

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 28, 2022

9:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Peter Micciche

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): UPDATE ON TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION
TASK FORCE

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

DR. BARBARA ADAMS, Adams Analytic Solutions LLC
Nenana, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented teacher recruitment and retention
taskforce updates.

SONDRA MEREDITH, Teacher Certification Administrator
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on teacher recruitment
and retention updates.

ED KING, Staff
Senator Roger Holland
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke to a non-agenda item on the parameters and history of teacher residency and paraprofessional training programs.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:03:13 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, Begich, Hughes, and Chair Holland.

**PRESENTATION(S) : UPDATE ON TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION
TASK FORCE**

[9:03:50 AM](#)

Chair Holland announced the consideration of a Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) Teacher Retention and Recruitment (TRR) Task Force update. The committee previously heard from Ms. Adams on May 5, 2021, regarding the results of the TRR survey. Finding solutions to identified problems is the goal of the meeting. A committee bill to address the shortage of teachers in Alaska was being drafted.

[9:04:37 AM](#)

DR. BARBARA ADAMS, Adams Analytic Solutions LLC, Nenana, Alaska, stated she was looking forward to finding collaborative solutions to the problems that the TRR taskforce had identified. Studies are being conducted that focus on the pandemic's contribution to the nationwide shortage. Committee members were given copies of supplemental studies that show the connections. An international study presented at a research webinar focused on how education fared during the first wave of COVID-19 lockdowns. She opined that globally Alaska was in the middle relative to student learning and teacher issues. She asked if the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) had specific numbers for Alaska's teacher shortage.

[9:06:46 AM](#)

SONDRA MEREDITH, Administrator, Department of Education and Early Development, Juneau, Alaska, stated that an assessment and accountability report is given to the legislature annually. The report shows approximately 20-23 percent teacher turnover yearly, with about half relocating to another district within Alaska. That leaves DEED needing to recruit the other half. Historically, this has been a consistent turnover rate, but it does not tell the whole story. She found that the number of teachers decreased by about 200 across the state over the past

five years. During that period, DEED did not experience a huge number of layoffs which caused her to question the reason for the decrease.

[9:09:04 AM](#)

MS. MEREDITH reported that five years ago, the State Board of Education established that districts had to report first-day vacancy information in October in addition to staffing information. By doing this, DEED would know how many positions were not filled by the start of the school year. From this, DEED found that the number of empty positions at the beginning of the school year has trended upwards. Vacancies at the start of the school year had been 150. They are now 300. Schools are starting without teachers, and districts are doing what they can with the information. Emergency certificates were reinstated at the start of the COVID pandemic. People with emergency certification have not completed all the requirements for regular certification. However, they are the ones frequently filling the vacant positions. There has also been an increase in the number of teachers being hired who are enrolled in teacher preparation programs, so they are not fully prepared. Qualitative data comes from hiring managers who report that teacher recruitment now continues year-round. Positions are filled all year long, and pool selection has diminished. She said this is a broad overview of what the department sees.

[9:11:12 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked where the school locations are that do not have teachers. He speculated that it is easier to find teachers for urban schools. He wondered what was being done to ensure and help people obtain regular certification.

MS. MEREDITH stated that districts support education and testing requirements for the limited certificate teachers. Mentoring is also offered to those who are less experienced. DEED, school districts, and schools are working to provide needed support.

[9:13:14 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated that innovation is needed, such as working closely with the university and other institutions that could help the teachers become certified. He asked about the locations of schools that start without certificated teachers.

MS. MEREDITH replied that the locations are across the state, with rural Alaska a little more acute. She offered to provide the numbers to the committee.

[9:14:29 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS responded that he would like the department to be aggressive in bringing about certification for the teachers. Accomplishing this may mean more money or hiring outside trainers. It is a big problem that needs to be addressed. He will look to the department for a plan.

SENATOR HUGHES asked how districts manage vacant positions while teachers are being recruited. She asked if long-term subs, retired teachers, teacher aides, and virtual education were used.

MS. MEREDITH replied that districts are utilizing all of those means to accommodate the drought of certified teachers.

[9:15:47 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said that 300 vacant positions impact many students. She asked if the department believes it is handling the shortage in a way that students do not suffer academic loss.

MS. MEREDITH replied that intuitively the comment is correct. She opined that historically the education system is impacted without teachers in place.

MS. ADAMS said districts are also putting students into larger groups to provide them with certified teachers, for example, combining 3rd and 4th grades. It creates a higher burden for existing teachers, but it is a method used until a teacher is hired.

[9:17:39 AM](#)

MS. ADAMS moved to slide 3. She said she was asked to discuss barriers, blockages, and breaks in our current educator pipeline. In essence, the TRR task force did not use the same perspective, but the work that has been happening can shed light on the barriers, blockages, and breaks. As a reminder, she mentioned essential items from the TRR survey that were presented to the committee in May 2021. These items were:

- Competitive salary commensurate with the cost of living
- Workplace conditions
- Manageable workloads
- Retirement benefits
- Health care benefits
- Quality support from leadership
- Positive school culture,

- Certification requirements
- Recertification requirements.

These findings aligned with many of the breaks in the pipeline. Potential solutions from the TRR task force fell under six essential areas that focus on aligning education's stakeholder systems to support the efforts happening at local levels. The six categories were:

- Enhancing recruitment efforts
- Streamlining certification
- Creating paraprofessional pathways
- Developing leadership
- Restructuring retirement options
- Strengthening working conditions

There were 18 recommendations in total from the six areas. Details for the recommendations are found in the TRR Action Plan [education.alaska.gov/trr].

[9:20:14 AM](#)

MS. ADAMS turned to slide 6 and stated that the focus needs to be on taking action to implement the recommendations and achieve resolutions. The situation is urgent and requires innovative and aggressive action. Efforts to forward these solutions mean implementing the TRR action plan by holding convenings and working groups. There are funds in place to contract actual studies. These studies are to compile, align, analyze, and recommend solutions to working groups. It is also necessary to develop ways of sharing strategies effectively. There are 54 districts in Alaska. Districts may hear of good ideas that originate elsewhere, but implementation does not always happen in a way that supports action. Although funds are available to find and implement innovative solutions for the shortage of teachers in Alaska, the timeline for achieving it is slower than she wanted. Last Thursday was the first-time convening. There were over 60 people in attendance representing various stakeholders, such as teachers, principals, superintendents, and many partner groups. It was held by zoom and provided information about the action plan in addition to a discussion on implementation.

[9:22:59 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH agreed that the process is moving slower than anyone would like. He explained that the committee has been working on pieces of legislation developed around professional pathways and mentoring, which relate to the 18 solutions in the

action plan. He asked if Ms. Adams could offer suggestions on existing legislation in real-time, so it can move forward while a larger convenience is awaited. He opined that her knowledge of teacher recruitment and retention would be beneficial if it were allowed under her contract with the department.

MS. ADAMS replied that the question was interesting, and she would need to talk with the department before answering.

[9:24:51 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH responded that he is hopeful the answer is positive so that the committee does not spend time heading in a direction different from the data she may have. He stated his belief that the paraprofessional bill is generally heading in the right direction. The committee has been involved in trying to provide greater support from the department because it makes for a more robust response. He would like action to be taken so cohorts, teachers, and students, do not continue to be lost.

[9:25:49 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS opined that housing is a major problem for teachers in villages. He has seen teachers living in squalid conditions. He opined that people from cities would not stay long in rural Alaska if housing was not adequate and comfortable. He said Alaska Housing Authority has money and is building all over the state. He asked if there was a problem with the department aggressively seeking to bring agencies to rural Alaska to build comfortable housing for teachers.

[9:26:57 AM](#)

MS. ADAMS replied that housing is an interesting topic because it came up as an issue but was not a top concern; it was a moderate priority. She stated there had been housing improvements in some areas but not others, so the topic remains in discussion. There are various housing issues. The struggle can be with the actual house, the lack of available housing, or that teacher housing is only for a year before personal housing must be obtained. In some housing situations, teachers have roommates, which can be a struggle. April 2021, Senator Murkowski's office was concerned about the housing problem and met with the department to provide support. This is how a whole system can support local control. This is a very important struggle in some places. She stated she is open to specific recommendations and will note the concern.

[9:28:58 AM](#)

MS. ADAMS said the department is aiming to have contracts out by April. Volunteers are being recruited. Subcommittees and working groups are forming. There is a ground swelling of people with ideas and recommendations about moving forward, so there will need to be a consensus. The proposed subcommittees were organizational health, innovative recruitment strategies, and alternative certification inclined towards paraprofessional pathways. At the first convening, it was determined that a retirement subcommittee was also desired and would be added.

[9:30:34 AM](#)

MS. ADAMS said that legislation to advance solutions would occur next session since suggestions will come from the work and the work's progress is slow. She stated that current efforts do align. Micro credentialing is a legislative effort that the department is considering. Tennessee, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Texas utilize it. It has been applied in teacher preparation, actual certification, and alternative certification support where there might be a pedagogical strand of micro credentials. Before using it in Alaska, the department needs to know that micro credentials will be allowed for use towards certification and fit into regulations and statutes. The long-term goal is to have system alignment across the state that supports local control.

[9:32:07 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said a considerable amount of money has come from the federal government to the department and school districts. He asked if those funds have been used to move ahead on recruitment and retention.

MS. ADAMS responded that she did not know the answer but could find out. She stated she serves as a board member in Nenana, and thus far, attention has focused on student health, and social and emotional learning.

[9:33:41 AM](#)

MS. MEREDITH said that a portion of the federal COVID relief money would support teachers' professional development. Some of the money is providing additional support for reading through convenings at the department level. Funds are also being used to modernize the department's teacher certification system, which is tied to recruitment. It would move from a paper-based process to an online system that provides better communication tools. The department has been working on revisioning regulations. The Education Board will meet this coming Tuesday and Wednesday. The agenda includes reviewing public comments on revising teacher

certification regulations and using micro credentialing. Building upon this would be continued through stakeholder input. There were also changes to regulations that may be burdensome when applying for certification and to educators who may be entering Alaska.

MS. ADAMS thanked the committee and said that a lot of collective will could be found across all areas of education.

[9:36:45 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said that as early as 2016, Dr. Adams was involved in work with former Commissioner Covey to identify why teachers were leaving. Strengthening working conditions was one of the six essential areas mentioned in the presentation. He opined that committee members could lose sight of why specific language was put into a bill. He said that working condition support came directly from the Moore lawsuit, and the data it produced was used in the reading specialist elements found in the Reads Act, SB 111 and HB 164. He emphasized that much of the information regarding the six elements have been known for years. The data exists but must be acted upon to happen. He encouraged his colleagues in the House to move the Reads Act forward. He reported the Senate was ready. He opined that acting on SB 111 would address one of the six essential areas. The new bill would address more of the areas. The committee's job should be to constantly move pieces of legislation forward that move the entire system forward. It should not be piecemealed. He stated his belief that the new bill would move the system one step forward.

[9:38:39 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated he would like to learn more on micro credentialing.

MS. ADAMS replied that the department would be happy to share more information on micro credentialing.

[9:39:18 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND asked Ed King to present the Senate Education Committee's bill draft regarding paraprofessional training and teacher registered apprenticeship programs in Alaska. The committee hopes to offer it as a bill soon.

[9:39:51 AM](#)

ED KING, Staff, Senator Roger Holland, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, stated he could speak about the history and research of the committee's bill draft. He stated his belief

that the bill draft would be heard next week, and Sondra Meredith would provide information on the bill's background structure. She would also return Monday to speak on the specifics of teacher certifications available in Alaska. He suggested that Ms. Meredith could also address micro credentialing at that time. The University of Alaska will speak next Wednesday on its teacher preparation programs and the requirements for becoming a teacher in Alaska. He said school districts would share experiences and how situations are handled the following week. In two weeks, agencies and invited testimony would address whether the bill would be effective in its mission.

[9:41:10 AM](#)

MR. KING stated that the bill does not have a bill number yet because it has not been filed. He said the bill draft creates two major programs and adjusts existing language in laws. The bill draft would allow the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to approve alternative pathways to certification. Alaska is one of five states that cannot authorize alternative pathways. If the programs have state board approval, the bill draft expands the universe of teacher preparation programs to include nationally accredited, non-traditional, and alternative teacher programs. The bill draft would allow a prospective teacher to demonstrate subject matter expertise via a competency exam, thereby adding to the expert-limited teaching certificates. Existing programs behind the idea of alternative pathways are Professional Administrative Certification of Excellence (PACE), American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE), Teach for America, Troops to Teachers, and Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). The teacher residency program is one program that the bill draft would create. It would be like a medical residency with an experienced teacher working in conjunction with a person who has a bachelor's degree but did not attend a teacher preparation program. Under current law the person with a four-year degree can teach while simultaneously taking courses in pedagogy.

[9:43:32 AM](#)

MR. KING said thirty-one states require this type of introduction for new teachers. Thirty-eight states have some form of a teacher residency program. Alaska does not have either. The university has a statewide mentorship program which it will speak to next week, but it is not required by law. Research shows that successful residency programs require mentors to have training. The bill draft would provide

professional development for mentors so that adequate mentorship is given to resident teachers. Mentor professional development training would not be a requirement because the teacher shortage already burdens current teachers. The goal is to strengthen the pipeline so that there is less leakage from teachers entering the profession and getting burned out immediately. This creates a revolving door, and an experienced workforce is not developed. The residency program would run parallel with the expert-limited teaching certificate. That option would be available if a district decides to satisfy an immediate need. However, if it wanted to participate in the residency program, it could.

[9:45:02 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH sought affirmation that a bill had not been introduced. Rather, the parameters of a committee's bill draft are being walked through. He expressed concern about following the rules and noted that a bill hearing had not been scheduled.

MR. KING replied that what is being discussed is the research that went into the bill draft. It is not a bill hearing. The parameters of the bill draft are being discussed so the committee can introduce the bill if it chooses.

[9:45:49 AM](#)

At ease.

[9:46:25 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting. He affirmed that a bill is not being heard; the parameters of a drafted bill are being discussed.

[9:46:39 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said that a medical residency is for someone on the pathway to becoming a physician. They are in four years of medical school. The student is taking classes and doing rotations in hospitals and clinics. It is part of medical school. When they graduate, they have an MD after their name. They then do a residency where they function as doctors. There is oversight, but they are working with patients without another physician. She asked if her understanding of residency teaching was correct.

CHAIR HOLLAND restated the question by asking whether teacher residencies would be like a super aide who would be in a classroom with an experienced teacher or would the teacher have a mentor monitoring and checking occasionally.

SENATOR HUGHES replied she hoped it was the latter.

[9:49:40 AM](#)

MR. KING replied that under AS 14.20.022, the subject-matter expert limited teacher certificate is used to hire someone with a degree and experience in a subject but has not completed a teacher preparation program. This person can be the teacher of record for a classroom if they have an assigned mentor. The mentor must only be an experienced teacher and does not have to work alongside the mentee. Research shows that this type of mentorship is unbeneficial and results in unprepared teachers who burn out from working as full-time teachers and taking preparation courses simultaneously with little or no support.

MR. KING said the residency program would be an alternative pathway to the expert-limited teaching certificate. It would be the same in that the resident teacher would be teaching and taking preparation coursework. Still, the mentor relationship would be stronger because the resident teacher would not be the teacher of record for the classroom. The resident teacher would work with a mentor to gain experience, build a support system, and establish a strong foundation for becoming a teacher of record, perhaps the following year.

[9:51:34 AM](#)

MR. KING said the draft bill is intentionally silent on how a district designs the program. Research shows flexibility is key to the program's effectiveness due to the many scenarios and situations within various communities.

[9:52:16 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said she taught in a private school without going through a teacher certification program and did it well. She stated that some people with degrees are naturally good teachers and are ready to be a teacher of record without taking an entire teacher preparation course. She expressed her belief that if teachers were surveyed, they would say only a fraction of their teacher training program helped them in the classroom. She suggested that to fill teacher vacancies, another option could be to allow a person with a degree to independently work as the teacher of record with another teacher and pare down the coursework needed for full certification. She opined that many professionals do not want to go through a whole teacher training program, but they would be fantastic teachers. She asked if the idea had been considered.

[9:53:48 AM](#)

MR. KING replied that the alternative pathway to certification addressed in the bill draft was perhaps similar in reference. It would allow such things as work experience in place of coursework. With the Board of Education's approved training plans, the alternative pathway would be available. The residency program is a more supportive pathway for a teacher that needs it. It is meant to augment other options, not replace them.

SENATOR BEGICH stated that attempts at solving the teacher shortage should not focus on only one issue. He opined that a continuing reduction in the quality of teachers would not solve the bigger problem of educating Alaska's children. Working conditions, retirement, and developing leadership are part of the issue, and he cautioned against taking away from the quality of the education system to fill vacancies.

9:55:30 AM

CHAIR HOLLAND said that Alaska suffers from a 20 - 23 percent turnover rate of teachers. He asked what the percentage is for other states and how Alaska compares to the rest of the nation.

MS. ADAMS replied that she would look for the information from the Education Commission of the States and get back to the committee. She added that it would be interesting to see how Alaska's rural areas compare to the rural areas of other states.

9:56:25 AM

MR. KING said another potential certification pathway that might be included in the draft bill is a teacher apprenticeship program for school district employees who work with students and express interest in becoming teachers. Research has suggested that paraprofessionals in education may have difficulty affording school if they are not working or find it challenging to work full-time and do coursework. The teacher apprenticeship program would have a tiered pay structure based on experience. It would provide a structured training plan in conjunction with a paid wage for doing valuable service that ultimately results in the employee completing the program and becoming a fully certificated teacher. The Department of Labor would run the program. Money for apprenticeship programs is available through the federal government and possibly through state grants. DOL and DEED could collaborate with the university to create training plans that allow school employees to work and earn money while progressing towards full certification. There are 28 states that have these paraprofessional pathways to a certification program, but Alaska currently does not.

9:58:54 AM

At ease.

9:59:12 AM

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting.

9:59:47 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Holland adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 9:59 a.m.