

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

March 28, 2019

9:00 a.m.

**DRAFT**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair  
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair  
Representative Chris Tuck  
Representative Josh Revak

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Grier Hopkins  
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky  
Representative DeLena Johnson

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: ALASKA BOARD OF EDUCATION & EARLY DEVELOPMENT  
ANNUAL REPORT

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JAMES FIELDS, Chair  
State Board of Education & Early Development  
Department of Education and Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the State Board of Education & Early Development's 2018 annual report.

KEITH HAMILTON, Ph.D., First Vice Chair  
State Board of Education & Early Development  
Department of Education and Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented testimony regarding the Department of Education and Early Development budget.

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented testimony to the committee during the department's annual report.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[9:00:22 AM](#)

**CHAIR STEVENS** called the joint meeting of the House Education Standing Committee and the Senate Education Standing Committee to order at 9:00 a.m. Present at the call to order from the House Education Standing Committee were Representatives Revak, Story, and Drummond. Representative Tuck arrived as the meeting was in progress. Present from the Senate Education Standing Committee were Senators Birch, Hughes, Costello, Begich, and Stevens.

#### **PRESENTATION: Alaska Board of Education & Early Development Annual Report**

[Contains discussion of HB 24]

**CHAIR STEVENS** announced that the only order of business would be an Annual Report presentation by Alaska Board of Education & Early Development.

[9:02:10 AM](#)

JAMES FIELDS, Chair, State Board of Education & Early Development, Department of Education & Early Development (EED) explained that he would be summarizing a PowerPoint

presentation, titled "State Board of Education and Early Development Report to the Alaska State Legislature." Mr. Fields began his presentation by introducing the members of the State Board of Education and Early Development then reading the board's mission statement: "An excellent education for every student every day." His next point to the committee was to share the board's five strategic priorities: "Amplify student learning"; "Inspire tribal and community ownership of educational excellence"; "Modernize the education system"; "Ensure excellent educators"; and "Promote safety and well-being." Mr. Fields shared a list of measurable goals: "Support all students to read at grade level by the end of third grade"; "Increase career, technical, and culturally relevant education to meet student and workforce needs"; "Close the achievement gap by ensuring equitable educational rigor and resources"; "Prepare, attract, and retain effective education professionals"; and "Improve the safety and well-being of students through school partnerships with families, communities, and tribes." He discussed some highlights from page 4 of his presentation focusing on the need for world language expertise in the classroom.

[9:05:29 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS moved to page 8 of the presentation and highlighted a portion of the page titled, "School Safety Program." In his explanation he stated, "The only expectation parents have for public education that is greater than that it provide every student with an excellent education every day, is that it keep their children safe at school each and every day."

[9:06:15 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS read the final paragraph at the bottom of page 9 of the presentation, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Alaska's Education Challenge established three priority strategies to advance its commitment to "Cultivate Safety and Well-Being". They include increasing the implementation of trauma-engaged practices in schools, increasing positive school climate, and increasing direct access to school-based nursing and counseling services for all students. DEED [Department of Education and Early Development]

has partnered with the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Education Northwest Comprehensive Center to create formal goals and action steps to implement these priority strategies between now and 2025.

[9:06:55 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS directed attention to page 11, titled "Implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)." He shared that the Act was approved by the U.S. Education Secretary, Betsy DeVos, then highlighted several parts of the Act for the committee. Mr. Fields summed up his presentation by sharing a table on page 15 showing 4-year graduation rates increasing from approximately 68 percent in 2011 to approximately 78 percent in 2018.

[9:09:26 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked how the goals and projects of the State Board of Education & Early Development could be achieved with the governor's budget cuts to DEED.

MR. FIELDS replied that he saw an opportunity to continue to move Alaska's education challenges forward, but without a formalized budget he could only commit to doing his best.

[9:11:07 AM](#)

SENATOR BIRCH inquired whether Mr. Fields was aware of testimony from a prior meeting that indicated between 50 and 75 percent of funding for education goes towards the classroom. He asked whether Mr. Fields had looked into the difference.

MR. FIELDS replied that he had not looked specifically at those numbers.

[9:12:34 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH commented that the board is independent and is charged with writing its own budget. He then asked whether the board intended to write its own budget next year instead of having the budget presented to it by the governor.

MR. FIELDS replied that he was recently presented with a memo from Luann Weyhrauch, Assistant Attorney General, that stated the board's vote was simply symbolic whether it approves a budget or not. He said it was the Office of the Governor that

crafts the actual budget. Mr. Fields continued that it was up to the board whether to vote on the budget, but if a vote was symbolic, the board had no real way to affect the budget.

SENATOR BEGICH explained that he had requested a copy of the memo but had not been given one. He then asked, "If it's just symbolic, why do we have a board of education?"

[9:16:16 AM](#)

KEITH HAMILTON, Ph.D., First Vice Chair, State Board of Education & Early Development, Department of Education & Early Development, replied to Senator Begich by explaining the board has been asked to "check off" the DEED budget during his time on the board. Dr. Hamilton read a line from the memo from Luann WeyRauch that read, "Such a vote would solely be a symbolic statement in light of the governor's responsibility under the Alaska constitution." He went on to say he wished the board had more input into the process, but it was not given that opportunity.

[9:18:09 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH discussed a time when he was in a position to ask a governor to allow his committee to exercise the committee's responsibility or to ask the committee to leave. He asked that the State Board of Education & Early Development, exercise direction, provide the legislature guidance, and continue to do so even in the face of resistance.

DR. HAMILTON replied that the State Board of Education & Early Development was one of the DEED commissioner's supervisory groups. He explained that once the commissioner has a budget the board would encourage him to work and succeed with whatever funding was allocated.

[9:21:33 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS explained that the committee looks to the State Board of Education & Early Development for leadership and that hearing the actions of the board called symbolic was shocking. He offered his understanding that there were concerns around the table about how the board was being treated. He stated, "I'm a littler disappoint in where we are as a state, at this point, if that is the case."

[9:22:32 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES commented that she would like to see more dollars channeled toward classrooms and implored the board to trim money from expenses outside of the classroom.

[9:25:34 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS agreed that classroom funding was important and discussed using positive peer pressure to influence school districts to keep funding in the classroom.

[9:27:27 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND explained that the funding for education was secure for the next fiscal year unless the legislature decided to make a change. She continued by explaining that she had read a great deal about the transparency of the State Board of Education & Early Development but was not impressed with how little information had been forthcoming from recent board minutes. Representative Drummond commented that if the State Board of Education & Early Development's involvement in the budget process is strictly symbolic then DEED needs to become more involved in the budget process. She hoped the board would look at the impact of fewer adults in schools and the effects on safety of the students. She continued by saying she was concerned about the ability of school districts to prepare, attract, and maintain effective education professionals. She concluded her comments by stating she hoped the board would take a much larger role in the development of a budget next year.

[9:32:39 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS read from a letter dated March 27, to Dr. Michael Johnson, from Luann WeyRauch, Assistant Attorney General, as follows:

Under the Act, and the Alaska Constitution, the creation of a budget proposal for submittal to the legislature is the responsibility of the governor not the department or the state board. At the time the governor has prepared and submitted a budget to the legislature, the budget proposal is under the control of the governor, not the state board. The state board certainly has the authority in its discretion to take a vote approving or disapproving the governor's budget. Such a vote would be solely a symbolic

statement in light of the governor's responsibility under the Alaska constitution and the Act.

CHAIR STEVENS stated, "We look for you for leadership, and leadership is never easy."

[9:34:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY commented that the legislature and the board are the advocates for the children. She continued by saying "what we do and what we legislate, impacts every child's day." She asked what the findings were on a safety gap-analysis conducted by DEED during the past year.

[9:38:44 AM](#)

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph,D, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, offered his appreciation to both the committee and the board for the opportunity to listen to the interaction between the two bodies. He went on to address Representative Story's question regarding the gap analysis DEED conducted. He explained that the analysis was anecdotal and had been done a few years ago and a new analysis was recently completed for comparison.

[9:40:16 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked the board to look at the high cost of energy in rural school districts and to propose what it thinks the vision for education should be.

[9:41:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK said that historically the state schoolboard's proposal put forward for the budget had been respected. He explained that the memorandum ("memo") stating that the board's budgetary power is symbolic caused him to look up the budgetary and fiscal authority of the state schoolboard and DEED commissioner. Representative Tuck sai, the commissioner has the responsibility and authority for the preparation and execution of the budget and the other fiscal affairs of the department subject to the approval of the board. He suggested he would be doing more research and respected the roles of the commissioner and the board.

[9:44:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND commented that the line in the memo that read "the responsibility and authority of the commissioner for the preparation and execution of a budget and for the other fiscal affairs - of the department"; she continued by explaining that it is not for the foundation formula, base student allocation, or any other funding. Representative Drummond explained that fiscal impacts are always referred to as being to the department, not to the classrooms in the over 500 schools in Alaska. She went on to say the department has taken many cuts in the last few years and could not continue to provide the top-level service they had been providing to school districts if they were to endure additional cuts.

[9:46:28 AM](#)

SENATOR BIRCH suggested that the board look at health care costs during its upcoming retreat to address extraordinary increases in costs.

[9:47:40 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO questioned why the board needed a statute to weigh in on whether it support or do not support the governor's proposed education budget.

[9:48:15 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS explained that he could only give his opinion. He followed up by saying he believed the founders of the state intended for the board to be non-political. He continued by sharing his concern that with the legislature having one opinion regarding the budget and the governor having another, the board could become a political pawn if it decided to take a vote on the governor's proposed budget.

[9:50:27 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS replied that it was problematic, and the legislature looked to the board for leadership. He stated that Mr. Fields had not been forthcoming about the budget. He continued by saying that long ago he decided to do the right thing, and if he got thrown out of office for doing the right thing, so be it. He finished his comments by saying he believed the board needed to do the right thing.

[9:51:05 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO observed that the State Board of Education & Early Development is comprised of the only Alaskans that don't have an opinion regarding the budget proposed by the governor.

[9:51:30 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND related that she had heard from hundreds of Alaskans around the state and estimated that 95 percent of them were opposed to the governor's budget, particularly in the area of education.

[9:52:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK said (indisc. - technical difficulties). He stated, we're all in this together and we do need to hear from each other, and we do need to have the expected leadership rise up.

[9:53:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Mr. Fields about the need to support language immersion programs and his thought on HB 24.

[9:54:08 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS answered that the presentation explained that the board would like language immersion programs and HB 24 would only widen the options for schools.

[9:54:55 AM](#)

SENATOR BIRCH asked Mr. Fields if he would like to introduce the board members.

MR. FIELDS introduced board members who had been sitting in the audience.

[9:56:35 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY encouraged the State Board of Education & Early Development to meet with the Association of Alaska School Boards.

[9:57:57 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES commented that she respected Mr. Fields' opinion that the board remain non-political.

9:59:08 AM

CO-CHAIR STORY expressed the sentiment that student achievement and communication is important and encouraged the board to consider a communications plan during its retreat.

10:00:45 AM

MR. FIELDS expressed appreciation for the committee and their comments.

10:02:23 AM

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committees, the joint meeting of the House and Senate Education Standing Committees was adjourned at 10:02 a.m.