

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 24, 2023

8:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Mike Cronk

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S) : CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAMS =

- HEARD

PRESENTATION(S) : CONNECTIONS HOME SCHOOL PORGRAM

- HEARD

PRESENTATION(S) : IDEA HOMESCHOOL

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

HEIDI TESHNER, Acting Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint titled "Alaska's Correspondence Programs."

DON ENOCH, Education Administrator

Special Education

Division of Innovation and Education Excellence

Department of Education and Early Development

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint titled "Alaska's Correspondence Programs."

ELWIN BLACKWELL, School Finance Administrator

School Finance and Facilities Section

Department of Education and Early Development

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during a PowerPoint titled "Alaska's Correspondence Programs."

ELIZABETH GRENINGER, Assessments Administrator

Division of Innovation and Education Excellence

Department of Education and Early Development

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during a PowerPoint titled "Alaska's Correspondence Programs."

DEB RIDDLE, Operations Manager

Division of Innovation and Education Excellence

Department of Education and Early Development

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during a PowerPoint titled "Alaska's Correspondence Programs."

DOUG HAYMAN, Principal

Connections Homeschool Program

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a PowerPoint titled "Connections Homeschool Program."

DEAN O'DELL, Director

IDEA Homeschool

Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "IDEA Homeschool Interior Distance Education of Alaska Galena City School District."

DEB MACKIE, Assistant Director

IDEA Homeschool
Galena, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "IDEA Homeschool Interior Distance Education of Alaska Galena City School District."

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:00:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR JUSTIN RUFFRIDGE called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Representatives Prax, McKay, Himschoot, Story, McCormick (via teleconference), Allard, and Ruffridge were present at the call to order.

PRESENTATION(S): CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAMS

[8:02:12 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that the first order of business would be the presentation on Correspondence Programs.

[8:02:35 AM](#)

HEIDI TESHNER, Acting Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, commenced the PowerPoint [hard copy included in the committee packet] on Alaska's Correspondence Programs on slide 2, titled "Mission, Vision, and Purpose," and went over the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) mission statement. She proceeded to 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.

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER moved on to slide 4, titled "Agenda", which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- History of Correspondence Programs
- Overview of State Statutes and Regulations
- Statement of Assurance and Approval Process
- Current Correspondence Programs
- Correspondence Program Funding
- Statewide Average Daily Membership (ADM) History
- Assessment Participation Rates
- 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rates

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER continued to slide 5, titled "History of Correspondence Programs," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

State-run correspondence program

- Began operation in 1939, offering educational services to students statewide who lived in remote areas of the state with no local schools
 - Was Central Correspondence Study (CCS) then renamed to Alyeska Central School (ACS)
 - Last year of operation was in the 2003-2004 school year
 - Since then, there has been no state-run correspondence program
- During the 2003-2004 school year, correspondence program enrollment statewide exceeded 10,000 students
- During the 2022-2023 school year, there are 34 statewide and district-wide programs in 30 school districts serving over 20,000 students

[8:07:05 AM](#)

DON ENOCH, Education Administrator, Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development, joined the presentation on slide 6, titled "State Statutes." He reminded the committee that the statutes are in the committee packet and provided all details and regulations. He added that the statutes can be found on DEED's website as well. He stated that there are five essential statutes mostly

covering correspondence, which are summarized as follows [original punctuation provided]:

AS 14.03.300 - Established participation requirements and the development of the Student's Individual Learning Plan (ILP)

- Requires a certificated teacher assigned to each enrolled student
- Progress monitoring of student proficiency

• AS 14.03.310 - Identified Student Allotment Opportunity

- Districts may provide an annual allotment for parent's educational expenses
- Districts must account for costs allowable under the statute

• AS 14.07.050 - Addressed textbook approval by local school boards

- Allows for parent purchased materials at the parent's discretion

• AS 14.03.090 - Partisan, Sectarian or denominational doctrines prohibited

• AS 14.17.430 - 90% ADM funding for correspondence program students

MR. ENOCH paraphrased slides 7 and 8, titled "State Regulations," which read as follows as follows [original punctuation provided]:

• 4 AAC 09.040 - Counting Correspondence and Part-time students • 4 AAC 09.160 - Accounting for Fund Balances (10% limit)

• 4 AAC 33.420 - Defines the Department role in approving Correspondence Programs (Assurances/ Scope of Program)

• 4 AAC 33.421 - Individual Learning Plan (ILP) requirements

- Monthly contact, Grading by certificated teacher, Transcripts, Education materials are appropriate to the ILP, Assessment requirements, Tutoring rules

• 4 AAC 33.422 - Fund Accounts - Districts establish allowable expenditures IAW regulatory requirements

• 4 AAC 33.426 - Core Course requirements

- 4 AAC 33.430 - 432 Enrollment of students/students in Special Education (allows for local district coordination for statewide programs)
- 4 AAC 33.460 - Program Review
 - The department may monitor programs and may place programs on a Plan of Correction - Return of funding may be imposed
- 4 AAC 33.490 - Definitions
 - (11) defines a statewide correspondence study program
 - (12)/(13) define curriculum and curriculum materials
 - (14) defines the use of the term "home school"
 - (16) clarifies the teacher role as certificated staff
- 4 AAC 09.015 - Outside of Alaska
 - Correspondence students outside of the state are not eligible for funding

[8:12:02 AM](#)

MR. ENOCH pointed out that the information on slide 9, titled "Statement of Assurance and Approval Process," is in the committee packets. He noted that slide 10, titled "Current Correspondence Programs," contained a footnote to see handout 3 [included in the committee packet] for average daily membership data by school from FY2014 through FY2023.

[8:13:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked whether the IDEA and Raven programs use local special education services.

MR. ENOCH replied that making sure those relationships happen is a more challenging area. Students can receive services, for example, speech services, through video conferencing if it is appropriate for the student; therefore, a local school district would not need to establish or work with the student on it.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked for clarification if there is a partnership between the local district and the correspondence program. She added that she was of the understanding that correspondence programs hire their own special education teachers.

MR. ENOCH said he believed that all the correspondence programs must have special education staff to maintain paperwork involved in the progress of the student.

8:16:05 AM

MR. ENOCH continued on slide 11, titled "Correspondence Program Funding," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- AS 14.17.430
- Districts offering correspondence programs receive funding based on 90% of the correspondence average daily membership (ADM)
- Each correspondence ADM generates \$5,364 (based on a \$5,960 Base Student Allocation)

8:16:29 AM

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked about the figure of 90 percent and if it was fair.

8:16:48 AM

ELWIN BLACKWELL, School Finance Administrator, School Finance and Facilities Section, Department of Education and Early Development, explained that the amount of funding received is laid out in statute. The way the formula works in reference to correspondence funding is that at the end of the average daily membership (ADM) adjustment, it is multiplied by 90 percent, then added back into the adjusted ADM. At that point, he said, the base student allocation (BSA) is applied to the total number to fund the district.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked if the 10 percent were added back in what the difference in the dollars would be.

MR BLACKWELL replied it is roughly \$600 for each student, slightly less than BSA.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD inquired about the other 10 percent that the correspondence courses are not getting, and if that amount "goes back in the pot."

MR. BLACKWELL explained it does not go anywhere because all that is offered is 90 percent of BSA. The other 10 percent was never available to be allocated out the way the statute is written, he said.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked Mr. Blackwell if he found this fair.

MR. BLACKWELL replied that is a policy question the legislature will have to make.

[8:19:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY requested what the cost would be for the policy change.

[8:19:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX referred back to slide 7, regarding state regulations, to "core course requirements," and asked if they are the same for all school districts whether they are brick and mortar or operate correspondence courses.

MR ENOCH confirmed the correspondence requirements are the same.

[8:21:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCKAY inquired about the 10 percent deduction for a stay at home [correspondence] student and asked what the rationale is for that.

MR. BLACKWELL offered his understanding it has to do with the overhead cost. The cost of educating a correspondence student is less than for a brick-and-mortar student where there are additional costs for facility and personnel.

REPRESENTATIVE MCKAY said he agreed with the logic behind Mr. Blackwell's explanation.

[8:24:02 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD stated she thought the correspondence students deserve the extra 10 percent, as they are placing wear and tear on their own home, and parents have to hire tutors and other resources to educate them. She asked if the funds could come from the [higher education investment fund] like what is being done with career technical education (CTE).

MR. ENOCH replied that he is not sure how CTE plays in to the 90 percent.

[8:25:47 AM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER, in response to a previous inquiry from Representative Story, relayed that it would cost \$12.2 million to change correspondence from 90 to 100 percent. In reference to the higher education investment fund, she said it would be a formula change.

[8:26:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT pointed out the spring assessments on DEED's website and referenced the participation rates and accountability for correspondence schools. She asked if participation rates are accountable to a local school board because they are all district based.

MR. ENOCH confirmed that was correct.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT observed that since DEED's budget is transparent, they are financially accountable because it is all open records.

MR. ENOCH concurred.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT noticed great variability in the 2022 assessment for the language arts participation rates in the correspondence program, and 15 percent participation in mathematics. She asked what the academic accountability was when a family chooses a correspondence program to show the child is learning.

MR. ENOCH said that from the point of view of the individual learning plan, there is a requirement that a teacher is assigned to each student to monitor their progress.

[8:29:00 AM](#)

ELIZABETH GRENINGER, Assessments Administrator, Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development, joined the discussion and referenced Representative Himschoot's inquiry. She stated that the regulation that addressed participation in statewide assessments applies to correspondence students as public school students in the state; therefore, it is established that students should participate in the assessments.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT followed up on participation rates in various subjects and asked Ms. Greninger if there was a

mechanism that required the correspondence programs to improve the participation rate so their effectiveness can be determined.

MS. GRENINGER replied that the mechanism in place is the responsibility of the district that houses those correspondence programs. She added that each district is responsible for encouraging participation and ensuring that 95 percent statewide requirement.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated she did not have documentation for prior years, but asked if it is an anomaly that 2022 had a less than 15 percent participation rate.

MS. GRENINGER provided handouts 3 and 4 [included in the committee packet] that showed by program there is some variability because of the enrollment changing significantly.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT acknowledged that the handout was helpful. She asked if correspondence programs are responsive to the state or local board, and if their participation in the statewide assessment is something that they are required to monitor and improve. Additionally, she asked what the lever is to ask the correspondence programs to provide academic accountability in the form of a statewide test.

[8:34:06 AM](#)

MS. GRENINGER said the lever currently is for the accountability system and the participation measure included in the accountability formula that is the place has had an impact on the district. She acknowledged that the change in population causes the lower participation rate, and she further explained that DEED had spent time and effort engaging with some of the larger correspondence program leaders to brainstorm with hopes of improving how barriers are addressed.

[8:36:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked Ms. Greninger to confirm whether the districts have the responsibility for meeting the state assessment requirements.

MS. GRENINGER replied that is correct.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX noted that the districts must not be meeting the regulatory requirement.

MS. GRENINGER replied the districts are falling short of the participation portion of it, and as a result, the state is not meeting the 95 percent participation.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX opined that a direct solution would be to cut funding if requirements are not being met. He asked if there was a report on specific things DEED is doing to resolve the problem.

MS. GRENINGER stated that as an assessment team in office, they had worked closely with the larger correspondence programs as well as with district coordinators across all districts to gather information about what challenges and barriers they are facing. She further explained some of the things the department does to communicate with parents and districts. She related that one of the larger barriers is when parents decide not to have their children tested. She added that there is process documentation available that shares details about when there have been different conversations and meetings.

[8:40:39 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked if the BSA and ADM generation funding goes all the way through the entire foundation formula.

MR. BLACKWELL replied that the way the formula works is to make adjustments for brick-and-mortar students all the way through the formula, and at the tail end of the formula, correspondence students are factored back in. There are no additional factors applied to correspondence ADM, he said.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE clarified his question, and asked if the entire foundation formula and all the numbers apply to correspondence funding.

MR. BLACKWELL said none of those other factors apply to correspondence numbers. He explained DEED would take a look at all the brick-and-mortar schools and come up with a district number based on those students, apply all the factors plus an additional amount for intensive needs students, and then take the 90 percent of correspondence students and add them into the ADM before applying the BSA. None of the previous factors are used in coming up with the correspondence ADM for funding purposes, he confirmed.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked whether an intensive needs student who wanted to be in correspondence programs would not need the intensive needs factor applied.

MR. BLACKWELL replied that in such a case, DEED would count the intensive needs student as one of the district's intensive needs, and that student would generate an additional 13 times the BSA within the overall formula.

[8:44:59 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked if there used to be mandatory assessments. He added that it seemed no school is meeting the 95 percent requirement.

MS. GRENINGER said that through federal regulations, DEED is required to administer statewide assessments in grades 3 through 8, as well as English language arts, math, and science in high school. She said there is also the potential for parents to choose their own child's education pathway that included opting out of the assessments.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked if there was a time in the state where testing was required.

MS. GRENINGER confirmed there was.

[8:47:47 AM](#)

DEB RIDDLE, Operations Manager, Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development, added that there is a statute that parents can opt their students out of assessments and there is currently research being done to find out when that happened. She stated she could provide the information to the committee at a later date.

[8:48:17 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD requested the number throughout the year of students' assessments and surveys. She clarified she would like information on what is required in elementary and high school.

MS. RIDDLE said the information will be gathered for the committee.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD stated she was curious about getting all the survey questions that were requested of the parents.

MS. RIDDLE stated DEED is not allowed as a state to provide surveys to students unless it is a specific one approved, but she added she could get a list by grade span what they are.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked that as a parent, and a survey came to her asking her family "a slew of questions," whether she could request all the surveys of all the questions that the district or state is asking. She asked for confirmation that she cannot get those questions.

MS. RIDDLE replied that as a department, DEED is not allowed to offer surveys to students, but that is something the district can do. She further clarified that she could get a list of the survey questions that the state may send out to parents.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked whether she had to go to the specific school district and ask for the survey and questions.

MS. RIDDLE confirmed that DEED had access to the surveys they offer, but not access to the surveys the districts may offer.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked why DEED does not have access.

MS. RIDDLE explained that the district has the authority to operate through its school board as its governing body.

[8:52:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT offered her belief that the law allowing parents to opt out was in the last five years.

MS. RIDDLE reiterated that DEED would look into when [the opt out option] arose and provide the information to the committee when received.

[8:53:10 AM](#)

MR. BLACKWELL continued the PowerPoint on slide 12, titled "Statewide Average Daily Membership (ADM) History," which broke out the brick-and-mortar ADM versus the correspondence ADM for approximately ten years.

[8:53:43 AM](#)

MS. RIDDLE continued on slide 13, titled "Additional Information," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Assessment Participation Rates - 2014 through 2022
 - English Language Arts (see Handout # 4)
 - Math (see Handout # 5)
- 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rates - 2013 through 2022 (see Handout # 6)

[8:54:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked Mr. Enoch about English language learners (ELL) and whether they stay the same in a correspondence program.

MR. ENOCH replied that everything should stay the same in all the programs except for the administration, which may be more complicated; for example, if a child is physically located in another school district.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT inquired whether parents are allowed to proctor online tests.

MS. GRENINGER added that the ACCESS assessment for ELLs can be offered in some kind of remote capacity but the administration procedures for all DEED's assessments are established in regulation and define who can administer assessments and what trainings are required for those administrators. She said currently, parents are not allowed to administer any of the statewide assessments.

[8:57:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked about ACCESS [for ELLs] participation rates and for feedback on the number of ELLs in correspondence programs.

MS. GRENINGER confirmed that the data can be provided to the committee at a later date. She sought clarification that the data being asked for was referencing English learners participating in a correspondence school, as well as the percentage of those students being tested.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT responded that was correct. She asked whether families were required to provide an education by homeschooling or correspondence. In addition, she sought

clarification if there was demographic data beyond what is in front of the committee for correspondence schools.

MS. RIDDLE replied that DEED would get the information for the committee.

[8:59:53 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:58 a.m. to 9:02 a.m.

PRESENTATION(S): CONNECTIONS HOME SCHOOL PROGRAM

[9:02:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that the next order of business would be the presentation on the Connections Home School Program.

[9:02:48 AM](#)

DOUG HAYMAN, Principal, Connections Homeschool Program, provided a brief professional background and informed the committee to submit questions he can research, since he is new in his position. He began the discussion on slide 2 of the PowerPoint [hard copy included in the committee packet], titled "Elements of Connections Homeschool," and mentioned contents of committee members' packets. He said the Connections program is just "one cog in a big wheel" of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District and answers to many. He continued on slide 3, titled "Enrollment Process," which he described as simple, and read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Event/decision to select homeschool option
- Development of an Individual Learning Plan (ILP)
 - Identify learning target
 - Select curriculum
 - Verify rigor and accreditation
 - Identify expectations and timelines
 - Grading and report procedures
 - Recording of outcomes on transcripts
 - Determine reenrollment and next steps toward goals

MR. HAYMAN added that the vetted curriculum available is varied compared to a brick-and-mortar school and is also designed to achieve short term goals.

9:08:19 AM

MR. HAYMAN began discussing the grading and reporting procedures, and after the parents send in the report card - being they are the teachers - Connections verifies that the reports and curriculum are accurate. The reports are then filed and reported.

9:09:10 AM

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether the state provides the district with specific curriculum guides or objectives that must be met.

MR. HAYMAN assured Representative Prax the answer would be explained on the next slide. He moved to slide 4, which showed the state standards and an actual Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) that contained the standards the course was to address, as well as a grading scale that would be assessed at the time of reporting.

9:13:08 AM

CO-CHAIR ALLARD stated she was alarmed that parents spent a lot for the cost of correspondence tutoring. She asked whether high school students get \$2,600 for the entire year.

MR. HAYMAN affirmed that is Connections' current policy. He said some of the other funds of the BSA will be explained in a later slide.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked whether it was possible to stay under \$2,600 for the entire year considering everything it must cover.

MR. HAYMAN confirmed the limit is \$2,600 and noted that transportation or computers are not something Connections reimburses.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD questioned whether the monthly Internet came out of the \$2,600.

MR. HAYMAN said yes, an Internet reimbursement could be filed. He continued discussing the ILP on slide 4 and pointed out the student in the example had \$1,400 that could be rolled over. He acknowledged that it is more expensive but there was evidence that students and parents do use their entire allotment.

[9:17:00 AM](#)

MR. HAYMAN continued to slide 5, titled "Financial process and considerations," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Allotment deposit - July 1, we are a year-around school.
 - Allotment amount varies by grade level of student
 - \$2200 -Elementary
 - \$2400 -Middle School
 - \$2600 - High School
 - BSA x 90%= To district for homeschool
 - KPBSD model- remainder of allocation goes to:
 - Staffing (PTR 90:1)-
 - Facility and equipment
 - Computers and printers (-\$1000)
 - Sponsored events
 - ½ allotments for late enrollment
 - Basic curriculum
- Allotment expenditure qualification
 - Must support the ILP
 - Exclude faith-based curriculum (qualifies for credit but not reimbursement)
 - Equipment limits per subject \$200 unless preapproved
 - Equipment purchased becomes property of district
 - Rollover remains in account for as long as student is continually enrolled in Connections program
 - ½ allotment if enrolled October 19 - January 10-Academic curriculum only
 - Basic curriculum for enrollments after January 10

[9:20:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked what happens with a correspondence student when a family cannot get the child to the standard.

MR. HAYMAN replied that some of the brick and mortar would be incorporated, as well as suggesting tutoring and alternative curriculum.

[9:21:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked about the success rate of graduation.

MR. HAYMAN replied there is currently a 65 percent success rate, and 66 is the state standard. He added that this year's seniors are at 84 percent; however, that is still not 95 percent, so Connections is not satisfied, he said.

[9:22:54 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked for confirmation that Mr. Hayman had relayed the success rate had been 65 percent and now is almost at 84 percent after his short time in the position.

MR. HAYMAN confirmed that is correct.

[9:23:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT revisited Mr. Hayman's statement about falling back on the brick-and-mortar school if remediation is needed.

MR. HAYMAN said that is correct; it is offered as an option.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked what would happen with the allotment if a student wanted to participate in music programs at a brick-and-mortar school.

MR. HAYMAN explained it is not impacted on the school level and the money goes to the district. He added that up to two classes can be taken at a brick-and-mortar school.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether the 84 percent graduation rate was projected and also inquired about the FAFSA completion.

MR. HAYMAN confirmed that is correct. In response to a follow up question, he affirmed Connections' involvement with FAFSA.

[9:26:23 AM](#)

MR. HAYMAN moved to slide 7, titled "Advantages of homeschooling," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Individualized education
 - Interest driven/career path
 - Organic/real world application
 - Ability to fully integrate all curricular areas
 - Variable pacing

- Can take classes not available in traditional settings
- Controlled/family valued environment
- Financial support including technology (Computers/mifi)
- Travel seasonally (family life not dictated by school schedule)
- Off grid adaptable
 - No commuting
 - Less wasted time during instruction
 - Student will not fall behind due to illness or absenteeism
 - List is nearly infinite based on individual families

[9:28:14 AM](#)

MR. HAYMAN continued on slide 8, titled "Disadvantages of homeschooling," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Parent is the teacher
 - Sometimes difficult to teach your own children
 - Requires parent participation and support
 - Parent expertise varies
- Difficult in a two-income household
- Socialization opportunities (+, -)
- Communication and accountability required

MR. HAYMAN added there are many forms to fill out regarding accountability, and he referred to the contents in the committee packets. He further explained there are many checks and balances, and in addition, phone calls and emailing.

[9:29:45 AM](#)

MR. HAYMAN continued on slide 9, titled "How an increase to the BSA could influence our homeschool program," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Proportional increase
- Recalibrate increase
- Support shared access to curriculum and materials (lending library)
 - Any combination of above
- Support Co-ops
- Specialty workshops
- Tutors

- Social/Emotional support
- Academic intervention support

MR. HAYMAN asked the committee to submit any questions and thanked them for the opportunity to present.

[9:33:25 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 9:33 a.m.

[9:33:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked how Connections' success is measured with its 11 percent participation rate.

MR. HAYMAN replied it is not calculated currently because of the 11 percent, and he stated, "It bothers me more than it bothers you." He said in the homeschool setting, there is a much higher percentage of parents opting out which creates a hurdle. He said he had a plan to increase participation through motivation, for example, availability for secure testing multiple times throughout the day. He added that Connections is a year-round school and can fit with parents' lifestyles.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT inquired whether Connections had a standardized tool similar to MAP Growth.

MR. HAYMAN replied Connections does administer the MAPs three times per year.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether MAP is funded through the district through its 100 percent BSA or a shared resource that is not paid for out of the allocation.

MR. HAYMAN confirmed that is correct.

[9:38:47 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked Mr. Hayman about the assessments and whether parents should be allowed to opt out.

MR. HAYMAN explained the assessments are extremely valuable, and parents must be incentivized, which he stated he is working on.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked Mr. Hayman if he believed the ACT and SAT were valuable when going on to postsecondary education.

Mr. Hayman replied absolutely.

[9:40:33 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:40 a.m. to 9:41 a.m.

[9:41:46 AM](#)

PRESENTATION(S) : IDEA HOMESCHOOL

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that the final order of business would be the presentation on IDEA Homeschool.

[9:42:26 AM](#)

DEAN O'DELL, Director, IDEA Homeschool, began the PowerPoint presentation [hard copy included in the committee packet] by briefly summarizing slides 2, 3, and 4, titled "IDEA Homeschool," "History," and "Service to Alaska," respectively. He said IDEA was instantly successful, and over the years had served over 37,000 students. Currently, there are 6,700 students living in 111 communities that IDEA serves from six regional offices. He explained that within each office, there are a number of certified staff and services provided, as well as public spaces for clubs and events. One of the first decisions made within the program, he explained, was to provide field representatives to homeschool parents that partnered with the IDEA program.

[9:45:17 AM](#)

MR. O'DELL moved to slide 6, titled "Enrollment," which featured a snapshot of student count from October fiscal year 2013 (FY 13) through October FY 23. He said the incremental increases shown may not look significant but represented a 5 to 7 percent growth each year, and staff were also added each year. He said thousands of parents tried homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic and enrollment went from 5,000 to 9,000 students during that time. The following year, he said, many students returned to brick-and-mortar schools, but many stayed because they experienced the joy of homeschooling and gained a greater understanding of individualized education. He added that some parents waited for COVID-19 policies to stabilize within schools, and that resulted in some students returning to brick-and-mortar schools as well. He noted that in FY 16, there was a decrease in enrollment due to Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP) testing requirements, and the authority of parents to opt out.

[9:49:38 AM](#)

MR. O'DELL moved to slide 7, titled "Core Values Living into who we are!" He invited Ms. Mackie to continue the presentation.

[9:50:23 AM](#)

DEB MACKIE, Assistant Director, IDEA Homeschool, joined the presentation and provided a brief background. She summarized IDEA's core values and who IDEA is as an organization.

[9:51:52 AM](#)

MS. MACKIE continued to slide 8, titled "We Believe...", which featured IDEA's commitment and partnership with parents.

[9:52:34 AM](#)

MS. MACKIE proceeded to slide 9, titled "Created by Homeschoolers for Homeschoolers." She explained teaching children at home is different, and wisely, she said, IDEA continued to keep the mission to support dedicated parents who choose to homeschool their children.

[9:53:33 AM](#)

MS. MACKIE moved to slide 10, titled "Responsibilities," and she stated that is something IDEA takes very seriously. The minimums of state regulations are shown on the slide as well.

[9:54:23 AM](#)

MS. MACKIE moved on to slide 11, titled "Going Above and Beyond to Serve," and she stressed that IDEA believes parents should get more than they expect. She summarized other points relating what IDEA provides. She added that parents stated overwhelmingly that they stay with IDEA because of its knowledgeable, resourceful, and caring staff.

[9:56:03 AM](#)

MR. O'DELL continued the presentation on slide 12, titled "Challenges," and he said many are tied to funding. He pointed out that of the six funding formulas shown on the slide, five apply only to brick-and-mortar schools; they are multipliers on top of the BSA.

9:58:08 AM

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE invited questions regarding this formula.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked whether it was fair that correspondence courses aren't included in the entire BSA formula.

MR. O'DELL replied that certain factors are understandably applied to the brick-and-mortar programs.

9:59:18 AM

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether there was a multiplier applied for intensive needs students.

MR. O'DELL explained that he spoke with IDEA's special education director and was told they do not receive intensive needs special education factors. He added he would be glad to do more research to double check this.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT observed there were two presenters that related that correspondence programs do receive intensive needs special education factors and one who said they don't, and she asked for clarification. In addition, she asked Mr. O'Dell to justify why the school size adjustment, the district cost factor, and the CTE factor should be applied to the BSA.

MR. O'DELL responded that while he could not talk about all the factors and how they may be applicable to the IDEA program, within CTE, IDEA works with families to individualize programs and provide resources to build skills. He did not know if he would ask for all the multipliers, he said, but a step in the right direction would be to provide 100 percent of the BSA.

10:01:27 AM

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked for an idea of the percentage of intensive needs students who would be interested in the IDEA program.

MR. O'DELL replied it was a relatively small number, but he was aware of some students who meet that qualification, and he said he would research a number.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked if the IDEA program is attempting to accommodate those [intensive needs] students.

MR. O'DELL replied yes, and slide 13, titled "Special Education," would help answer the question about the services provided to families.

[10:04:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked for clarification whether that would be driven by where the students go - be it homeschool program or brick and mortar - and if it was driven by the accounting process.

MR. O'DELL replied they do not receive any special education funding but are required to live under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and provide all services with the 90 percent funding based on the BSA. He continued the presentation and noted that the seven districts around the state have signed a resolution requesting an amendment adding a special needs multiplier to correspondence schools.

[10:05:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCKAY asked how much money that would be.

MR. O'DELL said he did not have the calculation.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked if it would work to provide a grant to make up the cost difference if the funds could be found to make up the 1.20.

MR. O'DELL replied any support would be welcome. He referred back to the previous slide, titled "Challenges," that indicated IDEA was looking at a number of ways to do deficit spending. He returned to the discussion on testing and logistics, which he said is very challenging, adding that in small communities where staffing may be a problem, IDEA may not be welcome. In larger communities, he said, there are more choices.

[10:09:57 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked how much was allocated per student.

MR. O'DELL replied the allotment per student was the same as Connections, which is \$2,600 per high school.

[10:10:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT commented on IDEA's decision to expand beyond what it is capable of managing. She stated it felt disingenuous to ask for more money, and she inquired about MAP testing.

MR. O'DELL replied that IDEA was making an effort to share with families the value of assessment, and accountability is assessment, he said. He briefly went over core values, and that the true purpose was to honor parent choice.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked what accountability is if it is not assessment.

MR. O'DELL replied that accountability is found in regulation, and those responsibilities are taken very seriously, he said.

[10:13:49 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD said she found it disingenuous of all the public schools to request money without accountability. She noted that Alaska is failing in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as reading. She further noted the number of parents leaving the public school system because the correspondence courses could produce better results.

MS. MACKIE replied she knew there were challenges within the brick-and-mortar schools, and she offered her belief that the accountability piece is just one piece just as it is in correspondence schools. The same ability to determine children's success across a wide range of variables is the way all schools should be treated, she said. She stated the schools should not be [pitted] against each other, as they are on the same team of educating children.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD offered her opinion that parents deserve the right to choose their child's education and are the greatest advocates for their kids.

[10:16:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked what the graduation rate was.

MR. O'DELL replied that the program offers credit recovery for students who will not graduate on time; therefore, IDEA's graduation rate is not as pristine as it should be.

[10:18:04 AM](#)

MS. MACKIE moved to slide 14, titled "Success and Achievement Individualized Learning Works!" She touched on the ways IDEA measures success, and she stressed that IDEA prides itself on the relationship between certified teachers and families and the resources provided. She continued to slide 15, titled "Achievements and Awards," and summarized the various public school competitions in the state and noted that IDEA often wins. She continued to slide 16, titled "Workforce and College Readiness," which she said was done in many ways. She said IDEA students are lifelong learners and it comes out in their ability to change and flex as they leave high school and experience new jobs, careers, and opportunities.

[10:22:46 AM](#)

MS. MACKIE informed the committee that success stories have been included in their packets. The stories represent many different avenues the students have taken after they left IDEA, she said. She concluded the presentation on slide 17, titled "Success!" She added that the students have shown success on many platforms, and in many professions.

[10:25:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said she appreciated the broad understanding about accountability. She asked what the IDEA accreditation process is.

MR. O'DELL responded that he had less than direct participation in that process. He offered his understanding that IDEA presented materials as part of a district accreditation.

[10:26:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX observed the number of students enrolled in IDEA has increased, but Fairbanks, as an example, declined. He asked if correspondence programs are growing relative to statewide enrollment in other district programs.

MR. O'DELL said he believed so. For further clarification, he went back to slide 6, "Enrollment."

CO-CHAIR ALLARD commented that Mr. O'Dell's request for expansion dollars goes to show his testament of success.

[10:29:08 AM](#)

MS. MACKIE directed her comment to Representative Himschoot and said that open enrollment is part of the requirement since IDEA is a public school.

[10:29:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX expressed surprise that not just the IDEA program but other correspondence programs were able to accommodate doubling enrollment.

MS. MACKIE responded that she had to hire and train staff quickly.

[10:32:20 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:32 a.m.