

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 18, 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 Mike Cronk
Representative Ronald Gillham

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

Emma Melkerson - Kivalena
Adam Reid - Anchorage
Lem Wheelles - Anchorage
Deborah Riddle - Juneau
Kimberly Bergey - Palmer

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

University of Alaska Board of Regents

Kali Spencer - Eagle River

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

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."

- MOVED CSHB 173(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

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
03/16/22	(H)	Scheduled but Not Heard

WITNESS REGISTER

EMMA MELKERSON, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Kivalena, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, provided her qualifications, and answered questions.

KALI SPENCER, Appointee
University of Alaska Board of Regents
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee to the University of Alaska Board of Regents, provided her qualifications, and answered questions.

ADAM REID, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, provided his qualifications, and answered questions.

LEM WHEELS, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, provided his qualifications, and answered questions.

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, provided her qualifications, and answered questions.

KIMBERLY BERGEY, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, provided her qualifications, and answered questions.

DAVID SONG, Staff
Representative Geran Tarr
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Issued closing remarks on CSHB 173, Version G, on behalf of Representative Tarr, prime sponsor.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:07:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ANDI STORY called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:07 a.m. Representatives Cronk, Gillham, Hopkins, Drummond, and Story were present at the call to order. Representatives Zulkosky (via teleconference) and Prax arrived as the meeting was in progress.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S):
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
University of Alaska Board of Regents

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S):
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
University of Alaska Board of Regents

[8:08:11 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the first order of business would be confirmation hearings.

[8:08:56 AM](#)

EMMA MELKERSON, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, shared that she taught kindergarten and first grade at McQueen School and has taught in Kivalena for 11 years. She said that being appointed to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC) would allow her to aid students in learning

and achievement and make the classroom a more welcoming, engaging, and safer place.

[8:10:17 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 8:10 a.m.

[8:10:39 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked how her appointment to PTPC would contribute to the success of students in Alaska.

MS. MELKERSON responded that highlighting teachers would help with professionalism, raising the bar for educators across the state; therefore, bringing excellence to the students in their classrooms. In response to a follow-up question, she shared that this would be her first appointment to the commission.

MS. MELKERSON, in response to a question from Co-Chair Story, conveyed that Kivalina is a Native village with about 500 Iñupiaq people. She said she practiced culturally responsive education by incorporating the local culture into the classroom as often as possible. In response to Co-Chair Drummond, she said that she does not speak Iñupiaq; however, she has worked with and relied upon several fluent staff members to check her spelling and pronunciation.

[8:16:17 AM](#)

KALI SPENCER, Appointee, University of Alaska Board of Regents, informed the committee of her educational background and relevant experience. She expressed passion for student advocacy and credited her parents for fostering an appreciation for educators and for knowing the importance of a quality education.

MS. SPENCER, in response to a question from Co-Chair Story, stated that she has been involved in student leadership for seven years and shared her credentials. In response to Co-Chair Drummond, she stated that she was first appointed to the board last summer. In response to a follow-up question, she shared the names of the board members she has worked closely with.

CO-CHAIR STORY inquired about the outreach process to different universities.

MS. SPENCER responded that she has frequently attended meetings of a coalition of student leaders. These leaders are from various organizations across the state. She added that she has also checked in with friends at different campuses. In response to a follow-up question, she stated that she has served on an ad-hoc committee on refining and clarifying the board's policy surrounding tuition.

[8:21:08 AM](#)

MS. SPENCER, in response to a question from Representative Prax, shared her belief that the university system's primary mission is doing what is best for students by ensuring the university is crafting an educational experience which meets its student's needs. In response to a follow-up question, she said some of the challenges in her position involve establishing stability, confidence, and trust in the university.

[8:22:52 AM](#)

ADAM REID, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, shared with the committee his educational background and relevant experience, noting that he taught horticulture at King Tech High School before transferring to the virtual program in the Anchorage School District (ASD). He expressed the hope to continue serving the teaching professionals in Alaska. He expressed the belief that it is imperative to provide students with professional educators and Alaskans an outlet for protecting students' rights to have the best education possible.

MR. REID, responding to Co-Chair Drummond, answered that King Tech High School transitioned to a fully accredited, fulltime high school in 2018 or 2019. In response to a follow-up question, he described working closely with the Seeds of Change program in Anchorage. He stated that the program attempts to expand homegrown food opportunities to rural Alaska.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND pointed out that food security in Alaska is a major discussion in the legislature. She expressed her hope that students and educators from the horticulture program could contribute to this.

MR. REID stated that his replacement at King Tech High School was recruited from Seeds of Change where he specialized in food security.

[8:30:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether virtual instruction and remote meetings presented challenges from PTPC's perspective.

MR. REID responded in the affirmative. He expressed the belief that an increase in virtual learning made it difficult to maintain an open-door policy and follow the general rule that a teacher never be alone in a room with a student.

[8:35:11 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY inquired about PTPC's duty to review the department's regulations, as they relate to teacher certification, and recommend any necessary changes.

MR. REID said the commission is considering different approaches for teachers to become certified. He pointed out this could be possible through nationally accredited colleges. He acknowledged the staffing shortages among substitute teachers in ASD, adding that PTPC is trying to facilitate teacher recruitment, while maintaining high standards. In response to a follow-up question, he stated that PTPC has made no official recommendations to the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) regarding teacher certification. In response to Co-Chair Drummond, he stated that he taught electives in a variety of different science, health, and physical education courses.

[8:41:07 AM](#)

LEM WHEELLES, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, informed the committee of his educational background and relevant experience. He noted that he is a high school educator at Diamond High School, teaching AP government, AP history, U.S. government, and student government. He said his mission as an educator is to inspire students to be engaged citizens. He said he empowers students to be politically active by teaching government and its history. He said he teaches a variety of political ideologies so that students can form an educated opinion and engage in thoughtful, civic discourse, regardless of their political beliefs. He shared that he has served on PTPC for the past three years and currently serves as chair. His goal has been to hold his colleagues to the highest standards. He discussed the commission's responsibilities, among which are promoting professional and ethical outreach and responding to complaints. He addressed "the great teacher resignation" and its impact on Alaska schools, districts,

students, and families. As a member of PTPC, he said he would continue to work to increase education and outreach efforts to ensure all educators are familiar with the code of ethics.

[8:49:45 AM](#)

MR. WHEELLES, in response to Representative Prax, said PTPC could make recommendations to the legislature; however, during his time on the commission he has not seen anything which would require changes to statute.

MR. WHEELLES, in response to a question concerning homeschooling from Representative Gillham, said he valued the many choices and resources offered to families and students in Alaska, and more specifically, ASD. He referenced the charter school programs in various districts, which work as publicly organized homeschool programs. He shared his belief that, in the age of virtual education, Alaska has a better opportunity to support students and families in these settings.

MR. WHEELLES, responding to a question concerning culturally inclusive courses from Co-Chair Story, explained that the curriculum is designed to engage students with both content and social and emotional learning. He emphasized the importance of building a community of learners in his classroom, while capturing the diversity of Alaska, particularly its state government. In response to a follow-up question, he stated that he has not taught classes on Tribal government.

[8:59:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND questioned his perspective on SB 72. She stated that this legislation would require a high school exit exam on civics education.

MR. WHEELLES expressed the belief that it would be "excellent" to add a graduation requirement related to a government or civics course; however, he opined that the citizenship exam is not the way to accomplish this. He noted that some districts, including ASD, have implemented a similar requirement, but it is not currently a statewide requirement.

[9:02:49 AM](#)

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, in response to a question from Co-chair Story, explained that she replaced Tammy Van Wyhe on PTPC in August.

She informed the committee of her educational background and relevant experience, adding that she currently oversees special education and early childhood education at DEED. She expressed appreciation that, during her time on the commission, Melody Mann has made proactive efforts concerning pre-service educators and teachers in general. She added that PTPC has set education standards in Alaska. She added that she has taken the process of evaluating complaints seriously, as it concerns livelihoods.

[9:09:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether the Oregon school district, where she previously worked, had put bond issues before the voters for its operating costs.

MS. RIDDLE responded that she had been hired there because of an unanticipated influx of students. When the bond measure failed, she said the funding for her position dissolved.

[9:11:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX noted the dichotomy between professional and cultural standards and asked how she balanced conflicts between the two.

MS. RIDDLE said it is vital to include stakeholders in state plans and standards development, as this would balance competing interests.

[9:14:30 AM](#)

KIMBERLY BERGEY, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, informed the committee of her background in education and relevant experience. She shared that she currently serves as the principal for Raven Homeschool, a publicly funded statewide homeschool program. She expressed her pleasure to be able to serve as the principal representative for PTPC, thus far.

[9:17:35 AM](#)

MS. BERGEY, in response to a question from Representative Prax, shared that she has benefitted from bilingual education in a school setting, which is a key factor in her approach to teaching in a classroom and incorporating different cultures. She indicated that getting to know the students' cultural connections helped to engage students and parents and aided in

student achievement. In response to a follow-up question, she said she has not witnessed conflict between cultural norms and professional standards in her work as an educator.

[9:20:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GILLHAM recalled that she lives on a commercial vegetable farm and asked whether she had considered bringing her students to the farm to teach them about agriculture and food security.

MS. BERGEY responded in the affirmative. She stated that youth, community members, and classes have made trips to the farm for educational purposes. She added that the Alaska Farm Bureau has done an excellent job of supporting agriculture in Alaska's schools.

[9:23:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS inquired about the numerous short-tenured positions in her work history.

MS. BERGEY explained that she had multiple children with special needs who required a specific level of care, and this care is only available in certain communities. For this reason, she had taken various positions where she could support her family during this time. In response to a follow-up question, she confirmed that she has the necessary certifications to serve as the principal representative on the commission.

[9:27:20 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND also expressed similar concerns about the short tenures on her resume. She highlighted the issues with teacher turnover in Alaska and asked how the state could retain teachers in rural communities.

MS. BERGEY responded by emphasizing the importance of providing appropriate housing for teachers in rural Alaska. In response to a follow-up question, she clarified that her observation of housing for teachers is a personal one. She continued that during her membership of DEED's Instructional Audit Team from 2008 to 2010, the team had been tasked with looking at whether education at a particular school had met state requirements.

MS. BERGEY, in response to a question concerning inclusion in the classroom from Co-Chair Story, referenced her time at Clark

Middle School in Anchorage. She explained that it is imperative to greet students and meet them where they are. She stated that developing a dialogue with students produces vital information, which can keep them engaged and help increase their performance.

[9:34:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked how working in many small Alaska Native communities has helped shape her perspective and world view.

MS. BERGEY said her background and interaction with Alaska Native people is "different than most." She stated that she understands the culture around hunter gatherers and respect for elders. She emphasized the importance of teaching language through tradition and tying concepts to culture.

[9:40:59 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on the appointees to the University of Alaska Board of Regents and to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission. After ascertaining that there was no one who wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[9:41:38 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND stated that the House Education Standing Committee has reviewed the qualifications for the appointees and recommends that the following names be forwarded to a joint session for consideration: Kali Spencer, appointee to the University of Alaska Board of Regents; and Emma Melkerson, Adam Reid, Lem Wheelles, Deborah Riddle, and Kimberly Bergey, appointees to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, to the joint session for consideration. She reminded the committee that this does not reflect the intent of any of the members to vote for or against these individuals during any further sessions for the purposes of confirmation.

HB 173-SCHOOL CLIMATE & CONNECTEDNESS

[9:42:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the final 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."

[Before the committee, adopted as a working document on 3/7/22, was the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 173, Version 32-LS0727\G, Marx, 1/27/22 ("Version G").]

[9:43:33 AM](#)

DAVID SONG, Staff, Representative Geran Tarr, on behalf of Representative Tarr, prime sponsor of CSHB 173, Version G, stated the proposed legislation resulted from a collaboration with teachers across the state for many years. He asked for the committee's support.

[9:43:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND moved to report CSHB 173, Version 32-LS0727\G, Marx, 1/27/22, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHB 173(EDC) was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee.

[9:44:44 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 9:44 a.m.

[9:44:59 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY issued closing remarks and committee announcements.

[9:45:37 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.