

FY17 OPERATING BUDGET AMENDMENT **# 16**

OFFERED IN: The Senate Finance Committee

TO: SB 139 / SB 140

OFFERED BY: Senator Olson

DEPARTMENT: Education

APPROPRIATION: Teaching and Learning Support

ALLOCATION: Early Learning Coordination

ADD: \$820,000, Higher Education Fund, fund code 1226

EXPLANATION: Restore funds for Parents as Teachers and Best Beginnings. Best Beginnings and Parents as Teachers both support parental choice and help communities, parents, and extended family provide meaningful, positive, daily interactions that build young children's brains and lay the foundation for all future learning.

Best Beginnings supports a network of 30 Imagination Library affiliates through which 20,904 children from 0-5 in 105 communities from Barrow to Metlakatla receive an age-appropriate book every month. At a cost of just \$30 per year per child, this is an extremely cost-effective means of ensuring young children have access to books and develop a love of reading and learning. Because of reduced State funding, the percentage of enrolled children has dropped from 44% of all children under 5 to 39%.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, parents should begin reading to their children at birth because "children who are read to, especially before school entry, experience stronger parent-child relationships and learn valuable language and literacy skills." This is critical in a state like ours with high levels of adverse childhood experiences. They also say that reading exerts a positive effect on the developing brain. "Having as few as 20 books in the home has a significant impact on propelling a child to a higher level of education, and the more books you add, the greater the benefit." (Family Scholarly Culture and Educational Success: Books and Schooling in 27 Nations, University of Reno Nevada)

Best Beginnings promotes positive interactions between parents and their young children through social media, website and print resources in English, Spanish, and Yup'ik, and radio and TV messages.

Best Beginnings leverages State funding with contributions from businesses and corporations, foundations, and individuals – and so do local communities that also raise

funds. These private funds may not be available without State funding.

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is an evidence-based, home visiting model that provides parent education and support to pregnant women and families with children between the ages of 0 and 5. The model promotes culturally responsive and respectful relationships. Children exiting the PAT program demonstrate age-appropriate skills for their next learning environment. PAT participants report improved parent-child relationships, less stress, and increased children's school readiness — all for \$4-5,000 per family per year.

In FY 2015, 628 children in 474 families were served by PAT parent educators across Alaska, and 41.1% of the children were Alaska Native. Approximately 25% of the total participated in State-funded programs in Kodiak, Tok, Anchorage, Juneau, and Homer. Currently, Federal grants are used to provide services primarily to Alaska Native families. State funding has enabled PAT to provide additional services to both Alaska Native and non-Native families. It also provides a small amount of funds for the Alaska Liaison to the National office helping connect all PAT programs, regardless of funding sources, in the state to training, materials, and information.

All PAT parent educators are hired locally and participate in a rigorous training program, resulting in national certification. A majority of parent educators speak the first language of the families they serve. All PAT affiliate programs must meet national Quality Standards and are evaluated annually.