

Alaska State Legislature

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Senator Bettye Davis

Senate Bill 6 27-LS0058

"An Act relating to providing a prekindergarten program within a school district; and providing for an effective date."

SPONSOR STATEMENT

Pre-K programs are growing in popularity across the country. 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. SB 6 provides for a prekindergarten (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 they must be supported in funding and development if they do. Students who are enrolled in a prekindergarten program will be counted in the "average daily membership" count for foundation formula funding.

Early education programs are one of the best public investments available to states. Over 40 states and the District of Columbia offer state-funded prekindergarten, and at least 17 states have provided funding supplements to Head Start. Early childhood policies vary from state to state, as well as program options, such as private child care, preschools, federally funded Head Start, and state prekindergarten programs. State leaders are responding to the realities of today's working families, federal and state policy pressures, and demands of the No Child Left Behind Act. More women with young children are in the workforce than in previous decades, and many children spend full workday hours in the care of others. For every dollar invested in Pre-K, there is estimated a \$4 to \$9 return to society in higher graduation and employment 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 long history of successful early education programs for the last decade, but it now has the experience and results of the Alaska Pilot Pre-kindergarten Project (AP3) funded by the Legislature in 2009. Year One of the Pilot Pre-K Project found high numbers of children exceeding expected growth. While there is still extremely high need for the majority of children coming to the Pilot Pre-K Project behind typically-developing peers, this program shows what can be done with unprecedented levels of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration between Head Start programs and school districts which helped in alignment, transition, common planning and training. SB 6 expands on the \$2 million start up funding in the Pilot Prekindergarten Project in an effort to make prekindergarten a reality and available all Alaska children statewide.