

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 7, 2022

8:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 173

"An Act relating to state education policy; relating to school climate and connectedness; establishing the School Climate and School Connectedness Improvement Committee; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 335

"An Act providing that Rampart School is located within the Yukon-Koyukuk School District regional educational attendance area; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 173

SHORT TITLE: SCHOOL CLIMATE & CONNECTEDNESS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) TARR

04/14/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/14/21	(H)	EDC, FIN
05/07/21	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
05/07/21	(H)	Heard & Held
05/07/21	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)

03/07/22 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 335

SHORT TITLE: RAMPART SCHOOL: YUKON-KOYUKUK DISTRICT

SPONSOR(S): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

02/16/22 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/16/22 (H) EDC
03/07/22 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented the proposed CS for HB 173, Version G.

DAVID SONG, Staff

Representative Geran Tarr

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an explanation of changes in the proposed CS for HB 173, Version G, on behalf of Representative Tarr, prime sponsor.

NORM WOOTEN, Director of Advocacy

Association of Alaska School Boards

Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 173, Version G.

KATIE BOTZ, representing self

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 173, Version G.

HEIDI TESHNER, Acting Deputy Commissioner

Department of Education and Early Development

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HB 335 on behalf of the sponsor, House Rules by request of the governor.

KERRY BOYD, Superintendent

Yukon-Koyukuk School District

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 335.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:17 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Representatives Cronk, Gillham, Hopkins, Story, and Drummond were present at the call to order. Representatives Zulkosky and Prax arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 173-SCHOOL CLIMATE & CONNECTEDNESS

[8:05:22 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 173, "An Act relating to state education policy; relating to school climate and connectedness; establishing the School Climate and School Connectedness Improvement Committee; and providing for an effective date."

[8:05:35 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 173, Version 32-LS0727\G, Marx, 1/27/22, as a working document. There being no objection, Version G was before the committee.

[8:05:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented the proposed CS for HB 173, [Version G]. She shared that before serving in the legislature, she was an educator for two-plus decades. She expressed her interest in education policy and her belief that unfunded mandates pressure districts to implement new policies at their own expense. She voiced her commitment to do things "the right way" and not implement policies that are "pushed upon" educators and administrators. While attending a workshop offered by the Council of State Governments, she stated she learned about research on the "school-to-prison pipeline." Research shows that disciplinary policies used in middle and high schools can put students on the path to be in the juvenile justice and adult justice prison systems. She stated her belief that this track is costly, with negative outcomes. In the workshop she began to learn about restorative practices and alternative discipline policies. She stated she investigated the situation in Alaska and found concerning articles in the Anchorage Daily News on the rates of suspension and expulsion in schools. In the process of

her investigation, she stated that she visited a colleague working on the same policies in another state. During her visit, she learned that a foundational piece to school climate and connectiveness is creating a welcoming school environment for all students. To build this environment, she referred to the list of that which may be included in the district's plan, found on page 3, [line 27, through page 4, line 5] of HB 173, Version G, which read as follows:

- (c) A plan may incorporate use of
 - (1) social and emotional learning;
 - (2) trauma-informed and healing-centered practices;
 - (3) instruction in cultural competence and alignment with indigenous values;
 - (4) multi-tiered support for behavioral intervention, including restorative practices that are nonshaming, nonpunitive, and effective in addressing conflict and repairing relationships;
 - (5) methods for reducing racial disparities, disproportionate behavior responses, and suspensions or expulsions;
 - (6) culturally relevant practices adapted to the local district.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR explained that in the interest of not creating unfunded mandates and to support teachers and administrators, she began hosting a Restorative Justice Summit. She stated that last December she hosted the sixth summit. In the process of hosting the summits over the past six years, she stated that she has worked with at least 600 educators from diverse communities across Alaska. She explained that the input of these educators helped create the proposed legislation. She stated she follows the [House Education Standing Committee's] announcements; while the concepts in HB 173, Version G, are not new to committee members, the legislation would create a comprehensive approach. She distributed to the committee an Anchorage Daily News article from October 6, [2021], titled, "Anchorage Schools See Rise in Physical Altercations and Behavioral Issues." The article conveyed that there were "outbursts" when students returned to school in the fall. She stated that she attended a community council meeting and shared the concepts of the Restorative Justice Summit. She stated that in the meeting, a principal from the Airport Heights Elementary School shared that staff at the school had been trained on the use of behavioral-issue intervention, and the school had not experienced the behavior problems described in other schools.

She cited that this, along with other data, substantiates [school climate and connectedness] policies. She argued that reducing the time students are absent from school promotes inclusion, and the students are more likely to stay on task and learn. She stated the changes in [Version G] align with stakeholder groups and input from people across the state interested in the topic.

[8:13:04 AM](#)

DAVID SONG, Staff, Representative Geran Tarr, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Tarr, prime sponsor of HB 173, paraphrased the explanation of changes in the proposed CS, Version G [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Following feedback from educators and stakeholders, there are several changes in this version of HB 173:

- Section 3 (b): The membership of the School Climate and School Connectedness Improvement Committee is changed as follows:
 - o the modifier "current" has been removed for grammatical clarity (it is implied that non-retired members are currently employed in their field).
 - o School principals are included as members of this committee.
 - o School board members are included as members of this committee.
 - o Student representatives are included as members of this committee.
 - o Representatives from Alaska Native organizations (as defined by 25 USC 5304 and 43 USC 1601) o Grade levels for teachers have been changed from K-12 to pre-elementary-12.

MR. SONG noted information missing from the document which proposes a new paragraph under subsection (c), which read as follows:

(6) allows for this committee to consult with a nonprofit organization in an unpaid way, so there is no fiscal impact.

MR. SONG paraphrased from the remainder of the document, which read as follows:

- Section 4 (c): New subsection (6) has been added to guide districts' plans to improve school climate and school connectedness. It reads as follows:
 - o A plan may incorporate use of "culturally relevant practices adapted to the local district."
- Sections 5-7: All references to dates are moved forward by one year:
 - Section 5: Plan submission date moved to January 1, 2024.
 - Section 6: Repeal date changed to July 1, 2024.
 - Section 7: Effective date changed to July 1, 2022.

[8:15:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR explained that the [School Climate and School Connectedness Improvement Committee] would be comprised of individuals willing to volunteer their time. The committee would represent 52 school districts and self-organize into smaller subgroups. She stated that the concepts taught in the Restorative Justice Summit do not necessitate a "massive report" to prescribe mandates. Rather, implementation of school climate and connectedness concepts involve taking inventory of [a school district's] resources and capacities. Instead of starting with "you must do this," she stated that step one is to learn the availability of resources needed in the school district. She cited that [a school] may need a councilor or social worker for interventions on the social and emotional learning component, but due to budget cuts, this resource is not available. She stated that the idea is to create a plan by cataloging need and availability and then determine how to implement the plan without creating an unfunded mandate. She continued that step two would be considered after plans and evaluations are collected. She suggested that this is already happening, but [the proposed legislation] would "package" the process.

[8:18:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS thanked the bill sponsor for bringing the legislation forward. He commented that the [School Climate and School Connectedness Improvement Committee] represents a very large group. In consideration of the varying backgrounds and sizes of districts and schools, he questioned whether there would be a requirement that committee members come from dispersed regions.

[8:19:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR, in response, pointed to language [in Section 3] of Version G, which provides that the governor shall consider geographic representation. She also indicated subsequent language which provides that the committee "shall organize regional and subject-matter subcommittees to address the specific needs" of the diverse individuals and communities.

[8:19:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK contended that this type of program already exists through [the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB)].

[8:20:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR answered in agreement. She expressed confidence that AASB is interested in collaborative work. She stated that AASB is already conducting a school climate and connectiveness survey, and an AASB representative is expected to provide invited testimony during the hearing. She expressed hope that, through a partnership, survey information will translate into policy recommendations. In reference to teacher retention, she stated that school climate and connectiveness is not just about the students but also about the administrators and staff. She acknowledged that it takes work for everybody to want to be present at school.

[8:20:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY articulated her belief that the climate of a school makes a difference for students to feel welcome, comfortable, and ready to learn. She referred to the language on page 2, line 7, "The committee consists of the following members appointed by the governor". She expressed interest in the appointment process by the governor. She also inquired about the process between the committee and the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED).

[8:21:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR answered that there are two methods to choose committee members. One method is for the legislature to choose members in a joint decision between the House and the Senate. The other option is through the executive branch, under DEED, and the governor would appoint the committee members. She suggested that either option could work, but because the committee is under DEED, appointments are considered through the executive branch. She stated she is a member of the Statewide

Suicide Prevention Council and has collaborated with DEED while working on the trauma-informed school module. She explained that, regarding the proposed legislation, DEED's role is administrative, which includes work on the fiscal note. She stated that there is not a specific endorsement from DEED for Version G, although she surmised that its goal is consistent with the Alaska's Education Challenge and aligns with the goals of the current [DEED] leadership.

[8:23:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR, in response to a follow-up question, expressed hope that knowledge of the school climate and connectedness committee would spread through superintendents, professional certification organizations, union representatives, and people who have been involved. She stated that during the first legislative hearing on HB 173, Tom Klaameyer of the National Education Association provided invited testimony in support of the bill. She noted that collaborations and announcements could be a source of outreach to different groups. She stated her belief that a strong commitment to spread the word about the [School Climate and School Connectedness Improvement Committee] will reflect in quality committee members. She referenced a governor's task force that published a press release to recruit the public by providing an application link. She stated that in rural communities there are local newspapers, like the Nome Nugget or the Arctic Sounder, which would publish announcements, making the opportunity available to a diverse set of people.

[8:26:27 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY questioned how many districts currently incorporate school climate and connectedness, and whether there is a requirement of each local school district to develop a plan.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR responded that there are no mandates or policy changes for school districts without the accompanying resources. She stated that through discussions with educators participating at the Restorative Justice Summits, it was determined the preferred model is a two-step process. She outlined that step one is to create a plan, and then, if school districts are interested, step two examines the plans and requirements for implementation. She expressed excitement that educators have learned from DEED's trauma-informed education [framework] and are independently adopting some of these

practices. Referencing the Anchorage Daily News article from October 6, [2021], she stated that it recorded 601 suspensions in schools but did not mention disciplinary actions. She suggested that some schools are starting to teach emotional regulation and self-management; citing for example, instead of a time-out punishment, a student is taught to recognize that he/she may be out of control or angry and, to prevent altercations, can self-select by moving to another room to do schoolwork.

8:29:11 AM

REPRESENTATIVE TARR, in response to a follow-up question, stated that AASB conducts ongoing school climate and connectedness surveys; consequently, educators will be familiar with the language. She stated that Alaska districts and schools are diverse in size and background and require flexibility; as the language is not prescriptive, the legislation will not mandate districts and schools to hire researchers or contractors. She maintained that the role of the committee is to support the districts and schools [through the process].

8:31:37 AM

CO-CHAIR STORY referred to language from page 3, line 24, "A district shall designate district representatives to coordinate with the committee and draft the district's plan." She suggested that districts will communicate individual efforts [by means of a representative] to the committee, and this creates a web of support. She commented on the broad approach and that she believes coordination between organizations is productive. She expressed interest in knowing how much feedback individual districts have already given.

8:32:56 AM

REPRESENTATIVE TARR, reiterating that the requirement for districts' participation is specific to what is available to them, answered that principals from all Anchorage School Districts attended the Restorative Justice Summit and now the districts' priorities include trauma-informed and mental health and wellness policies. She opined that this validates the program. She stated that there is a letter of support from the North Slope Borough School District. She listed multiple representatives from schools that have attended the summits, including Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau, Sitka, Homer, Valdez, North Slope Borough, Chevak, Kotzebue, and Bethel. She stated

that from their feedback, she has learned about the diversity of Alaska school districts. In response to a follow-up question, she stated that the plan submission date could be flexible. She then surmised that two years is long enough, and if a school or district needs an extra year, the legislation provides an intervening year.

[8:36:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR, in response to a question from Representative Gillham, stated that after appointment, the members would be on the committee through the process of plan submission. She referred to the language in Section 6, that read, "Sections 1 and 3 - 5 of this Act are repealed July 1, 2024." She stated after that date the committee does not exist.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND referred to the language on page 3, line 5, "Committee members serve without compensation and are not entitled to per diem."

REPRESENTATIVE TARR, in response to Co-Chair Drummond, voiced hope that compensation will not be an issue. She offered that the fiscal note provides funding for a contractor to schedule committee meetings, keep notes, and track contact information. She noted that there has been a great deal of support, and she stated her belief that there are people who would like to be part of the process, without compensation. She said that people have already expressed interest in being members of the proposed committee.

[8:38:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR, in response to Representative Cronk, answered that the fiscal note was prepared April 30, 2021, and that there is nothing new beyond this date. She explained that the fiscal note of \$23,000 is for the two years the committee would be in existence. She explained that this is the estimated cost for a contractor to organize the [School Climate and School Connectedness Improvement Committee].

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK referred to the language in the legislation, that read, "that the district shall". He stated that, technically, this language usually indicates a bigger cost assumed by the districts.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR responded that this was a concern in developing the legislation; thus, the language is not

prescriptive in terms of expectation. She explained that to create a plan together, the district's representative would participate in limited consultations with the committee and may provide answers on a questionnaire. She stated that the intention of the legislation is to be "noninvasive" and not impose weekly meetings on "super-busy teachers." She stated her belief that smaller districts could put together a plan after participating in a couple of interviews and answering a set of questions. She stated that bigger districts may need more coordination, however; they may already have people working in the social and emotional learning and disciplinary components. She stated that to minimize the impact on the districts and schools, the committee-supported process would be flexible and nonprescriptive.

[8:41:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR, in response to a question from Co-Chair Drummond, answered that the fiscal note dated April 30, 2021, is current. She stated that the only change in Version G has to do with committee membership and consultation language.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND commented that there might be available funding from DEED's COVID-19 relief funds. She suggested that the pandemic might have had a serious impact on behavior issues in schools.

[8:42:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX voiced concern that once a plan [created by the committee and the district representative] is [complete], it would be prescriptive, and school districts would have to implement the plan.

[8:42:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR responded that the actual development of a plan is the only prescriptive element. She recapped her aspirations to be mindful of mandates. She reiterated that step two would be implementation of the plan, and if resources are not available, there would be no expectation for the districts to put policies into place. She stated that after two years, if there are plan recommendations, that would be the time to review the budget and see what the plan can achieve. She suggested that the process generates a roadmap. She stated that some community resources could become available. Businesses may be interested in policies that provide people with soft skills as

communication, connection, and leadership; this leads to the consideration of school programs and the type of students they produce. She suggested that there might be private investors. In Anchorage, for example, there are partnerships between schools and businesses that may help with strategic investments. She stated the intention is not for [the legislation] to presuppose solutions, but for the plan to open the conversation, whether funding comes from state resources or private partnerships.

[8:45:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX, for clarification, stated that the committee would develop the program and that would be through DEED. The next step would be implementation of the plan, if future legislatures so choose.

[8:45:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR answered in the affirmative. She explained that, on or before January 1, 2024, the districts would supply the finished plan to the board of education, the chief clerk, and the senate secretary. At that time the legislature would consider implementation. She stated that some districts might relay that they have resources in place and do not need to implement a plan. In response to a follow-up question, she stated that there has been a great deal of participation. She estimated that around 100 people this year and around 100 people last year signed up for the annual [Restorative Justice Summit]. She stated that this has been a work in progress over the last few years, and the input of summit participants helped develop the two-step process. She restated that step one is to create the plan, and step two is to consider resources and possible implementation of the plan. She referenced the example that some schools in the past used closets for behavioral interventions, as they did not have a physical space for the seclusion and restraint policy. She stated that the legislature intervened on the practice and the resulting [legislation] required some smaller districts to build a physical space for the seclusion and restraint policy, without providing funding. She argued that it is easy to think of a change in policy, without thinking in terms of implementation. She stated the goal with Version G is to understand what districts need without putting pressure on them.

[8:50:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND observed that the School Climate and School Connectedness Improvement Committee does not appear to have a requirement to produce a plan or report, but there is a requirement on school districts. Considering the current [legislative] schedule, she estimated that districts would have about 18 months to complete a plan. She acknowledged that this does not leave much time for the committee, in its initial phase, to support school districts while each school district produces its own plan, on or before January of 2024.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR answered that the committee is big enough to break into smaller groups. Each group will work with an allotted number of districts to help create standardized questions. The committee members serve a supportive role to help minimize the impact on the districts. While the districts would be submitting the plan, the committee's supportive role helps complete the plan. She expressed the belief that restricting the committee to an advisory role gives plan ownership to area groups, so they feel they are speaking on their own behalf. She suggested that due to time constraints the House Education Standing Committee should move the legislation. She expressed optimism that the bill will pass and observed that the outreach will take a couple months. She agreed on the idea of pushing out plan submission dates by a year, but she stressed that the dates must be relative, so the committee is repealed in the end.

[8:54:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR, in response to a question from Representative Gillham, explained that [Version G] does not repeal Section 2 because that section contains language on trauma-informed policy. She explained that four years ago the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and DEED had combined legislation to inform education and healthcare policy. This resulted in a statute for DHSS, but the language on trauma-informed policy never become part of a DEED statute. She stated that the original intention was that both DHSS and DEED would have statutes including the language.

[8:55:37 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND expressed her concern that the "early development" part of DEED should be kept "front and center." She stated that subsection (b) in Section 2 of HB 173, Version G, acknowledges this and makes it a permanent part of education

policy. She stated her opinion that this piece of the legislation should not be repealed.

[8:56:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR answered in the affirmative. She stated that the language becomes part of the policy directive and allows for prevention work. In addition, she said that DHHS has access to federal funding due to the language.

[8:57:04 AM](#)

NORM WOOTEN, Director of Advocacy, Association of Alaska School Boards, offered AASB's support for HB 173, Version G. To address earlier questions stated during the hearing, he detailed that school districts currently receive federal funding primarily through Title I and Title II of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). To receive federal funding through ESSA, school districts are required to provide the same information that is already conveyed in the school climate and connectiveness survey. He surmised that the process for school districts to create a plan to submit to the committee would not be onerous, as most districts are already doing the work. He asserted that AASB has long supported student physical and mental health as a prerequisite for student learning. He stated that AASB has an entire department, the Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement, working with school districts toward this goal. The methodology is to connect school districts, communities, tribes, and parents with resources [to help them understand] childhood trauma, isolation, bullying, and anything that prevents students from learning and becoming well-adjusted children and then adults. He stated that AASB has been the recipient of several grants from the U.S. Department of Education. These grants are to help create partnerships and provide support for students' physical and emotional needs. He opined that often educators must address the emotional needs of students before they can address the educational needs. He stated that students do not leave their problems "on the doorstep" of the school. He made the comparison to schools providing breakfast and stated that it is impossible to teach hungry students. He stated that AASB does not advocate supplanting parental responsibility; instead, supplementing it by integrating parental lessons into the academic day. To strengthen connections between parents and students, he stated that AASB works directly with families and communities to find ways to support values and strengthen connections between families and the school, as partners.

MR. WOOTEN stated that he expressed doubt when he first heard about the legislation and sought guidance from the board of directors. He stated that AASB does not typically advocate for mandates for school districts. However, the board agreed, AASB is "so deeply embedded" with school climate and connectedness, it could not do anything except support the legislation. He stated that school districts across Alaska are already doing this work in order to receive funding through ESSA. He continued that AASB worked with Representative Tarr and supports HB 173, and the changes in [Version G]. He expressed excitement to expand partnerships through the legislation to provide even greater support to communities, tribes, parents, and to support students in the school districts. He stated that AASB's [Resolutions Committee] has drawn up the following resolutions in support of [Version G]: supporting student success through social and emotional learning and positive youth development; safe, caring, and connected school; student wellness; encouraging districts to adopt standards for parental/family involvement programs; Alaska standards for culturally responsive schools; and support for ESSA's priorities. He thanked the bill sponsor and stated his belief that [Version G] would help school districts better prepare students by improving both their academics and mental health.

[9:04:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked Mr. Wooten and acknowledged his longevity in support of the Alaska's schools. She surmised from Mr. Wooten's testimony that the plan's submission date does not need to change. She stated that school districts are already doing the work, and they should not have an issue developing a plan by January 2024.

[9:05:17 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY thanked Mr. Wooten for his testimony and expressed interest on his opinion of the selection process of the committee members. She stated she feels that appointees to the committee should be experienced people who have been working on [school climate and collectiveness].

[9:06:34 AM](#)

MR. WOOTEN expressed confidence in the process. He also expressed confidence that, because the governor has a background in education, he will appoint experienced members to the

committee. He stated that, initially, school board members were not on the list of committee members. He voiced appreciation to the bill sponsor that the legislation now includes school board members, as he believes they will have valuable input in the discussion of school climate and connectedness. He stated that because of the expertise and experience of its members, AASB has offered volunteer consultants to the committee. He expressed confidence that, with the size of the committee, there will be committee members concerned with the improvement of the academic, mental, and physical health of students.

[9:08:33 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND opened public testimony on HB 173, Version G.

[9:09:02 AM](#)

KATIE BOTZ, representing self, stated her support of HB 173, [Version G]. She stated that she identifies as a victim of sexual assault. She shared that she was 12 years old at the time of her trauma and is living proof of its effects on mental health and wellbeing. She stated after the incident she felt she could not talk about her emotions, fear, or anything related to her trauma. She stated that at school she resented everyone, fought with other students, and was often in trouble. She stated that she never worked through the trauma, but moving to Juneau, where no one knew her past, felt like a clean slate. However, once she entered the workforce, she stated that her emotional trauma resurfaced. She said that, even as an adult, she almost lost her job because she never addressed the trauma at a young age. She stated that she feels addressing students' problems sooner will help them as adults. She asked the committee to support HB 173, [Version G].

[9:11:48 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked Ms. Botz for her testimony. After ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that HB 173 was held over.

[9:12:38 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:13 a.m. to 9:14 a.m.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 335, "An Act providing that Rampart School is located within the Yukon-Koyukuk School District regional educational attendance area; and providing for an effective date." [Not on the recording, but reconstructed from the committee secretary's log notes, was Co-Chair Drummond announcement of HB 335.]

[9:14:04 AM](#)

HEIDI TESHNER, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, presented HB 335 on behalf of the sponsor, House Rules by request of the governor. She stated that the Rampart School is currently within the school boundaries of the Yukon Flat School District (YFSD). However, since fiscal year 2017 (FY 17), a memorandum of agreement (MOA) authorized the Yukon-Koyukuk School District (YKSD) to administer and operate the Rampart School. In April 2019 both the commissioner of DEED and the commissioner of the Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development (DCCED) signed a decisional memorandum that effectively permitted the Rampart School to operate under YKSD. She stated that despite the Rampart School functioning under YKSD, residents of the community discovered they were not legal to vote on Yukon-Koyukuk School Board elections. She explained that under Article X, Section 6, of the Alaska State Constitution, the legislature serves as the assembly for the regional education attendance areas (REAAs) that are part of unorganized boroughs. Furthermore, she explained that [the decisional memorandum] cannot change school district boundaries, pursuant to AS 29.03.020, which would allow for maximum local participation, and allow the legislature to "establish, alter, or abolish school service areas within the unorganized borough".

MS. TESHNER stated that HB 335 allows for the maximum local participation within the Yukon-Koyukuk School Board, and the legislature is the appropriate entity to authorize the Rampart School to become part of the YKSD. The community of Rampart aligns culturally and historically with communities in YKSD, and both school districts back placing the Rampart School within YKSD. The passage of HB 335 would result in a boundary change for the two REAAs, allowing parents of students at the Rampart School to participate in school board elections applicable to their community school.

[9:17:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK stated that he is aware of this issue and is "thrilled" that the sponsor has put this forward. He recommended that the bill be passed quickly so the school districts can [proceed with their agenda]. In response to Co-Chair Drummond, he confirmed that the legislation directly affects the district he represents.

[9:18:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS stated his support for HB 335. He acknowledged that the need for this school district change has been ongoing. He inquired whether this situation has previously happened in the state and whether the community has any say in the move.

[9:18:50 AM](#)

MS. TESHNER answered that this situation is the only one she is aware of in the state, and the representatives from both districts and the community met and agreed to this move.

[9:19:21 AM](#)

MS. TESHNER, in response to a question from Co-Chair Drummond, stated that the MOA has been in existence since 2017. The Rampart School reopened in 2016 under YFSD and in FY 17 transferred to YKSD. In response to a follow-up question, she stated that the funding goes with the school, not to the original district. Based on the MOA, DEED pays the school's funding to YKSD.

[9:20:26 AM](#)

KERRY BOYD, Superintendent, Yukon-Koyukuk School District, Fairbanks, Alaska, stated her support for HB 335. She shared that she has worked in YKSD for 15 years and that both YKSD and YFSD support the bill. She stated that the discussion began when the Rampart Village Council sent a letter on April 19, 2016, requesting the school move from YFSD to YKSD. The chief of the village council, the school staff, and the members of community reached out to the YKSD, and since, she stated that the two districts have discussed the issue multiple times. The discussions resulted in both districts signing an MOA that called for YKSD to manage, administer, and operate the Rampart School. At yearly board meetings the two boards discussed the issue and posted public notices. She stated that the communities are culturally aligned and not opposed to the

change. She said that since 2017, the MOA must be renewed annually by a time-consuming process; thus, a commitment now exists for a permanent boundary change to move the Rampart School into YKSD. Even so, she argued that the main reason for the permanent boundary change is the Alaska Division of Elections cannot use [the decisional memorandum] to recognize the village of Rampart as part of YKSD, therefore Rampart residents are not allowed to vote in the Yukon-Koyukuk School Board elections. She stated that due to the closure of the Rampart School, the facilities and buildings need updating and improvement. She indicated that YKSD would be responsible for this maintenance. She stated that the permanent boundary change would remove any property ownership or title questions. She suggested that the school boards and DEED have spent many hours on the process of annually approving the MOA and, she stated, "now your time" is being spent.

MS. BOYD stated that since 2008 there has been a great deal of work and questions on how to make this boundary change. She stated the districts thought that they had found a solution when the commissioners of DEED and DCCED signed the decisional memorandum in 2019. However, that year, the director of the Alaska Division of Elections sent a letter invalidating the decisional memorandum. She stated that the Department of Law (DOL) nullified the decisional memorandum, announcing that the memorandum did not have the force of law. She stated that over the past few years the districts have been in contact with DOL in order to accomplish the permanent school district boundary change. She stated that for years the districts and communities have posted notices and had meetings; now HB 335 is in front of the this committee seeking a permanent resolution for the Rampart School. She voiced appreciation to the committee members for their public service and to the governor and his team for sponsoring the bill.

[9:26:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND stated she understood that the Rampart School closed for many years due to lack of population. She inquired whether the school had representation on the board of YFSD and would continue to have the representation.

[9:27:12 AM](#)

MS. BOYD responded that at that time, the school did have representation in YFSD, and the residents were able to vote for board members; due to the MOA, they have looked to YKSD for

representation. In response to a follow-up question, she stated that, as superintendent of YKSD, the Rampart School has been under her supervision. Responding to a subsequent follow-up question, she stated that once the bill passes, the Rampart School will have representation on the Yukon-Koyukuk School Board.

[9:28:25 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND opened public testimony on HB 335. After ascertaining that there was no one who wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that HB 335 was held over.

[9:29:31 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:29 a.m.