

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 17, 2023
8:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S) : BASE STUDENT ALLOCATION

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JESSICA PARKER, Principal
Family Partnership Charter School
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a PowerPoint presentation relating to the Foundation Funding Formula during the scheduled presentation on the Base Student Allocation.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:01:06 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR JAMIE ALLARD called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:01 a.m. Representatives Prax, McCormick, McKay, Himschoot, Story, and Allard were present at

the call to order. Representative Ruffridge (via teleconference) joined as the meeting was in progress.

The committee took two brief at-eases between the call to order and the presentation.

[Prior to commencing the scheduled presentation the House Education Standing Committee heard from Lacey Sanders, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, who responded to questions asked during the committee's 2/15/23 "Alaska Assessment Report - Innovation and Excellence" presentation.]

PRESENTATION(S) : BASE STUDENT ALLOCATION

[8:11:06 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD announced that the only order of business would be the Base Student Allocation presentation.

[8:11:38 AM](#)

JESSICA PARKER, Principal, Family Partnership Charter School, provided a brief introduction, and explained the 3 main things she would be discussing: a comprehensive overview of how Alaska's Foundation Funding Formula works, how the base student allocation (BSA) impacts correspondence schools, and an opportunity to create legislation to further improve education with a focus on special education (SPED).

[8:13:01 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 8:13 a.m.

[8:13:05 AM](#)

MS. PARKER began a PowerPoint [hard copy included in the committee packet], on a slide titled "Understanding the Alaska State Education Funding Formula." She synopsized that there is a base student allocation funding for each student and then there are various multipliers that change the number at the end. She summarized a slide, titled "State Foundation Formula and Local Taxes," which shows a snapshot of six steps referencing the preliminary budget projection. She reiterated her focus on special needs [step three on the slide], with the supports going to bilingual, special, gifted, and vocational education. She

explained there is an additional 20 percent to the average daily membership (ADM) in the category.

[8:16:49 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD referred to the 90 percent in the correspondence factor [step six] and asked where the other 10 percent goes.

MS. PARKER replied, "We just don't get it." She continued the discussion on a slide showing a spreadsheet that included the department's Foundation Funding Formula calculations. She explained that the total for brick and mortar schools is higher because in addition to the 100 percent, "they also get the multipliers."

[8:18:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked if the correspondence program is within the Anchorage School District (ASD). He also inquired if the money distributed to ASD is dedicated to the correspondence school, and if there are two separate checks.

MS. PARKER confirmed both to be correct.

[8:19:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY inquired whether the brick-and-mortar schools are responsible for "providing speech therapy for the correspondence schools and the special needs teachers."

MS. PARKER replied yes, the schools are, but they don't receive funding, and she stressed the burden that places on the districts. She continued back to the slide, and explained there are 33 correspondence program schools in the whole state of Alaska, and some are attached to different districts, and some are statewide. Each of the programs, she explained, all offer different allotments, and they all follow different rules.

[8:21:04 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked for clarification on whether a student would have to live within the memorandum of agreement (MOA) school district.

MS. PARKER confirmed that is correct. She continued on a slide titled "How Correspondence School Funding/Allotments Works,"

that briefly summarized the recent discussion on the BSA and correspondence schools.

[8:23:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT inquired if allotment would be impacted for a "correspondence family" whose child is taking a music class at a brick-and-mortar school.

MS. PARKER responded that the family would be charged a fee, which would be taken out of the allotment and given to the Anchorage school district, and that the fee helps to provide the music class.

[8:24:36 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked for elaboration on a possible hybrid school choice and whether correspondence courses deserve or need any more allocation.

MS. PARKER responded that the hybrid education model has "exploded," especially after the pandemic, as well as parents' preference to be more in charge of their children's education. She referred to this as "cafeteria style education." She further explained that as a result, more partnerships have evolved and there are numerous more vendors.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD commented on people liking the programs, but questioned whether there are results academically. She asked what a student's education looks like as far as accountability and achievements.

MS. PARKER replied that accountability test scores are how students are gauged through the correspondence model. She explained the challenge being a statute that allows parents to opt out of testing. The goal is to show the state that this is a model that works, and the accountability piece relies on participation.

[8:28:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked what the participation rate is for correspondence students and Measures of Academic Progress[®] (MAP) testing.

MS. PARKER responded the number is not high - around 22 percent. She clarified that brick and mortar schools have an easier time with testing due to having a more "captive audience."

[8:31:01 AM](#)

MS. PARKER continued the presentation while moving to a slide that showed an example of a student's learning plan and how students are kept accountable in the home school program. She noted that the statistics are excellent as for college participation; approximately 25 percent of high school students take college courses. In the accountability pieces, the numbers speak for themselves, she remarked.

[8:34:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT acknowledged the impressive numbers and asked how they compare to brick and mortar schools.

MS. PARKER replied she did not know, but the college class participation rate is significantly higher.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked how dual enrollment is handled in ASD.

MS. PARKER replied her district has a partnership with Alaska Advantage, resulting in some course offerings being available at very low cost. She moved on to focus on the third bullet point on a slide, titled "How services work for correspondence students with special needs." She pointed out a regulation that says schools are required to provide services even to correspondence students with identified disabilities; the students cannot be denied. She provided brief examples of students in her own district.

[8:38:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked for clarity on whether correspondence schools pay the district or provide the money to the parent to pay the district.

MS. PARKER stated that she would argue that the districts that support the correspondence programs should be allowed to figure that out. She opined that it needs to be a partnership within the districts, also that parents should have a say in how their children are educated.

[8:40:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX commented on the "routing of the check," and stated he thought it should go to the correspondence program rather than the general school district - for accountability purposes.

MS. PARKER replied that the heavy lift of providing that [accountability and service] is daunting. She stated it is up to the legislature to figure out the "how."

[8:42:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT relayed that she had talked to a couple of superintendents on this issue, and they stated they believed the funding should go to the correspondence school to provide training to the family.

MS. PARKER restated her opinion that it should be a district decision being that they are so different.

[8:43:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked if there is documentation on what services are provided to the 10 percent of students with disabilities, and she asked about the cost.

MS. PARKER responded that each correspondence school is required to have some kind system in place to track Individualized Educational Plan (IEPs), but her school, for example, does not track the funding of how much the services cost.

[8:45:22 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 8:45 a.m.

[8:45:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY stated she would prefer more documentation on what these numbers are to help her understand "the whole picture."

MS. PARKER confirmed she can provide documentation on the services, but not the costs. She returned to the presentation on a slide, titled "Current Guidance," which featured the current statutory language for the formula used and pertaining to [allocation from the public fund] "in an amount calculated by

multiplying the ADM of the correspondence program by 90 percent." Right now, funding equally for special needs students in the correspondence programs is missing. She urged the committee to consider the importance of funding the Foundation Funding Formula and supporting legislation that addresses these challenges. She moved on to the slide, titled "Proposed Legislative Change," and pointed out to the committee the amount of money that would be added if the special needs population at the correspondence schools were funded [by 90 percent plus a special needs funding factor of 1.20 applied as set out in AS 14.17.410(b)(1)].

[8:49:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCKAY asked Ms. Parker to clarify whether the state is not in compliance with that statute.

MS. PARKER reassured Representative McKay that the state is in compliance.

[8:51:40 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked if other services beyond SPED would be included in the 1.2, such as for gifted students.

MS. PARKER replied yes, the multiplier serves more than just special education.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT brought up an example of English language learners (ELL) having mandated testing and asked if this testing would be required of a correspondence family.

MS. PARKER replied there is already an obligation to provide those testings - and without any funding.

[8:54:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCKAY referred to the Foundation Funding Formula and asked how it is applied and who decides the categories students fall under.

MS. PARKER replied that students must qualify for special and intensive needs through testing, as well as qualify at a top percentage. In response to a follow-up question regarding CTE Career Technical Education (CTE) she stated she does not know but gathered it would be through enrollment in career courses.

[8:58:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX explained that in Fairbanks, decisions end up being made at the district level, and he questioned if it is the same in Anchorage.

MS. PARKER confirmed yes, it is, and there is a shared spreadsheet between the two cities.

[8:59:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked whether, if the legislature made this change, the district would need to sit down with the correspondence school and figure out how the payment works. She also inquired whether there have been any recommendations on how it should be done equitably.

MS. PARKER replied there are no current recommendations because of the diversity of the state, but her personal recommendation is to encourage as much parent involvement in the decision-making as possible.

[9:00:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCKAY inquired whether a school that gets a check based on the number of students it has, after the six adjustments, decides how the funds are to be spent. He further inquired whether the legislature would have no further input or control what happens afterwards.

MS. PARKER responded that yes, the legislature would approve the budget, and then the district would decide and create the spreadsheets to use the budget. She noted some possible limitations such as grant money that must be spent on certain things.

[9:03:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT referred back to step three [Special Needs Factor] and provided added commentary on how block grants work and their being tightly bound to the law.

[9:06:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY reminded everyone that statewide school boards are making the decisions about the money they get from

the state, and that these decisions are very difficult. She stressed the importance of meeting students' needs whether that encompasses study through correspondence or brick and mortar schools.

[9:08:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCKAY commented on what appeared to be a lack of control from the legislature "once the money leaves Juneau," and the lack of accountability being that the money is directed to the local districts and school boards.

[9:10:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCORMICK stated he would like to see more of a perspective towards the bush school districts. He opined it is important that individual districts make decisions that suit them best.

[9:11:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD acknowledged in input of both sides of the legislature, as well as local government but commented that "whatever is happening in the local school district, it's failing our kids." She opined that we as a government need to step up.

[9:11:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX pointed out the situations in larger districts as opposed to bush districts is considerably different, as well as the logistics and problems they face, and the legislature must take this into account - especially regarding the funding model.

[9:13:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT gave personal examples of visits to schools in the communities she represents, highlighting examples of local decision making.

[9:15:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE thanked Ms. Parker for her knowledge and for giving the committee much to think about and pursue going forward.

9:16:48 AM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:17 a.m.