

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT MEETING
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 9, 2011

8:06 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Kevin Meyer, Co-Chair
Senator Joe Thomas, Co-Chair
Senator Bettye Davis, Vice Chair
Senator Hollis French
Senator Gary Stevens

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

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

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

All members present

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

BEST BEGINNINGS PRESENTATION

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

BILL MILLET, President
Scope View Strategic Advantage
Charlotte, North Carolina

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a presentation on the importance of early childhood education from a business standpoint.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:06:44 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOE THOMAS called the joint meeting of the Senate and House Education Standing Committees to order at 8:06 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stevens, French, Davis, Co-Chair Meyer and Co-Chair Thomas; Representatives Kawasaki, Feige, Seaton, Pruitt, P. Wilson, and Chair Dick. Representative Cissna arrived shortly thereafter.

BEST BEGINNINGS PRESENTATION

[8:07:33 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOE THOMAS announced that the order of business is to hear a presentation by Bill Millet on early childhood development. He explained that Mr. Millet is the founder and president of Scope View Strategic Advantage which has assisted private, nonprofit, and public clients in the areas of economic, organizational, and business development. He has worked with dozens of partnerships for children in a number of states throughout the nation, including Alaska.

[8:09:04 AM](#)

BILL MILLET, President, Scope View Strategic Advantage, said "I am not here as a North Carolinian to tell Alaskans how to do things in Alaska." He explained that he is here to lay out a business case for quality early education. This case has not advanced well on a national level because it is focused on a single component of early education. The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce published a report which begins that the United States used to have the best educated and most driven work force. This is no longer true. The report states that quality early education is one of the best investments that a nation can make. As a result of the United States' lack in early education investments, the nation's place of superiority on a global scale has diminished. Children are too important to Alaska, the businesses in the state, the nation, and a global economy to allow them to fail.

He explained that the problem with early education is that in today's market it is difficult to sell quality early education by representing it with a single message: "let's do this because it's the right thing for kids." He noted that this is a critical part of early education, but it is a "losing hand" when trying to sell education in today's economic world. He said instead he will talk about quality education in regards to workforce, economic, and community development.

The competition is growing and Alaska's children today will be competing on a global level. The 55,000 children that are under the age of five in Alaska today need to be developing skills that will allow them to succeed. He informed the committee that many countries have more honor students than the US has students.

He noted that while there are many bad teachers in the U.S., there are also a lot of great teachers and they should not be the focal point of criticism for education in the US. Rather, the blame is one to be shared: by parents and by American society. The problem lies with children before they start in school. If this aspect is not fixed, then the education that is offered to students will be one of "patch and fill."

8:18:34 AM

MR. MILLET recalled an earlier meeting of the House Education Standing Committee regarding the Alaska Performance Scholarship Fund, when an individual testified that what happens in the early years drives what happens in the later years. The parent component to early education is crucial. He explained that no part of Best Beginnings is intended to impose government control on anything. Rather it is to provide opportunities for parents who want to become better informed on how to raise their kids and strengthen the quality and affordability of childcare across the states.

The United States Chamber of Commerce issued a report that stated there are four pillars of workforce development. The first pillar is early education and pre-kindergarten. If this first piece is done correctly then the outcomes are more successful and less costly to the state and to the nation. He noted that this report was issued four months ago and is available online.

He noted that Alaska is a very small part of the nation's population. He mentioned Robin Li, founder of Baidu (the "Chinese Google"), who has emphasized the importance of early

childhood education in order to be successful and compete in today's global economy.

The Business Roundtable includes 120 big name companies that represent 40 percent of the value on the New York stock exchange. The Roundtable issued a report that advocates policies that ensure vigorous economic growth. This report called for state and federal governments to make high quality early education a top priority for workforce development and a stronger economy. The Roundtable embraced five principles which include:

- Aligning the objectives of early education with K-12, so that every stage builds on the previous stage.
- Recognizing the value of teachers.
- Recognizing the primacy of parents as their children's first teachers.
- Embracing accountability for measurable results.
- Building local partnerships to finance, sustain, and improve the system.

He said Best Beginnings is a combination of these five principals and has been responsible in bringing this message to Alaskans and Alaska's legislators.

The Committee for Economic Development also issued a report on early education, titled The Value of High Quality Preschool Investments as Economic Tools by Dr. James Heckman. This report contrasted how wise it is to invest in early education and how the payoff is frequently better than in state incentive grants.

[8:26:58 AM](#)

MR. MILLET emphasized that in order to have an Alaskan workforce that is driven, motivated, and creative it is important to remember where this begins. He explained that these qualities do not begin in middle school or high school, but rather in the first four years of life. It is during these first four years that most connections are made in a child's brain. The environment in which a child grows determines the way their brain looks and their capabilities as an adult.

He noted Dr. James Heckman also stressed that "the earlier you invest [in education] the higher the rate of return." He said that this makes sense; in getting the first part right, all of the other benefits fall into place. However, the US tends to

invest in the backside rather than the front side. He stressed that the best investment is on the front side.

He said that the issues with education are not a teacher problem. It is a culture problem. In regards to education performance the US is 14th for reading proficiency, 17th for science proficiency, and 25th for math proficiency out of 34 countries. However, the countries the US is trying to compete with economically are at the very top.

The business community says that investments begin with early education. The consequences of not making that investment are substantial to the United States' place as a world power. According to the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, in ten years only six percent of 9th graders in Alaska will have a college degree and 38 percent of 9th graders will not have their high school degree. He stressed that Alaska is blessed with great natural resources; however, these have been inherited. Ultimately, what matters is the responsibility Alaska takes with its human resource.

He explained that it is not a question of American Society in terms of high school dropout rates. One-third of the students in American colleges today have to be enrolled in remedial education. There is a defined societal cost estimated at \$2.7 billion which is spent on these programs. He questioned what would happen if this money was invested up-front instead. The Education Commission of the States is made up of all 50 states and includes both democrats and republicans. The commission defines early education as the start of a trajectory that will ultimately determine success both educationally and in the corporate sector. He noted that it is important to recognize that this issue is non-partisan.

[8:37:20 AM](#)

MR. MILLET said that comparing the nation's states to one another is setting the bar low. He stressed that "we need to be comparing against countries that are beating us." He referred the committee to a report issued by The National Governor's Association. He noted that when he was a child, the rest of the world aspired to have an education in the US. Today, creativity rates are declining in the states. He explained that No Child Left Behind is forcing teachers into a very narrow curriculum and does not allow for innovation. Other countries are outperforming the United States when it comes to early childhood brain development. He reminded the committee that the countries

that succeed going forward will be the ones that are best prepared to generate ideas and solve creatively.

He introduced the word "obsoledge," which is a contraction of obsolete and knowledge. He explained that there is implication in teaching to the test because knowledge changes so quickly and children need to be able to think and adapt to new knowledge.

He said he is enthusiastic about one of Best Beginnings' programs, Imagination Library. For those communities that participate in the program from birth to age 5, parents get one book a month to read to their child. Alaska is facing many of the same challenges as other states in the U.S. and every state has fiscal problems. He said he is tired of hearing that the education problem is a money problem. He pointed to President Ronald Reagan's report [A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform] produced during his first term in office. He explained that since then distinguished groups of educators and corporations have generated similar contests.

The ramification of the United States' loss in global competitiveness over the last ten years is significant. He said "that's the message that needs to resonate through the hallways in Washington and Juneau and boardrooms across Alaska and across the nation."

He explained that while the US does have great postsecondary schools, 61 percent of students on American campuses receiving PhDs in sciences and math were foreign nationals. In the past these individuals have stayed in the US to work after completing their degree. However, increasingly these individuals are leaving and becoming part of the economic competition. He said, from an economic standpoint, the US has no American child to waste. He gave the analogy of an "educational pipeline" where 38 percent of the children "leak out" before high school graduation. He said "that's a disaster; equally important, but unrecognized."

He showed the committee a photo of 80 percent of the Intel Science Talent Search Winners in the United States. All of the individuals were first or second generation Americans. He asked the committee: "where are the rest of us?"

He stressed the importance of parents who are committed to their child's education and recognize the opportunities that America gives.

He used the analogy of baseball to explain that a country with "minor league talent" will not succeed on a "major league level." He reiterated that this begins with early childhood education.

8:48:08 AM

On a final point, Mr. Millet said the Mission Readiness Organization, led by senior retired military leaders, issued a report that stated: "72 percent of 17- to 24-year-olds do not meet the basic minimum standards required for military service." He said that this organization positions quality early education as a necessary investment to provide not only economic security, but national security.

He assured the committee that if the best care is not delivered to young children the United States will not remain competitive and this care begins during early education.

8:50:11 AM

CO-CHAIR THOMAS said some of the legislators had the opportunity to visit a Senate committee on outreach and steering in Washington D.C. The topic that day was education, in which 16 different organizations were represented. He said that almost all of these organizations pointed towards the importance of early education. He noted that change is always difficult. Recently the Senate Education Standing Committee passed a bill out that would lower the mandatory minimum school age to six and raise the age to 18. He said he appreciated Mr. Millet's approach on money for early education that they cannot afford not to make that investment.

8:52:08 AM

REPRESENTATIVE P. WILSON said she hoped that Mr. Millet would have a chance to speak with the House and Senate Finance Committees. She noted that education in the US has moved away from teaching personal responsibility. She asked how this fits in.

MR. MILLET replied that this fits into the parental support portion of early childhood education. He said that too many parents think that this is the teacher's job, and it's not. He reiterated that this is a cultural issue that needs to be addressed, unfortunately not just at a young level but at an adult level.

CHAIR DICK said that basketball is great competition within the villages of Alaska. He said that the competitive spirit is alive

here and it provokes for very healthy competition. He said he believes that the state has some of the most innovative people on the planet. He thanked him for his presentation.

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA agreed with Chair Dick. She said the challenge in Alaska is different. There are parts of the state that do not have an economic foundation or history that the rest of the nation does. She explained that there are pieces of success in the state that few other places have. The challenges that the nation and the world will face are playing out faster in the Alaska. The state has the potential of sustainability on another level which gives people choices that the rest of the world does not have. She said a presentation is needed that shows what Alaska can do that will put Alaska's children on the right page and give them the incentive to succeed.

[8:57:38 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked Mr. Millet what two or three books he would include for a reading list for Alaska's state legislators.

MR. MILLET replied first is Investing in Kids, whose author is the director of the Upjohn Institute for Workforce Development. This book documents, in measurable terms, the payoff from educational investments. Second, is a book titled The Sandbox Investment by David Kirp. He explained that there are several other books that discuss the competitive nature of the US versus other countries. He added that he will compile a complete reading list for the committees.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS said that he does not believe there is much doubt in the education committees' minds of the importance of early education.

[9:01:17 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Thomas adjourned the meeting at 9:01 a.m.