

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 11, 2009

8:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Paul Seaton, Chair
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

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Les Gara

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW(S): DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES(DHSS) AND MENTAL HEALTH TRUST'S "BRING THE KIDS HOME" INITIATIVE, THE YOUTH RECOVERY AND EDUCATION INTERFACE

- HEARD

BILL NO. 109

"An Act relating to eligibility for the Alaska supplemental education loan program and to the interest rate for a loan made under the Alaska family education loan program; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED HB 109 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 69

"An Act establishing in the Department of Education and Early Development a voluntary parent education home visiting program for pre-elementary aged children; and establishing a rating system for early childhood education."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 109

SHORT TITLE: EDUC. LOANS: SUPPLEMENTAL & FAMILY
SPONSOR(S): EDUCATION

02/02/09 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/02/09 (H) EDC, FIN
02/09/09 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/09/09 (H) Heard & Held
02/09/09 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
02/11/09 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HB 69

SHORT TITLE: EARLY CHILDHOOD ED: RATING & HOME VISITS
SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) REPRESENTATIVE TUCK, PETERSEN,
KAWASAKI, GARA

01/20/09 (H) PREFILE RELEASED 1/16/09
01/20/09 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/20/09 (H) EDC, FIN
02/11/09 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

JEFF JESSEE, Chief Executive Officer
Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority ("The Trust")
Department of Revenue (DOR)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of the Bring the Kids Home Initiative.

KELLY DONNELLY, Director
Children's Behavioral Health & Advocacy Programs
Center for Human Development
University of Alaska Anchorage
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During overview of the Bring The Kids Home Initiative, reviewed the Positive Behavioral Supports pilot program.

LORI ROTH, Project Director
Special Education Service Agency (SESA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During overview of the Bring The Kids Home Initiative, reviewed the educational transition support project.

DEE FOSTER, Director

Child & Family Services
Anchorage Community Mental Health Center
Project Director
Alaska Child Trauma Center
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During the overview of the Bring The Kids Home Initiative, reviewed the Little Tykes program.

JULIAN STOWE
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Related her experience being sent to a residential psychiatric treatment facility.

LYNN STOWE
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Related the experience of sending his daughter to an residential psychiatric treatment facility.

DIANNE BARRANS, Executive Director
Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE)
Department of Education and Early Development (EED);
Executive Officer
Alaska Student Loan Corporation
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During hearing of HB 109, answered questions.

REPRESENTATIVE CHRIS TUCK
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the one of the joint prime sponsors of HB 69.

JOY LYON, Representative
Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of [the Parents as Teachers program].

MELISSA PICKLE, State Coordinator
Alaska Parents as Teachers
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a slide presentation of the Parents as Teachers program.

ACTION NARRATIVE

8:03:07 AM

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Keller, Wilson, Edgmon, Wilson, and Buch were present at the call to order. Representative Munoz arrived as the meeting was in progress. Also in attendance was Representative Gara.

CHAIR SEATON explained to the committee that his intention is to always hold two hearings on legislation in order to provide constituents time to contact members and members to formulate amendments, if desired.

OVERVIEW(S): DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES (DHSS) AND MENTAL HEALTH TRUST'S "BRING THE KIDS HOME" INITIATIVE, THE YOUTH RECOVERY AND EDUCATION INTERFACE

8:04:32 AM

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be an overview of the Department of Health and Social Services and Mental Health Trust's "Bring The Kids Home" Initiative.

8:05:35 AM

JEFF JESSEE, Chief Executive Officer, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (the Trust), Department of Revenue (DOR), related that during the Murkowski Administration, the Trust realized it was facing an exponential growth in terms of the number of kids being sent to residential psychiatric treatment facilities. The aforementioned was because there was no plan or vision being implemented within the state to develop the capacity to serve these kids in the state. The difference between custody and non-custody kids is that the state doesn't have the option of placing children in the custody of the Division of Juvenile Justice or the Office of Children Services on a waiting list for services. He then relayed a scenario in which the parents of a teenager who they say is acting weird could approach his/her family physician or psychiatrist during which there could be agreement to place the teen in an out-of-state residential psychiatric treatment facility (RPTC). At the end of 30 days [in a RPTC] the income of the parents would no longer be deemed to the teen, and therefore the teen would become Medicaid eligible. The teen's eligibility would be retroactive to the date the teen arrived at the RPTC. Mr. Jessee noted that to this point, the state isn't aware of the situation until it receives the bill from the out-of-state RPTC. The department is

then in the position of questioning whether the teen should've been admitted to the out-of-state RPTC and discussions ensue. This system wasn't working to the tune of about \$40 million a year, he related.

[8:09:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if the requirement that the state pick up the costs retroactively can be changed.

MR. JESSEE said that the federal Medicaid program is fairly strict with regard to what services need to be provided. However, the state can and has put in place a mechanism to prevent the earlier-described situation.

[8:09:46 AM](#)

MR. JESSEE, in response to Representative Wilson, clarified that the chart on slide 2 entitled "Exponential Growth in Use of Out-of-State Residential Psychiatric Treatment Centers" illustrates the situation in fiscal year (FY) 2005. In 2005, the Murkowski Administration approached The Trust and expressed the need to address the situation. Since the institution of the BRKH Initiative, there's been a dramatic decrease in the number of out-of-state placements.

[8:10:42 AM](#)

MR. JESSEE then explained how the decrease was achieved. First, a work group was convened with all the stakeholders who worked through a logic model. The work group worked through and identified specific performance outcomes and specific strategies were fashioned to develop alternative services within the state to meet the need. A data-driven, outcome-oriented approach can be very effective, as is evidenced in the decrease in the number of out-of-state placements. The [work group] developed residential programs, support systems, and individualized services [that are utilized] prior to reaching the point of sending the children out-of-state. Mr. Jessee then explained that The Trust told the state that it doesn't need to dramatically increase its overall spending in the area. However, the state should reinvest the money now being spent out-of-state on in-state services and programs. The aforementioned isn't anything new as it was what occurred with the closure of Harborview, the institution for the developmentally disabled in Valdez. The Trust paid to run Harborview on the condition that the state would reinvest the

money it had been spending on Harborview on community-based services. The aforementioned allowed for the closure of Harborview and the ability to provide better quality services in the community at no significant extra cost to the state. He directed attention to the chart on slide 4 entitled "Progress: Projected BTKH Reinvestment." The chart relates that the out-of-state RPTC expenditures have decreased from \$38.2 million to \$26.8 million and those funds have been reinvested into community services and in-state RPTC. The aforementioned keeps children closer to home and also creates economic opportunities for Alaskans.

[8:13:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER commented that she has heard anecdotally that as fewer [children] psychiatric patients sent out-of-state for residential treatment, the number of autistic children being sent out-of-state to residential facilities has increased. She asked if that's truly the case.

MR. JESSEE responded that he isn't aware of any data that would illustrate such.

[8:14:35 AM](#)

MR. JESSEE, referring to slide 5 entitled "Back to their Home School:", highlighted that the result of [the BTKH Initiative] is hundreds of youth with special needs in the state. Much of the impact of the BTKH Initiative is to the education system. For example, every year the Anchorage School District used to have over 350 children sent to out-of-state residential psychiatric treatment facilities. Therefore, the BTKH Initiative meant that these children with fairly extensive needs would remain in state and dealt with at home or in the community. These children would still come to school. Dealing with the education issues would be a critical part of the sequence of events. The chart on slide 5 illustrates that often more than half of the kids located out-of-state aren't special education youth and thus don't have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). These are children who are struggling to such a degree in their home and community that they have to be sent to a treatment facility out-of-state, but they are just fine at school. The aforementioned is baffling, he remarked. Therefore, there's a question as to how special needs children are identified. Furthermore, there is quite a bit of disparity throughout the regions of the state in regard to how many children have been identified with special needs.

MR. JESSEE related that The Trust is reviewing how the BTKH Initiative is impacting education and what The Trust can do to work with [the Department of Education and Early Development (EED)]. Although some children are born with neurological or biological issues that will surface at some point as emotional or psychiatric issues, a sizable number of these children are living in challenging environments that include abuse, neglect, mental health issues, and poverty. Those families [in challenging environments] often don't seek help early on, and therefore the best early warning system is probably the education system. Mr. Jessee expressed the need to help the education system deal with these children with special needs by providing adequate services as well as helping the education system identify children with special needs earlier. He acknowledged the complaints from the education system regarding the schools being asked to do more outside their core competencies of educating children. The schools aren't prepared and nor should they, he said, to be the primary avenue of address for issues such as mental health issues, social service issues, and homeless issues. Therefore, The Trust is trying to link with the education system and form a partnership with the health and social services system in order to address the aforementioned issues. Mr. Jessee related concern that both branches of the legislature established education committees [separate from the health and social services committees, which isn't conducive to] the aforementioned partnership The Trust is trying to form. This matter is a social service issue at one level and an education issue at another level.

[8:19:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON, referring to the chart on slide 5, pointed out that the chart illustrates that Southeast and Southwest Alaska have more children with IEPs than the rest of the state. However, the numbers [of students in those regions] is smaller than other areas.

[8:20:32 AM](#)

MR. JESSEE said that's one of the questions The Trust is trying to answer. One thought is that perhaps the school districts in Southeast are more willing to identify children as special needs. There is also the thought that perhaps there is a difference in the types of children being identified and what type of children are being seen. The aforementioned are the

matters The Trust is trying to understand in order evolve the system.

[8:21:03 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON pointed out that the chart uses percentages rather than the number of children.

[8:21:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER recalled that the Anchorage School District identifies special needs children to be at the national average. If that's the case she asked why more special needs children aren't identified since the state leads the nation in children with fetal alcohol syndrome, domestic violence, and sexual abuse.

MR. JESSEE said that is a reasonable observation. He informed the committee that over 40 percent of the children [receiving services] out-of-state are Native Alaskans. The aforementioned is one of the reasons The Trust is adamant about working with its tribal partners.

[8:22:42 AM](#)

MR. JESSEE, returning to his presentation, directed the committee's attention to slide 6 entitled "BTKH Education Subcommittee." The Trust has been successful in having the commissioners of both DHSS and EED co-chair the BTKH Education Subcommittee. Mr. Jessee highlighted that one of The Trust's goals is to truly unite DHSS and EED in order to have a unified approach to this statewide problem. This approach would gather data, identify best practices and appropriate funding, and implement the keys for success. Slide 7 relates the membership of the education subcommittee. Mr. Jessee acknowledged that initially the performance measures were based on reducing the number of children receiving services out-of-state. In 2006, there were 439 children out-of-state, which was the high mark. However, yesterday there were only 164 children out-of-state.

[8:24:40 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked what occurs when children are brought home from an intensive residential program outside.

[8:25:01 AM](#)

MR. JESSEE explained that many of the children who went out-of-state for the RPTC treatment did so because there was no place to go between their home and the out-of-state facility. Therefore, The Trust is reviewing lower levels of care and creating in-state residential options. To truly develop a continuum of care for children with mental health needs, it would start with support in the home and the communities. Only when that support is inadequate would there be the need to move to out-of-home care, but the care would still be provided in the community. Only those very few children with very extreme and complex problems would [be treated] out-of-state, he said. Mr. Jessee said that The Trust is working in the direction of investing in home and community-based services in order to achieve a decrease in the number of children sent out-of-state for treatment. He then mentioned that there would be discussion today of a pilot program that would accomplish the aforementioned.

[8:27:23 AM](#)

KELLY DONNELLY, Director, Children's Behavioral Health & Advocacy Programs, Center for Human Development, University of Alaska Anchorage, referring to slide 8, explained the Positive Behavioral Supports pilot program focuses on creating better partnerships between community mental health providers, developmental disability providers, and school districts. This program attempts to engage communities around at-risk children and those children who are already demonstrating challenging behaviors. She explained that the program uses a three-tier approach toward positive behavioral interventions, including a universal perspective that looks at establishing environments and clearly express expectations that result in positive social and emotional outcomes for all children. At the secondary level, there is data that suggests those at-risk children who don't have their needs met will progress to more serious behaviors. At the secondary level, targeted training interventions are considered. Referring to the pyramid on slide 8, Ms. Donnelly pointed out that 1-5 percent of typical school populations place a tremendous drain on school resources in terms of managing discipline, school personnel morale, and the ability to create truly effective educational environments. She related that [the program offers] training for providers to create positive behavioral support plans that engage schools, community members, and families in interventions that lead to better outcomes for these children. This is a pilot effort that's being implemented in four communities this year. The hope is to expand its use in subsequent years. Mr. Donnelly

highlighted that this program builds on investments that schools are already making within their own structures. This is a pilot project this year, with the expectation to build and expand across the state.

8:30:08 AM

MS. DONNELLY, in response to Chair Seaton, related that the four communities using this program are Juneau, Ketchikan, Sitka, and Dillingham. This program is a partnership with the Special Education Service Agency, which provides training and support to educators in those communities using the program. The Stone Soup Group, which has been supported by EED, provides training for educators on school-wide positive behavioral supports. Ms. Donnelly opined that this program is really an effort to create a safety net and collaboration between community providers and schools in support of those challenging children.

8:30:54 AM

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON inquired as to whether the program is being reevaluated due to the new research that's coming out about brain development and how domestic violence impacts learning.

MS. DONNELLY answered that how trauma impacts brain development and how treatment outcomes are shaped is taken into consideration with all the children's programs at the Center for Human Development.

8:32:27 AM

LORI ROTH, Project Director, Special Education Service Agency (SESA), began by informing the committee that she arrived in Alaska in 1998 as an emotional disturbance specialist. When she visited school districts in rural Alaska, she said she saw the need for the program because there were school children who were returning to home and school, but no one knew they were coming. She recalled an instance in which a student returned home on a Friday, no one knew he was returning. The student came to school on Monday and registered with his mother. However, there were no educational records available for him. After searching the school district's main office, some of the student's information was found. Still, the teacher wasn't sure what was going on and thus she was stressed. Ultimately, the teacher performed academic assessments to determine his level and pieced together books for the student. About two weeks later, the

student had a bad day and was returned to RPTC. Therefore, the teacher's efforts were in vain. Since the teacher had no knowledge of the student's return or academic background, the student wasn't provided the appropriate support to be successful in school. The teacher was left wondering whether the student would've had a better outcome had there been notice to prepare the appropriate program for the student. This situation illustrates what is often forgotten: the child returning home faces adjustments but so do the family, school, and community. Therefore, the more information provided prior to the child's return home, the better the outcome is likely to be in all environments. The aforementioned has resulted in [SESA] working with the RPTCs and the school districts so that there is advance notice of a student's return and the student's educational records are part of the discharge file.

8:39:10 AM

DEE FOSTER, Director, Child & Family Services, Anchorage Community Mental Health Center,; Project Director, Alaska Child Trauma Center, informed the committee that [the Alaska Child Trauma Center] is one of 50 sites nationally of the Child Traumatic Stress Network. Last year, [the Alaska Child Trauma Center] served about 700 seriously emotionally disturbed children of which 70 percent were age 12 and under. The program funded by the BTKH Initiative is a preschool day treatment program called Little Tykes that serves children age three to five. These children arrive at Little Tykes after being kicked out of pre-school because of behavioral and emotional difficulties. The program seeks to guide them behaviorally in order that the children can focus on the learning process. The ultimate goal is to return these children back to daycare or preschool. Many studies, including a 30-year study of 700 children, found that the successful at-risk children had some person in their life that cared about the child and the child was successful in school. The aforementioned is the goal of the program.

8:41:10 AM

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked if Alaska's teachers are trained to recognize [at-risk children].

MS. FOSTER related that the aforementioned is a goal of the Alaska Child Trauma Center. To that end, there have been 16,000 contact hours of training in the last three years and a course on child trauma at the university. "We're trying to spread the

word about this and how if we can intervene early, we're going to stop the trajectory of these kids ending up in special education, in juvenile justice system, or in the psychiatric hospitals, or the adult criminal system," she said.

[8:42:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked if the aforementioned will be part of the university's teacher training curriculum.

MS. FOSTER characterized Representative Wilson's question as an excellent idea, which she said has stimulated her to approach the education department.

[8:42:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked whether the definition of mental health has widened over the years such that it now encompasses more behavioral patterns.

MS. FOSTER related her belief that there is the recognition that some children are neurologically predisposed to develop psychiatric symptoms. There is also knowledge that there is a wide array of causes for emotional disturbance, primarily environmental. Therefore, as knowledge of brain development and the impact of trauma on brain development has increased, the definition of mental health has widened.

[8:44:10 AM](#)

MR. JESSEE, referring to slide 11 entitled "Ahead in FY 2010: Support for On-going Efforts," related that the GF/MH [general fund/mental health] column are the reinvestment of the out-of-state savings. He then highlighted the "Assist in the Transition to Adulthood" category and opined that this is an area in which the BTKH Initiative hasn't adequately addressed. The question is how to transition these children into fully participating members of the community as an adult. He then introduced a family that has benefited from this program.

[8:45:47 AM](#)

JULIAN STOWE, informed the committee that she was initially a run away prior to being diagnosed bi-polar. She explained that she ran away from her support groups at home because they were telling her she needed to go to a RPTC. However, that wasn't what she needed. Ms. Stowe reported that the support of flex

high school was probably the best thing for her. She noted that she obtained a skills trainer that could help her at school. Ms. Stowe opined that she wouldn't be present today without her mental health advocates and her education.

[8:47:43 AM](#)

LYNN STOWE, speaking as Julian's father, related that one of the hardest things he has every done was to send his fifteen-year-old daughter, Julian, to the RPTC in Texas. He characterized it as a tough time during which typical family life was "put on hold." The family received a call to pickup Julian because if she stayed any longer she would relapse and become worse. The family was told that the conditions at the RPTC weren't tailor-made for their daughter's case. Upon arriving home, the family worked closely with mental health professionals and a psychiatrist who were able to get his daughter in the flex school. The aforementioned is what saved Julian and the family as a whole, he opined.

[8:50:03 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to whether children such as Julian find alternative schools a better choice than the public schools.

MR. JESSEE responded that it depends on each child and his/her needs. Connecting the treatment facility with the schools prior to discharge allows for placement decisions to be made prior to the child returning to the school district.

[8:51:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH acknowledged the courage it took to provide the aforementioned testimony, which may help others. He then inquired as to whether Ms. Stowe has seen the impact of what's being discussed today in her school or community.

MS. STOWE related the situation of a 15-year-old student who has overdosed three times. This 15-year-old student was sent to Providence after which he was returned to the public school. This student couldn't attend the flex high school because there isn't enough space. Furthermore, this student isn't able to have a skills trainer because the student isn't connected with the mental health side of things.

[8:53:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH inquired as to when Ms. Stowe felt different, realized life wasn't acceptable in her circumstance.

MS. STOWE answered that at age 12 she felt like she was losing her mind.

[8:54:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked if there was an avenue for her to express herself at that time.

MS. STOWE said that at the time she had a great psychiatrist who always made time for her. After the first return from Providence, he set up a therapist as support.

[8:54:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER related the following situation, which she referred to as the poster child for BTKH. A seven-year-old village boy who entered state custody very abused and traumatized. The boy was unsuccessful in a series of foster homes. The boy was sent out-of-state to an RPTC where he spent the next seven years. During those seven years, the boy lost his language, his father died, and he had barely been outdoors. Upon returning to the village, the boy was so institutionalized that he was socially inept. Representative Gardner opined that although there was no need for that boy to have seven years of residential treatment, there was nowhere else for him to go and the family wasn't questioning anything. She further opined that the aforementioned was abusive.

[8:56:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON related her appreciation for the Stowe family sharing their situation.

[8:57:35 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:57 a.m. to 8:59 a.m.
HB 109-EDUC. LOANS: SUPPLEMENTAL & FAMILY

[8:59:05 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 109, "An Act relating to eligibility for the Alaska supplemental education loan program and to the interest

rate for a loan made under the Alaska family education loan program; and providing for an effective date."

8:59:46 AM

CHAIR SEATON pointed out a zero fiscal note accompanies the legislation. He highlighted the analysis of the fiscal note, which read as follows:

This bill is intended to improve the quality of education loans sufficiently to maintain the Alaska Student Loan Corporation's (ASLC) capacity to issue revenue bonds, backed by loan assets, to finance future lending activities. Implementation of the proposed changes is not expected to require additional appropriations. It is feasible that these changes will positively impact ASLC revenues through improved collections on the loans, but it is not possible to estimate that impact at this time due to the complexity of factors impacting loan collections.

CHAIR SEATON explained that the problem is not being able to issue the bonds to be able to give student loans. The change proposed in HB 109 will rectify the aforementioned.

9:01:03 AM

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ inquired as to how many applicants are involved in the supplemental loan program.

9:01:18 AM

DIANNE BARRANS, Executive Director, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE), Department of Education and Early Development (EED); Executive Officer, Alaska Student Loan Corporation, answered that in the 2008-2009 year, there are approximately 5,100 borrowers. In further response to Representative Munoz, Ms. Barrans said that she couldn't specify the percentage of those who aren't meeting the credit standards. She explained that currently the criteria treats no credit as good credit and only looks for adverse events on a credit history. A credit criterion hasn't been applied to that pool of borrowers in order to know who would or would not require a credit worthy co-signer. Ms. Barrans did inform the committee that 24 percent of those 5,100 borrowers are under the age of 21, which raises the question as to whether they have sufficient credit activity to produce a credit score. She said for the

other 75 percent who are 21 years of age or older would have some credit criteria. She noted that she has a project underway to sample the 5,100 borrowers, but the results haven't yet been received.

[9:02:47 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON, upon determining no one wished to testify, closed public testimony.

[9:03:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH pledged support for HB 109.

[9:04:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ moved to report HB 109 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, it was so ordered.

[9:05:05 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:05 a.m. to 9:11 a.m.
HB 69-EARLY CHILDHOOD ED: RATING & HOME VISITS

[9:11:17 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 69, "An Act establishing in the Department of Education and Early Development a voluntary parent education home visiting program for pre-elementary aged children; and establishing a rating system for early childhood education."

CHAIR SEATON noted that the committee packet includes a proposed committee substitute (CS), Version 26-LS0281\C, Mischel, 2/9/09.

[9:11:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CHRIS TUCK, Alaska State Legislature, speaking as one of the joint prime sponsors of HB 69, explained that in Version C the term "participating family" was used instead of "participant" throughout the legislation. On page 2, lines 15-20, the legislation was amended such that educator parent visits are optional and allow parents to participate in more than one meeting per month and deletes references for cost considerations for reducing visits. On page 4, lines 9-10, the definition of "family" was added. On page 4, lines 12-14, the definition of

"trained parent educator" was added. Representative Tuck informed the committee that Version C no longer has the pre-K program rating system that was included in Section 4(a)(18) of the original legislation, and therefore the title of the legislation was changed such that the language on page 1, line 3 of HB 69 stating "**and establishing a rating system for early childhood education**" was deleted.

[9:14:23 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON pointed out that on page 4, paragraph (18) remains.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK explained that some portions of paragraph (18) were deleted, though not all of it.

[9:15:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked if paragraph (18) of the original legislation was removed because it refers to public and private pre-elementary programs.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK replied yes, adding his intention to introduce the subject of paragraph (18) as separate legislation. The desire, he explained, with Version C is to focus on the parents as teachers (PAT) program and not develop a system to oversee all types of pre-K education.

[9:15:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON moved to adopt CSHB 69, Version 26-LS0281\C, Mischel, 2/9/09, as the working document. There being no objection, Version C was before the committee.

The committee took a brief at-ease from 9:15 a.m. to 9:17 a.m.

[9:17:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK reviewed his involvement in the education system, which ultimately led to his seat on the Anchorage School Board. One of the matters the Anchorage School Board has tried to address is in regard to how to introduce pre-K education without it being a large cost to the public and without having to provide more classrooms and the associated capital expenses. This legislation provides, through Department of Education and Early Development (EED), parents with voluntary support for teaching their pre-K children in ways to develop learning skills for success. He opined that early education by parents will

save Alaskans money, develop a strong workforce, and make the neighborhoods safer. Representative Tuck explained that HB 69 allows local agencies to apply for grants administered by EED to prepare children under the age of five for school. The plan includes personalized meetings once a month as well as local group meetings once a month. He pointed out that having health and developmental screenings earlier on are helpful to identify/forecast any developmental learning problems.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK highlighted the short title of HB 69 and emphasized that the ultimate responsibility of educating children lies with the parent. This legislation merely attempts to provide services to the parents in order to empower them such that they are better prepared and more effective. The visits aren't necessarily home visits and thus the language on page 2, line 15, reflects that the visits can be at a mutually agreed upon location. Early education, he opined, is one of the best investments that can be made in the state. In fact, studies show that pre-K education increases school readiness, earning power as adults, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment. He then related that early education saves the state money, makes neighborhoods safer, reduces the likelihood of later criminal behavior, and instances of abuse. Therefore, the benefits of early education are lower criminal justice system costs, reduced welfare costs, savings for crime victims, and savings on school remedial services. In fact, every dollar spent on pre-K education saves the state approximately \$7. Furthermore, preschool programs for at-risk children save much more than the program costs by reducing future crimes. Early screening for disabilities or developmental delays and their resolution also result in cost savings due to fewer children being placed in special education or remedial classes or being retained in their grade. "Research has clearly shown that the early years are critical in a child's development and lay the foundations for success in school and in life. So, to invest in our future we need to give parents the education and support they need to promote their young children's health and development," he related. He then noted that PAT has been utilized in 47 communities in Alaska, serving about 3,000 children statewide. Although it's a private-public partnership, the program is funded mainly through federal grants. This legislation would make the program available statewide to any child or parent interested.

[9:24:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK, in response to Representative Gardner, reiterated that about 3,000 students are served statewide in 47 communities through federal funds. In further response to Representative Gardner, Representative Tuck confirmed that the committee packet should include a map specifying which communities utilize the program.

[9:24:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK told the committee that these programs have been in the state for 14 years.

[9:25:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ inquired as to the eligibility requirements. She also inquired as to the details of training.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK specified that any parent with a child under the age of 5 qualifies. The specifics of how the agencies receive the grants are stipulated on page 3, lines 6-28. To instruct children up to age 3 requires 37 hours of training. An additional 15 hours of training is required for those who want to instruct children age 3-5. The aforementioned hours of training are for the existing PAT program. This legislation will allow EED to determine the [training requirements].

[9:26:35 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON, referring to page 2, line 9, of Version C, asked how the implementation plan to be submitted by a local agency will work in a community.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK said that the local agency could be a Native Corporation or a school district. The local agency will announce when and where parent [training] meetings will be held, the number of children that can be served, who the staff will be, and how they will be trained. The local agency will then enter into an agreement with EED and after the grants have been awarded, the entity will enter into a collaborative agreement with EED. In further response to Chair Seaton, Representative Tuck clarified that the term trained parent educators refers to the individual who is training the parents. He then confirmed that the training to which he referred earlier is the training for those who are training the parents.

[9:28:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON inquired as to the meaning of the term "indentified" on page 2, line 18.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK related his belief that the term should be "identified," although the term "indentified" didn't come up as a misspelled term.

[9:30:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ inquired then as to what the parent receives during the once a month visit.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK explained that the visits begin by educating the parent regarding how the brain functions and learns as well as the developmental stages of children. After the education of the parent, the parent chooses the curriculum for his or her child. He informed the committee that studies have shown that children who are introduced to another language early on are able to grasp the language.

[9:31:31 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON related his understanding that this legislation specifies that any child under 5 is qualified for the program proposed in HB 69.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK replied yes, adding that there are pre-screenings and the parent educators can recommend further developmental tests if a possible learning disability is identified. In such a case, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) comes into play as there is a requirement for children to receive other services.

[9:32:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER, referring to the PAT Alaska newsletter, pointed out that it seems the data being used is from Missouri to relate what the program does in general. She then inquired as to the percentage of parents who participate in the program.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK expressed the need to review the communities in which PAT is being implemented such that there is knowledge as to how many children are between which age groups and the percentage being served. The aforementioned hasn't been done yet.

[9:34:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON directed attention to EED's indeterminate fiscal note that specifies there is no way to estimate the number of additional children that might be referred as a result of passage of HB 69. He then asked if there is a way to estimate the number of children.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK replied no, adding that this program will have to be a line item in the budget that EED will have to introduce. The program will serve the children it can based on the budget. As reports come in from the agencies, the budget for the next year can be adjusted to ensure the needs are met. This program, he opined, really needs seed money in order to get started.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON related his understanding that part of the difficulty identifying prospective participants is related to the fact that it's a voluntary program.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK replied yes.

[9:36:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH opined that the fiscal note should also include mention of interagency cooperation, such as public-private partnerships and other available mechanisms to reduce the costs.

[9:37:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if all of the existing sites implementing PAT use the same definitions or program specifications or have they developed their own versions.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK answered that the sites are all using the national PAT program and curriculum.

[9:38:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER inquired as to what the \$7 in savings for every \$1 spent is based upon.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK responded that those statistics are from Head Start surveys. In further response to Representative Keller, Representative Tuck informed the committee that the legislation doesn't include daycare. He highlighted that this program utilizes agencies within communities to provide the

services, which dovetails with the philosophy that it takes a community to raise a child.

[9:40:27 AM](#)

JOY LYON, Representative, Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC), said she would first address why the PAT program would improve high school graduation rates and how it will fit into the state's early education system. [This program] will lead to every child being more prepared for success in school, which leads to success in life. Ms. Lyon informed the committee that there is a correlation between 4th grade reading scores and high school dropout rates and that same correlation exists with the kindergarten readiness program. When a student begins behind, they don't tend to catch up. She further informed the committee that some children arrive at school with minimal literacy experiences, perhaps 20 hours of reading versus the average of 600 hours of reading. The aforementioned information is based on research from Dr. Reisling (ph) and Hart (ph). When the gap is so vast, say 600 hours, it's difficult to catch up because the kindergarten year alone is 600 hours of reading. Furthermore, such a gap makes it difficult to communicate with peers, which leads to social problems. Moreover, such a gap means that the child doesn't have the vocabulary to be able to understand the teacher or the books to which she refers. The gap in vocabulary is really significant at age 3. Based on research some children are hearing 10 million words by age three, whereas others are hearing 40 million words by age three. Therefore, by slightly increasing the numbers of conversations the parents are having with their children and the number of books they are reading, it tends to strengthen the family as more nurturing time is occurring. Having additional conversations means the children are hearing more than directives in their early years. The PAT program is the gold standard for curriculum to strengthen families and work on literacy and social emotional development. She noted that the PAT program has been heavily evaluated and is a really strong program.

[9:44:15 AM](#)

MS. LYON directed the committee's attention to a handout entitled "Investing in Alaska's Young Children," dated January 2009, which underscores that the PAT program works with many programs, such as Head Start and quality child care. Furthermore, the PAT program works for children whose parents are working and for children whose parents are at home. Ms.

Lyon then highlighted the need to identify children with special needs early on, which occur for those children in childcare. The PAT program could be one of the referrals for those children identified as having special needs. Ms. Lyon reiterated that the PAT program fits in the various settings in which children are served with early care and education. She noted her support [for the PAT program] as well as the support of the Alaska Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Best Beginnings, Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children, Alaska Head Start Association, Alaska Infant Learning Program Association, and Alaska AEYC.

[9:45:59 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to which parents are taking advantage of the PAT program, specifically are the parents of at-risk children taking advantage of the program.

MS. LYON explained that the intent is to target those children who are at most risk; the PAT program can be adapted to achieve the aforementioned. She noted that the PAT program is delivered through Head Start programs and other early intervention programs. She suggested that Ms. Pickle could provide further information.

[9:47:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked if the PAT program is the same as the existing eight programs in the state or is it different. She questioned whether it would be better to provide more support to the eight existing programs rather than create a new program.

MS. LYON clarified that all the programs are working together to achieve the vision of early care and education. No matter where the funds come from, all the programs are working together. In fact, all eight programs are working more closely than ever before.

[9:48:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON observed that HB 69 is placing definitions in statute for important terms such as "family," "local agency," and "trained parent educator."

MS. LYON answered that she believes that's correct. [Placing these definitions in statute] create more consistency throughout

the state such that the same standards, evaluations, and needs assessments are used.

9:50:02 AM

MELISSA PICKLE, State Coordinator, Alaska Parents as Teachers, clarified that she is not a state employee as her position is funded by the Alaska Parent Information and Resource Center, which is funded through a federal grant. Furthermore, the position is located within the Child Development Division of the Rural Alaska Community Action Program (RuralCAP). She explained that her role is to work with all of the programs in Alaska that utilize the PAT model. The PAT program is a voluntary personal visiting program for families with prenatal to kindergarten-entry age children. The vision of the program, as specified on the first slide says, "All children will learn, grow and develop to realize their full potential." The second slide illustrates that the PAT program is an international program that operates in all 50 states as well as China, Australia, and Great Britain. She characterized the program as a well established and very culturally sensitive and appropriate program. The PAT program has been in Alaska for nearly 15 years. Those parents who choose to enroll in the PAT program work with certified parent educators or family visitors who have been trained and certified in the PAT's Born to Learn curriculum. She noted that there are two national trainers in the state who can provide the training.

9:53:58 AM

MS. PICKLE, continuing with slide 4, reviewed the four components of the program: personal visits, parent group meetings, screenings, and resource referrals. The personal visits are offered at least monthly, although some programs choose to meet more frequently. The visits occur wherever the family chooses and the focus of the meeting is to support parents, to learn about child development, and to help parents engage in activities that promote the child's learning. The parent group meetings occur at least once a month to provide parents the opportunity to network with other parents and for children to gain social skills through interactions with peers. Again, these are voluntary meetings and thus no parent is denied access to these services if the parent doesn't want to attend these groups. The program also offers screenings for health, hearing, vision, and developmental delays, which ensures the child's development is on track. If there are concerns regarding the child's development, the program can assist families. Therefore, the PAT staff works closely with school

districts and infant learning programs. In fact, PAT staff are often members of the individual family service plan or the individual education plan (IEP) team because PAT's parent educators live in the communities in which the families reside and actually see families on a regular basis, perhaps even more often than an itinerate therapist. Ms. Pickle then turned to the resource referrals, which allows the family to connect with other services, as appropriate. The PAT program is there to help parents know what other resources are available.

[9:56:02 AM](#)

MS. PICKLE directed the committee's attention to slide 5, which relates the mission of PAT as the following: "To provide the information, support and encouragement parents need to help their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life." The aforementioned is often heard, particularly now that the most recent brain research specifies that the first three years of a child's life is critical in terms of development. Slide 6 entitled "Development of the Human Cerebral Cortex" illustrates the importance of the first few years of life. The number of connections formed in the cerebral cortex during the first two years of life never occurs again. Therefore, it's important that the first three years of life go well and [the PAT program] can help provide families with the ability to reach their full potential. The next slide entitled "Parents as Teachers Program Goals" relates the following goals:

1. Increase parent knowledge of early childhood development and improve parenting practices.
2. Provide early detection of developmental delays and health issues.
3. Prevent child abuse and neglect.
4. Increase children's school readiness and school success.

MS. PICKLE said that the PAT program is really dedicated to meeting the aforementioned goals and research has shown that the program is meeting all those goals. She then mentioned that the committee packet should contain a document entitled "Parents as Teachers in Evidenced-Based Home Visiting Programs," which illustrates how effective the program is.

[9:57:45 AM](#)

MS. PICKLE then directed attention to the slide entitled "Proven Outcomes for Parents," which highlights a few of the proven results of the PAT program for parents. The reason there is interest in the impact of an early childhood program on parents is because parents spend more time with their children and are the first and most influential teacher. The PAT program is there to support families in the aforementioned role, if the parents choose that support. As the slide relates, parents who receive services from PAT have been shown to have an increased knowledge of child development and child rearing practices, engage in more language and literacy promoting activities with their children, increased involvement in children's schooling, and have fewer documented cases of child abuse and neglect. Therefore, PAT helps parents prepare their children for their next educational setting, whatever that may be. The PAT program, as related on slide 9, has positive outcomes for children. Those children who receive PAT services exhibit higher levels of kindergarten readiness with these gains maintained through the 3rd grade and fewer special education and remedial education placements in Kindergarten through 3rd grade. The aforementioned saves schools money. Those children receiving PAT services are also more likely to display positive social and self-help behaviors and be four to five months ahead in language development at age 3. Ms. Pickle characterized the PAT program as providing children a good start in life.

[10:00:11 AM](#)

MS. PICKLE, referring to the slide entitled "Alaska's Children," informed the committee that there are approximately 65,000 children 0 to 5 years of age in Alaska. She further informed the committee of the following:

Nearly half of Alaskan children entering school are unprepared to read or learn;

Among the highest rates of child abuse and neglect, with approximately 50 percent of reports of harm are for children 0 to 5 years of age;

Highest high school drop out rates in the country.

MS. PICKLE opined that the aforementioned is unacceptable. The next slide entitled "A Call to Action" highlights three major movements in the state that have made recommendations regarding young children and their families. The Ready to Read Task

Force, which is now Best Beginnings, recommended in-home support in order to increase the engagement of parents in their child's learning. The Governor's Summit on Early Learning recommended that all parents have access to home-based education and support. The Alaska Education Plan recommended preschool programs and an increase in parent involvement. The PAT program can help meet the aforementioned recommendations for an annual average cost of \$3,000 per family. Furthermore, this investment can save many thousands of dollars in the future.

[10:01:42 AM](#)

MS. PICKLE noted that the committee packet should include the "Parents as Teachers Alaska 2008 Fact Sheet." The aforementioned document relates that 31 communities, 809 families, and 963 children were served. These numbers include children who will enter the public school system as well as children who will be home schooled. Nearly 80 percent of the children served by the PAT program in 2007-2008 were in programs run by nonprofits. About 19 percent of the programs were run by school districts and 1.5 percent were run by military programs. Ms. Pickle reminded the committee that all of the PAT programs in Alaska are funded through federal grants, which come and go. Therefore, every year there are PAT programs in the state that aren't funded. She related that she receives phone calls from other early education programs that want to refer children to the PAT program. However, the PAT program may not be in the area or there is a wait list. The PAT program is extremely popular and one loved by families. Therefore, the program needs the legislature's help in establishing a stable funding stream to allow access services that build a better future. Ms. Pickle said that the question isn't whether the state can afford to implement the PAT program but rather can it afford not to implement it.

[10:04:33 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that HB 69 would be held over with public testimony open. The discussion will continue at Friday's [February 13, 2009] meeting.

[10:06:06 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:06 a.m.