

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 14, 2019
9:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Shelley Hughes, Vice Chair
Senator Chris Birch
Senator Mia Costello
Senator Tom Begich

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

- PRESENTATION: ALASKA'S NEW SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM
AND SCHOOL DESIGNATIONS BY ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND
EARLY DEVELOPMENT

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

Deborah Riddle, Division Operations Manager
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave an overview of Alaska's School
Accountability System.

Brad Billings, Administrator
State System of Support
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave an overview of Alaska's School
Accountability System.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:00:19 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Birch, Hughes, Begich, and Chair Stevens.

Presentation: Alaska's New School Accountability System and School Designations by Alaska Department of Education and Early Development

[9:00:43 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the presentation of Alaska's New School Accountability System and School Designations by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.

[9:00:53 AM](#)

Deborah Riddle, Division Operations Manager, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, and Brad Billings, Administrator, State System of Support, DEED, Juneau, Alaska, introduced themselves.

MS. RIDDLE said every element of the education system works toward the goal to ensure all students are prepared after high school. Accountability is just one piece of this system. She reviewed the timeline for Alaska's plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Succeeds Act:

ESSA is a vehicle that will help move us toward our mission and vision.

- May 2018 - Alaska's plan approval by US Department of Education
- June 2018 - accountability regulations adopted by Alaska State Board of Education (4 AAC 06.800 - 899)
- October 2019 - school designations released

MS. RIDDLE reviewed the statewide stakeholder engagement:

- January 2016 - current
 - Collected nearly 4,000 stakeholder comments
 - Held or participated in over 40 meetings and conferences
 - Met with nearly 1,000 stakeholders
 - Formed an advisory committee consisting of over 40 members

- DEED sought public comment on three draft versions.
- Additional public comment was recently sought regarding an amendment to the approved state plan that was submitted to U.S. ED on January 15, 2019

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SENATOR COSTELLO joined the committee.

MS. RIDDLE shared that the Alaska ESSA plan is posted on the DEED website. She reviewed the different indicators in the accountability system:

Accountability Indicators

Grades K-6

- Academic Achievement
 - English language arts
 - Mathematics
- Academic Growth
- English Learner Progress
- Chronic Absenteeism
- Grade 3 ELA Proficiency

Grades 7-12

- Academic Achievement
 - English language arts
 - Mathematics
- Academic Growth
- English Learner Progress
- Chronic Absenteeism
- Graduation Rate
 - Four year
 - Five year

MS. RIDDLE said the academic growth indicator focuses on how students progress from year to year. Chronic absenteeism looks at how many days students are in school. Schools get additional points in the accountability system for third graders who are on track for English language arts proficiency.

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SENATOR BIRCH asked what the measurement for academic growth is.

MS. RIDDLE answered that the PEAKS [Performance Evaluation for Alaska's Schools] summative assessment is done once a year. ESSA

requires one summative assessment and an accountability system based on that assessment.

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SENATOR HUGHES asked what is done with the data they gather. She asked if they just make conclusions or, for example, are schools with chronic absenteeism coached or helped to improve that.

MS. RIDDLE replied that districts can make decisions based on the index score in the designation report they receive from DEED. She noted that Mr. Billings would address what the department can do to help those schools.

SENATOR HUGHES said that teachers have shared with her that some children are suffering from chronic absenteeism and that Alaska students spend fewer hours in school compared to other states. She mentioned how crucial the read-by-nine initiative is. If they tackled chronic absenteeism, fewer hours in school, and grade promotion of students who have not achieved what they need to do academically, along with the emphasis on reading, they would do wonders for kids.

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SENATOR BEGICH asked within which section of the budget her work falls.

MS. RIDDLE replied Student Learning.

MS. RIDDLE noted that for grades 7-12, the graduation rate for the four-year cohort is an indicator and those who graduate in five years also plays a consideration.

MS. RIDDLE went over how the indicators are weighted. Growth at 40 percent and achievement at 30 percent are the biggest indicators for grades K-6. In grades 7 and above, growth is still 40 percent, achievement is 20 percent, and the graduation rate is 20 percent.

MS. RIDDLE said in order to get an index score, schools must have enough students for two indicators:

Overall School Index Value

- Requires at least two indicators.
- One of the two indicators must be one of the following:
 - o Academic achievement in ELA or Mathematics,
 - o Growth in ELA or Mathematics,

- o Four-year or five-year graduation rate, or
- o English Learner progress

MS. RIDDLE reviewed the 2018 index score distribution. In all, 468 schools received an index score. The highest index score was 98.99, the lowest was 1.19, and the average was 46.2.

CHAIR STEVENS asked who received 98.99.

MS. RIDDLE answered a technical high school with grades 11-12. It did not have any ninth graders who were assessed and was rated on graduation rate and chronic absenteeism.

MS. RIDDLE said districts and schools receive designation reports with their overall index scores. The school designation report comes with a companion document to help with interpretation.

SENATOR HUGHES asked what happens when a school receives a score like 1.19.

MS. RIDDLE responded that Mr. Billings would address that with Student Supports.

CHAIR STEVENS said it would be nice to know what the top 10 schools are doing, and it's important to know why schools are failing.

SENATOR BEGICH asked if that level of analysis is going to be done.

MS. RIDDLE answered that Mr. Billings would speak about the supports based on school designations.

MR. BILLINGS reviewed the three school designations that are based on the data and the index score

Three School Designations

1. Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)
 - 5% of Title I schools with lowest index score (16 schools)
 - Graduation rate less than or equal to 2/3 (67 schools)
 - Three consecutive years as TSI for same subgroup (starts 2021)

2. Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) (24 schools)

- Based on equity gap for any of nine identified subgroups

3. Universal Support

All schools are eligible for a TSI or CSI designation regardless of size.

Mr. BILLINGS explained that the lowest performing schools receive the designation of Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI). The graduation rate is a new way to receive a CSI designation in that past accountability systems have not focused on graduation rates. Since a school must be a Targeted Support and Improvement school for three years to become a CSI school, that designation will start in 2021 because they are just starting this accountability system.

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MR. BILLINGS said the ESSA law requires not only treating the whole school as a unit but also looking at defined subgroups and each subgroup is treated as a school:

Subgroups
African American
Alaska Native/American Indian
Asian/Pacific Islander
Caucasian
Hispanic
Two or More Races
Students with Disabilities
English Learners
Economically Disadvantaged

SENATOR BEGICH asked if two or more races means two or more named races.

MR. BILLINGS answered yes. He explained that each subgroup gets an index value. For each school, the school has an index and nine subgroups. Sometimes there are not enough students in a subgroup to assign a value.

SENATOR BIRCH asked how the graduation rate was determined. He asked if they started with the freshmen class or only looked at the senior class.

MR. BILLINGS answered that a graduation cohort is determined for each school when students enter ninth grade. If students should exit or move to another school, then they are moved out of the cohort. Students can move into a cohort. The department tracks that.

MR. BILLINGS said that for the Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) schools, they are looking at the achievement of subgroups and equity gaps. Schools with low-performing subgroups are designated TSI.

MR. BILLINGS said the Universal Support includes all schools that not TSI or CSI.

SENATOR BEGICH said he saw a map in the Anchorage Daily News using these designations. He asked if it would be fair to say that the schools in the first two categories are all over the state, many in rural Alaska.

MR. BILLINGS replied that the CSI five percent are focused in rural Alaska. The graduation rate category is much more diverse in geography and school type. Some correspondence schools are newly on their radar because of that.

MR. BILLINGS said designated schools must complete the following four steps:

- Local needs assessment
- Consultation of stakeholders
- Improvement plan responding to reasons for identification and identified needs
- Implementation of Evidence Based Interventions

SENATOR BEGICH said he is concerned about student support and whether the department can do what it says it is going to do. He asked who is paying for interventions and how the department will know about that. He noted the proposed budget has a 19 percent cut to the state system of support and asked how the department will be able to implement the interventions.

MR. BILLINGS replied that the school improvement team distributes federal school improvement grants. The department also has a federal programs team that supports the title programs, such as Title 1, English learners, and migrant students. They also have school improvement coaches who are assigned to CSI 5 schools.

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SENATOR BEGICH asked how the coaches are funded.

MR. BILLINGS answered that the school improvement coaches are state funded.

SENATOR BEGICH said they had heard for years that the department is on the edge of not being able to provide support. He asked if ASD would be able to do these functions under the proposed budget.

MR. BILLINGS said he was not in a position to answer that, but they are considering that and thinking of how to distribute the resources to support as many schools as possible.

SENATOR BEGICH said he wanted the committee to consider that the presentation may be relevant to today's world, but not to tomorrow's world because of the budget.

MR. BILLINGS reviewed supports and resources for schools:

- School Improvement process and tool - Alaska Effective Schools Framework
- Partnerships for technical assistance and support
 - Alaska Statewide Mentor Project
 - Alaska Staff Development Network
 - Association of Alaska School Boards
- School Improvement Coaching and capacity building
- School Improvement Grants
- Outreach webinars and one-on-one assistance

SENATOR BEGICH asked where the Statewide Mentor Project and the Alaska Staff Development Network are located.

MR. BILLINGS answered that the mentor project is at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the Alaska Staff Development Network is a subgroup of the Alaska Council of School Administrators.

SENATOR BEGICH said he wanted to point that the university is facing a 44 percent cut.

[9:28:18 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO said the budget that was introduced yesterday was the beginning of a process. She supports education and is concerned about the cuts that were proposed. She said they

probably hate anecdotal story because they do not fit into the data analysis, but she wanted to share that she has served for eight years and visits her schools every fall. She learned of a middle school teacher with no students for the first hour. If students didn't show up for school, the principal and the teacher would drive to the student's house to bring the student to school. They would try to show kids that they matter, and on the flip side, sometimes parents of students with chronic absenteeism only get a letter. She wondered how they could communicate to parents and students exciting career and technical education (CTE) options. It pains her that the goal is not 100 percent graduation. She wondered if they know what happens when students stop going to school. She recounted a situation in Fairbanks where a kid just stopped going to high school and nobody looked into it. She asked if there is a process to know that they are doing right with families with kids who stop going to school.

MR. BILLINGS replied that he loves anecdotes because it takes him back to the classroom and what really matters. The local needs assessment allows local staff to tackle those issues. CSI schools in the graduation rate category have been wrestling with those questions: what are the needs and what will impact that. Some possibilities are a community liaison who reaches out to families when a student is absent or a focus on engaging students more with CTE options.

MS. RIDDLE added that the Alaska Education Challenge focuses on career and technical education as a method for helping with the graduation rate. Statistics from the Carl Perkins grant show that the graduation rate for students who take about two years of CTE courses is higher. They do have to collect data about where students end up after high school to report to the federal government.

CHAIR STEVENS said this is the place for anecdotes. They appreciate the high-level approach, but they appreciate hearing from kids, parents, and teachers.

SENATOR HUGHES said that she would expect to see more policies adopted about offering CTE to students at risk of dropping out. She asked if there are anecdotal stories about what has happened with schools who have had coaching and whether they have been able to raise their scores.

MR. BILLINGS related a story of a coach who worked with a strong school principal on behavior interventions so that the climate of the school improved dramatically.

SENATOR HUGHES asked if the school did better on academic achievement then.

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MR. BILLINGS replied there doesn't appear to be a direct link to assessment improvement, but there is improvement in middle indicators, such as school climate and attendance.

SENATOR HUGHES asked if it is because it has not been in place long enough or if they still refining what to do. It is a problem if there is no improvement with the support.

MR. BILLINGS replied that the way that adult behaviors flow through to student performance is a complex system. The larger challenge is staff turnover. A coach and principal work hard to build capacity in early reading skills, for example, and then the staff turns over and the capacity doesn't stay in that school. The nongovernment partners are so important because they have accepted the fact that they need to provide for annual training because of staff turnover.

SENATOR HUGHES said that she had hoped to hear that supports would result in better performance for low-performing schools. She hoped that the department continued to brainstorm on that. She looked forward to the day when she hears that intervention raised student performance.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if the committee could have more information about the coaches.

MR. BILLINGS answered yes.

MR. BILLINGS said the accountability system was introduced this year. They are working with a more diverse set of schools, such as smaller schools and correspondence and alternative schools that weren't on the radar screen in the past. Designations did not happen until October this year. They want to be intentional in how they interact with schools because schools have initiatives put in place and the accountability system is not there to displace those initiatives. The focus is more on outcomes and the needle is moving. In the future, more indicators could be included.

MR. BILLINGS summarized that the accountability system focuses on the six indicators, on graduation rate, and equity. The ESSA plan is not what is driving the department. DEED is guided by the mission and vision of the State Board of Education, the Alaska Education Challenge initiatives, and the initiatives of district, school, and classroom educators.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if they are better off with ESSA than the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

MR. BILLINGS said the accountability system still has some components of what was used before, but it allows flexibility with indicators, such as using chronic absenteeism and reading by third grade. They also have more flexibility with how to support designated schools than they did with NCLB.

MS. RIDDLE added that with NCLB, the goal was that 100 percent of kids would be proficient by a certain date. Now they can set more attainable goals, realistic goals that schools and districts can reach. ESSA is more than the accountability plan because it addresses what each of the title programs will do.

CHAIR STEVENS asked for a rough idea of federal funding vs. state funding.

MS. RIDDLE said about \$42 million comes from Title 1 and about \$16 million comes in for the migrant program. She said she was not sure about the other title programs. The funds are for supporting, not supplanting, state funds.

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SENATOR BEGICH asked if the federal funding is driven by the state contribution.

MS. RIDDLE answered that it is based on census data and low income.

SENATOR BEGICH said he wants to see what Senator Hughes was talking about, that they use the data they are collecting to improve outcomes. He wants them to prioritize and understand the interconnectivity between the department, university, and school districts so that when they build the education budget, they do so in a way that serves schools and the mission of the department. The committee wants to ensure that education works for the kids and the parents and the teachers in Alaska. Teacher retention is an incredibly important. Teacher retention and turnover is a factor every time they hear one of these

presentations. He would be interested in any ideas they have about that.

SENATOR BIRCH asked, considering how the committee had just heard from the Juneau superintendent about how much CTE courses increase graduation rates, why didn't DEED require a mandatory welding class, for example. CTE seems to be a vital contributor to a successful graduation rate. He asked if there were any consideration of technical education as a required component of graduation.

MS. RIDDLE answered that some districts do require some tech education as a local requirement. Forty-three districts receive federal Carl Perkins funds for CTE. The other 13 that don't are very small. Most districts offer CTE courses. One of the projects that is working through the Alaska Education Challenge is state-approved courses and pathways that could move up into postsecondary for districts that don't have the capacity. One is a Microsoft certification. Another goal is to create opportunities for students to graduate with dual enrollment or industry certifications.

SENATOR COSTELLO said that she was glad that Ms. Riddle mentioned that the census will affect federal funding. She has spoken to [Office of Management and Budget Director] Donna Arduin about the original \$250,000 that was in the budget for outreach about the importance of the census. The census is a significant opportunity to grab federal funds, but if Alaskans are not counted, Alaska could lose federal funds. Ms. Arduin had said those funds were removed and would be absorbed by the governor's office. She asked that the department, through the commissioner, have a conversation with the governor's office about the importance of educating people about what the census means. It affects transportation, education--quite a few areas of the state.

[9:52:27 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 9:52.