

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 30, 2011

8:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Cathy Giessel
Representative Tuck

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: CURRENT EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS IN ALASKA

- HEARD

SENATE BILL NO. 6

"An Act relating to providing a prekindergarten program within a school district; and providing for an effective date."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

BETH SNYDER, Early Childhood Teacher Specialist
Anchorage School District (ASD)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke on behalf of ASD's prekindergarten program.

MARK LACKEY, Executive Director

CCS Early Learning
Head Start
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a presentation on Head Start's role in early childhood education in Alaska.

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director
Best Beginnings
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a presentation on Best Beginning's role in early childhood education in Alaska.

KRISTEN RAMSTAD, Director
Parents as Teachers (PAT)
Rural Alaska Community Action Program Incorporated (RurAL CAP)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a presentation on Parents as Teachers' role in early childhood education in Alaska.

ACTION NARRATIVE

8:03:06 AM

CO-CHAIR KEVIN MEYER called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Davis, French, Stevens, Co-Chair Thomas and Co-Chair Meyer. [Due to technical difficulties the meeting was not recorded from 8:03 a.m. to 8:06 a.m.]

Presentation: Current Early Childhood Programs in Alaska

[8:06:49 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER announced that the order of business would be to hear a presentation from various groups involved with current early childhood programs in Alaska.

[8:08:45 AM](#)

BETH SNYDER, Early Childhood Teacher Specialist, Anchorage School District (ASD), said that districts throughout Alaska have had a successful history of providing services for children 3 to 5 years of age identified with early childhood developmental delays. She explained that prior to the 2009/2010 school year ASD had some prekindergarten programs funded by federal grants under Title I and migrant education. Through Alaska Pilot Pre-K (AP3) grant award process, along with two-year Title I stimulus funding (ARRA) ASD was able to add five additional classrooms for a total of 10 prekindergarten classrooms. She explained that during the past two years, with

the collaboration of Kids Corp Incorporated (KCI), ASD has, through a variety a funding sources, been able to provide services for more than 176 young children and their families annually at 11 school sites.

She noted that all of ASD's preschool programs serve specific populations based on funding sources. The AP3 collaboration sites require families to meet Head Start economic guidelines and prioritize children experiencing homelessness or who have been involved in the Alaska Child Protection Services.

She added that Title I funded programs reach out to families residing within school district neighborhoods that are most at-risk, with two slots in the Title I classrooms reserved for families experiencing homelessness.

8:11:56 AM

MS. SNYDER noted that ASD's preschools have 16 children per classroom and the sites provide breakfast and lunch. Schools are staffed by a full-time certified teacher and a part-time teaching assistant. Additionally, AP3 collaboration sites have an additional specialist who coordinates the comprehensive services program component. She stressed the importance of partnering with parents as a key to the overall success of the prekindergarten program.

She noted that Ready Kindergarten is offered three times annually at the AP3 sites. This program is sponsored by the National Reading Foundation and focuses on social and emotional development, language, and math skills.

The research based curriculums currently implemented at all of the schools sites were carefully considered. These curriculums use the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines for the prekindergarten standards. Multiple assessment tools are utilized throughout the school year, with ongoing data collection used to assist teachers with planning, monitor student growth, and for overall program accountability. ASD is also in the process of developing identifiers for students who have attended these prekindergarten programs in order to gather longitudinal data.

MS. SNYDER explained that the initial data from ASD's prekindergarten program is promising: students are better prepared for success in kindergarten and are confident learners.

She concluded her presentation with an example of one of the many positive outcomes of Anchorage's AP3 program. She explained

that research has documented both the short and long term benefits of high-quality prekindergarten for more than 50 years. She said that she hopes the committee will consider not only continuing the funding for the pilot prekindergarten program, but also consider increasing the funding allocation.

[8:18:49 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER said SB 6 would give funding for children to have access to prekindergarten schooling. He asked if ASD would have the capacity to accommodate all of these children if the bill were to pass.

MS. SNYDER replied that ASD has started to have these discussions and would need to look into space issues within the district. She reiterated that ASD is very excited about the current results on prekindergarten and that it would benefit the entire school system in Anchorage.

SENATOR FRENCH suggested that she think about a "phase in approach" that would gradually bring in every child in Alaska who wants to participate. He asked for confirmation that 176 children are currently taking advantage of the prekindergarten program in Anchorage.

MS. SNYDER concurred.

SENATOR FRENCH asked how many children in Anchorage might attend a prekindergarten program if it were made available.

MS. SNYDER replied that this question could be better addressed by Head Start because of its community assessment process. She noted that through this collaborative process ASD now understands more about the demographics of Anchorage, who is currently being served, and who is not.

SENATOR FRENCH asked for confirmation that the selection criteria for the AP3 program were similar to Head Start in regards to its focus group.

MS. SNYDER replied yes. She noted that ELL (English Language Learners) students also had priority in selection.

[8:22:49 AM](#)

MARK LACKEY, Executive Director, CCS Early Learning, Head Start, said he is speaking on behalf of all of Head Start in the state. With regard to Senator French's question, Anchorage has an estimated 874 Head Start eligible children in the municipality,

of which 630 of these children are currently being served. He noted that these numbers are based on age and income level, it does not take into account children with disabilities and children who are over the income limit. He added that roughly half of the eligible children in the Matanuska Susitna Valley are being served.

SENATOR FRENCH asked what the income limit is for Head Start.

MR. LACKEY said page 2 of the Head Start document addresses the income level [included in the document packet] and would be discussed during his presentation.

He explained that, in his experience, there tends to be a lot of confusion on the differences between the prekindergarten programs available. Page 1 of the document summarizes what Head Start does. He explained that the services provided by Head Start are individualized for each child in an attempt to move them forward. He noted that the other focus of Head Start's work is family education and empowerment.

He added that the document lists some of the comprehensive things that Head Start provides and the program's overall goals.

Page 2 addressed who is eligible to attend Head Start:

- Children who are at least three (3) years of age by September 1 of the current year and are not yet old enough for kindergarten, and
- Whose family income is at or below the Alaska poverty income guidelines are eligible. Head Start grantees can fill up to 10 percent (49 percent for programs operated by Alaska Native Organizations) of their total enrollment with children whose family income exceeds the Alaska poverty income guidelines.
- Up to 35 percent of a program's total enrollment may fall between 100 and 130 percent of poverty if the program can demonstrate that the needs of children and families under 100 percent are being met.
- 10 percent of the total enrollment must be set aside for children with diagnosed disabilities.

He continued that page 2 also included individuals who are categorically eligible:

- Families who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Homeless families
- Children who have a family member that is on Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
- Children in foster care are categorically eligible for Head Start, regardless of their foster family's income

He noted that these are all federal requirements.

8:32:58 AM

MR. LACKEY said page 3 outlines what makes Head Start different from other early childhood programs:

- Head Start is a comprehensive program that looks at the entire child (Health, Nutrition, Mental Health, Dental, etc) and also focuses on the child's family.
- Governed by parents (Policy Council) and by the community (Governing Body).
- In-kind and non-federal share contributions from parents and community.
- Head Start has over 45 years of history and continuous improvement behind it. The systems for delivering services, governance, monitoring and reporting are already in place.
- Professional development qualifications/mandates.

Page 4 summarized how Head Start fits into the overall work of the state in early childhood education. He noted that Head Start is the largest program and services 3,400 children in 100 communities throughout the state. Head Start also works with Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to create a consistent system for data collection and analysis. It partners with all other programs in the state that provide early childhood education or family services.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked what Head Start uses as a comparison to determine the results of the program.

MR. LACKEY replied that there have been national studies on children who received Head Start services versus those who have not.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS referenced page 2 of the document. He asked what a one person family unit would be [in reference to the first table].

MR. LACKEY replied that wouldn't apply.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked what the program costs statewide per child.

MR. LACKEY replied it depends on the community but, generally, it is about \$10,000 per child.

SENATOR STEVENS asked how many students in the communities that he serves are considered homeless.

MR. LACKEY replied that for the program in the Matanuska Susitna Valley there were about 22 families that were categorized as homeless last year.

CO-CHAIR MEYER commented that this is a fairly large number.

[8:42:08 AM](#)

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director, Best Beginnings, explained that Best Beginnings is a movement that began in 2006 to carry out the recommendations made by the Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Task Force. She noted that the movement works with many partners at the state and local level in order to support parents as a child's first teacher, promote access to high-quality and affordable early-learning programs, increase awareness of the importance of early learning, and make sure that sufficient funds are committed from public and private sources.

Best Beginnings leverages state funding with contributions from foundations, businesses, community organizations, and individuals. She stressed that young children are best served by a statewide early childhood system that empowers families and engages communities. She explained that Best Beginnings pursues this goal by promoting early learning activities, public education and awareness, early literacy, and community partnerships.

She gave some examples of Best Beginnings efforts including its decision to take up statewide sponsorship of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. In Alaska, Imagination Library is run differently and is community based and volunteer driven. She noted that an evaluation of Imagination Library in Alaska showed

that children enrolled for longer than one year had more books in their home, were read to more, and were more enthusiastic about reading.

8:47:23 AM

MS. HENSLEY explained that a more comprehensive effort to improve early-learning opportunities for young children is being taken on by a network of 11 early childhood partnerships across the state. She explained that, with the help of Best Beginnings, these partnerships are working to improve coordination of programs and services and promote a better use of resources. She gave an example of what is happening in one particular community with a Best Beginnings partnership.

She noted that Best Beginnings would like to see a comprehensive birth to five early childhood system that includes many options for families and their children. She recommended a diverse system for prekindergarten, in relation to SB 6 and the space needs. She explained that, for example, the prekindergarten program could be delivered through childcare centers. Best Beginnings would like to continue this conversation over the interim in order to encourage a greater understanding of the issues surrounding early-learning.

She added that Mark Lackey and Beth Snyder are both participants in Best Beginnings early childhood partnerships in their communities.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said part of the purpose of today's presentations is to share with the committee the various organizations that are involved with prekindergarten programs and are working together.

8:55:40 AM

KRISTEN RAMSTAD, Director, Parents as Teachers (PAT), Rural Alaska Community Action Program Incorporated (RurAL CAP), said PAT is based on the philosophy that parents are a child's first and most influential teachers.

She noted that page 2 of the PAT Power Point lists the goals of the program [included in document packet]:

- 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

- Increase children's school readiness and school success

She explained that the PAT program consists of four components and is completely voluntary. These components include personalized meetings with families, group socializations, annual developmental, vision, and hearing screening, and access to resource referrals.

She continued with page 3 of the presentation, which lists what PAT does:

- Certified parent educators provide research-based information and utilize evidence-based practices by partnering, facilitating and reflecting with families
- Parent educators use the Parents as Teachers Foundational Curriculum in culturally sensitive ways to deliver services that emphasize:
 - Parent-Child Interaction
 - Development-Centered Parenting
 - Family Well-Being

She explained that during the parent-child interaction portion of a home visit an activity is presented that focuses on parent-child interactions, prompt parent engagement, and encouraging child development. With regard to development-centered parenting, educators explain the link between a child's stage of development, the child's behavior, and appropriate parent decisions. Finally, parent educators focus on family well-being by working to strengthen protective factors in each family.

Page 5 of the presentation listed who PAT serves:

- Families with children birth to five
- Special populations: teen parents, children with special needs, culturally and linguistically diverse families, military families, and families referred by OCS [Office of Children's Services]
- Rural and urban communities
- Families in intervention school districts

She explained that 71 percent of PAT is delivered by non-profit agencies and 29 percent is delivered by school districts.

Page 7 listed the demographics of PAT from the 2009-2010 program year. She noted that around the state PAT was in 39 communities and served 781 families and 967 children. The page also listed the ethnicities of the children served.

[9:00:03 AM](#)

MS. RAMSTAD continued with her presentation. Page 8 listed how PAT is different from other programs:

- Parents as teachers
- Connects parents to other parents
- Incorporates brain development information
- Resources to extend learning opportunities for children in the home
- State Advisory Board
- Certified parents educators
- Modest investment for high returns/outcomes

She explained that the last bullet point is one of the most important differences. PAT has a very low cost to deliver PAT services, with an average cost between \$3,200 and \$4,000 per family.

Page 10 included some PAT results from around the state. She shared some of the successes that have been unique to Rural CAP in the past year.

Page 11 explained how PAT fits in with the other early childhood programs in the state. She noted that PAT is primarily a birth-three program, which transitions into Head Start or private/public preschool, and then to school districts. She explained that PAT also uses the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines to guide its work.

[9:03:48 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH commented that PAT is by far the most cost-effective program that the committee has heard from. He noted that while the program does not offer all-day instruction, it does train parents.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said that there are other organizations that he would like to have testify or give an overview. He asked these organizations, including Child Care Resources and Families First, to send the committee information. He noted that the committee will take public testimony on SB 6 on Friday. He said that, additionally, the committee would like to receive an

update on the AP3 program. He emphasized that prekindergarten is a big issue and topic.

9:07:36 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Meyer adjourned the meeting at 9:07 a.m.