

Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development

Approved Minutes

January 13, 2010

The meeting was called to order by Chair Cox at 10:15 a.m. at the Talking Book Library in Anchorage, AK. All members were present except Janel Keplinger and Shirley Holloway who were excused. Col. Sullivan joined the meeting at 10:30 a.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. There were no disclosures made. No public comment was taken at this meeting. The chair characterized the meeting as a work session with possible action to be taken at the end of the meeting.

Student Advisor, Tim Rockey, introduced Donald Handeland, the Student Advisor Elect. Donald is a student at Mt. Edgecumbe High School. Three things he wanted us to know about him were: 1) he is a fan of Lost; 2) he's a student at Mt. Edgecumbe; and 3) he was excited to be at the meeting. He indicated that he represents 110 schools through Mt. Edgecumbe High School.

First on the agenda was a discussion regarding Compulsory School Age. Commissioner LeDoux said that every child needs to be successful and the bigger issue with compulsory age was accountability. He asked how would this law affect students, what was it about and what was the real issue? Pat Shire said that the legislature wanted to know if they were getting what they were paying for. He said the current law doesn't do anything to increase accountability; it hunts down truants and drags them into a place they don't want to be. Esther Cox said she had heard that students don't have the skills needed to fill out applications, no concept of being on time for a job, and no basic grasp of math and language skills. Pat Shier questioned the strategy to keep kids in school until age 18, asking if it would increase the graduation rate. Geri Benshoof said maybe the reasoning was it would help the graduation rate. Tim Rockey said the students he has spoken with were divided on the subject, saying it could give two more years for a teacher to connect with the student(s). Geri Benshoof indicated that research shows that the decision to attend school (good attendance) is made in the second or third grade.

The commissioner asked for the board to list positive strategies to help kids graduate. How will the law affect kids?

- Have to because the law says you have to
- May help immigrant families who speak English as a second language
- Raises public awareness – it's a public statement that graduation is important
- Has the capability to keep kids in school longer
- It's a tool for principals to connect with kids

- Have two more years to get kids ready
- Sends a message that school is important
- Will improve the graduation rate some research shows
- Will increase the number of students outside the law, so it will bring truancy issue to the forefront.

The commissioner said we have a law that's unenforceable. He asked how the law would affect kids negatively.

- No enforcement – sends the wrong message if you can't enforce it
- It undermines local board engagement
- It jeopardizes those who want to be there and learn
- It's ineffective, won't have the desired affect
- It's not standards based
- It's inaccurate/a poor measure
- It infers that high school is a four year institution and supports a system that is fast changing
- It sends the wrong message to students
- It holds kids back from pursuing work/careers
- It sends a message that government is here to "fix it"
- It's a push out – lack of engagement
- It's not a strategy that will improve graduation

The second topic on the agenda was the Governor's Performance Scholarship (GPS). The commissioner said it was one the governor's top priorities and the final bill should be transmitted sometime this week. Eddy Jeans will be moving it forward for the department. The GPS requires four years of math, language arts, science and 3 years of social studies. There will be three levels tied to University of Alaska tuition. The scholarship cannot be used outside of Alaska. There is also a vocational component equal to \$3,000 a year for two years. Postsecondary will manage the disbursement of funds, and EED will be responsible for the regulations.

One criticism of the GPS is that it does not include a needs based component. It was pointed out that there are other opportunities for scholarship that do include a needs based component. It will take four years to phase in the program.

The third topic on the agenda was the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE). The commissioner said that the broader issue was accountability. Board members described accountability as depending on whose perspective was being considered, legislature or educators. Accountability is high stakes, with students, & teachers being the ones who are accountable.

Erik McCormick gave a brief history of the HSGQE and its inception beginning with Senator Bunde when the Senator was concerned that the state's diploma didn't mean anything. The test was first given in 2000, and became effective in 2004. The original test (2000) was harder than what has become the HSGQE (2004 and beyond). Prior to the test, there was only the 21 credit seat time required for graduation. The HSGQE stood alone in its accountability. Since then, the department has put multiple levels of accountability into place, such as the formative assessments, SBAs, state system of support, interventions in failing districts, WorkKeys, and early learning programs. Deputy Commissioner, Les Morse, said that today the accountability system is much more robust, the essential piece is consequences or recognition for making sure districts are doing at least the minimum. SBAs are in place and continuous growth is being measured, the curriculum is better aligned, and assessments are being given and results are being used to change instruction.

There was a brief discussion regarding the Common Core Standards. Les Morse, said the department was looking to see what the consortium was going to do, sharing information and he was hopeful that EED could transition its standards into the national model.

The commissioner asked what the data told us about the HSGQE and the success of kids. Erik McCormick indicated that for the first time this year, Alaska had over 8,000 students graduating or equal to 67.5%. That is 1,000 more graduates than in 2005, all the while with increasing enrollments over the past 10 years. The statewide graduation rate had increased by 3.2% to 65.8% in 2009. He noted that special education students were improving also.

The board agreed that accountability is held with the HSGQE and they would not recommend it be done away, for now.

The board went into a brief business meeting with the following motion being made by Phil Schneider and seconded by Pat Shier. I move the State Board of Education & Early Development adopt the proposed resolution #03-2010, supporting the proposed Governor's Performance Scholarship, and direct the department to forward the resolution to the Alaska State Legislature and Governor Parnell. The motion was passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Board Comments:

Pat Shier – appreciated the staff being at the meeting to help with the discussion; he thought it was like a mini-retreat.

Geri Benshoof – said it was a good discussion.

Donald Handeland – Thanked everyone.

Grant Sullivan – said it was great to see everyone again, and he appreciated the discussion.

Phil Schneider – said it was good to be back & Happy New Year.

Tim Rockey – said he was excited to represent students and to be working with Donald.

Bunny Schaeffer – no comments

Esther Cox – verified that the January 25 meeting was canceled and said she had met with the graduation working group the two previous days. She noted that she and Bunny would be going to the teacher quality meeting and she thanked the commissioner for his time and effort in the discussions.

Commissioner LeDoux – thanked the EED staff present and noted that they were all working outside of their original job descriptions.

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 2:45 p.m.