

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

March 25, 2008

3:07 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Bob Roses, Vice Chair
Representative Anna Fairclough
Representative Wes Keller
Representative Paul Seaton
Representative Sharon Cissna
Representative Berta Gardner

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Peggy Wilson, Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 241(SED)

"An Act relating to a report to the legislature on teacher preparation, retention, and recruitment by the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED HCS CSSB 241(HES) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 397

"An Act creating a postsecondary scholarship grant program for Alaska residents based on high achievement and financial need."

- MOVED CSHB 397(HES) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 403

"An Act appropriating \$100,000,000 to the Alaska achievers' scholarship fund; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 306

"An Act relating to providing a voluntary pre-elementary program within a school district; and providing for the establishment and implementation of a statewide early childhood education plan."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 241

SHORT TITLE: UNIV. REPORT: TEACHER TRAINING/RETENTION

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS BY REQUEST OF JT LEG EDUCATION
FUNDING TASK FORCE

01/18/08 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/08 (S) SED, HES
02/01/08 (S) SED AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
02/01/08 (S) Heard & Held
02/01/08 (S) MINUTE(SED)
02/06/08 (S) SED RPT CS 3DP 2NR NEW TITLE
02/06/08 (S) DP: STEVENS, WILKEN, DAVIS
02/06/08 (S) NR: OLSON, HUGGINS
02/06/08 (S) SED AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
02/06/08 (S) Moved CSSB 241(SED) Out of Committee
02/06/08 (S) MINUTE(SED)
02/13/08 (S) HES AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
02/13/08 (S) Moved CSSB 241(SED) Out of Committee
02/13/08 (S) MINUTE(HES)
02/15/08 (S) HES RPT CS(SED) 2DP 2NR
02/15/08 (S) DP: DAVIS, THOMAS
02/15/08 (S) NR: ELTON, DYSON
02/29/08 (S) TRANSMITTED TO (H)
02/29/08 (S) VERSION: CSSB 241(SED)
03/03/08 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/03/08 (H) HES, FIN
03/11/08 (H) HES AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106
03/11/08 (H) Heard & Held
03/11/08 (H) MINUTE(HES)
03/25/08 (H) HES AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HB 397

SHORT TITLE: POSTSECONDARY SCHOLARSHIPS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) GUTTENBERG

02/19/08 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/19/08 (H) HES, FIN
03/13/08 (H) HES AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106
03/13/08 (H) Heard & Held
03/13/08 (H) MINUTE(HES)
03/25/08 (H) HES AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HB 403

SHORT TITLE: APPROP: SCHOLARSHIP FUND

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) GUTTENBERG

02/19/08	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/19/08	(H)	HES, FIN
03/13/08	(H)	HES AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106
03/13/08	(H)	Scheduled But Not Heard
03/25/08	(H)	HES AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HB 306

SHORT TITLE: PRE-ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS/PLANS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) GARA, KAWASAKI, NELSON, KERTTULA, GRUENBERG

01/11/08	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/11/08
01/15/08	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/15/08	(H)	HES, FIN
01/31/08	(H)	SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED
01/31/08	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/31/08	(H)	HES, FIN
03/18/08	(H)	HES AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106
03/18/08	(H)	Scheduled But Not Heard
03/25/08	(H)	HES AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

TIM LAMKIN, Staff
to Senator Gary Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HCS CSSB 241, Version M, on behalf of Senator Stevens and at the request of the Joint Legislative Education Funding Task Force.

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID GUTTENBERG
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Speaking as the sponsor, answered questions during the hearing on HB 397.

CHRISTIAN GOU-LEONHARDT, Staff
to Representative David Guttenberg
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the hearing on HB 397.

DIANE BARRANS, Executive Director
Postsecondary Education Commission

Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on HB 397.

CHRISTIAN GOU-LEONHARDT, Staff
to Representative David Guttenberg
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HB 403 on behalf of Representative Guttenberg, the sponsor.

REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered a question during the hearing on HB 403, and presented HB 306 as the sponsor.

EDDY JEANS, Director
School Finance And Facilities Section
Department Of Education And Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on HB 306.

KIM LANGTON, PhD; Superintendent
Denali Borough School District
Healy, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 306.

CANDICE WINKLER, Chief Executive Officer
Child Care Connections
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 306.

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director
Best Beginnings
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 306.

ACTION NARRATIVE

VICE CHAIR BOB ROSES called the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at [3:07:21 PM](#). Representatives Roses, Gardner, Fairclough, Keller, and Cissna were present at the call to order. Representative Seaton arrived as the meeting was in progress.

SB 241-UNIV. REPORT: TEACHER TRAINING/RETENTION

3:08:07 PM

VICE CHAIR ROSES announced that the first order of business would be CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 241(SED), "An Act relating to a report to the legislature on teacher preparation, retention, and recruitment by the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska; and providing for an effective date."

3:09:01 PM

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH asked for an explanation of the changes in Version M.

3:09:15 PM

TIM LAMKIN, Staff to Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, spoke on behalf of the sponsor, Senator Stevens by request of the Joint Legislative Education Funding Task Force. He stated that, at the direction of committee members, included in Version M are changes in the bill as follows: on page 1, line 11, the reference to "past" plans has been struck; on page 1, line 14, "shall" has been replaced with "may"; on page 2, line 1, "budgets" has been replaced with "fiscal notes and outcome measures".

3:10:12 PM

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH moved that the committee adopt HCS CSSB 241, Version 25-LS1346\M, Mischel, 3/21/08, as the working document. There being no objection, Version M was before the committee.

3:10:36 PM

MR. LAMKIN added that the committee packet holds a draft letter of intent. The letter of intent clarifies that the legislature does not want to see the report process used to leverage new monies in the University of Alaska (UA) budget.

3:11:29 PM

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH moved to report HCS CSSB 241, Version 25-LS1346\M, Mischel, 3/21/08, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

[3:11:40 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER objected. She then asked the sponsor whether the report would reflect specific areas of teaching; for example, special education, science, or math teachers.

[3:12:14 PM](#)

MR. LAMKIN explained that the wording of the section is broad enough to not exclude those specialties; in fact, the UA can be as specific as it wishes.

[3:12:25 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER said that she would like the report to include an understanding of the specific subsets of teachers. She withdrew her objection.

[3:12:38 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER objected. He advised that, although his original concern that the bill proposed action beyond the issuance of a report was addressed, the bill does allow the UA discretion to provide limited information.

[3:13:53 PM](#)

MR. LAMKIN suggested that the committee adopt the letter of intent.

[3:14:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH expanded her motion to include the letter of intent.

[3:14:15 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER removed his objection.

There being no further objection, HCS CSSB 241(HES), including the letter of intent, with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes was reported out of the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee.

[3:14:34 PM](#)

HB 397-POSTSECONDARY SCHOLARSHIPS

3:15:11 PM

VICE CHAIR ROSES announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 397, "An Act creating a postsecondary scholarship grant program for Alaska residents based on high achievement and financial need."

3:15:45 PM

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID GUTTENBERG, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor, referred to an electronic letter that addressed questions raised during the previous hearing.

3:16:39 PM

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH acknowledged receiving the information electronically.

3:16:52 PM

REPRESENTATIVE GUTTENBERG expressed his pride in the quality of the testimony from the UA students.

3:17:42 PM

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER moved that the committee adopt Amendment 1, that read:

Page 2, line 9, following "\$1,000":
Insert "and not more than \$5,000 a year"

3:18:03 PM

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH objected.

3:18:18 PM

CHRISTIAN GOU-LEONHARDT, Staff to Representative David Guttenberg, Alaska State Legislature, explained that Amendments 1 through 5 were proposed by the Postsecondary Education Commission.

3:19:00 PM

DIANE BARRANS, Executive Director, Postsecondary Education Commission, Department of Education and Early Development, informed the committee that the original version of the bill did not include an annual cap, or an aggregate cap, on the amount of the scholarship. Amendment 1 would establish a maximum.

[3:20:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH removed her objection.

[3:20:43 PM](#)

There being no further objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[3:20:51 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES moved that the committee adopt Amendment 2, that read:

Page 2, line 11, following "year.":

Insert "The commission may not award a scholarship to an eligible applicant for more than four years or more than a cumulative amount of \$20,000."

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH objected.

[3:20:58 PM](#)

MS. BARRANS stated that Amendment 2 creates a cumulative cap on the amount of the scholarship.

[3:21:19 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH removed her objection.

There being no further objection, Amendment 2 was adopted.

[3:21:31 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES moved that the committee adopt Amendment 3, as follows:

Page 3, line 22, following "AS 14.43.190":

Insert ",for the cost of administering the Alaska achievers' scholarship program,"

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH objected.

[3:21:40 PM](#)

MS. BARRANS explained that the amendment ensures that any direct cost to establish the program was to be paid by the fund.

[3:21:51 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH removed her objection.

[3:22:13 PM](#)

There being no further objection, Amendment 3 was adopted.

[3:22:20 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES moved that the committee adopt Amendment 4, which read:

Page 3, line 16:

Delete "July"
Insert "May"

There being no objection, Amendment 4 was adopted.

[3:22:48 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES moved that the committee adopt Amendment 5, which read:

Page 2, line 23, following "achieved":

Delete "a"
Insert "and maintained a cumulative"

[3:22:54 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH objected.

[3:22:57 PM](#)

MS. BARRANS stated that Amendment 5 establishes an ongoing academic criteria in order for a student to continue to be qualified for a scholarship after the initial receipt.

[3:23:13 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH removed her objection.

There being no further objection, Amendment 5 was adopted.

[3:23:23 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES moved that the committee adopt Amendment 6, which read:

Page 2, line 16:

Delete "needed"

[3:23:35 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH objected.

[3:23:39 PM](#)

MS. BARRANS noted that the word was extraneous and a source of future debate.

[3:23:48 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH remarked:

So the new sentence, for those listening at home, on page 2, line 16, item (d) under 14.43.190, would say, "The commission shall adopt regulations to administer the program." With that, I'll withdraw my objection.

[3:24:16 PM](#)

There being no further objection, Amendment 6 was adopted.

[3:24:23 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES moved that the committee adopt Amendment 7, which read:

Page 4, following line 1:

Insert a new bill section to read:

****Sec. 3.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to read:

ALASKA ACHIEVERS' SCHOLARSHIP FUND; TRANSITION. Notwithstanding AS 14.43.195(c), added by sec. 2 of this Act, the commissioner of revenue shall determine the amount available for appropriation for scholarships from the Alaska achievers' scholarship fund as follows:

(1) as soon as practicable after the first appropriation is deposited into the fund, the commissioner shall determine the first full month-end market value of the fund and identify five percent of that amount available for the remainder of the fiscal year;

(2) as soon as practicable after May 1, 2009, the commissioner shall determine the month-end market value of the fund and identify five percent of that amount as the amount available for the following fiscal year; and

(3) as soon as practicable after May 1, 2010, the commissioner shall determine the average month-end market value of the fund for the preceding fiscal year and identify 10 percent of the amount as the amount available for the following fiscal year."

[3:24:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH objected.

[3:24:38 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES paraphrased Amendment 7.

[3:25:01 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER objected to offer Amendment 1 to Amendment 7, as follows:

Page 1, line 16,
Delete "10"

Insert "five"

There being no objection, Amendment 1 to Amendment 7 was adopted.

[3:25:38 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from [3:25:45 PM](#) to [3:27:07 PM](#).

[3:27:09 PM](#)

MR. GOU-LEONHARDT explained that Amendment 7 adds transition language to correct an omission in the original bill and allow the determination of the market value of the fund.

[3:28:07 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH withdrew her objection.

There being no further objection, Amendment 7, as amended, was adopted.

[3:28:40 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH moved to report HB 397, Version 25-LS1395\M, Mischel, 3/21/08, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHB 397(HES), was reported out of the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee.

The committee took an at-ease from [3:29:02 PM](#) to [3:32:12 PM](#)

HB 403-APPROP: SCHOLARSHIP FUND

[3:32:14 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 403, "An Act appropriating \$100,000,000 to the Alaska achievers' scholarship fund; and providing for an effective date."

[3:32:26 PM](#)

CHRISTIAN GOU-LEONHARDT, Staff to Representative David Guttenberg, Alaska State Legislature, speaking on behalf of the sponsor, Representative Guttenberg, informed the committee that

HB 403 appropriates \$100,000,000 to fund the scholarship program endowment established by HB 397.

[3:33:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH asked whether public testimony would be heard.

[3:33:16 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES called for public testimony. There being none, public testimony was closed.

[3:33:42 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH asked why the bill does not have any dedication of funds and whether it is not necessary on an appropriation bill.

[3:34:02 PM](#)

MR. GOU-LEONHARDT explained that, in HB 397, the enabling language for the scholarship fund is found on page 3, line 21 through 23, and read:

"Money in the fund may be appropriated for scholarships under AS 14.43.190 or for any other public purpose. Nothing in this section creates a dedicated fund."

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH further asked whether a dedication of funds is necessary in HB 403.

[3:35:04 PM](#)

MS. BARRANS opined that the purpose of HB 403 was to create a fund. [Her testimony was interrupted by technical difficulties.]

[3:35:55 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES asked Representative Fairclough to re-state her question.

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH remarked:

I understand that, in the bill that's already moved from committee, that we created the shell, or the

framework to establish the fund and inside of that there was a question about, or an answer to, "this is not a dedicated fund." On page 1, of HB 403, on line 7, it says "endowment fund and does not lapse." And usually when I see the "does not lapse" in other bills that I've seen ... I've seen somehow a re-statement that it is not a dedicated fund.

[3:37:11 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA, Alaska State Legislature, explained that a dedicated fund is created by saying, "in the future, money should be put into this fund." A future legislature can not be obligated to put money into a certain fund, and a certain amount can not be dedicated to a particular fund. However, in the appropriation process funds are always dedicated, for example, to a bridge. Representative Gara concluded that there is not a dedicated fund when the legislature makes an appropriation.

[3:38:26 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES pointed out that the issue was on the record for the House Finance Committee to address.

[3:38:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA affirmed that HB 403 would establish an endowment that would not lapse and would be continued by its interest and future funding. She opined that this funding could turn the [low] education statistics around for the state.

[3:39:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GUTTENBERG agreed with Representative Cissna. Furthermore, these funds, unlike dedicated funds, can be reappropriated and are not locked away; future legislators can access this money.

[3:40:10 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH expressed her reluctance at recommending an appropriation of \$100 million, given the other needs across the state. She compared the ways in which money is disbursed and the difficulties in prioritizing the funding of programs that are necessary for transportation, early education, and other worthy programs. She concluded that advocating for

this type of funding with the rural and urban needs that exist in Alaska is difficult.

[3:42:32 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER stated that he would vote against the bill. He recalled his support for the original concept that was for a merit based scholarship program; however, the requirement that a student maintain a cumulative 3.0 grade point average is very different from scholarships that demand high levels of achievement. He said that he understood the difficulty students face as he struggled to pay for his own college education. Representative Keller opined that the legislature needs to take the time to establish a merit based program.

[3:44:39 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA stressed that Alaska is not graduating enough students with higher degrees, thus the state must import its professional workforce and depend on oil and gas for revenue. She expressed her belief that there must be incentives to keep young people in the state. She pointed out that she, also, paid for her college education. To address the funding of how to support all of the worthy issues in the state would take a comprehensive look at the budget during a session longer than 90 days. Representative Cissna concluded that growing the state's economy is dependent on the passage of this bill.

[3:47:59 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER reminded the committee that, nationally, the U.S. is losing ground on the education front and statistics show that Alaska is near the bottom in the U.S. There is an overall need to promote education in general. She opined that merit based scholarships serve a purpose to inspire high school students; however, high achievers have a wide choice of where they might attend college. A need-based scholarship program would support students who have abilities but may have families or need extra study time. She stated that the bill is part of a long term plan to improve the education level of Alaska's permanent residents.

[3:50:15 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES announced that HB 403 would be held until it could be considered by the full committee.

[3:50:33 PM](#)

HB 306-PRE-ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS/PLANS

[3:50:53 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES announced that the final order of business would be SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 306, "An Act relating to providing a voluntary pre-elementary program within a school district; and providing for the establishment and implementation of a statewide early childhood education plan."

[3:50:55 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HB 306, as the sponsor. He cited widespread research that supports expanding early education opportunities for kids, especially for ages younger than six.

The committee took an at-ease from [3:52:10 PM](#) to [3:56:55 PM](#).

[3:56:57 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA continued his introduction of HB 306. Given the benefits of early learning, pre-elementary programs, for the ages of three to four, provide the most positive impact to help the very young child; in fact, 40 states have a statewide early learning program. In Alaska, there is a Head Start program for children under the poverty level; however, due to underfunding, over 50 percent of the children who qualify are not served. Representative Gara referred to the Perry Preschool Project that found that low-income children who participated in early education graduated high school, graduated college, and earned higher salaries at a higher rate than those who did not. Additionally, the 1999 Abecedarian Study at the University of North Carolina calculated that school districts save about \$11.00 per child on children who have attended pre-K programs. Furthermore, the Federal Reserve Bank established economic benefits associated with widespread early education. He then noted that a study by the National Institute for Early Education Research in 2004, found that children that attended state-funded pre-K demonstrated improvements in vocabulary 31 percent greater than those who did not participate, and 44 percent greater in math. Looking at crime statistics, the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) showed that kids who attend early education commit criminal acts and collect welfare in much smaller numbers, and complete their education in much higher numbers.

He opined that the research that proves the effectiveness of early education is compelling, even when programs are not mandated.

[4:02:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA continued to explain that the bill proposed that the pre-K program be a standards-based system delivered through local school districts. He then recalled that the Best Beginnings task force encouraged the inclusion of a statewide quality rating system for providers that would assist parents in selecting programs for their children. He acknowledged that there are many options for the committee to consider, such as assessing a sliding payment scale to cover a portion of the cost. Representative Gara expressed his hope that, due to the evidence of the value of early education, a universally available, pre-K educational system would soon be in place in the state.

[4:03:51 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH recognized the value of socialization, development of motor skills, and school readiness that takes place in preschool, but asked how the school system would house the additional number of students without displacing existing students. She also asked whether transportation would be provided and asked for an estimate of that additional cost.

[4:05:44 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA explained that the fiscal note would not provide \$163 million, unless the program was provided free and every child participated. However, the school construction issue is a hurdle; in fact, the legislature could not require that this program was to be implemented by school districts immediately. He pointed out that the bill proposes for the state to establish the standards and for the school districts to develop a program to provide services on a voluntary basis and as space allows.

[4:07:28 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH further asked whether there would be accommodations for special needs children. She opined that parents are responsible for providing for their children's needs to the best of their ability.

[4:08:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA agreed and stated that a sliding scale fee would allow those parents who can to pay, and yet provide for children in need. For example, in Anchorage, there are two early education programs operating through the school district with income qualification systems.

[4:09:59 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER observed that Head Start is a preschool program targeted at children who are at risk for a variety of reasons. She asked whether there are advantages of simply funding Head Start at a level so that every child who was qualified could attend.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA stated that, one problem with Head Start is the lack of a mixture of kids from all income levels and backgrounds. Furthermore, Head Start often has funding shortages. Although a strong program, Head Start is not particularly flexible.

[4:12:16 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA advocated for the Head Start program to be incorporated into the provisions of the bill.

[4:13:27 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES clarified that the question asked how adequately funding Head Start would differ from this program. He opined that the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) has very little oversight over Head Start.

[4:13:46 PM](#)

EDDY JEANS, Director, School Finance And Facilities Section, Department of Education and Early Development, opined that there would be substantial differences between Head Start and an early education program through the school districts. Head Start programs are federal and a strong component of its program involves medical and dental services that are beyond the scope of public school.

[4:14:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER further asked whether the state could provide preschool services less expensively than Head Start.

[4:14:57 PM](#)

MR. JEANS said that there is a place for both systems. He pointed out that kindergarten is optional in Alaska; the kindergartens are full and most are operating on a full-time basis. He stated that transportation home is not offered for kindergarteners and transportation costs were not included in the fiscal note attached to HB 306. He acknowledged that the inclusion of preschool programs would lead to capital requests to expand the capacity of schools. Mr. Jeans assured the committee that three and four year olds with special needs are already being served by local school districts.

[4:16:56 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA informed that committee that there are federal funds provided in order for states to partner with federal government programs; the Head Start program may fit here. She then suggested that the charter school concept may be an affordable model for this legislation.

[4:18:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA agreed that the charter school model might work. He indicated that Head Start staff use home visits to encourage the involvement of parents. The bill provides that school districts use existing structures and programs to deliver early education.

[4:20:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked whether local school districts have the ability to charge, on a sliding scale, for the education of children.

[4:20:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA answered that sliding scale fees are not addressed directly in the bill, but there was broad latitude for school districts to devise a program. He agreed that the language could be clarified to allow this ability.

[4:21:31 PM](#)

MR. JEANS responded that school districts have the ability to offer preschool programs and charge parents a fee. However, the law does not provide for state support for three and four year olds, unless a child has disabilities.

[4:22:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON further asked whether HB 306 directly provides state support.

[4:22:13 PM](#)

MR. JEANS said yes.

[4:22:16 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON referred to page 1, line 14, and asked whether "funded on a pro rata basis with a priority for low-income families" was the funding standard or whether the funding mechanism would be basic student aid.

[4:22:46 PM](#)

MR. JEANS responded that he would request direction from the Department of Law (DOL) on that point. He affirmed that school districts can provide a higher allocation for low-income families, but was unsure whether there could be a sliding scale.

[4:23:45 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked for a future response.

[4:23:53 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked whether this legislation, with or without state support, can act as an option or a solution for communities to view and expand.

[4:24:57 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA agreed that the bill would create a shell of a program that, if not funded by the state, relieves any school district from the obligation of providing pre-K education. Anticipating limited funding by the state, the bill does require school districts to provide pre-K education to as many children as the state provides funds for. Enactment of HB 306 would provide the structure.

[4:25:45 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA expressed her wish that, instead of standing still, the legislature would create structures that allow communities to begin solving problems, further supported by the possibility of future legislation and future funding.

[4:26:32 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked whether the cost for the DEED to devise the program was included in the fiscal note.

[4:27:18 PM](#)

MR. JEANS explained that there is staff at the DEED that works on early education guidelines. The fiscal note attached to HB 306 represents costs through the foundation program and does not represent DEED staff costs.

[4:27:51 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH observed that the legislature passed a substantial education budget this year. She asked Representative Gara to estimate the percentage of the education "pie" that should be allowed for preschool, given the shortages in education appropriations for weatherization, energy costs, and retirement and benefits.

[4:29:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA stated that a partial program would begin to open some classrooms. He opined that a \$30 million investment in education should be a high priority. He referred to the possibility that the legislature will approve payment of \$500 to all residents, to offset energy costs, and stated that his preference would be to fund educational programs. Educational programs to support college students and young children make a lasting effect on people's lives.

[4:30:44 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH re-stated her question about how to allocate educational costs. For example, should one-half go to K-12 education.

[4:32:19 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA answered that early education is a top priority. Reducing class size for grades K through five is very expensive, so money may be better spent to involve parents and fund early education. He reminded the committee that money spent in early education is even more effective than an increase in the foundation formula. Representative Gara listed several educational and financial aid programs that he described as underfunded.

[4:34:28 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH expressed her hesitation to support the bill considering the unanswered questions of transportation costs, expanded capital costs, and the constitutional issues.

[4:35:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA observed that for the last six years legislators have said, "We can't fund it because it hasn't been designed yet." The bill instructs the DEED to devise standards; the first step to a universal early education system. He questioned the purpose of avoiding the first step, and ignoring the advice from the Best Beginnings task force.

[4:36:35 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH suggested that a pilot program in rural Alaska would provide indicators of the success of the program and information sufficient to create a business plan, with measurable outcomes, to submit to legislators. She further suggested that Representative Gara approach the administration to establish support and credibility for the program.

[4:38:50 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA conceded that he will not be able to interest the administration in implementing a program. The Best Beginnings task force was comprised of a broad cross section of influential people; however, there has not been a response to their recommendations. In fact, the Palin Administration has rejected a pilot project. He agreed that there was need for a governor to champion the issue.

[4:40:26 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA opined that a great deal of money has been spent on programs with fewer positive outcomes substantiated in research. If, in fact, there was an interest in making a difference for education, the funding would be looked at as a budget issue by the appropriate committees. She opined that successful methods of educating children are known; however, funding is a continuing issue with constant changes in the legislature and in the administration. Representative Cissna challenged legislators to care about education issues and to have the will to make a difference.

[4:43:06 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH remarked:

I believe that we keep delegating our responsibility to other people, to come back with solutions and we never have buy-in from the legislature. ... If you do not have legislators involved in a process ... to commit to something where you get people believing and pulling the rope the same direction, that we continue to spin. ... I think [solutions] are there, it just requires a cooperative effort.

[4:44:59 PM](#)

KIM LANGTON, PhD; Superintendent, Denali Borough School District, informed the committee of his experience working in the Iditarod Area School District, the Kuspuk School District, and the Denali Borough School District. He opined that the issues dealing with the younger child generate the most excitement among parents and communities. He noted the positive impact of an early education program that was begun in 2001, in Aniak. In the Bush, children often do not have the language and comprehension skills needed for success later on in school. Dr. Langton stressed that early exposure to a print-rich and verbal-rich environment is critical for effective later learning. He observed that, if the state is sincere about achievement for the kids in rural Alaska, a program of pre-school is required.

[4:47:40 PM](#)

CANDICE WINKLER, Chief Executive Officer, Child Care Connections, expressed her support of the intent of the bill, adding her belief that these services need to be expanded beyond the school districts and should include child care programs, private preschool programs, and Head Start programs that meet

certain standards. Rating the existing programs, as previously suggested, would ensure that pre-K services could be delivered through a mixed approach. She opined that a mixed approach has been proven to be effective and efficient, and would meet parent's needs, reduce duplication, and improve community based programs. Ms. Winkler agreed that it is the responsibility of the legislature to review recommendations of citizen committees and become involved. Ms. Winkler stated that early education is good public policy and benefits economic development in that it would help the state remain competitive in a global economy. The research is clear that funding to support quality early education creates a high return on the investment. She assured the committee that there was plenty of research available to support early education and encouraged the legislature to pursue this issue.

[4:54:51 PM](#)

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director, Best Beginnings, informed the committee that Best Beginnings is a statewide initiative that brings together people and resources to ensure that all Alaskan children begin school ready for success. She pointed out the importance of delivering early learning opportunities through diverse delivery systems versus the public school system. In fact, a recommendation from the Ready to Read, Ready to Learn task force was to develop a statewide system of voluntary and affordable early childhood education with options for parents and families wherever they are. Additionally, Best Beginnings is focusing on children from birth to age 6, and working with families to provide learning opportunities in a variety of ways. Ms. Hensley encouraged the committee to look carefully at providing opportunities for the children in Alaska to successfully begin school, and prepare for the rest of their lives.

[4:59:48 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES announced that public testimony would be kept open for further discussion.

[5:00:13 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked whether deleting Sections 1 and 2 would allow the bill to move forward.

[5:01:20 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA acknowledged that this September, there will not be a statewide education program. Moreover, without any changes to the bill, the program would be further delayed. He agreed with the deletion of Sections 1 through 4 and the passage of Section 5, with the intent to allow the DEED to devise an efficient and effective early education program.

[5:02:23 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER offered Conceptual Amendment 1, which deletes from page 1, line 5, through page 4, line 8, leaving only Section 5 of the bill.

[5:02:46 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES objected.

[5:02:52 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER opined that the amendment contains the "nub" of the bill and would move the bill expeditiously.

[5:03:15 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER observed that there would be further public testimony, therefore, there would also be time to draft a committee substitute (CS).

[5:03:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH stated her support for the amendment, for further testimony, and for the submission of a CS.

[5:03:49 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked for comments from Mr. Jeans of the DEED.

[5:04:05 PM](#)

MR. JEANS stated his support for the amendment.

[5:04:38 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA suggested that Section 3 also contained language necessary for the bill.

[5:04:51 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES re-stated that the proposal by Representative Seaton was to eliminate Sections 1 and 2.

[5:05:11 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA affirmed that Sections 3 and 5, but not Section 4, should be retained.

[5:05:15 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES suggested that Representative Gardner work with the sponsor to draft a CS, rather than proceeding with action on the offered amendment.

[5:05:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER withdrew her amendment and commented that the last three lines of Section 5 could include the significant language from Section 3.

[5:06:00 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH spoke in opposition to language that incorporates "devise and implement".

[5:06:30 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES affirmed that the CS would propose a well designated plan as opposed to implementation of an immediate program.

[5:06:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA stated his intent to provide a CS.

[5:07:07 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ROSES announced that SSHB 306 would be held.

[5:07:23 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 5:07 p.m.