

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 17, 2021

9:03 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**

PRESENTATION: STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION REPORT BY JAMES FIELDS

- HEARD

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

State Board of Education and Early Development

Keith Hamilton - Soldotna  
Lorri Van Diest - Palmer  
Sally Stockhausen - Ketchikan  
Jeffrey Erickson - Unalakleet

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JAMES FIELDS, Chair  
State Board of Education  
Alaska Department of Education and Early Development  
Glennallen, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave a presentation on the State Board of Education.

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions about education during the State Board of Education presentation.

KEITH HAMILTON, Ph.D., Appointee  
Board of Education and Early Development  
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)  
Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as appointee to the Board of Education and Early Development.

LORRI VAN DIEST, Appointee  
Board of Education and Early Development  
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as appointee to the Board of Education and Early Development.

SALLY STOCKHAUSAN, Appointee  
Board of Education and Early Development  
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)  
Ketchikan, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as appointee to the Board of Education and Early Development.

JEFF ERICKSON, Appointee  
Board of Education and Early Development  
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)  
Unalakleet, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as appointee to the Board of Education and Early Development.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[9:03:05 AM](#)

**CHAIR ROGER HOLLAND** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stevens, Hughes, Micciche, Begich, and Chair Holland.

#### **PRESENTATION: ALASKA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION REPORT**

[9:03:40 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND announced the presentation the Alaska State Board of Education Report by Board Chair James Fields.

9:04:56 AM

JAMES FIELDS, Chair, State Board of Education, Glennallen, Alaska, said he will give a summary of the report to the legislature, which is in the committee packet. Board members include educators, administrators, local board members, like himself, and people with diverse backgrounds, including its military and student advisors. It is a well-rounded board.

MR. FIELDS reviewed the mission of the board--An excellent education for every student every day; its vision--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. - Alaska Statute 14.03.015; and purpose--DEED exists to provide information, resources, and leadership to support an excellent education for every student every day.

MR. FIELDS shared the strategic priorities from Alaska's Education Challenge (AEC): 1. Support all students to read at grade level by the end of third grade 2. Increase career, technical, and culturally relevant education to meet student and workforce needs 3. Close the achievement gap by ensuring equitable educational rigor and resources 4. Prepare, attract, and retain effective education professionals 5. Improve the safety and well-being of students through school partnerships with families, communities, and tribes.

9:08:03 AM

SENATOR BEGICH asked him to review what Alaska's Education Challenge is and how the five priorities emerged.

MR. FIELDS replied that several years ago the board tasked the commissioner and the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to put together a large group to determine strategic priorities. Five work groups involving more than 140 people, including legislators, put in a lot of work and time to create the priorities.

SENATOR BEGICH shared that many times when the committee discusses bills, the senators often ask how the legislation fits the AEC. So much work was put into creating the priorities that they are making sure that legislation meet those priorities from all across the spectrum.

MR. FIELDS reviewed the Board Action Highlights on slide 5:

- Adopted emergency regulation changes to ensure funding to eligible school districts under Senate Bill 74 to improve Internet services under the School Broadband Assistance Grant program.
- Adopted regulation changes to allow military training with the Alaska Army National Guard to count for high school credit and be available to all eligible high school students in Alaska.
- Adopted amendments to update the state's school library standards.
- Repealed and replaced regulations to allow the issuance of emergency administrative certificates and some emergency teacher certificates.

SENATOR HUGHES asked whether repealing and replacing regulations was done under the disaster declaration. She asked if the competency test for out-of-state teachers was waived.

MR. FIELDS deferred the question to the commissioner.

[9:11:55 AM](#)

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, replied that certain actions were taken as part of the disaster declaration to make it easier for teachers to receive certification. This also refers to action the board took to permanently change regulation to make it easier for districts to certify someone quickly for roles that they couldn't find someone else for. This was a regulation change that the board put out for public comment and adopted.

SENATOR HUGHES asked if that involved anything with competency testing.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied he did not have the regulation in front of him, but he did not think so.

[9:13:21 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS referred to the first bullet about internet services and broadband. He said he spoke to U.S. Senator Murkowski last night and she expected additional federal funds in the next round of federal funding. He asked what the plans are for the internet and broadband.

[9:14:00 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON responded that the issue is being addressed in a positive way from multiple directions. Alaska Telecom Association has been a great partner for DEED during the pandemic in trying to meet the needs of students throughout the state. The last Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act had a provision for money to go directly through telecom providers for families to offset the cost of home internet. That is not run through the department but through the federal government to providers. Senator Murkowski's staff has been helping DEED understand what is happening with some considerations for broadening the E-rate program so that could be used for home internet in some locations. The upcoming bill has more money in it. Yesterday he was in a call and learned the next package has at least \$7 billion to address broadband issues for education. DEED will learn more about that as it works its way through Congress. DEED worked hard so that BAG (Broadband Assistance Grant) awards continue to be maximized. DEED was able to include more districts in that. DEED is trying to receive input and outwardly address broadband from multiple angles to make sure the kids who need it are connected.

[9:16:48 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS observed that that is exciting and a tremendous opportunity for the state to help its students. He appreciates the work the commissioner is doing in terms of internet and broadband.

SENATOR BEGICH asked what the amount was in the package for broadband and how much of that would be for Alaska.

[9:17:16 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied that yesterday he heard \$7 billion. He doesn't know how much will go to Alaska. The last act had \$3.2 billion for an emergency broadband benefit program with perhaps a billion for tribal broadband programs. There are multiple parts of the relief packages that deal with broadband. He will try to work with the telecom industry to get a complete list of all the different elements that have been funded with various packages.

SENATOR BEGICH asked how much Alaska would need, conservatively, to get to a decent speed to ensure kids have access to broadband across the state.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered that the economy of broadband is outside of his area of expertise. He has heard different numbers

of what it would take to connect every part of the state since he has been commissioner. It changes yearly because more places get connected as fiber is laid and technology like satellites is used. He is not qualified to give an amount.

9:19:25 AM

SENATOR STEVENS added that he hopes there is recognition of Alaska's situation when it comes to internet and broadband. The state is in the buggy-and-whip stage compared to the rest of the country. He hopes Congress will recognize that Alaska has enormous needs compared to much of the rest of country when it comes to connectivity.

SENATOR HUGHES said that in addition to COVID legislation before Congress, there is also legislation about general infrastructure and a chance for broadband funding through that. The Congressional delegation understands that the information highway needs support just like roads, bridges, and airports. There may be money for this from the COVID bill and a capital infrastructure bill.

MR. FIELDS presented DEED Significant Steps on slide six:

#### Alaska Project AWARE Grant

DEED was awarded a five-year, \$9.1 million Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education) grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

- The grant will assist the state in improving mental health by growing mental health literacy, reducing mental health stigma, strengthening early identification and intervention for student mental health conditions, as well as providing more robust services for students who are experiencing severe mental health issues.

#### Transforming Schools Toolkit

- DEED, in collaboration with the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), launched a new trauma- engaged resource—a toolkit to complement the Transforming Schools Trauma Framework completed last year. The toolkit is a supplemental and highly practical online resource to assist Alaska schools becoming fully trauma engaged and practicing. The toolkit is intended for districts to use with staff.

#### Alaska Safe Children's Act Statewide Curriculum

- The Health and Safety Unit completed construction of a state authored student training to support districts with the implementation of the Alaska Safe Children's Act in grades 7-12. The curriculum is designed to help prevent childhood sexual abuse and teen dating abuse.

[9:22:34 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE asked if the board has a report on the effectiveness of the Alaska's Safe Children Act.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON responded that DEED will follow up and provide any reports associated with the grant. The Alaska's Safe Children Act curriculum has been in development and is ready to roll out. DEED has been working with advocates and others on timing since some students were not in school in the fall. It is an exciting course with video and other resources. It is going to be landing in schools in the coming weeks and months. It will be a great resource.

SENATOR MICCICHE said he is also looking for any metrics that may show COVID-related impacts on students.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON responded that his health and safety team will work with districts to find out what type of metrics could or should be collected on that.

SENATOR HUGHES said the legislature has heard that many students have struggled during the pandemic from social isolation and there may be increased mental health issues like depression. She asked if DEED and the state board are looking at any reallocation of funds to implement any new strategies for mental health. She also asked for an explanation of a trauma-engaged resource.

[9:26:21 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said that the Project AWARE grant and another grant with the Fairbanks School District are designed to identify effective methods to support students with mental and behavioral health. Those are ongoing as more is learned about the impacts of COVID on students. That is work that will be happening across the country. DEED will be working with partners at the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS). These are sensitive issues. The trauma-informed framework recognizes that some students come to school with trauma. The framework is a series of modules that support educators in identifying when there may be trauma and its impacts and how to support those

students and policies around that. The DEED website has the entire framework.

9:28:40 AM

SENATOR BEGICH noted that the Alaska Safe Children's Act emerged in part from the work of Butch and Cindy Moore and the death of their daughter Bree. He confirmed that they worked closely with the commissioner and were integral in developing the curriculum.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied that is correct. The Moores reviewed and provided feedback on the curriculum. They will be part of the rollout. The Moores have been close partners with the department and others in the development of the Alaska's Safe Children Act.

SENATOR BEGICH commended the commissioner and his staff for working with the Moores.

9:29:50 AM

MR. FIELDS reviewed DEED Significant Steps - Increased Focus on Third Grade Reading Proficiency on slide 7:

DEED received a \$20.7 million five-year Comprehensive Literacy State Develop (CLSD) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to expand the state's efforts to improve literacy skills for all students.

- Sixteen district projects were selected for funding, involving students from birth through grade 12 in 45 different schools.
- Subgrant awards were finalized and announced on January 17, 2020.

Project highlights include professional development in effective reading instruction for teachers, hiring reading specialists, incorporating new and innovative reading instruction, and more.

- Five out of the 16 district projects focus on the K-5 grade span, specifically targeting students reading at grade level by third grade.

SENATOR MICCICHE pointed out that in the actual report on page 8, it talks about the waiving of testing requirements for ACT, SAT, and WorkKeys. He asked if any work was being done on remote testing options for students who need these tests.

MR. FIELDS deferred to the commissioner.

[9:31:51 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said the SAT and ACT are given by companies that set the parameters for how those will be administered. He does not have the latest update. The companies make those determinations and DEED works with them. DEED also works with the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) about any waivers regarding those assessments for the Alaska Performance Scholarship, which will be waived again this year. ACPE just met and he hasn't had a briefing on the last meeting. For statewide testing, the department is waiting for more guidance from the federal government. DEED is proceeding as though the statewide test will be administered. It is important to find out where students are at so resources can be targeted to the students who have been most impacted.

SENATOR MICCICHE noted that for the first time the graduation rate dropped in 2020. He asked if that is COVID-related or is the state losing ground.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied they don't know. It is working with districts to find out. He wants to be careful about making judgements about data from the last year. It could be COVID-related, but he does not want to assume that. If it is not, the state wants to be aggressive about what caused it and how to address it. DEED has to work with school districts to get a window into that information and data about students and what may or may not have resulted in dropouts. That will be done as part of the recovery from last year.

[9:34:38 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said he appreciates the report but didn't see anything specifically about civics education. One of the original purposes of a free public education system in the country was the need to have educated citizens. He knows the commissioner pays attention to that and some districts have been successful with it and other districts have not done much. Everyone needs to keep attention on it. The state needs legislators, people working in state government, governors, commissioners, and people in Congress who have a good, solid basis in civics education. He has no criticism about what the department is doing, but hopes that the department keeps attention on that and that the state doesn't falter in making sure that it is creating citizens who understand its government.

[9:35:49 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES observed that the final paragraph on page 7 of the report discusses what was suspended during the disaster so

that districts could focus on restart efforts and continuing instruction for students. She is concerned because districts did not have to report on operating fund balance amounts, performance designations, and certain accountability indicators, in addition to changes to coursework and testing requirements for teachers and student teacher licenses and the prescribed length of student teaching. She can understand the suspension of student teaching because kids weren't in the classroom. She asked why districts were not required to provide information from previous years to hold them accountable. That is information they could have been working on remotely, and the coursework and test requirements for teachers and students could have been done virtually.

[9:37:16 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON thanked Senator Stevens for the admonishment. His heart is aligned with the senator's in terms of the importance of civics education. The last year has validated and enhanced that. He looks forward to continue to work with Senator Stevens on that. Yesterday he had a meeting with several people about ways the department can promote civics education, perhaps through podcasts and supporting materials. It is on the department's radar. He clarified with Senator Hughes what she was describing. The 10 percent carry over waiver simply allowed districts to add more to their fund balance. They are still required to do a full audit and submit that data to the department, which posts that information. There are some federal programs that allowed carry over of funds and delayed reporting requirements. The performance designations are part of the accountability system based on state testing, which did not take place in March and April of 2020, so that data wasn't available. There was some measure of reporting, Report Card to the Public, and the department continued to work with districts that were identified as needing comprehensive or targeted support.

SENATOR HUGHES asked the commissioner to follow up with more information about what was suspended and why.

SENATOR BEGICH asked that given the expiration of the most recent order whether anything was still suspended.

[9:40:08 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered that nothing is currently suspended. The department sends a detailed monthly report to the legislature on what was suspended and the rationale. He is not aware of anything that is currently suspended. Because of all the federal money coming to districts, the department continues

to advocate for a waiver of the 10 percent carry over simply to allow districts the flexibility of managing those funds in the most efficient and effective manner.

SENATOR BEGICH said that carry over has now kicked back in, so there is a 10 percent limit. Senator Hughes is proposing an increase to that limit more permanently. He asked if any receipt authority or ability to receive federal funds has been affected by the end of the order. The legislature has received conflicting messages over the last few weeks as to what is or isn't going to be lost without an emergency order. Only one other state in the union doesn't have an emergency order. One example is that with the end of the order SNAP funding is being lost at the Department of Health and Social Services. If there will be no effect at DEED, the committee should know that.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered for the packages that already passed, he is not aware of any additional receipt authority needed. Another package is being debated and DEED's team is monitoring that. DEED is monitoring Child Nutrition carefully. That is run by the Department of Agriculture at the federal level. The Child Nutrition team is on alert to identify any area that may be impacted and will let the governor's office know immediately.

SENATOR BEGICH asked the commissioner to please extend that courtesy to the committee as well.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied that he would be to do that.

[9:43:23 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE said that the governor issued a letter to commissioners to report back on gaps that may be problematic if there is not a new health order. He asked Commissioner Johnson if he was included with that.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered that he received the memo and his team is looking at any gaps that may exist. DEED will be working with school districts also for that information.

SENATOR HUGHES said that part of the report is about an increased focus on third grade reading proficiency and \$20.7 million for that. She asked if that dovetails with the policy proposals of read by nine that are currently before the committee.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON responded that those funds are through the comprehensive literacy state development grant from the federal government. DEED is doing what it can to make sure it aligns with the three important components of the Alaska Reads Act. However, most of that money goes directly to districts who work within the framework of the grant to spend the money.

[9:45:28 AM](#)

MR. FIELDS concluded by thanking the commissioner and department and all the staff. They all know that 2020 was a difficult year. He saw that from serving on a local school board. DEED fulfilled its purpose, "DEED exists to provide information, resources, and leadership to support an excellent education for every student every day," through all of 2020. The department went above and beyond to keep education and students as the focal point through the pandemic. Some things the board wanted to get done was put on the back burner, but he wants to recognize the commissioner and his leadership during 2020.

CHAIR HOLLAND noted that it was great to see the optimism and motivation in the conversations the committee had with superintendents last week. He noted that the complete board report was available on the Senate website.

**CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)**  
**Board of Education and Early Development**

[9:47:21 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND announced the consideration of the four governor appointees to the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development. He thanked the appointees for their dedication and called on Dr. Keith Hamilton.

[9:48:34 AM](#)

KEITH HAMILTON, Ph.D., Appointee, Board of Education and Early Development, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Soldotna, Alaska, said his wife is the executive director of New Hope Counseling Center on the campus of Alaska Christian College, where he serves as the president. Governor Parnell recommended him as a college educator to be a liaison between K-12 and higher education. He has served young people his entire professional life in many roles. He is also a commissioner on the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) and serves on the Alaska State Personnel Board. He is the vice chair on the state board and he is now in his sixth year on the board. He believes in the mission of DEED, both personally and professionally. His heart is for rural, young people. The

Alaska Christian College serves predominantly indigenous students from rural Alaska, which is 91 percent of the student body. More often than not they are undereducated when they arrive at the college. He sees the great need for K-12 to have all the support it can get to enable every child to have a shot not just at a great K-12 education but also to enter college or career and technical pathways. He has a heart for the undereducated, for students who say they have one shot at college and how do they get there.

[9:51:04 AM](#)

DR. HAMILTON said that regarding his goals for DEED, of course, there have been some valleys, but there have also been mountains along the way. Some of the valleys are what he calls the two t's. Every child needs to feel safe. Children who have the first t, trauma, in their background struggle. His wife deals with that at the college with students who go to the counseling center for assistance. There is an enormous amount of trauma. Many don't have any idea of the incredible struggle of students with the events they have experienced. He is pushing hard to make sure the state is paying attention to that trauma need. The second t is truancy. If kids don't show up at school they can't be educated and they can't get at least a couple of meals that day. Schools can't show that an adult teacher cares for them and wants to see them succeed. The state has a high truancy rate. As part of the Alaska Education Challenge, he worked hard to bring truancy to the forefront to ask what can be done about it. That hasn't received much attention yet. He is encouraged by some of the mountains encountered. He knows there is a lot of work to do. He is completely behind the commissioner. He is an extraordinary man and he and his team go above and beyond.

[9:53:21 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said he appreciated Dr. Hamilton's comments on how important the school environment is. Dr. Hamilton has been on the frontlines and understands the issues. Senator Begich suggested that he and Dr. Hamilton sit down and talk about truancy. The triborough antigang task force that involved the Anchorage, Kenai and Mat-Su boroughs in the late 2000s to about 2010, 2011, did extensive work on truancy and had some profound information that was never truly used. Senator Begich noted that he and Senator Hughes are addressing teacher recruitment and retention and early education in their education bills. He asked Dr. Hamilton what he saw as the board's role in addressing teacher recruitment and retention and early education.

[9:55:07 AM](#)

DR. HAMILTON replied that he will be happy to chat about what was discovered in the truancy task force. The state struggles with teacher recruitment. Part of it may be laws on the books that are a barrier to excellent teachers having a shot at being able to move to Alaska. The board has been working on opportunities for pathways for great teachers to serve in the state. Money is always the question. The state needs to pay teachers more. The state needs to recruit more teachers, which means it needs to offer more than others are offering. It is a constant battle and the state budget doesn't allow Alaska to go back to its earlier days when it was one of higher paying states for teachers. The state is not there anymore. It is very difficult. Last year he was disappointed at the recruitment in Anchorage. There were a couple of hundred positions available, and not even half that number showed up to apply. There is a constant shortage of state educators.

DR. HAMILTON said that everyone agrees that reading by fourth grade, which Senator Begich, Senator Hughes, and the department are engaged in, is the keystone to moving the numbers in the right direction. Every opportunity that the board has to receive grant funding or support policies to move that in that direction is part of the goals of the Alaska Education Challenge. He is done talking about it. He wants to see action.

[9:57:45 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said that Dr. Hamilton is in a key position on the board with his connection to higher ed and the ACPE. The state is in the doldrums in moving young people on to college and universities. Not everyone has to go to college, but it is still crucial that young people are involved in higher education. Many families are experiencing financial problems. He asked what the state can do to encourage more students to go to college.

[9:59:05 AM](#)

DR. HAMILTON said the ACPE goal is that in 2025, 65 percent of working age Alaskans will have some sort of technical or associate degree so the state will have its own workforce. A lot of people from the lower 48 come to fill those jobs because there are not enough people in the pipeline. The state is in the low 50s at this point, and the number is barely moving. After six years of serving on the ACPE board, they have hit their heads against the wall. He doesn't know what the silver bullet is. All students who come out of a K-12 system who have been prepped for college through the courses they took and the counseling they received are the ones likely to say they can do

this and will go on to the next level. He learned through his doctoral work that 68 percent of Alaskan high school seniors have the desire to go to college, but in the fall about 12 percent of those students matriculated and entered those schools. There is a big gap between K-12 and higher ed that comes down to whether students are feeling prepped and ready to go and people are directing them in the counseling phase.

[10:13:33 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE shared that he and Dr. Hamilton are very close. He has respect for his work at the Alaska Christian College. He asked Dr. Hamilton how his experience working with traumatized rural Alaskans converts to a better outcome for proficiency in math and reading. He assumes that has a lot to do with trauma-related obstacles to learning.

DR. HAMILTON said that the state understands the impact of trauma on every facet in life. Every state does, but Alaska's numbers are extraordinarily larger than many other states with just what is being reported. A child who comes to school who has had a trauma event will not be thinking about reading or being obedient to the teacher. That child's mind has strayed and is reliving recent events. That child needs professional help, more than just a caring, loving teacher. The child needs someone at the school to provide therapy. The Alaska Education Challenge spoke about a counselor available at all schools. The first step forward for a child who has been traumatized is to help that child feel safe again and understand that it is not the child's fault. That story is told on his campus and counseling center over and over again.

CHAIR HOLLAND thanked Dr. Hamilton for his service and called on Lorri Van Diest.

[10:04:30 AM](#)

LORRI VAN DIEST, Appointee, Board of Education and Early Development, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Palmer, Alaska, said that in January 2020 she was reappointed by Governor Dunleavy. She was previously appointed by Governor Walker. She is a lifelong Alaskan who grew up in Seward and had her first teaching job in Seward and then moved to Mat-Su. She has been a teacher, basketball coach, and school counselor, and district curriculum coordinator. She retired in 2010 and three years ago became a part-time elementary counselor working at two Title I schools, which gives her insight into the daily working of schools.

[10:07:01 AM](#)

MS. VAN DIEST said this is the perspective she brings to the state board. Her lens and focus is the safety, health, and wellbeing of students. They are living in unprecedented times where safety and wellbeing are continually challenged. As Commissioner Johnson states, they must keep reminding themselves of their mission. The strategic priorities of the Alaska Education Challenge provide a postpandemic pathway forward. The framework of AEC and the board's mission statement has guided the work of the board as they move through the maze of COVID-19, which has given school districts the opportunity to do education in different ways. School districts are doing in-person learning, virtual learning, or a hybrid of the two. The state has learned how to be flexible and efficient and open to change.

[10:09:17 AM](#)

MS. VAN DIEST said DEED's response to the pandemic has been stellar; DEED has listened and responded to the needs of school districts through a variety of ways. With the help of the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), DEED has developed the Start Smart 2020 framework and held webinars to help school districts. Child Nutrition worked to continue to provide meals to children in need. She is excited about the future work of the board. She wants to be part of moving forward after the pandemic. Her goals are aligned with framework of the AEC. She wants to see the proficiency rate increase in grade three language arts and continued growth in academic achievement in English/language arts and mathematics. Components in SB 8 and SB 42 are geared toward increasing reaching achievement, particularly in pre-K through grade three. She wants to see the graduation rate increase from 80 percent and chronic absenteeism decrease from 29 percent. She wants to see the university system graduate more Alaskan teachers to address the teacher shortage in the state.

[10:12:08 AM](#)

At ease

[10:12:15 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting.

SENATOR HUGHES thanked Ms. Van Diest for her willingness to step up again; she has pinpointed what needs to be done.

SENATOR STEVENS said it is great to hear from Ms. Van Diest with her professional, comprehensive background. He asked if she had to pick one thing to focus on in her term, what that would be.

MS. VAN DIEST said that she would choose reading proficiency at third grade. Two areas of concern are teacher recruitment and retention and third grade reading proficiency. A child who doesn't learn to read by grade four often doesn't catch up. A lifetime of illiteracy is such a disservice. That would be her number one focus. That is why she is excited about SB 8 and SB 42 that are in the committee. Dr. Hamilton said it is time for some action. She believes that all of those on the state board feel that same way. They would like to help the department with the heavy lifting that would have to happen if either of these bills passed.

CHAIR HOLLAND called on Sally Stockhausan.

[10:15:20 AM](#)

SALLY STOCKHAUSAN, Appointee, Board of Education and Early Development, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Ketchikan, Alaska, said she and her husband are teachers at Ketchikan High School. She has been teaching special education but this year she is teaching full time in the English department. She is seeing education from a general education perspective. She has a passion for advocating for students who struggle and teaching them to advocate for themselves. She is excited to be part of the board. It is a strong board committed to investing in the future of Alaska. She supports the mission of an excellent education for every student every day. She supports the AEC. DEED has given invaluable support to school districts during COVID. She is excited about the trauma-informed school movement. Classroom teachers have been struggling with this for years. She is optimistic that schools can make huge differences in the future of their students as they make intentional changes to become more aware of the trauma. This is timely because after the pandemic, schools and teachers will need to have this on their radar after the additional trauma of the past year.

[10:18:38 AM](#)

MS. STOCKHAUSAN said she is looking forward to SB 8 and the emphasis this will continue to place on quality reading instruction. She is particularly hopeful that it will help facilitate quality instruction for teachers in how to teach reading. Teachers come from a variety of backgrounds in the area of reading instruction. She is hopeful that the state can make sure that all Alaskan teachers are trained to teach reading. To the board she brings years of teaching at all levels. She has taught in the inner city, rural Alaska, and small-town Alaska.

She has taught general education, English as a second language, and special education. She is excited to continue to bring a teacher's perspective, as well as a special education perspective, to the board. The state is in challenging times, but she looks forward to working with the board in using the state resources to assist districts in meeting the educational challenge.

[10:19:53 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said she had answered all his questions and he appreciates her service.

CHAIR HOLLAND called on Mr. Erickson and noted that he is a new appointee.

[10:20:23 AM](#)

JEFF ERICKSON, Appointee, Board of Education and Early Development, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Unalakleet, Alaska, said he is a lifelong resident of Unalakleet. His parents were teachers in Unalakleet. After graduating from college, the village called him home so he got his teaching credentials from the University of Alaska Anchorage. He taught with the Bering Strait School District. He worked for the RurAL CAP Head Start program. He served on the Unalakleet school board and then resigned to be student activities director in Unalakleet until retirement in 2019. He has been a commercial fisherman for over 40 years. He has seen education from the perspective of his children and grandchildren. He has been a teacher and administrator. His youngest son is severely autistic, so he has been involved in the special ed realm for almost 21 years.

[10:23:44 AM](#)

MR. ERICKSON said he offers a diverse background. He is primarily rural and has a rural focus and experiences. He echoes what he heard from other board members. Literacy is such a challenge for communities and students, partly because it is generational. Many parents are not reading to kids. It is a real challenge to present solutions to get kids reading so that they are prepared for other aspects of education. His heart is with literacy and finding ways to work with families, communities, and each other. He appreciates DEED initiatives for teacher recruitment and retention.

SENATOR BEGICH said he asks new members about the words of the education clause, "affirm that no money shall be paid from public funds for the direct benefit of any religious or other

private educational institution." He asks every member their thoughts on the constitution.

[10:26:17 AM](#)

MR. ERICKSON replied that he has had private and public school experience. He sees the value in both. He sees value in choice when there is the ability to have equitable choices. He is a supporter of the constitution as written. Until he has further information and gets up to speed on the direction the department is going, he is going to have to give a vague answer.

SENATOR BEGICH said he appreciated the vagueness. It is an honest answer. He encouraged Mr. Erickson to look at the constitution and read those words. There is no issue about the quality of education in private institutions. It is simply the use of public funds for those private institutions. He would agree with Mr. Erickson that there are strong private and religious institutions, but he would encourage Mr. Erickson to see why those words were written. He appreciates his willingness to step up and serve.

[10:27:57 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE shared that he was concerned about his application when he read it initially. He thought he should be applying for a Fish and Game position instead of education, but hearing him speak about his rural focus and issues of trauma and how he can help the board with technology challenges in rural Alaska and his wide range of experience, his only request is that he suggests Mr. Erickson prepare more of a resume than just an application sheet to follow him through the process. It would help other members reviewing his qualifications. He has become supportive, but he wasn't sure from Mr. Erickson's original sheet.

MR. ERICKSON said that to be completely honest, he was looking for something to give back as he is retired and was looking at Fish and Game positions but then saw this seat was open. He has a real heart for education. Senator Micciche saw through his guise.

CHAIR HOLLAND thanked him for his pursuit of service. He opened public testimony and after ascertaining there was none, closed public testimony. He asked the will of the committee.

[10:30:05 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated that in accordance with AS 39.05.080, the Senate Education Standing Committee reviewed the following and

recommends the appointments be forwarded to a joint session for consideration:

State Board of Education and Early Development

Keith Hamilton - Soldotna

Lorri Van Diest - Palmer

Sally Stockhausen - Ketchikan

Jeffrey Erickson - Unalakleet

CHAIR HOLLAND reminded members that signing the reports regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects individual members' approval or disapproval of the appointees; the nominations are merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

10:31:13 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Holland adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 10:31 p.m.