

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 2, 2019

9:01 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

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S):
University of Alaska Board of Regents
John Bania - Wrangell

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development
Sally Stockhausen - Ketchikan
Bob Griffin - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JOHN BANIA, Appointee
University of Alaska Board of Regents
Wrangell, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee during his
confirmation hearing.

DARROLL HARGRAVES, Appointee
University of Alaska

Board of Regents
Wrangell, Alaska
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Confirmation hearing was rescheduled due to technical issues.

SALLY STOCKHAUSEN, Appointee
Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee during her confirmation hearing.

BOB GRIFFIN, Appointee
Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee during his confirmation hearing.

KATHY CUDDY, representing herself
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported the confirmation of Bob Griffin to the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:01:49 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Hughes, Begich, Birch, Costello, and Chair Stevens.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S):

University of Alaska Board of Regents

Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development

[9:02:01 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the consideration of the confirmation of the governor's appointees to the University of Alaska Board of Regents. He asked Mr. Bania to speak about what he would bring to the Board of Regents, why he is interested in serving, and what goals he may have to help improve the university system.

[9:02:41 AM](#)

JOHN BANIA, Appointee, University of Alaska, Board of Regents, Wrangell, said he came to Alaska in 1983 to seek a better life.

He was hiring for an education position in the Northwest Arctic, working in various villages near Kotzebue. Over the years, he served as principal and assistant superintendent. He met his wife in the Kotzebue area and raised a family. He later served as superintendent in Tanana for three years. When he decided he did not want to retire, he worked as a finish carpenter in Wrangell, where he owns a business, Finish Carpentry. He brings a unique perspective to the Board of Regents because of his experience in education and as a carpenter working with tradesmen, including plumbers, electricians and professional engineers, which has given him more community contact than someone who has only worked in a professional category.

MR. BANIA said the University of Alaska need regents who have respect for the university staff, faculty, and students. He offered his belief that the University of Alaska is a high-quality university, but any institution has room for improvement. He said he hopes he can contribute based on his experience in the field of education. Education has played an important role in his family, for himself and his son. As parents, he and his wife stressed the importance of education when his son was growing up. His son is now a physician in Wrangell, he said.

[9:06:07 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked Mr. Bania to describe his vision for the university, his view on the governor's \$140 million in proposed cuts to the university and if it affects his vision of the University of Alaska (UA).

MR. BANIA responded by describing his experience at the Tanana School District (TSD). When he was hired [as superintendent in 2009] the school district was on the verge of bankruptcy. Shortly thereafter, the commissioner called him to ask whether the district would need to close its offices. He asked the commissioner for time to address the school district's financial and operational problems. He was able to do so. The school district is working well today and thriving, he said. He acknowledged his budget experience at TSD was on a smaller scale than the severe budget problems the UA faces. He said he was not panicked about the governor's proposed budget for the university. He offered his belief that it was a proposal, one that would be modified before it takes its final form and the cuts will not likely be as severe.

SENATOR BEGICH asked for his vision for the University of Alaska and his focus, given the financial exigencies described by the

governor and others. He related his understanding that the TSD's budget was not cut, but he was given an opportunity to fix it.

MR. BANIA replied that the university should work toward its areas of strength, such as research. The UA is a great research university that provides innovation and growth in Alaska and elsewhere, but it could become even greater. He suggested that the UA should carefully review individual programs with only a small number of students to determine whether the programs should continue. Most institutions have areas that can be trimmed, but not necessarily cut out. He acknowledged that significant discussion about the accreditation problem at the College of Education in Anchorage and whether accreditation should be pursued was underway. He suggested that the full board should consider the accreditation issue to determine what benefits the university as a whole, not necessarily one branch of it.

CHAIR STEVENS remarked that the committee just received an email from UA President [Jim Johnsen] indicating his solution to the loss of accreditation for the teaching programs in Anchorage was to handle the programs through the Fairbanks and Juneau campuses. It would appear that the regents had discussed this and were not willing to move ahead with accreditation in Anchorage. He expressed concern that it seemed shortsighted because Anchorage is the largest school in the university system. It would be great to have Anchorage accredited in those areas rather than depend on classes and professors coming from outside.

MR. BANIA related his understanding that that the Board of Regents has not yet approved a solution. However, so long as education students can complete their programs, obtain certificates, and become teachers, he was unsure if it mattered whether the accreditation came from the UA Anchorage College of Education or the UA Fairbanks and UA Southeast.

CHAIR STEVENS said he appreciated his willingness not to panic.

[9:14:16 AM](#)

SENATOR BIRCH said that the University of Alaska is very important to him. He asked Mr. Bania how he perceived his role on the Board of Regents and to share how he would serve as an advocate for higher education in Alaska.

MR. BANIA replied that it was essential to respect and protect the needs of the university's faculty, staff, and students. The

Board of Regents oversees the University of Alaska system and hires or dismisses the president. He characterized it as a great responsibility because education is "a people business." When he was initially asked to serve on the board, he felt it was a great honor, but he also recognized the tremendous responsibility the board has since its decisions affect many people and programs, including the president, staff, faculty, and residents.

[9:16:47 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said she hoped that besides considering faculty and students, he would consider the state's needs as the university goes through the restructuring process. She reported that the UA has over 400 programs. She suggested that the UA could keep and improve the programs most important to the needs of the state and its workforce. These enhanced programs could draw in Lower 48 students, which could bring in nonresident tuition. She said she liked his comments on research and innovation since technology can create opportunities for Alaska. She suggested that the university should look ahead and consider how to prepare students to bring in new opportunities for the state.

MR. BANIA replied that he agreed wholeheartedly. He said that he has a master's degree in vocational-technical education. Since he has lived in many places in Alaska, he has a statewide perspective on the state needs, including training and education for people who can accomplish things. He said he hoped he could contribute by using his work history in other fields and in education as principal or superintendent. In particular, he would like to contribute by helping to develop programs in the technical fields that will benefit the state over time.

[9:20:30 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said that his statewide perspective and experience will serve him well in this position. She said she appreciated his experience in the K-12 system because many students are not prepared for college and must take remedial coursework. Once confirmed, he could provide a beneficial link to school districts to help ensure that students graduating from high school were prepared for the 100-level college courses.

CHAIR STEVENS asked him to reflect on teacher education in the state, which he is knowledgeable in since he has hired teachers. The state hires Lower 48 teachers to work in Alaska since the state does not have enough teachers to fulfill its needs. Each year, the legislature requests the Board of Regents to report on

measures it has taken to address teacher education. The University of Alaska's president developed the goal to achieve a certain percentage of teachers who from Alaska by a certain date. He asked whether Mr. Bania had any ideas on how to increase the number of rural Alaskans who go into teacher education.

MR. BANIA answered that he has experience in hiring teachers for many of the schools in the Northwest Arctic. He characterized teaching in rural Alaska as a way of life. In rural Alaska, educators are totally immersed and involved in the community. He explained that Alaska is divided into larger towns and Bush villages, which might seem like living in a foreign country to many teachers. Alaskans must bridge the gap between the larger towns and the smaller, rural villages. He recalled when Alaska had an exchange program for students from Anchorage or Fairbanks to spend two or three weeks in a village and vice versa. He suggested developing programs to inform people, so teachers realize what it is like to live in rural Alaska. Sometimes living in rural Alaska is tough: the climate is tough. However, some people who are outdoor oriented and become involved in the community learn to love it.

[9:25:44 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS offered his belief that the board has lacked the perspective of someone who has spent time in rural education. He said that Mr. Bania would be a great addition to the board.

CHAIR STEVENS turned to the next appointee, Darroll Hargraves, who has been involved in many legislative issues during the chair's tenure in the legislature. He asked Mr. Hargraves to speak to his interest in serving on Board of Regents and any goals he has to help improve the University of Alaska.

[9:26:54 AM](#)

DARROLL HARGRAVES, Appointee, University of Alaska Board of Regents, Wasilla, said he arrived in Fairbanks in February in 1966, on his way to teach English in Barrow. The downtown Fairbanks thermometer read 70 degrees below zero, which was a drastic change from Missouri weather. He remarked that he still retains a relationship with many former students. From Barrow, he went to Kivalina and then Gambell to teach. In 1969, University of Alaska Fairbanks recruited him. He eventually became director of UA Statewide Programs and Services. He was in charge of any classes not offered at the Fairbanks campus.

[9:29:43 AM](#)

{Indisc.--technical difficulties}

[9:30:34 AM](#)

At ease.

[9:30:39 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting. He advised Mr. Hargraves the teleconference was experiencing technical difficulties with the audio.

[9:34:35 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES commented that she served with Mr. Hargraves at a number of community council meetings. She explained that the Mat-Su Valley lacked representation on the Board of Regents for many years until Dr. Bishop was appointed, but shortly after her appointment, she was hired by the Anchorage School District and stepped down.

She offered her belief that Mr. Hargraves would bring a broad perspective from his experience living in many areas of the state. She related Mr. Hargraves currently lives in the Mat-Su, which is an area that has evolved into a good community. She said she wanted the committee to know Mr. Hargraves was a good candidate to serve on the Board of Regents.

[9:36:26 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS remarked that the committee wanted to hear more from Mr. Hargraves, but the audio was inaudible. He announced that Mr. Hargrave's confirmation hearing would be postponed.

[9:37:40 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS opened public testimony and after determining no one wished to testify, closed public testimony. He solicited a motion.

[9:38:11 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES stated that in accordance with AS 39.05.080, the Senate Education Standing Committee reviewed the following and recommends the appointment be forwarded to a joint session for consideration:

University of Alaska Board of Regents
John Bania - Wrangell

[9:38:34 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS found no objection and the motion carried.

[Signing the reports regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects individual members' approval or disapproval of the appointees; the nominations are merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.]

[9:38:42 AM](#)

At ease.

[9:38:57 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting and turned to consideration of the governor's appointees to the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development. He noted that the hearing of Ms. Tiffany Scott would be postponed because she was not available.

[9:41:18 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked Ms. Stockhausen to speak to her background, why she would like to serve on the State Board of Education, and any goals she has for the BOE.

[9:41:58 AM](#)

SALLY STOCKHAUSEN, Appointee, Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development, Ketchikan, said she is a special education teacher at Ketchikan High School. She began her teaching career in 1998 in Ft. Worth, Texas. In 2002, she and her husband moved to Glenallen. Her husband was a history teacher and basketball coach. She became a paraeducator in the special education program and through that experience she discovered her passion was advocating for and teaching students in special education. In the Copper River School District, she received outstanding professional development and worked with staff and the district to create an RTI [response to intervention] model before it became popular. She said earned a master's degree in special education at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) and taught special education in the Copper River School District for four years. In 2008, her family moved to Ketchikan. She said that she has two children who attend Ketchikan schools.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN reiterated that her greatest passion was to advocate for students who struggle, teaching them to advocate for themselves, creating a safe learning environment, and improving postsecondary outcomes for students in special education. She said she is very excited to be part of the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development (BOE). She offered her belief that this board is committed to investing in

the future of Alaska and the education of Alaska's children. She agreed with the board's mission statement that every student should receive an excellent education every day. She further agreed with the Alaska Education Challenge and its three commitments, to increase student success, support responsible and reflective learners, and cultivate safety and well-being. She expressed interest in the trauma-informed movement transforming schools. This movement focuses on trauma issues that classroom teachers have struggled with for many years. Schools can make huge differences in the future of students by becoming more aware of trauma, so students and their families can overcome past or current trauma.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN said she brings to the board her years of experience teaching at the elementary, middle, and secondary level. She has taught in the inner city, rural Alaska, and small-town Alaska. She has taught general education, English as a Second Language, and special education. She has served on many teams, committees, and served as a department chair for several years. She brings not only a teacher's perspective but also a special educator's perspective. She acknowledged that we live in challenging times. In terms of goals, she would like to assist districts in meeting the Alaska Education Challenge by finding innovative, creative ways to increase student success, support responsible and reflective learners, and cultivate safety and well-being, she said. She characterized educators as resourceful people. She highlighted other goals, including a desire to make the education system sustainable in the changing economy, and to help districts implement the trauma-engaged practice framework. Only when students feel safe and connected at school can these students learn, she said.

[9:46:07 AM](#)

MS. STOCKHAUSEN said that often during times of adversity come times of great growth. She identified some struggles, including low test scores, budget issues, UAA's accreditation, as opportunities for innovative growth. She cares about the future of students and is excited about increasing career and technical education (CTE) opportunities, so all students will have a chance for a bright future. CTE classes not only give students needed life skills, but also help students investigate career paths and motivate them to stay in school and pursue further training. She has observed students who have struggled academically for an entire school career blossom in an auto or wood shop. She would like schools to offer more of these opportunities. She expressed an interest in improving

partnerships with families, communities and tribes. Everyone needs to work together to support Alaska's children.

9:47:29 AM

CHAIR STEVENS pointed out one role that was not being addressed was its independence. By law, the board is an independent organization. The State Board of Education is responsible for voting on the budget, but Alaska's BOE has not done so. He acknowledged that it was a political issue. However, he asked whether she could speak to the role of the board, its independence, and its job as compared to the administration.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN said she would yield to the spirit of the statement the board issued:

We are supportive of our legislators and the governor as you work together to create a budget that will carry us into the future and that regardless of how much our budget increases or decreases, we'll remain steadfast to the Alaska Education Challenge.

9:48:39 AM

SENATOR BEGICH echoed Chair Steven's question. He recalled an attorney general's opinion presented at an earlier joint education meeting found that the board was symbolic in its decision-making authority. He said that he found the board's statement very disappointing. He paraphrased the BOE's mission statement to mean that the board looks forward to decisions made by others, but it considers its role a symbolic one. He asked whether she was accepting of the BOE's role as symbolic.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN offered her belief that where the board can make decisions that were more than symbolic in how it allocates the resources for education. She said that the board looks forward to reviewing the legislature's budget for education.

9:50:05 AM

SENATOR BEGICH asked about her vision for pre-K and the role it plays in the education system given her experience teaching pre-K in Copper Valley because it would help inform the writing of the budget.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN replied that the earlier that children can become involved in pre-reading instruction, literature-rich environments would be best. She explained her role in pre-K in the Copper River School District with special education students with Individual Education Plans (IEP) was for students who

needed assistance. At the time, that was their only scope of pre-K.

SENATOR BEGICH related from data on poor test scores that Caucasian students do better than the national average. However, according to data presented last week, non-Caucasian students, in particular, Alaska Native students perform poorly. He indicated that districts that perform most poorly have issues around language, whether a student comes prepared in English and Yupik, or English and Athabascan, or English and Inupiaq. He asked what the board would recommend for weaker outcomes for dual language students who are predominantly Alaska Native students.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN recalled that the Alaska Education Challenge [policy] suggested districts should purposefully increase their relationships with tribes and families to support [Alaska Native] students. She said sometimes schools project the sense that teachers are experts who know everything and tell students, "You need to do this to be successful." She suggested it was also important to consider areas which parents, communities, and tribes need their children to show proficiency, and to inquire what will culturally work for their children. She suggested that the districts needed to increase these partnerships.

SENATOR BEGICH said that he repeatedly hears about lower test scores. However, when the legislature and educators drill down and examine recent data, it also shows higher graduation rates and improved school outcomes since the legislature has stabilized education funding. He asked what she would do to address teacher turnover, which seems to be a chronic problem and is one of the drivers of the rural education challenges.

[9:54:18 AM](#)

MS. STOCKHAUSEN said she appreciated Mr. Bania's views about creating programs to allow new teachers to experience life in rural Alaska before moving to villages. She would take it a step further and suggest the districts should create ways to mentor teachers. Teachers graduate from college and imagine themselves teaching in rural communities. These teachers are sometimes shocked at the reality of village life. The mentor programs must be ones created in rural Alaska. These mentors could help teachers through difficult times in local schools or communities. She offered her belief that teachers need support.

SENATOR BEGICH said the Constitution of the State of Alaska prohibits the use of public funds for private education. He asked for her opinion.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN answered that she has considered this issue since he asked her about that during a meeting in his office. As a board member, it is her duty to uphold statutes, but if the statutes change, she felt it was her duty to have an open mind and hold discussions from all perspectives to determine the best for students.

SENATOR BEGICH clarified that the Constitution of the State of Alaska prohibits the use of public funds for private education, not the statutes. He asked whether education could be improved by cutting funding.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN said that cutting education funding concerns her. She was unsure how schools could make it with budget cuts, but at the same time she was concerned about the state's financial future. She remarked that she does not envy the budgetary decisions the legislature or the governor must make since these decisions will affect generations of Alaskans. She said the administration and legislature must find new revenues and cut expenditures. She acknowledged the difficulty to do so. She thanked the committee members for their service and for carrying that burden so that the board can focus on educating Alaska's children.

SENATOR BEGICH said he appreciates her candor.

[9:57:38 AM](#)

SENATOR BIRCH said he worked with local school boards and governments for six years in Fairbanks and nine years in Anchorage. Typically, the local school boards are "hands-on" and approve contracts, approve budgets and advance those budgets for local government approval. He asked if she could see any parallels between the statewide Board of Education, which has been viewed as "symbolic" and his experience with local school boards who control budgets subject to veto in local government. He offered his belief that the references to symbolic role does not sound meaningful.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN asked for further clarification that the question was how the board was different from local school boards.

SENATOR BIRCH replied yes. He said he is seeking a sense of the fundamental distinction for the Board of Education's role.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN answered that her experience was very school focused and the BOE represents a new arena for her. She related her understanding that the state board's role is more focused on the students and guiding policy and to allocate the [financial] resources the legislature appropriates whereas the local school boards receive funding and must allocate the funding.

SENATOR BIRCH said he is trying to figure out the state board's advocacy role.

10:00:56 AM

SENATOR COSTELLO said that everyone in the legislature recognizes the importance of education. She recognized the need for innovative and uncommon solutions to common problems. She was encouraged that Ms. Stockhausen recognized the impact of adverse childhood experiences and promoted trauma-informed care. She said it was time to examine the reasons that schools in some areas are underperforming. Some pockets of excellence and great results exist, but it seemed hit or miss across the state.

She expressed her concern that the legislature's budget approval timing has had an ongoing negative impact on teacher retention. Each year districts must write several budgets [to address potential budget cuts]. Further, the districts must lay off teachers, which is especially difficult in rural Alaska because those teachers must decide whether to stay or leave. Often, these teachers decide to leave.

SENATOR COSTELLO said she was also concerned about the suicide rate among young people in Alaska. It is disheartening and so sad, she said. She asked Ms. Stockhausen to comment about the early funding and the role she might have in addressing the issue of suicide.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN answered that she agreed with Senator Costello on early funding. She related her own experience in moving from Texas to Alaska. Each year was stressful because she and her husband would not know if their contracts would be renewed and considered leaving. She acknowledged that new teachers express the same concerns. She offered her belief that Alaska loses many good teachers as a result. She would love to find a way to address early funding.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN said that hearing about the suicide rate in Alaska causes her to picture some of her former students who committed suicide. It is heartbreaking, she said. The best way to combat suicide is for teachers to develop meaningful relationships with kids and to foster safe atmospheres in schools for peer relationships, she said. For example, all students need to experience someone being excited to see them walk through the door. She suggested that the trauma-informed movement will raise awareness regarding how important the personal connects are and help school staff to intentionally focus on building those positive relationships.

[10:05:35 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said that the Anchorage and Mat-Su superintendents expressed concern about the level of special education funding, such that some streamlining could be done without diminishing the quality of the special education services. However, districts were prohibited by federal law, not a state requirement. She encouraged Ms. Stockhausen suggest that the board send a letter or resolution to urge Alaska's Congressional delegation to remedy this issue to free up those dollars that could be used to provide other instruction.

[10:07:07 AM](#)

MS. STOCKHAUSEN asked for further clarification on the specific issue.

SENATOR HUGHES said that according to the superintendents, federal law requires districts provide the same level of funding for special education it did in the previous year. Districts do not have any flexibility to streamline to achieve cost savings and redirect the funds. She asked Ms. Stockhausen if she would support an effort at the federal level for this to be reconsidered to give districts more flexibility.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN answered that she was not familiar with the issue, but she offered to research it.

SENATOR HUGHES suggested that she contact Dr. Goyette and Dr. Bishop for information.

[10:08:17 AM](#)

She highlighted one area in the Alaska Education Challenge related to safety in school buildings. The legislature has heard of tragic circumstances in the lower 48. She offered her belief that Alaska still has work to do since schools feel less prepared than a few years ago. The legislature wants students to

learn and be safe, she said. She asked whether she had any thoughts on school safety.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN said that she spends a significant amount of time in different classrooms. She acknowledged when she enters a new classroom that she automatically considers how she would handle an emergency. Most teachers have made that transition, too, she said. Her district moved to ALICE [alert, lockdown, inform, counter, evacuate] training. She would like to further research school safety. In the last few years, her district has increased the discussion it has with kids and is doing more practice drills. She agrees that it must be one of the top priorities.

SENATOR BEGICH referred to an earlier discussion of the attorney general's legal opinion about the symbolic role of the BOE. He had asked Legislative Legal Services to provide a response to the memo. He said that he just received the response. He asked Ms. Stockhausen to comment on two statements.

[10:11:44 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS clarified that he had a response from Legislative Legal Services responding to the letter from the governor's office.

SENATOR BEGICH answered yes. He read an excerpt from the letter:

The Executive Budget Act does not actually supersede the procedures outlined in AS 14.07.150 regarding the Department of Education's (DEED) proposed budget because the provisions do not actually conflict. DEED could comply with both AS 14.07.150 and the Executive Budget Act through compliance with the process outlined in AS 14.07.150. Indeed, DEED has historically been able to comply with both the Budget Act and AS 14.07.150. Nevertheless, even in the event of an apparent conflict between these provisions, the Budget Act does not explicitly state that conflicting provisions are superseded by the Executive Budget Act and the DEED commissioner and board remain subject to the budget procedures set forth in AS 14.07.150.

A vote on the DEED budget would not merely be a "symbolic statement" as this is a statutorily required budget procedure. While the governor has already satisfied his constitutional and statutory obligations to submit a budget to the legislature for

consideration, the legislature has not yet completed its budget process and DEED's compliance with AS 14.07.150 may also aid the legislature in making its final budgetary decisions. Our legal advice is that you have a role advising us in terms of a budget.

He said he was not asking for a response today. However, since the BOE's role elicited the board's response, he suggested she should reflect on that statement. He offered to provide the opinion to the committee and the department.

CHAIR STEVENS asked whether she had a conflict of interest to serve on the Board of Education since she is an employee of Ketchikan High School, but falls under the jurisdiction of a principal, a superintendent, and the Board of Education. He said that being in a leadership position can be difficult. She may be asked to make decisions that her colleagues or administrator might not like.

MS. STOCKHAUSEN said that she does not believe that she has a conflict of interest. She agreed that the BOE will make decisions that people will not like. However, people have disagreements in every aspect of their lives. She expressed her interest to serve on the board as an advocate for teachers. She has enjoyed having her perspective broadened. For example, her perspective changed when she changed jobs from teaching general education to special education. Suddenly, she felt her perspective changed and she viewed policy decisions differently. She acknowledged that it may be difficult sometimes.

CHAIR STEVENS asked appointee Mr. Griffin to provide his personal background, the strengths he will bring to the State Board of Education and Early Development (BOEED), reasons he would like to serve and to outline any goals he may have.

[10:16:41 AM](#)

BOB GRIFFIN, Appointee, Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development (BOEED), Anchorage, said that his wife is a refugee from Laos. She speaks five languages and his daughter recently obtained her commercial pilot license. He is a professional pilot with experience in the military and as a commercial pilot. His grandparents came to Skagway in 1899. He grew up in Juneau and Anchorage. He offered his belief that his background as an Air Force fighter pilot, test pilot flight instructor, and lifelong learner will serve him well on the state board. He joined the Army at 18 years old and became a helicopter pilot. He obtained his degree by attending night

school. He has previously served on numerous board and commissions for many years, but he found this board to consist of an amazing group of people from Kotzebue, Fairbanks, Glenallen, Soldotna, and Ketchikan. He serves as an urban representative for the board. He previously served on the Budget Advisory Commission for the Anchorage School District (ASC) and for the Municipality of Anchorage for six years and as chair for one year. He is currently a member of the Capital Improvement Advisory Committee for the ASD. He has served on that committee for seven years. He has been an education research fellow for the last ten years with the Alaska Policy Forum. He has traveled to many education conferences to learn as much as he could. His passion has been to find ways to improve student outcomes in Alaska. He remarked that he is very proud of Alaska.

MR. GRIFFIN said he brings a sense of curiosity to the board. He continues his research to find the best practices to improve student outcomes. In 2013 Representative LeDoux asked him if he could only do one thing for the state of Alaska, what he would do. He told her it was to improve early childhood literacy. He offered his belief that the state's early childhood literacy rates were dismal.

MR. GRIFFIN said the trend in their NAEP [National Assessment of Educational Progress] test scores are alarming. He has done research for years on economic strata of children who qualify for free and reduced lunches. He said the schools do not fare well in that area either. He referred to a graph in members' packets. Alaska hovers near the bottom and has since 2003 when Alaska was first required to participate in NAEP. For early childhood literacy, he said he admires the Florida model, since Florida has improved early childhood literacy, especially for its low income and non-Caucasians.

MR. GRIFFIN said ultimately his goal was to support the inspirational Alaska Educational Challenge and increase student success, support responsible and reflective learners, and cultivate safety and well-being. He highlighted his interest in the concept of tribal compacting and giving Native Alaska tribes some ownership in the process. He said he is the only member on the Tribal Compacting Subcommittee who was not an Inupiaq speaker, but he expressed his willingness to learn. Some of the disappointing scores in Western Alaska and the Northwest Arctic could be helped if people took ownership of the process. He said, "An old Scottish economist years ago said, 'If you sell a man a desert, in a year you will have a garden but if you rent a man a garden, in a year you'll have a desert,'" he said. It is

important step an in the process to give tribal communities ownership in their tribal communities.

[10:25:29 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked what sparked his interest in education given his background as a military fighter pilot and airline pilot.

MR. GRIFFIN answered that about 11 years ago he and two other airline pilots formed the Municipal Taxpayer League in Anchorage when property taxes began to rise rapidly. He explained it was a complicated taxpayer ballot initiative that ultimately received 63 percent of the vote. The group thought about what else to focus on, so he reviewed the Anchorage School District, while the other two examined utilities and municipal government. As he researched the ASD, he became more concerned about the outcomes than the costs, so his advocacy on outcomes has continued, he said.

[10:27:37 AM](#)

SENATOR BIRCH pointed out that Mr. Griffin is a South Anchorage constituent of his. He asked for his view on the board's role in establishing policy. He recalled that a Senate Finance Budget Subcommittee previously discussed statewide health care costs doubling for teachers, such that rates have increased from \$300 million to \$600 million. He asked whether the board has a role in how well districts and education system function.

MR. GRIFFIN answered absolutely. Since he has served on the Budget Advisory Committee for a long time, he is very familiar with the cost drivers that increase K-12 educational costs throughout the state. He said these costs were not just due to rising health care costs, but also other costs, including building maintenance and bureaucracy. This begs the question of why this has been such a cost driver in the state of Alaska. He said he relies on benchmarks, so he is curious why the state is such a cost outlier compared to other states. He acknowledged that he does not have the answer. However, he offered his belief that it was worth investigating why Alaska is so unique in this category.

[10:30:00 AM](#)

SENATOR BIRCH indicated another issue is the percentage of state funds that go into the classroom. Some say it as low as in the 50 percent range. Other statistics indicate it is above 70 percent. He asked which metric he could rely on.

MR. GRIFFIN replied that it is difficult to pin down classroom costs because it depends on what is included in costs. For example, he asked if classroom cost factors should include health care costs for teachers and their staff support. He suggested one approach would be to review costs more globally, to identify the cost drivers, and try to keep them under control. He said he did not think it was worthwhile to spend a lot of staff time parsing out classroom cost factors since it would not be useful for the outcomes of children in Alaska.

10:31:25 AM

CHAIR STEVENS asked him to reflect on the previous discussion the committee held on the board's role. The question is whether the Board of Education [and Early Development] was truly independent or as the letter from governor's office states, that the board's position on the budget is only symbolic.

MR. GRIFFIN offered the distinction that the board's vote is symbolic, but the board's role is not symbolic. He said that he was very enthusiastic about working with the commissioner and other board members, who have been delving into policy issues. He offered his belief that the commissioner wants the board to be the formation point of policy. The board has formed four subcommittees and that he serves on two subcommittees, the Tribal Compacting Subcommittee and Regulations Review Subcommittee. He surmised that a lot regulations currently on the books made sense once but now cause drag on the system. In fact, these regulations could be creating some of the bureaucracy that he is very concerned about, he said. He emphasized that this board is very much a "hands-on" entity. The board reviews over 900-page packets at each meeting. Board members take on assignments and members frequently communicate. He offered his belief that board member were dedicated to the task of improving student outcomes.

SENATOR BEGICH said he would ask the same questions he previously discussed with Mr. Griffin in his office. He referred to the handouts that Mr. Griffin shared with the committee. He noted that Florida scores dramatically changed after 2003, right after Florida passed a constitutional amendment limiting class size. He asked Mr. Griffin whether class size had any effect on Florida's score improvements.

MR. GRIFFIN referred to a handout, titled "Table B4" for students and average daily attendance per teacher from NEA's rankings and estimates for April 2018. Alaska was 19th in the nation in students and average daily attendance {ADA} per

teacher at 13.76, that Florida was 45th in the nation at 18.27 students per teacher, and California had a similar statute.

SENATOR BEGICH further clarified his question. He said he was asking what impact that constitutional amendment had on changes to scores in Florida. He suggested it would not be fair to compare class sizes in Alaska to other states since some schools serve as few as ten students. Instead, he was asking about the impact on the scores in the handout.

[10:35:56 AM](#)

MR. GRIFFIN said that he always goes to the numbers as a policy wonk. He understands that California has a similar statute, which is difficult to enforce since the limit is difficult to implement. For example, he asked what would happen when the class size limit is 24 students and a 25th student arrived. Since the Florida law was instituted, the percentage of educators to students did not increase dramatically. He said he was not sure what happened, but it was something that should be investigated.

SENATOR BEGICH acknowledged that was a fair answer. He read the [Alaska] Policy Forum documents that criticized pre-K, but those documents were focused on Head Start. He asked for his thoughts on evidence-based pre-K, such as the programs in Nome, the Lower Kuskokwim School District, Mat-Su, and Anchorage that have shown remarkable outcomes in reading score improvements. He suggested that whatever the department has been doing seems to be working in comparison to the cohorts who did not attend the programs. He asked for Mr. Griffin's thoughts on pre-K and whether the state should pursue pre-K.

MR. GRIFFIN said he was one of the first students in the state of Alaska to attend the Head Start program. In fact, he was in a photograph on the front page of the Juneau-Douglas newspaper. The photograph showed him having his hearing tested in the brand-new Head Start program. He offered his belief that pre-K programs provide some great value, especially if the programs are directed at the at-risk populations. Some good data supports that, he said. In 2005, Florida began a voluntary pre-K program. Although that cohort was not old enough to be tested in 2009, Florida was number one in low-income fourth grade reading that year. He said he was a big fan of the Florida reading program. It is very efficient, but other policies can have as much value if not more than pre-K in some cases, he said.

SENATOR BEGICH asked for his thoughts on Best Beginnings, Parents as Teachers, and other educational programs.

MR. GRIFFIN replied that those programs were not in the governor's budget. He said that given long-term fiscal situation in Alaska, the department must face tough decision to decide which good programs to retain. He acknowledged that all of these programs add value to the student outcomes. However, at some point the state has to face the fiscal reality of what it can afford. He said he would not shortchange the innovative capabilities of his fellow Alaskans to solve these problems with the available resources.

10:40:24 AM

SENATOR BEGICH agreed the state would face a fiscal reality or have the fortitude to see a vision. He turned to the issue of NAEP and test scores, noting he reviewed the work of the Policy Forum on rural vs. urban scores. He specifically asked what Mr. Griffin would propose to address the key issue of teacher retention, particularly in the western and northern regions in Alaska. He asked what Mr. Griffin would recommend to the legislature or governor about teacher retention.

MR. GRIFFIN acknowledged that teacher retention was a big problem, especially for rural communities. He clarified that teacher retention was not a problem in some of the high-performing rural communities. These schools use a lot of innovative solutions to leverage available technology. He described a scenario in which a teacher would have long-term continuity in western Alaska via teleconferencing. A native elder could be paid to proctor and make sure that kids show up for school. The teacher could leverage that technology to provide continuity to communities.

He recalled he held a long conversation with an educator in Pilot Station who expressed frustration about the chaotic nature of his classrooms, who decided to leave because he could not handle it. He said that teacher was thrown into a difficult situation. However, continuity and ownership of the process are key to improving those outcomes. Teachers were more satisfied after the Florida reading model was in place because teachers from fourth grade on had a much more homogenous group of kids to teach. Recently he attended an Anchorage School District meeting that showed a slide depicting a fourth grade teacher with students of reading abilities that ranged between kindergarten and seventh grade. That teacher's time and resources were probably dedicated to the kids with lower reading levels and the

other kids were probably not getting the necessary attention. He offered his belief that becomes a much more satisfying experience when educators are teaching a homogenous group of students.

10:43:50 AM

SENATOR BEGICH asked whether cuts would improve education.

MR. GRIFFIN acknowledged that many people are having discussions that dollars equal outcomes. The State Board of Education and Early Development (BOEED) is dedicated to the principles of the Alaska Education Challenge regardless of the resources provided to them. He would never sell short the innovativeness of the people of Alaska and the people in the K-12 education system to get done what needs to be done, regardless of the resources provided.

SENATOR BEGICH said that, if confirmed he will swear an oath to support the Constitution of the State of Alaska. He asked if Mr. Griffin supports the constitutional prohibition against the use of public funds for private education.

MR. GRIFFIN answered that of course he does. The constitution is the constitution, he said. School choice has been settled. He acknowledged that he has long been an advocate for school choice, as he has been an advocate for literacy, and for issues including leveraging technology, career technology, tribal compacting, more recess time, the lack of preparation for college, and chronic absenteeism in Alaska. He expressed concern that too much money was being spent on buildings and bureaucracy that rob resources from classrooms. He explained that he has been an advocate for educational choice for children and parents in Alaska because he will advocate for anything with empirical data that might possibly improve outcomes for students.

10:46:28 AM

SENATOR HUGHES said she liked that he is a numbers "wonk." She related her understanding that he provides a wealth of information in the board settings. She recalled hearing that students in Alaska attend two or three weeks less school time than the national average in the Lower 48. She said she discussed this issue with some superintendents and these administrators share her concern that Alaska's students receive less academic time. Some of the superintendents were open to extending the school days since Alaska has achievement gaps and the need for improved outcomes. She asked whether that was a conversation the board is willing to have. If the board wants to

focus on policy, the board could bring a proposal back to the legislature, she said. She indicated that the current statutes include a day and hour requirement, but perhaps that needs to be increased.

MR. GRIFFIN said that besides less school, Alaska ranks number 2 in the United States for chronic absenteeism, just behind Washington. About 24 percent of kids miss more than 15 days of school a year, which equates to about 100 hours a year of lost instruction. He recalled that the last metric for the Anchorage School District showed 33 percent of seniors were on track to be chronically absent. Some policy measures could be taken to improve that, but the length of the day would require further evaluation, he said. He referred to one benchmark he uses, which is the Finnish system. In fact, the Finnish system actually has a short school day, he said. Mandatory education doesn't start until age seven, but at age 15 Finnish students walk away with the highest PISA scores in the Western world. Finnish students tend to be literate in four languages when entering college or trade tracks. He agreed these are areas that needed more investigation. Being below the national average for the amount of time spent in school probably doesn't help results, he said.

[10:50:01 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO made an analogy between Mr. Griffin's performance-based assessment and his work as a pilot. She said that pilots are trained to meet certain standards to get certification. She offered her belief that Mr. Griffin would bring his personal experiences to education. Hands-on learning engages kids and keeps them in school to graduate, she said.

SENATOR COSTELLO asked whether he had an opinion about the start times for high schools.

MR. GRIFFIN expressed concern that the Anchorage School District did not go with the recommended start times based on the best pedagogic practices. He acknowledged that busing, afterschool sports, and afterschool jobs had some effect. However, since he was data-driven, when research indicates that people should do something, people should probably do it rather than weighing the other considerations.

SENATOR BEGICH said he was intrigued that Mr. Griffin brought up the Finnish system. He said he has spent some time reviewing their educational system. He expressed an interest in having further discussions about the Finnish system. He would like to

hear how the board might apply that model to the Alaskan situation.

[10:52:46 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS opened public testimony on the confirmation hearing.

[10:52:57 AM](#)

KATHY CUDDY, representing herself, Anchorage, offered her support for the confirmation of Bob Griffin to the State Board of Education and Early Development (BOEED). She said that she served on the BOE under Governor Hickel, so she was aware of the volume of necessary work. She said that she served on a board with Mr. Griffin. She highlighted that Mr. Griffin was extraordinarily well-researched and grounded. She predicted that he would bring a wealth of information to the board. In her experience, he was always dedicated to researching and understanding the issues. She said that Mr. Griffin has a wonderful attitude and sense of humor.

[10:54:39 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS closed public testimony on the confirmation hearing for the appointees to the State Board of Education.

SENATOR BEGICH pointed out that Florida has the highest percentage of voluntary pre-K in the nation, which was even higher than Oklahoma. His [bill] was based Oklahoma's program.

CHAIR STEVENS solicited a motion.

[10:55:05 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES stated that in accordance with AS 39.05.080, the Senate Education Standing Committee reviewed the following and recommends the appointments be forwarded to a joint session for consideration:

Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development

Sally Stockhausen - Ketchikan

Bob Griffin - Anchorage

[10:55:40 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS found no objection and the motion carried.

[10:55:55 AM](#)

At ease.

[10:55:59 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting.

Signing the reports regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects individual members' approval or disapproval of the appointees; the nominations are merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

10:57:19 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 10:57 a.m.