

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 10, 2023
8:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Justin Ruffridge, Co-Chair
Representative Mike Prax
Representative CJ McCormick
Representative Tom McKay
Representative Rebecca Himschoot
Representative Andi Story

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Jamie Allard, Co-Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): STRATEGIC READING PLAN; ALASKA READING
PLAYBOOK; TEACHER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

KELLEY MANNING, Deputy Director
Division of Innovation and Education Excellence
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information during the presentations on Strategic Reading Plan; Alaska Reading Playbook; and Teacher Recruitment & Retention.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information during the presentations on Strategic Reading Plan; Alaska Reading Playbook; and Teacher Recruitment & Retention.

BARBARA ADAMS, Consultant
Adams Analytic Solutions
Coalition for Education Equity
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information during the presentations on Strategic Reading Plan; Alaska Reading Playbook; and Teacher Recruitment & Retention.

SUSAN MCKENZIE, Director
Division of Innovation and Education Excellence
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information during the presentations on Strategic Reading Plan; Alaska Reading Playbook; and Teacher Recruitment & Retention.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:01:22 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR JUSTIN RUFFRIDGE called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:01 a.m. Representatives McCormick, Himschoot, Story, and Ruffridge were present at the call to order. Representatives McKay, and Prax arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION(S): Strategic Reading Plan; Alaska Reading Playbook; Teacher Recruitment & Retention

[8:02:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that the only order of business would be the presentations on Strategic Reading Plan; Alaska Reading Playbook; and Alaska Teacher Recruitment and Retention.

[8:03:34 AM](#)

KELLEY MANNING, Deputy Director, Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), began the PowerPoint presentation, titled "Alaska Teacher Recruitment and Retention," [hard copy included in the committee packet]. She brought attention to slide 2, titled "Mission Vision Purpose," where she highlighted the purpose of the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), which is "to provide information, resources, and leadership to support an excellent education for every student every day." She continued on slide 3, titled "Strategic

Priorities: Alaska's Education Challenge," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Five Shared Priorities:

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.

MS. MANNING highlighted the agenda, on slide 4, which was: background, history and structure, current efforts, planned outcome, and timeline.

[8:06:07 AM](#)

SONDRA MEREDITH, Teacher Certification Administrator, Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development, joined the presentation on slides 5 and 6, both titled "Background," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

[Slide 5]

- Annually, Alaska has approximately:
 - 14,000 certified teachers;
 - 7,500 teachers; and,
 - 900 new teachers.

[Slide 6]

- Decreased number of applicants for vacant positions
- Increased number of first day vacancies
- Increased use of emergency certificates to fill vacancies

MS. MEREDITH pointed out that the information on slide 6 is received from school districts.

[8:09:54 AM](#)

MS. MEREDITH turned attention to a [7-page] handout in the committee packet, to the first page, which shows a graph reflecting the certified teacher count in the first bullet point of slide

[8:10:15 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 8:10 a.m.

[8:10:42 AM](#)

MS. MEREDITH continued to explain the graph on page 1 [of the 7-page handout]. She said the graph shows three types of teaching certificates. The large portion, [in blue], depicts the numbers of professional certificates. She explained that [the orange] section of the graph shows those people who are still working on satisfying all the requirements for licensure, as well as those with an emergency license. The [green portion] at the top of the bar graph depicts those limited licenses, which are given to those with expertise in certain areas, such as Alaska Native languages or military science. She summed up the page as providing a snapshot of what Alaska's educators look like and what is required for licensure.

MS. MEREDITH moved to page 2 [of the 7-page handout], which she said shows increases in certain certificates, such as two- to three-year [from 2018 to 2023]. It also shows a significant increase in out-of-state certification. As shown on this graph, Ms. Meredith pointed out that the increase in 2023 in the two- to three-year category is nearly 50 percent; the increase in the out-of-state category is about doubled in the same year. The remaining categories are: program enrollment, reemployment, and emergency.

[8:15:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said she had seen people in classrooms that have not "student taught" yet teach as if they are fully certified. She asked, "Is that an emergency certification?"

MS. MEREDITH responded that that is possible but drew attention to the program enrollment numbers on the graph, which have

increased from 10 in 2018 to approximately 70 in 2023. She said this is a license allowed by statute. She explained this program allows people with a bachelor's degree to enroll in a teacher preparation program and be "a teacher of record" while completing the program, using the time they are employed as part of their clinical experience.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked if that could indicate a "career crossover."

MS. MEREDITH replied often, yes.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked if there are exact numbers of how many J1s [exchange visitor (J) non-immigrant visa category] there are.

MS. MEREDITH replied that most in the emergency column are often coming with full degrees and education, as this is a requirement of the J1s in their country of origin, but end up in emergency certification because they do not have the exams completed in the area of basic competency and content. She said she does not have the exact number, but could find it. She added that not all emergency status certificated teachers are J1s.

[8:18:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked for a regional breakdown under the emergency category.

[8:19:02 AM](#)

MS. MEREDITH responded that it had been a year since the requested data had been pulled and offered to provide it to the committee on a future date.

[8:19:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX mentioned personal experiences of teachers who do not have certificates but a "broad wealth of knowledge and life experience."

[8:20:44 AM](#)

MS. MEREDITH explained the requirements for licensure are proscribed by statute.

[8:22:30 AM](#)

MS. MANNING further commented on workgroups and exploring other pathways to certification, and although requirements are in statute, DEED is looking at ways to help members of the community in accessing the certification requirements.

[8:23:07 AM](#)

MS. MEREDITH continued on page 3 of the 7-page handout, which shows a decline in the number of educators in classrooms over the past six years.

[8:24:12 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE commented on the numbers on page 1 versus page 3 and asked for the difference.

MS. MEREDITH explained that not everyone who is certified is necessarily working in Alaska's schools.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE assessed that of the 14,000 certified teachers in the state, half are not in a school.

MS. MEREDITH confirmed that is correct. She proceeded to explain the remainder of the handout [pages 4 through 7], which show first day vacancy data: how many positions are not currently filled by licensed teachers, administrators, or special service providers. She summarized that there is about a 5 percent vacancy rate across the state.

[8:27:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY questioned what a typical vacancy rate number would be, and also requested a breakdown by children who have the classroom teacher on the first day of school versus the special education teacher; she stressed the need for special education teachers.

MS. MEREDITH replied she could "dig deeper" into the data to distinguish between what the positions are in the collection [shown on slides 4 to 7] and provide that information to the committee on a future date. In response to a follow-up question, Ms. Meredith said she was not sure she had comparative data on typical vacancy rate numbers.

[8:29:32 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked if there is another data point throughout the year regarding vacancy rates.

MS. MEREDITH responded there are no other data points.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked whether first day vacancies remain the same throughout a school year or if some spots get filled by mid-year.

MS. MEREDITH confirmed that districts continue to hire throughout the year.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE brought up the need to check with districts on what their vacancy rates are currently, as that is not a data point held by the department.

MS. MEREDITH replied that is correct. She added that another good indication is to go to the Alaska Teachers and Personnel web page which includes postings of various vacancies.

[8:31:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT questioned the limit of J1s that can be hired.

MS. MEREDITH replied J1s can be here only 3 years, and limitations are not placed on individual districts and do not come from DEED.

[8:33:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCORMICK expressed interest in how the vacancies translate to classroom sizes.

MS. MEREDITH confirmed that the data can be gathered for the committee and provided on a future date. She concluded on pages 6 and 7 of the handout, which list first day vacancy by district for school year (SY) 2019-2023. She pointed out the variations in vacancy rates across the last few years.

[8:34:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked how much of the vacancy rate is a result of teachers leaving due to the hardships of COVID-19.

MS. MEREDITH agreed that had some impact, but related that during the pandemic people tended to stay where they were at.

[8:37:24 AM](#)

MS. MEREDITH returned to the PowerPoint, to slide 7, titled "Governor's Working Group on Teacher Recruitment and Retention (TRR)," and she explained that recruitment and retention is a national issue, not isolated to Alaska, and the first working group in Alaska began in April 2020 that included broad recruits with the common goal of developing an action plan. She pointed out that information gathered by the committee and survey results are available to the public, as shown on slide 8, titled "Access to all Teacher Recruitment and Retention Information (TRR)."

[8:41:05 AM](#)

MS. MEREDITH continued to slide 9, titled "Teacher Retention and Recruitment (TRR) Action Plan Recommendations," which led to the next presenter's introduction.

[8:41:49 AM](#)

BARBARA ADAMS, Consultant, Adams Analytic Solutions, Coalition for Education Equity, joined the PowerPoint presentation via teleconference and continued on slides 9 and 10, which show six color coded areas regarding alignment across the system and the ability to support local control. She continued onto slide 11, titled "Efforts to Forward these Solutions." She reviewed the first and second phases were developing an action plan and getting the word out, respectively. As shown on slide 11, the third phase is the implementation of the teacher recruitment and retention (REPRESENTATIVE TARR) action plan. There are two major activities: holding working groups and conducting contract studies to compile, align, analyze, and make recommendations. The outcome, she explained, would be the "Playbook."

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked when the playbook is expected to become available.

MS. ADAMS responded that the final piece will be pulled together by August 2023. She continued on slide 12, titled "Implementation - Virtual Committee Work," which featured different types of committee work, and whole group induction meetings. Slide 13, titled "Investigate Resources," shows that all information is available. She also stressed that feedback is welcomed and encouraged.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked for a "high level" overview of the "TRR Action Plan."

[8:48:37 AM](#)

MS. ADAMS explained the TRR Action Plan was featured on slides 9 and 10 and featured 18 recommendations. She reiterated the color-coded categories and corresponding goals. She returned to a previous comment on the recommendation "Grow Your Own Programs," under "Enhancing Recruitment Efforts" and she stressed the focus on paraprofessional pathways.

[8:53:54 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked if the 18 recommendations on the action plan are "clickable."

MS. ADAMS confirmed that is exactly what the playbook is going to be.

[8:56:06 AM](#)

MS. ADAMS continued on slide 14, titled "Implementation-Research Studies," where she highlighted the contract studies in column 1, followed by the description, and progress.

[9:00:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT referred to [slide] 10, to the subject of streamlining certification, and she asked whether these [potential solutions] are listed as things that should be done or are actually happening.

[9:01:20 AM](#)

MS. MEREDITH confirmed that some have been done already, but DEED is still moving forward.

[9:02:58 AM](#)

MS. MANNING added that the work groups [on slide 12] are digging in on the recommendations and identifying additional strategies.

[9:06:40 AM](#)

MS. MEREDITH, in response to Co-Chair Ruffridge, explained there is a provision in statute that limits the placement of an individual on the salary schedule that is coming in from out of state. Someone with a bachelor's degree can bring in only six years of experience; someone with a master's degree can bring in only eight years of experience. The consideration has been whether it is in the best interest of the state to put a cap on what a district can offer an individual based on the number of years of experience in the classroom when that person may be highly desirable.

[9:09:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE referred to slide 14, titled "Implementation - Research Studies," and asked what sort of dollar amounts are available for the contracts.

MS. MEREDITH explained a portion of the money received from the Alaska CARES Act was used to pay for this work.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE commented on the "Progress" column on slide 14, showing the contracts that are "available," and he asked where one would go to look at those.

MS. MEREDITH replied on the website. She further offered that she could print out those contracts for the committee.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked where to find financial opportunities options for districts.

MS. MEREDITH pointed to the "Organizational Health Cadre" category [shown on slide 13] of the PowerPoint.

[9:12:30 AM](#)

MS. MANNING joined on slide 15, titled "Outcomes - Playbook," and reiterated the goal of the current working groups is to take those recommendations from the teacher recruitment and retention plan and identify specific strategies. The playbook will lay out all these strategies and support local control. She continued to slides 16 and 17, titled "Timeline." She noted again that the playbook will be finalized by August 2023.

[9:15:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY requested to go to page 11 [included in committee packets], focusing on the specific contracts with the

University of Alaska, and asked for an update on the possible pilot study. She alluded to paraprofessionals in rural areas.

MS. MEREDITH replied that DEED does not have a pilot study directly related to the action plan; however, the University of Alaska has been working with districts for a long time to support paraprofessionals.

[9:18:36 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE questioned the new approach on the statewide teacher shortage. He remarked that in the past, of 52 proposed solutions, only 5 had been implemented. He asked what could prevent falling into "the same trap" with the new approach.

MS. MANNING replied it is difficult to speak to the challenges of the past - but acknowledged the need is acute. She stated the partnerships are there and DEED is currently pursuing some of the recommendations aligned to immediate results.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE commented on developing action plans and strategies but stressed the significant hurdle in the implementation. He asked to elaborate on the current hurdles DEED is facing.

MS. MANNING replied that staffing and resources are a priority. She explained that a lot of the strategies are at the district level, and following up with the districts on their needs is key.

[9:22:52 AM](#)

MS. MEREDITH followed up on the question from Co-Chair Ruffridge and stated capacity is always an issue, and some recommendations in the past had prioritized fiscal support. Some of the "great ideas" cannot happen since the dollar only goes so far and individual district resources are a factor.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE queried whether the limited number of people in the department influences the action plan.

MS. MEREDITH responded there had not been fiscal determination on what it would cost to do to all the "parts and pieces" at the department level, and she confirmed DEED does not have a plan at this point.

[9:25:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said she found the teacher shortage and lack of progress troubling. She asked how the Alaska teacher placement program is funded.

MS. MEREDITH replied that Alaska teacher placement is fee-based and funded from the districts.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT commented on the small pool of applicants at job fairs and asked if numbers can be provided.

MS. MEREDITH replied she does not have the [exact] numbers but confirmed that there are more jobs than applicants.

[9:29:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY expressed concern over progress on deferred maintenance.

MS. MEREDITH responded that deferred maintenance would be the purview of the School Finance and Facilities Section, and she stated she can gather and provide the data to the committee at a later date.

[9:32:15 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:32 a.m. to 9:34 a.m.

[9:34:50 AM](#)

SUSAN MCKENZIE, Director, Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development, began the discussion by focusing first on the Alaska Reading Playbook, which was put together last year and had been developed over the past couple of years. The playbook has the Alaska context and provides evidence-based reading strategies as a resource for teachers. She noted the playbook is not modeled after another state.

[9:38:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY questioned the process of how districts are using the playbook now and inquired whether any training is involved. She further requested a description as to how the playbook is unique.

[9:38:37 AM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE replied the playbook is place-based, and based on the science of reading research that has been collected over the last 50 years. Its purpose is to be a resource for teachers, with evidence-based strategies to use in their classrooms; it is not a curriculum but more of a resource.

[9:40:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked for a context regarding current status and future goals.

[9:41:18 AM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE focused her response on the subject of balanced literacy and there being a shift across the nation for structured literacy approaches. She referenced a subject of discussion during a previous presentation on The Alaska Reads Act requiring training for educators, and she noted the symposiums were capped out, confirming the "huge interest." Positive change stories were also noted in response to the question of where DEED is headed.

[9:46:48 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked if there is a plan to offer more symposiums, what the training looks like, and how DEED can be better supported.

MS. MCKENZIE responded there is funding for symposiums for the next two years. As for training that is required by the Act, DEED is using COVID-19 relief funds and has a request for proposals (RFP) out so administrators and teachers can receive the required training. There is a push for a larger scale effort for those courses.

[9:50:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked if Alaska is being modeled - to some degree - under Mississippi's success, and what steps were taken to get Mississippi's teachers up to speed.

MS. MCKENZIE explained teachers in Mississippi were required to take courses with more credits followed by a proficiency assessment. Another strategy - like Alaska's - is to offer symposiums. She noted concern as to how professional

development can continue to be offered after COVID-19 relief funds are gone.

[9:52:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked how districts are being helped to offer ongoing professional development.

MS. MCKENZIE replied that the answer lies within the strategic reading plan, which is a "living document" that DEED adds to as needs arise and data is received. She also noted that feedback from stakeholders offers direction on what more can be done to support the teachers.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY mentioned the expenses of evidence-based reading curriculum and asked if DEED has money from COVID-19 relief funds to help purchase them.

MS. MCKENZIE replied the current usage of COVID-19 relief funds is roughly \$8 million dollars, and over 40 percent of elementary students in Alaska will benefit from that initiative.

[9:56:28 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE noted the big difference between 13 and 3 credits and questioned why 3 credits would be chosen if the model of success from Mississippi was based on "a much greater course."

MS. MCKENZIE responded that many states are choosing a model for professional development that offers a menu of options, and this is the goal of DEED.

[9:58:50 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:59 a.m.