

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT MEETING
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE
February 24, 2010
8:04 a.m.**

MEMBERS PRESENT

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Kevin Meyer, Co-Chair
Senator Bettye Davis, Vice Chair
Senator Gary Stevens

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Paul Seaton, Chair
Representative Cathy Engstrom Munoz, Vice Chair
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Representative Peggy P. Wilson
Representative Robert L. "Bob" Buch
Representative Berta Gardner

MEMBERS ABSENT

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Joe Thomas, Co-Chair
Senator Charlie Huggins
Senator Donald Olson

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Wes Keller

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

University of Alaska Board of Regents, Teacher Preparation Report

- HEARD

PRESENTATION: Best Beginnings/Early Childhood

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record.

WITNESS REGISTER

PAT JACOBSON, Chair

Academic and Student Affairs

University of Alaska Board of Regents

POSITION STATEMENT: Delivered the annual report "Alaska's University for Alaska's Schools."

JOHN PUGH, Chancellor

University of Alaska Southeast

Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions and provided information about the Teacher Education Planning Group.

DAN JULIUS, VP Academic Affairs

University of Alaska System

Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions and provided information about the P-20 agenda.

MELISSA HILL

Alaska Teacher Placement Program

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions and provided information about funding for the mentoring program.

LEXIE HILL, Research Associate

Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER)

University of Alaska Anchorage

Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information about the proposed education policy research center.

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director

Best Beginnings

Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information about Best Beginnings as part of the standards based early care and education system partnership.

JOY LYON, Executive Director

Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children

Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information about the support for professional development aspect of the standards based early care and education system partnership.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:46 AM](#)

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the joint meeting of the Senate and House Education Standing Committees to order at 8:04 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Davis, Stevens, and Meyer and Representatives Gardner, Buch, Munoz, P. Wilson, and Seaton.

UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA TEACHER EDUCATION PLAN

[8:05:27 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be a presentation by the University of Alaska (UA) Board of Regents about their teacher education plan for Alaska.

[8:07:53 AM](#)

PAT JACOBSON, Chair, Academic and Student Affairs, University of Alaska Board of Regents, introduced the regents who were present as well as the UA teacher education planning group members and support staff.

She explained that she is presenting the second annual report in accordance with legislation that passed in 2008 requiring the UA Board of Regents to deliver an annual report to the Legislature on teacher preparation, retention, and recruitment. While much of the report is similar to the first, she said, there have been slight improvements and encouraging signs for the future. While there is no question that the gap between the need for teachers and the actual numbers of graduates is significant, the issue is a multi-faceted and some areas are beyond the university's control.

MS. JACOBSON pointed out that in addition to detailing the university's efforts to attract, prepare and retain qualified teachers, the report also includes information on graduation and enrollment data, a gap analysis of the shortages in the teaching workforce, and recommendations for improving educational

opportunities for all students. This year the report also contains: the UA teacher education plan; a graduate data report by major academic units; the UA FY11 proposed/approved budget priorities for teacher education.

MS. JACOBSON explained that pages 2&3 of the report highlight the small increase in the number of new teachers graduated in 2009 and the slight decrease in the number of new principal graduates. Because there are many more career opportunities for administration and secondary math and science graduates, there is stiff competition for recruiting these graduates for teaching careers. In 2009 UAS joined UAA in offering a principal endorsement program and last summer had a cohort of 20 new applicants, some coming from the statewide mentor project.

8:12:02 AM

MS. JACOBSON highlighted that each campus in the UA system offers endorsement programs for advanced degrees, certificates of completion, or recertification courses. UAA offers programs for special education, reading, and a superintendent degree, as well as a speech/language pathologist program that is partnered with East Carolina University. UAS offers a master of arts in teaching and has six M.ED programs for both distance learning and in-person on campus. UAF offers master of education degrees as well as the only terminal degree for educators through the interdisciplinary studies PhD program.

She reported that in 2009 UAS and UAA each graduated about 22 new special education teachers. UAF began offering special education certificate and master's programs last fall and expects 10 graduates by 2011. These three campuses worked cooperatively to develop and offer a single program at each campus and these increases are believed to be a direct result of this collaboration. Hopefully this model can be used to similarly address the shortages in math and science, she said.

MS. JACOBSON informed the committees that about 200 new teachers graduate from the UA system each year and there is high demand for these graduates; some don't end up teaching, some don't go to rural areas, and some tend to stay where they did their internship. She directed attention to pages 5-8 and emphasized that teaching in Alaska is unique and rural sites in particular have difficulty recruiting special education teachers. The report indicates that 49 percent of special education teachers no longer teach in that position after four years. Clearly,

producing more special education teachers does not address the issue of retention, she said.

[8:14:11 AM](#)

MS. JACOBSON said that a statewide mentor project report indicated that mentoring partnerships can increase retention to 80 percent. The report also found that 52 percent of experienced special education teachers recruited from outside Alaska leave the system within three years, whereas new special education teachers already employed in Alaska and those from the UA system tend to stay longer over a three-year period. Recent small increases are hopeful, but they don't mean that the gap in demand is closed. More research is needed on turnover trends in order to assist policymakers and school districts to shape policy and target resources to promote retention and thus decrease the need to hire more teachers. Collaboration between the state and school districts is needed to develop strategies to reduce teacher turnover, particularly in rural districts where recruitment of teachers in general is problematic.

[8:15:15 AM](#)

MS. JACOBSON said that each year 900-1,100 teachers are hired to fill the 800-900 vacancies that result from teachers leaving the system. Alaska Native teachers comprise less than five percent of the workforce, less than three percent of the principal positions, and less than two percent of the superintendent positions. In 1998 the Alaska Department of Labor Economic Trends reported that in many communities the local school district is one of the few employers.

[8:17:05 AM](#)

MS. JACOBSON emphasized that K-12 outreach and bridging programs continue to be a priority in the university's budget and for federal grant requests. While many other university programs don't have direct relevancy, they do contribute to attracting and training of qualified teachers. The university can help with retention by offering continuing education courses and the mentorship program, she said.

MS. JACOBSON directed attention to page 13 and explained that restricted [federal] funding has decreased over the past four years, which challenges the ability for education units to grow in response to demand. Even with 40 percent decreases, UA has continued to provide services and support, primarily through

sponsored programs and activities. However, sustaining these programs has become increasingly problematic.

8:17:58 AM

UA staff members are actively involved in planning meetings to look at teacher quality, increasing graduation rates, career and technical education, teacher certification, and establishing a virtual school as part of the development of the Alaska Education Plan that was initiated by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development Commissioner LeDoux. Moreover, UA and the department are partnering in the administration of the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project. The VP for academic affairs is also working with Commissioner LeDoux on other items of interest under a P-20 [pre-school through higher education] agenda.

MS. JACOBSON said she would defer to Chancellor Pugh to speak about the Teacher Education Planning Group.

8:18:44 AM

JOHN PUGH, Chancellor, University of Alaska Southeast, said he's chaired the Teacher Education Planning Group for the past four years. Today he would talk about four main goals of the group with a little about the action steps involved in reaching those goals. The four goals are: 1) recruit and retain more students in education, particularly Alaska residents; 2) improve program access through multiple delivery methods; 3) enhance educator preparation programs in special education, math and science; and 4) conduct research to identify causes and proposed solutions for education challenges in Alaska.

8:20:00 AM

The first goal is to recruit and retain more students in education, particularly Alaska residents. The actions needed to accomplish this goal include:

- Develop a stronger partnership between K-12, DEED, and UA. So far they've met with and shared the draft plan with superintendents on three occasions and with the Alaska teacher placement advisory group twice over the past two years. This partnership needs to be strengthened.
- Develop a public awareness campaign in Alaska about teaching as a profession. This will take money and they'll be seeking partners like the National Education Association (NEA) and hopefully school districts.

- Increase outreach in rural districts and look at ways to encourage individuals in these areas to go into education. This will require some additional resources from the schools.
- The Education Planning Group needs to continue to coordinate with future educator associations in the various school districts. Young people work with the faculty in these schools and the university encourages these individuals to take the appropriate course work to prepare to become a teacher.

CHANCELLOR PUGH said the group has challenged itself to increase the number of students in teacher education programs by five percent per year for the next three years. They also hope to get at least 15 percent of the kids that work with the future educator associations into teacher education programs after graduation.

CHANCELLOR PUGH said the second goal is to improve program access through multiple delivery methods and the university has done a lot of this over the years. He directed attention to the last page of the regent's report that lists all of the teacher education programs offered by UAA, UAF, and UAS. The asterisks indicate programs that are totally distance delivered. He noted that one particular success has been special education. UAS started programs three years ago and last year graduated 22. He opined that if there's a market for distance delivery of a particular program, then UA should be reaching out statewide to fill that need. They hope to increase the number of students in distance delivery programs by five percent per year as well.

[8:23:59 AM](#)

CHANCELLOR PUGH said the third goal is to enhance educator preparation programs in special education, math and science. As Ms. Jacobson mentioned, UAF began offering special education certificate and master's programs last fall and 10 students are expected to graduate in the next year. The intention is to expand these special education programs, but they are already available by distance delivery so all the rural districts in the state are currently being served.

Producing more math and science teachers is more challenging because students see that they can earn two or three times as much with an engineering degree or a health science degree than they can as a secondary math or science teacher. Nevertheless, the Teacher Education Planning Group will be collaborating with

the UA arts and science faculty to encourage students in the math and science programs to look at education as a profession.

CHANCELLOR PUGH said the fourth goal is to conduct research to identify causes and proposed solutions for education challenges in Alaska. He said he's pleased about the major grant to track students, but that doesn't address the issue of teacher turnover. ISER (UA Institute of Social and Economic Research) has done some work on the related issues, but they've never received resources to do this work. It's been on top of the work they're already required to do. The Teacher Education Planning Group continues to feel that there is need for a research arm at ISER that looks at teacher programs, teacher turnover, and how to better serve rural areas in order to recommend improvements.

[8:27:24 AM](#)

MS. JACOBSON informed the committees that the annual budget that the Board of Regents developed addresses the priorities outlined in SB 241 and demonstrates the university's commitment to address the educational needs of the state.

In conclusion she emphasized the importance of establishing an education policy research center to address the numerous problems and potential solutions in the education realm. The resulting information could go a long way in assisting the university, state agencies, and other entities in finding solutions to the many problems associated with teacher attraction, education, and retention in the state.

MS. JACOBSON clarified that while she said she had been working on her report since December, the university began working on the annual report as soon as the first one was delivered. She emphasized that the priorities outlined in SB 241 have been on every academic agenda since the legislation passed in 2008.

[8:30:13 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS related that she's has been trying to establish a P-16 council and she's interested in hearing more about the P-20 agenda.

MS. JACOBSON deferred to the VP for academic affairs.

SENATOR DAVIS asked if the mentor project is for teachers only or both teachers and principals and if it's in the annual budget or a special request.

MS. JACOBSON said her understanding is that it's for teachers and there's a coaching program to mentor principals. She deferred the question about funding to Melissa Hill.

[8:31:55 AM](#)

DAN JULIUS, VP Academic Affairs, University of Alaska System, explained that they've been meeting with DEED to develop a memorandum of understanding (MOA) that is similar to the legislation Senator Davis introduced to establish a P-16 council. At this point they're talking about holding regular meetings, sharing information, and exchanging data to make students' transition from high school to college a more successful and seamless process. He noted that oftentimes K-12 and university systems don't work well together, but that's not the case here in Alaska where there's a real commitment for the two organizations to collaborate.

SENATOR DAVIS noted that her legislation extends to school year 16 and questioned why they've chosen to extend to year 20.

MR. JULIUS admitted he didn't have firm opinion, but he supports what would be most likely to pass.

[8:34:11 AM](#)

MELISSA HILL, Alaska Teacher Placement Program said she also assists with K-12 operations at the university. Responding to the question about the mentoring program, she explained that it includes both teachers and administrators. Funding for the program is allocated through the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) and it's survived through multiple commissioners. The university contributes \$500,000 to assist with the implementation and some school districts join this partnership by providing on-the-ground in-kind support.

[8:35:24 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS asked if that information is in the annual report.

MS. HILL replied it was referenced in the report, but there isn't detailed information because the report only contains what SB 241 specifically required. She offered to provide the information.

SENATOR DAVIS asked how much money is allocated to the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project this year.

MS. HILL deferred to Eddie Jeans.

CHAIR SEATON said he'd ask DEED to send an analysis of the mentoring project to both education committees.

8:36:49 AM

SENATOR STEVENS expressed appreciation that the UA Board of Regents took SB 241 so seriously. The Legislature has learned more about teacher training and the added benefit is that for the first time a dialog has been established. Referencing the comments about ISER, he asked what it would take to have an ISER study. He said he's also interested in knowing if there's system-wide consistency in getting a degree in education because his daughter found that she could get a master's in teaching in Juneau in 1.5 years and it would take 2.5 years to get it in Anchorage.

8:38:55 AM

MELISSA HILL asked him to clarify his question about the ISER study.

SENATOR STEVENS asked if it would take more than just money to get an ISER study.

MS. HILL said it would require personnel funding because ISER operates on a cost-recovery basis. People pay ISER to have a specific question answered so it's difficult for them to put off or drop paying customers when the state asks questions. She recalled that the request was for \$250,000 for faculty and to launch an education policy center and said she believes that this would be very beneficial to this committee when it makes critical decisions about where to allocate limited resources. She added that data indicates that investing in Alaskans keeps them here longer.

8:41:07 AM

SENATOR STEVENS asked if there is system-wide consistency in the master's in teaching program.

CHANCELLOR PUGH replied there is consistency in types of degrees, but not the curriculums and how long it takes to

complete the program. In part this is due to the fact that each university is separately accredited and each institution has to have faculty and establish its own programs and curriculum. However, the campuses are working together on these. At this point, the special education and early childhood programs are the same system wide and the bachelor's degree in elementary education is very similar across the three campuses. There are differences at the master's level, particularly in the art of teaching. UAS is the only campus that has a one-year master's in the art of teaching program. The programs take longer at UAF and UAA so they can be taken on a part time basis, which isn't the case with the intensive and full-time UAS program. He opined that different models are needed in order to meet the varied demand in Alaska.

SENATOR DAVIS asked if a person who didn't have a four year degree could get a master's in education in one year and be qualified to teach.

CHANCELLOR PUGH replied absolutely. That master's in the art of teaching meets the accreditation requirements; it's been in place for 15 years and is well accepted statewide.

[8:45:54 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked how he knows that the goal to increase the number of students in teacher education programs by five percent per year is the right number. He also asked if a certain number would be special education teachers.

CHANCELLOR PUGH explained that the number is based on what the education deans have said they can handle without additional resources; it's not what would fill the need. In special education they set the goal at 50 percent and would like to do that again; that's why they added the special education program at UAF.

[8:48:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked how many they anticipate will do distance learning.

CHANCELLOR PUGH replied most of the increase will be distance learning in order to meet rural community needs. He added that in the last five years UAA increased the number of programs that are distance delivered from 17 percent to 60 percent. At UAS the MAT students are required to be on campus for one month but if

those students are counted, then 100 percent of the programs are distance delivered. The bachelor of elementary education is both on campus and distance delivered and the goal is to have all of these programs available throughout the state because the market includes non-traditional students in addition to those coming out of high school.

REPRESENTATIVE MUÑOZ asked if high turnover rates are an issue in urban areas or if it's primarily a rural issue.

[8:50:28 AM](#)

MS. HILL directed attention to the graph on page 9 of the report that shows that the majority of the turnover comes from rural areas, but additional study is needed to determine the factors that contribute to the turnover.

CHAIR SEATON noted that the chart shows the percent of total teachers compared to the percent hired in academic year (AY)09; while 31 percent of the teachers are employed in rural districts, they account for 46 percent of the new hires.

MS. HILL confirmed that rural teachers represent a smaller portion of the teaching workforce, but they cost more to hire and they're hired at a higher rate.

REPRESENTATIVE MUÑOZ asked if they have a means for capturing data on teachers that leave districts and their reasons for doing so.

MS. HILL replied they capture that information through exit surveys and ISER has in the past conducted studies, but ongoing research is needed to have current information about the relevant factors.

[8:53:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUÑOZ asked what the requirements are for cross-cultural training for teachers that go into rural districts.

CHANCELLOR PUGH replied DEED requires three credit hours in Alaska history and three credit hours in multicultural studies. The university has designed the individual education programs to develop teachers to meet individual needs.

[8:55:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDMON said there's a disconnect between the "boots on the ground" message that teachers in his rural district are giving him and this report. The talk about an education policy research center doesn't make sense when the cost of living for a teacher in Dillingham surpasses their salary. Until this is addressed, turnover will continue, he said.

[8:58:16 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON said he doesn't disagree, but some of the issues are beyond the scope of teacher preparation.

REPRESENTATIVE EDMON asked if he's off base.

MS. JACOBSON said she shares those concerns, but she believes that the research center will be an important addition to fully understand all the problems associated with retention.

MS. HILL added that finding the best teachers possible is an extremely tough job.

[9:00:47 AM](#)

CHANCELLOR PUGH said a lot of information from past ISER studies coincides with what Representative Edgmon is saying, but it's necessary to continue to track that and make sure that current information is fed back to the Legislature to help plan how to solve these problems. One reason it's so important to have programs distance delivered is to accommodate the needs of local individuals so they can qualify for these teaching jobs. He acknowledged that it's not a solution but it's something that the university can and is trying to do.

CHAIR SEATON called at ease from 9:01 a.m. to 9:07 a.m. to accommodate the Senate members who had other obligations at 9:00 a.m.

[9:07:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDMON said he'd like to hear more about the proposed education policy research center in terms of what it might do and what it would cost to see if that might complement the foregoing discussion.

MS. JACOBSON deferred to Chancellor Pugh and Lexie Hill.

9:08:54 AM

LEXIE HILL, Research Associate, Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) University of Alaska Anchorage, explained that the education policy research center would address three large areas: 1) the intersect of education policy and education practice; 2) broad-based work on the fiscal and cost issues; and 3) funding to work with directly with DEED on important issues.

This state is short on research where education policy and education practice intersect, she said, and unless the researchers who are busy teaching and doing clinical supervision can be paid to work with ISER on these issues, it won't happen. For example, while it's true that low salaries are a cause for turnover it's also true that you can raise salaries and still have turnover. Other issues like effective administrative support and working conditions play a part, but it's difficult to get a handle on what's most important and what will give the biggest bang for the buck without getting people together from both sides of this policy practice continuum.

ISER did some work with a professor from USC looking at national models to find ways to fund education more effectively, but that research stopped because they were only able to cobble together enough money to get through the first four steps. That was frustrating, she said.

She offered the view that partnering with DEED on areas of research that are of interest to the department would be very valuable. She related that sometimes when DEED has called she wasn't able to answer their questions without the context of a large body of research. While it's possible to do something that takes two or three days it isn't possible to squeeze several months work for three people into the budget.

9:12:27 AM

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER observed that some studies show that the most cost effective way to increase college graduation rates is to help students return and finish after having dropped out. She questioned whether that approach could apply to getting more math and science teachers. Rather than trying to convince engineering students to become math and science teachers, try to get people who are already good teachers to focus on math and science.

MS. JACOBSON related that a longtime friend from Kodiak who teaches special education attended the Science Teachers Education Program in Fairbanks last year and was so enthusiastic she was thinking about getting another master's degree even though she'd always been intimidated by science and math. She described it as a very valuable learning experience for the teachers and scientists alike.

[9:15:31 AM](#)

CHANCELLOR PUGH added that the university is already doing that with the distance delivered master of education, mathematics K-8 program, but many of these students are already teachers who are returning to school to improve their elementary and middle school skills. They're not seeking to move to the high school math programs. Recruiting at the high school level is more difficult and No Child Left Behind requires secondary math and science teachers have a relevant background. At some point, he said, you may have to admit that it may take incentives to attract engineering and health science students to secondary education. Nursing is a good example; in years past nurses' salaries were held down - just like teachers, but now nurses make a decent salary and more people are entering the field. He emphasized the necessity of looking at these market driven issues.

[9:18:16 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON mentioned the impressive Memorandum 96 longitudinal study that the Anchorage School District did and asked if the university is doing a similar cohort analysis on its programs.

MS. JACOBSON said she is very enthusiastic about the possibility of doing gap analysis with the \$12.8 million three year statewide longitudinal database grant that DOLWD, DEED, the university and the Alaska Postsecondary Commission are applying for.

[9:19:56 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON clarified that the ASD Memorandum 96 longitudinal study traced a cohort of students 8th grade through high school to see where and why they dropped out before graduation. He wondered if that type of study was being done for the people who enter a teaching program, looking at completion percentages and the factors that caused people to leave the program.

9:21:33 AM

CHANCELLOR PUGH said it's particularly easy to track the students in the master of teaching program, but they aren't doing a good job of tracking freshmen who say they want to become teachers. He offered to work with the education deans and the institutional research offices to look at doing that sort of tracking. He cautioned that it's not straightforward because students have to fulfill basic requirements before they can start a teaching program so many don't start until their junior year.

9:23:03 AM

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked if statutory changes would be required to allow disparate pay ranges for math and science teachers.

CHANCELLOR PUGH said he isn't an expert in labor relations but he imagines that contractual changes would be necessary.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH said that next year he'd like to hear about what the university believes it will be addressing five to ten years from now.

9:27:00 AM

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked if university staff is using new research when they are teaching prospective new teachers to address individual needs in the classroom.

CHANCELLOR PUGH replied the university is research-driven so the faculty stays abreast of new research and all the programs are designed to ensure that the teachers are prepared and understand individual differences.

CHAIR SEATON thanked the university and opined that the legislation requiring this annual report has served both the university and the Legislature well in directing a focus on globally looking at how to prepare teachers to meet Alaskan needs. He noted that this committee has been looking at the new book, "Drive, the Science of Motivation" and suggested the university consider using it.

At ease from 9:32 a.m. to 9:34 a.m.

Best Beginnings/Early Childhood

9:36:20 AM

CHAIR SEATON announced the final order of business would be a presentation by Best Beginnings.

9:36:44 AM

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director, Best Beginnings, CANDACE WINKLER, CEO, Thread - Alaska's early care and education connection, JOY LYON, Executive Director, Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children, and MELISSA PICKLE, Director, Rural Alaska Community Action Program (Rural CAP), Parents as Teachers (PAT) program, introduced themselves.

MS. HENSLEY thanked the committee for its ongoing support of young children and their families and said this presentation would focus on the early care and education public policy priorities for this year. She informed the committee that they're talking about a comprehensive early childhood system to deal with the fewer than 50,000 children under the age of five in this state. It's a collaborative effort between Best Beginnings at the statewide level and local partnerships to bring better services closer to home in a most cost effective manner.

9:41:07 AM

Last year the Legislature budgeted \$200,000 to Best Beginnings and \$50,000 helped support the development of nine local early childhood partnerships. These local partners conducted need and asset assessments in their local communities and the priorities that they identified are being developed into strategic plans for the next two years. This year, she said, they are asking the Legislature for \$1 million to provide grants to the partnerships and support of this network.

MS. HENSLEY displayed a graph to demonstrate the partnership growth as a result of funding from Best Beginnings. The \$50,000 in state funds was leveraged with \$59,000 in corporate funding, and then the local communities, through cash or in-kind, came up with an additional \$133,000. The governor's current budget has \$200,000 for Best Beginnings to do that work and for the Imagination Library.

9:43:01 AM

MS. HENSLEY said that the second initiative she wanted to focus on is the Dolly Parton Imagination Library in Alaska. For \$30 per participating child per year the Dollywood Foundation mails an age-appropriate book to that child each month. The partnership members also help establish and encourage parent engagement and community activities for these children and their families. The funding for the 7,594 Alaskan children who are currently enrolled in the Imagination Library came from a variety of sources including the Rasmuson Foundation. She said that they're looking for \$400,000 to support this work.

[9:44:30 AM](#)

MELISSA PICKLE, Director, Rural Alaska Community Action Program (Rural CAP), Parents as Teachers (PAT) program, said she would talk about early childhood home visitation programs as well as Head Start. She clarified that these visitations can occur outside the home if that is more comfortable for the parent. The positive outcomes they've seen includes: improved parenting practices by promoting early literacy practices in the home; prevention of child abuse and neglect; screenings to help identify developmental issues early on; increased readiness for school; and later on increased parent involvement in school.

[9:45:39 AM](#)

MS. PICKLE displayed a graph depicting the neural connections in the brain to demonstrate that the early years in a child's life are so critical. For young children the initial neural connections for hearing, vision, language, and cognitive functioning are being laid four months before birth and reach peak formation before the second birthday. All future growth is based on what happens during this critical two to three year period, she said.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked for additional information on the source of the data, identified as C.A. Nelson (2000).

[9:47:06 AM](#)

MS. PICKLE agreed to provide the information.

She displayed a graph that showed that parents involved in the Parents as Teachers program stay involved in their children's learning after they go to school. Their involvement included attending special events, volunteering, attending PTA meetings, talking to teachers, initiating contact with the school, and

helping with schoolwork. She said she recognizes that some people question whether parents need support to raise their children, but the parents who enroll in the PAT program do so voluntarily. When they enroll in the program they fill out a survey that asks about their parenting practices and knowledge of child development so that the services can be more individualized.

She pointed out that Parents as Teachers program does not receive any state funding, but in 2008-09 federal grants funded 11 programs that served 910 families in 47 communities. This year they have only 8 programs because federal dollars are scarce.

[9:49:24 AM](#)

MS. PICKLE said that the Head Start/Early Head Start programs also include personal visitation. Eligibility for these comprehensive school readiness programs is based on income and in Alaska poverty of access is taken into consideration. Services include classroom and personal visits as well as home visitation services in certain communities. Parents are involved in the design and implementation of these programs. The 16 Head Start grantees in this state provide services in more than 100 communities and they serve over 3,500 children. The federal government provides about 75 percent of the funding and the state provides about 25 percent.

The summary report of services identified: 276 children that needed medical treatment; 515 children that needed dental treatment; 77 children that needed mental health services; 379 children that had special needs; and 1,119 parents that asked for parenting information. The average pay for a Head Start teacher in Alaska who has a bachelor's degree is \$27,744. Most of the teachers do not have a degree and thus are paid much less.

MS. PICKLE directed attention to the Alaska Head Start Association (AHSA) 2010 critical issues document in the packets and highlighted that there are currently 711 children on the wait list for services and that doesn't include the families that have said it's futile to sign up because the wait list is so long. Additional funding is also needed to repair facilities and to develop the workforce and meet the new guidelines requiring all teachers to have bachelor's degrees by 2014.

[9:51:54 AM](#)

CANDACE WINKLER, CEO of Thread, Alaska's early care and education connection, said that while Thread was established about 24 years ago, it's in just the last several years that they've become a part of this statewide partnership. And in the last six months they've taken on the new name. She pointed out that every year they work with about 7,600 families to find early care and education services. This provides a good sense of the needs and challenges that parents face. Aside from the university, they play the largest role in providing training and technical assistance to early care and education teachers both at the individual teacher level and at the program level, she said.

MS. WINKLER said that today she wanted to focus on the intersection between early childhood education and supporting parents being able to work. In Alaska, about 60,000 children are under age six and about 40,000 of those children have all of their parents in the workforce and thus need child care, but there are fewer than 24,000 licensed or approved spaces in child care, Head Start, and preschools. This large gap in services creates a real financial challenge for families; 36 percent of households across the state indicated that they had work restrictions because of affordability, availability, or quality issues related to child care.

[9:54:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked how many of the children that fall in the gap are cared for by family members.

MS. WINKLER replied they don't know and some of those are probably in safe environments, but they do know that lots of families want to go back to work but they can't because of problems with availability, affordability and quality of child care. Continuing with the presentation, she displayed a slide showing that the state is investing the least during the most critical time for brain development.

MS. WINKLER said that the goal of providing lower income children access to quality child care is best accomplished by increasing the reimbursement rates for child care assistance. The increase that came out several weeks ago moved infant care reimbursement rates to the 75th percentile and the rest of the rates to the 50th percentile. The national best practice and what Alaska has set as its goal in the early childhood comprehensive system is to have all reimbursement rates at the

75th percentile. The other piece of child care assistance, she said, is related to family eligibility. Those rates haven't been reviewed since 2002 so there are lots of families that are struggling and still unable to get assistance.

[9:56:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked if some of the children that fall in the gap are in "illegal" child care.

MS. WINKLER replied some categories are unregulated and could be illegal in terms of health and safety issues.

[9:58:10 AM](#)

MS. WINKLER said she was also asked to talk about the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). This is a comprehensive way to help parents evaluate child care using a system that is similar to the star system for restaurants or hotels. The QRIS provides clear standards that allow parents to drive the market and it's a clear pathway for bringing programs together and improving their quality. It also provides a way for public policy makers to assess any sort of intervention.

MS. WINKLER recapped that Alaska's standards based early care and education system is comprised of: standards for programs and practitioners; an assessment to measure the standards; access to financial support for families (child care assistance and Head Start funding); incentives for programs once needs are identified; support for professional development (Ms. Lyon will address this.); and ratings that communicate and make sense to parents and policy makers. Many states are establishing similar systems and the federal government is focusing on QRISs as a comprehensive approach for changing the quality of the overall system, she said.

[10:01:10 AM](#)

JOY LYON, Executive Director, Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children, said one of the most important components of the quality rating improvement system is the teacher education levels. Research has found that this is the indicator that most highly correlates with higher outcomes for children and higher quality programs. The recruiting and retaining difficulties that the university mentioned are magnified 100-fold in the early childhood field because the average wage for child care is only \$9 per hour, she said.

Currently, less than 10 percent of people in this field have a college degree, but the national accreditation and Head Start standards are moving toward having a bachelor degree in each classroom. Alaska has a ways to go to meet that standard, she said, but doing so will impact turnover rates.

States that have linked salary incentives to professional development have dramatically reduced turnover rates and this, in turn, has impacted the students' ability to learn because the relationship between students and their teachers is so very important.

MS. HENSLEY thanked the committee and reiterated that the list of their priorities is in the handouts along with contact numbers if additional information is desired.

10:04:09 AM

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON commented that based on the information the committee received today, she isn't sure that the state is putting its funds in the right place. If year one is so critical we should be zeroing in there, she said.

10:04:43 AM

MS. PICKLE said that if you don't address the critical time between birth and age five it takes the rest of a child's educational career to catch up and sometimes it's not possible to catch up.

MS. WINKLER added that there is no silver bullet because families have so many different needs and challenges. There's a need to support the parenting aspect but there's also a need to support the working aspect while making sure that the children are growing and developing. Sometimes a publicly funded pre-K program in the school for several hours is appropriate, but for children who are in out-of-home care all day, that needs to be the highest quality learning environment. While it has to be a comprehensive approach, everyone would agree that focusing on these early years is the best strategy for the state.

CHAIR SEATON thanked the presenters and commented that this committee was impressed with how effective the Parents as Teachers program has been in Angoon and Hoonah.

10:07:17 AM

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ informed the committee that tomorrow at 5 p.m. Senator Davis is leading a group of legislative women on child care.

10:07:48 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Seaton adjourned the House Education Standing Committee meeting at 10:07 a.m.