

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 27, 2021

9:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Roger Holland, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Shelley Hughes
Senator Peter Micciche
Senator Tom Begich

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

No witnesses to record

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:02:40 AM](#)

CHAIR ROGER HOLLAND called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stevens, Begich, Hughes, and Chair Holland. Senator Micciche arrived thereafter.

Organizational Meeting

[9:03:09 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND announced the purpose of the meeting was to allow committee members to introduce themselves and speak about their goals. He said his background is in environmental science and

metrology, the study of weights and measures. He worked in a research position at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette for ten years. He taught state and federal workers how to safely operate boats and airboats and certify them for work. He worked with the Coast Guard Auxiliary for ten years and is a certified instructor with the Auxiliary. Recreational boating safety through public education is one of the cornerstones of the Coast Guard Auxiliary. He has 30 years with the Coast Guard Reserves as a boatswain's mate. His two daughters went to Service High School and attended the University of Alaska Anchorage.

[9:04:18 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS shared that this is his 21st year in the legislature. He is a retired professor of history with the University of Alaska and a former Army intelligence officer. His legislation created the Education Committee. When he first came to the House, there was no Standing Committee on Education in either the House or the Senate. That was an anomaly in comparison to other states. Education was part of Health and Social Services. It made sense to him to create an Education Standing Committee, which has been working very well.

[9:05:36 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES congratulated Chair Holland on chairing his first meeting. She stated that she did not know that Senator Stevens had created the Education Committee. Her four children attended public schools, starting in Bethel, then Fort Yukon, Fairbanks, Seward, and finally Palmer. She homeschooled briefly, which gave her a deep appreciation for parents who decide to do that. She was a contract instructor with the Department of Corrections and helped inmates with remedial work to get their GEDs and for job preparation. Her grandchildren are in public school in Anchorage. She was active in schools when her children were in school. She is a University of Alaska graduate and appreciates that system. Her goal for the committee is a big question. She has had students in urban and rural schools. She understands the state has pockets of excellence and some wonderful teachers and institutions, but there are some serious gaps. If the state is going to have a bright future, the state needs to ensure that all students have every opportunity to be well equipped. Hearing how Alaska does in comparison to other states makes her want to be on this committee. When she hears about how the nation is doing compared to other nations, she realizes there is a lot of work to do. She is happy to be on the committee so they can do what they can for the children of Alaska.

[9:08:36 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH shared that he is a musician and consultant in the fields of education, juvenile justice and delinquency. He works around the country in those areas. Both of his parents and his two sisters taught in the Anchorage School District. He graduated from the Anchorage public schools and is a UA alum. He almost completed the graduate teacher program at UA but decided that a teaching career didn't pay enough. One of his interests is ensuring that it does pay well enough so that people are interested in the career. He has been the national chair of the Coalition for Juvenile Justice. He worked for the Department of Justice on juvenile justice and delinquency issues, which have correlations to education. He has been involved in law-related education in Alaska for many years. He was active for 15 years with Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children, which successfully sued the state in the Kasayulie and Moore cases to ensure adequacy in education. His wife continues to be involved in that work as the executive director of what is now called the Coalition for Education Equity, which is currently suing the state about forward funding of education. He does not have a direct connection to that organization but is putting it on the record. He will be declaring that conflict of interest numerous times during committee hearings.

SENATOR BEGICH said that his priority in the committee is early education connected to reading. He and the governor worked closely over the last year and a half on a reading bill that included universal, voluntary early education tied to reading outcomes through third grade. He and the governor worked together on every change to the bill as it moved through the process. They worked with people from both ends of the spectrum, from the National Education Association to the Alaska Policy Forum, to develop that legislation. The bill will begin as it was [when the previous legislative session ended]. Finally, he is hoping that the committee can discuss issues that Senator Stevens has brought up, such as middle school and tribal compacting. Senator Begich said he has a bill simply for discussion about class size. Senator Hughes is also interested in class size. He is hoping to have robust discussions about those issues.

[9:12:02 AM](#)

SENATOR HOLLAND welcomed Senator Micciche.

[9:12:18 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE observed that the constitution requires some services. People care about roads and public service, but no one gets more emotional than about Alaska's system of education.

Now, families are struggling because of COVID and the time out of the classroom. Alaska has problems with where it sits in the queue with the quality of education in Alaska, which varies dramatically depending on the community. He has a 25-year-old who went through the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District. He has three children in the district now. His family partially homeschooled this year. His wife, who is a teacher, taught the two youngest while the oldest did distance learning through the high school. Two-parent working families around the state don't have the time, ability, and sometimes interest in helping kids where they are, so what is delivered through the public school system is probably the most important in bringing some of those young, amazing people to a standard by giving them the support they need to succeed. He does not have anything specific he is working on, but he is here to support the committee and the young people in the state. They are the future. Education is a key, constitutionally-required responsibility that the state must deliver. The product has some gaps. He hopes the committee can move the needle to improve what is being done around Alaska.

[9:14:54 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES noted that she and Senators Stevens and Begich have been past members of the committee. She is excited to have two new members, Senators Holland and Micciche, with a fresh perspective. Education is a crucial topic in the state.

SENATOR HOLLAND observed that the legislature has three big issues this year, the budget, healthcare, and education and also how coronavirus affects all of those.

[9:16:21 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Holland adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 9:16 a.m.