

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

April 8, 2022

9:06 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Tom Begich

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

Emma Melkerson - Kivalina

Adam Reid - Anchorage

Lem Wheelles - Anchorage

Deborah Riddle - Juneau

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

SENATE BILL NO. 157

"An Act relating to health and personal safety education; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 157

SHORT TITLE: HEALTH AND PERSONAL SAFETY EDUCATION

SPONSOR(S) : SENATOR(S) GRAY-JACKSON

01/18/22	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/7/22
01/18/22	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/22	(S)	EDC, HSS
04/08/22	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

EMMA MELKERSON, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Kivalina, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

ADAM REID, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

LEM WHEELS, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 157.

BESSE ODOM, Staff
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional analysis for SB 157.

ROSE OHARA JOLLEY, Director
Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates - Alaska (PPAA)
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided invited testimony in support of SB 157.

JAYNE ANDREEN, President

Alaska Public Health Association
Douglas, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided invited testimony in support of SB 157.

HANNAH GUZZI, Education Manager - Alaska and Hawai'i
Planned Parenthood Great Northwest
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided invited testimony in support of SB 157.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:06:59 AM](#)

CHAIR ROGER HOLLAND called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:06 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Hughes, Stevens, and Chair Holland. Senator Micciche arrived shortly thereafter.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

[9:07:42 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND announced the consideration of governor appointees to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

[9:08:47 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE joined the meeting.

[9:09:02 AM](#)

EMMA MELKERSON, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Kivalina, Alaska, provided her background. She stated that she began teaching K-1 students at McQueen School, [also known as Atautchikun Inuunialikun] after graduating from Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Washington. She said she had been teaching in Kivalina for 11 years. She offered her belief that she would be an excellent addition to the commission because she believes that education should be viewed through a teacher's eyes and that teachers should be held to the highest standards. She would like people to respect the teaching profession.

SENATOR STEVENS asked what she was doing to help ensure that students would become good citizens and what the legislature could do.

[9:10:49 AM](#)

MS. MELKERSON responded that she teaches five and six-year-old students in an Alaskan village, so teaching civics was limited. She said she tries to share the world around them. These young students don't understand that the world is bigger than their village, so she wants them to gain a perspective about the world and their place in it. She stated that she uses children's literature to share their culture, other people's cultures, and holidays.

[9:11:48 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said he appreciates the work K-1 teachers perform. He related that he observed a K-1 classroom recently and he found it took a lot of energy just observing the classroom.

[9:12:08 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND asked how many students were in her classroom.

MS. MELKERSON responded that she has six first-grade students and nine kindergarten students in her classroom. She said she averages between 12 and 16 students per day, depending on their attendance.

[9:12:45 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES noted that she was one of the success stories in rural Alaska. She asked for any insights into teacher retention since she remained in the village. She said one goal was to help bring respect to teachers. She commented that the teaching profession was traditionally well-respected, but that has changed over time. She related remarks at high-school graduation she had attended. When the graduates indicated they planned to go into nursing, people were excited for them, but when graduates suggested they wanted to become teachers, the reaction was subdued. She acknowledged that teaching was much more challenging. She wondered what she would do to help spur greater respect for the teaching profession or suggestions for teacher retention.

[9:14:21 AM](#)

MS. MELKERSON responded that both she and her brother are educators. She also experienced negative reactions; when she graduated from high school and told people she wanted to be a teacher, they gave her funny looks. She offered her view that the press tended to highlight unsuccessful schools and teachers. She stated that bad press could be countered if people would shine a positive light on educators more often and share all the

wonderful things that teachers do in their classrooms every day. She suggested that highlighting more positive stories could outweigh the negative press.

9:15:53 AM

MS. MELKERSON agreed that teacher retention was difficult. She related that when she moved to Kivalina at 21, she told herself she would be part of the community. When she arrived in August, it was so light outside that she couldn't sleep, so she went for a walk at 10 pm. She encountered several middle-school kids who told her she might as well get back on the plane because all of their teachers leave the village by Christmas. She indicated that their comments broke her heart and she decided to prove them wrong. She expressed gratitude that the community allowed her to be as engaged as she wished by welcoming her, and that attitude cemented her relationships. She indicated that she loves her kids and community and could not imagine leaving Kivalina.

9:17:08 AM

CHAIR HOLLAND asked where she lived prior to moving to Kivalina.

MS. MELKERSON stated that she grew up as a military "brat" and traveled around with her family until her dad retired in Tacoma. She said she was primarily raised in Tacoma and attended Central Washington University in Ellensburg. She noted that she had never been away from home when she flew into Kivalina to teach.

9:18:53 AM

ADAM REID, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Anchorage, Alaska, provided his background. He stated that he worked as the horticultural and science instructor at King Tech, formerly the King Career Center, for the first 20 years of his career. He noted that he recently transitioned to the Anchorage School District (ASD) Virtual Program. He said he grew up in Iowa; his father was the head of security at the prison, and his mother taught in the prison system. He related that he graduated from a rural high school in Iowa and continued his education and basketball career at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. He moved to Anchorage after graduation. He and his wife have three children who graduated or attended public schools.

9:20:20 AM

MR. REID offered his belief that he would bring his community service to the board. He reviewed his community service, noting

that he served at King Tech as a department chair, as part of their AdvancED Accreditation Team when King Tech transitioned into a fully-accredited high school and was a leader for the Capturing Kids Hearts process, and on their literacy team. He said he currently serves on the [Anchorage Youth Soccer Club]. He previously served on the Anchorage Hockey Association and the Alaska Youth Soccer Association statewide. He indicated that his community service had prepared him to work with other commissioners and to impartially review each case, ask questions, thoroughly review each case on its own merits, and ensure that all participants were given due process. He indicated that he would like to serve the state and the teaching profession by serving on the PTPC. He emphasized the need to provide students with professional educators and an outlet for Alaskans to participate in the process of protecting students' right to the best education. He indicated that he would like to continue to serve on the PTPC.

[9:21:35 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND noted this was not his first appointment to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

MR. REID answered that this was his second term.

[9:21:59 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked if he had comments on civics education, including what was being done, what should be done, and how to make it better.

[9:22:14 AM](#)

MR. REID related that during his first 20 years of teaching, he taught a diverse group of kids from different backgrounds. He emphasized that he does not share who he voted for with his children or students because he wants them to be critical thinkers. He explained how difficult it was for students to research and discern good from bad information because so much information is available on the internet. He said he tries to instill in his students the importance of involvement in local elections and giving back to their community by serving. He characterized the importance of school board elections, noting that local elections can have the biggest impact on student's lives.

[9:25:01 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES stated that the PTPC was empowered to impose sanctions against the certificates of educators who engage in illegal, immoral, or unethical conduct. She wondered whether he

had observed any trends or problems. She asked whether young teachers had a good understanding of what was okay or if he had observed any gaps or things of concern.

MR. REID answered that it seemed to him that the commission saw fewer cases. He attributed this to the executive director, who had done considerable outreach to school districts, new school administrators, and teachers. He noted that teachers also have significant training, and the districts provide training. He related a scenario where the school administrator indicated that someone had reported him having lunch with a female student in the cafeteria. It turned out that he was having lunch with his wife.

MR. REID pointed out that the commission primarily heard cases related to a breach of contract. He noted that school districts have teachers sign their contracts earlier. He indicated that the ASD renews their contracts automatically, but many districts require their teachers to sign contracts yearly. Some teachers sign contracts in January or February for the following school year. He related a scenario where a teacher might sign a contract for a Mat-Su teaching position in January. Then their dream job position in their home community of Sitka opens up. If the teacher does not get approval to cancel their contract and take the job in Sitka, it is considered a breach of contract. He stated that PTPC had struggled with the penalty of a one-year suspension for breach of contract. He related that administrators want to ensure they can fill their teaching positions, and teachers want the flexibility to transfer to a job they feel suits them better. During COVID-19, teachers resigned, and the districts did not appear to submit those names to the commission. He commented that it is tied to teacher retention because teachers are happier if they have the right to choose. He thanked members for the opportunity to come before the committee.

9:31:25 AM

LEM WHEELS, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Anchorage, Alaska, provided his background. He said he was raised in Anchorage, graduated from Dimond High School, and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and a Master of Arts in Teaching from the University of Anchorage. He stated that he taught social studies at Dimond High School for 18 years, including World History, US History, Alaska Studies, AP Comparative Government, and currently AP US Government, AP US History, US Government, and Student Government. He commented

that he also taught online courses for the Anchorage School District for over a decade. In addition to teaching, he assisted the Anchorage School District during the transition to online learning due to the pandemic. He stated that he also trained teachers to use their online learning management system.

[9:32:43 AM](#)

MR. WHEELLES highlighted that he was recognized as the 2018 Alaska History Teacher of the Year, the Alaska World Affairs Council Teacher of the Year in 2010, and the Model United Nations of Alaska Advisor of the Year in 2011 and 2017.

MR. WHEELLES noted that in addition to the courses he teaches, he provides opportunities for students to develop their interests and leadership skills as the sponsor of Model United Nations Club and Christian Club. He indicated that he served as the Student Government Advisor for 12 years. Under his leadership, Dimond Student Government was awarded the National Student Councils' National Gold Council of Excellence Award in 2018-2021. Dimond High School is the only school in the state to hold this top national distinction. He said he currently serves as the ASD Student Advisory Board Advisor, the Election Chair for the Anchorage Education Association, and the Parliamentarian for the NEA-Alaska Delegate Assembly. He further stated that he had participated in numerous ASD committees and task forces.

[9:33:36 AM](#)

MR. WHEELLES stated that he currently serves as a Subject Matter Expert for the US Census Bureau, Statistics in Schools Program, and is currently a Statistics and Schools Ambassador, helping to promote the census to educators and students. He presently serves on the Bill of Rights Institute Teacher Council.

[9:33:59 AM](#)

MR. WHEELLES related that he had been married for 20 years and had two daughters attending ASD public schools.

[9:34:28 AM](#)

MR. WHEELLES related his interest in serving on the Professional Teaching Practices Commission. He stated that his mission as an educator was to inspire all his students to be engaged citizens. He said he empowers his students to be politically active by teaching them about their government and its history and providing them with opportunities to engage with their government. He indicated that he had hosted a sitting governor, Congressional members, legislative members, US ambassadors, and foreign consuls in his classroom. He remarked that his students

have taken what they have learned and applied them as campaign volunteers, legislative and Congressional staffers, delegates to United Nations conferences, and candidates for public office. He stated that his ultimate objective was to challenge his students to not just learn about their government but to be an active part of it. He noted that he visited three former students who were working for the legislature.

[9:35:18 AM](#)

MR. WHEELLES stated that students often ask about his political views, and he tells them he does not share his personal political views with students because it would be unethical for him to do so. He indicated that he wants his students to form political opinions and be able to articulate the reasons for them. He highlighted that he teaches his students about various political beliefs and ideologies, so they can form an educated opinion and engage in civic discourse with each other.

[9:35:46 AM](#)

MR. WHEELLES noted that Senate Education Committee members come from different political parties and have a variety of political beliefs. Yet, the committee meets regularly, respects one another, and engages in thoughtful discourse to do what is best for Alaska. He stated that his goal as a teacher was to prepare his students for those conversations in their homes, social media, workplaces, or legislature.

[9:36:08 AM](#)

MR. WHEELLES stated that his goal as a teacher leader and PTPC member was to hold his colleagues to the highest standards. He related that he had served on the commission for the past three years and is currently Chair of the commission. During his time on the commission, he advocated for reminders via the PTPC newsletter to educators about the appropriate ways to handle politics in the classroom. He had advised colleagues on the proper way to handle those subjects.

[9:36:38 AM](#)

MR. WHEELLES stated that he had advised students and parents when they believed a teacher had crossed the line and pushed a particular political view. He highlighted that his goal was to be proactive and address those issues before they rose to the level of a complaint before the commission. However, if complaints reach the PTPC, he is prepared to react appropriately. As a quasi-judicial body, the PTPC is asked to adjudicate complaints against certain certificated educators,

including teachers, counselors, principals, and school superintendents.

MR. WHEELS stated that he appreciated that the legislature created the commission over 50 years ago so that educators could hold their colleagues accountable and allow them to be judged by a jury of their peers. When he teaches about the importance of jury duty, he lets students that they might be able to avoid jury duty but to think about whether they would want to be judged by the people who were left if they were ever accused of a crime. He suggested that if he were the subject of a complaint to the PTPC, he would like to be judged by his peers because they would have a good grasp of what it means to be an educator in 2022.

[9:37:52 AM](#)

MR. WHEELS related that the Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC) was comprised of five teachers, a principal, a superintendent, a representative from higher education, and a representative from the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). He characterized the commission as a group of educational professionals who understand the challenges of being an educator and want public education to be esteemed throughout Alaska. As a body, PTPC works to promote professional and ethical behavior by all Alaskan educators through proactive education, outreach, and responding to complaints when a violation has occurred. He noted that the added stress placed on educators during the pandemic led to what some coined "the great teacher resignation," which has serious implications for the schools, districts, families, and students of Alaska. If educators leave their positions mid-year without being released by their districts, they are in breach of contract and subject to a one-year suspension of their teaching certificate.

[9:38:52 AM](#)

MR. WHEELS stated that the commission must ensure that all educators are familiar with the professional teaching code of ethics and the potential consequences for violations of it. As a PTPC member, he vowed to continue to increase the commission's outreach efforts to ensure that all educators are familiar with the code of ethics and understand what it means for their professional practice, especially in these unprecedented times. He offered his belief that as a lifelong Alaskan and a career educator with connections throughout the state, he was an ideal nominee for continued service on PTPC. He offered his view that he was well-informed on current education issues in Alaska and was respected by educators throughout Alaska.

[9:39:43 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS thanked Mr. Wheelles for previously testifying before the committee on issues. He commended him on his ability to encourage students to become good citizens.

[9:40:03 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND remarked on his impressive resume and his leadership roles.

[9:40:46 AM](#)

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, stated that she was the Operations Manager for the Division of Innovation and Education Excellence at DEED. She provided her background: she was born in Glenallen, graduated from high school in Bristol Bay, earned a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in Elementary Education from Oregon State University, and a Master of Education in Educational Leadership (M.Ed. Educational Leadership) from Montana State University. She worked as a substitute teacher and had three children who were born in Alaska. She stated that most of her teaching was in Montana. She taught at a rural Herderites school teaching English. She taught science and math for 12 years at a middle school. She returned to Alaska and began working for DEED as an education specialist and content specialist for math and science.

MS. RIDDLE said she enjoys working for DEED because she developed a systems view of education, which is different than working in the classroom.

[9:44:18 AM](#)

MS. RIDDLE stated that she had served as the DEED representative on the Professional Teaching Practices Commission. She noted that her third meeting would be held next week. She indicated that she was impressed by executive director Melody Mann's outreach. She described her as proactive and dedicated, ensuring teachers understand their responsibilities.

[9:44:58 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES referred to her resume, noting that it was detailed. She surmised that she would be thorough and detailed at the commission. She remarked that she was unaware the department representative had to be confirmed by the legislature instead of appointed by the commissioner.

SENATOR HUGHES wondered if she had an area of concern to focus on at the commission. She noted that Mr. Reid had mentioned the breach of contract issue. She acknowledged that Alaska had an ongoing shortage of teachers.

MS. RIDDLE expressed concern that the breach of contracts was so high. She explained that DEED was working on a multifaceted approach to retain teachers in the school districts. She highlighted that it was not solely the school districts' responsibility and that everyone needs to address the matter. She suggested that it might help to have some training and partnerships in rural schools for incoming teachers prior to the school year to allow them to adjust to living in a rural community.

[9:47:28 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS offered his belief that she would do a great job serving on the commission.

SENATOR HOLLAND remarked that her resume was detailed and highlighted her qualities.

[9:47:52 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND opened public testimony on the governor's appointees to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission; he found none, and closed public testimony.

[9:48:21 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated that in accordance with AS 39.05.080, the Senate Education Committee reviewed the following and recommends the appointments be forwarded to a joint session for consideration:

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

Emma Melkerson - Kivalina

Adam Reid - Anchorage

Lem Wheelles - Anchorage

Deborah Riddle - Juneau

[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.]

[9:49:01 AM](#)

At ease

SB 157-HEALTH AND PERSONAL SAFETY EDUCATION

[9:49:48 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 157, "An Act relating to health and personal safety education; and providing for an effective date."

[9:50:13 AM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 157, read the sponsor statement.

Sex education is essential to young people's health, relationships, and life goals. Young people should get age-appropriate, medically accurate information. Young people across Alaska deserve age-appropriate, medically accurate information about sex, reproduction, and healthy relationships taught in culturally competent, inclusive ways. Sex education should cover a wide range of topics, including healthy and unhealthy relationships, decision-making and peer pressure, abstinence, communication, consent, body image, media literacy and critical thinking, birth control, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). But many students in Alaska don't have access to the information and skills they need to protect their health because our state does not have comprehensive requirements for sex education in public schools. Sex education can equip young people with the skills they need for a lifetime of good health, including the ability to have healthy relationships, make decisions for themselves, think critically about the world, be a good ally to those who are different, and love yourself for who you are. Comprehensive, medically accurate sexual health education is the best way to help young people stay healthy.

[9:52:21 AM](#)

BESSE ODOM, Staff, Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, read the sectional analysis for SB 157.

[Original punctuation provided.]

Sectional Analysis for SB 157 version A

Section 1. This section amends AS 14.03.120, the statute regarding public school reports on school performance and planning by adding a new subsection. This new subsection requires a summary and evaluation of health and personal safety.

Section 2. This section amends AS 14.30.360 - 14.30.370 by adding personal safety program standards.

Section 3. This section amends AS 14.30.360, by adding conforming language as seen in section 2. This section is also amended to mandate a health and personal safety education curriculum. Additionally, this section adds a new subsection. This new subsection requires medically and scientifically accurate information for curriculum and defines "consent".

Section 4. Adds a new subsection that sets requirements for the health and personal safety education program curriculum.

Section 5. Repeals AS 14.30.361.

Section 6. This section sets an effective date of June 30, 2023.

[9:53:54 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND turned to invited testimony on SB 157.

[9:54:32 AM](#)

ROSE OHARA JOLLEY, Director, Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates - Alaska (PPAA), Fairbanks, Alaska, began invited testimony on SB 157. She stated that PPAA strongly supports SB 157, a bill that would enact state standards for sexual health education to ensure that all young people in Alaska receive the education they need to live healthy, safe lives. She offered her belief that most people in Alaska want young people to receive sex education. She reported that a 2019 survey [not identified] showed that over 90 percent of Alaskan voters agreed that sex education should be medically accurate, age-appropriate, and cover healthy relationships, consent, and communication skills, all of which is covered in SB 157.

[9:55:25 AM](#)

MS. JOLLEY related that medical associations, including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Alaska Association of Student Government all

support sex education. The vast majority of people support sex education, including 9 of 10 parents, which is why 33 states and the District of Columbia require sexual health education. Young people deserve to get evidence-based, medically accurate, age-appropriate information and answers to their questions about sex and relationships without being shamed or judged. Alaska leads the nation with sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), ranking the highest per capita for chlamydia and second-highest for gonorrhea. Teens and young people are particularly vulnerable to these infections. Young Alaskans 15-19 years old contract chlamydia at three times the [national] average. Despite these staggering statistics, only half of the secondary schools allow teaching teens how to access valid and reliable information, products, and services related to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) STIs, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and pregnancy. Alaska also has the country's highest rate of reported rape, almost three times the national average. Alaska's child sexual assault rate is estimated to be the highest in the country, with nearly one in seven people in Alaska experiencing some child sexual abuse.

MS. JOLLEY stated that considerable research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that comprehensive sex education reduces sexual risk behavior and STIs. Sex education is also associated with the delayed initiation of sex, fewer sexual partners, and more widespread use of condoms and contraceptives. Alaskan youth need to be equipped with information on respecting boundaries, protecting their health, and knowing who to turn to for help. Student health, including sexual health, is strongly connected to academic success and should be a core part of any student curriculum, just like any other subject area. It is time for Alaska to adopt comprehensive, inclusive, medically accurate, and age-appropriate sexual health education standards for students.

[9:58:01 AM](#)

JAYNE ANDREEN, President, Alaska Public Health Association (ALPHA), Douglas, Alaska, provided invited testimony supporting SB 157. She stated that ALPHA, an affiliate of the American Public Health Association, represents a 150-year history of translating and promoting effective public health policy and practices to improve the public's health. ALPHA supports implementing a required, comprehensive, and sequential health education program for K-12 so that all students in public and private schools receive this information.

[9:58:56 AM](#)

MS. ANDREEN stated that research shows that well-designed, effectively-implemented school health policies and programs improve student health-related behaviors and outcomes and their educational outcomes.

MS. ANDREEN stated that according to the most recent 2019 Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey, many high school students in Alaska engaged in health risk behaviors. In the past months, students responded that 34.5 percent had used tobacco products, including vaping, 21.6 percent had used marijuana, 20.9 percent had used alcohol, 12.4 percent had engaged in binge drinking, and 15.1 percent misused prescription pain medication. Students also reported that in the past year, 19.7 percent had seriously considered suicide, and 26 percent had sex in the last three months.

[10:00:00 AM](#)

MS. ANDREEN stated that according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), a comprehensive health education curriculum is "one that is broad in scope and content, addresses numerous health problems, issues, and topics, and includes a set of instructional strategies and learning activities for students in pre-K through grade 12 to acquire the knowledge, attitude, and skills to address multiple health outcomes." She noted that key topics of a comprehensive health education program include personal health and wellness, alcohol and drug abuse prevention, tobacco use prevention, safety, physical activity, food and nutrition, violence prevention, mental health, emotional health, and sexual health.

MS. ANDREEN highlighted that sexual health education was considered one of the critical topic areas within a comprehensive health education program.

[10:01:00 AM](#)

MS. ANDREEN stated that the CDC analyzed each state's health education laws and regulations on sexual health, HIV, and STD prevention. She indicated that Alaska was missing every one of the evidence-based components known to promote health. Current law encourages school districts to conduct health education, but SB 157 would require this education in grades K-12. It would expand the list to include sexual health, covering various topics. Currently, Alaska only requires education on child sexual abuse prevention for grades K-12 and dating violence prevention for date rape for grades 7-12. She noted that students must earn one health unit for physical education to

graduate from high school. She offered her view that SB 157 was critical for Alaska's youth to ensure that they were equipped with information to develop healthy behaviors, understand how their actions impact their health and learn how to find accurate health information. She encouraged members to pass SB 157 to ensure Alaskans' immediate and long-term health.

[10:02:47 AM](#)

HANNAH GUZZI, Alaska and Hawai'i Education Manager, Planned Parenthood Great Northwest, Anchorage, Alaska, provided invited testimony on SB 157. She stated that through education and health promotion, the organization's collective goal was to improve health outcomes for Alaska's youth and to be changemakers to the statistics shared about Alaska. She explained that people need multiple opportunities over time to make long-term changes in health behaviors. Comprehensive sex education provides age-appropriate education and gives students numerous opportunities to have their questions answered, normalize all the changes happening in their bodies, and provide medically-accurate information for students to make informed choices. She characterized comprehensive sex education as essential to young people's health, relationships, and life goals. It covers various topics, including healthy and unhealthy relationships, decision-making, peer pressure, abstinence, communication, consent, gender identity, sexual orientation, body image, media literacy, critical thinking, birth control, and STIs.

[10:04:13 AM](#)

MS. GUZZI said that sex education should be culturally specific, taught each year by a trained educator, and equip young people with the skills they need to lead a healthy life, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ), and students with disabilities. She related that in her experience teaching sexual health education in the classroom, she found that students needed to receive medically-accurate information without judgment or shame. One way to accomplish this was to provide a space for students to ask questions anonymously. Most of the questions come from data that they may have seen online or heard from friends. Students are trying to understand their bodies and if their bodies are normal.

[10:04:52 AM](#)

MS. GUZZI shared some questions she had received that demonstrated how SB 157 standards would help students throughout their lives.

If you don't get consent, what happens?

Do periods hurt?

Could you get pregnant if someone had ejaculated into a pool you were in?

What if your partner doesn't want to get tested or won't share their test results?

Is it normal if one testicle is lower than the other?

What happens if you don't go through puberty?

How do I start a healthy relationship?

What if someone doesn't put a condom on?

How can you let a person know you don't want to have sex?

[10:05:32 AM](#)

MS. GUZZI stated that with SB 157, teachers could answer these questions in a medically-accurate, evidence-based, age-appropriate way for all users across Alaska. SB 157 would require that this life-changing information be taught throughout Alaska while still allowing schools flexibility to determine how to teach sex education and what curriculum would meet the required standards. School districts and communities could ensure that the content was culturally specific and relevant to their communities while understanding that standards guide the information being taught just like any other content area.

[10:06:00 AM](#)

MS. GUZZI noted that standards guide the information being taught to students. She stated that SB 157 would require that the guidelines were consistent with the National Sexuality Education Standards, Core Content and Skills K-12, which outlines age-appropriate learning standards. SB 157 would require that all health education is age-appropriate and provides information to guide youth as they grow and develop. For example, these standards would require curricula for students K-2 to help students identify different kinds of family structures, describe the characteristics of a friend, and explains that all people, including children, have a right to tell others not to touch their bodies when they don't want to be touched. It explains why bullying and teasing are wrong.

[10:06:46 AM](#)

MS. GUZZI provided examples, noting that grades 3-5 would include noting that the timing for puberty and adolescent development varies considerably and can still be healthy. She related an example for grades 6-8 would describe the advantages and disadvantages of communicating using technology and social media. She indicated an example for grades 9-12 would compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of abstinence and other contraceptive methods, including condoms. She offered her view that these standards would ensure that students were equipped with accurate information to understand what was happening to them at their developmental stage.

[10:07:21 AM](#)

MS. GUZZI stated that sex education should be inclusive, ensuring that the curriculum resonates with all students regardless of gender identity, race, disability status, religion, or sexual orientation. She highlighted that educators had shared multiple instances where a student approached them after a lesson to share how much it meant to see themselves in the curriculum. She indicated that creating spaces for all students to feel welcome, valued, and represented, can increase student attendance and grades and lower suicides. She offered her view that comprehensive sexual education could also build empathy for students who were different and normalize the social and emotional changes that young people go through. It would provide medically accurate answers to their questions, ensure they know to seek the necessary health care, and empower youth to have power and agency over their lives and bodies. She urged members to support SB 157.

[10:08:15 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND expressed his concern that SB 157 would change the sex education program from "should" to "must." He expressed further concern that the program would require sexual health for K-12 because he was unsure that age-appropriate information would be presented to students.

[10:08:55 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said she would like to hear from the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). She related her understanding that health was required for high school graduation, so some sex education was already included in the curriculum. She said she shared Chair Holland's concerns about the bill.

[10:09:25 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS remarked that a constituent contacted him and was upset that their son brought home a survey about sexual issues. He wondered about parental rights and whether parents could opt out because some parents may not wish their children to learn sex education for religious or other reasons.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON offered her belief that schools were teaching some sex education. She agreed that parents have a right to decide if they want their children to participate.

[10:10:28 AM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON thanked the committee for hearing SB 157.

[10:10:39 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND held SB 157 in committee.

[10:10:48 AM](#)

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