

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 19, 2025

3:33 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
Senator Jesse Kiehl  
Senator Mike Cronk

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative Alyse Gavin

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 69(RLS) AM "An Act relating to education; relating to open enrollment in public schools; relating to school and student performance reports; relating to school and district accountability; relating to charter schools; relating to an annual report for correspondence study programs; relating to the base student allocation; relating to reading proficiency incentive grants; relating to wireless telecommunications devices in public schools; relating to the duty of the legislature to pass a public education appropriation bill; relating to the duty of the governor to prepare a public education appropriation bill; establishing the Task Force on Education Funding; relating to a report on regulation of school districts; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 69

SHORT TITLE: EDUCATION FUNDING: INCREASE BSA

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) HIMSCHOOT

01/24/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/24/25 (H) EDC, FIN  
01/27/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106  
01/27/25 (H) Heard & Held  
01/27/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)  
01/29/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106  
01/29/25 (H) Heard & Held  
01/29/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)  
01/29/25 (H) EDC AT 5:00 PM DAVIS 106  
01/29/25 (H) -- Public Testimony --  
02/03/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106  
02/03/25 (H) Heard & Held  
02/03/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)  
02/06/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519  
02/06/25 (H) <Pending Referral>  
02/12/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106  
02/12/25 (H) Heard & Held  
02/12/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)  
02/12/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519  
02/12/25 (H) <Pending Referral>  
02/18/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519  
02/18/25 (H) <Pending Referral>  
02/19/25 (H) MOTION TO DISCHARGE FROM EDC, RULE  
48(D)  
02/19/25 (H) DISCHARGE FROM EDC, RULE 48, PASSED Y21  
N18 E1  
02/19/25 (H) RESCIND ACTION TO DISCHARGE FAILED Y19  
N20 E1  
02/19/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519  
02/19/25 (H) Scheduled but Not Heard  
02/20/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519  
02/20/25 (H) Moved HB 69 Out of Committee  
02/20/25 (H) MINUTE(FIN)  
02/21/25 (H) FIN RPT 5DP 4DNP 1NR 1AM  
02/21/25 (H) DP: HANNAN, GALVIN, FOSTER, JOSEPHSON,  
SCHRAGE  
02/21/25 (H) DNP: TOMASZEWSKI, STAPP, ALLARD,  
JOHNSON  
02/21/25 (H) NR: JIMMIE  
02/21/25 (H) AM: BYNUM  
02/21/25 (H) MOTION TO WITHDRAW FROM RLS TO CAL,  
RULE 18  
02/21/25 (H) WITHDRAW FROM RLS TO CAL, RULE 18,  
FAILED Y18 N20 E2  
02/24/25 (H) MOTION TO WITHDRAW FROM RLS TO CAL,  
RULE 18

02/24/25 (H) WITHDRAW FROM RLS TO CAL, RULE 18,  
 FAILED Y19 N19 E2

03/05/25 (H) RLS AT 8:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

03/05/25 (H) Moved CSHB 69(RLS) Out of Committee

03/05/25 (H) MINUTE(RLS)

03/06/25 (H) RULES TO CALENDAR PENDING RLS RPT/REF

03/06/25 (H) NOT TAKEN UP 3/6 - ON 3/10 CALENDAR

03/10/25 (H) RLS RPT CS(RLS) NEW TITLE 4DP 3AM

03/10/25 (H) DP: EDGMON, KOPP, SCHRAGE, STUTES

03/10/25 (H) AM: VANCE, COSTELLO, TILTON

03/10/25 (H) DEADLINE FOR ALL AMS AT 12 P.M. TODAY  
 Y21 N19

03/11/25 (H) BEFORE HOUSE IN SECOND READING

03/11/25 (H) TAKE AM 23 FROM TABLE UC

03/12/25 (H) MOTION TO RETURN TO EDC COMMITTEE, RULE  
 39 B, FAILED Y19 N21

03/12/25 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)

03/12/25 (H) VERSION: CSHB 69(RLS) AM

03/12/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

03/12/25 (S) <Pending Referral>

03/14/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS

03/14/25 (S) EDC, FIN

03/17/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

03/17/25 (S) Heard & Held

03/17/25 (S) MINUTE(EDC)

03/19/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

**WITNESS REGISTER**

MELISSA BURNETT, School Board President  
 Fairbanks North Star Borough  
 Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified by invitation on HB 69.

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

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided an overview of the fiscal notes for  
 HB 69.

ERIC WALTENBAUGH, representing self  
 Homer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified on HB 69 with concerns.

MADELINE AGUILLARD, Superintendent  
 Kuspuk School District

Aniak, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

CAROLINE VENUTI, representing self

Homer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified with concerns on SB 69.

ANDREA GARDNER, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69 with concerns.

CAROLINE STORM, Executive Director

Coalition for Education Equity of Alaska

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69 with suggestions.

MIKE BRONSON, Education Committee

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

JENNA FABIAN, State Representative

Alaska Associations of Elementary School Principals (AAESP)

Nikiski, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

VICKI TURNER MALONE, representing self

Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 69.

ELLEN JAIMES, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

LADAWN DRUCE, representing self

Sterling, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified on HB 69.

KORTNIE HORAZDOVSKY, representing self

Chugiak, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69 with concerns.

ANDREW WEST, representing self

Bethel, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

KAI BORSON-PAINE, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

MARGO BELLAMY, Anchorage School Board  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

LILI MISEL, representing self  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

PAT RACE, representing self  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

SIOBHAN MCINTYRE, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

ALLEN HIPPLER, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to HB 69.

ANDY HOLLEMAN, Board President  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified on HB 69 with concerns.

CHELSEA AMBROSE, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

DANETTE PETERSON, President  
Fairbanks Education Association  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

RACHEL DETEMPLE, representing self  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 69.

DAVID IGNELL, representing self  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to HB 69.

CHRISTY GOMEZ, Principal

Tyonek Elementary School  
Tyonek, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified on HB 69.

HANNAH MURKIN, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified on HB 69 with concerns.

## **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:33:38 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:33 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Cronk, Kiehl, and Chair Tobin. Senator Stevens arrived shortly thereafter. Senator Bjorkman arrived thereafter.

### **HB 69-EDUCATION FUNDING: INCREASE BSA**

[3:35:00 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 69(RLS) am "An Act relating to education; relating to open enrollment in public schools; relating to school and student performance reports; relating to school and district accountability; relating to charter schools; relating to an annual report for correspondence study programs; relating to the base student allocation; relating to reading proficiency incentive grants; relating to wireless telecommunications devices in public schools; relating to the duty of the legislature to pass a public education appropriation bill; relating to the duty of the governor to prepare a public education appropriation bill; establishing the Task Force on Education Funding; relating to a report on regulation of school districts; and providing for an effective date."

[3:35:16 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced invited testimony on HB 69.

[3:36:41 PM](#)

MELISSA BURNETT, School Board President, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified by invitation on HB 69. She said she is a parent, community member, and president of the Fairbanks North Star Borough School Board and testified as a strong advocate for Alaska's students and emphasized the urgent need for increased school funding. She stated that districts across the state are struggling to meet rising costs while being asked to do more, leading to larger class sizes, stretched

staff, and insufficient support for students. She urged lawmakers to support a \$1,000 increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA), noting it would provide real and lasting impact. Her district has committed to lowering the pupil-to-teacher ratio (PTR), and with additional funding, could reduce class sizes and increase one-on-one support for students.

[3:37:49 PM](#)

MS. BURNETT reported that since 2019, Fairbanks has been forced to close seven schools, including three this year alone. She detailed that some grade bands now exceed 30 students per class. Special education programs, the Extended Learning Program (ELP), and supply and activity budgets have all been reduced, some by half. The district has eliminated hockey, elementary band, orchestra, and art programs, and shut down its print shop. Administrative staff has been reduced by 20 percent, and the district is currently considering another \$500,000 to \$1 million in administrative cuts. With a loss of 650 students and a projected \$16 million deficit if funding remains flat, the district has decided to close three additional schools and contract out evening custodial services. Additional proposed cuts would increase the PTR by another 2.5 students per teacher. She stressed that every student in the district is affected by these reductions and shared that many parents are making difficult choices due to under-resourced schools. Teachers are using personal funds to supply their classrooms, and school boards are forced to make painful decisions year after year. She acknowledged concerns about the state's budget but argued that Alaska cannot afford not to invest in education, emphasizing that strong schools create strong communities.

MS. BURNETT also addressed policy changes that could strengthen HB 69. She supported open enrollment, provided local students are given priority and school boards define capacity. She advocated for counting correspondence students as 1.0 in the foundation formula instead of 0.9, noting Alaska's long history of distance education and the need to fully fund these programs. She also called for a focus on Career and Technical Education (CTE) policies that expand opportunities for students preparing for trades and high-demand jobs. She emphasized that investing in CTE supports both students' futures and the state's economic growth.

[3:41:47 PM](#)

MS. BURNETT concluded by urging the legislature to pair increased funding with smart, student-centered policies. She called HB 69 a strong starting point but said it needs

additional work to ensure it passes and becomes impactful. She asked lawmakers to build a system that truly supports all students long term, rather than continuing to patch holes.

[3:42:12 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked Ms. Burnett to confirm that Fairbanks has closed seven schools and is planning to close three more, for a total of ten school closures. He also requested that she repeat the number of students the district has lost in recent years.

MS. BURNETT clarified that Fairbanks has closed seven schools in total, four in previous years and three more this year. She added that the district lost 650 students this year due to declining enrollment.

[3:42:58 PM](#)

SENATOR CRONK thanked Ms. Burnett for her hard work and the efforts of the Fairbanks School Board. He also expressed appreciation for the policy ideas she shared, noting their importance.

SENATOR KIEHL asked whether, under the current policy in the Fairbanks North Star Borough, students from Nenana are able to enroll at University Park Elementary, and if that reflects an existing open enrollment practice in the district.

[3:43:45 PM](#)

MS. BURNETT confirmed that the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District has a lenient out-of-attendance-area policy that allows students from outside the district, such as those from Nenana, to enroll in schools like University Park Elementary. She clarified that enrollment is permitted as long as there is available space in the school.

SENATOR KIEHL asked approximately how many students from outside the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District are currently attending schools within the district.

MS. BURNETT responded that she did not have the exact number but would have the numbers sent to the committee.

[3:44:37 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN said Ms. Heineken from the Department of Education and Early Development would give a review of the fiscal notes for HB 69.

[3:44:54 PM](#)

HEATHER HEINEKEN, Director, Finance and Support Services, Department of Education and Early Development, Fairbanks, Alaska, provided an overview of the fiscal notes associated with HB 69:

- Public Education Fund, OMB Component No. 2804:  
HB 69 proposes increasing the Base Student Allocation (BSA) by \$1,000, from \$5,960 to \$6,960. This change creates a cost of \$253,201,200 beginning in FY 2026, with the same cost projected for the out years 2027 through FY 2031. The bill is set to take effect July 1, 2025.
- Foundation Program, OMB Component No. 141:  
This fiscal note mirrors the Public Education Fund analysis but shows a \$0 fiscal impact because the general fund transfers to the Public Education Fund, not directly into the Foundation Program. It is included for informational purposes only.
- Mt. Edgecumbe High School, a division of DEED, OMB Component No. 1060:  
This fiscal note reflects an increase in receipt authority to align with expected allocations from the Public Education Fund. The projected increase is \$706,500 for FY 2016, and annually for the out years FY 2027 through FY 2031.
- Student and School Achievement Allocation, OMB Component No. 2796):
- HB 69, Section 15: Adds one Education Specialist II, Range 21, to serve as a charter school coordinator at a total cost of \$158,200 in FY 2026, including \$135,600 salary, \$17,600 in annual operating costs and a one-time \$5,000 equipment cost. The ongoing annual cost from FY 2027-2031 will be \$153,200.
  - o Section 23: Establishes Reading Proficiency Incentive Grants of \$450 per student in grades K-6 who meet proficiency or demonstrate progress on statewide assessments. Based on current data, 48,847 students would qualify, with an annual cost of \$21,981,200. A one-time \$6,000 legal cost is also included for regulation development, making the total FY 2026 cost \$21,987,200. The annual cost from FY 2027-2031 remains \$21,981,200 (noting a correction from a fiscal note error showing \$21,971,200).
  - o Section 25: Requires districts to adopt mobile communication device policies, with a one-time legal cost of \$6,000 in FY 2026. No ongoing costs are anticipated.

- o Total Cost for OMB Component 2796:
- o FY 2026: \$22,151,400
- o FY 2027-2031: \$22,124,400 annually

- Office of Management and Budget, OMB Component No. 2144:  
This fiscal note addresses the requirement for a separate education appropriation bill. OMB reported that it can absorb the additional workload within existing resources, so this is a \$0 fiscal note.

MS. HEINEKEN stated there are additional regulations drafted in HB 69 that do not create department level costs and can be performed within current resources in place.

[3:50:54 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL questioned why the estimated cost for the reading incentive grants remained flat over the years. He asked whether the department expects that the number of students reading at grade level or making progress will not increase as a result of the grants.

[3:51:20 PM](#)

MS. HEINEKEN replied that DEED can only make projections on information that is currently available. Ideally 100 percent of students will qualify, and the state pay grants for all students' achievement. She said she would give more detailed information to the committee.

[3:51:50 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL acknowledged that fiscal notes are estimates based on a specific point in time. He stated that before finalizing work on HB 69, he would like to hear from DEED on whether the reading incentive grants are expected to be an effective tool for improving literacy outcomes, or if they serve primarily as a funding mechanism without a meaningful impact on student reading achievement.

[3:52:25 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN reached out to Ms. Heineken for the additional information on the reading incentive grants and requested it also provide a breakdown of the estimated 48,847 students eligible for the reading incentive grants by school district. She asked for an approximate distribution of funding to each district to help the committee better understand how the grant resources would be allocated across the state. She stated that

this information would be helpful for evaluating the impact of the program.

MS. HEINEKEN said she would get the information to the committee.

[3:53:00 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN concluded invited testimony on HB 69.

[3:54:19 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN opened public testimony on HB 69.

[3:54:28 PM](#)

ERIC WALTENBAUGH, representing self, Homer, Alaska, testified on HB 69 He said he is the principal of West Homer Elementary School and said he is testifying in support of several aspects of HB 69, including early funding, the proposed \$1,000 increase to the BSA), the cell phone policy, and the shift from achievement to growth data. However, he said he would focus his remarks on concerns about educational outcomes, particularly within homeschool and correspondence programs.

MR. WALTENBAUGH acknowledged that school choice is valuable and that many families do homeschooling effectively, but he also noted that many do not. He shared that homeschool families have personally thanked him for raising concerns about the lack of accountability in correspondence programs, expressing surprise at how minimal oversight is, especially given the visible neglect by some families. He questioned how many students in these models are truly making academic progress and emphasized that the state lacks the data to answer that.

[3:56:05 PM](#)

MR. WALTENBAUGH highlighted that only 9 to 12 percent of correspondence students take state assessments, far below the state's 95 percent participation goal. He also pointed out that students homeschooling outside of correspondence programs are not required to notify the state or participate in testing or recordkeeping, making it impossible to know how many are in that category.

[3:56:40 PM](#)

MR. WALTENBAUGH suggested policy solutions, including requiring any homeschool or correspondence student receiving a state allotment to participate in state assessments or Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing as outlined in HB 69. He also proposed incentivizing correspondence programs to reach the 95

percent testing participation rate by granting them a full BSA instead of 90 percent, but only if that benchmark is met. He concluded that meaningful and consistent outcome data is essential for making fiscally responsible investments in school choice programs.

3:57:48 PM

MADELINE AGUILLARD, Superintendent, Kuspuk School District, Aniak, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is also a board member of the Alaska Superintendent Association. She stated the district's and board's positions of support had already been outlined so she would like to focus on the taskforce. She stated that the task force is a much-needed component of the bill but recommended that its composition go beyond just a legislative committee. She encouraged including representatives from the Alaska Council of School Administrators and the Alaska Superintendents Association. She also emphasized the importance of involving outside school finance experts to provide critical support and expertise.

3:59:30 PM

CAROLINE VENUTI, representing self, Homer, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 69. She said she is a graduate of Kotzebue High School, and the University of Alaska. She testified as a lifelong Alaskan and a product of the state's public education system. She shared that she served as a teacher and administrator in both rural and urban schools in Alaska for 40 years. Referencing the phrase "No Child Left Behind," she emphasized that while it originated as a federal education law in 2002, it should also serve as a guiding principle to ensure equity for all students, including those from low-income families, minority groups, and students with disabilities. She expressed concern that underfunding public schools while increasing funding for homeschool programs with no required student testing risks creating a two-tiered system in Alaska. She warned of developing "apartheid schools" where village and low-income students face overcrowded classrooms, outdated textbooks, no science labs, no music or art, and a constant turnover of untrained teachers.

MS. VENUTI proposed a solution in the form of a modest statewide school tax, suggesting a \$50 or \$75 deduction from every working Alaskan's first paycheck of the year, including oil field workers and legislators. She recommended this revenue be placed in a dedicated fund to improve education access and equity statewide.

[4:01:55 PM](#)

ANDREA GARDNER, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with concerns.

[Original punctuation provided.]

Chair Tobin, Vice Chair Stevens, and members of the committee,

My name is Andrea Gardner. I live in Anchorage and teach in the Anchorage School District. I have rewritten this testimony countless times, trying to wholly capture *why* HB69 is so critical. I realize though, all I can do is share my own story of how underfunding affected me.

Last year was my tenth year as a classroom teacher. I hold a master's degree in elementary education, am a certified reading specialist, and have extensive training in supporting neurodiverse students.

But in the 2023-2024 school year, I faced my largest class ever—35 kindergarten and first-grade students—without enough materials, space, support, or even chairs. Out of respect for my students' privacy, I won't share many details. But I can tell you this: many were twice-exceptional, needing both academic enrichment and behavioral accommodations. Thirty-five five- and six-year-olds may not sound like much. Imagine three cartons of eggs—minus one. Now place each egg on the floor, and make sure you keep every single one from breaking. Or picture hosting a dinner for 20. You have food, space, and settings for exactly that. But guests keep arriving. You welcome them, because it's what you do. Soon, you're hosting 35 people with resources meant for 20. Would you like to host that party? Would you like to attend it? Now imagine doing that every day for 180 days with five and six year olds

This isn't a partisan issue. It's a logistical one—just because you CAN fit 35 bodies in one room doesn't mean you should. Overcrowding made it harder for my students to focus, self-regulate, and feel safe. It lowered their engagement and test scores. I had to spend more time managing behaviors than delivering actual instruction. It felt like the difference between teaching swim lessons and lifeguarding.

As a reading specialist, I can assure you—raising reading scores really isn't possible in overcrowded, unsupported classrooms. Teachers need time, resources, and capacity to provide the systematic, research-based instruction young learners deserve.

Twice-exceptional students experience the world intensely. In my overcrowded classroom, many students became overwhelmed, leading to escalating vocal, physical, and destructive outbursts throughout the day. An education system starved of funding doesn't just struggle—it wears down teachers, limits student potential, and makes meaningful learning harder every day. HB 69 isn't an upgrade—it's what stands between instability and total collapse. It's the bare minimum our students and teachers deserve.

[4:04:55 PM](#)

CAROLINE STORM, Executive Director, Coalition for Education Equity of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with suggestions. She stated that after over a decade of advocacy, the need for increased education funding is well established. She noted that school districts continue to struggle with inflation, rising energy and insurance costs, and an inability to offer competitive wages. She pointed out that unlike education, most other state departments have seen 2 to 4 percent increases in their personnel budgets, and the Department of Corrections budget has doubled in five years without calls for increased accountability. She urged the legislature and governor to meet students' needs by passing HB 69 with a \$1,000 BSA increase and to amend the bill to include a comprehensive school funding adequacy study.

[4:06:32 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN arrived at the meeting.

[4:07:30 PM](#)

MIKE BRONSON, Education Committee, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Hi, I'm Mike Bronson. I'm a volunteer with the NAACP in Anchorage. My daughters went through public schools in Anchorage and recently graduated from West High.

I'm speaking in favor of HB 69 to increase the base student allocation. You can think of the increase as a downpayment toward a long-overdue debt to students. You also can think of raising the BSA as an important step for the legislature to comply with its education duty under the constitution.

Under the state constitution, you have to provide for funding for every child to have the opportunity to meet the state's performance standards in reading, writing, arithmetic and science. You're far behind in your duty because only a minority of Alaska's 130,000 students have had the chance to achieve to the state standards since 2012.

Instead, for a substantial majority of students to meet the standards, you'll have to be even more generous than HB 69 in the future. But the bill's funding this year is a step in the right direction.

4:007 PM

JENNA FABIAN, State Representative, Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals (AAESP), Nikiski, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She provided her brief work history as an educator. She emphasized that funding public education is a constitutional responsibility. A BSA increase is essential to address inflation and avoid cuts that lead to larger class sizes and the loss of experienced educators. In her district, a \$17 million deficit could result in the loss of three to nine of 18 certified teachers at Lathrop High School. She also stressed the importance of passing education funding by March 15 to allow districts to plan and retain high-quality staff. She urged the legislature to invest in Alaska's students by passing HB 69 and ensuring timely, stable funding.

4:11:26 PM

VICKI TURNER MALONE, representing self, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in support of SB 69. She stated that underfunding public schools over the past seven years is like "starving a kid to death and then blaming them for being too skinny." She emphasized the strong link between funding and student performance and said that while parents should have choices, closing their local school should not be one of them. She urged the legislature to act quickly before more teachers leave and stated that in the Mat-Su Valley, they are prepared to work with their legislators to override a veto if necessary.

[4:12:46 PM](#)

ELLEN JAIMES, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, Testified in support of HB 69, expressing deep concern about proposed class size increases in Anchorage's FY 26 budget, which would raise K-3 class sizes from 22 to as many as 30 students. She compared teaching 26 kindergarteners to trying to transport 26 kids in a 24-seat bus with one driver, saying it simply doesn't work. She noted that nearly a dozen U.S. states cap K-3 class sizes between 15 and 20 students and argued that larger class sizes will harm education quality, worsen teacher burnout, and increase vacancies. She shared that her daughter's current teacher is a long-term substitute and stressed that without adequate funding, schools cannot attract and retain qualified educators. She concluded by urging the legislature to pass HB 69 with no less than a \$1,000 increase to support Alaska's children.

[4:15:22 PM](#)

LADAWN DRUCE, representing self, Sterling, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is a retired teacher who has lived on the Kenai Peninsula for over 30 years, She and her husband, also a retired teacher, have remained active in Alaska's public schools since retiring in 2013 and 2016, working part-time or full-time, primarily in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District. She shared her personal experience witnessing the impacts of underfunding, including lack of support, overcrowded classrooms, and cuts to extracurricular programs. She expressed appreciation for the inclusion of a common-sense cell phone policy in the bill, calling it an important issue for educators. She concluded her testimony with a quote from Nelson Mandela, stating, "Education is the most powerful weapon which one can use to change the world," and affirmed her wholehearted belief in that message.

[4:17:51 PM](#)

KORTNIE HORAZDOVSKY, representing self, Chugiak, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with concerns. She said she is a lifelong Alaskan and parent of four children—three currently enrolled in the Anchorage School District. She expressed her desire to raise her family in Alaska with better opportunities than she had and noted that the state has not prioritized education in recent years. She emphasized that class sizes of over 30 students, including in her second grader's class, are incompatible with a serious focus on student achievement. She shared that her son, who has dyslexia, made significant reading progress this year thanks to the support of his teacher, and

warned that such progress will be harder to achieve under crowded conditions. She urged that reading incentives be targeted toward students who need the most help, rather than those already at grade level, and cautioned against treating education as a commodity. She commended the inclusion of the March 15 funding deadline in the bill, explaining that delays in past years have led to last-minute cuts and community anxiety. She also voiced support for the task force on education funding. She concluded by urging the legislature to pass HB 69 with the full \$1,000 BSA increase and to override a veto if necessary.

[4:20:33 PM](#)

ANDREW WEST, representing self, Bethel, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. He emphasized that increased funding is essential for students, teachers, and communities in rural Alaska. He explained that many rural schools serve low-income populations and often provide even the most basic school supplies necessary for student success. He stated that additional resources help retain teachers by ensuring they feel supported with adequate supplies and facilities. He shared that some science teachers at his sites have already left or plan to leave at the end of the year. Recalling his own experience, he noted that it took three years before his students stopped asking when he was leaving and instead began saying, "Welcome home."

MR. WEST also addressed the conversation around school choice, stating that rural students do not have that option as there is only one school available. He concluded by emphasizing that well-funded and well-supported schools are the anchor of rural communities and must be invested in to sustain student success and community pride.

[4:22:21 PM](#)

KAI BORSON-PAINE, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She shared that her family recently returned to Alaska, but their dream of coming home has been shaken by the sharp drop in her daughter's test scores after enrolling in a first-grade classroom with 36 students. She attributed this decline to overcrowding and urged the legislature to raise the BSA so that returning and long-time families alike can give their children a quality education in Alaska. She expressed her deep love for the state but warned that, without adequate school funding, her family may be forced to leave. She urged lawmakers to make the right choice and raise the BSA.

[4:24:14 PM](#)

MARGO BELLAMY, Anchorage School Board, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69.

[4:26:30 PM](#)

LILI MISEL, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69, as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

My name is Lili Misel and I am a parent of two students at Fairbanks schools. I am a resident of District R, and fully support the \$1000 raise to the BSA and HB 69.

Some of you, like me, went to Alaska schools. We all understand the importance of a strong education and how it can help students raise themselves out of poor circumstances. However, if that ability isn't there through lack of funding, how can our students meet the needs of our state? Without students who can receive a solid base education in K-12, how can they be ready to fill the engineering, management, teacher, and leadership roles of the future?

The funding of education in Alaska has been lacking for over a decade. Now is the time to rectify that. I would also ask that there be accountability for home school programs to ensure that those students also demonstrate they are meeting the same educational standards of brick-and-mortar schools.

We all want Alaskan students to be able to have a successful future for our state to be successful. I have been told we need to look at finances and that education is always pitted against the PFD. I think this is a false argument. Education needs to be a priority for our state, and I encourage you to support HB 69 and the \$1000 increase to the BSA.

[4:28:14 PM](#)

PAT RACE, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 and emphasized that inflation is outpacing education funding. He referenced a statement from a spokesperson for Governor Dunleavy acknowledging the need to adjust budgets for inflation across government and said he agrees with that sentiment. He stated that the key issue is not whether to fund

education, but how to fund it. He pointed to potential revenue sources, including reforming S corporation tax treatment, addressing oil tax credits, and reexamining the \$8-per-barrel tax break, which he said should be made more visible in the state budget.

He also advocated for the reinstatement of a state income tax, noting Alaska had one when it achieved statehood and used it to build public services. Although he does not have children, he said he would gladly pay an income tax to support public education. He concluded by urging the legislature to pass HB 69 at the full proposed amount—or higher—and to make a serious effort to fund it sustainably.

[4:30:24 PM](#)

SIOBHAN MCINTYRE, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She urged the Senate to maintain the \$1,000 BSA increase included in HB 69 as passed by the House. She criticized the current practice of school districts having to build budgets based on uncertainty and one-time funding, which she said is unsustainable. Speaking specifically about Anchorage, she noted that the Anchorage School Board has stated \$1,000 is the bare minimum needed to maintain current programming and class sizes, which are already too large.

MS. MCINTYRE emphasized that school districts are clearly communicating what is required to educate Alaska's future workforce and contribute to a strong economy. She called for robust, stable education funding, with the \$1,000 BSA increase as a starting point, and urged the Senate to consider tying future increases to inflation. Acknowledging the state's complex fiscal situation, she said she would accept a reduced Permanent Fund Dividend and support new revenue measures, including an income tax, to properly fund education. She concluded by calling for education to be the centerpiece of the state's budget and expressed her hope that every child in Alaska has access to a well-resourced learning environment.

[4:33:19 PM](#)

ALLEN HIPPLER, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in opposition to HB 69 stating the state keeps putting money into the system but sees no results. HB 69 needs to be linked to reform. [Indiscernable] He urged HB 69 be strengthened before passing.

[4:34:15 PM](#)

ANDY HOLLEMAN, Board President, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, testified on HB 69 with concerns. He said he

is in strong support of a significant increase to the BSA, emphasizing that the current static funding level does not reflect the rising costs faced by school districts. He noted that while some legislators claim to be funding education, reliance on one-time add-ons has created an ongoing gap between funding and actual needs. This approach, he said, is confusing to the public, puts programs at risk, and undermines the retention of educators.

MR. HOLLEMAN shared that class sizes have grown and extracurriculars have been cut, and highlighted two Anchorage programs particularly at risk: the IGNITE program for gifted elementary students and language immersion programs. Both require specialized staffing and cannot adapt class sizes like general education. Language immersion, for example, requires hiring native speakers in advance, and if key positions go unfilled, the program can collapse. He stressed that increasing and stabilizing the BSA would allow districts to plan and hire early, during February and March, instead of waiting until June.

[4:36:28 PM](#)

CHELSEA AMBROSE, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She urged the legislature to support the full \$1,000 increase to the BSA to protect Alaska's students and future. She warned that without this increase, critical cuts will impact programs like IGNITE, immersion, sports, libraries, and others that foster student connection and engagement. As a library specialist, she emphasized that non-core academic programs often serve as the primary motivation for at-risk students to attend school and are essential to their success. She shared that projected class sizes without increased funding are alarming, noting that she currently teaches classes of 32 kindergarteners, 35 fourth graders, and 35 fifth graders. She stated it is nearly impossible—or a direct path to burnout—to provide quality instruction in such overcrowded settings

MS. AMBROSE educators are being asked to do more with less and echoed earlier testimony comparing current school funding to hosting a dinner party with no food. She concluded by stating that Alaska is losing educators and vital programming and that underfunded schools are unsustainable.

[4:38:47 PM](#)

DANETTE PETERSON, President, Fairbanks Education Association, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She cited the closure of seven schools in Fairbanks over four years, a 20 percent annual teacher turnover rate, and 73 full-time education

positions proposed for elimination in the district's budget due to a \$16 million deficit. She emphasized that despite research showing smaller class sizes improve learning and school closures harm student performance, districts are being forced to make harmful cuts because state funding has not kept pace with inflation.

[4:39:54 PM](#)

MS. PETERSON shifted focus to the mental health challenges and burnout educators are facing, an issue she said is rarely discussed publicly. She described overcrowded classrooms, such as reading to a kindergarten class of 31 students and not bringing enough candy canes. Teachers lack basic supplies like copy paper and crayons, and support staff such as counselors and behavior interventionists are increasingly scarce. Emergency-certified teachers are overwhelmed and unsupported, CTE teachers are being assigned unfamiliar subjects, and substitute shortages are forcing teachers to give up prep time or combine large classes, sometimes up to 57 students. She concluded by urging the legislature to pass HB 69 with a minimum \$1,000 increase, stating that Alaska's students are the state's greatest resource and future ancestors.

[4:42:23 PM](#)

RACHEL DETEMPLE, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She expressed frustration at years of underfunding. She described how every spring, instead of planning for school improvement, educators are forced to plan how to deliver the same services with less, leading her to say she has come to "hate spring." She shared that her school's Career and Technical Education (CTE) program is currently trying to reduce staff from 19 to 17, meaning teachers may be reassigned to subjects outside their expertise. For example, a welding teacher might be forced to teach health or social studies, even though industry demand for welding instruction is strong and welding classes cannot accommodate large sizes like 36 students due to safety and space concerns.

MS. DETEMPLE stressed that a \$1,000 increase to the BSA is not truly \$1,000 more per student, given past one-time funding; rather, it's a slight improvement and a necessary step to slow the decline. She strongly supported the bill's accountability provisions for homeschool and correspondence students, noting that public in-person schools are heavily scrutinized through testing while homeschool programs receive public funds without the same expectations. She shared frustration over having to

"fix" academic issues from home-schooled students, only to be blamed when their scores are recorded in her classroom.

MS. DETEMPLE closed by thanking legislators for moving the bill forward and including a funding deadline, saying it's time to "get off this train to nowhere" and start giving Alaskan kids what they deserve.

4:45:06 PM

DAVID IGNELL, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in opposition to HB 69. He said he is a journalist and radio talk show host with three primary concerns. First, he criticized the legislative process behind HB 69, noting that it started as a simple one-page funding bill but was expanded into a nine-page bill with policy changes after moving to the House Rules Committee. He said the public had no opportunity to testify on those new provisions, and that meaningful amendments offered by minority members were not seriously considered. He called the process political "gamesmanship" and said Alaskans deserved better. Second, he questioned the logic of increasing funding when many students aren't attending school. He noted that chronic absenteeism rates in Alaska are alarmingly high, citing examples of districts where 60-80% of students are frequently absent. He referenced the North Slope Borough School District, which has high local funding but also poor proficiency and absenteeism, as an example that money alone does not fix educational outcomes. Third, he argued that districts like Anchorage and Fairbanks should contribute more local funding rather than expecting the state to fill their budget gaps. He pointed out that Juneau contributes \$7,500 per student, while Anchorage contributes \$5,500 and Fairbanks \$4,500. He claimed that if those districts matched Juneau's local contribution levels, they would raise \$86 million (Anchorage) and \$36 million (Fairbanks)—enough to cover their stated shortfalls.

MR. IGNELL concluded by expressing that while Alaska's education system needs serious reform, HB 69 does not offer real solutions and should not be supported in its current form.

4:47:24 PM

CHRISTY GOMEZ, Principal, Tyonek Elementary School, Tyonek, Alaska, testified on HB 69 stating that Alaska's students deserve better and that it's unsustainable to keep asking schools to do more with less. She emphasized the need to raise the BSA to keep pace with inflation and provide students with the resources they are constitutionally owed. Without adequate funding, she said, students miss out on opportunities, and

teachers lack the support they need. She concluded by urging lawmakers to prioritize education, stating that well-funded schools strengthen communities and that education is a necessity, not a luxury.

[4:49:27 PM](#)

HANNAH MURKIN, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified on HB 69 with concerns. She said she is a parent who currently homeschools her children through a correspondence program and advocated for equitable treatment of correspondence students. She began using a correspondence program in 2020 after her child experienced disruption during COVID in a brick-and-mortar school. She shared that the structure and teacher support provided by the program allowed her to offer a consistent and individualized education plan for her children. She expressed concern over criticisms of how correspondence students use their allotments, such as for horseback riding lessons, pointing out that students have varied interests and learn in different ways. She emphasized that all students, regardless of their educational setting, deserve equal opportunities. In addition to supporting an increase in the BSA, she urged the legislature to raise the funding factor for correspondence students from 0.9 to 1.0.

[4:52:08 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN held public testimony open on HB 69.

[4:52:31 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked whether HB 69 contains a provision for homeschool testing, as was mentioned by a previous testifier.

[4:52:49 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated her belief that HB 69 is silent on homeschool testing other than a report on homeschools that came from House Bill 202 last year. She deferred to Chair Tobin.

[4:53:22 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN responded that she believes the report referenced in HB 69 is similar to the one included in legislation passed last year. That previous legislation modeled a historical report that had been collected from the inception of public correspondence (homeschool) programs beginning in the 1950s through 2013. She noted that the earlier report was repealed in 2013.

[4:54:11 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee,  
Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee  
meeting at 4:54 p.m.