

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 9, 2011  
9:16 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Alan Dick, Chair  
Representative Lance Pruitt, Vice Chair  
Representative Eric Feige  
Representative Paul Seaton  
Representative Peggy Wilson  
Representative Sharon Cissna  
Representative Scott Kawasaki

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Chris Tuck

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 154

"An Act providing for the establishment of a statewide early childhood education plan and guidelines."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 154

SHORT TITLE: PRE-ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLANS/GUIDELINES

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) KAWASAKI

|          |     |                                 |
|----------|-----|---------------------------------|
| 02/11/11 | (H) | READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS |
| 02/11/11 | (H) | EDC, FIN                        |
| 03/09/11 | (H) | EDC AT 9:00 AM BARNES 124       |

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE SCOTT KAWASAKI  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced HB 154, as the sponsor of the bill.

ALICIA MARYOTT, Intern  
Representative Scott Kawasaki  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 154, on behalf of the sponsor, Representative Kawasaki.

JOHN ALCANTRA, Government Relations Director  
National Education Association of Alaska (NEA)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 154.

JOY LYON, Director  
Association for the Education of Young Children in Southeast Alaska  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during discussion of HB 154.

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director  
Best Beginnings  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during discussion of HB 154.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[9:16:17 AM](#)

**CHAIR ALAN DICK** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:16 a.m. Representatives Dick, P. Wilson, Feige, Kawasaki, Seaton, Cissna, and Pruitt were present at the call to order. Representative Tuck was also in attendance.

[9:16:43 AM](#)

#### **HB 154-PRE-ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLANS/GUIDELINES**

CHAIR DICK announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 154, "An Act providing for the establishment of a statewide early childhood education plan and guidelines."

[9:17:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCOTT KAWASAKI, Alaska State Legislature, listed the extensive numbers of teachers, staff, students, and children currently participating in pre-Kindergarten and child care programs throughout Alaska. He stated that the continuum of education should begin with birth.

[9:18:31 AM](#)

ALICIA MARYOTT, Intern, Representative Scott Kawasaki, Alaska State Legislature, paraphrased from the prepared Sponsor Statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Alaska remains one of the only states that do not provide pre-Kindergarten (pre-K) education to its children on a statewide basis. HB 154 seeks to add Alaska to the ranks of states that recognize that children benefit from early education. Children who participate in early education programs earn more money as adults, enter the job market in much larger numbers, obtain college education in higher numbers, remain off of public assistance and are more likely to stay out of jail.

Alaska has a responsibility to provide the best education possible for its children. Currently, outside of few school district classrooms, the state only provides pre-K education through Head Start programs and through the Best Beginnings partnership. Head Start is underfunded and only available to the poorest students. Due to underfunding, the Alaska Head Start Association estimates that more than 50% of the children who qualify cannot receive Head Start education. Head Start has consistently lagged far behind its need. Providing early public education opportunities is a crucial stepping stone to brightening the future of the young Alaskans.

Extensive research shows that a child's intellectual development is especially important before age six. A study by the National Institute for Early Education research in 2004 found that children who attended state-funded pre-kindergarten programs demonstrated improvements in vocabulary 31% greater than those who did not participate, and 44% greater in math. Young children who receive high quality early education do

better in school academically and are more likely to stay in school, graduate, and go on to attend college.

The beneficial impact of early education also extends to the economy with multiple studies showing that funds invested in early education pay dividends in the long run. Every dollar invested in high quality pre-kindergarten programs saves Alaskans from paying for remedial and special education and public assistance. An ongoing study of 40-year old adults in Michigan who participated in the 1962 Perry Pre-Preschool Project found that adults with pre-K were more likely to be employed and earned 33 percent higher average income than their peers who did not have state funded early education.

Additionally a study prepared for the University of Alaska Southeast, states that 87% of Alaska residents think it is important for state government to provide financial support for early education and child care.

[9:21:21 AM](#)

MS. MARYOTT explained that there were three sections to the bill: The first section stated that the state would devise a plan for a statewide early education program that would work with Head Start and other current early education programs; the second section stated that the Department of Education and Early Development (EED) should adopt guidelines that the programs be cost efficient and optional; the third section required that a report be submitted by January 15, 2012.

[9:22:15 AM](#)

MS. MARYOTT explained the fiscal note, which outlined the cost of the program to be \$150,000. She detailed that \$40,000 would be required to write the plan, \$86,455 would be for travel costs to four statewide meetings, and \$23,545 would pay for the final council review and publication of the plan.

[9:23:41 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK opened public testimony.

[9:24:00 AM](#)

JOHN ALCANTRA, Government Relations Director, National Education Association of Alaska (NEA), stated that investment in pre-K education was important. He quoted "change occurs when the necessity for it overcomes our resistance to it," and he emphasized that it was now necessary for this wise investment in pre-K. He urged passage of HB 154.

[9:27:03 AM](#)

JOY LYON, Director, Association for the Education of Young Children in Southeast Alaska, reported on the Best Beginnings and Parents as Teachers partnership, and its fit into the early learning system. She offered an anecdote on the effectiveness of the Imagination Library program and its connection to other family literacy events in Southeast Alaska. She stated that more than half the children in Juneau were enrolled in Imagination Library. She shared that the Best Beginnings partners created these programs together. She described the partnership as a magnet for the local elements in early learning programs. She reported that the Parents as Teachers program would now be the highest priority to encourage early literacy. She reported that reading with a child for 20 minutes each day would increase the child's literacy by a year when the child entered kindergarten. She encouraged support to engage parents into early learning programs.

[9:31:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if HB 154 provided the community integration for early childhood programs.

[9:32:49 AM](#)

MS. LYON stated that it was important that an early learning system went beyond the pre-K classroom. She touted the critical importance for the years from birth to three.

[9:33:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked to have any suggestions brought to the committee. He expressed a concern that EED would continue to focus on K-12, and that for early learning programs to be more effective, it would be necessary for HB 154 to include more guidance and support.

[9:35:07 AM](#)

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director, Best Beginnings, stated that early learning was critical and it was necessary to have a plan. She applauded the early learning guidelines as a foundation, but that a plan educating 3-4 year olds did not incorporate the birth to age five kids, which was critical. She stated that high quality formal programs, as well as informal activities, were needed. She touted a need for determining the state and private investments to develop an early learning plan and outcome. She asked that HB 154 be expanded to include a more comprehensive approach to early childhood learning from birth to school entry.

[9:39:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI asked for her comments on the results of the pilot pre-K program.

[9:39:52 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY deferred any comment on the program results. However, she said questions should be asked to identify the best practices to be shared between communities.

[9:41:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA suggested that current economic challenges could hinder participation in many activities. She asked if groups were supporting members to participate.

[9:42:45 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY, in response to Representative Cissna, said that local partnerships were assessing, developing priorities, and implementing a strategic plan in each community.

[9:44:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked if there was adequate funding for the programs.

MS. HENSLEY replied that there was funding from the State of Alaska, as well as from private foundations, corporations, and individuals. She declared that the need for funding would increase with the growth of the programs. She pointed to the potential growth of the Imagination Library, as there were 50,000 kids [in Alaska] under the age of five, and books were being provided to only 12,260 kids.

[9:45:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked how many other pre-K programs existed in Alaska.

[9:46:08 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY explained that Best Beginnings brought together people and resources so communities could develop activities and programs for its children. She noted that these partnerships existed in 11 communities and offered assistance to parents to locate available programs.

[9:47:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON reported that Wrangell had a partnership and that parental support and training had increased, especially for young parents. She offered her belief that there were Best Beginnings plans with proven outcomes throughout Alaska, and that these could use increased funding. She asked if it was necessary to start with a new plan.

[9:50:02 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY stated that the mission of Best Beginnings was to empower communities and parents through a variety of mechanisms. She directed attention to the early childhood coordinating council and other early childhood work which could form a base of the formal and informal components that would include childcare, Head Start, pre-school, and other programs.

[9:51:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON reflected on studies which had tracked children in Head Start, and reported that the initial advantages from the program had vanished by the third grade. He asked how to determine the overall effectiveness of a program.

[9:53:05 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY, in response to Representative Seaton, said that although it was difficult to determine, it was an important question to keep asking. She stated that high program quality, meaningful parental engagement, and continuity through the grades were all important. She pointed to studies which indicated the necessity for a strong reading background by the

third grade. She noted that Best Beginnings had recently received a grant from Providence Health and Services to enroll the children born at Providence Hospital in Anchorage, and then the children born in Valdez and Kodiak, in Imagination Library. She opined that children and parents should continue to receive support for development beyond the beginning of the formal classroom program.

[9:56:56 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK announced that public testimony would remain open and that HB 154 would be held over.

[9:59:00 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:59 a.m.