

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

May 3, 2024

8:06 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

HOUSE BILL NO. 400

"An Act relating to correspondence study programs; relating to allotments for correspondence study programs; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSHB 400 (EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 24 (FIN)

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

- MOVED CSSB 24 (FIN) OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 400

SHORT TITLE: CORRESPONDENCE STUDY PROGRAMS; ALLOTMENTS

SPONSOR(s): EDUCATION

04/26/24	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/26/24	(H)	EDC, FIN
05/01/24	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
05/01/24	(H)	Heard & Held
05/01/24	(H)	MINUTE (EDC)
05/03/24	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: SB 24

SHORT TITLE: PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

SPONSOR(s): GRAY-JACKSON

01/18/23 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/23
01/18/23 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/23 (S) EDC, HSS, 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 SB 24 Out of Committee
03/06/23 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
03/08/23 (S) EDC RPT 4DP 1NR
03/08/23 (S) DP: TOBIN, GRAY-JACKSON, STEVENS, KIEHL
03/08/23 (S) NR: BJORKMAN
03/23/23 (S) HSS AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/23/23 (S) Heard & Held
03/23/23 (S) MINUTE(HSS)
04/11/23 (S) HSS AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/11/23 (S) Heard & Held
04/11/23 (S) MINUTE(HSS)
04/13/23 (S) HSS AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/13/23 (S) Moved CSSB 24(HSS) Out of Committee
04/13/23 (S) MINUTE(HSS)
04/14/23 (S) HSS RPT CS 3DP 2NR SAME TITLE
04/14/23 (S) NR: WILSON, KAUFMAN
04/14/23 (S) DP: TOBIN, DUNBAR, GIESSEL
02/07/24 (S) FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
02/07/24 (S) Heard & Held
02/07/24 (S) MINUTE(FIN)
02/15/24 (S) FIN AT 1:30 PM SENATE FINANCE 532
02/15/24 (S) Moved CSSB 24(FIN) Out of Committee
02/15/24 (S) MINUTE(FIN)
02/19/24 (S) FIN RPT CS 4DP SAME TITLE
02/19/24 (S) DP: HOFFMAN, OLSON, KIEHL, BISHOP
03/06/24 (S) TRANSMITTED TO (H)
03/06/24 (S) VERSION: CSSB 24(FIN)
03/11/24 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/11/24 (H) HSS, EDC, FIN
04/11/24 (H) HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106
04/11/24 (H) Heard & Held
04/11/24 (H) MINUTE(HSS)
04/16/24 (H) HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106
04/16/24 (H) Moved CSSB 24(FIN) Out of Committee
04/16/24 (H) MINUTE(HSS)
04/17/24 (H) HSS RPT 3DP 1DNP 1NR 1AM

04/17/24 (H) DP: FIELDS, MCCORMICK, MINA
04/17/24 (H) DNP: RUFFRIDGE
04/17/24 (H) NR: PRAX
04/17/24 (H) AM: SUMNER
04/29/24 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/29/24 (H) Heard & Held
04/29/24 (H) MINUTE (EDC)
05/03/24 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

JAMES "BUD" SEXTON, Staff
Representative Justin Ruffridge
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of Version U to HB 400.

DEAN O'DELL, Director
IDEA Homeschool
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony in support of HB 400.

BRIAN ROZELL, Principal
CyberLynx Homeschool & Correspondence Program
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony in support of HB 400.

DOUG HAYMAN, Principal
Connections Homeschool
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony in support of HB 400.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 400.

CHRIS REITAN, Superintendent
Craig City School District
Craig, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 400.

LEIGH SLOAN, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 400.

ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 400.

MELISSA GORDAOFF, representing self

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 400.

CHERIE TAYLOR, representing self

Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 400.

CHRISTY MONTERO, representing self

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 400.

NICHOLE CONNOLLY, representing self

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 400.

PENNY VADKA, representing self

Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 400.

BETSY CAMPBELL, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 400.

SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented CSSB 24 (FIN).

DEENA BISHOP, Commissioner

Department of Education and Early Development

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on HB 400.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:06:46 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR JUSTIN RUFFRIDGE called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. Representatives Himschoot, Prax, Allard, Ruffridge, McCormick, McKay, and Story were present at the call to order.

HB 400-CORRESPONDENCE STUDY PROGRAMS; ALLOTMENTS

[8:07:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 400, "An Act relating to correspondence study programs; relating to allotments for correspondence study programs; and providing for an effective date." [Before the committee, adopted as a working document by a vote of 4-3, on 5/1/24, was the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 400, Version 33-LS1571\U, Bergerud, 4/30/24, ("Version U").]

[8:08:31 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:08 a.m. to 8:09 a.m.

[8:09:28 AM](#)

JAMES "BUD" SEXTON, Staff, Representative Justin Ruffridge, Alaska State Legislature, provided an overview of HB 400, Version U, and explained that it speaks to the correspondence programs and deals with some of the recent changes to do with court rulings. He offered to recite the sectional analysis at the will of the committee.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE added that he wanted to make sure there was an understanding of what the bill intended to address, which were learning plans and the allotment program. He welcomed invited testifiers.

[8:11:45 AM](#)

DEAN O'DELL, Director, IDEA Homeschool, gave invited testimony in support of HB 400 and provided information about Interior Distance Education of Alaska's (IDEA) allotment systems. He began a PowerPoint [hard copy included in the committee packet], titled "IDEA Homeschool Interior Distance Education of Alaska Galena City School District," beginning on slide 7, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Regulations and policies...

- Allotment purchases (simplified):
- Purchases must be tied to the established learning plan, must not conflict with regulation, and must abide by policies that IDEA has established as 'not excessive' and 'appropriate'.
- Allotments are monitored through our Family Allotment System Tracker (FAST) electronic system.
- Regulation requires that materials be returned to IDEA if they are not consumable or otherwise depreciated.

MR. O'DELL continued on slide 8, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Allotment Purchases and Reimbursements

- FAST Process and Review:
- Plan Review: Certified staff verify that the purchase aligns with the ILP and student needs.
- Regulatory Review: Ordering staff verify that the purchase is 'fundable', and that it meets regulatory guidelines. This includes comparing a class/curriculum to vetted/approved lists.
- Policy Review: Ordering staff also verify compliance with district and program guidelines.

MR. O'DELL added that the administrative review is for anything that might have been rejected that families want to appeal. During the statewide discussion, the question had arisen whether IDEA could continue without an allotment, and it was hard to comprehend how that would work, he said. The allotment ensures that students have equal access to funding.

[8:16:54 AM](#)

MR. O'DELL said he appreciated the latest version of the bill and gave examples of the vast majority of students in all districts and what makes homeschooling such a powerful opportunity.

[8:20:23 AM](#)

MR. O'DELL continued his testimony and spoke to post-secondary support being a big part of IDEA's strategic plans and all correspondence programs, and that the allotment is the key to that support and those opportunities. He touched on the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS), as well as IDEA's growing number

of partnerships with organizations and apprenticeships in dozens of fields of interest. He pointed out that the feedback he gets from universities is that IDEA's students are respectful and prepared.

[8:23:27 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE requested that Mr. O'Dell remain online for questions from committee members.

[8:23:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether materials get returned when families are done with the program.

MR. O'DELL confirmed that is correct; it is state regulation to return non-consumable materials.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether IDEA participated in the program that allowed students to use their allotment as tuition, and whether IDEA will have to change practices. She further inquired about a number of approximately 200 students.

MR. O'DELL replied that 2.9 percent of students were availing themselves of the opportunity to pay for non-sectarian classes at local private schools and those families could be affected by regulation or the law. In response to a follow-up question, he confirmed the number was 210 students.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT expressed appreciation for the slide showing how kids are doing well, and she requested that IDEA families measure building-based programs not on test scores.

[8:27:55 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE commented that he had not heard Mr. O'Dell characterize testing in neighborhood schools as being the only thing necessary, but he allowed Mr. O'Dell a chance to respond.

[8:28:20 AM](#)

MR. O'DELL responded that recent conversations addressed the desire to change the whole narrative not only for Alaska, but the whole nation. Test scores have a place and have value but are not the best way to evaluate how a student is doing.

[8:29:14 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked how much IDEA received per child for a portion of the base student allocation (BSA).

MR. O'DELL confirmed it was 90 percent, which was just under \$5,400, and that IDEA does not receive the multipliers that other schools receive. He added that the amount is the bulk of the financial support IDEA receives from the state.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD referred to scholarship funds and testing not being mandatory to get into universities and asked Mr. O'Dell how he felt about it.

MR. O'DELL restated his previous comments about assessments and that there are other ways to evaluate how students are doing. Whether it should be the "end all," IDEA does not think that is the case, he stated.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD circled back to the student allotment and asked Mr. O'Dell to clarify the numbers and whether the remaining amount goes back into the school district.

MR. O'DELL confirmed IDEA receives approximately \$5,400 from the state and provides an allotment of \$2,700 per student K-12. In response to a follow-up question, he affirmed that the remaining monies go back into the district to help pay for various expenses.

[8:32:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD offered her understanding that families turn in receipts for reimbursement upon the allotment, and she asked Mr. O'Dell whether there were checks and balances to verify whether something was a reimbursable expense or not.

MR. O'DELL confirmed that there are multiple levels of review to make sure expenses are justifiable.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD asked whether there was ever any conflict surrounding a family member who decided to pay another family member in order to try to get their child an education through the allotment.

MR. O'DELL responded that that is not allowed, and IDEA asks for W9s from vendors. If a conflict is identified, he explained, it is often a misunderstanding on the part of the family, and he

further noted that he had not experienced anyone "trying to work the system."

[8:36:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY questioned the practices of some families not using all their allotment and the opportunity to save it or carry it into the future.

MR. O'DELL explained that was referred to as the "allotment carry-over" in current law. All unspent funds carry over to the next year as long as the family stays within the program. Over time, he said, there can be an accumulation in [the allotment carry-over] account which is helpful and is popular for stakeholders. Upon leaving the program, the money must be returned to the program, he confirmed.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked for an example in reference to travel and whether a student would be accommodated financially.

MR. O'DELL asked for clarification on the specific travel.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY gave an example of a family who used allotment funds to study in Hawaii.

MR. O'DELL responded that out-of-state travel is prohibited unless it is approved by the Galena City School District School Board, which has approved only very specific travel, such as for competitive groups that may go to nationals. In state, there are extreme limitations, and it must be a unique educational opportunity that is justifiable, he said.

[8:41:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked whether the Galena parameters and regulations are still intact.

MR. O'DELL offered his understanding that is correct. He said he could "dig" for precise regulations.

[8:42:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX stated that he believed Sylvan Learning is eligible for allotments, and he asked for clarification that it provides tutoring.

MR. O'DELL replied that is correct. He added that Sylvan Learning utilizes "interventions" to help a student achieve a certain set of goals.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX inquired whether Sylvan Learning was certified by the state or accredited by "some institution."

MR. O'DELL said that he would be speaking out of turn to say that he knew for certain about the accreditation or certification of Sylvan Learning. He further noted that Sylvan Learning had a level of expertise accepted by all districts in the state.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether a service such as music lessons are provided through the allotment.

MR. O'DELL replied that music lessons are currently acceptable and paid for by allotment, and there are no particular regulations that require a music teacher to be certified or accredited.

[8:46:34 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE referred to HB 400 and the importance of having an individualized learning plan (ILP), and that that plan would have to include music as a part of the plan for the allotment to be provided.

MR. O'DELL clarified it must be an expenditure related to the class and is justified by the plan. If it is not in the plan, it is a miscommunication and it can be addressed, he said.

[8:48:32 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that Representative Prax had to leave the hearing and attend another committee briefly. He thanked Mr. O'Dell for his testimony and welcomed the next invited testifier.

[8:49:14 AM](#)

BRIAN ROZELL, Principal, CyberLynx Homeschool & Correspondence Program, gave invited testimony in support of HB 400. He expressed his gratitude for the committee's focus and effort given to this issue. He said many families and staff have related their concerns about the fate of programs and home school partnerships. With the current CS for HB 400, he shared

that his optimism was warranted and on behalf of CyberLynx he offered full support for HB 400 as it is today. He noted that he felt confident that all expenditures under the allotment process were appropriate and serve an educational purpose. He concluded by thanking the committee for talking directly to program directors and he offered to remain online to answer questions.

[8:52:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked for understanding on what the reporting requirements and guardrails are. She further inquired about demographic data and its collection.

MR. ROZELL replied that as a public school [CyberLynx] is required by regulation to report demographic data to the Department of Education on every student every year. It is collected in the OASIS student data report in the fall and summer, he said.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether there was a way to separate out the CyberLynx kids from the other kids in the OASIS report.

MR. ROZELL replied that is correct due to CyberLynx being a school within the district that provides the report; therefore, the student would be identified in OASIS as being enrolled in CyberLynx.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT referenced the state-level scrutiny of allotments and whether there was a way to find out in the reporting how they are used.

MR. ROZELL said there are regulations provided as to what eligible expenditures are. As for individual purchases, elements of correspondence programs are reviewed as well.

[8:57:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked how many families use allotments for private school tuition.

MR. ROZELL replied that there are approximately 100 new students that are enrolled in brick-and-mortar private schools for the allotment benefit; however, they do not pay for tuition, because that is not something the allotment can go towards.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT sought confirmation that families are not just taking the allotment and giving it to a private school but really just "doing it course by course."

MR. ROZELL replied that the nature of the course must be aligned with the ILP that was crafted in order to be considered for reimbursement.

[9:00:17 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE referred to a line in a previous memo that alluded to families enrolled in private schools and tuition being reimbursed for the amount up to their student allotment. He gave Mr. Rozell an opportunity to clarify.

MR. ROZELL clarified that the memo was written in the very early days of understanding what is allowable under that process. Regulation had been changed in 2014, and he stated if he could write the memo again he would not use that wording and would present the information differently.

[9:02:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY questioned why a child enrolled in a private school would have to pay for individual classes if they were attending that school. She sought clarification as to why a student could be both a private and correspondence student.

MR. ROZELL explained that a student can be enrolled full time in a private school and also be enrolled in a correspondence program; it can be done simultaneously since the private school is not receiving any funding from the state.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY questioned why a student enrolled in a private school would pay for an individual algebra class, since she said she believed that would be part of the school offerings.

MR. ROZELL said it would be part of the private school offerings but the individual class would be paid for.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY expressed her confusion as to why a class included in private school tuition would have to be approved.

MR. ROZELL said the institution honors parent choice on how the parents wished to educate their child with what resources and curriculum.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY reiterated that it was hard for her to understand.

[9:05:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether it is possible for a student to enroll in multiple individual classes at a private school, thus cumulatively using their allotment effectively as tuition.

MR. ROZELL confirmed that they could.

[9:07:03 AM](#)

DOUG HAYMAN, Principal, Connections Homeschool, gave invited testimony in support of HB 400. He noted that Connections' focus is on the Kenai Peninsula but is a statewide program and can reach out to the rest of the state. He gave examples of students on the Kenai Peninsula in reference to numbers of students and geographic population. He began a PowerPoint [hard copy included in the committee packet], titled "Connections Homeschool Program." He highlighted slide 3, which read as follows:

Breakdown of the money trail

- × Initial current BSA- \$5960
- × BSA times the multiplier of homeschool programs- 90%
- \$5364
- × \$5364 - \$2700= \$2664 to meet the following needs:
 - × Staffing
 - × Professional development
 - × Facilities
 - × Supplies
 - × Events
 - × Advertising
 - × "Non-Count" students
- × ½ allotment students enroll between October count and first week of January
 - × Second semester enrollment

MR. HAYMAN added that all students need services and to not waste the opportunity for advancing their studies, and Connections provides this on a case-by-case basis. He noted

required meetings and check-ins in which Connections must participate.

[9:12:35 AM](#)

MR. HAYMAN referenced slide 5, titled "Assessment plan," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- × Offer all district and state assessments on schedule
- × Design and support formative assessments - teach parents to use formative assessment to improve instructional outcomes
- × Use formative assessments to specifically improve Reading instruction (AK Reads) with intense focus on students achieving grade level standards by 3rd grade
- × Design support system to influence graduation rate
 - × Identify at-risk students early in high school
 - × Identify support materials and course corrections
- × Design tutoring support for targeted students with the goal that all student will EARN a high school diploma.
- × Continuous professional development
- × Working with parents to design and/or use formative assessments
 - × Working with parents to improve Reading instruction
- × Working with at-risk students to provide support needed for graduation

MR. HAYMAN added that he was encouraged by the committee and HB 400 in that he opined it is the right direction and that he would support working with the State Board of Education, since it would be a "heavy lift" to get the work done correctly. He further commented that he would support the allotment being tied to assessments if they were formative and reliable.

[9:17:49 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD referred to Mr. Hayman's comment about allotments versus assessments, and she offered her belief it is a violation of one's First Amendment rights and in doing that, every student's parent in the state would be forced to make their child take an assessment test.

MR. HAYMAN replied that besides that, for the assessment to be useful it needs to be better, and regardless of how it got tied to the money, he said he understood Co-Chair Allard's comments. He stated that he felt the assessment needed a lot of work and hoped the State Board of Education would address it.

CO-CHAIR ALLARD reiterated that tying an assessment test to a child's education and then withholding their allotment is something she would not support.

MR. HAYMAN said that he agreed with Co-Chair Allard's statement and clarified he was trying to express that better assessments in general are needed so students can learn better. He restated that he spoke to formative assessments.

[9:21:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT inquired how student athletics are funded for students being homeschooled and whether it is covered by part of the allotment.

MR. HAYMAN confirmed that none of the allotment is used in sports and that the district has funds, and in addition, teams organize fundraising for tournament travel and so forth. There is a fee associated with each sport, he explained, so it is per student per sport and the amount is regulated by local athletic associations.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT commented that in Sitka, the school district is cutting 16 teaching positions based mostly on the funding situation. She asked whether any of Kenai's 11 positions would be impacted.

MR. HAYMAN replied that he was understaffed by one person and none of his current staff would be affected.

[9:24:48 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE thanked invited testifiers and opened public testimony on HB 400.

[9:25:35 AM](#)

LON GARRISON, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards, stated that he supported the committee substitute (CS) for HB 400. He said correspondence schools and programs have a long presence in Alaska spanning back to 1936 and are an

integral part of the public education system. He confirmed his organization's support for CSHB 400 is that they felt it was a simple and elegant solution to the current situation that they find themselves in. He said a concern was to make sure a significant number of students and their families have some certainty about what will happen in the near future with their correspondence programs, and how the organization can best serve and meet the needs of those students.

[9:28:06 AM](#)

CHRIS REITAN, Superintendent, Craig City School District, stated that he supported HB 400, Version U, because it provided support for the state's families who choose to partner with school districts and educate their students through a correspondence school option. He summarized the benefits involved and the importance of them. He thanked the committee for bringing HB 400 forth.

[9:29:26 AM](#)

LEIGH SLOAN, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 400 and opined that the bill was premature as she awaited the final decision in the court system. She offered her belief that HB 400 sought to further curb the choices of the parent who has the most at stake in a child's education, and a group that would be hurt the most was low-income families. She further noted a hasty misuse of funds, and she asked the committee to do right by the kids and not withdraw the freedom to educate children well.

[9:31:45 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE reminded everyone that there was a CS adopted, Version U, and he speculated that some may be testifying on a previous version.

[9:32:38 AM](#)

ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 400 and shared that he is a homeschooling father and also a vendor for correspondence and charter schools for the past 15 years. He opined that the legislative action was premature, and adding more scrutiny actually stands a chance of losing some liberty as parents. He stated that he felt further information needed to come from the recent court action. He said the bill's

current form should be rejected by the committee, and he thanked the committee for supporting parent choice.

[9:35:09 AM](#)

MELISSA GORDAOFF, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 400 and related that she had two children she homeschooled. She gave examples of testing not being accurate, and she opined that the bill should go to a higher court and that the bill was being rushed through. She commended Co-Chair Allard's recent comments, and she urged the committee to "keep working on this."

[9:38:46 AM](#)

CHERIE TAYLOR, representing self, stated that she testified in support of the committee substitute to HB 400, Version U. She offered her belief that the bill provided the best avenue of continuity for all school correspondence programs, and she noted that it does not change the current system. She voiced concern over SB 266 and opined that the bill would have catastrophic consequences for currently enrolled students in homeschool programs. It should be a parent's choice whether or not their child takes assessment tests, she said, and she thanked the committee for its time.

[9:40:22 AM](#)

CHRISTY MONTERO, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 400 [via unidentified interpreter]. She said we need not impact parent choice and it should be left alone. She offered her belief that state testing needed to change and people need options. She restated to leave parent choice alone and she thanked the committee.

[9:42:56 AM](#)

NICHOLE CONNOLLY, representing self, noted that she would change some of her testimony due to just recently having read Version U of HB 400 while being on hold. She shared her background and thanked the committee for its work. She requested that the committee look at Matanuska-Susitna ("Mat-Su") because they have been "incredible pioneers" in correspondence schools and they handle reimbursement so well, she opined. She provided further examples and praise for Mat-Su's practices. She thanked the committee for the chance to speak and urged committee members to do the best for the state's students.

[9:45:16 AM](#)

PENNY VADKA, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 400 and shared that she was a former school board member but would testify on her own account. She confirmed that she is not in favor of HB 400 as presented and that public money must not be allowed or used for private or religious education purposes. She added that she was in favor of formative and summative assessments as written. She urged the committee to make changes before the bill should pass, and that education is an equal opportunity for all students.

[9:47:18 AM](#)

BETSY CAMPBELL, representing self, testified during the hearing on HB 400 and offered her background as it related to education. She gave examples of her personal experience with her local district, and she urged the committee to consider more changes to HB 400. She further related that she had trouble finding the latest version of the bill.

[9:50:20 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE clarified the location where work draft Version U of HB 400 could be found online. After ascertaining no one else wished to testify, he closed public testimony on HB 400.

[HB 400 was held over and brought back before the committee following a recess.]

[9:51:42 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that the House Education Standing Committee would recess to a call of the chair.

[4:05:48 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE called the House Education Standing Committee back to order. Representatives Himschoot, Prax, Allard, McKay, Story, and Ruffridge were present at the call back to order. Representative McCormick arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 400-CORRESPONDENCE STUDY PROGRAMS; ALLOTMENTS

[4:05:59 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that that the next order of business would be a return to HOUSE BILL NO. 400, "An Act relating to correspondence study programs; relating to allotments for correspondence study programs; and providing for an effective date." [Before the committee, adopted as a working document by a vote of 4-3, on 5/1/24, was the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 400, Version 33-LS1571\U, Bergerud, 4/30/24, ("Version U").]

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced the committee had another committee substitute for consideration.

[4:06:42 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 400, Version 33-LS1571\R, Bergerud, 5/3/24, as the working document.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY objected for the purpose of discussion.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE explained that Version R was almost identical to Version U. He explained that the changes, which he summarized, move it to uncodified law. He further noted that a sunset date of July 1, 2025, would be added, and it would still grant for the opportunity to draft regulations during the interim to ensure ILPs and allotments would continue for the next year.

[4:09:32 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT offered her understanding that if the bill were to pass, then the State Board of Education would make regulations for ILPs and allotments, but if something were to change, she asked whether statute would become permanent next year and inquired when the regulations would expire.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE stated that he could defer the inquiry to Commissioner Bishop [Department of Education and Early Development], and she could also add some clarity around the current work draft, Version R.

[4:11:02 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:11 p.m. to 4:16 p.m.

[4:16:52 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE said that there were technical difficulties with the phone system. He announced that SB 24 would be presented next, but there was a motion to adopt Version R to CSHB 400.

[4:17:33 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD [moved to withdraw] her motion to adopt Version R to HB 400. [There being no objection, the motion was withdrawn.]

[4:17:24 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that HB 400 was held over and would be revisited after the presentation on SB 24.

SB 24-PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

[4:17:45 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that the next order of business would be SENATE BILL NO. 24, "An Act relating to mental health education; and providing for an effective date."

[4:18:13 PM](#)

SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented CSSB 24(FIN) and explained that the bill encouraged mental health education and the curriculum that already exists in K-12.

[4:18:54 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD moved to report CSSB 24(FIN) out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSSB 24(FIN) was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee.

[4:19:19 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:19 p.m. to 4:24 p.m.

HB 400-CORRESPONDENCE STUDY PROGRAMS; ALLOTMENTS

[4:24:02 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that the final order of business would be a return to HOUSE BILL NO. 400, "An Act relating to correspondence study programs; relating to allotments for correspondence study programs; and providing for an effective date." [Before the committee, adopted as a working document by a vote of 4-3, on 5/1/24, was the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 400, Version 33-LS1571\U, Bergerud, 4/30/24, ("Version U").]

[4:24:19 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 400, Version 33-LS1571\R, Bergerud, 5/3/24, as the working document.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY objected for purposes of discussion.

[4:24:46 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT restated her previous question and asked if something changed in the next year before the sunset of the bill and there is a new statute, whether the regulations the state board adopted would expire.

[4:25:21 PM](#)

DEENA BISHOP, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), confirmed to Representative Himschoot that she was correct.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT inquired whether the regulations become permanent if nothing changes.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP explained that with the sunset, unless this body or another took action, and being on uncodified law, there would have to be action to keep regulations moving forward.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked for a description of a timeline.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP indicated a need for emergency regulations, but in the bigger sense of regulations, the department would draft the language and after being approved internally, it would move to the Department of Law (DOL). Once that happened it would move to the State Board of Education to review and approve for public comment, be reviewed again by DOL, and eventually

have a final vote. She added that it would occur in a shortened amount of time.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked what the timeline would be to accomplish the many steps, being that the state board meets only four times a year.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP responded that the board can call meetings and meet once per month; after that, within a week's notice, the board can call itself back to meet either in person or electronically.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT expressed concerns that homeschool families have certainty and districts operating the programs know what will happen. She asked Commissioner Bishop how long regulations could take.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP offered her belief that it would be by the beginning of the school year - not the fiscal year - with an August or September timeframe.

[4:29:23 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE asked Commissioner Bishop if she had any input about the underlying HB 400, or Versions U or R.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP stated that she supported CSHB 400 Version R. She said the recent decision in the Alaska Superior Court negatively impacted education in Alaska, and the removal of correspondence statutes would be remedied by Version R. She opined that it is the needed stability for the state to continue its successful homeschooling choice while allowing the state to appeal to the Alaska Superior Court on the matter. She thanked the committee for its quick action to provide a successful and lawful education choice for Alaska's homeschool and correspondence students.

[4:31:29 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE welcomed final comments on Version R.

[4:31:39 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD thanked Co-Chair Ruffridge for accepting advice for drafting [Version R] She shared that she was confident the version would be the best for homeschool and correspondence students.

[4:32:06 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT added context to Commissioner Bishop's comments and noted that the legislature took an oath to uphold the Constitution of the State of Alaska, and there has been harm to families due to an unconstitutional practice; however, the legislature can fix that, she stated. She said she supported the bill.

[4:32:46 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCKAY challenged Representative Himschoot's remarks and commented that it had not been determined whether the practices had been unconstitutional, and he said that he would not accept the comment that the legislature did anything unconstitutional.

[4:33:24 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY removed her objection to the motion to adopt the proposed CS to HB 400, Version 33-LS1571\R, Bergerud, 5/3/24, as the working document.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCORMICK objected. He stated that he had pause with the process in which the version was introduced and that he would not support it. Decisions were made off record, he said, and he offered his belief that that was unprecedented.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE, in response to the comment about decisions made off record, stated he found that "quite an accusation," and for the record, he wished to relate that there was a half hour meeting before committee began for committee members to be given work draft Version R with a brief explanation of what the bill would do, giving the committee the capacity to discuss it on record.

[4:35:07 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD expressed appreciation for the document that was brought forward and acknowledged that it had to be done quickly.

[4:35:29 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX brought up the court ruling that was "sprung up" on the committee, and he offered his belief that [the proposed Version R] looked like the most flexible way to do

things, and that the details would be worked out as more information came in.

4:36:43 PM

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE commented that he would like more time to work on "this project," but time has alluded the committee as it nears the end of session. He acknowledged Representative McCormick's concerns but also agreed with Representative Prax in that the [the proposed Version R] might be the solution that best fits the moment.

4:37:30 PM

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked what the next step for the bill version would be if it were approved.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE replied that should the bill move today, it would move forward to the House Finance Committee.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY offered her belief that committee members wished to be able to provide as much certainty as possible to homeschooling families, and due to the tight timeline, she stressed the importance of moving the bill from committee.

4:38:25 PM

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Prax, Himschoot, Allard, Ruffridge, McKay, and Story voted in favor of the motion to adopt the proposed CS for HB 400, Version 33-LS1571\R, Bergerud, 5/3/24, as the working document. Representative McCormick voted against it. Therefore, Version R was before the committee by a vote of 6-1.

4:39:00 PM

REPRESENTATIVE STORY addressed Commissioner Bishop and offered her assumption that the board, moving forward with regulations, would let families know that public funds cannot be spent with religious education and private educational institutions.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that as regulations would be developed, they would be addressed in line with the expectations in Alaska's Constitution. The recent [court] decision in regard to private educational institutions is of high concern to get sorted out, she said, and the goal is to support and move homeschooling families forward.

[4:41:51 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ALLARD moved to report CSHB 400, Version 33-LS1571\R, Bergerud, 5/3/2, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHB 400(EDC) was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee.

[4:42:56 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 4:43 p.m.