

Alaska State Legislature



Senator Hollis French

SB 120 – Early Childhood Education: Parents as Teachers

Sponsor Statement

Education begins at home, and parents are a child's first and most important teachers. Engaging families in understanding the way their child's brain develops and how to create the best possible learning environment for their child is extremely beneficial. Encouraging parental involvement and fostering strong parent-child interactions before a child starts school creates positive outcomes that are long-lasting.

As a home visiting program, Parents as Teachers (PAT) is designed to provide education services to newborns and continue until the child reaches the age of five. The services offered include personal visits, group socialization opportunities with other families, developmental screenings to ensure a child's development is on-track, and referrals to other services as needed. PAT began in Alaska in 1995 when it was first implemented in Hoonah. Now, PAT operates in 41 communities around the state. It is a proven, successful program serving over 900 children in 2011.

Research from both the PAT National Center and state office indicate a multitude of benefits from participation in the program that range from short to long term. By age three, children who have been enrolled in PAT are more advanced in language and problem solving, scoring higher on kindergarten readiness tests. In addition, children who have participated in PAT also score higher on standardized reading, math, and language tests from first through fourth grade. Those students also presented a higher likelihood to graduate from high school. Participants in early childhood programs such as PAT show reduced criminal and delinquent behavior and need for public assistance, while also exhibiting greater employment rates.

Fostering positive learning experiences during the critical years of a child's brain development produces lifelong results. PAT is a voluntary program, empowering parents with the knowledge and resources to help their children develop into capable, successful students. I urge your support of this legislation.