

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 28, 2025

8:05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Maxine Dibert

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S): PROFESSIONAL TEACHER PRACTICES
COMMISSION

Patrick Frymark, Fairbanks

CONFIRMATION(S): ADVANCED

HOUSE BILL NO. 98

"An Act relating to a maximum pupil-teacher ratio in public schools; relating to the duties of school districts and governing bodies of school districts; and providing for an effective date."

- -- INVITED & PUBLIC TESTIMONY --

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 98

SHORT TITLE: MAXIMUM PUPIL-TEACHER RATIO

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) FIELDS

02/12/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/12/25	(H)	EDC, FIN
03/28/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

PATRICK FRYMARK, Appointee
Professional Teaching Practices Commission
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during his confirmation hearing.

REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented CSHB 98 (EDC) to the committee.

COURTNEY OWEN, Staff
Representative Zack Fields
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Representative Fields, prime sponsor, Answered committee questions on CSHB 98 (EDC).

TOM KLAAMEYER, President
National Education Association Alaska
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony on CSHB 98 (EDC).

MIKE BRONSON, Member
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Anchorage Education Committee
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony on CSHB 98 (EDC).

CAROLYN STORM
representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on CSHB 98 (EDC).

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:05:30 AM](#)

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

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S): Professional Teacher Practices Commission

[8:06:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the first order of business would be a confirmation hearing for the Governor's Appointees to the Professional Teacher Practices Commission.

[8:07:15 AM](#)

PATRICK FRYMARK, Appointee, Professional Teaching Practices Commission, testified during his confirmation hearing. He began his testimony by sharing personal memories of his primary education and history in education and Alaska. He said that he joined the Fairbanks association on teacher's rights as a way to support his colleagues and learn about the ethical dilemmas that face teachers every day. He said that there is "power in the shared responsibility of teaching" that is recognized and shared between the members of the Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC) and shared that he has mentored three student teachers in the previous years as a means to further both his and other educators' careers.

[8:12:30 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked Mr. Frymark how he would go about working with a colleague who is "making a mistake" and asked Mr. Frymark to "keep an eye please" on how the PTPC could equitably represent rural Alaskan educators.

MR. FRYMARK answered that he is "the kind of person who doesn't want to make the same mistake twice" and said that he would approach the person making a mistake from "the standpoint of well intention, understanding their motivation, understanding their perspective." He

[8:17:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked Mr. Frymark about his time on a positive behavior interventions committee in Fairbanks and asked how positive behavioral interaction could benefit the mental health of students.

MR. FRYMARK explained that the positive behavior interventions system was created out of a necessity to place attention on the positive things that students are doing and to place a "ten-to-one" ratio on positive-negative student-teacher interactions. He explained that negative interactions don't do anything to help the students or the classroom climate and said that poor

teacher-classroom interactions can often exacerbate student's negative headspace. He emphasized the importance of positive behavioral intervention systems.

[8:25:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Mr. Frymark to describe challenges that educators in Alaska face today and asked what kind of pressure the current budgetary situation is putting on the community.

MR. FRYMARK replied that the biggest challenge educators are facing is the expectation that teachers "do more with less" with regards to the declining public education funding in Alaska. He said oftentimes, performing a myriad of tasks that would normally be delegated among a myriad of staff is putting an undue pressure on educators. He explained that the state of his community, regardless of any disagreements in understanding of how to solve the problems that face education, is driven by a care for children.

[8:31:09 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on the confirmation hearing for the governor's appointee to the PTPC. After ascertaining that there was no one who wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[8:32:04 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:32 a.m. to 8:35: a.m.

[8:35:38 AM](#)

HB 98-MAXIMUM PUPIL-TEACHER RATIO

[8:35:45 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 98, "An Act relating to a maximum pupil-teacher ratio in public schools; relating to the duties of school districts and governing bodies of school districts; and providing for an effective date."

[8:36:06 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 98, Version 34-LS0332\G, Bergerud, as the working document.

CO-CHAIR STORY objected for the purpose of discussion.

[8:36:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented CSHB 98 (EDC) to the committee. He explained that the proposed committee substitute would lower a school district's student population threshold from 40,000 to 35,000. He said that the current draft of the bill would only affect the Anchorage School District (ASD).

CO-CHAIR STORY removed her objection, there being no further objection, Version G was before the committee.

[8:37:30 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:37 a.m. to 8:38 a.m.

[8:38:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS began a PowerPoint presentation for CSHB 98 (EDC) [hardcopy included in the committee packet] on slide 2, which displayed a graph that highlighted the inflating number of students and class sizes in Alaska's public schools. He moved to slide 3, which emphasized the correlation between a decline in student performance and rising class sizes. He moved to slide 4, which detailed how the Pupil-Teacher-Ratio (PTR) method of measuring class size is significant from a simple class size number. He concluded the presentation on slide 5, which emphasized the importance of a small class size and its positive impact on improving achievement, particularly among disadvantaged students.

[8:47:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS emphasized that class size is subject to collective bargaining in most states in the country, notably in the upper Midwest region of the U.S. He said that small class size is one of the primary things that teacher's unions bargain for outside of Alaska and explained that a "legally anomalous" court decision from the 1970s has blocked the National Education Association (NEA) of Alaska from bargaining for lower class sizes.

[8:48:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked why CSHB 98 would apply only to the Anchorage School District (ASD).

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS answered that he has a "strong deference" to local governance and explained his apprehension to legislating a school district at a state level.

[8:50:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked where the data displayed on slide 2 came from.

[8:50:53 AM](#)

COURTNEY OWEN, Staff, Representative Zack Fields, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Fields, prime sponsor answered committee questions on CSHB 98 (EDC). She explained that the first graph on slide 2 displayed statewide data and the second graph displayed only anchorage elementary school data.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS added that he is "extremely loathed" to insert state legislation into local governance and explained that the ASD is not actually subject to the extreme amount of bureaucracy that is so commonly perceived to be true. He said that the proposed legislation would show constituents that money is actually being put back into the classroom and explained that making class size law would have a positive impact on budgeting structure in the ASD.

[8:56:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE UNDERWOOD asked for confirmation if the proposed legislation would only consider the ASD.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS confirmed that CSHB 98 (EDC) would only apply to the ASD.

[8:56:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked if there are any calculations that could give a sense of the variation of class sizes currently being experienced in the ASD.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS shared his understanding that an effective calculation could be a determination of the highest possible class size for the highest possible student achievement.

[9:01:32 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT commented that class size and workload are different things.

[9:02:45 AM](#)

TOM KLAAMEYER, President, National Education Association Alaska, gave invited testimony on CSHB 98 (EDC). He said that the issue of class size is largely a problem for more urban school districts, but does profoundly impact rural school districts. He suggested that the proposed legislation be amended to include all of the largest school districts in Alaska and reiterated that the PTR is often misunderstood and is merely a budgetary tool, not necessarily a measurement of student success. He said that class size is 18 percent higher per education professional since 2010 and explained that the PTR "mathematically conceals" the true class size and learning environment of a classroom. He said that the National Education Association (NEA) Alaska would like to see a "caseload cap" added to CSHB 98 (EDC) and emphasized that NEA Alaska would also like to see a base student allocation (BSA) increase alongside, not instead of, lower classroom and caseload sizes. He paraphrased a statement from Patrick Frymark during a previous House Education Standing Committee meeting that said "classroom management is less about the rules on the walls than the relationships that a teacher builds with students" and emphasized the difficulty of a teacher's ability to build relationships with their students when their class sizes are too large. He explained how large class sizes lead to increased levels of disruptive behavior and emphasized how large class sizes negatively affect the entire process of learning and teaching.

[9:17:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked Mr. Klaameyer where he thought funds from an increased BSA might go.

MR. KLAAMEYER answered that most of the funds would go to support teaching professionals, administrators, and support staff. He said that an increase to the BSA is the number one priority of the NEA Alaska because it would reduce PTR in all school districts in Alaska, especially the ASD.

[9:22:35 AM](#)

MIKE BRONSON, Member, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Anchorage Education Committee, gave invited testimony on CSHB 98 (EDC). He explained that there are a large amount of students in the ASD are "unprepared and way behind their grade level, most of whom never catch up to the states math and English standards in their large classrooms". He emphasized that large class sizes do not allow for students to reach their academic benchmarks in a single academic year and explained lower test scores and lower teacher retention are also associated with a higher PTR.

[9:25:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked Mr. Bronson to elaborate on his claim that children are showing up late and unprepared.

MS. BRONSON referred to a document that he sent regarding academic growth rates to Representative Fields office that found that 75% of entry-level kindergarteners in Alaska were "well below" the national benchmark.

[9:28:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked Mr. Bronson to further describe his proposed changes to CSHB 98 (EDC).

MR. BRONSON answered the proposed committee substitute would add policy to ensure that certain grant programs that incentivized higher academic performance created by the Alaska READS act of 2021 would be implemented.

[9:31:23 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on CSHB 98 (EDC).

[9:31:42 AM](#)

CAROLYN STORM, representing self, testified during the hearing on CSHB 98 (EDC). She said that the Alaska State Legislature needs to begin addressing the problems that Alaska's public schools face by first adequately funding them. She said that a heavy investment in pre-kindergarten education is an important tool in improving future student outcomes and encouraged the

committee to understand the implications of the proposed legislation.

[9:34:40 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY, after ascertaining that there was no one else to testify, closed public testimony on CSHB 98 (EDC).

[9:34:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS explained that the intent of the proposed legislation is to identify the necessary funding to improve student outcomes and emphasized that the proposed policies of CSHB 98 (EDC) are "nothing" without a meaningful increase to the BSA.

[9:37:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked if there is a fiscal note associated with CSHB 98 (EDC) and asked what kind of conversation should be had with regard to school district budgeting of smaller class sizes. He asked how pre-kindergarten education funding should be navigated by the Alaska State Legislature.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS answered that there is a zero fiscal note associated with the proposed legislation and said that the conversation surrounding the reduction of class sizes would have something to do with the implementation of an increased BSA and targeted PTR reduction. He explained that student readiness entering kindergarten is certainly "beyond the scope of this bill" and said that he supports the full funding of pre-k programs in Alaska. He said that addressing developmental and pre-k issues would be far less money spent than fixing the issue in the future.

[9:42:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked if there has ever been a record of a schoolboard in Alaska that has advocated for larger class sizes and asked Representative Fields if he had any sense of the cost of the proposed legislation. She commented that a Pikus-Oden study noted that a BSA increase of \$13,000 was necessary to adequately fund Alaska's public schools and shared her experience in teaching students that have successfully navigated the Alaska Early Intervention/ Infant Learning Program (EI/ILP) and the Individual Education Plan (IEP) system. She said that she "loves the intent of this bill" but said that she would

really prefer to let local school boards "do what they need to do" and emphasized that the root of the class size problem lies within the underfunding of schools in Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS answered that he is not aware of any schoolboard in Alaska that has advocated for a larger class size and said that he is "very supportive" of ASD's proposed budget that aligned with increased BSA funding proposed by HB 69. He said that there could be a possibility to align a class size with the increased BSA proposed by HB 69.

[9:49:06 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY commented "what happens in those [Alaska's public schools] depends on what we [the Alaska State Legislature] do in here".

[9:50:29 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY thanked the invited testifiers and delivered committee announcements.

[CSHB 98(EDC) was held over.]

[9:51:33 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:51 a.m.