



Alaska Education Update

February 6, 2015

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Thursday, February 5, 2015

Senate Education Committee

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Thursday afternoon the Senate Education Committee heard [SCR 3](#) – Alaska School Choice Week, and a presentation on ANSWERS (Alaska Navigator: Statewide Workforce & Education-Related Statistics) by Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education Director of Operations Stephanie Butler. Present were Chair Dunleavy, and Senators Giessel, Huggins, and Gardner,

SCR 3 – Alaska School Choice Week

Sen. Bill Stoltze, sponsor of [SCR 3](#), reviewed the resolution for the committee. [*SCR 3 is identical to [HCR 2](#), which was heard in the House Education Committee on Wednesday and Friday.*] Sen. Stoltze said there’s a need and a strong desire for choice. SCR 3 was brought to him by David Boyle, who asked him to promote it. Sen. Stoltze said he wishes he could offer broader options. His colleagues and others refer to charter schools as private schools, not realizing they’re public schools. There are great public

school teachers throughout the state, although they highlight the ones who are not so great, but by and large teachers are great. The date on the resolution has already passed for this year, and the committee may want to change that. The resolution won't cost anything and will acknowledge that doing what's best for students is the first mission of education.

Sen. Giessel said, as the parent of children who were homeschooled, went to private and public schools, and did CTE, she is a supporter of SCR 3.

Sen. Gardner said she has no problem with the resolution, but there are a lot of alternative schools, which is not reflected in SCR 3. Sen. Stoltze said those are recognized. The elementary school he went to is now an ABC school with a long waiting list. Most alternative and charter schools have lotteries and long waiting lists. The Anchorage School District told him they'd get him information on waiting lists, and then just gave him a form and didn't get him the information, which probably speaks to the Anchorage School District. He said perhaps he shouldn't have made that comment, but he found it frustrating.

Chair Dunleavy thanked Sen. Stoltze for sponsoring SCR 3 and said he would co-sponsor it. His focus has always been on education, while others focus on school. Every other aspect of our life there is choice, and they don't always have to be controlled by government.

Sen. Huggins offered two amendments to change the date to January 24 – 30, 2016 in two areas of the resolution. The amendments were adopted unanimous consent.

Chair Dunleavy opened up public testimony, but none was offered.

Sen. Huggins said, regarding charter schools and alternative schools, most charter schools would prefer not to be called alternative schools, but would prefer to be called schools of choice. Sen. Stoltze said school choice is different than alternatives. He said he thinks choice is the more accurate word.

The committee moved SCR 3 from committee.

ANSWERS

Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education Executive Director Diane Barrans and Director of Operations Stephanie Butler reviewed ANSWERS (Alaska Navigator: Statewide Workforce & Education-Related Statistics). Ms. Butler showed a [PowerPoint presentation with 20 slides](#). Much of the presentation focused on data privacy. Below are a few of the slides and committee discussion.

- ★ ANSWERS – Alaska Navigator: Statewide Workforce and Education-Related Statistics
- ★ P-20W SLDS: early learning through the workforce statewide longitudinal data system
- ★ Federal grant - \$4 million over 3 years (July 2012 – June 2015)
- ★ Collaboration of Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE), University of Alaska (UA), Department of Education & Early Development (DEED), and Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DOLWD)



- ★ Keen interest in capacity building specific to assessing impacts of ACPE programs and services and providing analytical resource to other education/training stakeholders
- ★ Pursuant to AS 14.42.030. Functions, duties, and powers of commission. (4) contract with or use existing institutions of postsecondary education or other individuals or organizations to make studies, conduct surveys, submit recommendations, or otherwise contribute to the work of the commission
- ★ Relevant to ACPE mission: Promoting access to and success in postsecondary education and training for Alaskans and in Alaska

ANSWERS will equip state leadership with Alaska data to make informed policy and funding decisions based upon effectively evaluating immediate and the longer-term **outcomes** of programs and policies, and to clearly measure the state's return on investment

ANSWERS will:

- ★ Make evaluations which cut across multiple sectors easier and more cost effective, efficient, informative, flexible, and secure
- ★ Be a reliable source of cross-sector information from which policy makers can better identify program results
- ★ Increase agencies' capacity to comprehensively respond to inquiries

- ★ States' P-20W SLDS approaches vary
 1. Central database contains identifiable information with strong information security controls
 2. Central database that maintains de-identified data for research and analysis (*like ANSWERS*)
 3. Federated data system in which data queries draw from source systems and records based on specific data request
- ★ Mississippi and Arkansas were identified as having a similar system model to Alaska in terms of privacy and security

Sen. Gardner asked how they select which programs they will study. Ms. Butler said they did a survey of stakeholders to determine where to start. They are finding that the interest is in looking at students in K-12 and how they are performing in the workforce. Sen. Gardner said she's not sure those are the first questions she'd ask.

Chair Dunleavy asked if there is an assumption that all kids and adults will be part of the data gathering, because there is currently an opt-in for data gathering in statutes. Ms. Butler said there's been discussion about that, but there isn't an opt in or an opt out for the program. The data is data that is currently collected. They would have to identify people in order to let them opt in or opt out. The information is de-identified. Chair Dunleavy said that will be a sticking point for a lot of Alaskans. There is growing concern over data protection.

Chair Dunleavy asked Ms. Butler to name as many stakeholders as possible. Ms. Butler said the stakeholders are parents – Chair Dunleavy asked what the parents' role is. Ms. Butler said they are attempting to communicate with parents about what their interests are in being able to evaluate educational outcomes. Feedback has been that parents are interested in knowing what programs and activities are most successful. Other stakeholders are teachers, school district administrators, school boards, legislators, the general public, and the University of Alaska.

Sen. Gardner said today is the first day she ever heard of the program, so if there is outreach to legislators she missed it. Ms. Butler said there's been significant outreach to a variety of populations, which has been challenging. They've been most effective in working through organizations that are composed of people they want to reach, and working through that organization. For example, they've worked with the PTA. It is challenging to get it on people's radar.

Sen. Huggins asked what her wish is about two things that could come out of the program. Ms. Butler said it's that once ANSWERS is up and running, it be used and that it provide value – that the state's leaders find the information useful in serving students and the state, and that students and parents can make better-informed choices. Sen. Huggins said they've gone through lots of programs in the education system, but he remains unconvinced.

Sen. Gardner said she's in the same boat and is struggling to understand the program. Her concern are that this might be something ISER would do. The other is that they should have labor and workforce information already from the Dept. of Labor & Workforce Development. Is it necessary to have this much detail? They know where workers are, where they have shortages, and what they make. Ms. Butler said it could be done by a number of organizations, including ISER. The program is designed to be modular, so that it could sit in a number of organizations.

Sen. Gardner asked if they are just setting it up, and that other agencies can harvest information. Executive Director Barrans said that's what they hope will happen. They have the information at a high level already, but as they get into more detail they will be able to find where Alaskans who make up the higher end of the workforce come from – what districts and programs they come from that led to success, and which programs were not successful.

Sen. Gardner asked how they define success – by pay scale, by employment, by satisfaction? Executive Director Barrans said that depends on the questions being asked.

Chair Dunleavy said the federal government doesn't give something unless they get something in return; what does the federal government want for the grant funding? Ms. Butler said the requirement is that the state build a longitudinal data system for state use.

Chair Dunleavy asked if there is any possibility that the federal government could hook into the database. Ms. Butler said it's not a requirement of the grant, and there is no intent or design to provide information to the federal government.

Chair Dunleavy asked if the federal government can access the information. Ms. Butler said they have no legal right to any of the information.

Chair Dunleavy asked if the commission would support stiff criminal and civil penalties for individuals and organizations [accessing the data inappropriately]. Executive Director Barrans said they may not understand the full implications of accessing the

data, since they aren't part of the Dept. of Corrections or the Dept. of Law, to say that they would support criminal charges for inappropriately accessing the data, since the data is de-identified. They would consider additional measures to ensure the protection of the data. So she can't say whether the commission would be supportive.

Chair Dunleavy noted that the ongoing cost would be \$1.2 million. Where is the money coming from? Executive Director Barrans said it's Alaska Student Loan Corporation receipts. This year they're making modifications to absorb the costs for the next three years.

Chair Dunleavy asked if it was part of the grant that there would be a guarantee to maintain the database after its creation. Executive Director Barrans said it's more of a commitment to seeking a sustainable model to sustain the system.

Sen. Huggins noted that his wife is on the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education board. He said when they talk about education and refer to Arkansas and Mississippi, those guys are at the bottom of the heap. They are not exactly the trendsetters. He asked that if 20 years from now they would anticipate that it will have made a difference to a significant number of Alaskans. Will he be able to do that? Ms. Butler said she hopes that 20 years from now they will be able to say that they used information from ANSWERS to direct resources and policy decisions in such a way that they made the most efficient and effective use of funds to serve students.

Sen. Huggins said a number of legislators have been on school boards. His experience on the school board is that the average school doesn't know what happens to students after they graduate. Does ANSWERS fill those voids? Ms. Butler said one of the products that has been designed is a school district feedback report that looks at students in that school district and how they do postsecondary and how they do in the workforce. They've demoed that to school districts and had very positive feedback.

Sen. Huggins said asked if 20 years from now ANSWERS will tell them whether something worked or not. Ms. Butler said she would love to say they will know what happened to 100 percent of their students, but she's not sure that's a reasonable promise to make. But they will have vastly improved and more timely information. They will be most likely to identify programs where they can get students back on track.

Chair Dunleavy said they will get students from out of state coming into high school, and will have private school students and homeschool students. Not all Alaskans are part of the system. It seems like the system is built so that people who don't want to be part of it don't have to be part of it. Is there anything in the federal guidelines to include homeschool students and others? Ms. Butler said there's nothing in the federal

guidelines regarding that. If the student, at any time in their life, touched the Alaska system, the student's data will be in the system.

Chair Dunleavy said he's having more and more constituents telling him they are opting out of the public school system because they don't want to be tracked. Ten years ago they would have been viewed as "black helicopter people" or had too many drinks the night before, but the FBI and the NSA have made people think that's not outlandish. He knows what they are trying to do – get as much information as possible to help people. But there are people who just don't want to be tracked. He cautioned them that there may be bills allowing people to opt in, because they don't own the people. But the presentation was good.

The committee then adjourned.

Friday, February 6, 2015

House Education Committee

[Link to Video](#)

[Link to Documents](#)

Friday morning the House Education Committee heard HCR 2 – Alaska School Choice Week and HB 30 – Constitutional History Curriculum. Present were Chair Keller and Representatives Seaton, Drummond, Kreiss-Tomkins, and Colver. Rep. Reinbold participated via teleconference. Rep. Vazquez was excused.

HCR 2 – Alaska School Choice Week

Chair Keller noted that the only thing before the committee regarding HCR 2 was changing the date. The committee has a committee substitute for the resolution. Drew Ford, staff to sponsor Rep. Gattis, sponsor of [HCR 2](#), said the committee substitute changes the date on the resolution to January, 24-30, 2016. The committee adopted the committee substitute for HCR 2 with unanimous consent.

Public testimony was available, but no one wished to testify on the resolution.

Rep. Seaton said he received a number of contacts from constituents who wanted assurance that no state funds would go to private schools or vouchers. He said they confirmed at the last hearing that HCR 2 recognizes choice, and that no public funding will go to private schools or vouchers, but just to public education. They are also not saying there shouldn't be accountability, but that there will be choice for homeschool for parents. Chair Keller said he's certain that anyone involved in education believes it's in

the best interest of the state that everyone gets a super education. The point on public funds is certainly of contention. But it's not a point of contention that every child in Alaska should have a good education. Rep. Seaton agreed with that, but that the point is that accountability is key throughout the educational process.

Chair Keller said what's on the record from last year is that accountability for the educational process is ultimately on the parent. He understands there's a tension with funding, but that's not the point of the resolution.

Rep. Drummond said the Anchorage School District has dozens of traditional public schools, charter schools, and a multitude of optional and alternative programs. All programs of choice celebrate their existence and ask people to participate. She wondered if they should celebrate those options. Chair Keller said Rep. Drummond could offer an amendment on that. If she does, they will have to set the resolution aside again. It would be difficult to list all those choices. He doesn't see the purpose of that, since all districts are doing that.

Rep. Drummond moved to amend HCR 2 by adding "optional public schools" between "traditional public schools" and "public charter schools." Chair Keller objected so they have a clear understanding of the amendment and so the sponsor can comment. Rep. Gattis said the resolution recognizes parent choice, so ultimately they can put as many schools as they want in the resolution. She has no objection to adding things to the resolution.

Chair Keller maintained his objection to the amendment because he doesn't see the point. He thinks Legislative Legal Services would say the same. Public school options are available to all parents. Rep. Drummond said as a three-term representative on the Anchorage School Board, the optional places are available to all parents and have been for decades. She would find the resolution objectionable if her amendment is not adopted.

Rep. Gattis said in many districts they name some of the schools differently. But she's not sure if they have "optional" schools. It's really about parents being able to choose.

Rep. Seaton said he sees both sides. All the public schools, including charter and optional schools are public schools. But they aren't seen as traditional schools. The amendment would give them a greater breadth of inclusion. Hearing from the sponsor that she doesn't object to the amendment, he supports it so there isn't confusion on the floor about whether the resolution supports all options.

Rep. Gattis said she has no objection to the amendment. Chair Keller restated the amendment and removed his objection to the amendment. It was adopted unanimous consent. The House Education Committee moved HCR 2 from committee.

HB 30 – Constitutional History Curriculum

The committee then took up [HB 30](#). Chair Keller, the sponsor, reminded the committee that HB 30 was brought up briefly on Wednesday. He reviewed the bill, which requires a constitutional history curriculum segment, which can be embedded in other courses. The curriculum segment must have the early founding documents of the founding of the country. They do not have to advocate for the values that were there. It's a course that teaches the values when the country was founded. He said he personally believes that American constitutionalism provided a level of freedom for mankind that was probably America's greatest gift to the world and all people. He thinks that's very important, and he doesn't want to imply that school districts aren't doing this, but that some schools are doing it inadequately, although some schools are doing a great job. No one would argue that they have somehow lost some of the knowledge of this topic. The actual bill is in Section 3, with the date in Section 4. He read Section 3. Students may not graduate from high school if they don't pass the course in which the curriculum segment is contained. He said there is no state test; the curriculum will be a district standard, not a state standard. A question was raised by Commissioner Hanley about not being allowed to not grant a waiver to the requirement. But it's up to a district to decide whether a student has completed the curriculum.

Rep. Seaton asked if there any other requirements in statute for the chief administrator of a school district to develop a curriculum; he doesn't think that's the normal method of developing curriculum. Chair Keller said they gave the bill to the drafter and that's what they came up with. His intent is that it be an approved curriculum segment. They don't want to change how curriculum is developed, just that the superintendent is responsible for getting it done. The superintendent could delegate it.

Jim Pound, staff to Chair Keller, said it's a delegation, most school districts operate from the superintendent or school administrator. Rep. Seaton said he's just trying to get the structure of the bill in line with current practice, which he would like consideration of. Chair Keller said it's not their intent to do that. He thinks it's appropriate specify the superintendent, but Rep. Seaton could offer an amendment.

Rep. Drummond said the memo from Chair Keller states the school district shall have a one-semester course, but the bill refers to a curriculum segment and the course in which it's contained. The memo doesn't reflect what the bill says. Mr. Pound said that was his error, and he's corrected it in the new sectional analysis. Chair Keller said the bill is perfect because it's been vetted before. Rep. Drummond said she now understands that

the sponsor is recommending a curriculum segment. And is fine with that as long as the old memo is not part of the record.

Rep. Drummond noted that HB 30 mentions the governing body approving the curriculum; what if the governing body chooses not to approve it? Chair Keller said that's an interesting question; the bill doesn't answer that. He assumed the school district will work it out. If they don't approve it they will have trouble with the requirement that it occur in order for students to receive a diploma.

Rep. Seaton said school districts can't grant a waiver to the requirement, but he's not sure how that would work if there's no assessment required. He thinks that means that students have to have the content, but it's a high-stakes graduation requirement. If a test doesn't have to be administered, then students just have to attend the class, but don't have to demonstrate any understanding. There's no length specified for the segment, so it could be a one-week segment. Is his understanding correct? That seems to be in conflict. Chair Keller said the syllabus is an outline for the course. If a curriculum is in a syllabus, then he assumes there would be some kind of test. The standard for the district is that there be successful completion of the course. He thinks the wording is clear. Rep. Seaton said the syllabus is required to ensure a student has access to the material, but not granting the waiver means the student has to successfully attend or complete the course, but not have to demonstrate knowledge. Chair Keller said he can't imagine that happening, but it is a possibility. He's operating on the presumption that teachers, students, and parents want it to be taught in good faith in the schools, so he's not concerned that teachers might just check a box that a student attended every day. Rep. Seaton said to follow up, he's concerned about special education students that are at different levels. He wants to make sure it's the intention of the sponsor that there's a certain level of the material that has to be demonstrated by special education students, non-special education students, English language learners, and others. He wants to make sure that however students complete the course is acceptable within the bill. Chair Keller said yes.

Public Testimony

Stuart Thompson, Mat-Su Valley, spoke read a statement in support of HB 30. He prayed for committee compassion. He said he's followed the debate on the bill for years. Some have argued that the information is already in existing courses. These rationales for objecting to an adequate education make him want to puke. It's government by the elite. Politicians think it's best to make decisions on behalf of everyone. But that's not the intent of the founding fathers. They used Latin and Greek to understand the words they used because no English dictionaries existed. A political leader has to handle constituent laziness, ignorance, and immaturity. About ten years ago he was refused a hearing by the Rules Committee about having a rule about legislator knowledge about

government. The current relationship is like the relationship between nobles and peasants in the middle ages. He said he would submit his written testimony to the committee. Not having this curriculum is hurting students and teachers.

Bob Bird, Kenai, testified in support of HB30. He said he's taught for 42 years and has taught constitutional history to seniors for many years. In his class they've used the great books method. They read the entire Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the constitution. Only when you go through the documents of the constitutionalists and the anti-constitutionalists can you understand what's going on. He sent information to the committee from his students about what they say after taking the course. Students understand that they are in a terrible constitutional mess. The topic is incomprehensible to most adults, let alone students, and he has to translate the documents for them. If you allow boiler plate constitutional text books to be used, those texts asked for opinion on whether there should be a balanced budget amendment and asks students to analyze and make up their own mind. But there already is a balanced budget amendment in the Tenth Amendment. That is a typical example of how textbooks don't get it. He had to disabuse students that the constitution is a living document; that would mean the constitution is essentially dead. There has to be a strict construction, which textbooks consider an opinion. The only textbook that should be used, if a text book is used, is Kevin Gutzman's "[A Politically Incorrect Guide to the Constitution](#)." It will become fluff stuff if they don't require the original documents.

Chair Keller said he thinks Mr. Bird captured well his [Keller's] intent. An important word is "constitutionalism." "[American Constitutionalism: A Shot Heard Round the World](#)" is an important book. He asked Mr. Bird what the most impressive "ism" value is in The Declaration of Independence. Mr. Bird said that God is recognized in the founding document. And it's nonsense that there's a separation of church and state. God is recognized as lawgiver, creator, and judge. The Supreme Court can't escape that. Bureaucracy and jury nullification is recognized in the declaration. The federal government has become a bureaucracy. There is an overweening central power that has nothing to do but grow. The firewalls have been destroyed and people are starting to wake up to it now. God is supposed to judge the righteousness of the American cause. It's nonsense to expunge any mention of God.

Christine Hutchison, Kenai Peninsula, said she taught social studies and would like to incorporate Mr. Thompson's and Mr. Bird's testimony into her own. She said she's been remiss in not paying closer attention and realizes now the grievous lack young people have of the process. She hopes the committee passes HB 30 as it is. She said she asks young people if they're registered to vote, and if they went to Nikiski High school and Bob Bird as a teacher they are registered to vote. She asked another student who didn't graduate from Nikiski High School, and they are not registered to vote. People need to

understand how the constitution works and how critical it is to their way of life. She prays that HB 30 flows through the House Education Committee, but she knows it will face roadblocks in the senate.

Barbara Haney, North Pole, said she taught political economy at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and several legislators have taken the class. HB 30 is very important. She's amused that the chief school administrator would develop the curriculum. She asked the committee to consider adding the Mayflower Compact to the list of documents in HB 30. It was the first one written on North American soil. It would impress upon students that even though there's no government, there's no excuse to act like an animal.

Chair Keller invited Stuart Thompson to testify again; Mr. Thompson read a written statement.

Rep. Colver said he supports the intent of HB 30, and would like to work with Chair Keller about how it would be implemented in the schools so as not to drop another required credit. He would like language adding it to the U.S. history classes that are currently required. If new books are required, it should be phased in so as not to require school districts to purchase new books.

Chair Keller asked if Rep. Colver had a specific amendment he'd like to offer; those concerns were already addressed in previous committee discussion. Rep. Colver asked that the bill be held so he can get a feel for the issues raised; he doesn't want to hold the bill back. Chair Keller said that's what he's asking for. Rep. Colver said he would like to discuss it with the chair. Chair Keller said they will set the bill aside so Rep. Colver can review the minutes of the hearing. They can bring the bill up again on Monday.

Rep. Seaton said he doesn't think they've had committee discussion on the bill, he's uncomfortable with it, and with the testimony they've had today saying that previous documents to the constitution should override the constitution. The constitution was agreed on by many parties. Reaching back to the Declaration of Independence and saying it is over the constitution rejects the idea of the constitution entirely. They are not talking about the constitution, but about the values of the people when the constitution was adopted. The constitution allowed slavery and did not allow women to vote. Married women were not allowed to hold property. Indians were not considered people at all. Slaves counted as three-fifths of a person. When they look at many things happening around the world today that they object to, many of them are those things he just mentioned. He is very concerned that they don't look at the document crafted and agreed to by the U.S., but look at the values of the people as controlling. He's concerned that they take an idea that the constitution isn't what's important, but the values of some of the founders. He's concerned about the implementation of the bill that says they will

teach the values of the people, including values they no longer espouse. He doesn't support moving the bill. Perhaps they can outline what they're really talking about.

Chair Keller said the intent of HB 30 is to look at constitutionalism, which is the values when the constitution was formed. The things Rep. Seaton is concerned about could be brought up in a discussion of the values. He's already said he's setting the bill aside. He won't try to run it over the committee, though he had hopes the committee would pass it out. They will hear HB 30 last on the agenda on Monday. They will hear a presentation from the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education first.