



Alaska State Legislature

Senator Hollis French

Sponsor Statement Senate Bill 15 **Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Programs**

Pre-kindergarten is the single biggest missing link in Alaska's educational system. Developmental research, neuroscience and program evaluations have found that a child's experiences from birth to age five shape the brain's architecture and influence later life outcomes. SB15 provides for a pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) program within Alaska school districts for students four and five years of age. Parents are not required to enroll their children in a Pre-K program. School districts are not required to initiate Pre-K programs, but if they do, they must be supported in funding and program development. Students who are enrolled in a pre-kindergarten program will be counted in the average daily membership count for foundation formula funding.

Over 40 states and the District of Columbia offer state-funded pre-kindergarten, and at least 17 states have provided supplements to Head Start. It's easy to see why they have chosen to spend scarce state resources on Pre-K. For every dollar invested in Pre-K, there is an estimated \$4 to \$9 dollar return to society in the form of higher graduation rates, higher earnings, less crime, less need for special education services, less use of public welfare systems, and better health.

Alaska not only has the benefit of building on a decade-long history of successful early education programs, but it now has the experience and results of the Alaska Pilot Pre-Kindergarten Project (AP3). The data is compelling. The Department of Education and Early Development monitored the 3-year pilot program closely, and compiled two annual reports on it. The 2012 report explains that 70% of children showed more than expected growth in vocabulary. In motor, concept, and language development the percentage of children at or above the 76th percentile tripled. The reports make a solid evidence-based case for expanding Pre-K. Please join me in supporting Senate Bill 15 and making pre-kindergarten available to Alaskan children statewide.