

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

April 3, 2019

9:02 a.m.

9:02:29 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair von Imhof called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Natasha von Imhof, Co-Chair
Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair
Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Peter Micciche
Senator Donny Olson
Senator Mike Shower
Senator David Wilson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Click Bishop
Senator Bill Wielechowski

ALSO PRESENT

Mark Foster, Public Policy Analyst, Mark Foster and Associates; Senator Cathy Giessel; Senator Gary Stevens; Senator Mia Costello; Senator Chris Birch.

SUMMARY

PRESENTATION: EDUCATION DATA ANALYSIS

Co-Chair von Imhof relayed that she had invited a public policy analyst to the committee as she considered education to be one of the most important // She remarked that while // Specifically as it evaluated // She had served on the Anchorage School Board for a term.

Co-Chair von Imhof continued her opening remarks. The previous year she had considered education data on poverty and // After considering the economic impacts on schools, she had observed and concluded that schools with similar

poverty levels, the // National data showed the same trends. She questioned how the state could focus //

Co-Chair von Imhof introduced Mark Foster, former CEO of //

^PRESENTATION: EDUCATION DATA ANALYSIS

9:05:52 AM

Co-Chair von Imhof discussed housekeeping.

9:06:09 AM

MARK FOSTER, PUBLIC POLICY ANALYST, MARK FOSTER AND ASSOCIATES, discussed the presentation, "K-12 In Alaska: Investing in Effective Measures to Ensure Student Success in Life," (copy on file).

Mr. Foster showed Slide 2, "Overview":

- How are Alaskan Students Doing on Standardized Tests?
 - NAEP & PEAKS, 4th & 8th Grade Reading/ELA & Math
- What drives the variation in standardized test scores?
 - Poverty & Standardized Test Scores
- How do we measure effective teaching?
 - Growth & Proficiency
- Which schools have students who are performing well above expectations?
- What do local superintendents report as the key factors driving student assessments?
- What does the national/international research say?
- Summary recommendations for Alaska

9:07:22 AM

Mr. Foster discussed Slide 3, "Disclosures, Caveats & Limitations":

Disclosures

1. Mark A Foster & Associates (MAFA) has been retained by Senator von Imhof to assist in the compilation and analysis of what drives student success and what education initiatives look most promising to deliver

effective, efficient and affordable education services for all Alaskan students

2. Mark Foster was appointed to fill a short-term vacancy on the Anchorage School Board, Seat A (October 2018-April 2019).

3. Mark Foster served as the Director, Office of Management & Budget, and CFO for the Anchorage School District from 2012-2016. Mr. Foster was the project manager on the Evidence Based Model for ASD (April 4, 2016).

4. MAFA has consulted for a wide range of private and public sector clients across multiple sectors in Alaska, U.S. and Internationally since 1994.

5. Mark Foster graduated from Lathrop High School in Fairbanks in 1979.

Caveats & Limitations

1. NAEP and PEAKS Standards Based Tests provide one summative approach to assessing student academic performance. Variation in student test scores are frequently correlated with poverty and related factors. The Gates Foundation Measuring Effective Teaching Project and subsequent research supports the use of student growth and proficiency as one domain to assess the value that teachers and schools contribute toward student academic success.

2. Standards Based Tests are modestly correlated with success in life (Raj Chetty)

3. Social skills tend to be better predictors of success in life (Kirabo Jackson, Raj Chetty)

[9:08:41 AM](#)

Mr. Foster referenced Slide 4, "How are Alaskan Students Doing on Student Standards Based Assessments?" The slide showed a data table reflecting National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). He emphasized that his slides would show progress over time, growth in student achievement from the fourth to the eighth grade rather than a snapshot in time.

[9:09:36 AM](#)

Mr. Foster reviewed Slide 5, "K-12 Progress to Date AK Student Growth & Achievement: NAEP Reading," which showed a

graph of 4th to 8th grade reading scale score growth versus 8th grade reading scale score. He relayed that he had examined the growth of the NAEP scores in students, across the United States, from the 4th to the 8th grade (2013-2017). Those numbers were then compared to the 8th grade reading scale score. The chart showed that Alaska started from a low base but showed high growth on the scale score. He noted that going back in time it was possible to see a persistent pattern over the previous 15 to 16 years. Alaska had tended to be one of the leading states in growth. He submitted that the state was in the high growth quadrant.

[9:12:00 AM](#)

Senator Olson thanked Mr. Foster for touching on an important subject. He observed that there was growth on the graph and brought of the issue of math and writing scores.

Mr. Foster said that math scores would be covered in future slides.

[9:12:36 AM](#)

Mr. Foster spoke to Slide 6, "K-12 Progress to Date AK Student Growth & Achievement: NAEP Math," which showed a graph of math scores. The slide reflected that the state in the low base and low growth quadrant and had a lot of room for improvement. He said that math remained a challenge across districts, from the 4th through the 8th grade. He encouraged the committee to examine this area when determining how children could be better served.

[9:13:34 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof had found through research that with reading and language arts, there were outside influences such as museum trips, plays, theatre, and reading. She furthered that oftentimes students had less exposure to math outside of school, and the teacher was the sole provider of math concepts. She mentioned the concept of "grit" being applicable to math outcomes.

[9:14:39 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman considered math and reading and noted that the state used to be under a state-operated school system that dictated what schools taught. The method had not been

effective. He referenced SB 35, which had changed the systems to give school districts the authority to set curricula. He wondered what Mr. Foster thought of the two systems.

Senator Hoffman continued. He recalled that Senator Stevens had made comments under Special Orders on the Senate Floor pertaining to the effectiveness of the schools in the state.

Mr. Foster welcomed the opportunity to address Senator Hoffman's remarks when he considered the slide showing a map of school districts.

[9:16:43 AM](#)

Senator Micciche asked about the significance of the arrow on Slides 5 and 6.

Mr. Foster stated that the arrow represented the aspirational goal to move into the high quadrant.

[9:17:04 AM](#)

Mr. Foster turned to Slide 7, "ALASKA PERFORMANCE EVALUATION FOR ALASKAN SCHOOLS (PEAKS)."

Mr. Foster advanced to Slide 8, "PEAKS Test Results 2017-2018/ELA Grades 4 and 8/Percent Proficient per School: 4th Grade English Language Arts," which showed a map of Alaska peppered with color bubbles that reflected percentage of proficiency. The slide was plotted by school; the size of the plot was the number of students that had taken the test. He highlighted Unalakleet, Kenny Lake, and Kodiak as schools that continued to provide superior results in early reading. He noted that Southeast showed mostly high proficiency. He related that half of the variation in proficiency was poverty driven.

[9:20:14 AM](#)

Mr. Foster looked at Slide 9, "PEAKS Test Results 2017-2018/ELA Grades 4 and 8/Percent Proficient per School: 8th Grade English Language Arts," which showed a map of Alaska with the colored bubbles reflecting a pattern of where 4th to 8th grade reading improved and places that had not improved. He pointed to more proficiency in Southeast and

Kodiak, as well as along the Railbelt. He lamented that there was still persistent low proficiency in lower income areas of Anchorage and other areas of the state.

[9:20:47 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman looked at Southeast Alaska on the map. He thought it appeared that the disparity was predominantly between rural and urban, native and non-native communities. He countered that Prince of Whales Island was non-native and was in the red. He looked at Kake, which was predominantly Alaska Native, and was green in 4th grade, changing to red in the 8th grade. He wondered whether the scores would be the same if other years were used for the aggregate.

Co-Chair von Imhof asked to keep in mind that 2017 was the first year of PEAKS testing. He said that statewide MAPS scores would also be discussed.

[9:23:18 AM](#)

Mr. Foster offered that the state tests available were the ones that had been plotted. He addressed Co-Chair Stedman's question about a similar pattern over time. He considered communities he was familiar with and contended that patterns tended to be consistent. He used Skagway as a classic example of a community of high support for students and education. There was not a rich, broad data set over time; rather, there was an attempt to validate the available samples as reasonable robust for comparison. He argued that there was persistence over time for community that were experiencing success.

[9:24:32 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman looked at Ketchikan on the map and noted there was an orange dot over a green dot. He wondered whether each dot represented a separate school.

Mr. Foster replied in the affirmative.

[9:25:10 AM](#)

Senator Olson compared the map on Slide 9 to the map on Slide 8. He observed that Unalaska and Sand Point had both gone to green and wondered how that had been achieved.

Mr. Foster stated that teachers had helped students grow, and the students had gained proficiency relative to where they had been in the 4th grade.

Senator Olson surmised that good teachers were the secret.

Mr. Foster agreed that they were one important factor to success.

[9:26:04 AM](#)

Mr. Foster reviewed slide 10, "What drives the variation in test scores?"

1. Test scores reflect poverty/affluence; frequently around ½ of the variation in test scores reflect the household and neighborhood challenges associated with poverty

2. The Gates Foundation Project, "Measuring Effective Teaching" focuses on actual test scores less the predicted test score (based on social-economic demographics) to assess how well teachers are helping all of their students learn and grow, regardless of where they start.

Mr. Foster thought it was important to be consistently mindful of the variation in test scores. He said that across Alaska and U.S. data sets, half of the variation in test scores reflected poverty, and poverty related factors, in households and neighborhoods; the combination of the two factors tended to be significant in test scores. He thought it was important to measure the difference between how well students were doing, and how well they would be expected to do under the weight of poverty. The Gates Foundation had examined the matter in 2014 and had concluded the best way to measure a school and a teacher's contribution was to consider relative proficiency related to the student's economic standing.

[9:27:45 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman had travelled extensively throughout the state and estimated he had visited over 200 communities in the state. He agreed that high levels of unemployment, poverty, and parental involvement were key factors in

student achievement. Another factor that rose to the top was teacher turnover. The turnover rate in rural Alaska had become astonishing in the previous years. He shared that many students asked teachers at the end of the school year whether they would be coming back to teach. He believed that the problem of teacher retention, and the issues associated with retention, was a major contributing factor in low proficiency.

[9:30:18 AM](#)

Senator Micciche looked at the Kenai Peninsula, and noted that communities had come together to offer homework help and other programs. He wondered whether Mr. Foster had evaluated other factors in highly impoverished areas that might have proved successful.

Mr. Foster answered in the affirmative.

[9:31:15 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof agreed with Senator Hoffman and thought the trend needed to be addressed. She considered the many factors related to teacher retention in rural areas of the state.

Senator Hoffman suggested cultivating teachers within the communities could be a solution.

Co-Chair von Imhof agreed.

[9:33:01 AM](#)

Mr. Foster reviewed Slide 11, "Student Achievement and Poverty Are Highly Correlated across the U.S." He asserted that the pattern in Alaska was like that of the pattern in the United States. He pointed out that the map of the United States on the left showed the percentage of school aged children living in poverty, by school district. The map on the right showed the average test scores, by school district. He observed that poverty was the primary driver in the difference in test scores across the country. He encouraged members to be mindful that there were significant challenges in getting children to high levels of proficiency.

[9:34:06 AM](#)

Mr. Foster showed Slide 12, "Student Achievement and Poverty Are Highly Correlated Across Alaska," which showed 4 graphs. He relayed that looking at test scores against the percentage of economically disadvantaged in English Language Arts and Math, 4th through 8th grade, showed a consistent pattern for all schools in the state; a lot of dispersion around the general pattern following poverty. He noted that he had investigated the schools that performed at high levels regardless of economics. He said that places that performed well despite the patterns of poverty could be found across the state.

[9:35:10 AM](#)

Mr. Foster reviewed Slides 15 through 18:

- "K-12 Progress to Date Student Assessments - AK PEAKS English Language Arts 4th Grade"
- "K-12 Progress to Date Student Assessments - AK PEAKS English Language Arts 8th Grade"
- "K-12 Progress to Date Student Assessments - AK PEAKS Math 4th Grade"
- "K-12 Progress to Date Student Assessments - AK PEAKS Math 8th Grade"

Mr. Foster explained that the slides showed places that were doing well relative to the patterns of poverty. He said that the superintendents in those districts had been asked about the methods used to inspire student success.

[9:35:50 AM](#)

Mr. Foster advanced to Slide 19, "Measuring Effective Teaching English Language Arts (ELA) Growth & Proficiency 7th to 8th Grade," which showed a graph entitled 'Growth vs. Proficiency - 7th to 8th Grade MATH PEAKS Assessment.' He said that the slide offered an example of measuring effective teaching related to how far students were growing in in percentage proficiency, how many more students were becoming proficient from the 7th to the 8th grade, and how well students were doing relative to what would be expected based on students economic status. He noted that some of the higher scoring students were looking into vocational and technical education in the middle school years, preparing for jobs rather than a strictly academic program. The academic result associated with vocational and technical programs were high.

[9:37:07 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof interjected that the Lower Yukon school district was partnering with the Anchorage school district, purchasing a hotel on Lake Hood to send students into Anchorage to attend classes at a career center in Anchorage. She added that the King Career Center had switched from a part-time to a full-time school. Students could attend the center and take all the courses necessary to graduate from high school. She relayed that teaching a culturally relevant and engaging curriculum was a great benefit to students.

[9:39:50 AM](#)

Senator Micciche felt that charter schools did not represent a cross-section of a school district. He said that his daughter's school, Aurora Borealis, served predominately low-poverty, high performing students. He relayed that another daughter went to a public school where teacher's energy was spent on issues unrelated to educating students; i.e., behavioral issues and other. He wondered whether there was data for any public school that provided best practice elements to a larger, general population of students.

Mr. Foster directed Senator Micciche to Slide 16. The parentheses showed the number of students tested. He noted that Mirror Lake, where 198 students were tested, was doing well comparative to what was expected relative to its diverse population. He added that even the charter schools were doing better than expected, even with low poverty.

[9:42:37 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof referenced Slide 17 and pointed to the numbers for Baxter and Klatt. She related that PEAKS testing began in 3rd grade and went through 10th grade. She said that looking at the scores in terms of growth from one year to the next would reveal the strengths and weaknesses within schools, which would be helpful.

[9:44:17 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman looked at Slide 17, and asked Mr. Foster to discuss the correlations. He thought the squared numbers seemed low.

Mr. Foster stated that with smaller sample sizes, there was more dispersion in the data.

Co-Chair Stedman thought it would be helpful to have the charts reprinted to identify schools in specific areas. He wanted to be able to identify the schools in his district.

Co-Chair von Imhof stated that she was hoping to have the charts interactively available on the Senate Finance Committee website.

[9:46:03 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman considered previous questions and Senator Hoffman's comments about teacher longevity. He expressed concern for students that advanced beyond the help parents could offer academically.

[9:47:09 AM](#)

Senator Micciche asked to go back to Slide 17. He looked at the trend line, and assumed it was the mean. He referenced Co-Chair Stedman's remarks. He noted that his kids had all had the same teachers. He considered the relationships versus the turnover rate as discussed by Senator Hoffman. He did not know how to address the problem but thought the instability of high teacher turnover was an important part of the education discussion. He wondered whether there was a way to overlay something over those challenged districts that could compensate for the instability. He wondered whether the private sector could provide more stability.

Mr. Foster stated that part of the conversations with superintendents had been to ponder what was driving superior results as well as the challenged they faced. He said that rural districts, with high teacher turnover rates, had a lot of challenges preparing kids for success in life.

Mr. Foster showed Slide 22, "What do local subject matter experts tell us when we ask, "what is driving your superior results?"":

Rural Considerations:

- Rural districts with high teacher turnover rates often graduate fewer than half of their students, and

their students have significantly lower reading [and math] proficiency

- Finding ways to engage students, with place-based learning and courses that incorporate local culture and industry, is critical in making learning more relevant for students, teachers and the community

Railbelt / Southeast Considerations:

- Highly experienced & effective teachers
- Community of parents that value education
- A generous and supportive municipality
- Kids that respond to our practices; work hard, desire to do well not only as a reflection of their own academic achievement but also a reflection of their school and community
- The more we have, the more we can do for our kids
- Instability in finance and policy are our biggest threat to continued success

9:50:10 AM

Senator Micciche noted that the mean was significantly separated, looking at the Railbelt versus Southeast. He wondered how the Railbelt competed nationally.

Mr. Foster offered that there were preliminary maps that would be made available. He added that given the poverty, English Language learners, and Special Education prevalence in Southeast and the Railbelt, they were comparable with national schools with similar conditions.

9:51:32 AM

Senator Shower asked whether Mr. Foster had historic data that was comparative. He wondered about trends, and whether anything had changed.

Mr. Foster replied that he had looked at the NAEP data, given its relative stability as a test. State tests had varied overtime, which made comparisons a challenge. He said that sample sizes in the state were relatively small

and a difference in a few dozen could skew results. He thought that NEAP was likely the best back cast but that it did not have a long history in the state.

[9:53:16 AM](#)

Senator Shower wanted to see past data. He thought it would be interesting. He spoke to the size of Alaskan school districts. He made a correlation with Alaska State Troopers and teacher turnover. He asked if there was a consideration of reducing school district size.

Mr. Foster stated that there was a slide coming up that outlined recommendations.

[9:54:52 AM](#)

Senator Olson referenced Mr. Foster's point about early literacy. He asked about the importance of Pre-K education such as Head Start.

Mr. Foster offered that Pre-K can be very effective in helping children from challenging environments. He said that Pre-K had also been determined to help children later in life to find employment and raise families.

[9:56:35 AM](#)

Mr. Foster highlighted the rural and Railbelt and Southeast considerations. He thought clearly there was agreement that effective teachers and small class sizes were key. He thought the challenge was that it was hard to attract and retain effective teachers in many communities. He thought some of the reasons were related to specific factors in those communities. The challenge was how to bring together the groups that had an interest in making sure students had an equal opportunity to have an equal education. He said that the test results indicated that the state had a lot of room for improvement. He stressed that the focus should be on teachers and making sure that they were well prepared and effective in a wide range of community settings.

[9:58:24 AM](#)

Mr. Foster showed Slide 24, "K-12 Investing in Effective Measures to Support Student Success in Life: National & International Research (Hattie)," which showed support for

the conclusions of state superintendents. He said that the issue had been debated vigorously. He stressed that the bigger issue was how to get effective teachers and small class sizes so that all children had an opportunity to learn.

[9:59:26 AM](#)

Mr. Foster showed Slide 26, "Rigorous U.S. "Big Data" Research Supports Highly Effective Teachers + Small Class Size." He offered that researched showed that a high-impact teacher could make a significant difference, in a few school years, for all students.

[10:00:21 AM](#)

Mr. Foster discussed Slide 27, "Reducing Class Size + Highly Effective Teachers = Large Long-Term Returns." He said that the all the suggested items were necessary to bring about meaningful change.

[10:00:40 AM](#)

Mr. Foster showed Slide 29, "Successful State-Local Partnership"

[10:01:00 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof asked to go back to Slide 27. She pointed out that the study had shown that small class size, coupled with highly effective teachers, made the largest impact.

[10:01:47 AM](#)

Senator Shower asked Mr. Foster to expand on the top bullet on slide 27. He asked how a highly effective teacher was measured.

Mr. Foster stated he had initiated a dialogue with the commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) on how to measure teacher effectiveness. He said that the state needed to do more to attract and retain high impact teachers. He thought this was particularly relevant at the state level.

Senator Shower asked about the first bullet that referenced changing schools in "specific ways."

Mr. Foster said that Professor Chetty had concluded that small class sizes as well as effective teachers was the most effective way to make a difference in children's lives.

[10:04:13 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman referenced comments about effective teachers. He discussed teachers fitting in within the communities they served. He discussed the cultural differences in the state. He asked what was being done to encourage Alaskan kids to become teachers and then come back to serve their home communities.

[10:05:52 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman thought another key factor directly attributed to teacher turnover was transient teachers. He said that when 90 to 100 percent of teachers failed to grow roots in communities it could subconsciously affect their work as educators. He mentioned improvements that had been made with the retention of healthcare workers in rural areas, through educating locals in healthcare positions, who then remained in the community for significant amounts of time. He wondered if a similar template could be applied to educators.

[10:08:02 AM](#)

Mr. Foster made two points in conclusion. He asserted that success would require partnership between the state and local communities. State support for effective teachers, small class sizes, culturally relevant education, and early literacy were critical components to success.

[10:08:58 AM](#)

Mr. Foster showed Slide 30, "Recommendation":

- Target Investment
- Small class size
- Effective teachers
- Early Literacy

Accountability

- Every child deserves one year of progress for each year of school

Mr. Foster encouraged the committee to target investments in small class sizes. He encouraged learning from the example of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, where resources were focused, local communities were engaged, and ensuring effective teachers in classrooms.

[10:10:02 AM](#)

Senator Shower mentioned a policy recently instituted in Arizona that had experienced success in reading proficiency. He agreed that each child deserved one year of progress but wondered whether some children should be held back if they were not prepared to advance to the next grade. He asked whether a performance-based system for tenure for teachers had been discussed.

Mr. Foster stated that historic research suggested that grade retention policies based on proficiency tended to have negative results over time. He added that recent analysis suggested that grade retention policies tended to have a disproportionality effect on young mothers, lacking in college education, and their children. He urged caution on crafting policy that raised the bar for holding children back for them to gain mastery. He noted that focusing on behavior, rather than academics, when considering holding a child back, was a more effective approach.

[10:14:01 AM](#)

Mr. Foster thought that a better job needed to be done on measuring teacher effectiveness, and that 3 to 5 years data was needed to reliably measure teacher effectiveness. He felt that in Alaska, given the wide variety and the smaller sample data, it could take up to 5 years to identify high impact teachers.

[10:15:11 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman referenced the subject of teacher turnover in rural Alaska. He thought it was important to mention that it took time to integrate someone into a community and 2 to 3 years was not long enough. He stressed that it could

take a decade to integrate into a community, particularly when considering cultural differences.

[10:16:31 AM](#)

Senator Wilson thought education was as complex an issue as healthcare. He lamented that there was no matrix for accountability for low performing teachers. He spoke to the myriad of challenges facing Alaska's school districts. He wondered whether models that had proven successful in other parts of the country could be applied to the state.

Mr. Foster recommended that the legislature understand where local communities were coming from; talk to local subject matter experts to understand what works and what does not and validate that information against national case studies. He said that outside models would need to be fashioned for local effectiveness. He stated that he had experienced more success over time by starting with a local model and building on that. He offered his personal experience working in public health for decades with the Native Tribal Health Consortium. He shared that he had looked at what was happening, on the ground, in each community to identify the challenges. He relayed that the fixes were not always simple and could involve a change of governance but always included accountability measures. He urged the committee to listen to local experts.

[10:20:44 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof thought Senator Wilson had identified an important point: what the state could do about education as it contemplated the budget. She asserted that the state could invest in broadband, explore tribal compact agreements, work with the University to aggressively campaign for students to become teachers in their communities, and bring together stakeholders in the different regions to discuss ideas and formulate a plan. She noted that the implementation of any plan could take a decade, or two, to yield results.

[10:22:34 AM](#)

Senator Micciche said that none of the information in the presentation was new. He wondered whether a think tank existed that was exploring the issues. He spoke to issues related to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and

lamented that in many parts of the state it was impossible for children to come to school ready to learn because of challenges to basic survival. He thought that an isolated think tank made up of the right people could help; the school system could not solve all the problems alone.

[10:24:32 AM](#)

Senator Shower thought part of the solution was more teachers. He thought the findings were thin and had hoped to be presented with more solutions. He thought there might be a two-tier system: one for the Railbelt, and one for rural Alaska. He stressed that there were geographical and cultural issues that were different from one area to the next. He suggested that there were two separate groups in Alaska that needed to be taught, he reiterated the issue of cultural differences.

Mr. Foster looked at a study that contemplated school systems with diverse populations and what they had done to address performance. He said that the models used had allowed schools to have autonomy, with accountability back to the central funding source. He believed that the best way forward included listening to local communities when they shared what they needed to be successful, combined with funders who provided adequate funds while demanding accountability, and allowing enough time for results.

[10:27:26 AM](#)

Senator Olson was alarmed with his home school district having progressed into non-graded homework. He said that in his experience homework had provided discipline. He wondered about studies that investigated homework and graduation rates.

Mr. Foster had not done independent research on the issue of homework. He was biased in the direction of graded homework, based on his schooling experience.

[10:28:49 AM](#)

Senator Wilson was hearing two different things. He thought Mr. Foster was saying the state was so unique it could not use other systems that worked in other states, while human development was similar across the planet. He wanted to know what could be done sooner rather than later to correct

the downward curve of education. He thought Alaska was not so special that it could not use other techniques from around the world.

Mr. Foster offered that there were many lessons that could be imported from out of state, but if the local community was not willing and able to import the lesson it would not have an impact. He thought in order to be successful, the local community needed to be engaged in serious substantial dialogue about what was needed for the children of the community to be successful. He contended that in order to really build a successful model, it had to be built from the local community upward.

[10:32:10 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof added that there were things the state could do sooner rather than later. She said that educational funding could be used to decrease class sized by hiring more teachers versus administrators, and that seniority rules should be examined so that good, new teachers can be retained over less effective teachers that have seniority. She said that funding could be tied to accountability measures once the trends became more illuminating.

[10:33:30 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman considered the village of Tuntutuliak, which was an isolated community and cost approximately \$350 for a roundtrip flight from Bethel. He said that a teacher recruited to the village would be transported by 4-wheeler, as the community was connected by boardwalks, to whatever housing was available - without running water. He furthered that then the teacher would go to the store for basic needs; no spices, little fresh produce would be available, and a gallon of milk would cost \$12. In September all the teenaged boys would be absent from class for two weeks because they would need to go moose hunting and would be intermittently hunting throughout the year to subsist. The teacher would have no luxuries in their downtime, no movies or restaurants. He said that the communities would continue with their cultural activities regardless of the teacher's expectations. He perceived that being paid \$35,000 per year to be isolated for 9 months was a grim reality for a new teacher from outside of the community. He wondered how any

teacher was expected to be eager to enter that reality, let alone an effective teacher.

[10:37:23 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman continued his comments. He recalled that Senator Stevens had a daughter that taught in rural Alaska and had conveyed to her father the drastic differences of teaching in a rural community versus living on Kodiak Island. He argued that people in rural communities loves their way of life and the challenge was to address the cultural shock for incoming teachers.

[10:38:51 AM](#)

Senator Shower declared that the lowest income Alaskans were affected the most by the size of the dividend. He thought that this point was germane to the conversation. He mentioned that Mt. Edgecumbe School, which had a high native population, had done very well. He wondered what could be learned from that school.

Mr. Foster had not had a chance to consider data for individual schools and did not have an informed opinion about Mt. Edgecumbe.

[10:41:00 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof thought it would be interesting to look at Mt. Edgecumbe, Galena, Nenana, and Bethel. She referenced Senator Hoffman's comments and remarked that there was a saying, "If you give a man a fish, through a \$3000 dividend, you feed him for a day or a couple of months. You teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime."

[10:41:39 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman thought that care should be taken when discussing Mt. Edgecumbe School. He related that the school brought in high performing students from all over the state into a very closed environment. He thought that comparing the school to other schools in the state was unfair. He said that the school's performance was commendable and that the attitude of the students was geared toward discipline and academic achievement. He believed that it was important to be cognitive of the structure of the school when comparing it to other schools in the state.

Senator Shower agreed that everything should be taken with a grain of salt. He thought that successful schools should be examined, particularly for the Native population, to replicate successful practices elsewhere in the state.

[10:45:13 AM](#)

Senator Micciche relayed that the Alaska Native graduation rate on the Kenai Peninsula was higher than the non-Alaska Native population. He wanted to understand the correlation with poverty and academic challenges. He thought that less money was not the reason for poor academic results. He believed it was a lack of skill, opportunity, motivation, incentive, vision, and inspiration. He thought that those were the real challenges of poverty-stricken places, not lack of money, and he wondered if there was a way to counteract those challenges. He asserted that in some cases there was a lack of a role model. He said that he had no way of understanding the challenges faced by rural Alaska and that the challenges there were not comparable to the rest of the country.

Mr. Foster offered that the issue was being explored. He said that the results were being investigated on an individual student level to understand the risk factors and the tailwinds that were making a difference in children's lives. He reminded the committee that the presentation was aggregated at the school level and not for individual students. He said that the best way to get information on individual students was to talk to local high-impact teachers.

[10:48:42 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof added that there were two organizations: The Mat-Su Health Foundation, which was singlehandedly paying for a behavioral health therapist to be in 9 pilot schools to help families with any challenges that might be affected by behavioral health issues. She added that the United Way in Anchorage had helped fund several school counselors in schools to provide support in several areas. She related that positive effects were being seen in attendance, behavior, and academic outcomes. She lamented that the practice was costly and required significant cooperation between local and state agencies.

10:50:30 AM

Senator Olson asked what kind of influence mission schools had in the state.

Mr. Foster replied that an independent study had not been done. He said that the mission schools stood out in the data. He thought that it would be interesting to test whether the correlation matched the national data. He believed that there were potential lessons to be learned from mission schools about longevity and the value placed on education.

Co-Chair von Imhof discussed housekeeping.

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ADJOURNMENT

10:53:02 AM

The meeting was adjourned at 10:53 a.m.