

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 12, 2025

8:05 a.m.

DRAFT

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Rebecca Himschoot, Co-Chair
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair
Representative Maxine Dibert
Representative Ted Eischeid
Representative Jubilee Underwood
Representative Rebecca Schwanke
Representative Bill Elam

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

BOARD OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

KATHRYN MCCOLLUM - Wasilla

Kimberly Bergey - Palmer

CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

HOUSE BILL NO. 28

"An Act establishing a student loan repayment pilot program; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 57

"An Act relating to wireless telecommunications devices in public schools; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSHB 57(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 28

SHORT TITLE: TEACHER/STATE EMPLOYEE STUDENT LOAN PRGRM

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) STORY

01/22/25	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	EDC, FIN
02/12/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/12/25	(H)	<Bill Hearing Canceled>
02/17/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/17/25	(H)	Heard & Held
02/17/25	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/24/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/24/25	(H)	Heard & Held
02/24/25	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/12/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 57

SHORT TITLE: COMMUNICATION DEVICES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) FIELDS

01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	L&C, EDC
01/29/25	(H)	L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
01/29/25	(H)	Heard & Held
01/29/25	(H)	MINUTE(L&C)
01/31/25	(H)	L&C AT 9:15 AM GRUENBERG 120
01/31/25	(H)	Heard & Held
01/31/25	(H)	MINUTE(L&C)
02/05/25	(H)	L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
02/05/25	(H)	Moved CSHB 57(L&C) Out of Committee
02/05/25	(H)	MINUTE(L&C)
02/10/25	(H)	L&C RPT CS(L&C) 5DP 1NR
02/10/25	(H)	DP: CARRICK, SADDLER, COULOMBE, HALL, FIELDS
02/10/25	(H)	NR: NELSON
02/24/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/24/25	(H)	Heard & Held
02/24/25	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/03/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
03/03/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/03/25	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/12/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

KATHRYN MCCOLLUM, Appointee

Board of Education & Early Development
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on her confirmation hearing to the Board of Education and Early Development.

KIMBERLY BERGEY, Appointee
Board of Education & Early Development
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on her confirmation hearing to the Board of Education and Early Development.

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HB 28 to the committee.

KERRY THOMAS, Acting Executive Director
Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Representative Andi Story, prime sponsor, answered committee questions on HB 28.

REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, answered committee questions on CSHB 57(L&C).

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:05:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ANDI STORY called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. Representatives Eischeid, Underwood, Schwanke, Elam, Himschoot, and Story were present at the call to order. Representatives Dibert arrived as the meeting was in progress.

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the committee would take a moment of silence in honor of Ashley Johnson-Barr day.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S):

Board of Education and Early Development

[8:07:23 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the first order of business would be the confirmation hearings for the governor's appointees to the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development.

[8:08:15 AM](#)

KATHRYN MCCOLLUM, Appointee, Board of Education & Early Development, testified on her confirmation hearing to the Board of Education and Early Development. She began her testimony by sharing a brief history of her teaching career and time in Alaska and said that she "really has a passion for student learning and education for all students, I actually was prompted to run for the school board when the Alaska READS act was happening." She said that she wants to do any work to help all students in the State of Alaska.

[8:10:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked Ms. McCollum if teachers should be free to insert their own personal beliefs into their instruction.

MS. MCCOLLUM opined that teachers should teach their board-approved curriculum while being cognisant of other's beliefs.

[8:13:06 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked if it could be seen as a conflict of interest to have an educator serving on an education board.

MS. MCCOLLUM said that is "really important" to have an active educator serving on the Board of Education and Early Development.

[8:14:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Ms. McCollum what she sees as the primary issues facing education today.

MS. MCCOLLUM replied that teacher recruitment and retention as well as classroom challenges are the biggest issues currently facing education in Alaska.

[8:15:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE UNDERWOOD asked Ms. McCollum how she handled a larger class size versus a smaller class size.

MS. MCCOLLUM explained that a larger class size puts more of a stress on her classroom management ability and said that she felt she was still successful in delivering instruction, regardless of any issues that might affect to her ability to teach.

[8:17:21 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Ms. McCollum how she felt about the book bans occurring in the country today and asked for her opinion on public funds being utilized for private religious schools.

MS. MCCOLLUM explained that the Matanuska-Susitna School Board did a "really good job" of putting together a committee to review books' removal from school libraries. She answered that she believes it is currently illegal to direct public funds to private religious schools, though parents and students should be allowed to have a choice in the schools they attend.

[8:19:03 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked Ms. McCollum if the execution of the Alaska Reads Act went well or could have been improved. She asked how the "Spaulding Method" of elementary instruction was different than newer methods of teaching occurring today.

MS. MCCOLLUM said that she is a "staunch supporter of phonics" and said that she thought the Alaska Reads Act was getting "easier and easier" to implement. She said that teachers are applying the skills they learned from the "Spaulding Method" of elementary instruction to newer instruction models occurring today.

[8:23:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked Ms. McCollum how she feels about students using technology versus hands on, place-based education.

MS. MCCOLLUM said that it is "sad to her" to see the amount of technology that young children are using, both in the classroom and at home.

[8:28:34 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked what the "right amount" of technology is with regards to classroom instruction.

MS. MCCOLLUM shared her belief that teaching is about people, relationships, and communication and said that she does not believe that the woes of education may be solved by more technology.

[8:30:44 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Ms. McCollum if she believes that the State should fund its public schools less because its schools are "failing" and asked what the Board of Education and Early Development should do to combat the narrative that negative things are occurring within Alaska's schools.

MS. MCCOLLUM replied that she does not believe that the State shouldn't fund its public schools because they might be performing at a lower standard than the rest of the country and said that there should be more work done to celebrate the work that is being done in Alaska's schools.

[8:32:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked Ms. McCollum if she believed that either she or her students were failing during her long career in teaching.

MS. MCCOLLUM answered that it is "hard to correlate what we hear around the talk about how schools are failing when you see what is really happening out there".

[8:35:47 AM](#)

KIMBERLY BERGEY, Appointee, Board of Education & Early Development, Testified on her confirmation hearing to the Board of Education and Early Development. She shared that she has attended Alaska's schools from her elementary to graduate levels of instruction and said that she has worked in the mining industry and the service industry. She said that her interest in serving on the BEED comes from a want to give back and serve in hopes to look at "what's working well, what isn't, and improve upon what isn't".

[8:38:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked Ms. Bergey to give two suggestions to the Alaska State Legislature to help improve graduation rates in Alaska. He shared his understanding that high school students in Alaska are struggling with the feeling of hope because of a lack of education funding.

MS. BERGEY answered that the State has to "meet students where they're at" to help to meet their individual & situational needs. She emphasized that the most important thing that could be done to improve graduation rates is to instill a sense of hope in the students.

[8:43:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked Ms. Bergey if she has seen success in the application of Career & Technical Education (CTE) and work apprenticeship programs.

MS. BERGEY replied that CTE and work apprenticeship programs are vital in ensuring that a student feels hopeful for their future.

[8:46:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked Ms. Bergey how the Alaska State Legislature could motivate school districts in Alaska to "be more collaborative".

MS. BERGEY answered that school district interconnectivity is often directly tied to a school district's ability to communicate with its students, parents, and community partners.

[8:50:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE UNDERWOOD asked Ms. Bergey how teachers could avoid their students feeling anxious about their teacher's finances or school funding.

MS. BERGEY answered that classrooms should be meant for instruction and teacher's finances should be kept private.

CO-CHAIR STORY clarified that it is commonplace board policy across the State that teachers keep their personal finances to themselves and emphasized that students "notice things in their classrooms and in their buildings, when their classes are crowded, when they're losing educational opportunities, they have a right to speak their thoughts on what they're experiencing".

[8:53:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT commented that students notice negative changes in their public schools and asked how the BEED could more equitably represent rural schools. She asked how her job as the principal of a homeschool program differs from that of a brick and mortar principal and asked what her "overall vision for education in Alaska" is. She asked if it is possible for one person serving on the Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC) to have "too much influence" in simultaneously serving on the Board of Education and Early Development.

MS. BERGEY answered that she works for the Yukon- Koyukon School District and said that she would adequately represent rural schools on the BEED. She answered that her job entails staff supervision, curriculum administration, and student-parent outreach. She shared her vision of the future of education in Alaska to be a "system of education that offers choice, because we know that not every child learns in the same way". She said that it is important to note the differences in the work that is done on the PTPC and the Board of Education and Early Development in order to make a fair judgement of whether or not a person may serve on both boards.

[8:59:56 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Ms. Bergey how she felt about the book bans occurring in the country today and asked for her opinion on public funds being utilized for private religious schools.

MS. BERGEY answered that setting up a community stakeholder group is a "great way" to review materials and ensure that they are appropriate for students. She explained that Alaska is not set up for the use of education vouchers in private institutions and said that Alaska has laws that must be followed with regards to the utilization of public school funding in private institutions.

[9:05:05 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 9:05 a.m.

[9:05:37 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY made clear to the committee that there would be public testimony on the current confirmation hearings on a later date.

[9:06:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked Ms. Bergey if the BEED is failing its students with regards to accountability in its public schools. He asked, "With a shorter answer, is proper education funding a piece of the [education] puzzle?"

MS. BERGEY said that she doesn't believe that the BEED is failing its students, but does believe that "we need to do some things differently, we need to look at some things". She shared her belief that the Alaska READS Act was a step in the right direction with regards to improving education in Alaska. She said that education funding is a small part of the effort to deliver a better education for all Alaskans.

[9:12:46 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:12 a.m. to 9:16 a.m. [During the at-ease, Co-Chair Story handed the gavel to Co-Chair Himschoot.]

^#hb28

HB 28-TEACHER/STATE EMPLOYEE STUDENT LOAN PRGRM

[9:16:55 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 28, "An Act establishing a student loan repayment pilot program; and providing for an effective date."

[9:17:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 28 to the committee. She explained that there has been a greater number of people leaving from than arriving in Alaska in the previous 12 years and explained how that outmigration has negatively affected various sectors of work in the state. She said that the bill is nicknamed the "come back home bill" because of its primary goal of bringing native-born Alaskans back to their home state. She explained that the program established by HB 28 would be a three year, \$8,000 per year program that would send the rewarded funds directly to the institution that the recipient attended and

pointed the committee's attention to the Higher Education Investment Fund (HEIF) that would fund the proposed legislation.

[9:23:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked how long the bill's proposed policies are expected to retain an employee in Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY answered that HB 28 would apply to Alaskan-born people who have attended university, obtained certifications, and currently live outside of the state.

[9:26:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE UNDERWOOD asked if a program that incentivized employees to live in rural Alaska was enacted by the Alaska State Legislature or another agency in the Alaska state government.

[9:27:54 AM](#)

KERRY THOMAS, Acting Executive Director, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, Department of Education & Early Development, On behalf of Representative Andi Story, prime sponsor, answered committee questions on HB 28. She shared her understanding that Representative Underwood was referring to the Teacher Education Loan Program (TELP), which is no longer active due to a lack of funding.

[9:28:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked if the TELP had a cap on the funds it would repay participants.

MS. THOMAS answered that someone could've attended any school at any cost and the TELP would have paid for it.

[9:29:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE UNDERWOOD asked about the difference between the proposed policies of HB 28 and the TELP.

MS. THOMAS explained that both of the programs are fundamentally different because the TELP program was a loan forgiveness program and HB 28 proposes a loan repayment program.

[9:31:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked Representative Story to describe who would qualify for the proposed policies of HB 28.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY explained that HB 28 was introduced as an "antidote" to the outmigration that has been occurring in Alaska over recent years and gave a hypothetical scenario to explain how a person might qualify for the proposed policies of HB 28.

[9:35:35 AM](#)

MS. THOMAS added that HB 28 says that "the person should have resided outside of the state for at least 12 months before beginning full-time employment". She said that her interpretation of the bill is that whether someone would be eligible to receive the proposed benefits of HB 28 or not would be unaffected by their residency status, rather it would be contingent on how long they have been out of the state.

[9:36:54 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT thanked the invited testifiers and announced that HB 28 would be held over.

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[9:37:02 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 9:37 a.m.
[During the at-ease, Co-Chair Himschoot handed the gavel back to Co-Chair Story.]

^#hb57

HB 57-COMMUNICATION DEVICES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

[9:37:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the final order of business would be CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 57(L&C), "An Act relating to wireless telecommunications devices in public schools; and providing for an effective date."

[9:38:20 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY moved to adopt Amendment 1 to CSHB 57(L&C), labeled 34-LS0064\I.2, Bergerud, 3/10/25, which read as follows:

Page 2, following line 14:

Insert a new bill section to read:

"* Sec. 2. The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to read:

REPORTS. (a) Not later than June 30, 2026, a school district shall report to Department of Education and Early Development describing the policy the school district adopted under AS 14.33.300(b) and the effect of the policy on student academic achievement and behavior in the school district.

(b) Not later than July 31, 2026, the Department of Education and Early Development shall prepare a report that describes, for each school district, the implementation process of policies adopted under AS 14.33.300(b) and the outcomes of prohibiting the use of nonschool-issued wireless telecommunications devices, including the effect on student academic achievement and behavior. The Department of Education and Early Development shall make the report available to the public, submit the report to the senate secretary and the chief clerk of the house of representatives, and notify the legislature that the report is available."

Renumber the following bill section accordingly.

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT objected for the purpose of discussion.

[9:38:36 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY explained that Amendment 1 to CSHB 57 (L&C) would create a section that mandates that school districts report to the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) about the effects of the proposed policies on student achievement and behavior.

[9:39:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked how a school district might properly deliver the report proposed by Amendment 1.

CO-CHAIR STORY answered that it would be "up to the school district" to handle how they would complete the report proposed by Amendment 1.

[9:42:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked if the report proposed by Amendment 1 could be considered a "satisfaction survey."

[9:43:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, answered committee questions on CSHB 57(L&C). He said that the purpose of the amendment would be for districts to report both how they implemented a ban on cell phone use and the impacts of a ban.

[9:44:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE shared her concern that the amendment would create unnecessary oversight of local districts from the state government and said that she is unsure if the report proposed by Amendment 1 is even necessary, given the certainty of the possible positive effects.

[9:46:29 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY commented that she did not make the proposed Amendment extremely prescriptive because she is "sensitive to more reporting from districts".

[9:47:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked if the proposed Amendment could be re-drafted to clarify its intention.

CO-CHAIR STORY commented that Representative Elam's idea for the proposed report was already covered by current bill language.

[9:48:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked if his understanding as to how the proposed amendment's policies would be administered was correct.

CO-CHAIR STORY confirmed that Representative Eischeid's understanding was correct.

[9:51:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS commented that the goal of the proposed amendment was to both study the impacts of a cell phone ban in schools and make the implementation of such a policy easier,

[9:51:40 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT removed her objection.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE objected.

CO-CHAIR STORY commented her desire for the report proposed by Amendment 1 to contain accurate and concise information and reiterated her apprehension to creating any further administrative burden for school districts in Alaska.

[9:52:46 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:52 a.m. to 9:54 a.m.

[9:54:01 AM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Dibert, Eischeid, Story, and Himschoot voted in favor of Amendment 1 to CSHB 57(L&C). Representatives Schwanke, Elam, and Underwood voted against it. Therefore, Amendment 1 was adopted by a vote of 4-3.

[9:55:44 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease from 9:55 a.m. to 9:56 a.m.

[9:56:09 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY moved to report CSHB 57(L&C), as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes and [to allow Legislative Legal Services to make] conforming changes, as needed. There being no objection, CSHB 57(EDC) was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee.

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[9:56:52 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY delivered committee announcements.

[9:57:48 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:58 a.m.