

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 23, 2009

8:01 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

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW(S): DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT
DISCUSSION ON GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED PRE-KINDERGARTEN PILOT PROGRAM

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 23

"An Act establishing a grant program to support voluntary class size reduction."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 23

SHORT TITLE: CLASS SIZE REDUCTION GRANTS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) CRAWFORD, GARA

01/20/09	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/09
01/20/09	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/20/09	(H)	EDC, FIN
02/23/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

ERIC CROFT
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as a former legislator to assist in presenting HB 23 on behalf of the joint prime sponsor, Representative Harry Crawford.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the discussion of HB 23.

LARRY LEDOUX, Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the DEED overview of the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program.

REPRESENTATIVE HARRY CRAWFORD
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as one of the joint prime sponsors of HB 23.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:01:37 AM](#)

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:01 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Wilson, Edgmon, Gardner, Buch, and Keller were present at the call to order. Representative Munoz arrived as the meeting was in progress.

OVERVIEW(S): DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT
DISCUSSION ON THE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED PRE-KINDERGARTEN PILOT
PROGRAM.

[8:02:15 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be
Overview(S): Department Of Education and Early Development
Discussion on the Governor's Proposed Pre-Kindergarten Pilot
Program.

[8:02:54 AM](#)

LARRY LEDOUX, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEED), recalled several meetings recently

held in Anchorage related to this topic. He explained that a group of Alaskans discussed the immediate changes necessary to address the graduation rate in Alaska. Another group comprised of early childhood providers, Head Start, Best Beginnings, the University of Alaska, and Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) personnel discussed implementation policies for programs. He indicated the DEED has requested \$2 million in its budget request to develop a Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program in Alaska. He mentioned that this program would be a voluntary school-based program designed to work with poverty-level children and families, children with disabilities, children who are learning English as a second language, and at-risk children who are not prepared to read or learn.

[8:04:27 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX offered his belief that quality pre-school programs make a difference in children's lives. Brain development between birth and school age is phenomenal, he opined. Anything that can be done to encourage development of healthy brains pays tremendous dividends. He stressed that his focus today is not on the financial benefits of early childhood education, but rather to provide information that demonstrates children need quality social, emotional, and physical experiences prior to entering school that prepares them to learn.

[8:05:13 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX stated that the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program will provide an emphasis on quality programs for four-year olds that will be "state-driven" with local control over leadership and program decisions. He indicated the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program will emphasize a wide variety of models ranging from rural to urban and will be designed to enhance existing pre-kindergarten programs. Applicants to host these programs must demonstrate the means by which they will meet the program goals and requirements. He stressed that applicants must demonstrate how the district will support parents and children enrolled in a center-based program, the "strengthening families" model, as well as support for those not enrolled in any program by providing library materials, home visits, and other materials as requested. If an application is reviewed positively, the applicant may request a waiver from any specific requirement. He explained that the DEED has the ability during the RFP process to craft the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program to fit the needs of the community it will serve.

He mentioned that the DEED's FY 10 budget request also includes funding for the Head Start program within the Teaching and Learning Support Division so the program can work with all children within a community.

8:07:08 AM

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX explained that the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program would be guided by the Alaska Early Learning guidelines, aligned with the K-3 standards, and its curriculum will be based on the developmentally appropriate practices as defined by the National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The requirements for the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program include that the teachers must possess a Bachelors of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education and the applicant must demonstrate partnerships with community entities. The program will provide for ongoing teacher training and support. The class size will be limited to 20 with a staff ratio of 1:10 or better. Community partners will conduct vision, emotional and health screening. The three and a half hour program will provide children with nutritional snacks and meals, and children will have a minimum of 15 hours of contact time per week. The DEED will also partner with community entities such as the Need for Transportation and Extended Day Services. The Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program will incorporate a local community board or an advisory council will be established in collaboration with community partners.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX emphasized that the program will provide administrative flexibility to encourage creative proposals that will help provide information for the state's future development of the pre-kindergarten system. He stressed that the DEED will prioritize community engagement, offering additional points for applicants showing collaboration among the widest possible community partners. He related that the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program will focus on communities that are in an under improvement status with the department. He said he hopes that the DEED will collect information for two years, and that the department will regularly evaluate the program to produce data that should demonstrate the benefits of the program.

8:09:21 AM

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX, in response to Representative Keller, offered to provide his speaking notes to the committee.

8:09:32 AM

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON offered her support for the request for proposal (RFP) process. She referred to constituent letters expressing their concerns that the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program would be in competition with existing child care centers. She inquired as to whether the current child care centers could apply if they meet the requirements of the program.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX offered his belief that the RFP will allow community partners to apply for funding. He emphasized the outcome is the important aspect and not the process. He stressed that standards will be in place for the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program no matter what form the program takes.

[8:10:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER referred to the handout titled "Pre-K Pilot Guidelines" and inquired about the regulation referenced, 4 AAC 12.331, and asked if the teachers will be credentialed.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered that trained teachers are essential to the program. He stated that the regulation requires that teachers and classroom staff must have a minimum of six credits in early childhood education. He offered his belief that credentialed teachers will be required since they will be working with young children.

[8:11:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked Commissioner LeDoux to describe the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX responded that the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines were established in accordance with the vision of University of Alaska early childhood development providers and professionals. He indicated that the guidelines address school readiness factors such as language development, literacy, and cognition, ranging from birth to grade six. He offered to provide the document to the committee.

[8:12:11 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON related his understanding that the proposed Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program would focus on four-year olds, with a class size of 20, for 15 hours per week as the basic model. He

opined that the program would basically be a 4-year old kindergarten class. He recalled a similar program in the North Slope Borough that was eliminated, and asked the commissioner to provide data from that program. He further recalled the children in the two-year kindergarten class out performed students that did not attend school for the additional year. He also asked if all kindergarten teachers are required to have an endorsement.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered that all kindergarten teachers are certified as teachers, but do not all have a minimum of six credits in early childhood development. He clarified that the teachers for this program will be certified child professionals with training in early childhood education. He emphasized differences between a kindergarten class and an early childhood program, which he offered to provide to the committee in written form.

CHAIR SEATON further recalled that the 2-year kindergarten program was folded several years ago due to funding requirements, not due to lack of performance. The outcomes for that program should be available to support the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program, he surmised.

[8:16:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER inquired as to whether transportation and extended day care are requirements for the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered no. He stated that the recommendation would be for community partnerships to assist parents. He said that the public system will not be required to transport young children for the proposed pilot program.

[8:17:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON cautioned the committee not to attempt to compare programs in the North Slope region, as she recalled that the programs were not fully funded, but tended to supplement the school funding in those school districts. She cautioned that the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program may have a decidedly different focus versus the prior kindergarten program. Thus, a comparison may not provide a fair assessment unless the baseline and educator requirements for the prior program are also considered.

CHAIR SEATON recalled the North Slope program required certified teachers and received full funding including cost differential. He agreed it would be important to discern the differences. He opined it is important to examine similar programs in Alaska and the Lower 48 and their results. Chair Seaton added that he would also like to review the solutions that the early childhood group anticipated. Thus, the committee will have some idea of what the group that met on this discussed and their recommended solutions.

[8:20:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER recalled a flurry of communications from daycare providers that argue that the current system meets the needs of preschool children. She related the complaints are that government should not provide what the private sector is already providing. She highlighted that private schools exist as well as public schools and neither should be eliminated. However, she also recognized that a range of child care exists. She said, "Some of it is crummy and some of it is absolutely wonderful..." She inquired as to whether any information on ranking child care programs exists. She further asked how the department will target the regions that really need the pilot program and not provide duplicate services in areas that do not need the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX explained that daycare programs and early learning programs are very different. He emphasized that the department is focusing on quality early learning programs for four-year olds. He stated that the Head Start program has a lengthy waiting list, up to 1,000, and many children come to kindergarten not having attended any program. He offered that the state has an Early Childhood Education System. It is the intent of the department to work through the system, which is why the program is a "pilot" program. The DEED's underlying philosophy is to recognize that parents are the best educators of their small children. He pointed out that part of the program is to support the efforts of parents who are providing those skills for their children. He related that the intent of the RFP process is to work with providers in each community to ensure that every child has an opportunity to gain early childhood experiences prior to attending school. He mentioned several models such as Head Start. He also pointed out that the needs of four-year olds is different from the needs of five-year olds. He surmised that a universal program may negate the importance of parents in the lives of their young children. He offered his belief that using the RFP process allows the DEED to

work with each community to fill the gaps in parent education, and to access children that will benefit from a quality early childhood program. The overarching goal is to improve the overall quality of early childhood education, he stated.

[8:24:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked whether the department has a timeline; and whether the department is "pressed" due to the Superior Court decision, Moore v. State.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX opined that the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program would be fully in place by next school year. He opined that the court decision has caused the department to review educational programs in school districts in which the students are chronically underperforming. However, the court decision is not the motivating factor, he said.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH stated that it sounds as if the department is addressing this in a rational matter and it may just take some time.

[8:26:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ asked if underperforming districts or schools will have a preference.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered yes.

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ recalled the commissioner mentioned that transportation poses one barrier at the kindergarten level. She inquired as to whether there will be any means for considering support at the pre-kindergarten level. She further inquired as to whether any preference could be given to those programs that offer transportation or work with families to provide transportation.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX responded that within the RFP, the department will look for full partnerships. He opined that the more services that are provided the greater the likelihood that the program will be funded. He offered his belief that by using a grant fund, local resources will be leveraged to assist in these areas. He also mentioned that it is problematic for some parents to transport their children since the kindergarten classes often are shorter programs so busing is not available after class.

8:28:34 AM

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ offered that the "Ready to Read Ready to Learn" program is beneficial in the early childhood and pre-kindergarten programs. She asked whether this program or similar programs would be encouraged to participate with the proponents of the pilot program.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX acknowledged that the "Ready to Read, Ready to Learn" initiative is a wonderful document that is well thought out, is helping children, and forms the cornerstone of the program that the DEED is trying to develop. He indicated that the DEED has worked closely with Best Beginnings, a public-private partnership that works to ensure all Alaska children begin school ready to succeed, and Head Start, and other professionals in the early learning environment to develop a program.

8:29:11 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER agreed with the commissioner's statement that parents are the best first teachers. He asked what safeguards are in place to prevent the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program from becoming a substitute for parental attention.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX opined that the RFP process will designate the local communities to identify the children who need early learning assistance. He stated that the emphasis is to help parents who want to help their children and who need information and access to an early learning professional. He related that parents who are not interested in the services will be respected. He said, "Parents who want to use the system as a daycare or to abdicate their responsibilities; we're going to leave that to the local agency to set those standards within that community. You know, local communities do that best." He offered that if the DEED provides guidelines, the outcome could be to block the children who need the services. He offered his belief that providing quality information and access will allow many parents to have the information to help their child develop pre-literacy skills.

8:32:15 AM

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER inquired as to whether the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program needs to be a "brick and mortar" school setting. She cited the Parents as Teachers Program (PAT) that helps parents become better parents. She inquired as to

whether PAT could successfully qualify for an RFP for the pilot program.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX related that any organization within the community that the school district supports via the RFP process may have an opportunity to be part of the pilot program. However, he highlighted that any quality early childhood program will have close partnerships with the parents of children in the program. The advantage of an RFP pilot program is that the DEED's goal is to not only reach parents of children who will participate in the pilot program, but to also allow access to resources for parents whose children are not in the program. Thus, components of the PAT program will be incorporated into this Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program. He added that the advantage of an RFP process is the flexibility to leverage partnerships within a community. He pointed out that every community has a number of providers who are currently providing services to those children. He emphasized the purpose of the pilot is to find a pathway to collaborate and build the infrastructure so that no child "falls through the cracks" within the system. He opined that a unilateral effort would negate the partnerships and would pull the children from the private and public entities and place them in one vast system. He said, "That doesn't always work as well."

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH said that he is very encouraged that the commissioner emphasizes the need to collaborate with the various programs that currently exist.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX underscored his interest in providing quality early childhood programs.

[8:35:45 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX, in response to Chair Seaton, answered that the advantage of utilizing the RFP is that the individual cost will be set. He related that cost factors of each community can be taken into account since he anticipates every program will be different. He highlighted that the DEED will not be attaching specific funding for each child. The application will establish what the funding requirements will be in each area. He said, "But we fully expect we're going to spend more money in some of the remote rural regions for a program that will be identical to one that was in Anchorage or Kodiak or Kenai."

[8:37:17 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked for a summary of the committee's work that includes the breadth and depth of the anticipated program, including the funding mechanism. He also expressed interest in the class size limit of 20 and 15 contact hours and how services that are provided to parents whose children are not in the classroom will fit into the funding formula.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered that each community is different. Many early childhood programs are four days per week programs. During the fifth day, the teacher will work with parents or make home visits. He highlighted that each community's program will vary. He related a scenario in which a community applies for the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program, but already has an existing PAT program. The community may put together a program in which the PAT personnel will carry out the educational component for the parents. He cautioned that the DEED is not going to base the funding on the number of children in the community who participate. Instead, the funding will be based on the quality of the program and how the applicant "leverages resources" into the community. He explained that if the program funding were based on the size of the program, that the DEED would assume that each community possesses the same infrastructure, will offer the same program, and use the same philosophy to implement the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program. He said he hopes that every community that applies will have enough funding to provide a quality comprehensive Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program within the community.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX related that as part of the grant development, some providers such as Head Start and Best Beginnings have been collaboratively working with the DEED and the University of Alaska (UA). He said, "The beauty of the program is that every program will be different and because it's an RFP and we evaluate the RFP, we can leverage the money to meet the need that that community individually puts together."

[8:40:24 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked for clarification of how an existing program, such as a PAT program, will be leveraged into the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program. He further asked for the parameters of the program and how the pilot program will mesh with the funding of an existing program.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX offered his belief that applicants for the grant will collaborate with other community providers. He opined that if a community had a PAT program, that the applicant

would reference the PAT program. He further opined that a solo PAT program would not likely qualify. In further response to Chair Seaton, Commissioner LeDoux reiterated that the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program will apply to four-year olds and the five-year olds that are too early to start school.

8:43:14 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER inquired as to whether what standards will be utilized for faith-based organizations who might also apply for the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered that all programs will use state the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines as the basis to align the curriculum.

8:44:00 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER asked if the guidelines are met will the school district and faith-based organization be kept separate in accordance with the statutes.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered that he did not think that faith-based organizations are specifically addressed in the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program. He offered to review the issue of how faith-based organizations mesh. He offered his intent to provide information to support parents who are working with their children. He stressed that if a parent is sending their child to a private early learning environment, that the DEED's services to that parent would be the same, regardless of whether they attend a private or public setting. He pointed out that he envisions it would be similar to correspondence programs that the DEED provides to parents. He said, "But we will serve parents."

8:45:35 AM

CHAIR SEATON asked for clarification of "leverage" with respect the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX explained that prior to becoming commissioner, he wrote a grant called "The Learning Café" that provided services to students up to the age of 24 who had dropped out of school. He related that the grant provided a broad range of services. He stated that as part of the development of the RFP, he was able to leverage funds from the community in support of the effort. The community shared a

common goal to help young people find success and had a vehicle through his grant to achieve its goal. Thus, if a community is developing a program to provide quality early learning, due to the collaborative nature of the RFP, other sources will offer resources in support of the community's need, he stated. He offered his belief that the strength of any grant program is that it brings people together to prepare an attractive proposal.

8:47:32 AM

CHAIR SEATON related his understanding that leveraging of funds would not just mean coordination with existing programs but that the RFP is able to expand the existing program with new grant funding and that is what is meant by the leverage of funds.

8:48:06 AM

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered that it is difficult to predict what the applications will consist of but he stressed that the DEED desires to work with existing programs in the community. He explained that the pilot program could allow a community that does not have an existing program, to create a single program. He contrasted that community with one in which many public-private programs currently exist. Thus, the two applications would be very different. He emphasized the DEED wants to find a niche for every child to have a quality early childhood experience. He offered his belief that the expectation is that this pilot program will raise the bar in each community that participates.

8:48:52 AM

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked if other states offer similar programs and have already set parameters for their programs.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered that many states have fully funded universal preschool programs. He offered to provide information for the committee. He elaborated that some states use Head Start as the vehicle, others have no program. He reiterated that DEED's goal is to provide every child with quality early childhood support. Thus, instead of proposing a universal program, the nature of the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program is to work within each community and collaborate within the existing infrastructure in Alaska to utilize local resources. He surmised that the pilot program will not be able to reach all children and anticipates revisiting the legislature to provide

feedback and revise the program to meet the needs of the community.

[8:50:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON recalled that the DEED hopes to have the program in place by the fall school year. He opined that the RFP process may be lengthy. He inquired as to how the RFP process will unfold, the number of additional administrative staff will be necessary to review the proposals.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX explained that the DEED is already preparing RFP's and the infrastructure is being developed. He said he hopes that the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program funding will be approved, that the infrastructure will be in place so that as soon as the funds are approved these RFP's will be distributed. He mentioned that the department will provide technical assistance, hopes to have pilot programs in various geographical areas of the state.

[8:51:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON inquired as to whether the distribution of the funds would compare with the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) weatherization program distribution of funds.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX responded that the DEED anticipates that the program will have geographic priorities to ensure that statewide needs will be taken into consideration. He said, "We hope we have programs from Barrow to Wrangell, if you will, when it's all said and done. We won't say that this community is going to get one but we are interested in geographic diversity around the state and we'll write that into the RFP."

[8:52:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked how assessments will be measured to determine if the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program has met its objectives.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX answered that each district is required to submit the "Alaska Developmental Profile" which measures a number of criteria that will provide the data necessary to determine the success of the child's pre-literacy and pre-social skills. He said that the DEED believes it already has an assessment program in place to measure the pilot program's success.

8:56:31 AM

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX, in response to Representative Wilson, explained that he understands the facets that each school brings to each community. He stated that he hopes that this program will become a catalyst to provide new partnerships in each community. He related that while an overall quality is the goal, that each program will be different.

8:57:00 AM

CHAIR SEATON asked how many programs might be funded if the full \$2 million for the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program is approved.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX estimated approximately 20 programs are anticipated for the pilot since some communities may have only a few children. He opined that if the program is funded and is successful, that the DEED will need to request additional funding so the goal is to create an efficient data-driven program and to set up sites to collect the information.

8:58:39 AM

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX, in response to Chair Seaton, explained that the applications will come from school districts in partnership with communities, with the potential for the district to request funds for more than one site in its application. In further response to Chair Seaton, Commissioner LeDoux related that grant writing involves some risk. The need for quality early development programs is universal, not only rural versus urban. He surmised that in ten years the program might meet the needs of 25 percent of Alaska's pre-kindergarten children. He explained that 50 percent of parents will probably provide the experiences, and Head Start and private programs will meet the rest of the needs of children. He reiterated his belief that the pilot program will "raise the bar" due to the collaborative nature of the RFP process.

9:00:40 AM

CHAIR SEATON related his understanding that of 10,000 four-year olds, the program estimates about that about 400-500 children would be served in the pilot program. He recalled that brain development for children ages one to three is rapidly expanding. He inquired as to the rationale for selecting four-year olds.

9:01:45 AM

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX surmised that the reason to focus on the four to five year olds is due to the political reality of state funding. He stressed the importance of building the infrastructure that could expand to three-year-olds. He pointed out the importance of the role of parents in young children's lives.

CHAIR SEATON agreed. He also reminded the committee that parents have the potential to be the best teachers. However, it is not happening in Alaska, which is why the legislature is considering funding a \$2 million grant program. He mentioned that children are not arriving to school ready to learn. He stressed that these efforts are geared to get Alaska closer to the ideal. He mentioned that the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program has been in Hoonah for 14 years. He inquired as to whether the district can track individual performance of students in a school with a program like the PAT as compared to a school without such a program.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX explained that statistical data regarding each child that enters first grade can be provided. However, he highlighted that information regarding programs that exist in each area will not be available. He pointed out that the availability of a program is not necessarily the only factor to consider since the outcome depends on the quality of the program.

9:07:25 AM

CHAIR SEATON offered that providing an assessment over time may be the best means for understanding the effects of a program in a given community. He suggested that it is important to understand how the existing programs are performing.

9:08:42 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER opined that early childhood learning is clearly beneficial. He related his understanding that parents often bring their children to early learning programs voluntarily. He empathized with how difficult it is to collect meaningful data for this age group. He further related that a child might be three to four years ahead due to the early learning experiences.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX recalled a statement that he agrees with: "College begins in pre-school". He opined that quality early learning programs have been deemed critical in the development of the child, with the emphasis on quality.

[9:12:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER suggested that much could be accomplished with a good library in every community, with a qualified librarian present to provide story hours every day.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX offered his belief that literacy of our children, making sure that every child can read by the time they finish second grade is a statewide priority. If communities realized the importance, reading circles would be prevalent. He said that literacy is a number one priority. He said he hopes that the pilot program will help create that environment and can build on it. He also stated that the DEED should not take over the responsibility but should provide an infrastructure that will ensure that every child has access. He said, "This is only the first step."

[9:13:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ recalled that assessments will be given in kindergarten and first grade with the developmental profile. She inquired as to whether the DEED will also track the child through the third and fifth grade assessment.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX agreed that the children's success will be tracked through the years.

[9:13:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON drew attention to the information on the federal stimulus funding for education packet and indicated her interest in how the department will incorporate the funding into the formula.

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX related that the expectation is that the stimulus funding will be distributed based on the Title I populations since school districts receive most of the federal funding through this formula.

[9:16:41 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX, in response to Chair Seaton, explained that the information in the committee packet was prepared by the federal government and the information from the federal government changes daily. He said that he will meet with the Secretary of Education this week in Washington D.C. He said he hopes to share the unique circumstances that Alaska faces.

[9:17:21 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON mentioned that Shirley Pitts, Office of Children's Services/Department of Health and Social Services is online to answer questions. He also indicated that communications received from constituents are in members' packets.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER commented that having an OCS/DHSS representative on line to this meeting is encouraging.

[9:19:43 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER LEDOUX, in response to Representative Gardner, agreed to address the committee regarding details on dropouts and the graduation rate.

[9:20:25 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:20 a.m. to 9:24 a.m.

HB 23-CLASS SIZE REDUCTION GRANTS

[9:24:23 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 23, "An Act establishing a grant program to support voluntary class size reduction."

[9:24:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HARRY CRAWFORD, Alaska State Legislature, paraphrased from his sponsor statement that this process began in about 2003. He stated that the dropout rate was bad then but is worse now. He opined that Alaska is failing its children and has a dropout rate nearly double the national average that leads to a number of negatives. He offered that students who complete high school earn an average of \$290,000 more in their lifetime. He related that non-graduates are 68 percent more likely to rely on public assistance and graduates are 20 percent less likely to commit violent crimes. He stated that according to a 2002 U.S.

Government Accountability Office study nearly 80 percent of inmates were high school dropouts. The average cost of incarceration to the State of Alaska in 2002 was \$36,730 per year. Alaska ranks as ninth in the number of students who will earn a university Bachelor's degree in 10 years.

[9:26:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD related that HB 23 would give a grant of \$8,000 to any school district that will commit to class sizes of 15 or under. He explained that the class size of 15 was chosen because the Project STAR, a Tennessee based study, tested three class sizes, and saw a dramatic increase in performance in class sizes of 13-17 students. Other studies, such as one in California in which class sizes were reduced to 20 showed some improvement, but did not demonstrate the dramatic improvement that smaller class sizes showed.

[9:28:23 AM](#)

ERIC CROFT stated that as a past legislator, he had previously introduced similar legislation. He stressed the many things can be done to help the school system, but the single most important thing is to have students enter school with appropriate skills. Additionally, it is important to have a qualified teacher with time to teach. Despite technological advances, it remains that the two most important things are to enter school ready to learn and to have a teacher who has time to teach his/her students, he stated. He indicated that particularly in the K-3 classes the class size is important. He characterized this bill as an antidote to one-size fits all testing model of the "No Child Left Behind" testing model. He further opined that by adding testing requirements without providing states with the additional resources does not do the school systems justice. He mentioned that the bill would not dictate what the district must do, but if the school districts decide to implement the grant program, the program can be completed at their own time and speed. He pointed out that California tried to implement class size reduction as a requirement but could not hire enough teachers or find that many buildings in a year or two.

MR. CROFT related that the state can provide the incentives, the "road map", and the funding to address two of the most important aspects of education.

[9:33:33 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to whether school would need to address all classes from kindergarten through third grade (K-3) in order to qualify for funding.

[9:34:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD explained that the intent of HB 23 is to make this funding as flexible as possible and have it apply for classes K-3. However, a school may need to begin with kindergarten and add classes as possible.

[9:35:39 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON directed attention to the sectional analysis titled "House Bill No. 23 - Voluntary Class Size Reduction Sectional Summary", to Section 2 that read: "Only schools maintaining a class size of no more than 15 in grades kindergarten through three would be eligible for grants."

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD answered that his intention is to make it more flexible than that. In further response to Chair Seaton, Representative Crawford answered that he was not certain how to enforce the commitment that each school district participate for a minimum of five years to provide data on the efficacy. He offered his belief that class size will reap benefits.

[9:37:16 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to what measure of achievement will be used to track the academic progress and achievement levels. Chair Seaton further inquired if the language in the sectional analysis that states the definition for "child with a disability" has the meaning in AS 14.30.350, which refers to special education students.

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD said he did not know. In further response to Chair Seaton, Representative Crawford agreed that the \$8,000 funding will go through the current foundation formula funding.

[9:40:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER pointed out that the title states that it is to support class size reduction, but he recalled that the criteria for the grant would require a commitment to that size.

He related his understanding that half of the schools in the state could not meet that class size.

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD related his understanding that many schools statewide have small class sizes but have other problems. The funding would also act as an incentive for those classes to do a better job, he stated.

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER maintained his belief that the title of the bill needs to be altered to include a commitment to reduce class size versus requiring a reduction in class size.

[9:42:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ referred to the fiscal note. She pointed out that the fiscal note is for \$118 [million] but in calculating the five year grants the totals to about \$38 million.

CHAIR SEATON asked to hold questions on the fiscal note for Mr. Jeans.

[9:43:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER provided a district scenario that might pose a problem with respect to special education children such that a district has 14 children but the next child is a special education child. She opined the district would lose funding allocation since the class size would exceed 15:1.

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD stated that if the special education child is counted as two, that the class would be divided into two entities to maintain the small size.

[9:44:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER inquired as to how many new teachers and classrooms would be required if this bill passed and was implemented.

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD related that the fiscal note includes all classrooms that would be eligible statewide, if all classes participated. However, he pointed out it would not be realistic to implement statewide.

[9:44:59 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON referred to the sectional again, and read, "A parent of a child may file a complaint in court to require a district to comply with and enforce the class size requirements of this Act." He inquired as to whether Representative Crawford thought that the bill refers to voluntary class size when it seems to him as though at least one parent would file a lawsuit to force the school district to enforce the smaller class size.

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD answered that provision would apply once the school district agrees to the small class size to ensure that the class size was maintained. He stated that the school would not be forced to make the commitment to reduce class sizes.

CHAIR SEATON suggested that the sponsor should request a legal opinion on this point. He opined that a court challenge could come to the fore, given the existing language.

[9:47:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER offered his belief that nothing prevents a school district to choose to have a low teacher to student ratio on its own.

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD, in response to Chair Seaton, answered that the grant would fund certified/qualified teachers and not teacher aides.

[9:47:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON stated that every single school that could get a teacher would apply since this would help the school obtain additional funding.

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD said that that would be the intent, for each school to implement this as quickly as possible.

[9:48:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON related that classroom facilities would be an issue.

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD offered that the intent of the bill is not to make small classrooms mandatory but to get smaller classes in place as quickly as possible. The results for small classes have been demonstrated. He said, "I just don't think we can afford not to do this." Alaskan children are being failed

and something needs to change, he added. He opined that the state will spend a lot of money to try to fix problems with education. He further opined that directing attention to the early grades will garner results throughout a student's career. He again said, "College begins in pre-school."

[9:50:17 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON asked what percentage of districts would automatically qualify for this program since some classes already have less than 15 students.

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD deferred to Mr. Jeans.

[9:51:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON related her understanding that the impact in funding could be considerable.

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD addressed the fiscal note regarding the Wrangell schools. He opined that the schools in Wrangell would receive almost \$244,000 in additional funding.

[9:52:59 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to whether Representative Crawford has reviewed the base student allocation.

REPRESENTATIVE CRAWFORD recalled that the fiscal note was based on 1.5 times the base student allocation.

[9:54:30 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON related his understanding that the intent of the bill is to provide an additional \$2,500 per student for kindergarten through third grade. If a school district were able to make the change for kindergarten and first grade that the bill would only apply to classes for 15 students or less.

[9:56:23 AM](#)

EDDY JEANS, Director, School Finance and Facilities Section, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), stated that the DEED prepared a fiscal note for HB 23. He directed attention to Page 2 of the fiscal note. He explained that the DEED reviewed the total number of students enrolled in K-3, by district, and assumed that every district would apply for the

grant if they do not automatically qualify for the grant by default since many of the schools already have a ration of people teacher ratios (PTR) below 15:1. He related that the fiscal note was based on a school size adjustment of .97, which represents the adjustment that schools would receive from the school size adjustment table from 250-450 students. He stated that he could have picked another adjustment, but that is the one selected for this purpose. He further explained that geographic cost differentials were added to the adjustment as well as 20 percent for special needs funding. Thus, the overall cost was \$118 million statewide, he stated.

MR. JEANS opined that the DEED interpreted the costs as supplemental grants above the base student allocation (BSA). He reviewed the calculation which he said was applied that to the adjusted attendance area and average daily membership (ADM). He explained that for 2011-2015 the same adjustment was used. He mentioned that an additional \$7,476 is added for each year to adjust for the consumer price index (CPI).

[9:59:02 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON related his understanding that the basis for the fiscal note is \$118 million and the other funds are estimated for Consumer Price Index (CPI) adjustment, but the \$118 million is the base amount since it represents the beginning of the program.

MR. JEANS agreed. He stated that once the funds are in the base funding and the additional years would be adjusted for the CPI.

[9:59:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ related that the fiscal note is \$118 million plus the CPI for the five years. She inquired as to whether any cost is included for additional space that might be needed to implement the smaller classroom sizes.

MR. JEAN answered no. However, he noted that typically the larger urban schools would need additional space. However, he explained that if HB 23 were to pass, that would be taken into consideration when the department considered space eligibility to allow municipalities to request additional money to expand their facilities.

[10:00:46 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON returned to his question regarding the ratio of schools whose PTR is below 15 for K-3 classrooms.

MR. JEANS offered to provide an estimate for the committee. The larger urban areas have a ratio that is over 1:15 with most reporting classroom sizes of 17 to 18 PTR. He explained that the way that this bill would work is to provide additional funding on a per child basis.

[10:01:48 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON expressed concern that the bill would not provide enough funding to incrementally implement the program. He posed several instances in which a school might have to split a classroom or hire additional teachers.

MR. JEANS offered to provide the information. However, Mr. Jeans opined that the fiscal note for HB 23 would provide enough funding to hire the teachers the schools would need to hire. He posed a scenario in which Glacier Valley School has 2 classes for each grade from K - 3. He related that if the school has a 17:1 ratio, that probably only two additional children would be in each of the six classes so one or two additional classes would be created to fulfill the smaller class ratios. He further opined that the smaller schools already meet the requirements but would gain additional revenue under the bill. He opined that many small schools are operating at a 10:1 or less PTR ratio.

[10:04:15 AM](#)

MR. JEANS addressed Representative Gardner's question that adding an extra special education child to the class would put the school over the ratio of 15:1 PTR. He responded that the child would not be counted as two students, except when applying the formula to generate revenue, and not for the PTR ratio.

[10:04:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON inquired as to what would happen if the student count was 15 and an additional child was added to the class.

MR. JEANS explained that scenario would trigger subsection (d) which is where the child's parents or the state would petition the court to enforce the smaller classroom size. He indicated that this subsection is the enforcement aspect of the bill for

compliance. He emphasized that if a school district gave its assurance that it would maintain a smaller classroom size, the mechanism exists for the parents or the state to force compliance.

[10:05:43 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON maintained his concern regarding the legal aspect, such that a parent could assert that funding is available, his/her school district is opting to offer a lesser quality education than is available statewide.

MR. JEANS answered that he understood Chair Seaton's concern.

[10:07:23 AM](#)

MR. JEANS, in response to Representative Wilson, explained that the fiscal note reflects the changes over the prior year. Once the change has occurred, it becomes part of the base. Thus, the \$118 million is the base and is carried forward, he noted.

[10:07:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON related her understanding that the cost is actually higher since the fiscal note costs are cumulative.

MR. JEANS reiterated that implementing HB 23 would require and additional \$118 million from this point forward, plus adjustments for each additional year.

[10:08:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked how much more will the cost be for a five year period.

MR. JEANS answered that it would cost approximately \$600 million over a five-year period.

[10:08:58 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON inquired as to whether a \$100 increase in the base allocation amounted to about \$20 million.

MR. JEANS agreed that the increase would range from \$20-22 million.

MR. JEANS, in response to Chair Seaton agreed that is a fair assessment that the cost of implementing HB 23 would represent a base allocation increase of \$500 statewide

[10:09:31 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:09 a.m.