

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 25, 2022  
9:05 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair  
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair  
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky  
Representative Grier Hopkins  
Representative Mike Prax  
Representative Mike Cronk  
Representative Ronald Gillham

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 272

"An Act relating to education; increasing the base student allocation; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED HB 272 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 273

"An Act relating to education; increasing the base student allocation; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSHB 273 (EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 48

"An Act relating to the Alaska performance scholarship program."

- HEARD & HELD

PRESENTATION: UNDERSTANDING CULTURALLY RELEVANT EDUCATION IN ALASKA

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 272

SHORT TITLE: INCREASE BASE STUDENT ALLOCATION

SPONSOR (s) : REPRESENTATIVE (s) STORY

01/18/22	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/14/22
01/18/22	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/22	(H)	EDC, FIN
02/09/22	(H)	EDC AT 9:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/09/22	(H)	Heard & Held
02/09/22	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/11/22	(H)	EDC AT 9:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/11/22	(H)	Heard & Held
02/11/22	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/23/22	(H)	EDC AT 3:30 PM DAVIS 106
02/23/22	(H)	Scheduled but Not Heard
02/25/22	(H)	EDC AT 9:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 273

SHORT TITLE: INCREASE BASE STUDENT ALLOC. INFLATION

SPONSOR (s) : REPRESENTATIVE (s) STORY

01/18/22	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/14/22
01/18/22	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/22	(H)	EDC, FIN
02/09/22	(H)	EDC AT 9:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/09/22	(H)	Scheduled but Not Heard
02/11/22	(H)	EDC AT 9:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/11/22	(H)	Heard & Held
02/11/22	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/23/22	(H)	EDC AT 3:30 PM DAVIS 106
02/23/22	(H)	Scheduled but Not Heard
02/25/22	(H)	EDC AT 9:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 48

SHORT TITLE: AK PERFORMANCE SCHOLARSHIP; ELIGIBILITY

SPONSOR (s) : REPRESENTATIVE (s) STORY

02/18/21	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
02/18/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/18/21	(H)	EDC, FIN
04/12/21	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/12/21	(H)	Heard & Held
04/12/21	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/28/21	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/28/21	(H)	Heard & Held
04/28/21	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/22/22	(H)	SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED
02/22/22	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/22/22	(H)	EDC, FIN

02/25/22

(H)

EDC AT 9:00 AM DAVIS 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

ARIEL SVETLIK, Staff  
Representative Andi Story  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Explained the changes to SSHB 48, on behalf of Representative Story, prime sponsor.

SANA EFIRD, Executive Director  
Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education  
Department of Education and Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided invited testimony on SSHB 48.

REBECCA BRAUN, Consultant  
McKinley Research Group, LLC  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided invited testimony on SSHB 48.

CARIN SMOLIN  
Career and Technical Education Coordinator  
Juneau School District  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided public testimony in support of HB 48.

DAVE REES, Facilitator  
Alaska Business Education Compact  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided public testimony in support of HB 48.

DIANE HIRSHBERG, PhD, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented about culturally relevant education in Alaska.

BARB QASUGLANA AMAROK, PhD, representing self  
Nome, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented about culturally relevant education in Alaska.

MELANIE BAHNKE, President  
Kawerak, Inc.

Nome, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented about culturally relevant education in Alaska.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[9:05:00 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Representatives Story, Cronk, Gillham, Hopkins, Zulkosky, and Drummond were present at the call to order. Representative Prax arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**HB 272-INCREASE BASE STUDENT ALLOCATION**

[9:06:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 272, "An Act relating to education; increasing the base student allocation; and providing for an effective date.

[9:06:25 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY moved to report HB 272 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND objected for the purpose of discussion.

[9:06:44 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY, as prime sponsor, summarized HB 272. She reminded the committee that the funding for the base student allocation (BSA) has been flat for the past six years. She pointed out the drop in per-student funding. She reminded members that school district representatives have reported to the committee concerning the rise in fuel prices and other costs. She said that the result has been cuts in education, including teacher staffing, technological services, pre-K programs, and transportation. She stated that the proposed legislation would increase BSA to \$6,153 per pupil. Additionally, there would be an increase the second year of \$6,280 per pupil. The bill would set the intention of the legislature to increase BSA a year in advance, which would allow schools to focus on student achievement, not what needs to be cut. She reminded the committee that the federal COVID-19

relief funds are meant to address effects of the pandemic and not meant to replace state dollars. She argued that the proposed legislation would help to maintain and fund Alaska's public schools. She asked fellow committee members for their support.

[9:09:44 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:09 a.m. to 9:11 a.m.

[9:11:07 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND removed her objection.

[9:11:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK objected.

[9:11:53 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:11 a.m. to 9:12 a.m.

[9:12:25 AM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Story, Hopkins, Zulkosky, and Drummond voted in favor of the motion to move HB 272 out of committee with individual recommendations and the attached fiscal notes. Representatives Cronk, Gillham, and Prax voted against it. Therefore, HB 272 was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee by a vote of 4-3.

[9:13:04 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:13 a.m. to 9:15 a.m.

**HB 273-INCREASE BASE STUDENT ALLOC. INFLATION**

[Contains discussion of HB 164.]

[9:15:17 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 273, "An Act relating to education; increasing the base student allocation; and providing for an effective date." [Before the committee, adopted as a working document during the 2/11/22 House Education Standing Committee

meeting, was the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 273, Version 32-LS1366\W, Marx, 2/7/22 ("Version W").]

[9:15:36 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY moved to report CSHB 273, Version 32-LS1366\W, Marx, 2/7/22, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

[9:15:52 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND objected for the purpose of discussion.

CO-CHAIR STORY, as prime sponsor, summarized Version W. She reviewed that the bill would inflation-proof the base student allocation (BSA) every year on July 1, starting with fiscal year 2024. This would be done using a three-year average of the consumer price index for urban Alaska, with a one-year gap. She stated the cost would be \$26,136,000. She stated that there is a recognition of increased costs to delivering education in Alaska; however, this modest increase would help maintain services to students by creating efficiencies, which would allow districts to focus on student achievement instead of what needs to be cut from the budget. She encouraged her fellow committee members to vote in favor of the bill.

[9:17:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX cited that the Wielechowski v. State of Alaska, 403P.3d 1141, 1150 n.52, (2017), decision put forth that appropriation supersedes statutes, "so there's no way to control it." He argued that this legislature should not be telling future legislatures how to spend money. He remarked that the legislature has no control over the consumer price index; therefore, the future of the price index is unknown.

[9:18:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GILLHAM commented that HB 164 has provisions which would accomplish the same things as the proposed legislation. He recommended bringing HB 164 back before the committee.

[9:19:11 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND remarked that past legislatures have had issues increasing BSA. She expressed agreement with

Representative Gillham on moving HB 164; however, she said those expenditures would be in addition to BSA and the foundation. She said because of fixed costs, schools have had to make cuts in the classroom, which adversely affects students.

[9:20:45 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY, responding to the comment from Representative Prax, emphasized that the legislature never seems to finish its budget before schools must create theirs.

[9:22:05 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND removed her objection.

[9:22:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX objected.

[9:22:19 AM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Story, Hopkins, Zulkosky, and Drummond voted in favor of the motion to move CSHB 273, Version 32-LS1366\W, Marx, 2/7/22, out of committee with individual recommendations and the attached fiscal notes. Representatives Cronk, Gillham, and Prax voted against it. Therefore, CSHB 273(EDC) was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee by a vote of 4-3.

[9:23:05 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:23 a.m. to 9:25 a.m.

**HB 48-AK PERFORMANCE SCHOLARSHIP; ELIGIBILITY**

[9:25:55 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the next order of business would be SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 48, "An Act relating to the Alaska performance scholarship program."

[9:26:11 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY, as prime sponsor, presented SSHB 48 via a PowerPoint, titled "Improving the Alaska Performance Scholarship" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. She stated that the purpose of the proposed legislation is to

improve the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS) program by increasing its use, which would "grow" Alaska's workforce. As addressed on slides 2-4, she spoke about workers in the state leaving the workforce. She pointed out that the statistics show if students attend postsecondary institutions in Alaska, they are more likely to stay and work in the state. She noted that APS was created in 2010 to retain students in the state; however, the use of the program has been less than half of what was anticipated. She stated that SSHB 48 would add career and technical education (CTE) credits to APS eligibility. She noted that graduation rates increase when students take CTE classes. She listed the three options of applying CTE credits: a student may replace one credit social studies with one credit CTE, replace two credits world language with two credits CTE, or replace one credit social studies with one credit CTE.

[9:31:47 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY discussed the program review and recommendations, beginning on slide 5. Drawing attention to slide 6, she expressed the desire to keep APS competitive. She indicated that SSHB 48 would expand the use of the scholarship from six years to eight years, allowing students to take "gap years," and it would increase the award. She pointed out on slide 6 the use and decline of the scholarship by region. On slide 7, she pointed out that the proposed legislation would increase the award, as follows: from \$4,755 to \$7,000 for a grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 or higher; from \$3,566 to \$5,250 for GPA of 3.0 up to 3.5; and from \$2,378 to \$3,500 for GPA of 2.5 up to 3.0. She explained that these numbers are sustainable draws from the Higher Education Investment Fund, which is sourced from investment returns. She stated that the proposed legislation would remove the college entrance examination requirement for the award. She maintained that research suggests that GPA is a much better predictor of college success, as seen on slide 8.

[9:35:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY highlighted slide 9, which addresses making APS more accessible. She stated that to determine whether students are on track for the program, the proposed legislation would require a check in by January 31 of their junior year. She noted that some states have a deadline for the scholarship, and she had considered an amendment to add this provision. Moving to slide 10, she pointed out some photographs of student involvement. She expressed excitement to see the students who

have higher success in high school and college under this program.

[9:37:40 AM](#)

ARIEL SVETLIK, Staff, Representative Andi Story, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Story, prime sponsor, presented the changes in SSHB 48 [copy included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Version G:

- Amends the title of this bill to align with changes made in the Sponsor Substitute.
- Adds a new Section 3, requiring students to be notified of their progress towards receiving the APS scholarship during their junior year.
- Adds a new Section 4, which increases the awards and removes entrance exam requirements. Changes to award amounts are as follows: o Level one: \$7,000 (was previously \$4,755) o Level two: \$5,250 (was previously \$3,566) o Level three: \$3,500 (was previously \$2,378)
- Adds a new Section 5, which increases the number of years a student can use the scholarship after graduating high school from six to eight years.

[9:40:25 AM](#)

MS. SVETLIK pointed out the document provided by the Association of Career and Technical Education (ACTE) [copy included in the committee packet]. She stated that the document includes a discussion of ACTE's impact on the workforce. It contains a list of institutions in Alaska which accept APS; a list of CTE programs where the scholarship can be used; a data sheet from the National Conference of State Legislatures showing scholarships offered in all 50 states; and the APS review which has influenced many of the changes in SSHB 48.

[9:42:16 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced the committee would hear invited testimony on HB 48.

[9:43:06 AM](#)

SANA EFIRD, Executive Director, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE), Department of Education and

Early Development, gave invited testimony in support of SSHB 48. She shared that ACPE's mission is to support secondary education, and the proposed legislation directly supports the work of the commission. She said, "To provide for a growing, robust, Alaska economy, at least 65 percent of Alaskans will need some type of postsecondary credential to obtain living-wage employment and to meet Alaska's workforce needs." She shared that a national survey of the 2020 graduating class found the top reason for not pursuing postsecondary education had been financial concerns. To ensure Alaskans have access to funds, she said, APS is vital. She reviewed the history of the scholarship, and she reported that since its inception, 26,713 Alaska high school graduates have earned eligibility for the scholarship. Furthermore, 11,383 graduates have received the award, which represents 13 percent of all graduates and 43 percent of the eligible students. She echoed the information regarding the likelihood of students remaining in Alaska if they get a postsecondary education in the state.

MS. EFIRD named four primary objectives of APS, as follows: to offer an incentive for Alaska students to excel in high school; to prepare Alaska students for college or career training; to help Alaska students succeed in postsecondary programs; and to keep skilled, high-achieving graduates in Alaska. She said annual surveys conducted by ACPE have validated the importance of APS. She stated that of the first full-time APS students who began their enrollment in 2015 in the University of Alaska system, 62 percent of these students completed an undergraduate degree certificate or occupational endorsement within 6 years. She compared this to only 29 percent of other students.

[9:47:27 AM](#)

MS. EFIRD called APS "a motivator for better grades" and shared statistics in support of the statement, including the preparedness of those in the program and their higher rate of involvement in the workforce. She commented on the comprehensive documentation of the program, which includes 11 reports and a full program review focused on program improvement. She pointed out a 2021 APS student survey and quoted students who had recommended the program. She concluded her testimony by reiterating ACPE's support for the proposed legislation.

[9:52:26 AM](#)

REBECCA BRAUN, Consultant, McKinley Research Group, LLC, provided invited testimony in support of SSHB 48. She pointed out that not using APS equals missed opportunities, and this [negatively] affects the workforce in the state. She said program participation had peaked at 902 students in 2016, and then dropped to 644 in 2019 and 700 in 2020. She stated that eligibility had varied from 23 percent to 34 percent over the first 9 years of the program, peaking in 2014. She explained that eligibility went up in 2020 and 2021 because ACPE had suspended the testing requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic. She stated that across the board eligibility has grown by 63 percent, with the highest growth percentages being among Alaska Native, African American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students. She advised that the test is a disproportionate barrier for certain underrepresented groups.

[9:56:37 AM](#)

MS. BRAUN highlighted results from a survey by the McKinley Research Group, LLC. She stated that about 6,000 high school students between 2015 and 2020 had been surveyed, with many eligible graduates choosing an out of state school. This choice had been based on the belief that they would receive a better education. She stated this points to a lack of confidence in the University of Alaska system. She added that scholarships or financial aid packages were cited as other reasons. She continued that almost half of ineligible students were interested in qualifying for the program in high school; however, they did not meet test score requirements or did not take the test. She said interviews with administrators, data, and survey responses all corroborated this. She stressed that the issue of testing came up consistently. She stated that national trends show grades are a better indicator of college success than standardized tests, which have inequitable impact and serve as barriers to underrepresented groups. She reported that the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores highly correlate with family income. She related that the National College Access Network found when schools removed test requirements, they ended up with more diverse student bodies and did not see a decrease in student quality or success. She said, concerning financial aid and admission decisions, the role of standardized testing is declining.

[10:01:48 AM](#)

MS. BRAUN stated that 80 percent of schools have now suspended test requirements, many permanently. The University of Alaska

Fairbanks, which still requires standardized tests, has waived the requirement at least through 2025. She pointed out quotes which highlighted the trend of moving away from these tests. She said, "The more other institutions and other scholarships remove testing requirements, the fewer Alaska students are actually going to be motivated to take it, and then APS will lose even more and more potential students who could be strong candidates. I think that's a sort of growing risk."

MS. BRAUN said the recommendation from the McKinley Group study was to simplify program eligibility by eliminating the distinction between academic and CTE awards; thus, offering alternative pathways to demonstrate academic rigor. She stated that SSHB 48 would support this. Regarding the requirement in the proposed legislation of using three years for eligibility in award determination, she argued that using only three years would mean "students don't meet the necessary rigor." She recommended the committee consider amending this to three- and one-half years. She pointed out the recommendation to extend the six-year window to eight years, which the legislation would do. She highlighted other provisions in SSHB 48, including increasing access, eliminating testing requirements, earlier ongoing academic counseling for students, and amending the dollar amount of APS awards to keep pace with costs.

[10:06:01 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 10:06 a.m.

[10:06:20 AM](#)

[Public testimony was not officially opened at this point; however, Co-Chair Drummond subsequently stated that Ms. Smolin's statement was part of public testimony.]

CARIN SMOLIN, Career and Technical Education Coordinator, Juneau School District, testified in support of HB 48. She called the proposed legislation timely and needed. She cited data which reflects a high rate of students who take CTE classes in high school will go on to postsecondary education. She highlighted the provisions and asked the committee to support the proposed legislation.

[10:08:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND opened public testimony on HB 48.

[10:09:22 AM](#)

DAVE REES, Alaska Business Education Compact (ABEC), said ABEC's focus is on connecting educators and employers in partnerships to focus on career pathways for students. He indicated that students often leave CTE programs at [the high school] level to prepare for the APS requirements. He said ABEC supports the change in the APS qualifications under the proposed legislation. He emphasized that CTE is much more than auto shop classes, as it is helpful to those going into occupations related to science, technology, engineering, and math.

[Public testimony remained open.]

[10:13:40 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that HB 48 was held over.

[10:14:29 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the House Education Standing Committee was recessed to 3:30 p.m.

[3:33:24 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND called the House Education Standing Committee back to order at 3:33 p.m. Present at the call back to order were Representatives Zulkosky, Hopkins, Story, Prax, and Drummond.

#### **PRESENTATION: Understanding Culturally Relevant Education in Alaska**

[3:34:15 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the final order of business would be a presentation on understanding culturally relevant education in Alaska.

[3:34:58 PM](#)

DIANE HIRSHBERG, PhD, representing self, referenced her years of experience in education and research as Director of the Institute of Social and Economic Research and Professor of Education Policy, University of Alaska Anchorage. She expressed

concern about the inequity in Alaska's schools for Indigenous students. When measured through disparities in graduation rates, drop-out rates, and other standards of school success, she deduced that many schools in Alaska do not support Indigenous students. She continued that this is not about individual failures, as there are bright students and good teachers throughout the state; however, there continues to be a system which reflects curriculum, calendars, pedagogies, and epistemologies developed by people from outside the state who have different worldviews. She stated that there is a common factor for success in Indigenous education in other places which involve local ownership of schools, including New Zealand, Hawaii, and Canada. This gives the sense that the schools have not been imposed upon from the outside, rather they have emerged from within the communities. She expressed the opinion that models coming from outside of communities do not work. She stated that in Alaska these models create a systemic failure in rural schools which is reinforced by the teacher-workforce crisis. She described current teacher turnover as very high, with communities having to repeatedly rebuild relationships with new educators. She concluded that this grows tiring, resulting in low student achievement.

DR. HIRSHBERG said that when the Alaska Board of Education and Early Development adopted the [Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools] over a decade ago, education standards and processes were not guaranteed to be met. She suggested that schools must equip all students with skills and knowledge, so they have choices for their future. She stated that critical learning and knowledge transfer can happen in many places, including the home, on the land, when travelling, and within school buildings. She expressed the opinion that schools which reflect local cultures in ways of teaching and learning can equip students with skills and knowledge to succeed within Alaska and beyond. She opined that non-Indigenous educators who learn Alaska Native ways of teaching are better equipped to meet the needs of all their students.

[3:43:11 PM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG stated that, with respect to educational outcomes over time and across the state, there remains a gap in achievements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In many classrooms throughout the state, she said, "if you closed the shades, you wouldn't know you were in Alaska," as classrooms currently do not adequately incorporate Indigenous ways of learning. She stated that significant evidence supports there

are positive outcomes for students when they receive high-quality, dual-language education.

[3:48:15 PM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG stated that Alaska currently brings in 50 percent to 80 percent of its educators from outside the state, and the required professional development is delivered by video. In other words, she said, educators from outside the state are not brought in with a thoughtful or robust policy explaining the unique intricacies of working in diverse communities. She pointed out that individual districts have had culture camps to help educators, but it is not a requirement throughout the state and not guaranteed because it is usually dependent on federal funding. She reiterated that the need for culturally responsive education remains.

[3:53:36 PM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG argued that across the nation a culture has been created through standardized testing. This culture is centered around achievement derived from rewards, funding, and sanctions for school districts. She argued that because of this, skills based on standardized-test subjects surpass place-based, hands-on activities. She suggested that standardized tests convey to teachers that they are not trusted to assess student learning. In contrast, she referenced the schools in Finland, which do not test students until around age 15. She added that the teachers there are required to have a master's degree and mentor new teachers. She said, "none of it is rocket science," as standardized testing should be a check along the way, not the sole method of assessing individual students.

[3:59:35 PM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG referenced a University of Tennessee study on literacy skills in a pre-K program. She stated that upon entering kindergarten these students were reading at a higher level than children who had not been in the program; however, the students lost reading gains by first grade and behavioral issues began by third grade. She said that the students were doing worse than others by sixth grade. She deduced that overly prescriptive programs create behavioral issues later. In response to a question about the five reading principles, she suggested that a diverse group of researchers should speak on this topic. She added that just because something may be successful in other states, does not mean it will work in

Alaska. She suggested looking at educational programs in other countries which have similar heritage language aspirations as Indigenous Alaskans.

[4:12:35 PM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG, in response to questions about homeschooling, emphasized the importance of creating a connection between the school building and the community to increase engagement. She explained that school buildings can be a place for elders, a local library, and a community meeting space for "more than just basketball." Regarding recruitment, she answered that a combination of out-of-state teachers and local teachers is necessary, because presently not enough local students in small villages become teachers. She advised that more opportunities need to be available for local teachers to be incorporated into the community from the start. She continued that bringing in teachers from outside the state can also be valuable, as they provide alternative experiences for students in villages.

[4:18:24 PM](#)

BARB QASUGLANA AMAROK, PhD, representing self, shared her experience as Director of the University of Alaska Fairbanks Northwest Campus. She shared that her parents were fluent in Inupiaq but chose not to teach their children their heritage language out of fear for their safety. She stated that her career has focused on education. She expressed gratitude for Representative Story's advocacy for equity and inclusion in schools, because ultimately the state is responsible for the education of every child. She said, "Organizations are perfectly designed for the results they are getting," and it is widely known that Alaska Native students have never achieved proficiency in mathematics and language arts at rates which they are capable of. She emphasized that students in the state are not deficient; therefore, the system must improve.

Dr. Amarok expressed support for a transformation of the educational system and said, "The children do not need fixing; the system needs fixing." She continued that every school in Alaska should be a place where identities, lifeways, and languages of Alaska Native students are strongly present. She argued that effective schooling starts with educating administrators and teachers about authentic culture and history in Alaska, as this would support efforts toward antiracism, equity, and inclusion. She stated that a truly multicultural education is not about just switching out textbooks. She

expressed the opinion that teachers criticize Native families and have lesser expectations of Alaska Native students. She stated that understanding the historical perspective is essential to implementing policies which would decolonize schools so they would be more effective for all students. She said that the [Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools] had been adopted in 1998; however, the guidelines have not been implemented across the state. She argued that Alaska Native families have rarely been involved with the decision making and planning processes in schools, and inclusion of those who have been excluded "on our own land" is necessary for the success of all, especially Native students. She emphasized her support for language immersion in classrooms for all districts and for HB 272 and HB 273.

[4:28:34 PM](#)

MELANIE BAHNKE, President, Kawerak, Inc., presenting about culturally relevant education in Alaska, shared that she has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in rural development. She stated that traditional curriculum at the Head Start program in Nome resulted in low attendance rates and risked federal funding losses. She said that after beginning her role as president, along with help from elders and education experts, a new culture-based curriculum was designed. She said that now the program has full attendance, with a waitlist, as children are eager to be in school because they can relate to what is being taught. She stated that now children in the Head Start program have had higher achievement compared to those not in the program in the Nome area.

MS. BANKE pointed out that suicide rates are extremely high in rural Alaska. She stated that the current school systems devalue Alaska Natives because these individuals are not adequately represented. She suggested that the school year should be designed around subsistence calendars, and there should be an investment in local teachers instead of importing the workforce from outside the state. She reasoned that longevity and consistency of teachers within a district would make a difference. She exemplified the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program as a model which should be replicated across the university schools of education and nursing. She added that education degrees should be incentivized through loan forgiveness. She recommended that the state partner with Native corporations to create higher success rates for Native students. This could be done through remote learning in rural villages,

and it could help rural students navigate Anchorage when embarking on higher education.

MS. BAHNKE urged that when new education legislation is being considered, educators with experience in rural Alaska should be highlighted, and she warned that unfunded mandates should not be passed. She encouraged the committee to look at the whole system and not just make "tweaks" to a failing system. She stated, "Don't come up with a prescription without first thoroughly diagnosing the problem." She continued that, "Our kids should succeed because of the way our school system is designed, not despite it. I am an example of somebody who succeeded despite the system not being created for success for somebody like me."

[4:46:57 PM](#)

DR. AMAROK concluded that any child could do well on a standardized test; however, the issue is the system, delivery, and content. She stated that effective education is measured by how the policies and practices implement transformation, decolonization, and antiracism practices. She advised that multicultural-education systems can be inclusive; however, this cannot be accomplished until policy makers have a thorough understanding, promote relevant teacher-education programs, and create institutions which support students who will make society better.

[5:04:48 PM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 5:05 p.m.