

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 11, 2022
8:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Mike Cronk

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 72 (FIN)

"An Act relating to civics education, civics assessments, and secondary school graduation requirements; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 147

"An Act relating to the teacher education loan program; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 312

"An Act relating to dress codes and natural hairstyles."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 72

SHORT TITLE: SEC. SCHOOL CIVICS EDUCATION

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

02/05/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/05/21	(S)	EDC, CRA
03/10/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

03/10/21 (S) Heard & Held
 03/10/21 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
 03/19/21 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
 03/19/21 (S) Heard & Held
 03/19/21 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
 03/22/21 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
 03/22/21 (S) Scheduled but Not Heard
 03/24/21 (S) EDC RPT CS 5DP NEW TITLE
 03/24/21 (S) DP: HOLLAND, HUGHES, STEVENS, MICCICHE,
 BEGICH
 03/24/21 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
 03/24/21 (S) Moved CSSB 72(EDC) Out of Committee
 03/24/21 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
 03/30/21 (S) CRA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
 03/30/21 (S) Heard & Held
 03/30/21 (S) MINUTE(CRA)
 04/08/21 (S) CRA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
 04/08/21 (S) Heard & Held
 04/08/21 (S) MINUTE(CRA)
 04/20/21 (S) CRA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
 04/20/21 (S) Moved CSSB 72(CRA) Out of Committee
 04/20/21 (S) MINUTE(CRA)
 04/21/21 (S) CRA RPT CS 2DP 2NR NEW TITLE
 04/21/21 (S) DP: HUGHES, GRAY-JACKSON
 04/21/21 (S) NR: MYERS, WILSON
 04/21/21 (S) FIN REFERRAL ADDED AFTER CRA
 02/01/22 (S) FIN AT 1:00 PM SENATE FINANCE 532
 02/01/22 (S) -- Invited Testimony --
 02/08/22 (S) FIN AT 1:00 PM SENATE FINANCE 532
 02/08/22 (S) Moved CSSB 72(FIN) Out of Committee
 02/08/22 (S) MINUTE(FIN)
 02/09/22 (S) FIN RPT CS 4DP 1NR NEW TITLE
 02/09/22 (S) DP: STEDMAN, BISHOP, HOFFMAN,
 WIELECHOWSKI
 02/09/22 (S) NR: OLSON
 02/16/22 (S) TRANSMITTED TO (H)
 02/16/22 (S) VERSION: CSSB 72(FIN)
 02/17/22 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 02/17/22 (H) EDC, FIN
 03/11/22 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 147

SHORT TITLE: RURAL DEF. TEACHER EDUCATION LOAN PROGRAM
 SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) ZULKOSKY

03/24/21 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 03/24/21 (H) EDC, FIN

03/11/22 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 312

SHORT TITLE: ALLOW NATURAL HAIRSTYLES

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) TARR

02/09/22 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/09/22 (H) EDC, L&C
03/11/22 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

SENATOR GARY STEVENS

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, introduced CSSB 72(FIN).

TIM LAMKIN, Staff

Senator Gary Stevens

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Senator Stevens, prime sponsor, gave a sectional analysis of CSSB 72(FIN).

MICHAEL JOHNSON, PhD, Commissioner

Department of Education and Early Development

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing in support of CSSB 72(FIN).

CHRISTINE HUTCHINSON,

representing self

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of CSSB 72(FIN).

KATY GIORGIO, Staff

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Representative Zulkosky, prime sponsor, gave a sectional analysis of the proposed CS for HB 147, Version B.

SANA EFIRD, Executive Director

Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education

Department of Education and Early Development

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on HB 147, Version B.

MADELINE REICHARD, Teacher
Lower Kuskokwim School District
Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 147, Version B.

KIMBERLY HANKINS, Superintendent
Lower Kuskokwim School District
Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 147, Version B.

SEGUE GRANT, Vice President
National Education Association, Alaska Affiliate
Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 147, Version B.

LISA PARADY, PhD, Executive Director
Alaska Council of School Administrators
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 147, Version B.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:02 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 7:40 a.m. Representatives Gillham, Zulkosky, Hopkins, Drummond, and Story were present at the call to order. Representative Prax arrived as the meeting was in progress.

SB 72-SEC. SCHOOL CIVICS EDUCATION

[8:05:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the first order of business would be CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 72(FIN), "An Act relating to civics education, civics assessments, and secondary school graduation requirements; and providing for an effective date."

[8:05:27 AM](#)

SENATOR GARY STEVENS, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, introduced CSSB 72(FIN). He explained that the proposed legislation would create a [secondary school] exit exam

in the form of a civics assessment. He stated that in recent years he has witnessed apathy and division in the country and in the schools. He commented that students have done well in science, mathematics, reading, and writing, but in comparison, civics education has taken a "back seat." He shared the observation that other states are changing civics education policies by creating new curriculum, providing assessments, and offering volunteer programs and leadership workshops for students. He expressed urgency to reverse the recent trend and restore faith and understanding in the government by making an investment in the future of the country. He contended that CSSB 72(FIN) is an effort to educate students on both the system of government in the country and the cultural diversity in Alaska.

SENATOR STEVENS stated that the proposed civics exam would not be considered high stakes, as a student could take the test repeatedly until 70 percent of the questions were answered correctly. He described the process of retaking the exam as a method for learning. He added that the test would not stop a student from graduating. He indicated that the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) has agreed to create a civics curriculum unique to Alaska. He stated he believes synonymously with the country's Founding Fathers that the fundamental purpose of the public education system is to teach the meaning of citizenship and to create a population of citizen voters. He described a personal experience from his youth when he attended a mock legislative session; he conjectured that this experience moved him to be involved in government.

[8:09:03 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated that, with no offense intended, he would like to distribute a civics exam to the committee members. He explained that the exam [included in the committee packet] consists of 42 questions that are part of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services naturalization exam. He related a joke that he missed a few questions, reinforcing that the test is a learning opportunity. He related that many school districts in the state already provide instruction [in civics education]. He stated that the legislation would require every student to take the test, adding that it is a way for students to learn to be citizens. He related the personal experience that, unlike now, he could not vote until the age of 21. He remembered the first time he voted as a great experience.

[8:11:01 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked Senator Stevens and questioned whether committee members should take the test now. She then questioned whether he managed [the Task Force on Civics Education].

[8:11:31 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS answered that the committee members should take the test home. He answered that he managed the task force with support from DEED and the school districts. He stated that after working on the task force many school districts moved ahead with civics programs. He reiterated that the Founding Fathers of the country sought to create citizens, and this legislation is part of that process.

[8:12:06 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND related a personal story that her mother, as an immigrant, took the naturalization test years ago to become a citizen. She stated that she learned from her mother, who survived World War II, to never forget [the value of citizenship].

[8:12:51 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS offered that DEED would design an appropriate test specific to Alaska. In response to Co-Chair Drummond, he stated that the test passed out to the committee is a sample of the naturalization test given to U.S. immigrants applying for citizenship.

[8:13:35 AM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Senator Stevens, prime sponsor, gave a sectional analysis of CSSB 72(FIN). He stated that the proposed legislation is the recommendation of [the Task Force on Civics Education]. He stated that committee members can find the task force's final document posted on BASIS.

[8:14:33 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN proceeded to the sectional analysis of CSSB 72(FIN), [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Sec. 1: AS 14.03.076, relating to public schools, adds
a new section

- a. directing the State Board of Education & Early Development (SBOE) to develop curriculum and a related assessment based on the civics portion of the naturalization examination administered by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for immigrants seeking U.S. citizenship. The curriculum and assessment must also include systems of Alaska Tribal government;
- b. requiring students to pass the assessment established in (a) above in order to receive a high school diploma, with exceptions for students with a disability and who receive a waiver from their local school board;
- c. schools are to document on student transcripts when a student has passed the assessment, with the option for the student to retake the assessment;
- d. districts are required to report annually on their respective civics course offerings and overall average student score on the assessment; and
- e. a passing score is defined as correctly answering 70% or more on the civics assessment.

Section 2: AS 14.07.168, relating to reporting requirements of the SBOE, to include in their annual report to the legislature a description of civics education curriculum in the state, of civics-related course offerings in respective districts, and of student performance on the assessment described in section 1, by district.

Section 3: Provides for an effective date of July 1, 2023.

[8:18:25 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND questioned whether 70 percent of the test questions must be answered correctly to pass the U.S. naturalization exam.

[8:18:42 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN responded that the minimum passing score to attain U.S. citizenship is 60 percent correct. He noted that the average immigrant scored around 84 percent. In comparison, he cited a poll that found some of the school districts in the state had scores as low as 3 percent correct.

[8:19:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND commented that, owing to these numbers, the students in the state deserve more. She added that, owing to the committee members' participation in government, it would be interesting to see how they do on the test. She offered the joke that there should be no cheating.

[8:19:45 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS responded that the committee members' results would not be shared. He stated that this test is for self-education to realize the "holes" in everyone's education.

[8:19:58 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN, in response to Representative Gillham, stated that the language in the bill gives districts flexibility and is not meant to be prescriptive. He cited that the naturalization test consists of 10 questions randomly picked from around 140 study questions. To pass the naturalization test, 6 out of 10 questions need to be answered correctly.

[8:20:50 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated that the test handed to the committee members is not the test that would be given to students. He stated that DEED would create a test specific to Alaska.

[8:21:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked whether school districts have responded to the bill, as teachers have conveyed concerns that testing does not capture students' comprehension. Referring to students with test anxiety, she suggested that repeatedly taking a test could have negative effects on self-esteem, while hands-on activities are more conducive to learning. She questioned why the legislation does not incorporate civics into courses already offered by school districts. She argued that a course offering information and exercises would be more useful than one test as

the only "tool in the toolbox." She expressed doubt that passing a civics test would make students "model" citizens.

[8:23:43 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS referenced Co-Chair Story's background as a teacher and expressed appreciation for the question. He stated that the proposed legislation is not the only answer, and there are other ways to help young people understand the meaning of citizenship. He offered his understanding on the issue of test anxiety but asserted that retaking the test can be a progression, and students would realize they [gained an understanding of civics] through the process.

[8:24:45 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN, in response to Representative Hopkins, stated that he has researched each school district's graduation requirements and compiled a binder with this information. He stated that there is a social studies component, but it may not specify [Native Alaska] civics.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS posited whether options, other than a test, could reflect the same comprehensive knowledge of civics. He questioned whether the legislation is to be kept to one standardized test.

[8:25:45 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated that any changes to the legislation would be considered. He added that some of the larger districts are doing an exceptional job [incorporating civics], but this is not seen in the smaller districts. He stated that the commissioner of DEED would speak to this.

[8:26:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY thanked Senator Stevens and shared that she was never a teacher; instead, she sat on the school board for 18 years.

[8:27:15 AM](#)

MICHAEL JOHNSON, PhD, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, testified in support of CSSB 72(FIN). He expressed gratitude to Senator Stevens for the bill and his statesmanship. He stated that civics education is not a new

idea, but timely wisdom. He paraphrased Plato in saying that schools should create good men and women that act nobly. He added that "if the education system does less than that, all efforts for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness will be thwarted." He cited a [2018] study from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation that found only 36 percent of Americans passed a multiply-choice citizenship test. He said that that test is comparable to the test passed out during the meeting to committee members. He stated that the study found less than 25 percent of Americans knew why the U.S. fought the British, and only 24 percent of Americans could name anything Benjamin Franklin accomplished. He added that 74 percent of Americans aged 65 and older scored the best, while only 19 percent of those aged 45 and younger passed. He emphasized that these statistics support the legislation's importance.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON stated that he does not have specific data; nonetheless, he asserted confidence that few citizens in Alaska understand Alaska Native history and tribal governance. He described this knowledge as an essential part of civics education in the state. He referred to a presentation given on March 4, 2021, by the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs [on layers of governance]. He described the presentation as a perfect example of Alaska civics education. He stated that the legislation is a needed effort to repair the foundation of the state's education system. He explained that civics education is about purpose, and a public education system without clear purpose is expensive, ineffective, and corrosive to society. A purposeful public education system improves society through efficiency and effectiveness. He stated that this bill further implements a long-time statute that affirms the legislature's purpose for education. He read AS 14.03.015, which follows:

It is the policy of this state that the purpose of education is to help ensure that all students will succeed in their education and work, shape worthwhile and satisfying lives for themselves, exemplify the best values of society, and be effective in improving the character and quality of the world about them.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON stated that this statute also represents the SBOE's vision statement and is a great description of a purposeful education in civics. He stated that every dollar of the \$1.6 billion spent annually on public education in the state should have a purpose. As the state comes out of the [COVID 19] pandemic, he expressed hope that the benchmark for school districts is higher than "merely" having its schools open.

[8:32:02 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON argued that opening schools is good, but the difficulty is in being purposeful and effective [within the school]. He referred to President John F. Kennedy's speech that questioned spending the country's money on the exploration of the moon. He said that President Kennedy relayed in the speech that going to the moon was not about improving the moon but making America better. He said, "Let's not storm the capitol. Let's teach our kids to read. ... Let's show them how to work together to create good policy. Let's teach them the value of liberty, and never take it for granted. Let's show them how to embrace what is difficult, because it makes us better and more thankful." He stated that, as members of the state government, it is appropriate to have high expectations for schools and students in Alaska through strong legislation, like CSSB 72(FIN). He expressed anticipation to work with the bill sponsor. In conclusion, he stated that the challenge may not be simply passing and implementing the legislation but living up to the civility and the character expected of students.

[8:34:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX agreed with Commissioner Johnson on Plato's purpose of public education. In reference to the requirement that the test be taken until it is passed, he contended that any test measuring knowledge should be this way. He expressed unease at setting a centralized standard. He surmised that formulating the section of the civics exam on Alaska Tribal government would be difficult, as there are 21 Native Alaska languages recognized in the state. He questioned how to decide on an applicable and meaningful standard for a test specific to Alaska civics.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON responded that Native Alaska tribes have commonalities, including history. He compared an inclusive civics standard for the tribes in Alaska with the American history standard that includes all 50 states. He expressed respect to Representative Prax and recommended that he view the presentation from March 4, 2021, given by the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs. He stated that the presentation helps to understand the standards. He expressed confidence that watching the presentation would help inform viewers what can be accomplished.

[8:38:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX stated that he remembered being 13 years old when his family moved to Alaska and being taught Alaska Native history. He suggested that because there are more indigenous Native Alaskans, than in other states, there would be more to learn. He continued that a 13-year-old moving to the state would have more to learn to meet the test standards.

[8:39:54 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON stated that, like with other exams, the state would accommodate students arriving from outside Alaska. He expressed confidence that if a 13-year-old student were to come to Alaska, he/she would have the time to learn the history and pass a civics test. He stated that, in his experience, 13-year-olds new to Alaska are eager to learn about Alaska.

[8:40:46 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY expressed interest in whether school districts have responded to the test requirement. She inquired whether requirements for social studies could be interwoven with civics education.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON conveyed confidence in the teachers of Alaska, not the bureaucracy. He suggested that if the bill is passed, then teachers would meet to reference examples and discuss effective implementation. Regarding testing, he expressed the belief that effective education requires assessment. He noted that that can take different forms, as teachers use creative ways to determine whether students are learning.

[8:42:29 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY voiced the belief that within the social studies standard there is an American government class that includes civics education. She questioned whether anything new needs to be implemented. She expressed concern that a test requirement would involve money and time and whether one test is the right tool to evaluate learning.

[8:43:41 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON maintained that he has relied on Mr. Lamkin's research and data to understand the situation in schools. He stated that the proposed legislation would provide

resources to DEED and school districts to create material and assessment. He referred to data that points out some of the larger school districts have already made progress, explaining that this is an opportunity to support smaller districts. He emphasized that the other part of the legislation ensures students in Alaska are educated in tribal government and civics, as there cannot be an assumption that curriculum purchased outside of Alaska contains this part. He pointed out that there are partners in the state who have already worked on this portion of the legislation. He expressed excitement for the bill to pass so partners can develop the resources together and for this element to be incorporated in the districts' curriculum.

[8:45:15 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON, in response to a follow-up question, stated that he is a teacher, and he has heard direct testimony in other meetings from teachers [in support of the legislation]. He stated that teachers can be asked to provide direct testimony to the committee, as he does not want to speak on their behalf. He voiced his belief that many teachers are excited about civics education and becoming partners in the implementation of the bill.

[8:46:21 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND voiced the belief that this is not a high-stakes test and is not required to graduate. She suggested that the test be given junior year, as this would provide time before graduation. She commented on the lack of knowledge citizens of the state have about Alaska Native history, pointing out that current work on a reading bill has been paused, as the Native Alaska community requested the inclusion of culturally relevant education. She said that the value is in how the legislation fits together, and the process should not involve interpreting one bill at a time but develop understanding across the board, before going forward.

[8:47:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY expressed appreciation that the civics exam is not a high-stakes test, however; the current language of the bill indicates that schools may not issue a high school diploma unless the student has achieved a passing score on the civics assessment. She acknowledged the use of "may" and not "shall" in the language of the bill. Since this is not a high-

stakes test, she inquired about alternative ways, other than a standardized test, that schools could illustrate its students are learning civics.

[8:49:03 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN stated that the bill reads correctly. Students must pass the assessment with 70 percent correct in order to receive a diploma. He continued that "high stakes" refers to the idea that the test is not a onetime pass/fail. He indicated that the option to take the exam repeatedly reduces the pressure.

[8:50:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY stated research from [the Alaska Reads Act] shows that culturally and linguistically diverse students have challenges within the systemic history of standardized tests. She stated that her perception of high stakes implicates diploma issuance and not the number of times a test is taken. She restated the question on whether the sponsor's office is willing to consider other avenues of Alaska civics education without a proficiency benchmark.

MR. LAMKIN stated that the bill sponsor is amenable to whatever the committee considers a balanced approach in meeting the goal of improving and developing citizens.

[8:51:30 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN, in response to Representative Prax, stated that the bill retains the maximum flexibility among districts and is not meant to be prescriptive. He stated that the legislation directs DEED and SBOE to develop assessment and curriculum on tribal government structures. Some districts are in the process of developing their own curriculum, while the curriculum is already in use in other districts. He stated that last year representatives from the First Alaskans Institute and the Alaska Federation of Natives testified on the subject. He stated he would be able to bring these representatives into the discussion to offer more details. He reiterated that the bill is meant to be flexible and creative so as to involve a broad range of Alaska Native cultures.

[8:53:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX stated that the challenge of standardized assessment is determining which questions should be included.

He surmised that there is even a challenge as to which answers are considered correct. He stated that there are many different perspectives on what happened and which events in U.S. history are the most important, along with the question of the government's fundamental function. He expressed concern that [the civics exam] would dictate a particular version. With no further questions, he urged that these ideas be pondered.

[8:54:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS offered his understanding that from previous testimony the legislation would help support smaller school districts, as larger school districts are already addressing the topic. He expressed interest in the bill's focus on smaller school districts and how classroom structure may help students pass the civics test.

[8:55:38 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered that, in order to teach well and support students, there must be clarity in what students should learn. He stated that educators must answer five essential questions every day for each student. He listed the questions, which would determine: what standard is effective; how to instruct effective curriculum effectively; what assessment is effective; how to intervene effectively; and what enrichment is effective. He maintained that the bill contains support for all these questions. He conjectured that partners working together with existing projects would [achieve the goal of the legislation]. He stated that teachers at the Canvas [Studio] are contracted to deliver curriculum and courses. He added that district teachers would work with the Canvas [Studio] to address content, assessment, and the other questions [listed above]. He added that there are accommodations for students who need extra support with the statewide assessment.

[8:57:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS argued that students would be losing valuable class time while taking the civics test. He questioned whether the format of test would be designed by teachers and the districts.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON responded that assessment is an essential part of effective instruction and part of the learning process. He stated that there are multiply ways to format the test. With no federal protocols, each district could determine the format

and implementation of the test. In response to a follow-up question, he stated that the assessment would resemble a test given at the district level.

[8:59:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS restated that, along with other testing requirements, the civics test would take time away from learning in the classroom.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON stated that the federally required assessments contain protocols and must happen at a certain time of the year. He reiterated that the proposed civics assessment would be a different type of test. He listed examples: the test would not have to be in the spring; the test may be given after a student takes a course; and the test may be given during sophomore or junior year. He stated that he does not envision a prescriptive setting; it could be determined, not only at the district level, but also at the individual school level, as there would be no constraints of reporting to the federal government.

[9:01:56 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 9:02 a.m.

[9:02:47 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND opened public testimony on CSSB 72(FIN).

[9:04:05 AM](#)

CHRISTINE HUTCHINSON, representing self, stated that she has been following the legislation since [the Task Force on Civics Education] began its work. She said that, through contact with Mr. Lamkin, she passed a copy of the task force's report to the curriculum department of her local school district. She stated that she is a public member of the curriculum committee and would be present at the next meeting. She said that during its last meeting civics was not a high point of the discussion. She stated that she asked the curriculum committee about civics education, and she was told "they teach to standards, not to the topic." She argued that civics education should be a requirement in the education system, as [citizens] should be as knowledgeable as immigrants about the U.S. government. She related the story that a local retiree in her community passed the naturalization exam at nine years old. She expressed the

belief that a 13-year-old should be able to take the exam. She voiced the opinion that the exam is critical and should be part of the standard. She offered her appreciation to the committee, the bill sponsor, and Mr. Lamkin. She stated that she would continue to use the information provided by Mr. Lamkin in her group discussions on local and state government. She maintained that the issues are critical, and she reaffirmed her strong support of CSSB 72(FIN).

[9:08:07 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that CSSB 72(FIN) was held over.

[9:08:27 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:08 a.m. to 9:10 a.m.

HB 147-RURAL DEF. TEACHER EDUCATION LOAN PROGRAM

[9:10:55 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 147, "An Act relating to the teacher education loan program; and providing for an effective date."

[9:11:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 147, Version 32-LS0692\B, Klein, 5/5/2021, as a working document. There being no objection, Version B was before the committee.

[9:11:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY, as prime sponsor, presented the proposed CS for HB 147, [Version B]. She asserted that the purpose of the proposed legislation is to address the increased difficulty of retaining teachers in the state. She stated that data shows the issue is pronounced in rural and very remote communities in Alaska. She cited a presentation by the Institute of Education Sciences that relates data on teacher turnover; teacher turnover is higher in high poverty schools and is associated with lower student outcomes. Also, high teacher turnover is costly for schools and districts. She stated that, to improve educator recruitment and retention, it is consistently recommended to locally grow teachers and increase incentives, such as loan forgiveness programs. In alignment

with these recommendations, she provided a 2021 factsheet [included in the committee packet] from the Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY stated that the Teacher Education Loan (TEL) program was created in 1986 and managed by the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE). The program provided low-cost education loans to high school graduates who were pursuing careers in elementary or secondary education. She stated that each year ACPE mailed nomination forms to rural school districts. The districts nominated students interested in pursuing education as a career. Upon receipt of these nominations, ACPE mailed informational letters concerning the TEL program to the students. After confirmation of an education program [admittance] and financial aid eligibility, the students then could receive \$7,500 in funding per year. These recipients could apply annually, up to five years. She stated that upon program completion, the TEL recipients could receive forgiveness equal to 100 percent of the principal and interest, if they met all forgiveness eligibility requirements and worked as a teacher for a rural Alaska community, as defined by statute.

[9:15:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY expressed her appreciation to the committee for considering HB 147. She continued that Version B proposes a narrow change to a statutory definition that, due to an arbitrary and outdated population ceiling, unintentionally disqualifies rural Alaska communities for loan forgiveness eligibility. She indicated that a constituent brought the issue to her attention. The constituent qualified for TEL, completed college education, and earned a master's degree. Currently teaching in Bethel, the constituent was informed by ACPE that the community no longer met the statutory definition of rural. She stated that Version B changes the loan program's definition of a rural community to match the definition in the Medical Education Program for Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho (WWAMI). She expressed the opinion that TEL's current definition of rural is arbitrary in comparison. She stated that the proposed legislation also includes a retroactivity clause. This would restore eligibility of loan forgiveness for those who received the loan after January 1, 2016. She stated that [Version B] is an effort to bring uniformity to the definition of rural and fulfill [the state's] promise to Alaska-grown teachers. She added that the legislation could add incentives for teachers to return to teach in a rural school district. She stated that the House Education Standing Committee has

consistently heard that teachers familiar with the unique conditions and cultures in rural communities contribute to the success of rural students. She encouraged the committee to do a small part by supporting the legislation.

[9:18:08 AM](#)

KATY GIORGIO, Staff, Representative Tiffany Zulkosky, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Zulkosky, prime sponsor, gave a sectional analysis of the proposed CS for HB 147, [Version B]. She stated that Section 1 of the bill aligns population limits in the TEL program with the definition in the WWAMI program. She stated that there are two different types of rural communities: those off the road system and those connected by roads to Anchorage or Fairbanks. She explained that Section 1 raises the population requirement ceiling from 5,500 or less, to 7,500 or less, matching the TEL program definition of rural communities off the road system to the WWAMI program definition. This change would include Bethel and Kodiak on the list of communities defined as rural. She stated that Version B does not change the rural requirements for communities on the road system. She added that the WWAMI definition of rural schools on the road system is a population of 3,500 or less, while the TEL definition is 1,500 or less. She stated that the bill sponsor would welcome a friendly amendment to change the TEL definition of rural schools on the road system from 1,500 to 3,500, to match WWAMI's definition. She stated if an amendment were to be presented, the list of rural communities on the road system would then include Seward, North Pole, Willow, Anchor Point, Kenai, Farm Loop, and Houston.

MS. GIORGIO stated that Section 2 would make the legislation retroactive to January 1, 2016. This clause enables the state to fulfill its promise to rural teachers who entered the TEL program in good faith that their loans would be forgiven. She stated that, while the TEL program has ceased, there are still teachers in rural areas who are seeking to have their loans forgiven. She stated that Section 3 establishes an effective date.

[9:20:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GILLHAM asked if teachers, who have been paying back their loans, would receive reimbursements for the entire time.

[9:20:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY responded that she would like to defer Representative Gillham's question to the executive director of ACPE. In response to Co-Chair Drummond's question, concerning the two different fiscal notes, she stated that the most recent, larger fiscal note of \$3 million reflects the original bill version, in which an unintentional change made the definition of rural communities too broad. She stated that by adopting Version B the population ceiling is lifted from 5,500 to 7,500, in alignment with WWAMI's definition of rural communities off the road system. She assured the committee that the smaller fiscal note of \$1 million is aligned with Version B.

[9:22:55 AM](#)

SANA EFIRD, Executive Director, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, Department of Education and Early Development, answered questions during the hearing on HB 147, [Version B]. In response to Representative Gillham, she stated that when the [TEL] program began, the borrowers in the program initially received funds from the Alaska Student Loan Corporation (ASLC). She stated that general funds were never appropriated for the loan forgiveness piece of the legislation; therefore, when loans were repaid, they would have been contributed to ASLC. She stated that the fiscal note shows [loan repayment] funds - that would have been for the forgiveness piece - going back to the ASLC through general funds. She stated that since TEL was a state program, it was not initially covered to provide forgiveness. She stated that this is her understanding of the original intent of the program, that there were never general funds to backfill or support the forgiveness.

[9:24:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS offered his understanding that the [TEL] program has stopped operation. He suggested that the bill just supports educators in Bethel who were initially part of the program, but now excluded. He clarified that the legislation is not opening the door to new teachers but only provides funding for those who were left in "the donut hole" of Bethel when the program was operating.

[9:24:58 AM](#)

MS. EFRID responded that this is the spirit and intent of the bill. She stated that the program no longer functions because there is no support for the forgiveness piece.

[9:25:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS estimated that \$1 million would be available for 20 eligible teachers, and that this would be the only cost. He questioned whether the \$1 million would come out of the general fund or from ASLC.

MS. EFRID responded that the \$1 million is being requested from the general fund. She noted that Kodiak would also be included, if the definition changes for off-road rural communities.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY underscored that a friendly amendment could expand the definition for on-road communities to include the communities of Seward, North Pole, Willow, Anchor Point, Kenai, Farm Loop, and Houston. She noted that this population limit change would likely alter the fiscal note.

[9:27:03 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 9:27 a.m.

[9:27:28 AM](#)

MADELINE REICHARD, Teacher, Lower Kuskokwim School District, testified in support of HB 147, [Version B]. She paraphrased from the following written statement [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Thank you Madam Chair for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 147[;] my name is Madelene Reichard. My [Yup'ik] name is Arnaucuaq, I am named after Arnaucuaq Angiak from Tununak Alaska who was a storyteller, which is why I think I talk so much. So I will try to keep it brief today.

-I am a teacher here in Bethel at Ayaprun Elitnaurvik, our [Yup'ik] charter school.

I was born and raised here in Bethel and am incredibly proud to have grown up in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta. I attended elementary, middle and high school here before graduating from Bethel Regional High School in 2011.

-Prior to graduating in the fall of 2010, the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) selected me for their future teacher candidate scholarship, they submitted my name to the State of Alaska through the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) to be considered for the Teacher Education Loan (TEL) Program.

-I was subsequently accepted into the TEL program. Where was mutually agreed upon that if I returned to rural Alaska to teach for 4 years that the TEL loan would be forgiven in full, and any payments I had made towards the loan would be returned to me.

-I attended the University of Oregon and received my Bachelor of Science in Educational Foundations. I then continued into an accelerated program in which I also earned my Master's Degree in Curriculum and Teaching, with a special focus in elementary education and English as a second language.

-Upon graduating in 2016, I happily accepted a teaching position with LKSD at the Bethel Regional High School. After one year there, I accepted a new position at Ayaprun Elitnaurvik where I am currently teaching, right now Kindergarten-6th grade art and English Language Development.

-Mrs. Hankins and Mr. Daniel can speak more to this but My school is a Title 1 Yup'ik Immersion Charter school wherein 90% of our students are Alaska Native. We focus on language and cultural education and preservation as well as western education.

[9:30:11 AM](#)

-Teacher retention has been a long-standing issue within rural communities. For some rural districts the teacher turnover rate is as high as 50-80% per year, as you have heard recently and this revolving door of teachers leaving has detrimental effects on students in our area. Growing up as a student here, the turnover of teachers is very evident. It is disruptive. You lack consistency. You miss out on opportunities to build trust and focus on learning because you are constantly having to adapt[.]

-Having to frequently reintroduce yourself and learning needs as well as readjust to new teachers every year, especially ones who do not understand or value the cultural background you come from, is exhausting.

- It was very important to me to come home and teach to provide another stable, consistent influence for kids that grew up just like me. I want to show that kids from our community can succeed. Having local teachers who understand your language, your culture, the community removes a barrier and allows you to be in a better starting position as a teacher. I was especially enthusiastic to return to the state of Alaska and specifically Bethel, because it's my home and I want to give back to the community that has always supported me. One of my favorite parts of my job is getting to work with families I have known my whole life or to build relationships with new families getting to watch their children learn and grow from kindergarten to junior high.

-After my first year of teaching I applied for forgiveness from ACPE as I had been instructed. I was shocked when I received a letter back from the ACPE stating I had not been approved for forgiveness, because my school was not in a rural community. According to AS 14.43.700, "rural means a community with a population of 5,500 or less that is not connected by road or rail to Anchorage or Fairbanks...".

-These population guidelines were originally set the year I was born, which as my students like to constantly remind me... was a very long time ago, left no room for population growth or any language allowing for mirroring of Federal or other state guidelines.

-Bethel does not technically meet the population component of the definition. However, I would note that because of its remote location "not connected by road or rail to Anchorage or Fairbanks," it is clear to anyone who has lived, worked, or visited Bethel that it is, in fact, a very rural community.

-The goal of programs like the LKSD scholarship and TEL is to create homegrown teachers. The programs are

meant to help improve teacher retention by encouraging local students to become teachers and return to their home communities.

- That is why this issue is consequential not only for me but for all rural students who wish to become teachers in the future. If we as a state plan to truly invest in the future of education, this program would benefit from a rewrite. During this pandemic we have seen teacher retention rates taken an even greater hit and we owe it to our kids to do better for them. I have spoken to Department Directors, The Commissioner of Education and even the Governor himself, everyone was equally confused and in support of the definition changing to reflection what is accurate.

-I am a proud public school educator committed to the education of students in the YK delta but I am also just a kid from Bethel, asking for the state of Alaska to hold up the end of their promise so I can continue to hold up my side of teaching these awesome kids in this strong, resilient community. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on this bill I stand ready to answer any questions from the committee.

[9:35:09 AM](#)

KIMBERLY HANKINS, Superintendent, Lower Kuskokwim School District, testified in support of HB 147, [Version B]. She paraphrased from the following written statement [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Chair Drummond and House Education Committee members, thank you for the time today to speak in support of HB 147, the importance of growing our own teachers, and supporting multiple pathways for teacher retention.

I'm Kimberly Hankins, Superintendent of the Lower Kuskokwim School District.

This is my second year serving as superintendent, and 19th year with the district. The Lower Kuskokwim School District is headquartered in Bethel. We serve approximately 4,000 students in 29 schools, in 24 locations, across an area of approximately 22,000 square miles. Access to Bethel is via Alaska Airlines

from Anchorage, weather permitting, and access to our 24 village locations is via small air carrier, snow machine, four-wheeler, boat, ice road in the winter, and/or dog sled.

Over the past decade and a half, LKSD has worked incredibly hard to implement language immersion models, including a dual language enrichment model program and a Yupik immersion program in the majority of our schools. We have worked to develop place-based, culturally rich and relevant education materials aligned to state standards, in both English and Yugtun. The mission of our district is to ensure bilingual, culturally appropriate and effective education for all students, and this is supported by the LKSD Board of Education's four Key Measures, one of which focuses directly on Yup'ik/Cup'ik proficiency.

In order to staff our schools, the district looks to develop teachers from within our communities as well as recruit from around our state and nation. In the past few years, our teacher turnover rate has hovered between 20-25%, and has been as high as 38%.

Unfortunately, we have seen a trend over the past several years in that we are unable to staff all of our teacher openings despite exhaustive, ongoing recruitment. This places a burden on the district and on individual schools that are not fully staffed, but ultimately underserves our students. Teacher retention and turnover has been and continues to be an issue we face annually, both here in Bethel and in our village sites.

Most recently, the district has found it increasingly difficult to staff positions in Bethel due to the high cost of living -rent and utilities in particular; for your reference a gallon of milk in Bethel is nearly \$9, apples can cost as much as \$4.99/pound, and an 18-pack of eggs costs over \$6.00. While Bethel has a larger population than surrounding villages, it faces similar challenges both in teacher recruitment and retention, and common struggles associated with living in rural Alaska. (high cost of rent, housing shortages, high cost of utilities, access to services, isolation)

In a 2021 study titled "Education Retention and Turnover in Alaska," published by the Institute of Education Sciences and REL [Regional Educational Laboratory] Northwest at Education Northwest, it is stated that educator turnover is associated with a broad range of negative outcomes for students. It is also noted that rural schools in Alaska continue to be hit hardest by turnover, and that teachers and principals prepared outside Alaska continue to be more likely to turn over.

[9:39:05 AM](#)

In the same study, the following strategies are noted for improving educator recruitment and retention in Alaska:

- Create and support multiple teacher preparation pathways that can increase the supply of Alaska-educated teachers, including grow-your-own programs
- Increase incentives for educators, including loan-forgiveness programs

For more than a decade LKSD has developed and implemented our own TEACH program as a way to develop local talent and grow our own teachers both as a way to meet teacher turnover needs and as a way to staff our dual language and immersion model schools. Our district commits hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to this program and we have numerous certified teachers who have completed this program working throughout the district.

Each year, LKSD devotes a significant amount of time and man-hours in developing new hires and in educating them on district programs, instructional models, and in helping them learn about the culture of the region, communities, and students that they serve. This is a continuous cycle. Locally grown teachers, such as Madelene Reichard, are incredibly valuable in that they are from the region, they have grown up in the culture, they are familiar with and have connections in our communities, and they serve as excellent role models and mentors both for our students and our new to district teachers. They are familiar with the familial structures found in our region, they

understand the cultural context of our students and our communities, they enhance relationships in their schools and greatly contribute to school climate and connectedness.

Programs that support developing local talent - or growing your own - and teacher loan forgiveness programs are critical solutions in solving the education retention and recruitment issue faced in rural Alaska.

[9:41:44 AM](#)

MS. HANKINS, in response to Representative Prax, stated that to qualify for the [TEL] program the recipient must have been a resident of a rural area when he/she applied. In response to a follow-up, she stated that the recipient would return to teach in a rural area for four years. She asked that Representative Zulkosky confirm the requirements.

[9:42:32 AM](#)

MS. EFIRD, in response to Representative Prax, referred to the TEL information sheet in the committee packet. She stated that, after five years of teaching in an area defined as rural, the loan would be forgiven.

[9:43:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY, in response to Representative Prax, answered that the purpose of the legislation is to fulfill the state's promise to rural teachers, specifically those in Bethel and Kodiak. She stated that LKSD nominated Ms. Reichard to receive the loan because she intended to pursue a career in education and return to Bethel to teach in the community. However, once she applied for loan forgiveness, because of the outdated statute governing the program, she was told she was ineligible. She stated that Ms. Reichard brought the issue forward, but the legislation could help other teachers.

[9:44:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY, in response to a follow-up question, stated that the program is no longer utilized by ACPE. She stated that she and Ms. Efird have had an ongoing conversation regarding different programs for teacher retention in rural communities. This legislation seeks to remedy the promise the

TEL program made to teachers who continue to teach in rural Alaska, but due to the outdated definition, are unable to qualify for the forgiveness element. These teachers have paid down their loans under the impression their community would be considered rural because they were nominated by a rural school district.

[9:45:57 AM](#)

SEGUE GRANT, Vice President, National Education Association Alaska Affiliate (NEA-Alaska), testified in support of HB 147, [Version B]. She provided her Yup'ik name, Chagusak (ph), and stated that public education is her career and passion. She stated that she has worked in LKSD for 13 years. As an itinerant educator, she travels to villages in the district supporting other teachers in their classrooms. She offered her gratitude to Representative Zulkosky for introducing legislation that would fulfill the promises made to educators committed to working in rural Alaska. She said that the state widely promoted the TEL program years ago. To attract students in rural Alaska to the education profession, the state offered loans that would be reduced or forgiven, provided the recipient return to work in rural Alaska. However, school districts grew in population and no longer fit under the definition of rural. She continued that the unintended consequence makes the TEL recipients ineligible for the loan forgiveness, even though the population of the community was within the definition of rural when the teacher originally applied for the loan. She stated that the legislation would allow a statutory fix for applicants on the original terms of the TEL program, adding that the retroactivity clause is critical to fulfill the promise to those who applied for the loan under the impression they would qualify for loan forgiveness. She stated that attracting and retaining teachers to rural Alaska has been a challenge for decades. She stated that NEA-Alaska supports the initiatives to create a strong cohort of teachers who intend to return to communities to pass on their knowledge. She argued that students learn best from educators who share their values, history, and connection to the land. She continued that educators who return to their home to teach are less likely to seek a job in another district or state. She stated that continuity has profound implications on generations of young Alaskans. She urged the committee to support the legislation, as it is important to her community and to the teachers.

[9:50:42 AM](#)

LISA PARADY, PhD, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), testified in support of HB 147, [Version B]. She shared that ACSA is the umbrella organization for superintendents, elementary and secondary principals, school business officials, and "all hard-working school administrators" in Alaska. Referencing the importance of the first sentence in the sponsor statement, she read the from the statement, as follows, "Teacher recruitment and retention pose significant challenges to Alaska schools, but the issue is most pronounced in rural communities. Overtime, this can be a contributing, systemic factor to success and, most importantly, achievement gaps experienced in Alaska classrooms." She stated that preparing, attracting, and retaining qualified educators is one of the highest priorities for ACSA, NEA-Alaska, and the Association of Alaska School Boards. She stated that to solve the crisis there must be intentionality. Retaining effective educators is imperative to increase student achievement and eliminating academic disparity for all of Alaska students. She expressed gratitude to the committee for looking at the research that supports these ideas. She stated that ACSA strongly encourages the development of statewide programs that would prepare, attract, and retain high-quality, diverse educators. She added that ACSA recommends funding for a robust educator pipeline, creating incentives for graduates to stay in Alaska. She commented that while the Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest was doing research in Alaska, a new definition of rural had to be applied. Due to the remoteness of the state the federal government's definition of rural "did not fit."

[9:54:29 AM](#)

DR. PARADY stated that the Center for Alaska Education Policy Research and the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, published an article on February 24, 2022, that addressed teacher turnover in Alaska as the "perfect storm." The article related that Alaska has traditionally recruited teachers from the contiguous U.S. The article also related that there are fewer people going into teacher preparation programs across the country. Because there is a high demand and a diminished supply, competition for teachers from within Alaska and across the country is elevated. She stated the research suggests Alaska is in a significant crisis. She compared the situation to a weave of cloth made up of multiple crisscrossed strands. She said that the state needs multiple strands to fix the educator staffing crisis, with one of the strands being loan forgiveness. She stated that ACSA, not only supports the bill, but encourages reconsideration of a

comparable [TEL] program for the entire state. She expressed the belief that staffing classrooms with high-quality, locally grown educators would support the weave of cloth. She expressed hope that the committee would support the legislation, as well as look at solutions to attract and retain high-quality staff. She offered her thanks to the committee for its work in supporting public education.

[9:57:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND requested that Dr. Parady provide to the committee the statistics on teacher retention and student performance. She stated that these statistics help explain the importance of retaining teachers.

[9:57:49 AM](#)

DR. PARADY answered that she did not have the statistics available but could supply them at a later date. She stated that a study by the Institute of Social and Economic Research found the lowest achievement in reading proficiency was found in the districts with the highest teacher turnover; the districts with the lowest teacher turnover had the highest achievement in reading proficiency.

[9:59:01 AM](#)

DR. PARADY, in response to Representative Prax, agreed that the legislation only addresses the past. She stated that, due to circumstances outside of their control, teachers were reliant on a program that shifted. She expressed hope that the committee would support future programs for locally grown educators with loan forgiveness.

[10:01:11 AM](#)

MS. EFIRD clarified that ASLC did provide forgiveness for over 300 of the loans. She responded to Representative Hopkins that ACPE absolutely agrees the number one priority for Alaska is recruitment and retainment of teachers. She stated that the spirit of the legislation shows a good faith effort by the state.

[10:03:05 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that HB 147 was held over.

10:04:26 AM

The committee took a brief at-ease at 10:04 a.m.

10:05:07 AM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:05 a.m.