

**GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL
EDUCATION
Education Committee Meeting**

**LOCATION
Governor's Council Conference Room
3601 C Street
Anchorage, Alaska
Teleconference**

**Meeting Date
February 9, 2010**

Attendees:

Julie Broyles, Chair
Anna Attla
Taylor Gregg
Debbie Kitelinger
Tonja Updike

Community Members/Guests:

Janean Butler
Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus
Karen Jenkins
Patrick Pillai
Mo Sanders

Staff:

Teresa Holt

Guests:

Commissioner Larry LeDoux
David Tarcy
Sharon Fishel

Prepared by: Paula DiPaolo
Peninsula Reporting

CALL TO ORDER – 5:00 p.m.
ROLL CALL

Welcome from the Chair

Introductions

All of the Council members and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

There was no quorum, and the approval of the minutes was tabled until the next meeting.

Comments from Commissioner LeDoux

Teresa Holt stated that she invited Commissioner LeDoux to the meeting to get his perspective on SB 109.

Commissioner LeDoux stated that the State Board of Education has taken a very difficult position with regard to the exit exam. He stated that their point of view is to reluctantly stay the course until the accountability framework becomes clear.

Commissioner LeDoux stated that there is a movement to develop national standards which they expect to be part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. He believes it will carry with it a complete set of national standards and national assessments that may or may not replace their standards based assessments.

Commissioner LeDoux also stated that they are also taking a close look at Alaska's standards and comparing them against the new national standards to make sure that they reflect the steps necessary to prepare children for college or for the workplace.

He also stated that they are required under federal ARRA guidelines to start linking student performance with teachers. He noted that this is a priority from the federal government. They also have WorkKeys coming on next year and that will be developed statewide.

Commissioner LeDoux shared that as a teacher/principal/superintendent, he has not been an advocate of the exit exam. His concerns have been that it is too rigid, inflexible, takes too much time to deliver, no make-ups, he disagrees with the way the information is presented, and the projection that it represents graduation or college-level skills, which it doesn't. He stated that the exit exam came into being during a time when there was little accountability with regards to what students were learning.

Commissioner LeDoux stated that the reason that the State Board of Education thinks that they should continue the exit exam until the accountability framework clears up is because they believe that the biggest risk to children with disabilities is people having little expectations for them. He doesn't believe the standards should be lowered for those students because many students have proven that there shouldn't be any top limit placed on them.

Commissioner LeDoux commented on some of the data which shows that the number of special ed students who are graduating has increased since the start of the exit exam. He believes that most of the reason for this is that they are now paying more attention to individual children. This system now says that if a student does not pass the exam, the schools have to work harder to help that student do it.

He stated that he has seen the level of responsibility towards the success of students grow in the schools. He believes that if they take away that accountability, schools will sink down again and people will start thinking less about a child's potential.

Commissioner LeDoux did state, though, that he is reluctant to keep the test because he doesn't like the inflexibility of it. He also shared a story of one student who was greatly impacted by his inability to pass the exam. He stated that he will try to learn more about what is happening with all of the national assessments that are heading their way. He stated that if there is no change on the horizon, then he will seek to add to the flexibility that this exam needs for general ed students, which would include special ed students.

Commissioner LeDoux added that before the accountability of the exit exam, he believes that children got an unfair representation of their performance. He noted that past practices were that many diplomas were given out to young

people because it was easier to give them a passing grade than it was to give them a grade that their work deserved.

Teresa Holt stated that some members of the Education Committee feel that 10th and 11th grade it too late to be testing the children and that testing really should take place during 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades. Commissioner LeDoux responded by stating that he thinks that they need to do much more to ensure that children can read by the time they leave 2nd grade, and it bothers him that it is not happening, and it is one of the highest priorities that they have. But he stated that if accountability at 3rd grade means holding them back, he does not support that because he does not believe in that. Commissioner LeDoux also agreed with Teresa and explained that they are concerned with the SBAs because they aren't sure that they are accurately representing a child's performance.

Commissioner LeDoux stated that he is very open to any kind of alternative flexibility that would allow kids to receive a diploma without losing accountability.

Janean Butler stated that teaching to the test has changed the way she teaches and has changed their school perspective. Jeanne Gerhart-Cyrus agreed that these days, they are teaching tests and not teaching kids. She also agreed with Janean that without the vocational and alternative programs like they used to have, children don't have those resources to feel successful during their school days.

Debbie Kitelinger stated that she believes a lot of their position is that children shouldn't have to be held hostage to this system until somebody gets around to putting something else in place. She stated that maybe if the exit exam goes away right now, maybe that will motivate people to put something else in its place.

Commissioner LeDoux stated that although he agrees with much of what everyone has said, the kind of accountability he is looking for is probably a junior level test that informs parents about where their students are operating with regards to college and being work ready. He is also very interested in having SBAs that properly inform parents with regard to what the student is actually able to do. He also stated that the exit exam is really an 8th grade competency test.

Commissioner LeDoux also commented on the suggestion of a diploma with scores on it, but that bothers him because not all kids perform and show what they can really do on an exam. He doesn't want to put an exam label on their diploma forever that they would have to carry around with them. He stated that what he would really like to do is issue a regular diploma, but on their transcript, they would list the grades of an exam that really measured the grade they could perform when they leave high school.

Commissioner LeDoux reiterated the fact that he does not like the exam, but he also wants to make sure that these kids aren't marginalized. He thanked the committee for their work and stated that he looks forward to working with them and hearing their suggestions on this difficult issue.

Review of Indicator 14

David Tarcy introduced himself and stated that he works for Alaska Research Evaluation Services. For the last three years, he has collected data for the State around post-school outcomes for children who exited school with an IEP.

David Tarcy referred the committee members to the materials Teresa Holt e-mailed to everyone and highlighted the preliminary results.

He stated that the requirements have been revised for indicator 14 and they now ask for three different numbers. He stated that it is the percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school and were:

- A. Enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school,
- B. Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school,
- C. Enrolled in higher education or in some other post-secondary education or training program or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school.

He stated that the changes to the indicator have tightened up the measure and made it possible to make comparisons across states, which OSEP is more interested in. David noted that this data was not required on this year's Annual Performance Report, but the State Office of Special Education wanted to pilot test their revised survey this year to give them an extra year of data collection.

David Tarcy noted that due to the changes in the definitions of “enrolled in higher education” and “competitively employed”, it makes it difficult to compare this year’s results to the previous year’s results. He stated that to be considered competitively employed means that someone had to be employed in an integrated (or regular) employment setting or in the military, and they have to make at least minimum wage, work at least 20 hours a week, and/or be employed for at least 90 days from leaving school.

He stated that the definition of higher education means that somebody needed to be in a community college, technical college, or four-year college or university and have completed one full term.

He reviewed the charts and graphs with the committee members and noted that the slight changes in percentages are probably the result of changing the above definitions as well as a reflection of the current economy.

David Tarcy stated that the survey results are very reliable and noted that dropouts are under-represented. He stated that for a variety of reasons, it’s been more difficult to capture what’s happening with dropouts. He noted that 281 of the 981 respondents were dropouts.

David Tarcy also made a note that they will look to adding something about someone receiving their GED. He also noted that it would be very interesting to understand what happens with dropouts and reasons why they drop out. Karen Jenkins explained that the GED has a demographic form students have to fill out that gives reasons why they dropped out of school. He stated that they can contact Amy Iutzi with the Department of Labor, and Karen believes she has the capabilities to pull all that information.

David Tarcy stressed that this data not public. It is up to Art Arnold and Sharon Fishel how this information gets distributed because they were just pilot testing the survey this year, and he reminded committee members that this is preliminary data.

David also noted that in previous years, they also counted and reported on people who were engaged in their local community subsistence activities. They did that in a separate table for OSEP because they did not meet the definition for competitive employment previously. But this new definition of some other type of employment can capture those individuals in that overall

number.

Debbie Kitelinger asked how people working seasonal employment and who earn a percentage get counted. David Tarcy stated that the responses people can give can be subjective.

Janean Butler asked if they had the percentages broken down by rural or urban. David Tarcy replied that he can probably break it down by school district.

Teresa Holt stated that these results are interesting because the unemployment rate in Alaska for people with disabilities is high, and the indicator shows high employment numbers, which surprises her. David Tarcy stated that he doesn't know how those labor statistics are calculated and that makes it difficult, because people define their variables in different ways. He stated that their disability categories are the ones that are reported to OSEP under IDEA.

Important Future Meetings/Conferences/Trainings

- American Council on Rural Special Education, March 24 – 27, Memphis

Teresa encouraged committee members to contact her if they are interested in being considered for attending the Rural Special Ed Conference.

Other Information for the Good of the Order

Teresa Holt stated that there are two bills now, HB 206 and SB 109 that deal with the exit exam. She will send committee members an update on those two pieces of legislation. Teresa also noted that she will be working on getting people to testify for those bills that allow public testimony.

Time and Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for March 11, 2010 at 2:00 p.m.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m.