

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 14, 2024

3:35 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
Senator Jesse Kiehl  
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative Tilton

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 215

"An Act relating to teacher incentive payments for national board certification; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PRESENTATION: THE STATE OF TEACHING IN ALASKA

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 215

SHORT TITLE: TEACHERS: BOARD CERTIFICATION INCENTIVE

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) BJORKMAN

01/31/24	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/31/24	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/14/24	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

**WITNESS REGISTER**

RAYMIE MATIASHOWSKI, Staff

Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the sectional analysis for SB 215.

SARAH PINKSKY, Senior Policy Director  
National Board of Professional Teaching Standards  
Washington D.C.

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Invited testimony for SB 215.

TARA BIVENS, Teacher  
Mears Middle School  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Invited testimony for SB 215.

MARTY LANG, Chief Human Resources Officer  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented The State of Teaching in Alaska.

DANETTE PETERSON, President  
Fairbanks Education Association  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented The State of Teaching in Alaska.

KRISTIE COTRONEO, Teacher  
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District  
Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented The State of Teaching in Alaska.

HEATHER BAKER, Teacher  
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District  
Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented The State of Teaching in Alaska.

CORY AIST, President  
Anchorage Education Association  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented The State of Teaching in Alaska.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:35:07 PM](#)

**CHAIR LÖKI TOBIN** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:35 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Kiehl, Bjorkman, Stevens, Gray-Jackson and Chair Tobin.

**SB 215-TEACHERS: BOARD CERTIFICATION INCENTIVE**

[3:36:00 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 215 "An Act relating to teacher incentive payments for national board certification; and providing for an effective date."

[3:36:33 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN, speaking as the sponsor of SB 215 stated the bill could significantly advance educational practices across Alaska. SB 215 aims to increase pay for the state's most qualified teachers and encourage others to pursue National Board Certification, which research shows leads to better educational outcomes and improved teaching. He detailed the four-part certification process, which includes content knowledge testing, differentiated instruction, pedagogical competence, and self-reflection. He highlighted the rigorous, personalized training involved in certification, emphasizing that teachers must demonstrate content mastery, instructional effectiveness, and continuous improvement. He urged support for the bill, noting its potential to enhance teacher retention and educational outcomes statewide.

[3:40:13 PM](#)

RAYMIE MATIASHOWSKI, Staff, Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 215:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**SB 215 Version S  
Sectional Analysis**

***"An Act relating to teacher incentive payments for national board certification; and providing for an effective date"***

**Section 1: Amends AS 14.20 by adding a new section, AS 14.20.225, which would allow a school district or the Department of Education and Early Development to pay an incentive of \$5,000 to each teacher who has a National Board Certification. The funding would come**

from the Department of Education and Early Development.

**Section 2: Amends the uncodified law of the State of Alaska by adding a new section,** which clarifies that this bill will apply to contracts entered into after the bill takes effect.

**Section 3: Provides for an effective date,** of July 1, 2024.

[3:41:10 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS expressed strong support for the program, stating that improving teacher quality leads to better outcomes for students and overall success. However, he questioned how the program would contribute to teacher retention, asking for clarification on how board certification specifically helps retain teachers.

[3:41:36 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN explained that when teachers become board certified, they enhance their teaching skills, making their profession more satisfying. He shared his personal experience, suggesting that data supports this view, and noted that invited testimony might further address this point. He emphasized that the certification process helps teachers become more reflective and effective, which can reduce frustration. He highlighted that the process provides clear metrics for teachers to measure their effectiveness and includes a renewal requirement every five years, ensuring continued growth and effectiveness.

[3:42:46 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS commented that he believes the program is excellent but expressed concerns about the retention issue. He requested any available statistical information on retention to help evaluate the program's impact. He suggested that if retention data is unavailable, the focus should remain on the program's inherent value rather than on its potential effects on retention.

[3:43:19 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN said she would distribute to committee members any retention information sent to her office.

[3:43:24 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN recognized Representative Dibert was in the room.

[3:43:32 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN expressed curiosity about the recertification component mentioned and noted the possibility of refining the legislation to better support educators in the recertification process. She questioned whether there might be costs or additional continuing education credits required to maintain certification and ensure ongoing support for educators.

SENATOR BJORKMAN welcomed suggestions from committee members on how to best support teachers. He acknowledged that there is a cost for both certification and recertification. He noted that many programs allow National Board Certification to be applied as university credit, and it is up to individual districts to recognize it as continuing education credit for salary advancement. He mentioned uncertainty regarding whether the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) currently recognizes National Board Certification as continuing education credit for teaching certificate recertification.

CHAIR TOBIN acknowledged that representative from DEED could provide clarity on whether National Board Certification course work could count towards continuing education credits.

[3:45:09 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL inquired whether any districts in Alaska include National Board Certification in their salary schedules or employee contracts as an incentive.

SENATOR BJORKMAN responded that he did not know. He mentioned that the topic had come up during negotiations in various bargaining processes but remains uncertain about its current status in district contracts.

[3:45:42 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN suggested the Senior Policy Director from the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards might provide the answer during her testimony.

[3:46:05 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced invited testimony for SB 215.

[3:46:29 PM](#)

SARAH PINKSKY, Senior Director of Policy, National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, Washington D.C., invited testimony for SB 215, expressed her enthusiasm for discussing how states can leverage policy to increase the number of National Board-Certified Teachers (NBCTs) in schools. She

explained that the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, an independent nonprofit organization founded over 30 years ago, aims to advance accomplished teaching for all students, with the belief that higher teaching standards lead to better student outcomes.

[3:47:25 PM](#)

MS. PINSKY moved to slides 3-4 and provided an overview of National Board Certification, describing it as a voluntary, advanced certification recognized as the gold standard in teacher certification, indicating a teacher's expertise in a specific subject and grade level. National Board Certification is by teachers for teachers. She emphasized that the certification process, developed by expert practitioners, is rigorous and performance-based, requiring teachers to demonstrate their impact on student learning through submitted work samples, teaching videos, and in-depth written reflections. Additionally, teachers must pass a content knowledge exam.

[3:49:26 PM](#)

MS. PINSKY moved to slide 5 and highlighted that the certification process fosters a habit of continuous reflection, which remains with teachers throughout their careers. This reflective practice, she noted, benefits both teachers and students long after certification. The certification must be renewed every five years, ensuring ongoing professional growth and impact on student learning.

[3:49:47 PM](#)

MS. PINSKY moved to slides 6-9 and shared research. She discussed the importance of expanding the number of NBCTs, citing research that consistently shows NBCTs lead to better student outcomes. She mentioned a survey where teachers reported that board certification was the most effective professional development they had ever experienced, as it provided immediate, applicable feedback for their classrooms. She shared research findings that students taught by NBCTs make more significant learning gains, with evidence suggesting one to two months of additional instruction. She also noted that NBCTs tend to stay in the profession longer, with turnover rates about a third of those for all teachers. Additionally, NBCTs are more likely to mentor new teachers, contributing to the development of future educators. She shared research findings that students taught by NBCTs make more significant learning gains, with evidence suggesting one to two months of additional instruction. She also noted that NBCTs tend to stay in the profession longer, with turnover rates about a third of those for all teachers.

Additionally, NBCTs are more likely to mentor new teachers, contributing to the development of future educators.

[3:52:54 PM](#)

MS PINSKY moved to slides 10 - 12 and discusses state policy approaches. She outlined three common policy approaches states use to increase NBCTs that drive teacher interest and action: financial incentives or stipends, fee support for certification costs, and mentorship or support programs. She said the cost of initial certification is \$1900 and maintenance of certification is approximately \$495. She said SB 215 focuses primarily on financial incentives. Twenty-nine states currently offer financial incentives, which vary in structure but generally lead to increased participation in board certification.

[3:54:45 PM](#)

MS. PINSKY moved to slide 13 and provided the following example of salary incentive structures and briefly described how various states implement the incentive:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **Salary Incentive Structures**

##### *Increase for all NBCTs*

Example: North Carolina

NBCTs placed on salary schedule 12% above base pay.

Example: Wyoming

NBCTs earn an annual \$4,000 stipend.

##### *Increase for NBCTs in high-need schools*

Example: California

*Both – increase for all NBCTs and additional increase for NBCTs in targeted schools*

Example: Utah

[3:56:13 PM](#)

MS. PINSKY moved to slides 14-15 and provided examples from Delaware and Texas, where financial incentives have led to

significant increases in the number of new NBCTs. Delaware saw a notable growth in NBCTs after implementing a stipend equal to 12 percent of a teacher's base salary, while Texas offered stipends of \$3,000 to \$9,000 depending on the socioeconomic status of the teacher's school, along with reimbursement for certification costs. She concluded that even when the absolute numbers are different the trends are common in states that introduce supportive policy. She said she expects the same would be true for Alaska if a stipend was implemented.

[3:58:06 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TILTON joined the meeting.

[3:58:11 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked about the portability of National Board Certification in two contexts. First, he inquired whether an Alaska teacher with this certification would receive a salary increase if they moved to Washington. Second, he asked if a teacher certified in Washington who was hired in Alaska would receive the additional funds associated with the certification in Alaska.

[3:58:43 PM](#)

MS. PINSKY replied that the salary increase does not follow the teacher when they move to a different state. While National Board Certification is nationally recognized, each state determines how it recognizes and rewards the certification. She mentioned that many states grant a professional teaching license in a similar area for teachers moving in with board certification, but not all states have this policy. Therefore, the recognition and any associated salary benefits depend on the specific policies of the receiving state.

[3:59:20 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS highlighted Alaska's significant challenges in hiring teachers and suggested that making the certification benefits portable could be crucial. He noted that out-of-state teachers might decline a job offer if they didn't receive the additional money associated with their National Board Certification. He expressed interest in knowing how the bill's sponsor or the department would address this issue, suggesting it could be important to include it in the legislation.

[3:59:55 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN explained that currently, a teacher moving to Alaska with National Board Certification does not receive additional pay for the certification earned in another state. He

cited an example of a friend who was board certified in Washington and received extra pay from both the state and district but did not receive any additional compensation after moving to Alaska. However, under SB 215, a board-certified teacher hired in Alaska would immediately be eligible for additional pay, if they maintain their board certification.

[4:01:08 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN expressed curiosity about how National Board Certification addresses cultural responsiveness in the classroom, specifically regarding English Language Learners (ELL), English as a Second Language (ESL), special education, and mainstreaming. She inquired how the certification supports educators working in these areas.

[4:01:38 PM](#)

MS. PINSKY explained that there are 25 certificate areas within National Board Certification, including one for Exceptional Needs Specialists, which supports teachers of both students with disabilities and gifted students. Additionally, there is an English as a New Language (ENL) certification for teachers focused on English language acquisition and those working in dual-language classrooms. She emphasized the importance of these areas and noted that the certification process is based on five core propositions for accomplished teaching, with the first being "knowledge of students." This proposition highlights the need for teachers to deeply understand their students, including their families, special supports, motivations, and how to effectively praise and critique them. She added that teachers who undergo board certification develop a thorough understanding of their students' individual learning and general needs through this rigorous process.

[4:03:13 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN mentioned that information from the National Center for Education Statistics highlights the top six qualities of a highly effective educator, one of which is the length of time spent in the classroom and profession. She expressed curiosity about whether this is why the maintenance of certification is required every five years, as research indicates that educators reach a peak level of effectiveness around this time.

MS. PINSKY explained that the five-year recertification period was primarily designed to align with state licensure systems, as most states require teachers to renew their licenses every five years. She mentioned that the National Board Certification renewal period was originally 10 years, but it was adjusted to

match state requirements. This alignment also encourages states to use National Board Certification as a streamlined path for licensure renewal. For instance, in Washington, a state teacher's license remains valid as long as their National Board Certification is active. She acknowledged that she had lost track of the specific question and asked for a reminder to address the substance of it.

[4:04:48 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN repeated that research shows that educators who have worked in the field between 5 - 7 years are highly effective.

MS. PINSKY explained that the previous requirement mandated teachers to have three years of experience before starting National Board Certification. She noted that the policy was changed to allow teachers who feel prepared to apply earlier, particularly because certification offers access to higher salaries and professional advancement. Teachers can now begin the certification process at any career stage, but they must complete three years of teaching before earning certification. She emphasized that the policy reflects the belief that accomplished teachers require experience.

[4:05:51 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS inquired about the renewal process, asking if it is as challenging as the original application. He questioned whether the renewal involves submitting samples of student work, teaching videos, and conducting a deep reflection analysis, making it feel like starting the process over again.

[4:06:12 PM](#)

MS. PINSKY clarified that it is not a recertification process, so teachers do not have to repeat the entire process every five years. Instead, the focus is on demonstrating that they maintain their high level of teaching. The renewal process involves fewer requirements: one video recording instead of two, some written analysis, and a greater emphasis on professional development activities. Teachers must show what they have gained in their field, how they have shared their knowledge with others, and how they have spread their expertise. It is not simply repeating the original process.

[4:07:23 PM](#)

TARA BIVENS, Teacher, Mears Middle School, Anchorage, Alaska, invited testimony for SB 215, emphasized the benefits of National Board Certification for teachers and responded to earlier questions, particularly from Senator Stevens, about

district supplements for certified teachers. She noted that several major districts offer financial supplements: Anchorage provides a \$2,000 annual supplement, Sitka recently introduced a \$1,000 supplement, and Mat-Su possibly offers \$2,000. In Fairbanks, teachers with both National Board Certification and a master's degree receive a salary increase. She explained that these supplements are subject to contract negotiations, which can lead to fluctuations based on agreements between teacher associations and districts.

[4:08:58 PM](#)

MS. BIVENS shared her experience regarding recertification and renewing her Alaska Master's certificate. She said she qualified for her Alaska Master's certificate due to her National Board Certification. While additional credits were required, she was able to use non-academic credits at the time. She mentioned having to pay a fee and provide a report justifying the credits if accepted by a university, noting that this practice is no longer common. However, she believed that some universities still accept National Board Certification as equivalent to course credit, which could count toward recertification, though she had not experienced this herself.

[4:10:50 PM](#)

MS. BIVENS shared her experience teaching math at Mears Middle School in Anchorage and her 24-year commitment to raising awareness of National Board Certification (NBC) in Alaska, as well as supporting teachers pursuing certification. She outlined the mission of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), which aims to enhance teaching and learning by maintaining high standards and providing a voluntary certification system for teachers. Alaska currently has 203 National Board-Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and 43 candidates.

[4:12:40 PM](#)

MS. BIVENS explained the rigorous four-component certification process, which includes classroom-based components requiring in-depth analysis, reflection, videos of instruction, student work samples, and a set of assessments. She discussed the cost of certification, which starts at \$1,900 with additional fees for assessments, and the option for candidates to complete the process over five years. She noted that 70 percent of teachers who received a certification decision since 2017 earned the NBCT designation.

[4:14:52 PM](#)

MS. BIVENS shared that she has undergone the process of recertification twice, emphasizing the focus on professional growth and its impact on student learning. She found the renewal process meaningful and beneficial for staying current with teaching practices. She reflected on how NBC improved her teaching by encouraging self-reflection, informed instructional decisions, and collaboration with colleagues.

[4:17:21 PM](#)

MS. BIVENS highlighted the significant impact of NBC on student learning, supported by a decade of research showing that students of NBCTs outperform their peers. She cited a national survey indicating that 96 percent of teachers ranked NBC among the top three most impactful professional development experiences. As she prepares for retirement, she emphasized the importance of continuing to share the positive impact of NBC on teaching and learning. She urged support for the proposed incentive in SB 215, stating that it could inspire more educators in Alaska to pursue NBC and improve their craft.

[4:19:46 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN held SB 215 in committee.

#### **PRESENTATION: THE STATE OF TEACHING IN ALASKA**

[4:20:21 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of a presentation The State of Teaching in Alaska by invited teachers and stakeholders from Anchorage, Fairbanks, Soldotna.

[4:20:43 PM](#)

MARTY LANG, Chief Human Resources Officer, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, Co-presented The State of Teaching in Alaska and said he worked for the Anchorage School District (ASD) for 25 years. He provided an overview of his career and discussed the state of teaching from a human resources perspective. He said that as the Chief Human Resource Officer, his primary role is to support principals in hiring highly effective certificated teachers and staff to meet the diverse needs of ASD students. He emphasized that finding and sourcing talent has become increasingly challenging, especially given the size and diversity of ASD.

[4:22:20 PM](#)

MR. LANG moved to slide 2 and shared national and state-level trends to contextualize the challenges ASD faces. In the 2021-2022 school year, there were approximately 3.2 million teachers

in public education across the U.S., with about 10 percent leaving their positions—a 4 percent increase from pre-pandemic levels. Of those, 8 percent [256,000] left the profession entirely, while only about 162,000 new teachers graduated, leaving a gap of about 95,000 teaching positions. Mid-year turnover went from 4 percent to 6 percent, which is alarming as there is often no or little remedy mid-year to fill vacated positions. He stated that since the 2021-2022 school year was the most recent year for which there was a complete set of national statistics, he would continue using it in the presentation.

[4:25:21 PM](#)

MR. LANG moved to slide 3 and focused on Alaska, noting that in 2021-2022, there were about 7,500 public school teachers. Around 22 percent of public-school teachers left their positions, with nearly 1,000 of those teachers leaving the state or profession entirely. The University of Alaska (UA) System only produced 153 graduates with initial teaching licenses that year, creating a gap between those leaving and entering the profession locally that is even bigger than the national level.

[4:26:22 PM](#)

MR. LANG moved to slide 4 a chart showing five-year trends for ASD resignations, the percentage of total full-time equivalents (FTE), and the number of UA initial licensure graduates. In 2021 - 2022, 416 of ASD's 3,100 teachers resigned, or about 13.5 percent of the total teacher workforce. He noted that even if all 153 UA initial licensure graduates applied to ASD, they would only fill about a third of the vacancies. This shortage has led ASD to source two-thirds of its teachers from outside Alaska, which is becoming more difficult.

[4:27:50 PM](#)

MR. LANG moved to slide 5 a chart of teacher vacancies from 2019-2024 and said that over the last five years, on the first day of student instruction, ASD has seen almost a doubling in the number of teacher vacancies that were unfilled.

[4:28:01 PM](#)

MR. LANG moved to slide 6 and discussed the measures ASD is taking to address its teacher:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Approximately two thirds of ASD's teachers are hired from outside of Alaska

- ASD hired 84 teachers with emergency or program enrollment certificates - individuals with a bachelor's degree who have not yet completed a teacher preparation program
- ASD currently employ 49 BridgeUSA J-1 visa program teachers
- ASD plans to expand use of retire/rehire option and grow your own (GYO) programs going forward
- ASD is currently covering 100+ classroom vacancies with long-term subs, paraprofessionals, or student teachers

[4:29:24 PM](#)

MR. LANG highlighted ASD's recruiting efforts, such as offering signing bonuses, relocation assistance, and referral bonuses. However, attracting talent remains challenging due to competition with other districts in the lower 48 states. He noted the ongoing impact of 167 paraprofessional vacancies on student outcomes and the added stress placed on the educational system.

[4:30:14 PM](#)

MR. LANG moved to slide 8 and provided two final thoughts that stand out to him from an HR standpoint:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- ASD now spends over \$100+ million annually on health benefits which erodes our ability to maintain reasonable class sizes, keep valued programs, and provide meaningful wage increases for our employees. Next year we are facing a 10 percent increase for renewal on most ASD health plans. This follows two years of similar increases.
- In spring of 2018, ASD laid off 200 teachers. Within weeks all 200 positions were recalled through State one-time funds. Despite being offered a guaranteed position in ASD the next year 32 percent of those teachers chose to leave Alaska.

[4:30:36 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS expressed concern about the state's teacher shortage, noting that Alaska is losing 1,000 teachers while universities are only producing 153 new teachers annually. He highlighted accreditation issues at the University of Alaska Anchorage and questioned how to encourage more young Alaskans to

pursue teaching careers. He emphasized the urgency of improving local teacher production to avoid relying on other states for educators. He requested ideas on how the university can enhance its efforts in educating teachers, though he did not require an immediate response.

[4:31:27 PM](#)

MR. LANG replied that he would send information on the efforts being made through the Academies of Anchorage initiative, which they hope will help address the teacher shortage.

[4:32:03 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN requested that the information from Mr. Lang be provided to her office for dissemination. She expressed interest in how the Academies of Anchorage are focusing on the teacher pipeline, particularly in early education and social services. She then moved on to the next agenda item, inviting the Fairbanks Education Association to testify. She briefly introduced Ms. Peterson.

[4:32:25 PM](#)

DANETTE PETERSON, President, Fairbanks Education Association, Fairbanks, Alaska, co-presented The State of Teaching in Alaska. She provided a brief work history she has taught for years.

[4:33:11 PM](#)

MS. PETERSON moved to slide 2 and discussed aspects of enrollment in the Fairbanks district:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **About Our District**

Student Enrollment: 12,459

- 25 percent are military connected, 33.4 percent are economically disadvantaged

Certified Staff: 751

- 6 unfilled certified positions to be filled ASAP
- 38 emergency certificated educators hired this year
- 14 J1 visa educators hired this year

- SPED certified positions and related service provider positions (SLP, OT, and PT) are being filled virtually

Classified Staff: 754

Schools: 33 total

- 15 elementary, 8 secondary, 5 charter schools, 5 schools of choice, including three schools on military bases, a CTE school, home school program, and various programs that provide alternative learning opportunities.

4:33:35 PM

MS. PETERSON drew attention to the 38 emergency-certified educators hired this year, not including those hired last year. She stated that the district did not have success with emergency-certified educators, as only one-third were retained after their first year of teaching. This year was the first time that J-1 visa educators were significantly utilized by the district. Currently, 14 J-1 visa teachers are employed in Fairbanks. The hardest positions to fill are special education (SPED) roles. SPED teachers and related services providers are teaching virtually. She mentioned that her sophomore son is in a SPED English class taught by an educator in Florida, which is very difficult. She described the 33 schools in the district as having a diverse military population, comprised of low socioeconomic students, charter schools, schools of choice, Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools, homeschool programs, and a variety of alternative learning opportunities.

4:35:27 PM

MS. PETERSON moved to slide 3 and noted various teachers who were awarded for their excellence, as well as awards schools and students have achieved. She noted that great achievements have occurred with the money the district had received. Unfortunately, the district faces a \$28 million deficit, has closed three schools in the last couple of years, and will announce the closure of two more on Friday. She said the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) is ridiculous, with some classes having 39 students in a room designed for 24. She noted that large class sizes make it very difficult for teachers to know their students. The district will cut 100 teachers and lose 17

kindergarten paraprofessionals. She said all students, but especially kindergarten students, need smaller classes and individualized instruction.

[4:36:10 PM](#)

MS. PETERSON moved to slide 4 and said the district faces a \$28 million deficit, has closed three schools in the last couple of years, and will announce the closure of two more on Friday. She opined that the pupil teacher ratio (PTR) is ridiculous with some classes having 39 students in a room that was designed for 24. She noted that large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to know their students. The district will cut 100 certified teachers, which is 15 percent of the district's teachers, and lose 17 kindergarten paraprofessionals. She said all students, but especially kindergarten students, need smaller classes and individualized instruction. The Alaska Reads Act asks for smaller classes and for struggling students small group sizes of 5 to 1. Currently the district, with help from secretaries, can do 15 to 1. However, the schools she visited all expect to cut four teachers so the group size will increase. Schools are unable to find substitute teachers, so classes are combined or split, creating safety and fire code concerns. Furthermore, it makes it difficult to accommodate students with special needs, such as wheelchairs.

[4:39:00 PM](#)

MS. PETERSON moved to slide 5, which described differences between schools in 2014 and 2024. She said programs such as music and gifted and talented (GTE) have been cut. Schools are experiencing shortages of substitutes and transportation. Funds for transportation now dip into general funds, which are estimated to last two weeks. She stated she has no idea what else to cut.

[4:39:28 PM](#)

MS. PETERSON moved to slide 6 and summarized what the lack of funds means to students and the district:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **What This Means to Our Students**

- Up to six (6) classes of students at the secondary level sit in an auditorium or library supervised by a single teacher when experiencing sub shortages;
- Elementary classes are divided between three different teachers that are often not the same grade level;

- We hired 132 certified educators this year: 38 emergency certificated and 14 J1 visa educators (17.5% or more than 1 in 6 educators are new to our district this year). Many early-career-educators are leaving for other states;
- SPED classes are taught virtually from outside of Alaska without certified educators supporting in the classroom;
- Related services (Speech, OT, PT) are being provided virtually to SPED students even at the elementary level;
- Costs of athletics and extracurriculars have risen to the point of being too costly for many families to access;
- Secretaries and other classified staff are doing walk-to-read to attempt to have small reading groups per the Alaska Reads Act. There is inadequate funding for after school reading programs and after school transportation;
- Aspects of our buildings are in disrepair - windows, boilers, stairs, and roofs;
- We are dipping into our general fund to cover transportation costs

[4:39:56 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON asked if all 100 teaching positions that the district plans to cut are currently filled.

[4:40:11 PM](#)

MS. PETERSON replied that a few positions are currently unfilled, and 35 teachers are retiring or have otherwise given notice to leave. This still means the district will be cutting currently employed educators. The district still needs to hire special education (SPED) educators. Some classes, such as Extended and Intensive Resources, are being combined due to vacancies. Hard-to-fill positions or vacancies aren't really being cut. The cuts impact general classrooms, Gifted and Talented Education (GTE), and music programs more significantly.

[4:40:56 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON stated that the question was asked because, while recognizing the critical need for teachers and fully supporting that, it is difficult to see people losing their jobs when positions are cut.

[4:41:13 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked if, as a professional with many years in the field, Ms. Peterson had any suggestions on what the University of Alaska could do to produce more Alaskan teachers. He also inquired if there were actions her department, school, or district could take to help move in the right direction for increasing the number of Alaskan teachers.

MS. PETERSON replied provide a pension.

MS. TOBIN stated the committee is trying to make that happen.

[4:42:42 PM](#)

KRISTIE COTRONEO, Teacher, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, Soldotna, Alaska, introduced herself.

[4:42:50 PM](#)

HEATHER BAKER, Teacher, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, Soldotna, Alaska, introduced herself.

[4:42:57 PM](#)

MS. COTRONEO moved to slide 1 and said she came to Alaska as an educator because its districts offered extensive professional development opportunities, option for outdoor education, small class sizes and a community in which everybody in Alaska becomes a family.

MS. BAKER said she came to Alaska because the schools offered a competitive contract and had a phenomenal reputation in Washington. The contract pay between both states was competitive, but the healthcare option in Alaska was exceptional. She said when she moved to Alaska retirement was less of a concern than the fact that the Base Student Allocation (BSA) supported small class sizes of under 20 students in primary grades, compared to Washington where there were 30 students per room in K-6, with overflow sent to other local schools. She noted that Alaska's classrooms and schools look very different today.

[4:43:39 PM](#)

MS. COTRONEO moved to slide 2 and shared that in 2013, her third-grade class had 20 students. The following year, she taught a multi-age classroom with 18 students and had a guarantee that no additional students would be added. She had a mentor and participated in professional development (PD) with Southeast Alaska schools. This connected her to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) and cultural career connections specific to Alaska, allowing her to extend

learning beyond the classroom. She and her students explored the lake behind the school, studied the biodiversity in the school's backyard habitat, and were trained as teacher leaders. As teacher leaders, they presented this style of learning and teaching to other educators.

[4:44:30 PM](#)

MS. COTRONEO emphasized that the state of Alaska's investment in PD and funding through the Base Student Allocation (BSA), which kept class sizes small enough to facilitate this type of education, was a significant reason she chose to stay in Alaska.

[4:44:39 PM](#)

MS. BAKER said that while her experience as a teacher mirrors Ms. Cotroneo's, she felt it was more important to share her testimony as a mother. Her four older children had an incredible elementary education, benefiting from Alaska's strong music programs and small class sizes. These opportunities allowed them to excel academically and participate in enriching activities like state-wide field trips, hands-on science, and performing arts. She credited their success, including high academic achievement, to the individualized attention they received in smaller classes. However, she noted that this level of support is no longer the norm for younger students.

[4:46:03 PM](#)

MS. COTRONEO moved to slide 3 and noted that while her first few years of teaching featured small class sizes, the last few years have seen a trend of multi-age classes with 26 or more students. She emphasized that she is not alone in this situation. For example, third-grade teachers, a critical grade where students are still learning to read, now each have 30 students. One colleague left her position in November due to managing a group of 34 fifth graders, some with significant behavior concerns, and no classroom support. She explained that shortages in busing and financial concerns have reduced the number of field trips, limiting students' exposure to culture, and learning experiences. Although there are academically high-performing students at school, there is no Quest programming available in her building. Additionally, Tier 3 students—those below the 10th percentile in math—no longer receive pull-out support, and interventions are now done within classrooms of 26 students, including for Tier 3 reading interventions. She also mentioned a continuing trend of high teacher turnover, with her school needing to replace more than 12 educators last year, only one of whom retired.

[4:47:21 PM](#)

MS. BAKER said that many of the educators who made Alaska desirable are leaving the state for better opportunities. She provided several examples. She said the teachers were highly qualified educators, including the president of the Alaska Society for Technology and Education (ASTI) and the district's Positive Behavior and Intervention System (PBIS) team lead. She expressed concern that the quality of current applicants does not match those who are leaving. The hiring team has had to bring in emergency-certified teachers simply to ensure enough adults are in the building. She provided several examples and expressed frustration that a re-hire retiree makes more than her even though they do the same job. She further expressed disappointment in her children no longer having access to AP classes in their schools despite high marks. Her children must either transfer or take online courses.

[4:49:42 PM](#)

MS. BAKER expressed gratitude for the Reads Act, describing it as crucial for early education and vulnerable populations, but she raised concerns about its implementation in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD). The district's use of the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) curriculum mandates 90 to 120 minutes of daily reading instruction with little flexibility, minimal scaffolding, and a one-size-fits-all approach. In a post-COVID environment with 30 students per classroom and no pull-out support services, this reduces teachers' autonomy and hinders their ability to connect with students and meet their individual needs, leading to a lack of engagement and retention. The curriculum also lacks cultural connections and limits the ability to teach science, social studies, and health in alignment with Alaska State Standards.

MS. BAKER concluded by expressing hope that they can work together to find solutions that make the spirit of the Reads Act shine through in its implementation, ensuring it benefits both students and educators.

[4:51:08 PM](#)

MS. COTRONEO moved to slide 5 and shared that 11 years ago, she and her husband relocated to Alaska to start her teaching career. Coming from Washington, where opportunities for professional growth were abundant, Alaska offered her a chance to thrive. With the guidance of mentors and experiences like the Southeast Alaska Career and STEAM camp, she developed as an educator. However, she now feels compelled to leave Alaska due to financial strain. The combination of her salary and the lack

of retirement benefits has made it unsustainable for her to continue teaching in the state. She will return to Washington, where she will receive a \$32,000 salary increase next year. She urged the state to address the challenges facing educators, noting that investing in teacher compensation and benefits is crucial for retaining talent and preserving the quality of education for Alaska's students.

[4:52:28 PM](#)

MS. BAKER said that 10 years ago, she moved to Kenai, Alaska, because of the strong reputation of its schools. Her four children have flourished and are graduating at the top of their classes, but she is concerned that opportunities are rapidly dwindling at the high school level due to the stagnant Base Student Allocation (BSA) and the difficulty in recruiting quality educators. She said she no longer feels confident in the public schools' ability to provide a strong education for her two younger children. As a single mother of six, she is considering either opening a pod school or moving to a state that offers better recruitment of quality teachers. She noted that if she moved to Washington, she would receive a retirement plan and earn about \$38,000 more than she does in Alaska, largely due to a \$6,200 bonus for being a National Board-Certified Teacher.

[4:54:01 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN introduced Mr. Aist stating the Anchorage Education Association represents about 3,000 educators in the Anchorage School District.

[4:54:29 PM](#)

CORY AIST, President, Anchorage Education Association (AEA), Anchorage, Alaska, said he would focus on two slides and asked the audience to review the data in the others. He stressed the importance of visiting a school in Alaska if they haven't done so in the last two years to understand the current environment. He urged them to speak with educators, principals, and students. He noted that the Anchorage School District and Superintendent recently discussed how inadequate funding impacts classrooms and programs, and he was asked to speak about the student experience.

[4:55:17 PM](#)

MR. AIST moved to slide 2 and shared that he has 30 years of experience as a professional search and rescue volunteer. He explained that in a crisis, the first step is recognizing the situation and assessing it. Typically, 30 to 40 percent of

people freeze, 30 to 40 percent become hysterical, and only 10 to 20 percent take action to solve the problem, which requires training, time, and clear thinking. He expressed that Alaska's schools are in an emergency, but most legislators, aside from education committee members, do not recognize it. Educators are looking for exit strategies and are leaving. He urged immediate action.

[4:57:15 PM](#)

MR. AIST moved to slide 7 a graph depicting the reasons for teachers leaving ASD and stated that the biggest impact on students is class size, which is directly related to staffing. He emphasized that Alaska used to be a competitive destination for educators, but it no longer is due to the lack of a pension and an uncompetitive salary schedule. The staffing crisis has led to larger class sizes, worsening the situation in classrooms. He noted that in May 2023, teachers cited student behavior as the top reason they are considering leaving, followed by workload, which is tied to class size, and salary as the third reason. He urged the committee to recognize that students are having the same experience in a classroom as the teacher.

[4:58:41 PM](#)

MR. AIST moved to slide 13, a graph showing the percentage of all ASD schools reporting 90 percent or better daily attendance by school year from 2009 to 2024. He stated that the main reason students are not attending school is a lack of relationships. He questioned how teachers can build meaningful relationships or provide one-on-one and small group instruction when class sizes are too large. He noted that managing a large classroom is challenging. He also highlighted that the Anchorage School District is heavily impacted by the shortage of substitutes, with long-term subs, student teachers, and Educational Support Personnel (ESPs) covering many classes, leading to a significant number of classrooms being managed by uncertified personnel.

[5:00:05 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN thanked the presenters and pointed out that the legislature is currently debating whether a \$680 increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA) is sufficient. He emphasized that this amount would only prevent things from getting worse for one year. He reiterated that testimony from educators reflects a broader issue, not an isolated case. He expressed concern that the other legislative body is debating whether to appropriate just enough funds to maintain the current situation for one more year. He stressed that if the state expects education to

improve, significant investment is needed to provide better opportunities and outcomes for students. He noted that labor decisions and educational choices are often driven by financial considerations, and without adequate funding, people will seek opportunities elsewhere. He concluded by stating that while \$680 million might be all that can be done this year, it is far from enough to address the critical needs of the educational system.

[5:02:49 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN opined that Senator Bjorkman would receive no opposition to his statement from the Senate Education Committee.

[5:03:21 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 5:03 p.m.