

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 13, 2009
8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Paul Seaton, Chair
Representative Cathy Engstrom Muñoz, 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 Chris Tuck

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW(S): DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT
(EED) SPECIAL EDUCATION, INTENSIVE NEEDS PROGRAMS

- HEARD

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 69

SHORT TITLE: EARLY CHILDHOOD ED: RATING & HOME VISITS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) 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
02/11/09 (H) Heard & Held
02/11/09 (H) MINUTE(EDC)

WITNESS REGISTER

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the overview by the Department of Education and Early Development (EED).

CYNDY CURRAN, Director
Teaching and Learning Support
Department of Education and Early Development (EED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the overview by the Department of Education and Early Development (EED).

NICKI SHELTON
National Trainer
Parents and Teachers Program (PAT)
Hoonah, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69, and provided a description of the program.

JANE SULLIVAN, Educator
Parents as Teachers Program (PAT)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the discussion of HB 69.

MELISSA PICKLE
State Coordinator
Parents as Teachers Program (PAT)
Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc. (RurAL CAP)
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

FAY GALLAGHER
Hoonah, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:32 AM](#)

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Edgmon, Gardner, Buch, and Keller were present at the call to order. Representatives Muñoz and Wilson arrived as the meeting was in progress.

[8:03:10 AM](#)

OVERVIEW(S): DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT (EED) SPECIAL EDUCATION, INTENSIVE NEEDS PROGRAMS

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be Overviews by the Department of Education and Early Development (EED) Special Education, Intensive Needs Programs.

[8:03:56 AM](#)

EDDY JEANS, Director, School Finance and Facilities Section, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), introduced the supervisor of the Special Education Division, Cyndy Curran, who will provide a brief overview of the special education team.

[8:04:57 AM](#)

CYNDY CURRAN, Director, Teaching and Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development (EED), stated that the Special Education Division employs a staff of 11 who operate under various state and federal statutes and regulations regarding education of students with learning disabilities and special needs. These employees maintain compliance with state and federal laws governing students with disabilities through technical assistance to school districts, distribution of grant funding, development of pre-service and in-service training programs, complaint investigation, mediation, due process hearings, and compliance reviews. She related that the Special Education Unit monitors districts on a five-year cycle for compliance with federal and state regulations. The unit is responsible for ensuring that children receive early screening and intervention for health and developmental learning needs.

[8:07:47 AM](#)

MS. CURRAN indicated that the special education team collaborates with other agencies, such as Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) to provide services and support for general, oral, mental and behavioral health, early intervention services, Head Start, and daycare services. The funding also

supports the Autism Resource Center, secondary transition services, and the vocational rehabilitation activities. Within the University of Alaska Statewide System, the Alaska Teacher Placement Center has worked on a special education professional development grant whose goal is to increase the number of special education teachers and to mentor special education teachers in their first two years in the state.

[8:08:14 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to whether mentoring for special education teachers is different than other teacher mentor programs.

MS. CURRAN answered that within the framework of the statewide mentor project, the special education development grant pays for special education mentors in Alaska to assist new teachers understand the requirements in Alaska. In further response to Chair Seaton, Ms. Curran answered that the Special Education Federal Grant has one more year prior to expiration. She said that she is not sure if the grant will continue to be available.

[8:09:45 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON requested an analysis of how important the mentoring program has been for teacher training and whether the grant is available.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked for clarification on whether the pre-service are kindergarten programs.

MS. CURRAN answered that the pre-service component is designed to prepare special education teachers for Alaska, such as the Early Childhood Special Education program that operates at the University of Alaska Anchorage, and the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) has a special education teacher preparation program for teachers. She explained the UAS program is an endorsement program. She mentioned that the university does not offer a 4-year program that leads to special education.

[8:11:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER referred to the responsibility for complaint investigations. She reported on comments that she has received from parents in her district who are unhappy about the services their children receive. She recalled that Anchorage School District superintendent Carol Comeau reported that very

few parents' complaints are burdensome. She inquired as to whether a mechanism is in place to determine the actual cost of complaints that are ongoing and result in hearings and mediation.

[8:12:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER observed that people should have a way to make their views known and ask for assistance legislation exists for

[8:13:00 AM](#)

MR. JEANS, in response to Representative Gardner, explained that if parents are dissatisfied with the complaint process agencies are available for parents, such as the Disability Law Center. He surmised that the superintendent may be referring to the cost to go through the process. However, it's the school district's responsibility to provide the educational services. He opined that some parents may claim that their child is entitled to additional services that the district may view as unreasonable.

[8:13:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER opined that sometimes the parent may be right that the child is not receiving the services he/she needs.

MR. JEANS agreed. He stated that in those instances an administrative law judge will then issue an order and the district would need to comply.

[8:14:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER observed that regarding the Autism Resource Center, the handout lists that about a tenth of the Specific Learning Disabilities (LD) fall into the category of autism, yet a specific resource center is provided. She recalled the governor has focused attention on autism diagnostics. She questioned how this compares to the fetal alcohol programs since the incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome (FASD) is so high in Alaska.

MR. JEANS responded that the Learning Disability (LD) category includes many services including attention deficit disorders (ADD). He said that the level of services some students receive are minimal, but the district must identify the child with

disabilities in order to receive services. He said that the services are quite a bit different for the children identified as autistic.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER related her understanding that the autistic children represent a more intense need.

MR. JEANS agreed.

[8:16:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER referred to early screening, and recalled that pediatricians can make referrals. She further recalled that HB 69 will help indentify special needs children. She inquired as to whether specific outreach exists. Thus, how does the school district reach children in need of early childhood services, in instances in which a parent is not knowledgeable enough to know that something might be wrong.

MS. CURRAN answered that every school district has people who are tasked to identify children whose parents may not be aware of their child's needs. She mentioned that many school districts hold parent meetings and advertise "Child Find" services for Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna area. She recapped that school districts perform the outreach, which is done to assist parents.

[8:17:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON inquired as to whether Alaska is so different from other states since federal laws apply. She inquired as to the necessity to offer special education teacher training for new teachers arriving in Alaska.

MS. CURRAN explained that many of the teachers being mentored are first and second year teachers who have not honed their skills with respect to special education.

[8:18:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked for specifics of how the EED collaborates with other agencies, such as DHSS. He asked whether the department works with other agencies and specifically how that happens.

MS. CURRAN related that program managers from EED and DHSS work on areas that are specific to the special education and health

and early intervention services. She related that the collaboration could be provided via a task force, panel, or other group to find solutions to issues. She offered to provide the specific name of the panel that regularly meets.

8:20:21 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER related his understanding that the department allows the school districts to monitor and provide quality measures and innovative strategies. He asked if the department generally addresses innovation.

MS. CURRAN responded that all of the department personnel responsible for programs attend professional development opportunities for themselves to learn the variety of things going on throughout the U.S. She related that they bring back knowledge to Alaska. She related two examples such as response to intervention, which the State of Alaska (SOA) refers to "response to instruction" and "positive behavioral supports". She opined the goal is to learn innovative techniques other states have been using to assist students with appropriate achievement levels.

MR. JEANS commented that he has attempted to point out to the finance subcommittee for a number of years that the Teaching And Learning Support Division of the state, with a staff of 70 employees is funded through the federal government. Their job is to ensure that the school districts are complying with the federal grants they receive. He highlighted that when the committee asks if the EED has a section or division of innovation, the answer is no. He opined that this staff implement federal laws and if the legislature wants to fund a division to address innovation, state funding would need to be provided. He indicated that most of special education or children with disabilities is dictated by federal mandates.

8:24:10 AM

CHAIR SEATON asked for clarification for the committee on the definition of special education and the specific qualifications needed to receive special education, how the Individualized Education Plans (IEP) are performed, and any other parameters for this category, prior to continuing since the committee will be discussing intensive needs.

MS. CURRAN answered from her perspective as a former teacher. She related her experience that when a child is not achieving at

his/her age level, the teacher will recognize there may be a reason the child is not performing well, such as a behavior, a physical disability or other reason. At that time, a teacher would intervene to try to help a student. She related that the teacher would consult with a special education teacher to identify any issues. If the process does not help, the teacher would then identify the child, including providing data on actions taken, and the child's response. She related that an IEP team, consisting of the principal, the teacher, the special education teacher, the school psychologist will be consulted, to review the issues the child is having. From there, the team decides whether the child would receive an evaluation by a school psychologist or psychometrist.

[8:27:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON inquired as to when the parent is contacted.

MS. CURRAN answered that the teacher would hold conversations with the parent throughout the process, from the time that the teacher realizes the child is having difficulty. The team will recommend any number of services, such as a math tutor, physical therapy, or other needs. She acknowledged that the parent is at the IEP meeting. She emphasized that if an evaluation is done, the IEP team meets to determine what types of services the student would need ranging from math tutoring, to physical or speech therapy. She indicated the Independent Education Plans (IEPs) are reviewed periodically to identify progress once services are provided.

[8:29:17 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON related his understanding that the classroom teacher is often the person who identifies the underperforming student, the parent is informed, and measures are taken to help the child. He inquired as to the boundary so that the services can be accessed for special education.

MS. CURRAN answered that a parent may approach a teacher to express concern. She related that the teacher would work with the parent, for example when a child has a speech impediment. She highlighted that if a classroom teacher cannot intervene in a meaningful way, at the parent's request an IEP team would be formed for an evaluation by the speech pathologist and the appropriate services could be provided.

[8:31:16 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON clarified that the request might come from the parent or teacher identifying a need.

MS. CURRAN agreed.

MR. JEANS reiterated that the teacher or parent can request an evaluation through the principal. The evaluation can then be made to determine if the student is qualified to receive services. At the time the eligibility determination is made, the team would be convened.

[8:32:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUÑOZ asked if a parent resists intervention, whether the district continues to attempt to establish services and form an IEP.

MS. CURRAN said she was not certain and offered to provide that information to the committee. She surmised that it is the parents' right to decide if they do not want services provided.

[8:32:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUÑOZ inquired as to whether it is easy to remove an IEP in the event the child progresses and no longer needs services or if it is difficult to remove the child from the system.

MS. CURRAN explained that the purpose of the IEP is to help the student achieve at appropriate levels. She offered that some children remain in special education while others receive services, the IEP team meets to review the child's progress, and if the services are no longer needed, the child exits the system.

[8:33:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON requested the estimated percentage of the number of parents that refuse the IEP service. He related his own parental experience with IEP and surmised only a small percentage of parents would decline services.

MR. JEANS related his understanding that information is not currently collected by the EED so the information may not be readily available. He surmised that very few parents would

decline specialized instruction. Thus, he said he thought the incidence of parents refusing services would be minimal. If a child has trouble with reading due to a disability, the teacher might recommend removing the child from class for individual assistance. If a parent did not want their child removed from the class, the teacher might move the student to a quiet area to read instead.

[8:36:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER recalled prior testimony before the committee, and shared that he has never experienced a parent refusing services.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER offered that some parents may decline if the child were labeled in order to receive services. She inquired as to whether a child has to be diagnosed as learning disabled in order to obtain an IEP.

MS. CURRAN opined that the label is not the important aspect of the process, but identifying what service is needed in order to help a child succeed. She explained that the label doesn't follow a child, but rather the child is identified as needing additional help with reading, or the child needs physical or speech therapy and obtains it. She reiterated that teachers don't refer to the child as "learning disabled" but identify the child needs extra help.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER speaking from personal experience, explained that an IEP does not need a "label". She offered that she had a child with a speech problem for six years, but she did not think the child was labeled as learning disabled.

[8:38:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON related her understanding that some parents whose children are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may choose not to medicate their child.

CHAIR SEATON offered his belief that would be a discussion that would take place during the team meeting to create an IEP.

MR. JEANS, speaking from his personal experience related that his daughter was diagnosed ADHD by their physician. He explained that they agreed to medication for their daughter, but that if they elected not to provide medication, that she was

still eligible for special education services. Thus, the medicine does not trigger whether the child is eligible for special education services, rather it is the disability.

[8:41:47 AM](#)

MS. CURRAN offered that the special education unit also assists and supports the alternate assessment, which addresses items such as working with home school initiatives, correspondence students, and homeless students. She related that federal funding is available for children ages 3-5. She stated the DHSS provides a guidance document called the Special Education Handbook to assist parents which includes the federal regulations, examples of IEP's, and other information. She opined the handbook is updated annually and is easy to use.

[8:44:04 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked what percentage of students in the K-12 system has IEPs.

MR. JEANS answered that approximately 17,760 students of 128,000 are identified as special education students attending schools statewide.

[8:45:12 AM](#)

MS. CURRAN, in response to Representative Muñoz, stated that the DHSS works with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on programs.

[8:45:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUÑOZ asked if that is for rehabilitative training and not for vocational technical education.

MS. CURRAN agreed.

CHAIR SEATON asked for examples of vocational rehabilitation training of for grades K -12.

MS. CURRAN offered to provide more information. She related her understanding that vocational rehabilitation deals with the secondary transition and students needing specialized training for physical impairments.

[8:46:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH related that vocational education is under the block grant aspect, which is different than vocational rehabilitation.

MR. JEANS agreed that the vocational education for grades K - 12 is included in the 20 percent block grant, while the vocational rehabilitation that Ms. Curran referred to is those transitional services that a student leaving the K - 12 system needs to transition into adulthood to provide for himself/herself.

[8:47:41 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON advised Ms. Curran that provides him with enough information that the services provide students who have special needs to transition out of school so that the person can function independently.

[8:48:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER inquired as to what the national average is for special education children.

MS. CURRAN offered to provide the information to the committee.

[8:48:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if Alaska's rate would be higher due to fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and other societal issues.

MS. CURRAN said she did not know.

[8:49:49 AM](#)

MR. JEANS, in response to Representative Wilson, explained that the 20 percent block funding is labeled "special needs" to assist school districts to provide special education, vocational/technical, and bilingual/bicultural needs. Once a school district has identified a child as needing special education, it must provide the services regardless of the cost. These funds are to assist school districts to meet the needs, but they can use other funds as well such as their general funds. He highlighted that the school districts are not expected to cover all its programs with 20 percent block funding. He stated that the funding is a way to allocate resources. The funding is discretionary and it is up to the

school board to figure out how to provide services with the total "pot of money" it receives.

[8:51:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON related her understanding that the state does not make a determination that a particular school has greater needs for technical training. She opined that every school receives the same amount in the same category.

MR. JEANS agreed that the 20 percent block funding is what schools receive, but the amount is adjusted for other factors such as cost differential. He related the 20 percent is the mechanism in the funding formula.

[8:52:33 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON opined if this was not allocated as a 20 percent block grant, the school districts would still be required to provide special education and other services. He opined that the district chooses how to establish and administer the services.

[8:53:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH related his understanding that vocational education is not mentioned in any other component.

MR. JEANS agreed.

[8:54:26 AM](#)

MR. JEANS, in response to Representative Keller, explained that charter schools are different. He explained that if there are over 150 students, the statute is very clear that at a minimum the base amount is provided.

[8:55:21 AM](#)

MR. JEANS explained that "Intensive Needs" is a State of Alaska (SOA) term, and is not found in the federal title. He indicated that the SOA recognizes that some children require a high cost to serve. The funding formula changed for an intensive needs student from 5 times the base allocation to 9 times this year, and it will increase by 11 times. The following year the funding formula for an intensive needs student will be 13 times the base allocation. He related that the funding for an

intensive needs child from approximately \$24,000 at the 5 times the base allocation is almost \$75,000 per child by the time it is fully implemented, which he offered is a substantial increase. Thus, school districts must validate any claims for intensive needs students.

MR. JEANS stated that ten years ago the student count in this category was 1,400 statewide. That number has increased to approximately 2,000 this year, while the overall state population has remained about the same, he offered. He highlighted that due to disputes about eligibility of intensive needs students, the department to conduct a training session to assist the schools to determine eligibility for intensive needs students. He directed attention to the committee handout titled "Training Materials for Determining Eligibility of Intensive Needs Students," published September 22, 2008. He explained that the guide contains the regulations, and provides information on how the department interprets the regulations, and how it relates to the IEP. He reiterated that the EED has provided a step-by-step process for determining eligibility for intensive needs and how to document that need.

[8:59:38 AM](#)

MR. JEANS pointed out that the EED has requested \$150,000 to provide for auditors for intensive needs funding, to examine every claim to ensure the claims are valid.

[9:00:17 AM](#)

MR. JEANS referred to a handout titled "Alaska's Public School Special Needs Funding Prepared 2/7/09," and explained how the funds are distributed, allowing for the discretionary use by the districts. He related that combining special needs, the 20 percent block, and intensive needs, that the funding increases from \$202 million in FY 06 to \$304 million in FY 10. He said he thinks it is important to recognize that when the funding is distributed in the foundation formula program, that it is "one pot". He related that allocations exist within the system, but "at the end of the day, it's one pot of money; the district determines how to spend that money."

[9:01:47 AM](#)

MR. JEANS, in response to Representative Wilson, explained that the federal sheet does not use the term "intensive needs" and uses a definition for children with disabilities. In further

response to Representative Wilson, Mr. Jeans explained that the intensive needs students are included in the 17,600 students. He indicated that "intensive needs" refers to the level of service, how much additional service these students require beyond the services provided for a "special education" student.

[9:03:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON some of the intensive needs students have a person accompanying them to class, and asked if that were a qualifying characteristic.

MR. JEANS agreed that was one of the identifying criteria, however that has been loosened somewhat. He stated that it is the EED's intent to identify intensive needs students as those who require 1:1 assistance throughout the entire day, not just during the school day.

[9:03:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH directed attention to the budget figures on page 2 prepared on 2/7/09 and asked for clarification whether the total is included in the budget.

MR. JEANS clarified that the FY 10 appropriation has already been allocated. The appropriation the EED is requesting this session will fund FY 11.

[9:04:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked if other options are available to care for "intensive needs" students, for example through the Department of Health and Social Services. He offered that "intensive needs" students can be difficult in a classroom.

MR. JEANS related that federal law requires that disabled children have a right to attend public schools.

[9:06:07 AM](#)

MR. JEANS, in response to Representative Wilson clarified that for FY 10 funding is 11 times the base allocation and for FY 11 it will be 13 times the base allocation for "intensive needs" students.

[9:06:39 AM](#)

MR. JEANS referred to the handout titled "VII," which provides information previously requested by the committee and details the number of "intensive needs" students who have moved in and out of districts across the state, which ranges from 20 to 30 students. He pointed out the minimal flux that occurs. Typically a family receiving services establishes itself in a community and remains in the community.

[9:08:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked whether the cost to provide services to "intensive needs" students is exorbitant for a community without available services.

MR. JEANS stated his belief that every district has adequate funding to provide for the needs of an "intensive needs" student during the year.

[9:09:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON recalled a presentation by the Mental Health Trust Authority. He directed attention to the Emotional Disturbance (ED) category and asked if there are other categories that tie trauma to the overall numbers of students.

MR. JEANS answered that the majority of the students coming back in the "Bring The Kids Home" program fall under the ED category. He stressed that it is important to understand that some of these students may not actually qualify for "intensive needs" funding under the category as defined by the EED.

[9:12:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER related her understanding that many children are in treatment program out-of-state to deal with eating disorders. She opined that when they return home, they may need "wrap around services" but they may also be good students.

MR. JEANS agreed.

[9:12:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER inquired how a determination is made for "intensive needs" students.

[9:13:09 AM](#)

MR. JEANS responded that all of the determinations are made with the IEP team. He pointed out that the training guide identifies specific services that a child receives and when a certain threshold is attained, the student is considered an "intensive needs" candidate. He related that the guide that was developed is intended to provide guidance, for example, one of the categories is that the child requires multiple services including related services, which includes examples, so the special educational director knows where the information should be included in the IEP. Thus, the documentation for "intensive needs" students is clear.

[9:14:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked if there is a mechanism to check on the accountability of the program.

MR. JEANS related that the special education team conducts field reviews, holds parent conferences to discuss services, and determine that the child is receiving appropriate services as per the IEP.

CHAIR SEATON recalled that the EED has requested an \$150,000 increment in the budget to support auditors for "intensive needs" students.

MR. JEANS clarified that with existing staff, reviews are completed on all of the new claims. The budget increment of \$150,000 would review 100 percent of "intensive needs" students.

[9:20:59 AM](#)

HB 69-EARLY CHILDHOOD ED: RATING & HOME VISITS

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."

[9:21:47 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON reminded the committee that public testimony is still open on HB 69, and clarified the items in the packet that were added since the last hearing on the bill.

9:23:03 AM

CHAIR SEATON advised that a voluntary program is in place in certain areas of the state.

9:23:56 AM

NICKI SHELTON, National Trainer, Parents and Teachers Program (PAT), stated her support for HB 69, and offered a brief biography of her credentials as a long time teacher in Hoonah, as a Parents as Teachers trainer and as a national trainer for the program based in St. Louis, Missouri. The first responsibility is to train and certify those who will deliver this service. The core of the program is the personal visit. In Hoonah, 70 percent requested that the visit occurs in the home, and 30 percent prefer another location, such as the local Head Start center or in another person's home. The components of the personal visit are included in the committee packet, she stated. Before the PAT providers are certified they must demonstrate ability to present the materials. The family will decide if other caregivers will also attend the personal visit.

MS. SHELTON said that visits differ with each family. Progress is tracked on an individual basis. She provided examples of how interactions occur such as the observation of how a child is responding to a task previously suggested and the child's development. She provided anecdotes of actual activities that have occurred, and stressed the importance of using material that is easily found in the home or community. She explained that she brings a parent/child activity that is geared to the child's interest.

9:31:17 AM

MS. SHELTON explained the parent's role is to model for the child, and the PAT provides models for the parent. She stressed that the PAT provides coaching for the parents and the facilitator is not the child's teacher.

MS. SHELTON also explained another component is literacy activity and appropriate reading is modeled. She described some types of age appropriate reading experiences. She explained that she provides activities for the families to perform that reinforces the child's development that has been discussed and that reinforces that parents are assuming learning responsibilities for their children.

9:33:27 AM

MS. SHELTON explained that parent educators must become certified in the program. This maintains a standard for material administration/dissemination. She stressed the importance of local training. She related that materials used should be germane for the area to meet cultural and local needs.

MS. SHELTON offered that the program undergoes a yearly certification renewal. The website provides PAT training opportunities and other information for becoming involved in the program.

9:37:06 AM

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to the level of participation in Hoonah, if the program is open to all, or if there are limitations in the number of clients served.

MS. SHELTON answered that she does not have specific statistics but that participation is high. She offered to provide statistics to the committee. She related that after 14 years of operation, the program offers weekly family nights, with attendance ranging from 40-65 people in a town of approximately 800 residents.

9:38:24 AM

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to whether the program is open to everyone.

MS. SHELTON stated the only requirement is the age of a child. She related that at one time the program had waiting lists, but the program has received enough grant money to train parent educators, which has alleviated the backlog. She mentioned that the funding is not stable.

9:39:22 AM

CHAIR SEATON asked if she works with the school district.

MS. SHELTON answered that the school district is the sponsoring program, although she recalled previously some agencies provided additional funding. In response to Chair Seaton, Ms. Shelton answered that the program is only offered through the school district.

[9:40:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER recalled the PAT has a national model and inquired as to whether a person applied for a grant, or if a major foundation identified communities that would receive these services.

MS. SHELTON explained that the program was discovered by a school superintendent who proposed the program. She related that several years later Title I funds were used to initiate the program. Since then the program sponsors have included the Hoonah Heritage, Central Council, Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, and Ward Cove Packing Company. She stated that funding has also come from Tribal Colleges Education Equity Grant funding and Alaskan Children's Trust.

[9:42:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUÑOZ asked if she has tracked the success of the students as they go through the high school.

MS. SHELTON answered that statistics were not gathered. She related anecdotal statistics such as the first group of thirteen families have provided informal reports. The vast majority of parents have commented on how helpful the PAT program has been for their children.

[9:44:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked if she supports HB 69.

MS. SHELTON offered her support for HB 69. She emphasized that funding is volatile and some communities cannot sustain services without state funding.

[9:45:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON referred to the definition of family in HB 69, and recalled her reference to parents. He inquired as to whether the terms are interchangeable.

MS. SHELTON explained that visits are done with various family configurations, ranging from foster parents, grandparents, aunts, or the child's guardian. Thus, family is a more appropriate term rather than parents.

[9:48:05 AM](#)

MS. SHELTON, in response to Representative Buch, explained that the PAT program has grown significantly. She related that the PAT holds teleconferences with providers. She related a scenario in which a woman provides training in Yupik. She opined that the volunteers are a cadre of unsung heroes who are passionate about their work with families.

[9:49:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked what advancements have occurred in continuing education regarding the parent educators.

MS. SHELTON offered that many of the parent educators have their Child Development Associate, which is a credential. Next, the person would take distance delivery courses to earn their Associates of Arts degree (AA) or Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Early Childhood Education. She stated that she did not have specific statistics to provide.

[9:51:35 AM](#)

JANE SULLIVAN, Educator, Parents as Teachers (PAT), offered that she has a degree in Early Childhood Education, has homeschooled her five children, and has been a parent educator in Hoonah, as well as having experience working for Head Start. She stated that she decided to home school her children in order to provide the best educational opportunities for them, to address their individual learning styles, and their interests in specific subjects. She said that homeschooling her children required a lot of discipline and organizational skills. She said she used school resources, ranging from auto shop classes, attending writing workshops, science fairs, and using the school library, as well as curriculum materials.

MS. SULLIVAN participated in annual state and federal testing for her children to verify that they were at or above their grade levels. She explained that when she began working for Parents as Teachers, she realized it was an extension of that same dynamic. Educating parents about child development and how to respond and provide resources for parents are what parent educators provide. She related that they are facilitators that help parents understand the impact they have on their children. She stated that the parents she worked with in Hoonah became excited about the positive influences they had on their children's lives.

[9:54:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER related her understanding that some opposition is coming from home school parents who seem to be concerned with government intrusion. It may be helpful to provide them with letters of support from those experienced with the program do not find it intrusive. She asked for a summary of Ms. Sullivan's experience.

MS. SULLIVAN agreed to provide a summary of her testimony to the committee.

[9:56:44 AM](#)

MELISSA PICKLE, State Coordinator, Parents as Teachers (PAT), Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc. (RurAL CAP), stated support for HB 69, and outlined her background in early childhood education along with her credentials. She said that several of these programs have closed due to lack of funding. Every year the number of programs changes because of the funding fluctuations.

[9:59:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked on a scale of 1 to 10 how she would rate the program.

MS. PICKLE stated that she would rate the program as a 9 or a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10. She offered her belief that early childhood attention is critical and is a known fact. Many research programs are now including parental visits as a fundamental need. This program serves young children who would otherwise have limited options.

[10:01:48 AM](#)

FAY GALLAGHER shared her experience as a grand parent of a 4-year old, and a previous school district employee who was working at the Hoonah School in 1995 when the program began. Despite her skepticism of the benefits of teaching a small child, she has since gained an understanding of the importance. She praised the materials and the support that the program provides. The program definitely improves the quality of life for those involved, and she opined that the PAT program is for everybody. She opined that having the program in Juneau would also be beneficial.

[10:07:23 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON stated that HB 69 would be held, and public testimony would remain open.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee the House Education Standing Committee was adjourned at 10:07 a.m.