

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

May 7, 2025

8:04 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

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S): UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA BOARD OF REGENTS

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 176

"An Act relating to notice of new fees and fee increases from the University of Alaska; relating to billing statements from the University of Alaska; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED HB 176 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 212

"An Act relating to the local contribution made by a city or borough school district; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 59

"An Act relating to demonstration state-tribal education compacts; relating to demonstration state-tribal education compact schools; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 25

Supporting and encouraging the continued recruitment and retention of international educators on J-1 and H-1B visas in the state.

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 176

SHORT TITLE: UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FEES

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) CARRICK

04/09/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/09/25	(H)	EDC, FIN
04/30/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/30/25	(H)	-- Invited & Public Testimony --
05/05/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
05/05/25	(H)	Heard & Held
05/05/25	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
05/07/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 212

SHORT TITLE: LOCAL CONTRIBUTIONS BY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) STORY

04/30/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/30/25	(H)	EDC, FIN
05/05/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
05/05/25	(H)	Heard & Held
05/05/25	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
05/07/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 59

SHORT TITLE: STATE-TRIBAL EDUCATION COMPACTS

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	TRB, EDC
02/11/25	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/11/25	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
02/13/25	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/13/25	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
02/18/25	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/18/25	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
03/13/25	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
03/13/25	(H)	Heard & Held

03/13/25	(H)	MINUTE (TRB)
04/08/25	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/08/25	(H)	Heard & Held
04/08/25	(H)	MINUTE (TRB)
04/24/25	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/24/25	(H)	Heard & Held
04/24/25	(H)	MINUTE (TRB)
05/01/25	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
05/01/25	(H)	Moved CSHB 59 (TRB) Out of Committee
05/01/25	(H)	MINUTE (TRB)
05/02/25	(H)	TRB RPT CS (TRB) 2DP 1NR 4AM
05/02/25	(H)	DP: MOORE, UNDERWOOD
05/02/25	(H)	NR: CARRICK
05/02/25	(H)	AM: BURKE, STORY, SCHWANKE, DIBERT
05/07/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

FERNANDO ESCOBAR, Appointee
 University of Alaska Board of Regents
 Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during his confirmation hearing.

PAT JACOBSON
 representing self
 Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Fernando Escobar's appointment to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

BETTY WALTERS
 representing self
 Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Fernando Escobar's appointment to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

SOPHIE MAY
 representing self
 Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Fernando Escobar's appointment to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

REPRESENTATIVE ASHLEY CARRICK
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HB 176 to the committee.

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HB 212 to the committee.

HEATHER HEINEKEN, Director
Division of Finance & Support Services
Department of Education & Early Development
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Explained the fiscal notes associated with HB 212.

DR. DEENA BISHOP, Commissioner
Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered committee questions on HB 212.

DR. DEENA BISHOP, Commissioner
Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of House Rules by request of the governor, prime sponsor, presented HB 59 (TRB) to the committee.

DR. JOEL ISAAK, Director of Tribal Affairs
Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of House Rules by request of the governor, prime sponsor, presented HB 59 (TRB) to the committee.

DR. MICHAEL ROBBINS, Superintendent
Ketchikan School District
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony in support of HB 59 (TRB).

JAMIE BURGESS, Superintendent
Nome School District
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony in support of HB 59 (TRB).

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:02 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Representatives Elam, Dibert, Schwanke, Eischeid, Himschoot, and Story were present at the call to order. Representative Underwood arrived as the meeting was in progress.

8:04:56 AM

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the first order of business would be the confirmation hearing of Fernando Escobar to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

8:06:30 AM

FERNANDO ESCOBAR, Appointee, University of Alaska Board of Regents, testified during his confirmation hearing.

Hello Representatives of the House Education Committee, My name is Fernando Escobar. I was recently nominated as the next Student Regent for the University of Alaska Board of Regents. My confirmation hearing is scheduled for May 7th at 8am for the House Education Committee.

First, thank you for your hard work and commitment to our state. Your efforts truly make a difference in Alaskans' lives. I am proud to be an Alaskan and appreciate everything you do to support our communities. A little about me: I was born and raised on Kodiak. My family immigrated from El Salvador in the mid-2000s, and I was the first of my family to be born in the United States. My passion for public service developed during my 8th grade year and has followed me since. I was very active with student government, my school district, and my community. One of my proudest commitments, which I always like to discuss, is my involvement with the Kodiak Teen Court. This program employs a Restorative Justice model for juvenile offenders. It gave me the chance to work with young individuals in Kodiak and partner with my peers who acted as youth attorneys and judges. This experience expanded my understanding of the challenges and issues that juveniles, students, and many community members faced. Within my school district, I have served on numerous committees focused on curriculum and student outcomes. These opportunities

have continued my interest in ensuring educational access for all individuals, regardless of their background or level of understanding. When it was time to pursue a postsecondary education, I chose to stay in Alaska because of the opportunities I could see. I am currently studying at the University of Alaska Fairbanks(UAF). This decision was the best I have made so far in my life, and I am proud to share that story of continued education in Alaska. As a student, I have had the opportunity to meet so many others, whom I call friends, and they range from all over Alaska, to the Lower 48, and some who come from other nations. Their stories create our future in Alaska. I am honored to have been nominated to represent my peers across the university system, not only to lead them but also to lead Alaska's future and its education. I look forward to your questions on May 7th!

[8:07:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked Mr. Escobar why he wanted to serve on the University of Alaska (UA) Board of Regents and asked what his biggest concerns with education were.

MR. ESCOBAR shared his belief that there must be a "strong" student representative on the UA Board of Regents and said that his biggest concern with regards to the UA system were threats from the federal government.

[8:09:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID commented that he was "very impressed" by Mr. Escobar's introductory email and resume and thanked him for his application to the UA Board of Regents.

[8:10:25 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on the confirmation hearing of Fernando Escobar to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

[8:11:13 AM](#)

PAT JACOBSON, representing self, testified in support of Fernando Escobar's appointment to the University of Alaska Board of Regents. She shared a series of positive attributes of Mr.

Escobar's personality and emphasized his various positions in community service and student activism.

[8:13:20 AM](#)

BETTY WALTERS, representing self, testified in support of Fernando Escobar's appointment to the University of Alaska Board of Regents. She referred the committee to her letter of support for Mr. Escobar and urged the committee's support of his appointment.

[8:14:44 AM](#)

SOPHIE MAY, representing self, testified in support of Fernando Escobar's appointment to the University of Alaska Board of Regents. She emphasized Mr. Escobar's trusted role within the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) honors college and said that he brings a "rare big-picture vision" to the UA Board of Regents.

[8:16:40 AM](#)

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

[8:16:50 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY stated that the House Education Standing Committee has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointees and recommends that the following names be forwarded to a joint session for consideration: Fernando Escobar, University of Alaska Board of Regents. She said that signing the report regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects an individual member's approval or disapproval of the appointee, and the nomination is merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[8:17:22 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:17 a.m. to 8:19 a.m.

HB 176-UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FEES

[8:19:45 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 176, "An Act relating to notice of new fees and fee increases from the University of Alaska; relating to billing statements from the University of Alaska; and providing for an effective date."

[8:20:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ASHLEY CARRICK, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 176 to the committee. She reminded the committee that HB 176 would provide fee transparency to UA students with an itemized list of consolidated fees and notify the students of their bill as it becomes available.

[8:21:06 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT moved to report HB 176, labeled 34-LS0880\A, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 176 was reported from the House Education Standing Committee.

[Co-Chair Story passed the gavel to Co-Chair Himschoot.]

[8:21:57 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:21 a.m. to 8:24 a.m..

HB 212-LOCAL CONTRIBUTIONS BY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

[8:25:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 212, "An Act relating to the local contribution made by a city or borough school district; and providing for an effective date."

[8:25:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 212 to the committee. She referred the committee to the fiscal note associated with HB 212.

[8:26:34 AM](#)

HEATHER HEINEKEN, Director, Division of Finance & Support Services, Department of Education & Early Development, explained the fiscal notes associated with HB 212. She explained that the

first fiscal note would direct the Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) to change how it currently conducts funding disparity tests with school districts. She detailed how the second fiscal note referenced the proposed funding mechanism by HB 212 and explained that the third fiscal note was related to the Mt. Edgecumbe High School.

[8:29:44 AM](#)

DR. DEENA BISHOP, Commissioner, Department of Education & Early Development, answered committee questions on HB 212. She explained that the DEED is currently evaluating regulatory changes related to special revenue fund contributions by local governments and their school districts, which would be altered by HB 212 if it were to pass. She said that school districts around Alaska are interpreting current DEED regulations differently and said that the DEED is working on new special revenue fund regulations because of it. She emphasized that current Alaska Statute requirements already embed school impact aid funding within them and said that "all applicable revenues must be included in the disparity test under law". She explained how a local government that might be able to better fund a school within its district would be unfair to other schools around the state that might not have as many financial options to utilize. She suggested that previous comments made to the House Education Standing Committee by Lisa Parody were inaccurate and said that it school districts being funded over the disparity limit "could trigger retroactive consequences." She shared her belief that the proposed regulatory changes being made by the DEED were to bring school districts in Alaska more in accordance with existing Alaska Statute and said that the DEED supported the language that currently existed in SCS CS HB69, which provided "clear" language on funding disparity tests.

[8:43:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked if impact aid dollars are allowed to be used outside of education and asked what the maximum allowable local contribution is under the current state education funding formula.

DIRECTOR HEINEKEN answered that impact aid dollars are included as part of a school district's general operations budget.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP added that the state education funding formula has minimum spending formula that allows for a 25%

overspending range with local contributions. She said that a local government with more funding options might lead to an inequitable funding scenario between different school districts in Alaska.

DIRECTOR HEINEKEN commented that additional funds could be spent on current expenditures, like administration, instruction, attendance & health services, pupil transportation services, operation maintenance & plans, and fixed charges, which the DEED was attempting to clarify by aligning its regulations with the U.S. Department of Education.

[8:54:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked if the state has ever failed a funding disparity test before and asked what the consequence would be if it were to fail it.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP said that she was not aware if Alaska had ever failed a funding disparity test and explained that the federal government currently dictates the 25% funding disparity.

DIRECTOR HEINEKEN commented that she was unaware of any failure of a disparity test during her time working in Alaska Education.

[8:58:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY said that the state did fail a funding disparity test in 2019 because of transportation funding and explained that the DEED acquired a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education to allow for the higher cost of transportation that exists within Alaska.

[HB 59 was held over].

HB 59-STATE-TRIBAL EDUCATION COMPACTS

[9:03:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the final order of business would be CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 59(TRB), "An Act relating to demonstration state-tribal education compacts; relating to demonstration state-tribal education compact schools; and providing for an effective date."

[9:05:27 AM](#)

DR. DEENA BISHOP, Commissioner, Department of Education & Early Development, on behalf of House Rules by request of the governor, prime sponsor, presented HB 59 (TRB) to the committee.

[9:08:37 AM](#)

DR. JOEL ISAAK, Director of Tribal Affairs, Department of Education & Early Development, on behalf of House Rules by request of the governor, prime sponsor, presented HB 59 (TRB) to the committee. He gave a PowerPoint presentation for HB 59 (TRB) [included in the committee packet] on slide 4, which highlighted the agenda of HB 59 (TRB) and moved to slide 5, which explained the difference between compacting and other types of tribal education. He continued to slide 6, which explained what compacting was with regard to tribal education and moved to slide 7, which described the policy differences between two different pieces of Alaska legislation concerning tribal compacting. He continued through slides 9-11, which explained the policies of SB 34, a previously passed tribal compacting bill, and moved through slides 12-13, which detailed the timeline of the negotiation schedule for tribes and the state. He continued to slide 14, which gave broad introduction and overview of the proposed policies of HB 59 (TRB). He skipped to slide 16, which detailed the overlapping policies of tribal compacting and HB 59 (TRB) and moved through slides 17-18, which described sections 1 and 2 of a report on the outcomes of SB 34. He continued through slides 19-21, which detailed the findings of section 2 of a report on the outcomes of tribal compacting and moved through slides 22-24, which described the findings of sections 4 and 5 of a report on the outcomes of tribal compacting in Alaska. He continued to slide 25, which detailed the pilot tribal compacting program proposed by HB 59 and skipped through slides 26-31.

[9:29:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked Dr. Isaak to describe the difference between the tribal compacts in schools and Alaska Native Corporations.

DR. ISAAK said that one might "need a masters degree to understand Alaska tribal landscape" and explained that the federally recognized tribes recognized tribes function as tribal governments, while tribal corporations do not. He said that tribal corporations can provide some services that tribal governments might, though it is often at a federal level through bill appropriations language. He said that village corporations

can set up foundations to provide services to their shareholders, who are different than tribal citizens or members. He explained how a 1986 congressional amendment precluded that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) from giving money to Alaska for school funding and construction.

[9:35:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked Dr. Isaak to elaborate further on the governing power of Alaska Native Tribes.

DR. ISAAK described how Alaska Native Tribal governments might be able to issue government proclamations, like the Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope (ICAS) declaring a state of emergency for education within the boundaries of its tribal area. He explained that tribal schools are not currently recognized as public schools under state law, which was why the proposed legislation was before the committee.

[9:39:33 AM](#)

DR. MICHAEL ROBBINS, Superintendent, Ketchikan School District, gave invited testimony in support of HB 59 (TRB). He said that the proposed legislation would provide an "important opportunity to advance culturally responsive education across Alaska". He proposed that HB 59 (TRB) include a "hold harmless" provision for funding to support school districts that may not be able to meet certain criteria for a school currently outlined in Alaska Statute.

[9:44:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked Dr. Robbins if his idea to amend HB 59 (TRB) to include a "hold harmless clause" were based on existing laws regarding "hold harmless".

DR. ROBBINS answered that he was referring to existing "hold harmless" laws to be implemented into HB 59 (TRB).

[9:45:31 AM](#)

JAMIE BURGESS, Superintendent, Nome School District, gave invited testimony in support of HB 59 (TRB). She explained how the Nome School District (NSD) was already in a "hold harmless" situation due to its enrollment decline in the past several years and explained how the proposed legislation would benefit the NSD. She said that the NSD currently faces the potential

for specialty teachers to be laid off and detailed how specialized programs are important to students within the NSD.

[9:51:08 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 9:51 a.m.

[9:51:29 AM](#)

MS. BURGESS continued her testimony by explaining how the NSD utilized place-based learning and indigenous reading classes as apart of a indigenous language immersion program that is now at risk of being cut if funding were to fall through. She detailed how a declining enrollment in the current statutory landscape could negatively affect the NSD emphasized the school district's full support of HB 59 (TRB).

[9:55:48 AM](#)

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

[HB 59 (TRB) was held over].

[9:56:32 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:56 a.m.