a compromised strategic execution of programs designed to increase positive student outcomes. She expressed her dedication to improving student outcomes as a priority including accountability and transparency. She suggested that when compared to other school districts in Alaska and to the nation's 100 largest school districts, ASD administrative costs are prudent and not excessive. She indicated that uncertainty and reductions to funding had necessitated prioritization of cuts to programs rather than prioritization of implementation of strategic plans for improvement.

[8:11:10 AM](#)

DR. BISHOP urged legislators to support HB 236 in order to invest in the education of children. She noted that the passing of HB 236 would provide stability in funding so that ASD can plan for the best possible program execution and produce the best possible student outcomes. She expressed her gratitude to the [bill sponsor] and extolled increased funding for education as courageous.

[8:11:44 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND referred to Dr. Bishop's comments comparing ASD to the 100 largest school districts across the nation and asked her to provide additional information that would offer context of spending levels.

[8:12:25 AM](#)

DR. BISHOP suggested that due to economies of scale, administrative costs in education in Alaska are among the lowest in the nation. She offered to provide the committee with the source material to which she referred that depicts Alaska spending below the nation's largest 100 districts' mean.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether the source of the material is Great City Schools.

DR. BISHOP confirmed and explained that Great City Schools represents the 100 largest school districts in the nation.

[8:13:07 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked for additional information regarding administrative cost control at ASD.

[8:13:26 AM](#)

DR. BISHOP explained that administrative costs include payroll, and during the preceding six years, ASD has realized a 17 percent reduction in administration costs. She explained that the costs include receiving and distributing materials to 3,600 teachers in the district and organization and feeding of 25,000 students per day. She emphasized that perception of administrative costs may be "someone sitting up in a big, fancy mahogany desk somewhere" and refuted this perception, indicating that administrative costs pertain to the execution of large programs that occur directly in schools. She added that administration also covers monitoring student outcomes. She welcomed review of the data reporting on use of administration cost funds.

CO-CHAIR STORY asked how ASD would plan to deliver health education and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) standards through health educators and indicated her understanding that the number of health educators continues to be reduced.

8:15:48 AM

DR. BISHOP emphasized that students' health, including mental health, is a top priority and would not be jeopardized as a result of funding shortages. She explained that SEL in ASD is not conducted through health teachers but is instead infused into every teacher, bus driver, and personnel that encounter students. She indicated that reduction in funding results in a reduction of available resources and additional demand on individual teachers in classrooms as a result.

8:17:53 AM

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Dr. Bishop to briefly discuss what measures ASD is taking to ensure the safety of the approximately 47,000 students and 600 district employees in light of the Coronavirus [Covid-19 pandemic].

8:18:22 AM

DR. BISHOP explained that the most controversial decision had been a travel restriction, which was made in consultation with health officials. She explained that the priorities that shape ASD travel decisions are staff and student infection rate reduction and protecting against the uncertainty of travelers being able to return home. She explained that there is a difference in decisions that may be weighed by a parent as compared with decisions that must be weighed by the school district, which operates "in loco parentis," which she defined as "a caretaker" and "like a parent." She explained that the risk assessment, including uncertainties going forward, led to the decision to restrict planned travel in the district for over 1,000 students and chaperones. She added that because one-sixth of the population of Anchorage enters ASD premises every day, public health is a major consideration and cleaning and disinfecting sites including charter schools is a priority.

8:21:05 AM

DR. BISHOP added that schools are teaching students proper handwashing techniques. She explained that ASD is working with

officials on multiple levels to create decision-making framework and protocols related to infection detection and containment and logistical planning such as for transportation of students. She added that while the travel ban has been an unpopular decision, ASD has elected to prioritize safety of students, staff, and the larger community.

[8:22:04 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND indicated that the [conversation regarding pandemic preparedness] should take place in more detail and suggested that the House Health and Social Services Committee would be an appropriate venue for that conversation to take place in the near future.

[8:22:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX expressed his sympathy for districts facing difficult and complex decisions and suggested that the legislature is faced with a similar dilemma. He asked whether there exists a documented list of mandated tasks from which the district creates actions.

[8:23:34 AM](#)

DR. BISHOP indicated that one example could be the 10 health standards proposed under HB 181, which exemplify the increasing mandates for teachers in the classroom. She remarked that the school day had not lengthened despite the increase of performance mandates. She offered to compile and provide the list requested by Representative Prax and cautioned that it would be lengthy.

[8:24:40 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Dr. Bishop to provide some demographic information for ASD student population.

[8:25:00 AM](#)

DR. BISHOP explained that demographically, 60 percent of students in ASD are nonwhite. She lauded the diversity of over 100 languages spoken throughout the district. She estimated the mobility of students in the district between 40-75 percent of families at any given time relocating within the district. She highlighted that many high-potential students are English Language Learners (ELL) who come to the school district with a variety of existing education levels and first languages. She noted that poverty can range from 40 to 100 percent in various schools and many students require food programs. She suggested that ASD is unique as "urban" among other districts in Alaska and is challenged by issues that may not occur in rural districts.

[8:28:10 AM](#)

MEILA NEELEY, Student, testified in support of HB 236. She requested the proposed increase in BSA to help alleviate issues such as increasing class size. She indicated that her class consists of 32 students and suggested that teachers and substitutes do not have adequate time for much needed individual instruction. She explained that some of her peers require extra instruction in SEL. She also suggested that schools should increase resources for art classes and indicated her ambition to become an artist. She expressed her concern that art and culture programs will be cut.

[8:30:06 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Miss Neely to provide her age, grade, and school name to the committee.

[8:30:21 AM](#)

MISS NEELY stated that she is nine years of age, in the fourth grade at Sayéik Gastineau Elementary School [in Juneau, Alaska].

[8:30:44 AM](#)

KRISTIN RUTLEDGE testified in support of HB 236. She described herself as a public school student and now mother of school age

children in Alaska. She recounted her experience at a recent ASD board meeting, which she described as five hours of testimony that was difficult and frustrating to endure. She criticized the proposed use of public funds for individual supplemental [Alaska Permanent Fund] dividends instead of for the purpose of funding education. She criticized ASD cuts to health education programs, emphasizing the importance of health education, especially under circumstances of a growing [Covid-19] pandemic. She criticized cuts to classroom time at all grade levels and cuts to University of Alaska funding, suggesting that public education in Alaska is inadequate to maintain a professional workforce and population. She expressed her support for diversification of state revenue sources including taxes. She urged support of HB 236.

[8:32:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked Ms. Rutledge to identify areas of spending that she would recommend cutting in favor of funding public education.

MS. RUTLEDGE suggested that paying Alaska Permanent Fund Dividends seems anathema to enduring more cuts to services and suggested that funding for programs should not be further cut and instead the state should seek alternate sources of revenue as opposed to an attempt to live within a shrinking means.

[8:34:08 AM](#)

KAY ANDREWS, President, Southwest Region School District School Board, testified in support of HB 236. She suggested that children in Alaska are the state's most valuable asset for the future. She described cost increases that Southwest Region School District has endured, including increased health insurance, supplies, transportation of goods, and increase in costs of fuel oil and other utilities. She noted that increased costs such as those result in direct negative impacts on students in the classroom. She explained that schools face unprecedented and increasing complex problems related to trauma and emphasized a need for training in trauma-informed practices

and additional school counselors, psychologists, and other related professionals.

[8:36:19 AM](#)

MS. ANDREWS explained that she has observed children and communities suffering from trauma, and that reductions to funding compromise schools' ability to support and educate children. She explained that funds distributed to schools outside of the BSA formula create complexities and the inability to plan, retain teachers, and effectively implement long-range reading and other strategic programs. She urged the support of increase to the Foundation Formula and BSA so that districts can plan and execute programs.

[8:39:40 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Ms. Andrews to describe the geography and number of students in her district.

MS. ANDREWS explained that she was located in the community of Alaknagik, and the communities within the Southwest Region School District include Togiak, Twin Hills, Manokotak, Koliganek, New Stuyahok, Ekwok, and Clark's Point. She noted that the district had recently closed Portage Creek School due to lack of student population. She noted that Clark's Point School had been recently closed and re-opened with community support. She explained that her district has no art program and no school nurses. She expressed her concern regarding the growing [Covid-19] pandemic and noted that an emergency planning meeting for her district was planned for today; however, no health professionals are available to participate at school sites. She emphasized that transportation of goods is extremely challenging for her district. She expressed concern over lack of technology and infrastructure should the district be required to shut down. She extolled the support received from the communities in her district as well as support from ASD and the Alaska State Legislature in taking the time to understand the unique issues faced in her district. She encouraged visits to the communities in her district to directly observe the unique

challenges as well as key accomplishments in educating children and preparing them for life in Alaska.

[8:45:34 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY expressed her gratitude to Ms. Andrews for her service and testimony.

[8:45:51 AM](#)

ROBIN JONES, President, Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals (AASSP), testified in support of HB 236 on behalf of the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) and AASSP. She urged priority funding with timely and predictable revenue so that schools may execute all educational programs and comply with all mandates for education. She suggested that early notification and forward funding are crucial to sound financial management and recruitment and retention of quality educators. She suggested that the increase to BSA as proposed by HB 236 would aid in covering funding deficiencies caused by inflation. She indicated that increased costs for goods and services as well as deferred maintenance projects are depleting existing budgets. She suggested that passing HB 236 would aid in quality teacher recruitment and retention.

[8:48:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked Ms. Jones to verify the availability of her contact info.

[8:48:40 AM](#)

MS. JONES acknowledged her contact info is available to the committee and offered an in-person meeting while she is in Juneau with Representative Prax to provide additional information.

[8:49:08 AM](#)

PATRICK MAYER, Superintendent, Aleutians East Borough School District, testified in support of HB 236. He referenced the

ACSA joint position statement that was provided to the committee and emphasized that timely, reliable, and predictable funding is necessary to aid in quality teacher and administrator recruitment and retention. He offered that funding for education has not kept pace with inflation. He acknowledged that one-time funding infusions have been welcomed by schools; however, he suggested that [funds received outside of the Foundation Formula and BSA] do not provide stability in effective recruitment and retention. He explained that in Aleutians East Borough School District, school counselor positions have been eliminated, along with a physical education (P.E.) teacher and a librarian. He explained that extracurricular activities have been subject to reorganization and alignment to expenditures and revenues. He expressed that the goals of his district include expansion of Career Technical Education (CTE), drama and the arts, and trauma informed practices. He indicated that program expansion with current staffing levels would be impossible. He suggested that a BSA increase would be timely in aiding districts to meet program needs and adhere to mandates. He encouraged passing HB 236 as a first step in increasing funding for public education. He offered to provide a list of unfunded mandates to the committee for its consideration.

[8:52:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked Mr. Mayer to describe the demographics of his district.

MR. MAYER responded that there are four schools in the district: Sand Point School, populated by 114 students; King Cove School, populated by 87 students; False Pass School, populated by 7 students; and Akutan School, populated by 23 students. He indicated that the district had recently closed Cold Bay School and it is consolidating the resources of False Pass School to meet the ongoing needs of those students affected by the closure of Cold Bay School. He noted that the student body consists of 87 percent Alaska Native students and the poverty rate is at 80 percent. He acknowledged that his district, as other district representatives had indicated for their own, has room for improvement. He explained that the communities in the district

are primarily fishing industry communities with commercial fish processing plants. He noted that Sand Point fish processing facility had unexpectedly closed, impacting the community.

[8:54:40 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY referenced his earlier testimony regarding BSA comparison to the rate of inflation and asked whether the data he referenced fully reflected the rate of inflation experienced in rural areas and how rural schools have managed rising costs.

MR. MAYER allowed that the data to which he had referred did pertain to urban areas and described the availability of rural inflation rate data as "elusive." He opined with certainty that rural inflation rates would logically be higher than in urban areas due to factors such as transportation and fuel costs and higher costs of goods and services. He noted that impacts of cuts to the ferry system also contribute to additional challenges including relocating teachers. He explained that rising costs have resulted in cuts to eliminate P.E. teachers and limiting electives offered. He noted that school nurses have been eliminated, which is cause for concern considering [the Covid-19 pandemic response coordination].

[8:57:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS recalled previous hearings in which testimony was offered from a school district that endured a cost of over \$100,000 as a result of reductions in ferry service. He asked whether Mr. Mayer could estimate a cost to his district associated with reduction in ferry service for the committee and provide the information to the House Transportation Committee.

MR. MAYER agreed to research and provide a cost estimate and speculated the impacts had already resulted in coordination with freight companies to explore options to close gaps left by reduced ferry service.

[8:59:04 AM](#)

JIM ANDERSON, CFO, Anchorage School District, testified in support of HB 236. He stated that 87.4 percent of ASD expenditure is for personnel. He stated that since 2013, student enrollment has declined by 6.8 percent and staff had been reduced by 9.9 percent in the same timeframe. He stated that two schools have been closed, two schools have been relocated, and that two additional programs will be moved in the coming year. He assured that any possible means of cost savings is being evaluated. He noted FY 13-19 medical costs have been reduced by 0.6 percent by contracting with a health clinic. He predicted ongoing savings in health care costs. He noted that ASD worker's compensation claims have been reduced by over \$2 million, or 45 percent, while legal fees have been reduced by 44 percent. He cautioned that, despite cost savings realized, the reductions are not sufficient to account for inflation. He explained that cost increases have occurred in electricity, refuse, buildings and ground supplies, and insurance.

[9:01:45 AM](#)

MR. ANDERSON explained that the sunset of funds provided under House Bill 287 [passed into law during the Thirtieth Alaska State Legislature] has resulted in reductions of approximately 50 teachers and other staff for FY 21. He explained that community pressure exists for the district to perform and serve students. He explained that uncertainty in funding results in a paradigm of cutting services in favor of strategic growth.

[9:03:14 AM](#)

PEGGY COWAN testified in support of HB 236. She offered brief biographical information. She echoed earlier testimony that uncertainty in funding causes districts to bear negative consequences. She suggested that cuts to funding also bear indirect costs such as reduced morale, anger, and frustration, which she associated with high teacher turnover. She suggested that low morale among adults impacts the students, resulting in negative outcomes.

[9:04:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked Ms. Cowan in which districts she had been superintendent.

MS. COWAN answered that she had served longest at both the North Slope Borough School District and the Juneau School District.

[9:05:59 AM](#)

TOM KLAAMEYER, President, Anchorage Education Association, testified in support of HB 236. He spoke on behalf of over 3,200 members of the Anchorage Education Association. He echoed previous testimony regarding the effects of budget cuts, personnel cuts, and teacher turnover. He suggested that the community of Anchorage has conveyed an expectation of investment in education and applauded this and other proposed legislation to that end. He cautioned that further cuts would result in harm to students and forward funding should be contemplated. He expressed dismay that ASD had been required to make substantial cuts to health teachers, while proposed legislation pertaining to increasing health education is being considered by the legislature. He added that class sizes are increasing.

[9:09:06 AM](#)

PENNY VADLA, President, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Board of Education, testified in support of HB 236. She urged adequate and predictable funding for public education for districts to meet regulatory and constitutional obligations. She highlighted teacher recruitment and retention, support programs, strategic planning, student wellbeing as priorities. She suggested that further cuts to funding jeopardize students in her district. She explained cost-saving measures instituted while the district has strived to protect against cuts impacting students in the classroom. She urged the passage of HB 236.

[9:13:07 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Ms. Vadla to describe the geography and number of students in her district, as well as what transportation issues are being faced in her district.

MS. VADLA stated that her district consists of over 8,000 students and 42 schools that vary in size and grade level composition. She explained that transportation is a major consideration in her district and efficiencies have been realized within the large and complex district.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Ms. Vadla to provide additional geographical information on the transportation system in her district.

MS. VADLA explained that communities within the district include Tobona, Seldovia, Port Graham, English Bay, and Russian Orthodox community schools, most of which are part of the district's transportation system.

[9:15:50 AM](#)

DEENA MITCHELL, Board Member, Anchorage School District, testified in support of HB 236. She echoed prior testimony that urged the legislature to maintain funding and warned of the deleterious effects of unpredictability and continued cuts to funding. She suggested that cuts to health education have resulted in elimination of programs that are vital to public health, including SEL and suicide prevention. She extolled forward funding as a vehicle to increase teacher retention. She offered that cuts result in strain on teachers and exacerbate costly teacher turnover. She suggested that once a program is cut, it is costly to re-initiate, and cuts result in permanent program elimination. She stated that increasing class time has resulted in less teacher and student interaction while the need for behavioral management is increasing.

[9:20:04 AM](#)

MS. MITCHELL recommended: inflation proofing of the BSA; increasing the number of safety officers and equipment; mental health professionals and counselors; continued vigilance to guard against increasing class size; and increasing educational services. She suggested that SEL can positively affect student mental health and outcomes.

[9:22:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked Ms. Mitchell whether the district had an itemization of expenditures by program or service.

MS. MITCHELL answered that she would determine what information is available for her district and provide it to the committee. She asked whether Representative Prax was most interested in special education programs or more general program information.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX answered that he sought more general program information.

[9:23:14 AM](#)

BETH SHORT RHOADS testified in support of HB 236 as a parent. She explained that her district no longer has a library and no longer has a much-needed school counselor. She stated that one school nurse exists for approximately 1,200 students in her community and expressed her fear of negative impacts considering the Covid-19 pandemic. She applauded the efforts of her community school district to manage with reduction of resources and expressed that inflation proofing is necessary to prevent continued dire cuts to essential programs.

[9:25:51 AM](#)

ANDY HOLLOMAN testified in support of HB 236. He offered biographical information and explained that supplemental, one-time funding has resulted in poor conditions for planning. He suggested that inflation impacts result in cumulative ongoing cuts to basic core services and increased class size, and he urged inflation-proofing of the BSA.

[9:28:19 AM](#)

MARGO BELLAMY, Board Member, Anchorage School District, testified in support of HB 236. She suggested that an increase to the BSA is a morally appropriate decision. She echoed earlier testimony and emphasized difficulties in the budgeting process to meet the needs of students, including consideration

of delayed start of the school day, or early dismissal. She urged passage of HB 236.

[9:30:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND stated that Ms. Bellamy is a retired educator in addition to serving on the ASD Board of Education.

MS. BELLAMY confirmed her work history also included time as a school and office administrator, and her experience spanned 43 years of working with youth and families.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether delayed start or early release was included in the most recent ASD budget.

MS. BELLAMY confirmed it was, and she added that each school would have autonomy to determine the class times that best suit its need. In response to a follow-up question, she said the district would remain compliant regarding the minimum required number of instructional days when implementing any alteration in the school day schedule, plans for which are still in development, with challenges present at the site, district, and community levels.

[9:34:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether ASD maintained a list of mandated core services with a cost breakdown.

MS. BELLAMY confirmed that the information is available and would be provided to the committee.

[9:35:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK recalled Ms. Bellamy's testimony describing the challenges at discrete levels in public education and correlated them to those similarly faced by the legislature. He suggested that the legislature would benefit from the perspectives offered by witnesses in their testimony. He suggested that a recurrent theme offered in testimony is the need for additional revenue. He urged vigilance against

additional cuts that could result in serving only [economically] privileged students. He urged support of HB 236, especially considering the public testimony offered to the committee.

[9:38:47 AM](#)

SEAN CONE testified in support of HB 236. He suggested that the funding in recent years has been unsustainable and reliable funding is necessary. He echoed previous testimony regarding one-time funding allocations as appreciated but not sustainable. He echoed previous testimony regarding the constitutional mandate for education in Alaska and suggested that funding is not optional. He suggested that neglecting to fund education equates to cutting education funding and should be characterized as such. He suggested that inflation and cost increases in the absence of additional funding is tantamount to cuts to funding. He suggested that effects of inadequate funding in education reach beyond education and constitutional obligation, with wider community impacts economically and socially. He exemplified CTE classes as inherently required to maintain smaller class sizes due to the course material and teaching methods, and he expressed that those smaller class sizes become vulnerable to cuts by attrition.

[9:42:53 AM](#)

CRIS EICHENLAUB testified in opposition to HB 236. He suggested that poor management is taking place in public education. He said he has an issue with the term "flat funding" and questioned whether cuts should have occurred considering declining student population.

[9:45:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK commented that BSA is correlated directly with student population and a reduction of student population results in decreased funding, compounded by loss of economies of scale. He asked Mr. Eichenlaub to clarify his assertion of funding levels increasing with decline in student population.

MR. EICHENLAUB suggested that budgets are increasing while total student population is declining and suggested this exists due to mismanagement, including hiring additional teachers.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK suggested that class sizes are increasing which is evidence contrary to the suggestion that more teachers are hired when student population declines. He offered that expenses are increasing which is evidence contrary to the suggestion that funding levels are flat when they remain unchanged.

MR. EICHENLAUB recommended that class sizes should be investigated amid claims that they have increased.

[9:47:46 AM](#)

HERMAN MORGAN testified in opposition to HB 236. He suggested that an increase to BSA would be tantamount to funding socioeconomic problems and lower test scores.

[9:50:28 AM](#)

RALPH WATKINS, Superintendent, Hoonah City School District, testified in support of HB 236. He recalled previous testimony criticizing public education in Alaska and asserted that Alaska students receive world-class education. He extolled teachers' dedication, professionalism, and work ethic. He suggested that imparting quality education to students requires an entire system that is subject to funding. He cited costs such as teacher salaries, insurance, curriculum, and supplies. He suggested that withholding funding based on what he categorized as a flawed viewpoint is unacceptable. He urged previous testifiers to seek information and facts on schools and districts and to consider community expectations and impacts and to reconsider their support for increasing the BSA. He explained that his role in his district consists of superintendent, principal, sometimes-middle-schoolteacher, and custodian. His district business office staff consists of only two individuals. He stated that over the last two years, his district had graduated 100 percent of its seniors, seventy percent of whom have continued into postsecondary programs. He

asserted that quality education exists in Alaska and recommended increased funding.

[9:55:04 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND requested Mr. Watkins submit written testimony to the committee.

[9:55:30 AM](#)

SEANNA O'SULLIVAN testified in support of HB 236. She echoed previous testimony regarding increased costs and deleterious effects of flat or reduced funding. She explained that site councils were conceived to support extracurricular activities and are increasingly supporting core educational programs at the expense of extracurricular programs such as Discovery Southeast. She shared her experience as a parent whose personal circumstances had changed from being able to volunteer and participate in her children's schools to that of a parent who increasingly relies on school and ancillary programs such as Recreation, Arts, Learning, and Leadership for Youth (RALLY). She urged consideration of realistic expectations and realistic conditions taking place in schools that are increasing services despite reduction in resources. In response to a request from Co-Chair Drummond, she explained that RALLY is an after school childcare program in which her children are enrolled part time.

[10:00:51 AM](#)

BILL BJORK testified in support of HB 236. He argued that claims that Alaska teachers are highly paid is not based in fact. He offered to provide data to the committee in evidence of the contrary.

[10:02:36 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY closed public testimony on HB 236.

[HB 236 was held over.]

[10:03:52 AM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:03 a.m.