

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

February 17, 2020

9:05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

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

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Chris Tuck
[One vacant seat as of 1/25/2020]

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator John Coghill

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT TO THE
ALASKA LEGISLATURE

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development Annual Report.

MICHAEL JOHNSON, PhD, Commissioner
Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information during the presentation of the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:05:38 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the joint meeting of the House and Senate Education Standing Committees to order at 9:05 a.m. Representatives Hopkins, Johnson, Zulkosky, Story, and Drummond and Senators Hughes, Costello, Begich, and Stevens were present at the call to order.

PRESENTATION: State Board of Education Annual Report to the Alaska Legislature

[Contains discussion of SB 6.]

[9:06:25 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced that the only order of business would be a presentation by the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development.

[9:06:45 AM](#)

JAMES FIELDS, Chair, State Board of Education & Early Development, began a PowerPoint Presentation on the 2020 State Board of Education Annual Report [hardcopy included in the committee packet].

[9:08:04 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:08 a.m. to 9:09 a.m.

9:09:08 AM

MR. FIELDS introduced and provided a brief biography of the members of the board listed on the first slide. He referred to the slide entitled "Alaska State Constitution education clause" to highlight the strategic vision of the board. He recited the Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) purpose statement and drew attention to "Alaska's Education Challenge," which consists of five goals, shown on the slide as follows [original punctuation provided]:

1. Support all students to read at grade level by the end of third grade
2. Increase career, technical, and culturally relevant education to meet student and workforce needs
3. Close the achievement gap by ensuring equitable educational rigor and resources
4. Prepare, attract, and retain effective education professionals
5. Improve the safety and well-being of students through school partnerships with families, communities, and tribes

9:11:20 AM

CO-CHAIR STORY, referring to goal number three, noted that the Juneau School District has started closing the "instructional" gap as compared to the "achievement" gap. She explained that phrasing this differently resulted in focus on meeting the needs of students who come prepared and ready to learn. She recommended that the board consider this change in language.

9:12:10 AM

MR. FIELDS drew attention to the slide entitled "REGULATIONS AND OTHER BOARD ACTIONS" and highlighted the formation of four committees, each one focused on different DEED priorities: standards and assessments, tribal compacting, regulations, and the funding formula. He explained that the committees' configuration is being examined for effectiveness and that some of the structure may change.

He noted that in the area of school health and safety, the Transforming Schools Toolkit - a whole-child resource to assist Alaska schools becoming fully trauma engaged and practicing - is scheduled for completion in 2020. He also highlighted the

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)/Trauma Informed Schools eLearning courses, and paraphrased from page 11 of the annual report, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

DEED's eLearning Program provides more than 50 trainings to districts at no cost and now serves more than 25,000 school district employees. Since January 1, 2019 users completed 26,057 courses. The most heavily trafficked courses DEED continued to be those focusing on school health and safety topics. DEED continued its development of distance-delivered trainings to assist districts with becoming trauma informed.

[9:14:10 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS explained that DEED applied for and was awarded \$20 million in grant funding. He read a selection of [a quote by Dr. Michael Johnson, Commissioner, DEED, from page 13 of the annual report], as follows:

We intentionally applied for this grant to support the implementation of the first goal in Alaska's Education Challenge - supporting all students to read at grade level by the end of third grade. There is no question that reading proficiently improves student outcomes and quality of life.

MR. FIELDS explained that 26 districts applied for grants, and 16 were awarded grant funding: Alaska Gateway School District, Aleutians East Borough School District, Anchorage School District, Bering Strait School District, Denali Borough School District, Fairbanks North Star Borough District, Juneau Borough School District, Kodiak Island Borough School District, Kuspuk School District, Lake and Peninsula Borough School District, Lower Yukon School District, Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District, Nenana City School District, Nome Public Schools, Southeast Island School District, and Yukon -Koyukuk School District. He highlighted program areas where grant funding has been applied throughout the districts, including literacy development, professional development, hiring reading specialists, innovations in reading instruction strategies, increasing family engagement, and reading support outside of the school year timeframe.

[9:15:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY requested that DEED provide additional information on the school districts and explanation of focus on how grant funding has been received.

[9:15:48 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease 9:15 a.m. to 9:16 a.m.

[9:16:23 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS highlighted the new school data portal and paraphrased from the annual report, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

On September 30, 2019, DEED released a new online data portal for Alaska's families entitled The Compass: A Guide to Alaska's Public Schools. The purpose of the online portal is to provide Alaska's families with important information about their child's school so they can make the best decisions for their child's educational experience. The Compass presents school-level data reported to DEED in an easily accessible and understandable online format. Visitors can view a profile of their school, compare their school's data over multiple years, compare two schools, and explore educational options in their local school district and across the state.

MR. FIELDS added that the portal was recently updated to include data relating to per-pupil expenditures on the federal, state, and local levels to increase public accountability of schools.

[9:17:29 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Mr. Fields whether the board could explain specific circumstances represented in the data, such as whether a school had higher salaried teachers due to the length of service of those teachers.

MR. FIELDS indicated that the board had not met in person in seven or eight months but has plans to consider including that type of additional data on the portal.

[9:18:38 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked whether the board has not met in person due to lack of funding.

MR. FIELDS answered that the board has only two in-person meetings per year due to lack of funding.

[9:19:24 AM](#)

MICHAEL JOHNSON, PhD, Commissioner, Department of Education & Early Development, in response to Co-Chair Story's query, stated that the data represented on the portal is in compliance with requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act [2015, successor to No Child Left Behind Act]. He explained that when questions arise from individuals accessing the portal regarding a particular school, they are encouraged to contact the school in question to get site-specific data.

[9:20:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY suggested that DEED provide some concise narrative describing mitigating factors of a school [that would explain per-pupil expenditure variations.]

[9:20:59 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked Dr. Johnson for suggestions on solving the problem of the lack of funding for in-person meetings.

[9:21:19 AM](#)

DR. JOHNSON noted that this year's executive budget request included an increment in funding for monthly meetings, with a fiscal note that designated six of the twelve meetings to be in person, although the House Finance Sub-Committee removed the increment.

[9:22:47 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked whether the board had explored a virtual meeting space as compared to merely meeting via teleconference. She added that students in Alaska use technology for distance learning in a virtual learning environment.

DR. JOHNSON answered that DEED has used [Cisco product] WebEx and has coordinated with the Legislative Information Office. He pointed out that the board meetings are subject to the Alaska Open Meetings Act [AS 44.62.310-312], and he expressed concern about maintaining public access to the meetings in compliance with the Act.

[9:24:31 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES noted that technology exists beyond viewing meeting participants as "dots around a table" and encouraged DEED to explore other available technologies to increase productivity of meetings that are not taking place in person.

[9:25:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY reiterated the remarks of Senator Hughes regarding advanced technology for meetings. She recommended that DEED coordinate with the University of Alaska to determine technologies that it uses to engage meeting participants more fully. She pointed out that students in Alaska are encouraged to use distance learning to obtain their education, and that DEED should explore those same options.

[9:26:42 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS indicated that the board members have some barriers to understanding and using new technology. He added that face-to-face interactions outside of meeting proceedings add value to the in-person board meetings. He noted that Internet access varies depending on location of meetings, and he said sites would require vetting in addition to board members learning to use new technologies.

[9:29:29 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES added that she supports in-person board meetings and visits to individual communities. She pointed out that students are asked to participate in their education via distance learning, and the board would benefit from sharing the experience of the students while maintaining compliance with the Alaska Open Meetings Act. She suggested that Alaska should pioneer virtual education on a statewide level, especially considering the nationwide teacher shortage.

[9:30:36 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND detailed a student's experience in distance learning in Nunapitchuk, described to her as a "storage closet" that was subject to any other streaming users on the network which would need to be actively managed in order for the student to participate in his class. She suggested that improvements

need to be made to the distance learning opportunities offered to students.

[9:31:49 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS continued with the presentation and highlighted Mt. Edgumbe High School as a leader in academic progress.

[9:32:48 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH referred to page 18 of the annual report and noted that between years 2018 and 2019, the percentage shows an increase in graduation rates; however, the graduate count shows a decrease in number. He asked whether that was an indication of a decline in the number of student population.

DR. JOHNSON indicated that DEED would work with its data team to provide an answer.

[9:34:25 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH recommended a comparison of available data using multiple [aggregate] years of data that will reflect trends on which to base and measure impact of decisions.

[9:35:32 AM](#)

DR. JOHNSON agreed to provide additional information and noted that DEED already performs a calculation of four- and five-year graduation rates, which DEED uses to analyze trends.

[9:36:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS referred to DEED's report summary on trauma informed learning and goal number three of the Alaska's Education Challenge, pertaining to behavioral health and social emotional learning, and he asked for a description of what the board is working towards and what it are doing with schools in this area of focus. He asked how the legislature might help.

[9:36:50 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS indicated coordination is taking place with partners such as other state agencies and native organizations.

[9:37:46 AM](#)

DR. JOHNSON indicated that eLearning courses are well utilized and well received by participants, and modules are updated frequently. He added that DEED is coordinating knowledge sharing with other states on trauma informed learning, as this is a rapidly developing field. He indicated that the board intends to conduct further outreach with other states and stakeholders. He mentioned that the board intends to continue dialogue with stakeholders for feedback.

[9:39:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked what DEED is doing to get the curriculum directly into the classrooms.

[9:40:29 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS referred to Transforming Schools: A Framework for Trauma-Engaged Schools in Alaska as the guidelines for implementing these practices in the classroom.

[9:41:19 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS requested copies of the booklets for the committee.

[9:41:27 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said she has received feedback from teacher constituents suggesting that National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores are statistically concealing pockets of excellence. She asked how a certain school's NAEP scores could be reported individually.

[9:42:19 AM](#)

DR. JOHNSON indicated that NAEP scores are not available by school, or even by district, because they are aggregated on the national level. He noted that some very large cities pay to have their scores reported directly to them; however, no schools in Alaska pay for this information. He also noted that not all schools or districts participate in NAEP. He referred to The Compass data portal as a means to obtain detailed information on a particular school.

[9:44:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked DEED to provide background information on The Compass portal initiative. Referring to her experience in 1997 as a student at Bethel Regional High School, which experienced a shooting [incident], she asked what measures for physical safety for schools in various communities are being contemplated or implemented.

DR. JOHNSON indicated that data is sought by a variety of stakeholders, and The Compass as a concept arose to answer frequently sought data in addition to achievement data on math and English language arts. He noted that developments in technology contributed to a more user-friendly look and feel for this data to be stored and accessed on the Internet, and that DEED actively seeks stakeholder recommendations on what data to include.

[9:47:46 AM](#)

DR. JOHNSON spoke about safety in schools by noting that the U.S. Department of Education recently published a school safety website. He described DEED's outreach to individual districts to seek information about its community and needs.

[9:49:53 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked whether training for safety could inflict trauma on the students participating.

DR. JOHNSON indicated that he does not have an answer. He cited active shooter drills have, on occasion, had a negative impact on students. He expressed hope that the U.S. Department of Education website will offer guidance on appropriate safety preparation and training for schools.

[9:51:27 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS acknowledged Representative Zulkosky's personal experience with a school shooting and sought her leadership on matters of safety in schools.

[9:51:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY pointed out tremendous changes to safety infrastructure and awareness that have taken place in the 23 years since [the Bethel school shooting incident]. She encouraged continuation of addressing mental and behavioral

health, and she recommended that physical safety should also be considered.

[9:52:40 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY shared that students have indicated to her that they have received safety or emergency preparedness training, but there was no follow up and reinforcement from teachers and administrators. She asked how DEED is addressing teacher shortages and difficulties with recruitment and retention.

DR. JOHNSON explained that the board is contemplating new regulations for emergency teacher certification and is reviewing certification regulations to ensure that they are not a hindrance to recruitment. He referred to the teacher [retention] working group in SB 6, which includes Senator Costello, that will examine matters such as exit interviews. He noted that increased literacy among students in Alaska will lead to an increased talent pool of teachers available in the future.

[9:55:56 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS commented that the legislature has reached out to the University of Alaska to seek its input on matters of retention.

[9:56:26 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH cautioned that SB 6 has not passed the Senate, and only after it is enacted will the working group commence.

[9:56:55 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES added that increased proficiency will increase the pipeline of new teachers in the future, and increased proficiency among students now will positively impact existing teachers to potentially stay longer. She asked whether the committees formed by the board would provide comments on proposed legislation. She indicated concern with future tribal compacting possibly contributing to higher administrative costs.

[9:59:44 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS noted that tribal compacting legislation has not been heard and there is opportunity for discussion.

[9:59:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS spoke to the potential for innovations and nimbleness in planning that could be taking place in districts, including charter school formation. He noted that teacher pay and the teachers retirement system (TRS) [benefit plan] should be changed in order to encourage retention.

[10:02:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY referred to page 18 of DEED's annual report on student data and requested inclusion of post graduate survey data to measure the success of programs and policies implemented by the legislature and DEED. She noted that students are receiving less support financially under the Alaska Performance Scholarships and standardized testing costs, and she asked whether the decline in students taking these tests was a result of decreased funding.

[10:03:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON noted that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District conducts post graduate surveys of students.

[10:04:19 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS noted a decline in collaboration with the university due to a lack of joint meetings with the University of Alaska Board of Regents. He postulated that this decreased interaction may have had a negative impact planning for teacher retention.

[10:05:54 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the joint meeting of the House and Senate Education Standing Committees was adjourned at 10:06 a.m.