

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS**

April 29, 2021

8:08 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky, Chair
Representative Zack Fields
Representative Geran Tarr
Representative Mike Cronk

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Dan Ortiz

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): COMPACTING IN EDUCATION

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

BARBARA BLAKE, Director
Alaska Native Policy Center
First Alaskans Institute
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided testimony during the presentation on compacting in education.

TOM KLAAMEYER, President
National Education Association - Alaska (NEA-Alaska)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided testimony during the presentation on compacting in education.

LISA WADE, Director
Health, Education, and Social Services Division
Chickaloon Village Traditional Council (CVTC)
Secretary, Chickaloon Village Traditional Council (CVTC)
Chickaloon, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided testimony and PowerPoint slides during the presentation on compacting in education.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:08:47 AM](#)

CHAIR TIFFANY ZULKOSKY called the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 8:08 a.m. Representatives Tarr and Zulkosky were present at the call to order. Representatives Cronk and Fields arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION(S): Compacting in Education

[8:09:34 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY announced that the only order of business would be presentations on compacting in education by representatives from the First Alaskans Institute, the National Education Association, and the Chickaloon Village Traditional Council.

CHAIR ZULKOSKY invited the first witness, Ms. Barbara Blake, to provide her testimony on compacting in education.

[8:09:59 AM](#)

BARBARA BLAKE, Director, Alaska Native Policy Center, First Alaskans Institute, began her testimony with a story about when she and her son returned to Alaska after living in Washington, DC. She said her son had entered kindergarten in a school that had no reflection of Native people anywhere, and he went from a bubbling little boy to somebody who was reserved and struggling and didn't want to go to school. Upon moving to Juneau a few years later, her son entered second grade in a school that reflected Native culture, art, and language throughout the building and classrooms and her son felt welcome, began to love school, and flourished. Ms. Blake said her son's story shows that it makes a difference when Native kids can see themselves reflected in the world around them because when they don't, they struggle. When Native kids cannot connect with everything that they've known about who they are, they have a difficult time accepting that this is an institution in which they are meant to be, to flourish, and to succeed.

[8:14:20 AM](#)

MS. BLAKE stated that the current system isn't working for Native kids, and compacting is a solid solution if done in the correct way. She cautioned that there is a big difference between compacting and contracting. She related that with a compact, "I'm recognizing you as a sovereign, you and I are going to enter into a formal agreement, and as a sovereign I'm going to treat you as a sovereign, we have outcomes that we're expecting but how you get there is dependent on how you know how best to take care of the people within your care. That's a compact. I'm not dictating to you every single step of the way and micromanaging your ability to function in that system because I recognize you as a sovereign." Through contracting, she continued, "You and I are entering into a contract, I want you to achieve certain outcomes, and I want you to achieve them by following A, B, C, and D. This is how you're going to get there. I'm going to dictate to you exactly how you're going to get there, you're going to ask me permission for any changes or waivers in that contract and there's a big difference between how you can get someplace with the flexibility that is allotted through a compact agreement than a contract agreement." Contracting is what the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) Program currently runs under, she added.

[8:17:05 AM](#)

MS. BLAKE cited the Indian Health Service (IHS) as an example of successful compacting. She told of the dental care she received from the IHS as a child in Anchorage where Native children would be seated at a plastic table with a toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss, mouthwash, and fluoride in front of them. The dentist would sit at the head of the table and tell the children to brush their teeth, then floss, then rinse, then apply the fluoride. She asked whether committee members would consider that acceptable teeth cleaning for their children. Today, she continued, much has been accomplished under tribal authority and tribal compacting with the IHS, which operates intricately throughout Alaska. Amazing dentists are now taking care of Native kids the way they should be with fancy cleaning tools that prevent cavities. In addition, work was done with the federal government to allow non-Natives living in the rural Native communities to also participate in the IHS care.

MS. BLAKE stated that tribal transportation dollars are another example of compacting done well. She said these dollars come in through a compact, not a contract, that allows tribes to function within their spaces. The tribal transportation program takes care of tribal spaces as well as non-tribal spaces; it has

entered into successful agreements with city and municipal governments to [build] new docks and [provide] road maintenance. She said the aforementioned are examples of how municipal, state, and federal governments can work with Native tribes in a compact that recognizes a government-to-government relationship. An opportunity is on the desks of committee members for serving Native kids and ensuring that Native children are represented in Alaska's schools, she continued. There is room for improvement in the current compact, the current legislation before the committee, which is a great start but additional trust building needs to take place between the State of Alaska and Native tribes before anything moves further. A better reflection is needed of the government-to-government relationship that is had between tribes and the State of Alaska. She concluded by stating that the current bill needs to do more in recognizing that government-to-government relationship and recognizing a compact versus a contract.

CHAIR ZULKOSKY explained that this is an initial hearing on concepts and dialogue around compacting in education. She said Commissioner Johnson was unable to attend today but is committed, and she wanted to start putting something on the record since there has been a lot of dialogue around what education compacting could be in Alaska.

[8:22:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR concurred with Ms. Blake that it makes a difference when kids see themselves and feel that they are in a school environment where they are meant to be. She said HB 173, School Climate & Connectedness, is about addressing that issue as well as cultural competence in Alaska's school system. She stated she fully supports compacting to improve the public school system and looks forward to further conversations with Ms. Blake about a path forward.

[8:24:41 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY offered her understanding that the First Alaskans Institute is highly engaged in facilitating dialogues with the [Department of Education & Early Development (DEED)] on what education compacting in Alaska could look like. She noted that she and Representative Cronk are also members of the House Education Standing Committee where much is heard about the turnover of teachers and administrators in rural hub or village communities across Alaska. That committee, she continued, also hears about data regarding standardized test scores and how

students may not be prepared to perform academically in a school environment. She requested Ms. Blake to talk about what she envisions school compacting to look like and the types of models the agreements could be modeled after to bring about education improvements.

MS. BLAKE replied that a beautiful model is how the tribal health system operates in Alaska. She explained that the tribal health organizations come together to negotiate annually, but how they deliver those programs is dependent on both the regions and communities because the communities and regions are not the same. Application of the education system cannot be monolithic, she stressed, it must be able to flex to the community itself, to demonstrate to the students, and to develop a level of care for the teachers. A monolith operates from the top down, which becomes very challenging to operate successfully when there are over 300 rural communities to take care of. She said operating through a compact takes an approach that allows a community to engage in a space that it's familiar with and enables a community to uplift the system that it can put forward because these communities have each been in their same location for 450 generations and know best how to take care of the students and people in their care.

MS. BLAKE added that [compacting] would increase retention and the ability to care for teachers, as well as increase student scores. She related the findings of a Native friend of hers who attended American University and did his PhD dissertation on how Native kids absorb information. He found that Native kids had to make it relevant to their culture before they could absorb the information. Her friend interviewed one Navajo student who went so far as to translate all his information into Navajo before he could understand it in the way that was being presented to him. She advised that to get lesson plans across, Native kids must stop being asked to colonize themselves to absorb information.

[8:29:34 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY pointed out that education in Alaska is a constitutionally funded mandate, with systems in place where school boards are locally elected, and school districts are established. She inquired about the conversations Ms. Blake has had over the years regarding tribal compacting coming into play alongside state systems of government and management of local schools and school districts.

MS. BLAKE answered that it ebbs and flows in terms of how folks are feeling about it. She related that some folks are fearful tribes are going to take over and fire everybody and only hire Native people, which is not the case when one looks at how the Indian Health Service compact comes into play. Tribes didn't take over all the health care in Alaska of their people and fire all the non-Native doctors, nurses, and healthcare staff. Rather, almost every single person was retained and when hiring occurs it is of both Native and non-Native professionals. First, she stated, it wouldn't be good business for a tribe to replace everybody in organizations with its own people because many solid non-Natives are working in those organizations. Second, there isn't the capacity because of minimal staff and minimal dollars, and it wouldn't be prudent and wouldn't continue trust building. She further related that those who are supportive of compacting see the benefit of a school facility that reflects the Native kids and that stops asking Native kids to act a certain way for them to have a successful track in school. So, she added, it goes both ways and depends on who she is talking to and even the region of the state.

CHAIR ZULKOSKY invited the second witness, Mr. Tom Klaameyer, to provide his testimony on compacting in education.

[8:33:34 AM](#)

TOM KLAAMEYER, President, National Education Association - Alaska (NEA-Alaska), first noted that he is a 25-year teacher in Alaska and that he is testifying from a place not called Anchorage. He shared that NEA-Alaska has adopted the practice of starting every meeting with the Native land acknowledgement as part of its commitment to racial and social justice for Alaska's students. He said NEA-Alaska values this practice because it is important to acknowledge and pay respect to the Alaska Native ancestors upon whose land NEA-Alaska members live and work. It is also an opportunity to educate NEA-Alaska members on the history and the contributions of Alaska's first peoples from which members benefit given that all too often this rich history has been suppressed in the telling of the story of America. He said that when discussing the future of public education in Alaska, it seems especially important to be guided by the needs of the communities today and to always be mindful of the impact that this work has on future generations who will become the next stewards of this place.

MR. KLAAMEYER related that he teaches social studies at Eagle River High School in the Anchorage School District (ASD). He

said he came to Alaska with the US Air Force in 1989 and found his calling to become an educator after he volunteered to teach Sunday school at the church on his base. He stated he is before the committee on behalf of NEA-Alaska's almost 12,000 educators who are classroom teachers, specialist teacher aides, custodians, and others with firsthand expertise in delivering lessons and creating environments conducive to student learning. Alaska's professional educators, he continued, are committed to policies that promote educational equity, social justice, and high-quality educational opportunities for Alaska's students no matter where they live. Mr. Klaameyer noted that Alaska's educators are grateful and honored to be included in the conversations around tribal compacting for education, and because there is much to learn he is here to listen.

[8:37:49 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER said NEA-Alaska members believe that public education is a fundamental civil right, a human right. While the history of public education in Alaska is extremely tarnished by racism, cultural oppression, and colonialism, he stated, NEA-Alaska members are here to work to ensure that those atrocities are a thing of the past. He added that NEA-Alaska members are actively engaged in trying to dismantle all systems of oppression that prevent children from accessing a great public education and pledge to continue to address the legacy of systemic racism. He related that NEA-Alaska has fought hard for cultural responsiveness to be embedded in all curricula and has fought against the overuse of culturally biased nationally norm standardized tests. Further, NEA-Alaska is working to recruit and retain more ethnically and culturally diverse educators so that the faces in the front of the classrooms better reflect those looking back from their seats. He said it needs to be ensured that student and family voices are heard and that there is focus on creating welcoming and affirming schools that do not just acknowledge Alaska's Native cultures but work to protect and preserve them by sustaining and restoring languages, traditions, and culture.

MR. KLAAMEYER stated that educators want to be a partner in exploring the policies that will lead to the best outcomes for students, and that NEA-Alaska members have been engaged with this tribal compacting policy conversation through the Alaska Education Challenge. He said NEA-Alaska is supportive of the broad outlines that have been heard, particularly as related to tribal authority and local control. Local control in education is critical; students are best served by schools that meet the

needs of the local community, which cannot be accomplished without parental and community involvement. Tribal compacting, he continued, could provide the authority and the voice needed to create schools which truly reflect the cultures and values of the community they serve.

8:40:15 AM

MR. KLAAMEYER related that as this discussion progresses, NEA-Alaska hopes to address transitions and the impact on existing public schools, and further hopes that partnerships and sustainability will be considered. He said he was pleased to read a statement on compacting in education that stated, "In accordance with the Alaska state constitution the state tribal education compact schools will be public schools that are open to all students Native and non-Native alike." In addition, he continued, Alaska has a strong tradition of protecting workers and as such Alaska's educators recognize and value the importance of collective bargaining rights. This means educators manage and have agency in their employment contracts and the ability to negotiate with their employers over wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment.

MR. KLAAMEYER expressed NEA-Alaska's belief that collective bargaining gives educators a voice to advocate for themselves and on behalf of their students. Through this process, he explained, NEA-Alaska has worked to attract and retain the best educators for students, push back on unnecessary testing to increase instructional time, provide more nurses, health aides, counselors, social workers, mental health professionals, and insist on local control for schools, proper school funding, and advocate for racial and social justice. Collective bargaining for public educators offers an organized and transparent system to improve student learning and the overall environment in public schools. He related that Alaska's educators respectfully recommend that any tribal compact for education or related policy not inhibit in any way educators' ability to collectively bargain because this process helps to ensure the best possible education for all students in communities across Alaska.

MR. KLAAMEYER specified that foundational to Alaska's system of education is the conviction that local communities are best suited to address the educational needs of students. Accordingly, he continued, NEA-Alaska believes that if tribes have greater ownership and local control over education, student outcomes in their communities will improve. The result, he said, is that all Alaska students and their communities will

benefit from this self-determination and the new innovative educational opportunities which may be provided by compacting.

[8:42:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked whether NEA-Alaska represents the teachers in the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD).

MR. KLAAMEYER offered his belief that it does and said he will get back to the committee momentarily with a firm answer.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS stated he supports tribal compacting and protecting collective bargaining rights in the process, which is one of several options to increase local staff in schools. He noted LKSD's model teach program recruits local schoolteachers who progress from teacher aides to fully certified teachers. He said there are multiple models for success on a spectrum ranging from the traditional to compacting, with the successful LKSD model somewhere in the middle of the spectrum and of which NEA-Alaska members have been a part.

MR. KLAAMEYER confirmed that LKSD employees are members of NEA-Alaska.

[8:44:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR offered her appreciation for NEA-Alaska's willingness given that large organizations are sometimes slow to change. There is so much work to do in the areas of racial and social justice in terms of equity in education, she opined, and how foundational education is to succeed in life. She offered her appreciation for Mr. Klaameyer's acknowledgement of that.

[8:45:12 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY requested Mr. Klaameyer's perspective on what the dynamic of education compacting in Alaska might look like in a community or region.

MR. KLAAMEYER responded that he cannot answer the question because it is not for NEA-Alaska to determine given that NEA-Alaska values local control. While NEA-Alaska has worked hard to embed cultural responsiveness into its curriculum, he advised that self-determination through compacting is the only way to truly reflect, revitalize, preserve, and be the culture. Compacting and the self-determination it would provide, he continued, is probably the missing piece that will make the

difference for kids to be vested in their education because they will see themselves and it will become embedded in what they do in their community and in their identity. This will make it more attractive for more people to stay in their local areas and teach, work, and help the future generations. [Compacting], he further advised, has the potential of creating a cyclical improvement that becomes self-reinforcing. How that looks in each community is for the community to say, he added, not him.

[8:48:31 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY asked whether Mr. Klaameyer's understanding is that there could be a spectrum of what compacting could look like in a particular environment; for example, in some areas it may be focused on a lighter scope of work or agreement and in other areas it may be more sophisticated and have a higher level of impact.

MR. KLAAMEYER answered that that speaks to the heart of compacting - each entity, each community, will create its own compact and the state needs to be flexible in those agreements to allow the best situation to exist in each local community, and, yes, some of them will be more encompassing than others. But, he added, that is for those local leaders to determine.

[8:49:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS addressed Mr. Klaameyer's statement about how testing can perpetuate socio-economic and racial inequities. He recounted that while growing up in Virginia his generation was the first to be subjected to standardized tests, which was both a fascinating and demoralizing experience. The tests did a good job of testing whether he was a middle-class white guy whose parents read to him; as well, the tests assessed his socio-economic status and promoted him as a result. Kids from challenged socio-economic backgrounds scored poorly, and then the standardized tests served as a cudgel to beat up teachers and schools for socio-economic problems that had nothing to do with quality of the education system. Representative Fields related that a question he has is about the extent to which compacting would allow a focus on instruction, helping kids, and getting away from the perverse paradigm of standardized testing, which in his opinion serves to undermine schools rather than to increase the quality of instruction. He said he doesn't understand the nexus between standardized testing and compacting and would like to get away from standardized testing as much as possible, and perhaps compacting is a vehicle towards that end.

Of course, he continued, the goal is to ensure that kids have as equal an opportunity as possible, whether they come from a wealthier or poorer background.

[8:51:46 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY noted that the House Education Standing Committee is considering [HB 164], which is intended to improve reading scores across the state. Part of the discussion, she explained, is where elements of the bill would be creating a statewide assessment tool for schools that may be struggling. She asked Mr. Klaameyer's perspective on the opportunities for Alaska's schools to sidestep perpetuating the challenges of standardized assessments in these culturally diverse environments.

MR. KLAAMEYER replied that Representative Fields was spot-on. He said [NEA-Alaska] has long worked hard against the high-stakes over-reliance on nationally normed standardized tests as there is no norm because students are diverse. Tests are not inherently bad, he stated, where the kids are at needs to be assessed. Teachers do that every day every class, some of it is more formal and some less formal, but the more removed the tests are from the classroom where the educator and the student interact, the more out of whack they are. Mr. Klaameyer shared a story about an elementary school student who took a nationally normed standardized test in which the test question was a picture of a boy holding an item and the question asked what the item is. The boy responded that it was a king salmon, but it was marked wrong because according to this nationally normed standardized test the correct answer was fish. This student with additional knowledge was told he was wrong and punished for the local knowledge acquired through his life.

MR. KLAAMEYER pointed out that the difficulty at the heart of Chair Zulkosky's question is that many of these testing standards are federally required. There are some at the state level that compacting could probably address more easily, he advised, but if the compact were with the state government, the federal assessment requirements would still apply and so the problem will continue. If compacting is at the state level, he continued, perhaps there is some room around testing for skills and knowledge that are based on local learning, traditional cultures, how much natural science exists in hunting and fishing and identifying flora and fauna, how much art is there, how much history is there. Not enough credit is given for knowing their own history, own art, own science, own environment. The

discussion around testing will continue needing to be addressed, he stated, and NEA-Alaska is happy to be in those conversations.

CHAIR ZULKOSKY invited the next witness, Ms. Lisa Wade, to begin her presentation.

8:57:35 AM

LISA WADE, Director, Health, Education, and Social Services Division, Chickaloon Village Traditional Council (CVTC), Secretary, Chickaloon Village Traditional Council (CVTC), stated that CVTC's tribal school, Ya Ne Dah Ah, is doing exceptionally well and is a great example of what compacting could look like. She drew attention to the PowerPoint presentation of the school's yearbook, titled "Ya Ne Dah Ah School Dats'ehwdeldiixden 2019-2020," and said the yearbook speaks to what Mr. Klaameyer discussed regarding learning in a way that combines traditional lifeways with western academics. She then brought attention to the PowerPoint presentation depicting renovation of the school, titled "Tsin'aen for Our New and Improved Ya Ne Dah Ah School!"

MS. WADE next turned to the PowerPoint presentation regarding her tribal government's mission, titled "Nay'dini'aa Na" Kayax (Chickaloon Native Village), Ya Ne Dah Ah Dats'ehwdeldiixden School of Ancient Legends." She displayed the second slide depicting a map of the school's location eight miles north of Palmer and stated that it is the first tribally operated school in Alaska. She proceeded to the third slide and noted that the tribal government's mission is to help its citizens to thrive. She pointed out that while the tribe was federally recognized in 1982, the tribe's traditional governance and educational systems go back to time immemorial.

9:00:28 AM

MS. WADE moved to the fourth slide and said she would share the Ya Ne Dah Ah School origin story, which began with her grandmother Katherine Wade, pictured on the fifth slide. She continued to the picture on the sixth slide showing the correctional facility on a hill in the community and noted the school is two miles from the facility. She related that because the facility was disproportionately filled with Alaska Native men, her grandmother and family members were invited in 1989 to participate in cultural activities that included singing and dancing, and relationships were developed with these men. When the men came out of the correctional facility her grandmother

would invite them to stay at the family house where they would cut wood and do cultural things, but inevitably many of them would quickly end up back on the hill again. Ms. Wade explained that this frustrated her grandmother who said these men were lost and didn't who they were because it had been taken from them. Her grandmother said that to be successful the tribe's children needed to be taught who they are, so she began by teaching Saturday lessons, which were wrapped around the Ya Ne Dah Ah teachings, which means ancient legends. Her grandmother started sharing stories with family members and parents were driving from Anchorage to do this. They found it to be so successful that they wanted to form an actual school.

MS. WADE continued to the seventh slide, titled "Ahtna Values," and said that from the beginning the school was founded in Ahtna values, which are the cornerstone of the school. She explained that every month these values and their meanings are shared with the students, who live these values in their actions, words, and language. The Ahtna language is considered endangered, she stated, so a strong Ahtna language preservation component is built into the school. She moved to the eighth slide, titled "Education Department (1992)," and related that the group of students in the photo started singing and dancing together as a group in 1992. She pointed out that the young man on the right holding the drum was one of the school's first students.

[9:03:43 AM](#)

MS. WADE directed attention to the ninth slide, titled "Excellence in Tribal Governance," and stated that Harvard has recognized Ya Ne Dah Ah as an innovative school in Alaska and in the nation. Harvard, she added, has recognized that the school is creating opportunities for [Ahtna] people to learn western academics, sovereignty, and how to become future leaders in the community.

MS. WADE proceeded to the tenth slide, titled "From an old restaurant building..." and related that in 1999 her grandmother decided to move the school out of the old drive-in restaurant that she owned into a tiny schoolhouse built by the community (left picture). When the school reached 12 students it was decided to build a new schoolhouse for which the community took out a loan to build (right photo).

MS. WADE turned to the picture on the eleventh slide, titled "Education Department (Now)." She said the school is again bursting at the seams because it is getting students from

outside the tribe, and she is now in the sad place where she must turn away children; for this school year she probably turned away 20 families. She shared the story of a mother asking to move her children to Ya Ne Dah Ah because they were being bullied and called dumb Indians. One of those children began at the school with the goal of being expelled but through love and trust became engaged in all the activities and academics. Ms. Wade explained that she tells this story not to disparage public schools, but rather that for some [Native] kids this school is a safe and healing place. She pointed out that the drummer in the picture is the same student who came up from the school. She further pointed out that Ya Ne Dah Ah students are becoming successful in careers - one has become a registered nurse, and another has become a geographic information system (GIS) technical expert.

[9:09:24 AM](#)

MS. WADE said the twelfth slide is a photo of the renovated school. She then moved to the thirteenth slide, titled "Education Department Operational Logistics," and stated that everything is done as a community, such as building the school through a visioning that was held with the community; as well, there is a parent committee that guides the teaching of the kids. She said Ya Ne Dah Ah is a homeschool that is partnered with the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough School District. She explained that partnered means it is a bi-directional approach at learning, a benefit that compacting would offer. For example, district teachers come in and help guide Ya Ne Dah Ah teachers with curriculum selection and measuring successes. She herself has partnered with the district to help bring in cultural elements. She said the school currently has three classrooms and 22 students, with a capacity of 30 students.

[9:12:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked whether the 22 students are technically homeschooled students with the Mat-Su Borough School District.

MS. WADE confirmed that that is the current structure. She said it has taken her since 2012, when she began administering Ya Ne Dah Ah, to get the district to understand the value of the school's cultural education and to incorporate that into the learning plans. She stated that it has been a complicated relationship through several principals and several teacher advisors, which is the challenge that compacting could resolve.

She noted that she structures and helps write the compacts with the Indian Health Service (IHS), and in May she will be negotiating the compact to add a public health response to COVID-19. She explained that it is basically her telling the IHS that adding this extra component to the agreement is wanted; the IHS reviews it and says it sounds good; and then [tribal] funding dollars are allocated to that. So, she continued, it is less of having to prove the worth of cultural education.

[9:14:04 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY requested Ms. Wade to talk about how standardized testing is layered into the environment of Ya Ne Dah Ah School.

MS. WADE responded that she has a daughter with special needs, and during one assessment some shiny pencils were set off to the side of her daughter while the test was given in which her daughter was to focus on the alphabet. She related that she had to explain her daughter has fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and distractions cannot be laid out along with the expectation that her daughter is going to do well on the test. She said she was able to show the test administrators what her daughter knew so they could see progress in her daughter's learning. Ms. Wade stated that the different testing options like Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and Performance Evaluation for Alaska's Schools (PEAKS) are an ongoing challenge because they are not normed on Alaska Native kids, and it is especially problematic in special education and Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) development. She said the students at Ya Ne Dah Ah take the tests but [staff] recognizes that those tests are only a small part of it and work to show through examples the ways that the students are learning, which is the best approach because it is individualized per student. She added that many Native kids don't care about taking those tests because they don't see the value in being assessed like that; in addition, it is not a good indicator of what children know.

[9:16:56 AM](#)

MS. WADE proceeded to the fourteenth slide, titled "Education Department Staffing:" and resumed her presentation. She stated that Ya Ne Dah Ah School is not exclusive to tribal citizens but is open to everyone because what is good for tribal kids is good for all kids; growing together without segregation is the best way. She noted the school has three teachers - the pre-school to first grade teacher is non-Native, the second to eighth grade teacher is Alaska Native, and the high school teacher is

Vietnamese. She said other staff include a COVID-19 compliance manager who is also the cook, an administrative assistant, and a "477" [project manager] that benefits the "NYO" Program, plus many volunteers.

[9:19:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS inquired about the Native teacher's type of certification.

MS. WADE answered that this teacher previously taught for the Mat-Su Borough School District and has a teaching certificate.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS noted there is the Type I and Type M and asked how the school has navigated that certification process.

MS. WADE replied that that is one of the topics she has on her challenges.

[9:20:13 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY inquired whether there is an opportunity under a compact dynamic for collective bargaining to continue.

MS. WADE responded she could envision that happening. She qualified she is not an expert in that area and that the school hasn't entertained it yet, but she said it is something the school would entertain.

[9:21:16 AM](#)

MS. WADE returned to her presentation and addressed the fifteenth slide, titled "What we are doing is working!" She shared that Chickaloon Native Village is a finalist for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Prize. Consideration for this prize, she related, involved three days of interviews about how the village connects health to its school and community.

MS. WADE continued to the sixteenth slide, titled "Challenges." She stated that the sovereignty waiver issue presents all sorts of challenges to the Chickaloon tribal government in partnering. The tribal government is eager to partner on projects and has partnered on road and other projects, she related, but it always must go through third parties to formalize those agreements. She said, "The state is really missing opportunities for collaboration, and it's all tied to this beast because in our

constitution we have no way of giving up sovereignty in any form because it doesn't belong to us, it belongs to our children in the future." The second challenge, she said, is that [the school] is not eligible for Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) funding, so instead all sorts of funds must be pieced together. Compacting, she advised, could offer a centralized mechanism for doing this work and bringing funding into schools that would then give more opportunity for tribal governments or communities to spend less time doing this type of work. She said the BIE funding issue has been one of the greatest challenges and every year she spends a tremendous amount of time writing grants to fund the school. Ms. Wade related that another challenge is the shortage of Alaska Native teachers and CVTC's solution has been to grow its own. For example, she pointed out, the young [drummer] pictured earlier is now one of the school's teachers, and a parent whose children went through the school is now the school's Ahtna language teacher. While they are not licensed teachers, she continued, they possess knowledge that cannot be learned in a western educational system because they are Ahtna language and cultural experts.

[9:25:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS noted that Representative Kreiss-Tomkins has introduced a Native language licensing bill which would potentially expand the supply of Native language instructors. He said this bill could make a real difference in this area.

MS. WADE offered her appreciation for the bill, then returned to her discussion of challenges. She stated that a charter school approach was evaluated but it was determined that it wouldn't work because there is a minimum standard for school size and other constraints.

MS. WADE proceeded to the seventeenth slide, titled "Recommendations:" and recommended that the issue of waiver of sovereign immunity be dealt with. She next recommended that there be engagement with the Alaska Congressional Delegation to amend the barrier to tribes receiving BIE funding and to increase the funding allocation. She further recommended that flexibility be provided so Commissioner Johnson could truly negotiate with tribes given it is a government-to-government consultation. Lastly, she said she recommends compacts because they work and are an excellent mechanism for fostering collaboration.

[9:25:54 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY requested Ms. Wade to speak from the tribe's perspective as to the specific flexibilities that would be needed for the DEED commissioner to engage in compacting, such as whether the barriers have been administrative or statutory.

MS. WADE answered that it is probably a little of both, but much is administrative - setting up the agreements. She stated that the communities need to be allowed to bring to the commissioner their plans on what they want to do, and it's not so much an approval process as it is an evaluated question-answer process, a give and take that is supposed to be collaborative in nature. The problem, she explained, is that the authority must rest there so that if a good idea comes up that is outside of the box the commissioner can act on that great idea. The flexibility must be built into it from the start; negotiations must be able to go back and forth to figure out the best way forward. It is something the legislature will have to take up. A true government-to-government consultation, she stressed, is working together to create the best thing for the communities, it is not the state saying what can and cannot be done, which is kind of what is happening now.

[9:28:18 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY noted Commissioner Johnson is a big proponent of education compacting. She inquired about the progress of discussions with DEED in working out the granular details of what education compacting could look like.

MS. WADE replied that she was involved in the very early stages of discussion around what education compacting looks, but since then she hasn't been able to meet due to being the COVID person for her tribe. She said other groups have been involved and they would be the ones to ask.

[9:33:00 AM](#)

MS. WADE returned to her presentation and showed the eighteenth slide, titled "Trust Us! We are good stewards of resources." She said CVTC's accounting department/administration has had 17 years of certified clean audits, and no one who works for the tribal government ever wants to be the one who breaks that streak. She stressed that CVTC is transparent and takes its responsibility of stewardship of funding very seriously.

MS. WADE pointed out that the photograph on the nineteenth slide is of the Life House Community Health Center in Sutton that CVTC helped build. She said it is an example of how once a school is built in a community, then health care and other things become wanted within the community. The infrastructure that is built translates into care for the entire community. This community health center, she continued, is federally qualified and serves the entire community on a sliding fee scale. Importantly, the health center is connected to the school - the school kids planted apple trees for the building and during non-COVID times the children go there to work out in the gymnasium, and [health center] staff goes to the school to give lessons on dental and health care. It is a bi-directional support system built into the community, she added.

MS. WADE addressed the twentieth slide, titled "Transportation," and with a photograph of the Chickaloon Public Transit bus. She said CVTC operates the only transportation system for the whole community from Chickaloon to Palmer. This transportation system supports the school by bringing the children to the school, plus staff uses the system to get to work. Multiple tools are being brought to the community to support CVTC's educational efforts.

MS. WADE concluded by saying she hopes a pathway forward can be found because it would benefit Alaska as a whole. She said CVTC's goal at the school is to teach the children to be inquisitive, to challenge them and for the children to learn to challenge themselves, to develop a love of learning, and to grow good future community leaders.

CHAIR ZULKOSKY pointed out that today's presentations were the initial conversations on the opportunities related to compacting in education. She said the committee looks forward to working with DEED and other folks on this issue.

[9:37:31 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 9:37 a.m.