

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 7, 2025

8:03 a.m.

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

PRESENTATION(S): "SERRC ALASKA'S EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER HISTORY AND SUPPORT TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS".

- HEARD

PRESENTATION(S): "SPECIAL EDUCATION IN RURAL ALASKA".

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

OLIVIA YANCEY, Executive Director
Special Education Service Agency
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a presentation titled "SERRC Alaska's Educational Resource Center History and Support to School Districts".

DONALD ENOC, Education Administrator 2
Division of Innovation & Education Excellence
Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered committee questions on the presentation titled "SERRC Alaska's Education Resource Center History and Support to School Districts".

CYNDY FRY, Director
Special Education Services
Petersburg School District
Petersburg, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a presentation titled "Special Education in Rural Alaska".

DENISE KELLY, Director
Student Support Services
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a presentation titled "Special Education in Rural Alaska".

REPRESENTATIVE TED EISHEID
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, gave remarks on HB 90.

MIKE COONS
representing self
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 90.

TIM SULLIVAN, Executive Director
Financial Reality Foundation
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 90.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:03:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Representatives Eischeid, Himschoot, Dibert, Underwood, and Schwanke were present at the call to order. Representative Elam arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION(S): "SERRC Alaska's Educational Resource Center History and Support to School Districts".

[8:04:19 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the first order of business would be a presentation titled "SERRC Alaska's Educational Resource Center History and Support to School Districts".

[8:05:48 AM](#)

OLIVIA YANCEY, Executive Director, Special Education Service Agency, gave a presentation titled "SERRC Alaska's Educational Resource Center History and Support to School Districts". She began the presentation on slide 13, which described the Southeast Alaska Regional Resource Center (SERRC)'s visual impairment and deaf & hard of hearing programs. She continued to slide 14, which highlighted three points of feedback that SERRC received on its Low Incidence Disability (LID) visual impairment program.

[8:09:39 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked about the scope of SERRC's LID visual impairment program.

MS. YANCY answered that there are currently 28 active LID visual impairment students being served by SERRC.

[8:10:19 AM](#)

MS. YANCY resumed the presentation on slide 15, which highlighted three points of feedback that SERRC received on its LID deaf & hard of hearing program.

[8:11:45 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked how the best method of communication is chosen for a child who is deaf or hard of hearing.

MS. YANCY said that a child oftentimes already has their method of communication pre-selected by their parents before they attend school. She explained how SERRC works with parents to choose and develop a method of communication with a child in cases which that child has not yet been taught a way to communicate.

[8:13:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked how many students within the Anchorage School District are served by the SERRC's deaf & hard of hearing program.

[8:15:04 AM](#)

DONALD ENOC, Education Administrator 2, Division of Innovation & Education Excellence, Department of Education & Early Development, answered committee questions on the presentation titled "SERRC Alaska's Education Resource Center History and Support to School Districts". He said that the School for the Deaf's population is often in fluctuation and said that approximately 5 students are from the Anchorage School District (ASD).

[8:15:54 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT encouraged Representative Schwanke to reach out to ASD with regard to its LID student support staff.

[8:16:36 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY shared her understanding that there was proposed legislation in the Alaska State Senate that outlined common language and parental choice in LID student education.

MR. ENOCH confirmed Co-Chair Story's understanding of proposed legislation concerning LID education in the Alaska State Senate.

[8:17:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DIBERT asked if the state helps to pay for the equipment used to provide instruction to LID deaf and hard of hearing students.

MS. YANCY answered that a local school district is often responsible for the funding of an LID deaf and hard of hearing student's learning equipment.

[8:19:49 AM](#)

MS. YANCY resumed the presentation on slide 18, which highlighted the Alaska Autism Resource Center (AARC)'s work and moved to slide 19, which displayed a map of the locations that in-person services were offered by the AARC.

[8:21:23 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked if SERRC has seen an increase in autism-related services being provided in recent time.

MS. YANCY said that she would follow-up with more information later.

[8:22:42 AM](#)

MS. YANCY resumed the presentation on slide 20, which described the Alaska Deafblind project and its goals and moved to slide 22, which listed observations of the needs of the Alaska deafblind project. She continued to slide 23, which described the Alaska Center for Accessible Materials (AKCAM) and moved to slide 24, which listed observations of the needs of the AKCAM. She continued to slide 26, which displayed a graph that highlighted responses from an LID satisfaction survey and moved to slide 27, which displayed a graph that highlighted responses from an AARC & AKCAM training feedback survey.

[8:33:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked how long the waitlist for in-person services from AKCAM was and asked if AKCAM made sure to limit its caseload to 40 students.

MS. YANCY replied that the current waitlist for in-person LID autism services from AKCAM had two students on it and said that there were several students on the multiple disabilities waitlist. She said that 40 is the maximum amount of students on an AKCAM in-person service waitlist.

[8:37:01 AM](#)

MS. YANCY resumed the presentation on slide 28, which highlighted a few anecdotal remarks about the AARC & AKCAM since August 2024 and moved to slide 29, which celebrated the success of the Special Education Service Agency (SESA) and a teacher from a rural school that participated with SESA curriculum.

[8:40:09 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked Ms. Yancy how frequently special education paraeducators are filling the role of the certified teacher.

MS. YANCY explained that AKCAM is "making the best of what we have when we are onsite" and said that it "would like" to work with an onsite special education teacher once it is onsite and providing in-person services.

[8:43:39 AM](#)

MS. YANCY resumed the presentation on slides 30-32, which displayed a series of images that highlighted the in-person services offered by the Alaska Deafblind project, the AARC, and the AKCAM. She continued to slide 33, which emphasized the importance of community in allowing SESA to perform its work and moved to slide 34, which described the Anne Freitag Library and its resources. She continued to slide 35, which further detailed the Anne Freitag Library's available resources and moved to slide 36, which displayed a pie chart that outlined the Anne Freitag Library's top 5 patron types. She continued to slide 37, which highlighted a few partners of the Anne Freitag Library and moved to slide 38, which detailed the speaking events that SESA hosts at the Anne Freitag Library. She continued through slides 39-40, which highlighted a series of upcoming events through SESA and concluded the presentation on slide 41.

[8:55:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked how SESA is funded.

MS. YANCY explained that SESA is funded through a number of sources, like the LID fund, the Alaska Autism Research Center, and the Alaska Deafblind Project. She explained that the LID fund comes from a specific funding formula the is based on the previous years daily membership multiplied by \$23.10.

[8:57:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked Ms. Yancy to further detail the information displayed on slide 19.

MS. YANCY explained that the information on slide 19 referred to qualifying factors for a site visit by AKCAM.

PRESENTATION(S): "Special Education in Rural Alaska".

[8:59:50 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the next order of business would be a presentation titled "Special Education in Rural Alaska".

[9:00:22 AM](#)

CYNDY FRY, Director, Special Education Services, Petersburg School District, gave a presentation titled "Special Education in Rural Alaska". She began on slide 2, which gave a broad overview of special education services that are currently being offered in rural Alaska and continued to slide 3, which focused on special education services and associated statistics in Petersburg, including teacher's requirements and specific numbers of students with disabilities. She moved to slide 4, which emphasized the multiple roles that rural educators and administrators working in special education often must serve and continued to slide 5, which emphasized the vast number of paraprofessional openings across the state.

[9:17:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked how school districts are meeting the legal requirements of Individual Education Plans (IEP) and special educators.

MS. FRY answered that the Petersburg School District (PSD) has been fortunate enough to have met its special education needs and said that she is aware of other school districts in the state that are running a risk of legal action due to inadequate special education services.

[9:18:57 AM](#)

MS. FRY resumed the presentation on slide 6, which highlighted methods in which the PSD is addressing the challenges of special education in Alaska and moved to slide 7, which emphasized the challenges of special education teacher retention. She continued to slide 8, which highlighted various entities that provide essential support to rural special education programs in Alaska and concluded the presentation on slide 9.

[9:29:01 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked Ms. Fry if there is an occupational therapist on staff in the PSD.

MS. FRY said that the PSD does not have an occupational therapist on staff and instead opts to fly the necessary staff in to Petersburg.

[9:31:58 AM](#)

DENISE KELLY, Director, Student Support Services, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, gave a presentation titled "Special Education in Rural Alaska". She said that most of the schools in her school district are accessible by road, though some are roadless communities that have extraordinary needs and explained how the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) has had to contract both retired and third-party teachers from out of state in order to meet its special education needs. She emphasized that the shortage of special education teachers has "made it increasingly difficult" to provide consistent high-quality education to students with special needs and highlighted that there are currently 18 vacancies within special education positions in the KPBSD. She explained how the contracting of third-party teachers places a financial strain on the KPBSD and emphasized the more individualized attention that certain special education students need that a transient teacher might not be able to address during their short time at the KPBSD.

[9:39:23 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 90, "An Act establishing a financial literacy education program for public schools; and providing for an effective date."

[9:39:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TED EISHEID, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, gave remarks on HB 90. He shared his appreciation for the dialogue for the proposed legislation and said that he "heard a lot of support" from his constituents who were aware of HB 90.

[9:40:35 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on HB 90.

[9:41:15 AM](#)

MIKE COONS, representing self, testified in support of HB 90. He shared his suggestion that HB 90 be amended to include both 5th and 12th graders in its proposed curriculum and said that financial education is valuable for Alaska's students. He cited

a book by Dave Ramsey as his reason for supporting HB 90 and urged the committee's support of the proposed legislation.

[9:43:40 AM](#)

TIM SULLIVAN, Executive Director, Financial Reality Foundation, testified in support of HB 90. He explained that the Financial Reality Foundation hosts a series of financial education classes for high school students around Alaska and said that a financial education curriculum would be more sufficient in achieving the goals of a more financially educated public.

[9:45:18 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:45 a.m. to 9:46 a.m.

[9:46:40 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 90.

[9:47:11 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that HB 90 would be held over.

[9:48:07 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:48 a.m.