

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 11, 2011  
9:05 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Peggy Wilson

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 49

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

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 49

SHORT TITLE: EARLY CHILDHOOD ED: PARENTS AS TEACHERS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) TUCK, KAWASAKI, GARA, PETERSEN

01/18/11	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/7/11
01/18/11	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/11	(H)	EDC, FIN
03/11/11	(H)	EDC AT 9:00 AM CAPITOL 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE CHRIS TUCK  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 49 as one of the joint prime sponsors of the bill.

NICKI SHELTON, National Trainer

Parents as Teachers (PAT)  
Hoonah, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented a PowerPoint titled "Parents as Teachers" during discussion of HB 49.

NORMAN ECK, PhD, Superintendent  
Northwest Arctic Borough School District  
Kotzebue, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 49.

WANDA WINGFIELD  
Parents as Teachers  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 49.

CYNTHIA BUCHANAN  
Parents as Teachers  
Glennallen, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support for HB 49.

LYNNE OSHEIM, Director  
Parents as Teachers  
Hoonah, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support for HB 49.

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director  
Best Beginnings  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 49.

## **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[9:05:45 AM](#)

**CHAIR ALAN DICK** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Representatives Dick, Feige, Kawasaki, and Pruitt were present at the call to order. Representatives Seaton and Cissna arrived as the meeting was in progress.

### **HB 49-EARLY CHILDHOOD ED: PARENTS AS TEACHERS**

[9:06:14 AM](#)

CHAIR DICK announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 49, "An Act establishing in the Department of

Education and Early Development a voluntary parent and early childhood education program for pre-elementary aged children."

9:06:38 AM

REPRESENTATIVE CHRIS TUCK, Alaska State Legislature, paraphrased from the Sponsor Statement:

Parents are a child's first and most important teachers. Research has clearly shown that parental involvement in a child's early years are critical for development and lay the foundation for success in school and in life.

He directed attention to an earlier presentation which had reflected the importance of pre-K, and he highlighted that it improved school readiness and achievement, boosted graduation rates, reduced crime and the cost of social services, provided economic opportunities for families, and kept Alaska and the United States competitive.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK continued his paraphrase from the Sponsor Statement: [original punctuation provided]

HB 49, the Alaska Parents as Teachers Act, will empower parents with knowledge and resources to help their children develop into successful students with stronger scholastic achievements.

The bill allows the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to offer the successful Parents as Teachers parental involvement, early childhood learning system as an education option for families with children ages 0-5.

HB 49:

- Requires evidence-based education, parental involvement, and adherence to accepted best practices and early learning guidelines;
- Directs the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to develop local partnerships to implement Parents as Teachers; and
- Includes a 3-year sunset clause.

Parents as Teachers is completely voluntary for families. It succeeds by engaging families and

communities in understanding the way children's brains develop and how to create a learning environment for the child. Because Parents as Teachers is about how children learn, not what they learn, it fits with any educational philosophy and mode, from religious, charter and public school, to home schooling or other education types. Parents as Teachers helps build a community of learning, and assists in early detecting of impairments.

Parents as Teachers is the most cost-effective early education model available in Alaska. Further, it enhances local control and involvement, with partnerships ensuring cooperation towards education goals.

Funds invested in early education pay dividends in the long run. Research shows that children who receive early education earn more money as adults than their peers lacking early education. Children who receive early education also enter the job market in much larger numbers, obtain college education in higher numbers, and remain off public assistance and out of jail in greater numbers.

Alaska's children are our future workforce, and the key to our state's prosperity. Alaska's plumbers, doctors and teachers of tomorrow are the youth in our neighborhoods today. Helping parents boost the skills and natural ingenuity of their children will point the way to Alaska's growth.

Parents as Teachers enjoys statewide support and will help grow stronger Alaskan families, better students and safer communities. It is a proven successful solution for our children and our state's future.

[9:10:41 AM](#)

NICKI SHELTON, National Trainer, Parents as Teachers (PAT), stated that the vision of PAT was that "all children will learn, grow and develop to realize their full potential." She agreed with a statement by Representative Tuck that parents were the first and best teachers of their children. Referring to the PowerPoint "Parents as Teachers," [Included in members' packets] she declared the PAT mission to be: "to provide the information, support and encouragement parents need to help

their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life." She listed the PAT goals: increase parent knowledge of early childhood development and improve parenting practices; provide early detection of developmental delays and health issues; prevent child abuse and neglect; and increase children's school readiness and school success. She noted that PAT participation allowed parents to take control of the child's education from birth on into elementary school.

[9:14:04 AM](#)

MS. SHELTON directed attention to the four mandatory components of PAT: personal visits, when the educator meets with the family to focus on child development and parental/child interaction; screening to identify any factors which could affect development or hinder learning, and regular visits to allow developmental concerns to be identified/explained; group social connections to link parents with children of similar age and may include activities, presentations, community events, and informal discussions; and, resource referrals to link families with services outside of the scope of PAT, such as a food bank or Denali Kid Care. She confirmed that PAT services were provided by local parent educators, who were trained in early childhood education and the PAT curriculum.

MS. SHELTON announced that personal visits were the heart of PAT: each family decided who would participate in a visit and where the visit would take place; visits were individualized for each family; and visits were adapted to reflect the cultures of each family and each community. She reported that the materials used during personal visits were simple items for age appropriate interaction with a child, often common household items, as well as books that were reflective of the cultural and geographic surroundings. She described a personal PAT visit as a dynamic time that emphasized parent-child interaction, development-centered parenting, and family well-being. She explained that various strategies were discussed with the parents, who then decide on which action to follow. She provided an example of a basic pre-school game for parent interaction with their child. She declared that literacy was a component of every personal visit and the parent educator brought books to share and to stimulate extended play based upon the book. She discussed group connections in various formats of children and parents together as another popular part of the program.

[9:34:36 AM](#)

NORMAN ECK, PhD, Superintendent, Northwest Arctic Borough School District, read from a prepared statement: [original punctuation provided]

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify this morning. For the record, I am Dr. Norman Eck, Superintendent of the Northwest Arctic Borough School District. I have been employed as an administrator in this District for 13 years and this is my 6th year as superintendent. Two years ago I was the Alaska State Superintendent of the Year.

I am in support of House Bill Number 49. This Bill will provide a solid base to prepare parents and their children for when their children enter school. Many parents when they have children ages zero to 4-years, do not know what sort of activities that they can engage in with their children that will promote positive cognitive development. Parents as Teachers does that.

It is important that early childhood programs implemented in Alaska follow the guidelines of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. I firmly believe that evidence-based, non-mandatory, parent engaging efforts that meet high standards are the marks of good pre-Kindergarten programs and will meet the need of Alaska's children.

There is no one single solution to preschool needs. Our state is varied and the needs of students and families are very different. However, one fact is certain, and that is that the Parents as Teachers Program is a solid pre-school offering that can make a substantial difference in a child's life.

Let me give a concrete example. In 2003, Northwest Arctic was awarded a federal grant to implement a Parents as Teachers type program. We called our program, Getting Ready to Learn. As funds were limited, we strategically operated it in 5 of our lowest performing village schools. One of the program goals was to assure parents that they are their child's first teacher: "As your child's first teacher you need to provide one-on-one interaction between your child and yourself to develop the brain and

language skills to build the best foundation for future learning."

Four major skill areas were emphasized: language and literacy skills, thinking skills, self-control and self-confidence for parents and their children. The teachers worked to foster trust and communication and to provide activities which enhance attachment, engagement, investment and enjoyment of the child by the parents. Playgroups were established and home visits were made.

The homes in these five villages were primarily print free environments. So, family literacy programs were formed in each village. The purpose of those were to encourage families to read together at home by providing them with quality age appropriate books and simple activities that promoted family interactions.

Our federal funding ran out in 2006 and we had to close the Getting Ready to Learn Program. This was a great shame. By the legislature passing this bill, the opportunity we had that brought so many of our children to success as students will be able to be offered to Alaska's neediest families. We would hope to be able to re-implement our program.

Over the past 7 years, there have been many things that we have put into place in our district to contribute to improving student academic achievement. We have implemented quality programs, quality teacher training, and we require strict adherence by all teachers to do what is best for children at all times.

What did we find in our test scores that, I believe, were directly affected by the Getting Ready to Learn Program and through our overall quality schools efforts?

Overall student achievement based on the Standards Based Assessments taken by our students in grades 3 through 10 increased as follows: In 2003, 36% of our students were proficient in language arts, by 2008 that percentage had risen to 51%. During the same time frame on the same assessment, our math scores have risen from 2003 with 32% of our students

proficient to 51% of our students being proficient in 2008.

It takes many puzzle pieces to construct the entire picture of a successful education. Early childhood education is essential, especially for our underperforming students. Parents as Teachers is an excellent step for our legislature to take toward helping students to be academically successful.

WANDA WINGFIELD, Parents as Teachers, related her experience as a Parents as Teachers educator. She pointed out that the military families had lost this program due to budget cuts, and she stressed the importance of the program.

[9:42:19 AM](#)

CYNTHIA BUCHANAN, Parents as Teachers, shared her experiences as a Parents as Teachers educator and the connections that were cultivated and the child development that was supported. She said that the other services in the Copper River Basin were minimal, and that Parents as Teachers was stretched. She stated that it was a good investment of state dollars.

[9:46:56 AM](#)

LYNNE OSHEIM, Director, Parents as Teachers, stressing the need for good well funded programs, said, "If it doesn't happen in early childhood, it doesn't happen." She reported that PAT partnered with Best Beginnings, Head Start, Denali KidCare and other applicable local organizations. She recounted that PAT offered information, support, and early intervention for young families. She directed attention to the difference that PAT had made in Hoonah, which was evident by the outcomes: AYP was being met, graduation rates were up, and participating students had attained consistent honor role status. She declared how difficult it was for a child to ever catch up when they start behind in kindergarten. She offered her belief that it was far more effective to spend money on early childhood programs.

[9:53:11 AM](#)

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director, Best Beginnings, stated that the "Best Beginnings vision is to mobilize people and other resources to ensure that all Alaska children begin school ready to succeed." She extolled the value of home visitation

programs. She offered to speak from a different perspective, and referred to the handout titled: "Investing in Alaska's Young Children." [Included in members' packets] She shared that this handout listed the legislative priorities as determined by a coalition of early childhood experts and leading organizations across Alaska. She pointed to the local partnerships' work and assessments of the needs in the communities. This established a joint effort to maximize the resources, the time, and the energy, and she provided examples. She stated that there was not one program that met everyone's needs, but that the layering of programs created a comprehensive package.

[9:59:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA, stating the importance for the inclusion of health into the program, asked if that was a possibility.

MS. HENSLEY offered to have a future conversation.

CHAIR DICK announced that public testimony would remain open.

[HB 49 was held over.]

[10:01:28 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:01 a.m.