

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 27, 2024

8:00 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

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative Frank Tomaszewski  
Representative Dan Ortiz  
Representative Julie Coulombe  
Representative Jesse Sumner  
Representative Will Stapp  
Representative Alyse Galvin

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 392

"An Act relating to education; relating to funding for Internet services for school districts; relating to charter schools; relating to transportation of public school students; relating to correspondence study funding; relating to the base student allocation; relating to funding for reading improvement plans; relating to teacher retention and recruitment incentives; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 29(FIN)

"An Act relating to civics education, civics assessments, and secondary school graduation requirements; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 392

SHORT TITLE: EDUCATION FUNDING

SPONSOR(s) : RESOURCES

03/18/24 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
03/18/24 (H) EDC, FIN  
03/27/24 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: SB 29

SHORT TITLE: CIVICS EDUCATION

SPONSOR(s) : STEVENS

01/18/23 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/23  
01/18/23 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/18/23 (S) EDC, FIN  
02/22/23 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)  
02/22/23 (S) Heard & Held  
02/22/23 (S) MINUTE(EDC)  
03/06/23 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)  
03/06/23 (S) Moved CSSB 29(EDC) Out of Committee  
03/06/23 (S) MINUTE(EDC)  
03/08/23 (S) EDC RPT CS 5DP SAME TITLE  
03/08/23 (S) DP: TOBIN, BJORKMAN, GRAY-JACKSON,  
STEVENS, KIEHL  
03/14/23 (S) FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532  
03/14/23 (S) Heard & Held  
03/14/23 (S) MINUTE(FIN)  
04/18/23 (S) FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532  
04/18/23 (S) Moved CSSB 29(FIN) Out of Committee  
04/18/23 (S) MINUTE(FIN)  
04/24/23 (S) FIN RPT CS 4DP 1NR NEW TITLE  
04/24/23 (S) DP: STEDMAN, KIEHL, MERRICK, BISHOP  
04/24/23 (S) NR: OLSON  
05/05/23 (S) TRANSMITTED TO (H)  
05/05/23 (S) VERSION: CSSB 29(FIN)  
05/08/23 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
05/08/23 (H) EDC, FIN  
03/27/24 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE TOM MCKAY  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, introduced HB 392.

TREVOR JEPSEN, Staff  
Representative Tom McKay  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented a PowerPoint, titled "HB 392 - Alaska Education Funding," on behalf of Representative McKay, prime sponsor.

DEENA BISHOP, Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the hearing on HB 392.

LON GARRISON, Executive Director  
Association of Alaska School Boards  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 392.

RACHAEL POSEY, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 392.

CHRIS REITAN, Superintendent  
Craig City School District  
Craig, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 392.

LAURA STEELE, representing self  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 392.

CHRISTINA TURMAN, representing self  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 392.

CODY MCCANNA, Principal  
Aurora Borealis Charter School  
Kenai, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 392.

CHANDRA CAFFROY, representing self  
Anchor Point, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 392.

GABE KERRONE, representing self  
Anchor Point, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 392.

ELI KERRONE, representing self  
Anchor Point, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 392.

ANNELIEN KUZMIN, representing self  
Anchor Point, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 392.

ALISTER KUZMIN, representing self  
Anchor Point, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 392.

NATALEE PERVOST, representing self  
Anchor Point, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 392.

LEO ELLSWORTH, representing self  
Anchor Point, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 392.

JESSICA VAUDREUIL, representing self  
Shishmaref, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 392.

JACQUELINE MUEHLBAUER, representing self  
Fairbanks, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 392.

SENATOR GARY STEVENS  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented CSSB 29(FIN).

TIM LAMKIN, Staff  
Senator Gary Stevens  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the hearing on CSSB 29(FIN) on behalf of Senator Stevens, prime sponsor.

LISA BOUDREAU, State Policy Director  
iCivics/CivXNow  
St. Louis, Missouri

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony in support of CSSB 29(FIN).

JOHN PUGH, Former Chancellor  
University of Alaska Southeast  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony in support of CSSB 29(FIN).

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:00:18 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR JAMIE ALLARD** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Representatives Allard, Ruffridge, Prax, McKay, Himschoot, and Story were present at the call to order. Representative McCormick arrived as the meeting was in progress. Also present were Representatives Tomaszewski, Ortiz, Coulombe, Sumner, Stapp, and Galvin.

#### **HB 392-EDUCATION FUNDING**

[8:01:19 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 392, "An Act relating to education; relating to funding for Internet services for school districts; relating to charter schools; relating to transportation of public school students; relating to correspondence study funding; relating to the base student allocation; relating to funding for reading improvement plans; relating to teacher retention and recruitment incentives; and providing for an effective date."

[8:02:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TOM MCKAY, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, introduced HB 392 and read the sponsor statement [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

In the ever-evolving educational landscape of Alaska, the importance of supporting our students, educators, and schools has never been more critical. House Bill 392, introduced by the House Resources Committee, is a comprehensive piece of legislation designed to address several key areas in our educational system. Alaska currently ranks near the bottom of educational

outcomes in the US, and we owe it to our kids and parents to come up with solutions and educational options. This bill addresses multiple facets of our states education system, including public school funding, charter schools, and correspondence programs.

House Bill 392 is a testament to Alaska's commitment to its future generations. By addressing the pressing needs of our educational system through comprehensive funding and support measures, we are not only investing in the educational success of our students but also in the economic and social well-being of our state. As the chair of the House Resources Committee and de-facto sponsor of HB 392, I urge my colleagues in the legislature to support this bill, understanding that the benefits it brings will resonate throughout our communities, laying a stronger foundation for the future of education in Alaska.

[8:04:56 AM](#)

TREVOR JEPSEN, Staff, Representative Tom McKay, Alaska State Legislature, presented a PowerPoint, titled "HB 392 - Alaska Education Funding" [hard copy included in the committee packet], during the hearing on HB 392 on behalf of Representative McKay, prime sponsor. He began on slide 2, titled "Alaska Education System," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ▶ Alaska currently & historically has lagged behind in education outcomes
- ▶ Education more important now than ever as low-skilled jobs are increasingly being eliminated, a trend that will be exacerbated in coming years
- ▶ Solution can't be just based on BSA increase; Alaskan's deserve more inventive and pragmatic solutions
- ▶ The legislature has time for another shot at an education funding bill in the current session and our students need it

MR. JEPSEN proceeded to slide 3, titled "Base Student Allocation," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ▶ Rampant inflation in recent years justifies a significant BSA increase to allow districts security when crafting budgets
- ▶ Continued reliance on one-time spending outside of the formula works but isn't the best solution
- ▶ HB 392 proposes a \$680 increase to BSA from \$5,960 to \$6,640

[8:07:49 AM](#)

MR. JEPSEN continued on slide 4, titled "Public Charter Schools," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ▶ Public charter schools represent "public-school choice"
- ▶ Alaska charter schools recently ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the nation in by the Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG) at Harvard
- ▶ Alaska charter school performance: 32.1% of a standard deviation higher than the national average in reading and math
- ▶ HB 392 introduces a new pathway for charter school termination appeals & introduces a state charter school coordinator position

MR. JEPSEN stressed that charter schools represent a "bright spot" on Alaska's education system. He moved to slide 5, titled "Correspondence Programs" and stated that Alaska has over 30 correspondence programs and over 20,000 correspondence students. The slide read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ▶ Correspondence students currently only funded at 0.9 of average daily membership (ADM) for calculation of adjusted ADM
- ▶ HB 392 version A funds them at 1.0
- ▶ Example: if a district has 10 correspondence students, (10 x 0.9 = 9), only 9 students would be added to the adjusted ADM before being multiplied by the BSA

MR. JEPSEN advanced to slide 6, titled "Alaska Reads Act Funding," and he described the Act as a landmark piece of legislation. Slide 6 read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ▶ Alaska Reads Act signed by Governor Dunleavy in June 2022
- ▶ Focused on advancing reading levels for students in kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade
- ▶ Labeled "unfunded mandate" by many due to lack of specified funds in statute
- ▶ HB 392 provides an additional \$500 in funds for students in K-3 who are determined to have a reading deficiency under new section 14.30.773

[8:10:41 AM](#)

MR. JEPSEN proceeded to slide 7, titled "Transportation of Students Funding," which he related was the final funding aspect of the bill. Slide 7 read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ▶ Transportation funds (AS 14.09.010(a)) only applied to public school students
- ▶ Last increase to transportation funding was FY2013
- ▶ HB 392 represents a roughly 18% increase for transportation funding

[8:11:16 AM](#)

MR. JEPSEN gave the sectional analysis to HB 392, shown on slides 8 and 9, titled "HB 392 Version A Sectional Analysis," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ▶ Section 1: Amends AS 14.03.127(a) to allow schools districts qualifying for discounted internet services to receive funding to bring speeds up to 100 megabits per second (previously 25 megabits per second)

- ▶ Section 2: Adds a new section allowing charter schools to appeal to the commissioner of DEED if their contract is terminated by a local school board
- ▶ Section 3: Adds a new section under 14.03.277 establishing a charter school coordinator position with the department
- ▶ Section 4: Repeals previous 14.09.010(a) (Transportation of students) and replaces with updated 14.09.010(a) that reflects increased transportation funding
- ▶ Section 5: Amends AS 14.17.430 to increase adjusted ADM factor for correspondence students from 0.9 to 1.0
- ▶ Section 6: Increase BSA by \$680 to a total of \$6,640
- ▶ Section 7: Adds new section which mandates state provide \$500 for each K-3 student determine to have a reading deficiency
- ▶ Section 8: Establishes teacher recruitment and retention incentives for certificate full-time teachers
- ▶ Section 9: Provides for an immediate effective date for section 1 (internet funding for schools)
- ▶ Section 10: Provides for an effective date of July 1, 2024 (FY25) for sections 2 through 8

MR. JEPSEN concluded on slide 10, titled "Sponsor Recommendations for (H)EDU Committee Substitute," and went over the proposed committee substitute (CS). Slide 10 read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ▶ Section 1 - Remove entirely. Funding for internet schools has already passed both bodies of the 33<sup>rd</sup> legislature in a different vehicle (HB193)
- ▶ Section 2 - Replace "commissioner" with "state board" regarding the charter school termination appeal process

- ▶ Section 5 - Use special needs factor of 1.2 for ADM-based correspondence funding instead of a factor of 1 (current statutory factor is 0.9)
- ▶ Section 7 - provide \$180 for every student K-3 instead of \$500 for those determined to have a reading deficiency; Provide an additional \$100 for K-3 students in a title 1 school
- ▶ Section 8 - Lump sum payments for teachers; Remove entirely.
- ▶ New section - Include state board-authorized charter school language under a new section 14.03.254

[8:15:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD announced the committee would hear invited testimony.

[8:15:59 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:15 a.m. to 8:16 a.m.

[8:16:53 AM](#)

DEENA BISHOP, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), answered questions during the hearing on HB 392 and noted for the committee that Karen Morrison and Deborah Riddle from DEED were also available to answer questions.

[8:17:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether there would be an opportunity to ask questions referencing the CS that was currently not in front of the body.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD confirmed there would be time for questions and suggested waiting until the CS was ready.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT expressed that her lack of clarity came from the changes that might be in the CS. She offered her understanding that the "old SB 140," with teacher bonuses added, was in front of the body.

[8:18:37 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER BISHOP said that the CS as described in bullet 3 is 1.2 for average daily membership (ADM) funding, and .2 speaks to services for students. She briefly explained the steps in the algorithms in the formulas that speak to cost differentials and school size in Alaska. Insomuch as correspondence students are students, she said, the change supports the learning of students in various services in which they can partake.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT sought clarity on the special needs factor.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP confirmed it would be included in the 1.2. She said every child is treated as a whole child and Mr. Jepsen had shared how that was calculated.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT observed that the special needs category multiplier is a block grant, and districts must have a plan of service. She inquired how a plan of service would be rendered with individual families being the educators.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP responded that when a student is in public school correspondence it is articulated in regulations to include meetings with teachers to set up an individual learning plan (ILP) that speaks to the type of services a student needs, which is gathered through assessment. She added that special services are served through the district and funds go to parents through the ILP.

[8:22:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether the CS would contain any guardrails on the additional funding being used for the allotment that families receive. She offered an observation that if the expense for special programs is falling to districts, the 1.2 would not be allowed to be used to increase the allotment.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP explained that the home school district would determine the allotment number, and she further clarified that the charter schools are located within the districts that determine those costs.

[8:23:38 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD interjected that she would "reign this in" being the CS is not ready and keep the conversation to what is actually in before the committee.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said her questions pertain to what she considered a "familiar bill."

[8:24:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY noted that when special education plans are made for correspondence students there is a legal obligation, and she asked whether the local district is responsible if there is a legal suit.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP confirmed that is correct.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked where the money would come from to pay for the 20 percent increase.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD commented that the question could wait for Mr. Jepsen to rejoin the conversation.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY explained that her question had to do with charter schools and local school board authorization or state board authorization and, if it were state board, who would assess the local impacts to the neighborhood schools since finances are based on enrollment.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP responded she was not sure the local impact to schools was understood and alluded to educational or economic impacts of what children are learning.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY referred to loss of electives and losing kids.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that the type of program students receive is based at the local school level. She emphasized that it would be difficult to track, as all schools do not offer the same education and are designed to serve their particular area.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY pointed out that when there are fewer students, there is less money; therefore, there would be fewer offerings.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP explained that when the number of students decreases students, DEED must make different choices such as closing schools or combining programs. It is about organizing and prioritizing, she said.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked how the state board would know the impact on the choices the neighborhood schools would be making if there is projected enrollment in a charter school resulting in less enrollment in the neighborhood school.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP answered that the state board would work directly with the district and support all schools in the state.

[8:30:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT shared that she was still digesting the suggestions in the current bill for correspondence study and looking at a greater investment of the public dollar. She asked about accountability measures and proof that the investment was paying off.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP confirmed that all schools in Alaska are already financially accountable.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked about accountability measures surrounding the ILP.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP offered her experience that the ILP is taken seriously, and parents believe in the partnership in the education for their children. She added that there are four meetings per year required in regulation and it is essentially a contract.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT recognized the rights of parents to withhold testing and that there is a 14 percent rate of testing in correspondence programs. She asked whether that was considered adequate for accountability purposes.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP confirmed that she was not sure and would need to see the numbers. She praised measures of academic progress (MAP) growth, which demonstrates a student's ability according to their grade level - not only within the district but within the nation.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT added that MAP also allows seeing discreet skills.

[8:35:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX gave an example of enrolling his children and getting the assessments to make sure they were on track, so there was accountability. He asked whether there was a way to

transmit it up to the state level so that the public knows the Interior Distance Education of Alaska (IDEA) program is working.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP responded that DEED receives permission from districts to show MAP Growth data aggregates that demonstrates that success.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether the correspondence programs follow a standard for the ILPs.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP explained that correspondence schools are public schools that also participate in regular assessments given in Alaska schools. She added that the ILP is based off a template based off regulation, but the information would be the same.

[8:38:52 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD referenced Representative McCormick's button on his suit being possible propoganda that she stated legislators are not allowed to display; therefore, she said, she would contact Legislative Legal Services.

[8:39:08 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:39 a.m. to 8:45 a.m.

[8:45:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCORMICK asked whether DEED supported a raise to the base student allocation (BSA).

COMMISSIONER BISHOP confirmed yes.

[8:46:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT referred to Mr. Jepsen's presentation referencing wait lists for charter schools and explained she was unsuccessful in finding further information online on the number of waitlisted families for charter schools.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District ["Mat-Su"] and the Anchorage School District (ASD) have the largest amount of charter schools and the data is held locally. She said she did not have the exact numbers but offered an appropriate approximation from her experience that

about 2,000 children per year are waiting to get into charter schools.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether families are allowed to apply to multiple charter schools.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that they may have a first and second choice, but for the overall numbers, she could dig deeper into the data.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT inquired on how many charter schools have been declined by their local boards.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP said DEED does not collect those data currently.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked about a number representing how many families currently cannot get into a charter school as would like.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP reiterated that she did not have that piece of information and that the aforementioned 2,000 may be single families, children, or multiples.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether the wait list included optional programs and magnet schools in addition to charter schools.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP confirmed the numbers were specifically for charter schools.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT requested substantiation of the numbers.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that she could contact districts.

[8:53:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE referenced the CS recommendations discussed earlier during the final slide on Section 7 and asked for a description of what \$180 could do for a child with a reading deficiency.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP stated that she would not speak directly to the funds in the CS recommendations but that, in general, DEED supported overall K-3 reading. In addition to core reading, she

said the amount could include tutors and an individual reading improvement plan (IRIP).

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked how much tutoring \$180 could provide and expressed curiosity towards additional funding for Title 1 schools.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP provided a brief history of Title 1 schools and stated that the premise to Title 1 grew out of a study of assets kids could get depending on socioeconomic status. She said there is evidence that students that have reading deficiencies attend Title 1 schools and additional funds are provided.

[8:58:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE revisited his first question and asked how many additional services \$180 provides if one attends a Title 1 school and has a reading deficiency.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP said the programs are determined through a multitiered system of success, and inputs and charges are at the local level because of the local price. She offered her belief that the additional funds are for the additional students that may need to be served, and there is evidence that the need is greater in "title schools" where there are more kids. As for what is received with the amount, it depends on the IRIP itself at the school level, she explained.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked Commissioner Bishop to speak more generally instead of so specifically on how - if she were in charge of a school district - she would utilize funds for a child with a reading deficiency.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that she would put the money back and invest directly into teachers and additional aid and have opportunities for families to engage the teachers. She added that local funding to schools is empowering, and it works.

[9:04:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE expressed that he is attempting to understand the process behind what Section 7 would do, and if passed into law, whether it would look like a block grant put into a district.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP affirmed that she did not think DEED should pay for deficiencies and would not want to incentivize something "we don't want to see to begin with." She further stated that she would incentivize good teaching and reading instruction.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked Commissioner Bishop if she supported Section 7 or whether there could be a better way to do it.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP said she supported setting aside funding specifically for reading. She observed that the debates here are about money and accountability.

[9:10:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE inquired what Commissioner Bishop's opinion was of Section 7, relating that "certain people get this or that."

COMMISSIONER BISHOP reiterated that she would like all kids to be supported, but within the formula, it would allow smaller schools to have additional funds which depends on the body. She added that directing funds to the Alaska Reads Act is advantageous to the success of children.

[9:11:52 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked Commissioner Bishop whether she believed that opening up more charter schools would alleviate or minimize a waiting list.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP responded that she believed if there were additional charter schools to offer additional parent choice that wait lists in districts would go down.

[9:12:19 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD opened public testimony on HB 392.

[9:12:54 AM](#)

LON GARRISON, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards, testified in support of HB 392 on behalf of the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB). He stated that AASB expressed a deep appreciation for the legislature's continued efforts to address public education issues, mainly school funding. He stated that AASB was thankful for the proposed \$680 increase to the BSA; however, it is far less than the amount

needed to account for inflation. The additional funding for implementing the Alaska Reads Act is critical to its success and the impact it will have on students, he opined. He noted that AASB believed the proposed appeal process for charter school terminations and the dedicated position at DEED supporting charter schools were needed improvements. He added that AASB advocates for efforts that enhance and support charter school applications through local and state school boards.

[9:15:15 AM](#)

RACHAEL POSEY, representing self, testified in support of HB 392 and stressed that she supported raising the BSA to \$680. She said schools need funding to budget and plan for the year. She expressed concern with the new language about a state board authorizing charter schools and opined that having that remain with local school boards should not be changed. Education funding as a priority should be important to everyone for many reasons, one being it could help the future workforce in the state, she said.

[9:16:30 AM](#)

CHRIS REITAN, Superintendent, Craig City School District, testified in support of HB 392 and offered his belief that the proposed legislation would support the Alaska public school system by providing increases to Internet speeds, the BSA, and school transportation, as well as supporting correspondence students and the Alaska Reads Act. He added that his testimony included "cautious support" for the bill due to language related to the operation of charter schools, and that he is an advocate for locally developed school choice options in which charter schools are one critical component. He further explained his concern that the proposed legislation would allow DEED to override a school district if the school district disbanded a charter school, because the language oversteps the authority of elected school board members in governing their locally provided programs. He expressed his appreciation to the committee for continuing to have important conversations.

[9:18:33 AM](#)

LAURA STEELE, representing self, testified in support of HB 392. She stated that an increase in the BSA is needed, and she opined that while the amount of \$680 is not enough to keep up with inflation, it is better than nothing. She recognized the public support for an increase and stressed her belief that investing

in the state's children is an investment in the future and economic prosperity for the state. Another year of budget cuts cannot be afforded, she said, and she urged support for HB 392.

[9:19:55 AM](#)

CHRISTINA TURMAN, representing self, testified in support of HB 392 and of the funding schools so desperately need, and she acknowledged the "hard job" the committee has to do. She said she is a parent who has watched four schools close in three years, schools losing programs, and class sizes increasing, and she stressed that accountability is needed.

[9:21:53 AM](#)

CODY MCCANNA, Principal, Aurora Borealis Charter School, testified during the hearing on HB 392 and opined that the charter school approval process should stay as it is. He described the increase in the BSA in Section 6 as being a minimum increase, and if it does not happen this year, cuts will have to be made, he said. He opined that an increase to fund the Alaska Reads Act is also needed.

[9:24:04 AM](#)

CHANDRA CAFFROY, representing self, testified during the hearing on HB 392 and shared her experience in wanting to get a charter school started due to a public school "failing the community." She stated she would like to see responsible funding and accountability to budget inflation. She added that she would like to see teachers' personal and political agendas left out of the classroom and offered her belief many of parents' concerns are the evidence of mass exodus from public schools.

[9:26:33 AM](#)

GABE KERRONE, representing self, testified during the hearing on HB 392. He offered his belief that there should be charter schools to offer a different curriculum and students could learn things closer to "their culture." He spoke to being involved in sports and the drive to participate is too far for his parents. He stated charter schools could bring much more potential.

[9:28:53 AM](#)

ELI KERRONE, representing self, testified during the hearing on HB 392 and offered his support for obtaining a charter school.

He said he did not think teachers were getting paid for the hours spent teaching but if there were a charter school that may change. He further offered his support for having sports through the charter school.

[9:30:30 AM](#)

ANNELIEN KUZMIN, representing self, testified during the hearing on HB 392. She said she is thankful for the charter school close to her house and having the opportunity to choose from curriculum.

[9:32:18 AM](#)

ALISTER KUZMIN, representing self, testified during the hearing on HB 392. He said those who create charter schools believe they increase the learning opportunity to provide greater access to quality education. Charter schools are smaller than public schools and parents are more involved in their kids' educations, he opined.

[9:33:28 AM](#)

NATALEE PERVOST, representing self, testified during the hearing on HB 392. She opined charter schools are needed because of the focus on the subjects that matter and the small amount of students so the teacher can focus more on the students who need help. Charter schools bring extra activities that may not be offered in a public school, and there is more hands-on activity, she said.

[9:34:46 AM](#)

LEO ELLSWORTH, representing self, testified during the hearing on HB 392. He said charter schools give more opportunities to kids, especially to do the sports they love.

[9:36:02 AM](#)

JESSICA VAUDREUIL, representing self, testified during the hearing on HB 392. She observed that there was a focus on condemning or scrutinizing programs that are actually working, and she expressed that "it seems like you want to" micromanage correspondence programs. The reason the programs are working is that parents are involved, and they need to be left alone to do what they are doing. Teachers cannot just teach, and now kids are in correspondence schools and children are learning. She

said there must be school choice and she did not understand why there must be such a monopoly.

[9:38:13 AM](#)

JACQUELINE MUEHLBAUER, representing self, testified in support of HB 392 and stated that she supported a BSA increase of \$680 or more to local schools.

[9:38:45 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD, after ascertaining no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 392.

[9:39:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked for public testimony to be open on the CS once it is completed.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD replied that she could take that up with Co-Chair Ruffridge who may be chairing during that time.

[HB 392 was held over.]

### SB 29-CIVICS EDUCATION

[9:39:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD announced that the final order of business would be CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 29(FIN), "An Act relating to civics education, civics assessments, and secondary school graduation requirements; and providing for an effective date."

[9:40:23 AM](#)

SENATOR GARY STEVENS, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented CSSB 29(FIN). He paraphrased the sponsor statement to SB 29 [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

SB 29 is intended to improve awareness of the importance of civics education in Alaska.

While most Americans agree on the importance of preparing young people for citizenship in a democracy, civics education has received diminishing attention in schools over the past couple of decades. There has

been a gradual paradigm shift in preparing students first for college and jobs, responding to increasing accountability demands, and heavy emphasis on mathematics, reading, and writing. Experts believe a decline in civic engagement, such as the decline in voting rates among young voters since 18-year-olds were given the right to vote in 1972, may be a direct result of the decrease in emphasis placed on civics. Coupled with the present day political climate we are observing, many are calling for a return to civility.

One response to this decline in civic engagement, has been for states to develop content standards in civics or government, which occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s. This was an effort to ensure students have a basic understanding of the fundamentals of how our government works, of the documents on which American democracy is based, and of basic democratic values. Notwithstanding state efforts to improve instruction in the core academic disciplines, states should also establish statewide assessments aligned with their civics standards.

While many individuals and organizations have sought to address the poor condition of civics education, the problem remains acute. Strong state policies are needed to establish and reinforce the fact that preparation for civic life is equally as important for preparation for higher education and careers. In fact, preparation for active citizenship was a foundational principle of public education in America from its beginning, and it is a principle that must be reaffirmed by each generation.

By passing SB 29, Alaska will join with other states in an effort to restore attention to the importance of civics education in our schools, and ultimately in steadying civic engagement within our country.

I appreciate your consideration of this legislation.

SENATOR STEVENS added that the bill would task the state with reviewing and modernizing state standards for civics.

[9:43:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked Senator Stevens how he came up with the 70 percent cut score and why it was so important that students must pass a test to get their diploma.

SENATOR STEVENS replied they can take the class and pass, and then not take the test at all. He said that the test would consist of approximately 25 questions and further explained why taking a class would be more beneficial.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY pointed out that there is not a fiscal note for districts to be able to provide a staff person for a part-time class.

SENATOR STEVENS expressed his annoyance that each time he dealt with education, the first thing he heard was "unfunded mandate." He said billions are given to education and school districts should be expected to provide basic education, which he opined is citizenship.

[9:46:06 AM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, answered questions during the hearing on CSSB 29(FIN) on behalf of Senator Stevens, prime sponsor, and explained that the test is based on an exam designed for those who are seeking U.S. citizenship, and a passing score is 60 percent. The original bill had that same figure, but in the grading system, 70 percent is a "C-minus" which he described as a reasonable minimal passing score.

[9:47:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked what standards the U.S. Department of Homeland Security used when creating the test as well as who decided "this is what kids need to know."

SENATOR STEVENS articulated that it was not just directed to kids but for any entering citizen.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT reiterated her question regarding the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

MR. LAMKIN said it was developed federally and he could dig into the specifics regarding the development of the test.

[9:48:21 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD welcomed invited testifiers.

[9:48:58 AM](#)

LISA BOUDREAU, State Policy Director, iCivics/CivXNow, gave invited testimony in support of CSSB 29(FIN). She stressed that CivXNow ("the coalition") recognized that the issue is urgent, and she would speak to solutions that exist. She pointed out that since 2021, 20 states have adopted 22 policies aligning with the coalition's policy recommendations, and she offered a brief explanation as to what goes into the recommendations as well as speaking to survey results. Civics has been neglected over the past 50 years and 44 percent of school districts have cut back on instructional time over the last 20 years, she explained. State legislators outside of Alaska have taken notice and she highlighted examples from several states. She said the key to the coalition's policy recommendations is that more time must be spent on civics in schools so that students can walk away with the knowledge and skills necessary that come from high quality civics education. The bill would create course time for civics in high school and civics tests for high school graduation, and dedicated course time on civics would be the answer to what ails the nation, she opined. She further explained that the coalition is investing its time in working directly with the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) and various Tribal councils to create online resources and training. She thanked the committee for the time and attention and welcomed questions from committee members.

[9:53:55 AM](#)

JOHN PUGH, Former Chancellor, University of Alaska Southeast, gave invited testimony in support of CSSB 29(FIN). He provided a brief personal and professional background and highlighted his vast government experience. He offered his belief that the importance of the bill is the knowledge gained about how government works, key documents that formed the government, and learning about elected officials are key for people to engage in their civic responsibilities. He gave an example of research where individuals who have this knowledge engage more than others who do not and are active in student government and clubs, as well as legislative internships. Students who get knowledge and engagement in civics at an early age carry the knowledge forward and become active voters and participants in local and federal government, he said. He concluded that the bill alone may not stop the decline in young people voting but could increase engagement in civic activities.

9:57:06 AM

CO-CHAIR ALLARD noted the morning's time constraints and requested that committee members keep questions to a minimum.

9:57:23 AM

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE inquired about the intent of the bill and asked whether state government would be included.

MR. LAMKIN replied that is agreeable. He added that there may be no wrong answers to the bill and the ultimate goal is to improve young people's participation and understanding of what it is to be a citizen; therefore, a state government format would be appropriate in this context.

9:58:23 AM

REPRESENTATIVE STORY drew attention to the effective date of July 1, 2024, noting that the curriculum needed to be developed by the board, and she asked whether a 2025 timeline would be needed.

MR. LAMKIN explained that if the sectional analysis were taken up, he would have noted a consideration to adjust the timeline to 2025 or 2026.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY expressed confusion regarding the option of taking the class or the test. She further discussed the district's curriculum and whether one would receive a secondary school diploma unless the student has completed a semester.

MR. LAMKIN clarified that on page 2, line 3, the options are to take the class, take the test, or have a waiver. Any of the three would allow one to continue, he said.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY sought affirmation that one would not need to take a class.

MR. LAMKIN confirmed that was correct.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked whether Senator Stevens considered project-based learning in relation to motivation towards civics rather than having tests.

MR. LAMKIN responded that that was presumed to occur, but staff are trying to be cautious not to be overly descriptive as they approach the project.

10:01:19 AM

CO-CHAIR ALLARD announced that CSSB 29(FIN) was held over.

10:01:38 AM

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:02 a.m.