

Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development
Approved Minutes
October 9, 2015 by audio-conference
Juneau, AK

Chair Fields called the meeting to order at noon. Chair Fields, First Vice-Chair Hull, John Harmon, Dr. Keith Hamilton, Alec Burris and Lt. Col. Nall were present. Members and staff pledged allegiance to the flag. The board adopted the agenda unanimously. There were no conflicts of interest.

Commissioner Hanley summarized the process by which Alaska adopted new standards in 2012 and contracted with the Achievement and Assessment Institute to provide assessments, with reference to the participation of Alaska educators at each stage.

Public Comment

Dr. Deena Paramo, superintendent of the Mat-Su Borough School District, said assessment data should advance learning; standardized testing does not equate to better learning or accountability. Schools need relevant, actionable information about student achievement. The department should wait for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act before taking action.

Dave Herbert, superintendent of St. Mary's School District, said his community has serious concerns about the Alaska Measures of Progress. The student-level reports for the assessment are extremely vague and don't provide useful information to guide instruction; the reports don't tell which specific standards are met or not met.

Patrick Mayer, superintendent of the Wrangell School District, said he supports high standards but the Alaska Measures of Progress is not working for his district. Administering the assessment takes up a huge amount of time, placing an undue burden on school districts.

David Nees said he supports the Alaska Measures of Progress and the proposed cut scores for the achievement levels. But he is concerned that the written public comment did not affect the department's recommendation to adopt the scores. He said the department should consider making changes in response to concerns about not having separate reading and writing assessments and a reference to foreign-born students in regard to limited English proficient students.

Kevin Shipley, superintendent of the Kake School District, referred to a letter from 18 Alaska superintendents. The Alaska Measures of Progress provides limited information; the data doesn't allow for comparisons with other states; the assessment focuses on college entrance skills; it takes several days to administer; and districts had to develop new models for evaluating teachers partly based on student growth, but the assessment won't provide that information for several years. He said districts already assess students; the state should not continue with its assessments.

[In response to a board member's question, Assistant Attorney General Luann Weyhrauch clarified that only oral comments are allowed at the meeting.]

Rep. Lora Reinbold said the board should accept oral and written comments at its meetings. She expressed concern about Alaska's standards, the Alaska Measures of Progress, and the process of setting the ranges of scores for the achievement levels. She said the department should slow down its implementation of standards and assessments. State statute does not allow the state to spend money on standards that are based on the Common Core. She was concerned that the ANSWERS data project violates privacy rights in the Alaska Constitution. She urged the board to vote against the proposed regulation.

Dr. Lisa Parady, executive director of the Alaska Council of School Administrators and the Alaska Superintendents Association, said the department's communication with districts is marred; the department should collaborate with peers. She asked that a working group of superintendents be consulted in advance of decisions being made.

[Dr. Hamilton left the meeting at 12:30 p.m. Second Vice-Chair Thompson joined the meeting at 12:45 p.m.]

Bob Crumley, superintendent of the Chugach School District, said educators embrace accountability but have concerns about the time spent on assessment and the assessment's low returns, because the student reports provide little specific information about each student that would guide instruction. He said the Alaska Measures of Progress marginalizes career and technical education.

Taryn Luskleet said she was concerned about the direction of Alaska education. She asked why the department proposes to repeal its regulations about spending funds on elections and why it has eliminated separate tests for reading and writing. The state forbids spending funds on the Common Core, which Alaska's standards are. The participation guidelines for assessments should include a section on opting out. There should be a proper study of the reliability of the Alaska Measures of Progress; why are teacher evaluations tied to the assessment? Why don't the assessment's student reports produce useful data? Why add performance tasks to the assessment if it doesn't produce useful data? Data from the Alaska Measures of Progress should not go to the ANSWERS data collection project. Adaptive tests discriminate against minorities. The cut scores are set high and are unfair.

Abby Hall, a home educator on the Kenai Peninsula, said Alaska's standards are the same as the Common Core, which represents an overreach by the federal government. Students shouldn't be tracked personally. Alaska's standards contain a worldview based on humanism and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Ed Gray of Sitka agreed with others' testimony. He doesn't have confidence in the direction of Alaska education, the Alaska Measures of Progress, data security, and Alaska's standards.

Work Session

Agenda Item 1A. Assessment Achievement Level Scores. Margaret MacKinnon, Director of Assessment & Accountability, provided the background to the proposed regulation, referencing the strands assessed by the Alaska Measures of Progress and the future availability of interim assessments that will provide significant information to teachers about student achievement in individual standards. The Alaska Measures of Progress is a summative assessment that provides scores overall and in strands. The assessment's questions are complex and cover claims rather than specific standards. The Alaska Measures of Progress assesses standards that are grouped together and interwoven. Subscores on the student reports are intended to address concerns about empirical data.

In response to board questions about MAP (Measures of Academic Progress), Commissioner Hanley said MAP and the Alaska Measures of Progress have value for different reasons. Alaska needs some sort of statewide dipstick to check on academic achievement and to compare schools. Marianne Perie, project director of the Alaska Measures of Progress, said MAP does not assess students in their ability to explain and interpret topics in the assessment. MAP doesn't have the depth of the Alaska Measures of Progress.

Board members and staff discussed the consequences of not adopting the proposed regulation and of releasing to districts the raw scores of students.

Business Meeting

Agenda Item 2A. Student Accountability and Educator Accountability.

Second Vice-Chair Thompson moved and First Vice-Chair Hull seconded the following motion: After considering all public comment, I move the State Board of Education & Early Development adopt the proposed amendments to 4 AAC 06.737 Standards-based test, 4 AAC 06.739 Assessment achievement level scores, 4 AAC 06.775 Statewide assessment program for students with disabilities, 4 AAC 06.815 Annual measurable objectives, 4 AAC 06.820 Participation, 4 AAC 06.899 Definitions, 4 AAC 33.421 Correspondence study program requirements, 4 AAC 33.426 Core course requirements, 4 AAC 34.090 Definitions.

John Harmon said that despite potential flaws the cut scores were reached with openness and integrity. But he has heard concerns that the achievement levels are broad and imprecise and don't measure if a student is at grade level. Other concerns: Is the assessment system the best for Alaska; publicizing the assessment results may add undue pressures on schools; the assessment doesn't relate to instructional improvement; and the department is moving too fast, given the possible reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. He will vote no.

First Vice-Chair Hull said cut scores make the raw scores meaningful, but asked if the Alaska Measures of Progress the right assessment vehicle.

Second Vice-Chair Thompson said the department should make improvements collaboratively with stakeholders but the board needs to move forward with cut scores.

Voting yes were Alec Burris, Second Vice-Chair Thompson, First Vice-Chair Hull, and James Fields. Voting no were John Harmon and Lt. Col. Nall. The motion carried 3-1.

Board Comments

Alec Burris said he will attend a meeting of the Alaska Association of Student Government. He is glad the board approved the regulation.

Lt. Col. Nall said the department needs to listen to what superintendents say and work collaboratively with them.

Second Vice-Chair Thompson said she appreciated the board's discussion.

John Harmon said he appreciated the process of asking and answering questions.

First Vice-Chair Hull thanked the department and thinks the discussion has been useful.

Chair Fields said setting the cut scores isn't a reason to slow down the process, but there may be an opportunity in the future to slow it down.

The board adjourned at 2:45 p.m.