

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 4, 2009

7:59 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Cathy Engstrom Munoz, Vice Chair
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Representative Wes Keller
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Robert L. "Bob" Buch
Representative Berta Gardner

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Paul Seaton, Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW(S):

REGIONAL BOARDING SCHOOLS

- HEARD

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

HARRY WHITE, Principal
Galena Interior Learning Academy
Galena, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of the Galena Interior Learning Academy.

BILL HUTTON, Director
Mt. Edgecumbe High School
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of the Mt. Edgecumbe High School boarding program.

CYNTHIA CURRAN, Director
Teaching and Learning Support
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of Head Start grants and early learning programs.

EDDY JEANS, Director
School Finance and Facilities Section
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding the state's early childhood programs.

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director
Best Beginnings
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of Best Beginnings, a statewide program designed to increase early literacy and prepare children for kindergarten.

LORALEE PETERSON, Early Childhood Consultant
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information about training requirements for those working in early childhood development.

MARK LACKEY, Treasurer
Alaska Head Start Association
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information about the Head Start program in Alaska.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[7:59:45 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR CATHY ENGSTROM MUNOZ called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 7:59 a.m. Representatives Munoz and Wilson were present at the call to order. Representatives Buch, Keller, Edgmon, and Gardner arrived as the meeting was in progress. Vice Chair Munoz said Representative Seaton is attending his father's 100th birthday celebration.

OVERVIEW(S):

REGIONAL BOARDING SCHOOLS

8:01:09 AM

VICE CHAIR MUNOZ announced that the first order of business would be an overview of regional boarding schools.

HARRY WHITE, Principal, Galena Interior Learning Academy (GILA), specified that the academy has graduated 159 students since its start in 1997 and presently has 114 students enrolled. The goal was to reach 150 students through word-of-mouth advertising, he said, but since this method did not work it is being changed. Since implementation of the qualifying exam, the academy has had a 100 percent success rate for its graduates passing the exam. Only one student did not pass the exam by graduation and that student passed the next year.

8:02:39 AM

MR. WHITE noted that the academy offers vocational options. A new career health strand includes two classes, allied health and medical terminology, for which college credit is given, so the expenses are paid for by the "tech prep" program. In addition, over 20 students have graduated from the two Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) courses that were offered by the academy. Mr. White explained that academy students receive introductory vocational classes by their sophomore year. By their junior year, students spend a quarter- to half-time in vocational classes. If students complete vocational training by graduation they can become certified and, if not, they can come back and finish those programs.

MR. WHITE discussed cosmetology as one example of the academy's vocational training. Students can enroll during their sophomore year and participate half-time during their junior and senior years. To become cosmetology certified under state and federal guidelines, a student must complete 1650 hours and pass written and practical tests, he said. The academy had one student do this upon graduation and the rest have come back for one or two years. There are 36 students currently enrolled in cosmetology and 3 adults are finishing from previous years. One adult is in training to become an instructor in the academy's cosmetology program, he noted. The academy has enough equipment and student interest to double the size of its program from six chairs to twelve, but the program cannot expand without the funding to remodel a larger facility. Of the 16 cosmetology graduates, 13

are working in the industry throughout the state, 2 are raising families at home, and 1 is working out of the profession.

8:05:05 AM

MR. WHITE reviewed the academy's aviation vocational program. All expenses are paid for students enrolled in this program, except for the test fee, he said. In the last five years, eight private pilots have completed the academy's program and two have completed instrument pilot programs. The two who completed the instrument programs are going to school in Fairbanks and working for Everet's Air, a 100 percent success ratio. One of the academy's private pilots is teaching ground school at Elmendorf Air Force Base. All day instruction is currently being offered in the academy's aviation program, he continued, as well as night classes for adults. One of the day classes is also on the Internet through a district correspondence program that is offered to about 800 high school students. The aviation program is limited to 10 students and 9 students are currently enrolled.

MR. WHITE outlined the academy's culinary arts vocational program. He said the greatest success has been the certification of eight students in safety and sanitation health. Every restaurant is supposed to have someone with this certification, he added. Most of the academy's students are using this as a job and a means to move forward as they go through other postsecondary instruction. Next year the academy is implementing ProStart, a two-year program by the National Restaurant Association that enables a person to work in any restaurant in the nation.

8:06:12 AM

MR. WHITE highlighted the automotive vocational program. He pointed out that the academy's automotive instructor has all of the eight possible Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certifications. The academy is working toward certification by the National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation (NATEF) so that students will be able to get jobs in any mechanics shop anywhere. Five adults have completed the automotive program and are now in one part or another of ASE certification.

MR. WHITE said the academy is coordinating with Mount Edgecumbe High School to ensure that the two schools are not working for the same students. Since it is a school of choice, the academy tries to offer as much as it can to the students of Alaska. The academy hopes to attract the 500 homeless kids in the state's

urban areas who are not going to school, he added, because educating them is a better way to go than future incarceration.

Mr. WHITE explained that many rural residents do not have a driver's license, so the Galena Interior Learning Academy offers driver's education. The state will be needing workers with a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) as a result of the Alaska Gasline Inducement Act (AGIA), he said. The academy graduated 15 students last semester, has 15 this semester, and a CDL class is planned for this spring.

[8:07:54 AM](#)

MR. WHITE noted that 18 students have completed the academy's twice-offered line service technician class. A line service technician certificate is required to load fuel in any airplane anywhere, he explained. A hospitality program with Princess Cruises has also been offered twice, he continued, and those students are now working in Denali National Park and Preserve and in different motels in Fairbanks. Most of these students are using this work to go on to postsecondary education. In addition, the academy has completed three programs for adults - plumbing, carpentry, and electricity - through the Alaska Works Partnership. Each of those three programs had 10 students.

MR. WHITE said the academy's cost of education per student is \$26,000-\$30,000, depending upon whether there are 150 or 100 students. The more students the less the costs since the academy's expenses stay the same whether or not all the beds are full.

[8:09:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER complimented Mr. White on the academy's impressive campus and the engaged teachers, community, and students. He asked for a description of the connection between the boarding school and career training.

MR. WHITE said he believes the boarding school's vocational programs require more academic credits in English, math, science, and social studies than any school in the state. The career pathways are used as a carrot to get students to come to the academy. Students can start the career pathways as juniors, he explained, and it typically takes a thirteenth or fourteenth year to finish the pathway. The thirteenth and fourteenth year also attracts adults from other areas to come in and work. The career pathways keep a student in school and the student goes to

work when he or she leaves the academy. The academy also offers vocational classes at the community school.

[8:10:54 AM](#)

MR. WHITE, in response to Representative Wilson, explained that the academy would like to provide one career medical program because that is necessary in Alaska. The academy currently offers two high school classes in allied health and medical terminology where students get high school as well as college credit through a "tech-prep" program. Those are the initial classes necessary for any medical training, he said. The academy has twice offered CNA training to adults, but is hoping to eventually foster its own students to move into those health programs instead of pulling adults from other places.

MR. WHITE, in further response to Representative Wilson, said the academy requires four credits each in English, math, science, and history, and a total of 26 credits to graduate. Thus, the vocational programs end up being electives.

[8:12:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER shared her personal history of attending a boarding school for three years, which gives her an understanding of what it is like from the student's perspective. She asked whether Galena students have any unique qualities or assets that help them to see the opportunity that they have.

MR. WHITE replied that the academy's population is unique in the family-type atmosphere that is provided. The academy regulates everything, and for high school students this regulation can be difficult, he said. However, along with the specific bed, wake, and meal times, the academy provides lots of activities and community involvement such as after-hours snow machine clubs. He said he thinks this is why students come to the academy and for the most part stay. In addition, the academy provides after school tutors for any student having a hard time. The academy offers 480 minutes of school per day as compared to the state standard of 300. A detention or suspension is done at night or on weekends rather than during the school day. The staff knows all the students on a first name basis, although this may not be as possible when the academy grows to 300 students. The academy stays in contact with the parents and the grading system is done on line to allow parental access to the child's grades.

[8:15:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER commented that all students have opportunity, but not all of them can recognize it and be inspired to take advantage of it. For young people who have never left their very small communities, it would be quite a challenge to imagine themselves leaving and living away from their family and everyone and everything they know. A benefit of the University of Alaska Scholars Program is that kids all across the state now know at least one person who has gone to the university and this plants the seed that they could do this too. She said she thinks the academy is doing this same thing and the trick is ensuring that all kids know about it.

MR. WHITE responded that the academy's largest challenge is getting the word out. He said the academy is going to begin advertising this year, rather than relying on the current method of word-of-mouth. The other challenge is keeping the students once they come. The hope is that the advertising will let students know exactly what the academy is and what it offers so that when they come the academy is exactly what they expected.

[8:16:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER noted that a down side of boarding schools may be the impact on the students' home community schools when the most motivated kids leave and possibly never return to that community. She asked whether it would be feasible for the academy to provide intensive, month-long programs for students to attend and then return to their home school. An intensive program would be where just one class is offered all day every day, she clarified.

MR. WHITE said the first issue would be funding this type of program because there is presently no funding that he is aware of. The academy does provide three different summer programs that are three weeks to a month in length, he pointed out. He explained that the academy does not necessarily get the highest academic students from the small villages because grades are not considered when accepting students. The academy feels that its hands-on, close touch policy and after-school tutor program result in successfully raising students that originally came with very poor grades. The academy does not want to negatively affect any village school, he added.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER clarified that she was careful not to say the brightest or the best students, but those who are somehow motivated to reach out to the opportunity.

[8:19:48 AM](#)

MR. WHITE, in response to Representative Keller, said there is a huge amount of room for the academy to expand and space-wise there is already enough room for 300 students. However, he continued, most of the existing buildings were designed for the military and would need remodeling in order to expand, and unless the academy makes the list for capital improvement projects, there is no money for remodeling.

MR. WHITE, in response to Representative Edgmon, stated that the transfer from the U.S. Air Force is complete and the academy is now paying all of the utilities, which total over \$100,000 per month. The facilities were designed for a large number of military people, so it is a struggle without a greater number of students and a greater amount of support, he said. Therefore, a number of the buildings are in cold storage.

[8:22:42 AM](#)

BILL HUTTON, Director, Mt. Edgecumbe High School, referred members to a report entitled, "Thirty Years Later: The Long-Term Effect of Boarding Schools on Alaska Native Adults and Communities", written by researchers from the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER). He complimented the Galena Interior Learning Academy for its outstanding program and noted that Mt. Edgecumbe High School ("Mt. Edgecumbe") has been working with the academy. He said Mt. Edgecumbe believes it is in the business of providing an array of educational opportunities for all of Alaska's teenagers that wish to participate. Mt. Edgecumbe started as a federal school in 1947, closed in 1982, then reopened as a state school in 1985. Presently, there are 378 students representing over 100 Alaska communities with 348 students live in the dormitory, the most since the late 1950s.

[8:24:36 AM](#)

MR. HUTTON acknowledged that there is student attrition. He said 23 students went home this fall, a 20 percent decrease from last fall. The students left due for a variety of reasons: homesickness, request of a parent, family emergency, and inability to safely co-habitate in a dormitory setting. Twenty-seven students did not return in January and although this is a 25 percent decrease from the previous year, it is still more than is desired. The high school goes through a number of

admission applications, he continued, but only about 35 applicants were not accepted in August 2008 for this school year.

[8:25:39 AM](#)

MR. HUTTON related that 81 percent of alumni respondents cited the higher quality of education as the reason they attended Mt. Edgecumbe. Examples of this higher quality education include a genetics program that provides four University of Alaska credits to the student, an oceanography class where the students work directly with the "Scripps Institute", and a wide array of classes such as trigonometry, calculus, advanced chemistry, physics, Pacific Rim studies, animation, video production, and Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish languages. Seventeen students are signed up with the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Project (ANSEP) to pursue either engineering or science in college or university. Moreover, 70 students will be building their own computer this year with parts provided by ANSEP. Those students who take and pass trigonometry and chemistry before graduating from college can then keep their computers.

[8:27:48 AM](#)

MR. HUTTON reported that according to an ISER survey, 56 percent of Mt. Edgecumbe's students start college and 29 percent of those graduate within 5 years. He said Mt. Edgecumbe also has very good career technical programs of which welding is the most successful. Six students graduated from that program over the last three years and are employed at various places around Alaska, making between \$60,000 and \$85,000. There is also a residential construction program, a certified nursing assistant (CNA) certification program, emergency trauma training (ETT), and small engines.

MR. HUTTON noted that one of Mt. Edgecumbe's challenges is 300 students wanting permits or driver's licenses. The lack of a driver's license is a barrier, particularly for joining unions or getting a job. The school has a liaison with the University of Alaska for driver's training, but he said students will be using his personal car for the training because of some concerns expressed by the state.

[8:29:55 AM](#)

MR. HUTTON explained that students must maintain and clean their own rooms and have cleaning detail for other areas. If students

are not performing as well as they should there is a mandatory tutorial right after school from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. All students must attend mandatory study time from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Students are also responsible for doing their own laundry. However, there are still recreational activities such as a dance every two weeks, kayaking, paint ball, open gym, rock climbing, a ropes course, cultural programs, and a variety of leadership options. Life at the school is exciting with all of the after-school activities and social gatherings, he said.

MR. HUTTON allowed that Mt. Edgecumbe does have some challenges such as crowded dormitories. A waiver must be obtained every year because the rooms have 5-6 students in them. There is no music program because the school does not have enough teachers. The buildings were built in the 1940's and are in need of attention. Even the newest building, completed in 1986, needs a new roof.

MR. HUTTON concluded by saying that Mt. Edgecumbe is an exciting, dynamic place to be. To follow up on some of the things stated by Representative Gardner, Mr. Hutton said he thinks students have to have courage and a sense of adventure. There is a pride in attending Mt. Edgecumbe High School.

[8:33:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON said she was impressed with the enthusiasm of Mt. Edgecumbe students when she taught a state government class there. The boarding schools are successful because of the parents, the parents being the faculty and families within the community that adopt the kids, she opined. In addition, boarding schools are successful because of the controlled routine that is provided and the requirement that students take responsibility.

[8:35:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER agreed with Representative Wilson. She asked how often do students who attend boarding school return to their home communities to live.

MR. HUTTON cited a question on page 11 of the ISER alumni survey that asks whether the alumnus returned to his or her community after graduating from high school. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents said yes, he related. However, he said he believes the survey is slightly flawed because it was a voluntary survey with 126 respondents. He further related that 81 percent of the

respondents that returned to their home community said they returned within 1 year, 12 percent said within 5 years, and 7 percent said within 10 years.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

[8:37:54 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR MUNOZ announced that the next order of business would be an overview of early childhood programs.

The committee took an at-ease from 8:39 a.m. to 8:40 a.m. due to technical difficulties with the witness microphone.

[8:39:53 AM](#)

CYNTHIA CURRAN, Director, Teaching and Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development, explained that there is a three-person team within the Department of Education and Early Development that is focused on Head Start grants and early learning programs. This team issues grants to Head Start and Early Head Start grantees serving Alaskan children. She continued:

This unit provides technical assistance and resources to grantees in the area[s] of early childhood education, school readiness, health, nutrition, early development, and administration. This unit partners with other systems development initiatives to address specific issues for young children, birth to five years, and their families through federally-funded Alaska Head Start Collaboration Project. This unit works on increasing early literacy skills, family literacy skills, early learning skills, and parenting skills for all populations in Alaska. [The team works] to increase access to voluntary, affordable, and quality early care and education, and establishing a sustainable early childhood literacy and learning system with accountability for outcomes.

MS. CURRAN said the early learning guidelines have been published under "Assessment Accountability" on the Department of Education and Early Development's web site. This unit works to help disseminate those guidelines and provide training for groups that are using the early learning guidelines, she explained.

[8:41:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked how many children participate in the 100 Head Start programs across the state.

EDDY JEANS, Director, School Finance and Facilities Section, Department of Education and Early Development, said he believes that about 3,000 children are being served.

[8:42:53 AM](#)

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director, Best Beginnings, offered her thanks to the legislature for establishing a committee devoted to education. She said the vision of her organization is that all Alaska children begin school ready to succeed [slide 2 of Ms. Hensley's PowerPoint presentation]. It is about creating an environment and systems that help children to do this, she continued. It sounds simple but is actually quite complicated. Too many children are starting school unprepared and when children start behind they rarely catch up [slide 3]. This lack of readiness contributes to low scores on standardized tests, poor performance on high school graduation exams, and a high school dropout rate in Alaska that is one of the highest in the nation.

MS. HENSLEY pointed out that young brains are very busy [slide 4]. At birth there are few synapses in the brain, she said, but they increase dramatically by age three. A young child develops about ten quadrillion synapses. As a child grows older a pruning process takes place so that a child has the number of synapses necessary to do the work that he or she is doing. During this time of brain activity, learning activities provided by parents and other adults are absolutely critical. These activities include reading, singing, dancing, motor skills, communication, and social and emotional development.

[8:46:01 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY explained that investing in early learning is the very best kind of economic development that any state can make. Best Beginnings is pursuing solutions to meet this challenge by focusing its efforts in three areas: that parents are a child's first and most important teacher; that quality, affordable, and accessible early care and education programs should be available for families wherever they live; and that early learning should be a priority for all Alaskans. She said these three areas are from the eleven recommendations issued in September 2006 by the

Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Task Force. In regard to the aforementioned, she distributed to members a Best Beginnings publication entitled, "Report to Alaska 2008".

MS. HENSLEY said Best Beginnings is a statewide collaboration of businesses, philanthropic organizations, government agencies, educational institutions, faith-based entities, and individuals. She drew attention to the list of Early Learning Council members shown on slide 6. Early learning is everybody's business and everybody has a role to play, she noted.

MS. HENSLEY stressed that early learning matters because it impacts success in school which impacts success in later life [slide 7-8]. "The cost of not investing in the early years far outweighs the cost of making that investment," she said. Moreover, it can be a personal investment in the future that ensures there will be doctors, nurses, and other workers to provide the necessities for one's own benefit and care.

8:48:45 AM

MS. HENSLEY highlighted the first of the three areas of focus, [learning at home], that Best Beginnings is working on [slide 9]. This work includes public service announcements (PSAs) that are broadcast by radio and television across the state, she said. For example, one television PSA explains why early learning is important for the business community and another focuses on reading. Through a grant from the Alaska Children's Trust, Best Beginnings created booklets for parents based on Alaska's Early Learning Guidelines. The booklets outline activities that parents can do with their babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. Best Beginnings was charged with producing the booklets in various languages. Booklets in Spanish have been completed, Yup'ik and English versions are in progress, and other languages are to follow. Another of Best Beginnings' literacy activities is the Imagination Library. It is a low cost way to put books into the hands of children in communities and schools across the state, she said. Best Beginnings is also supporting other local initiatives such as the "ABC Read and Talk With Me" project in Anchorage.

8:53:01 AM

MS. HENSLEY discussed the second of the three areas of focus, learning away from home [slide 10]. She said Best Beginnings is bringing people and resources together to ensure that every family that wants an away-from-home program for their children

has one that is of high quality. Through a grant from the state, Best Beginnings developed a quality rating and improvement system for Alaska which the Department of Health & Social Services now has. Best Beginnings is also working to bring ideas to Alaska that have been found to be positive and productive elsewhere.

MS. HENSLEY addressed the third area of focus, [new thinking]. She advised that making sure all children are successful will require a big cultural shift in Alaska. She said Best Beginnings is working to make that happen through its public engagement campaign as well as by bringing together other members of the early childhood community to discuss, coordinate, and collaborate efforts. Best Beginnings recently submitted a proposal to the Partnership for America's Economic Success to put on a business summit in the fall. Co-sponsors of this event include: Northrim Bank, Providence Hospital, and the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce.

[8:55:41 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY said success will be achieved when everybody in Alaska feels that early childhood learning is vital to the state and understands that making the investment will provide lasting dividends. Once this happens, both public and private funds will be committed, families will be engaged in their children's education from the beginning, and quality programs will be accessible to all.

MS. HENSLEY related that several organizations collaborated to set early childhood legislative priorities for 2009. [These organizations are listed on slide 13: Alaska Childcare Resource and Referral Network, Best Beginnings, Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children, Alaska Head Start Association, and Alaska Infant Learning Program Association.] The legislative priorities set by these organizations are: Denali KidCare, Child Care Assistance, Infant Learning Program, Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), Parents as Teachers, Head Start, Pilot Preschool Program, and Best Beginnings.

[8:57:47 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY noted that the Pilot Preschool Program is in the governor's budget for \$2 million. It is designed to serve about 500 four-year-olds through competitive grants to school districts. She said Commissioner LeDoux has asked her to work with the Department of Education and Early Development to pull

together a group of people to figure out what this plan ought to look like so that it is not just a "cookie-cutter" type of program.

MS. HENSLEY said Best Beginnings is a public-private partnership and such a partnership requires the leveraging of state dollars and private funding [slide 14]. She said Best Beginnings is looking forward to continuing its excellent relationship with the state and to receiving some state funding through the Department of Education and Early Development, along with funding from private partners. Best Beginnings is looking for support for the work it is doing in: promoting early literacy through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library; developing local partnerships in communities; and educating parents and others through the public engagement campaign.

9:00:04 AM

MS. HENSLEY specified that pulling all of this together is really all about making connections among families, programs, providers, and the general public to ensure that the very littlest children get what they need to be productive citizens in the future. This needs to be a comprehensive early childhood system that looks at everything as a whole, not just isolated programs. She said she is working with Commissioner LeDoux to determine what the best governance entity for early childhood should be in Alaska. This is mentioned in the state's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Plan, she continued. In addition, it is required by federal legislation that re-authorizes Head Start and it is in the Ready to Read, Ready to Learn recommendations. This will bring all the players together to coordinate comprehensive services. Bringing the public and private sector together does not create additional government. Rather, it ensures better use of the available resources and that Alaska's children have the very best outcomes.

9:01:44 AM

MS. HENSLEY, in response to Representative Gardner, explained that purposeful baby talk is essentially paying close attention to the baby. Oftentimes in this talk adults will use a special name for the baby. For example, a grandmother might have a certain, special name that she calls the baby for ever after. The talk is directed at engaging the child and is a special relationship. Even very tiny babies are responsive to this kind of interaction, she explained.

MS. HENSLEY, in response to another question from Representative Gardner, said the publications produced by Best Beginnings are free and distributed through a variety of mechanisms. A poster in English and Spanish tells about the availability of the publications, she explained, and the publications are also mentioned on the Best Beginnings web site.

[9:04:24 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY, in response to a third question from Representative Gardner, expounded on the legislative priority of Parents as Teachers. She said this is a nationally recognized program that was developed in Missouri. It is an evidence-based home visiting program in which well-trained visitors go into homes to work with parents, sometimes even before birth, and up until the child enters school. There are several programs around Alaska and all of them are funded by grants. They have demonstrated success in better outcomes for children when they go to school. She cited a study that showed children who had had this experience were doing better in the third grade than those who had not. The programs are organized in a variety of ways, with the number of visits ranging from weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. In addition, all of the parents and children in the program gather together periodically.

[9:06:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER recalled a program in California where parents attended once a week. It allowed teen parents to participate and was part of the community college system. The program later evolved into a cooperative pre-school.

MS. HENSLEY noted that in some locations there are not enough children to warrant a group program, so doing something that supports parents in the role of being their child's teacher is a way to make sure that those kids get early learning experiences.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER added that an additional benefit of the California program was that the parents were supporters to each other rather than someone else supporting a parent and teaching that parent how to support the child.

MS. HENSLEY offered to ask the statewide coordinator for Parents as Teachers to provide members with more information.

[9:08:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH noted that the presentation was culminated with expectations. He said there appears to be an impasse since the fall 2007 Governor's Summit on Early Learning in regard to what the state is doing about all of this.

MS. HENSLEY responded that Best Beginnings provided the recommendations from that summit to the governor last spring. Some of the proposals in the governor's budget are items that were discussed at the summit, such as the increase in childcare reimbursement rates for Denali KidCare, an increase to Head Start, and the pilot pre-school program. She said she thinks this indicates greater interest on the governor's part and she is confident that both commissioners are committed to ensuring that something happens. A statewide governance entity is a step forward in ensuring better collaboration and formalized coordination of efforts, therefore she thinks there is some movement and people are feeling positive. A request has been made to increase the early childhood budget by \$400,000 and this would help the work that Best Beginnings is doing.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH remarked that a collective process appears to be missing among the various interest groups that are all trying to do the same thing. He said he would like to see more collaborative work.

VICE CHAIR MUNOZ agreed with Ms. Hensley that the governor has done a lot to expand early childhood in the budget.

[9:13:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON said he knows from personal experience that the state's Head Start programs are strapped for cash. He asked for Ms. Hensley's observation on how all resources as a whole could be disseminated.

MS. HENSLEY replied that the early childhood community is grateful for the recognition that more resources need to go to Head Start even though the increase in the governor's budget was not something that the association had requested. She noted that the private partners are being badly affected by the economic downturn and are having to cut back. Doing the right thing with fewer dollars is always a challenge, but she said this will not stop people from continuing to advocate for investment in early childhood over the other kinds of investments.

[9:16:41 AM](#)

LORALEE PETERSON, Early Childhood Consultant, noted that she has been working as an educator in the Kenai Peninsula for 28 years. She said she is speaking for the peninsula's early childhood organization. The organization's purpose is to assist with and provide high quality early learning experiences for all young children, and to assist in funding, training, and advocacy and communication to build public will. She said the organization is currently striving to ensure that parents, caregivers, and early childhood teachers and programs have the knowledge and support necessary for providing nurturing care.

MS. PETERSON reported that her organization is addressing the educational requirements for workers in licensed early childhood programs. Alaska requires that these workers receive 20 hours of training per year and Alaska is one of only a few states that do not require a higher degree of education for the early childhood field. She said that in 2010 Alaska will require a Child Development Associate (CDA) degree or equivalent. Training is extremely limited on the Kenai Peninsula, she explained, and the profession's low wages make the cost of training very difficult. Her group is striving to create a foundation to assist with more training opportunities, she continued. Early childhood programs are struggling due to the high cost of meeting all of Alaska's childcare regulations and they will need assistance with developing training strategies to meet the new regulations. She said her organization strongly supports the proposed pilot pre-school program.

[9:20:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER expressed her opinion that requiring a CDA risks making it too difficult and expensive to provide childcare as well as adding cost to parents. This could result in caregivers changing to other professions and worsening the current shortage of care giving facilities.

MS. PETERSON agreed, but said it is a "Catch 22". The low wage creates a high turn over and makes it difficult to meet the training requirements. She reiterated that Alaska is one of the few states that has not implemented a higher degree of education for working with young children. Preparing for this must be looked at, she stressed.

[9:22:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked who is required to meet licensing requirements for childcare.

MS. PETERSON explained that a person caring for more than five children must be licensed. The type of license depends on the number of children being cared for: home provider, group home, childcare center, and pre-school or after-school programs.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER surmised it would be illegal for a neighbor of someone with sextuplets to watch the children without a license.

MS. PETERSON replied correct.

[9:23:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON recalled that last year there was a movement to categorize childcare centers to help parents know what type of training the caregivers had.

MS. PETERSON answered that there is no separate categorization for the education happening in early childhood programs other than what exists in current regulation, and the requirements are all the same for every type of licensed early childhood program. The state currently requires that everyone working with young children, birth to five years, in a licensed facility have 20 hours of formal training per year. The CDA degree or equivalent requires 120 hours of formal training and will create a real struggle next year.

MS. HENSLEY said she thinks Representative Wilson is probably referring to the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) that was developed by Best Beginnings through a contract with the Department of Health & Social Services and presented to the department in January 2008. Best Beginnings requested that funding be provided in fiscal year 2010 to run a field test of the QRIS system. However, that funding did not come through and Best Beginnings is now talking to the department about what portions can be done with no resources or whether the legislature would be interested in funding the field test.

[9:27:15 AM](#)

MARK LACKEY, Treasurer, Alaska Head Start Association, first noted that he is Executive Director of CCS Early Learning, the grantee that provides Head Start services in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, Chugiak, and Eagle River. He said several

Alaska Head Start Association (AHSA) documents are included in the committee packets: "What is Head Start", "Fact Sheet 2008-2009 Program Year", "Position Paper", "Critical Issues 2009", and "Why Head Start Matters". He also drew attention to another paper prepared by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) entitled, "The Cost of Crime: Could the State Reduce Future Crime and Save Money by Expanding Education and Treatment Programs?"

[9:30:25 AM](#)

MR. LACKEY began his PowerPoint presentation by explaining that Head Start is a federal program that began in 1965 [slide 3]. All Head Start grantees must meet and abide by federal performance standards. Each Head Start program is governed by a board of directors comprised of community members and a policy council comprised mostly of parents. All Head Start services are provided at no cost to the families and there is a comprehensive focus on both the child and the child's family. Health and developmental screenings are required for all children that participate in the program. Alaska receives approximately \$27 million in federal funds for the Head Start program and the state contributes about \$7 million. The federal grants come directly to local grantees, but a 20 percent non-federal share is required to receive the grants.

[9:33:18 AM](#)

MR. LACKEY said monitoring and reporting of the Head Start program is extensive [slide 4]. Over 5,000 regulations are associated with Head Start, plus there are broader regulations that apply to grants and fiscal reporting. An Early Alert System works with individual programs to identify and solve any problems or challenges as early as possible. Each program has on-site program reviews that are conducted every three years by teams of reviewers from across the country. Program Information Reports (PIR) are required once a year and enrollment reports are required monthly. Each grantee is required to publish an annual report and there is a specific list for what needs to be in the annual report. Lastly, each program is required to do an annual self assessment; this is undertaken by staff, parents, and the governing board members.

[9:35:23 AM](#)

MR. LACKEY specified that priority for Head Start eligibility is given to low income families [slide 5]. Typically, the low

income population tends to have children that are more at risk. Under Head Start performance standards, 90 percent of the enrolled children must fall into the income guidelines. For example, of the approximately 3,100 children served across Alaska, 90 percent of them must be income eligible. He said the 10 percent of over-income children are usually eligible for the program in some other fashion, such as a diagnosed disability or special need. In addition to children with diagnosed disabilities and special needs, priority is given to homeless children, foster children, children who will attend kindergarten the following year, and returning Head Start children.

MR. LACKEY said 17 Head Start grantees provide service in 100 Alaskan communities [slide 8]. Just over 3,100 slots are available to children statewide for the fiscal year 2009. However, a conservative estimate is that over 7,700 Alaskan children are currently eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start but are not receiving services. He said his personal estimate is that the actual number is closer to 10,000 children.

[9:39:03 AM](#)

MR. LACKEY reviewed Head Start's educational services [slide 9] and explained that they are different than for kindergarten through twelfth grade. Since the children are so young and their attention spans so short, the goal is to prepare them for school and build a foundation for success. Therefore, the educational skills are focused on pre-literacy, pre-math, social and emotional development, language development, creative arts, and physical health and development. He drew attention to page 2 of the paper entitled, "Why Head Start Matters", and noted that Head Start children show gains in literacy and math.

MR. LACKEY described Head Start's family education and empowerment services [slide 10]. The goal is to invest time and effort into the child as well as the child's family so the child will have parental support, he explained. Monthly home visits are provided to each family by the child's teacher or other staff member. During these home visits, Head Start staff works with the parents to set goals for the family and the child and provides any necessary help to meet those goals. Family advocacy is also provided for families that need additional assistance beyond home visits.

[9:42:41 AM](#)

MR. LACKEY informed members that Head Start also provides health, dental, mental health, and nutritional services [slide 11]. He said Head Start performance standards require that children be current on their immunizations, have a physical exam that includes hearing and vision testing, and have a dental exam. Consultants are provided to help with any issues that are identified. Head Start is required to follow up on all identified concerns to make sure any issues are resolved. He drew attention to statistics in the aforementioned paper, "Why Head Start Matters", regarding health, mental health, and dental screenings.

[9:43:55 AM](#)

MR. LACKEY noted that the primary goal of Head Start is really to provide early intervention [slide 13]. He referred to a report in the committee packets entitled, "The Cost of Crime: Could the State Reduce Future Crime and Save Money by Expanding Education and Treatment Programs?" This report talks about the success of early intervention for children, he continued. Children are in a critical window of development when they are very young, so developing a pattern for success in the child and the child's family is crucial. Other goals are family involvement and empowerment, developing an educational foundation, social and emotional development, and addressing any and all obstructions to learning whether that is health, dental, or transportation assistance. In short, Head Start's goal is to prepare young children for their school years, he said.

[9:45:25 AM](#)

MR. LACKEY discussed the AHSA paper entitled, "Critical Issues 2009", which outlines the actions needed for Head Start to be successful [slide 14]. During the past couple of years Head Start has developed a stronger relationship with the Department of Education and Early Development, he said. The Alaska Head Start Association worked with the department this past summer to come up with a two-year plan that addresses how grantees could provide further services. Two million dollars was requested for this first year, which included \$1.8 million in new funding to serve approximately 200 more children. The request also included an amount dedicated to preserving existing slots because many of the grantees are facing the challenges of increased costs for the existing slots. He said the association is pleased that the governor has proposed \$800,000 in her budget for increased funding of Head Start. Although it is a small step, this will allow more children to be served, he continued.

The association's position is that more can and needs to be done, especially when one considers that there are 7,700 eligible children who are not being served.

[9:47:49 AM](#)

MR. LACKEY pointed out that a comprehensive state plan needs to be developed and is considered a critical 2009 issue [slide 14]. He said the association supports the "pre-K" program and parents as teachers, as these programs are needed and necessary within Alaska. The association is advocating that a very coordinated system be put in place that requires different programs and services to work together, as well as written memorandums of agreement that address eligibility or enrollment. Rather than having different programs competing for children, he stressed that the association wants these programs to work together to serve as many children as possible.

[9:49:02 AM](#)

MR. LACKEY addressed the need for dedicated workforce development funds [slide 14]. He said this is a current challenge as well as a looming challenge. Under Head Start's [2004] re-authorization, professional development mandates for staff were put into place. The improvement in Head Start teacher credentials is depicted in the chart on page 3 of the paper entitled, "Why Head Start Matters", he continued. This progress was made despite no increase in funding and the challenge of Head Start staff balancing family obligations with full-time jobs at low wages. The bar was raised again with the December 2007 Head Start re-authorization which requires that by September 30, 2011, 100 percent of Head Start teachers must have an associates degree in early childhood education and by 2013, 50 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide must have a bachelors degree or equivalent in early childhood education. The last bar was not quite made by Alaska's Head Start teachers and now the bar has been raised again.

MR. LACKEY said that along with no increased funding to meet either of the mandates for improving teacher credentials, Alaska's challenge is further amplified by the state's geography and access to education. He stressed that funding, as well as collaboration and communication with the university system, are needed to help Head Start staff meet these requirements. Another critical issue is increased health care access through Denali KidCare, he added.

[9:52:08 AM](#)

MR. LACKEY noted that Alaska's Head Start facilities are in desperate need of capital dollars, but there has been no federal or state funding for capital investment. The challenges with facilities are huge and need to be addressed. Increasing the number of children served by Head Start cannot happen without capital investment. He said another area of huge need is school buses.

VICE CHAIR MUNOZ inquired whether the \$800,000 increase in the governor's budget would result in increased federal funding.

MR. LACKEY said no, the state is providing supplemental funds for serving additional children in Alaska.

VICE CHAIR MUNOZ supported the coordination of effort and recognized that pre-literacy is important to a student's later success. She offered her concern over the lack of kindergarten school buses in Juneau which may be preventing children from attending school.

MR. LACKEY added that an inter-departmental group has now come together and this group is pulling the public and private partners together.

[9:55:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked how the \$800,000 will be disbursed.

MR. LACKEY said the bold type on the paper entitled, "Fact Sheet 2008-2009 Program Year", indicates the association's proposed increase in enrollment numbers under a \$2 million funding increase. Given that the proposed increase is for \$800,000 rather than \$2 million, the numbers would have to be scaled back, he explained. He clarified that the 2 million is the increase that would be available without capital investment.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON inquired whether Head Start will be receiving any monies from the federal stimulus funds.

MR. LACKEY replied that the association is hoping so, but he does not know whether the language in the current version of the federal legislation will remain the same or whether the funds would be for serving new children. He pointed out that any funding for serving new children would need to be ongoing funding.

[9:56:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON related that new studies show domestic violence affects the brain development of young children. She asked whether Head Start personnel are receiving training in how to address this issue in the classroom. For example, the studies indicate that where a child of domestic violence sits in the classroom can affect brain development.

MR. LACKEY noted that Head Start has been addressing this kind of thing with early childhood since 1965. Children cannot be addressed in a vacuum, he said. All the issues in a child's life must be addressed, such as violence, nutrition, family dynamics, and any other challenges. Head Start's partnerships with families helps to address these concerns and remove as many of the challenges as possible.

[9:58:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER inquired whether the increased education requirements for Head Start teachers will result in the teachers receiving higher wages.

MR. LACKEY responded that he does not know, but so far there has been no increased funding to help in obtaining the degrees and no increased funding for higher wages. Another concern, he continued, is that once these teachers have more qualifications, they will be able to take higher paying jobs elsewhere.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER cited her personal experience with Head Start through family members and being a foster parent. She said she has seen studies that indicate that by second grade there is no way to identify a child who has been in Head Start versus those who were not. She asked how the 11 grantees were chosen that are cited in the paper entitled, "Why Head Start Matters", and whether the charts in the paper would look different if all of the 17 grantees in Alaska had been included in the statistics.

MR. LACKEY replied that the only reason all 17 are not included is because the association did not get reports from all 17. However, he said he does think it is a representative example.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER commented that this might be true unless the reason for those schools not getting in their reports is

because they are less organized and therefore less effective, which would skew the results.

MR. LACKEY said correct, but he truly believes that these statistics are representative of the gains that are being made. It is important to keep in mind that Head Start is working to raise the performance and the success of children who are starting out with significant challenges in their lives, he explained. So, those children must be compared to their peers who do not have access to services like Head Start. They cannot really be compared to children that have no challenges in their lives because those children start much higher. Head Start is trying to move its children up as far as it can.

[10:01:46 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:02 a.m.