

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

April 1, 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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Gary Stevens

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 6

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

-HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 6

SHORT TITLE: PREKINDERGARTEN SCHOOL PROGRAMS/PLANS

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) DAVIS, FRENCH

01/19/11	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/7/11
01/19/11	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/19/11	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/28/11	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/28/11	(S)	Scheduled But Not Heard
03/14/11	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/14/11	(S)	Scheduled But Not Heard
03/25/11	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/25/11	(S)	Heard & Held
03/25/11	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/30/11	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/30/11	(S)	Scheduled But Not Heard
04/01/11	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

KELLY MCBRIDE, representing herself

Matanuska Susitna Valley, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 6.

CARL ROSE, Lobbyist

Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 6.

CHRIS MURRAY, parent

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 6.

CYNTHIA CURRAN, Director

Division of Teaching and Learning Support

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an update on the Alaska Preschool Pilot Project (AP3) and answered questions of the committee.

PAUL SUGAR, Education Specialist II

Division of Teaching and Learning Support

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an update on the Alaska Preschool Pilot Project (AP3) and answered questions of the committee.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:03:24 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 French, Davis, Co-Chair Thomas and Co-Chair Meyer.

SB 6-PREKINDERGARTEN SCHOOL PROGRAMS/PLANS

[8:03:44 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER announced the consideration of SB 6. [CSSB 6(), version B, was before the committee.]

He said that the committee would begin by taking public testimony and then receive a progress-report from the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) on the Alaska Prekindergarten Pilot Project (AP3).

[8:04:45 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER opened public testimony.

8:05:03 AM

KELLY MCBRIDE, representing herself, testified in support of SB 6. She noted that she is a teacher in the Matanuska Susitna School District working with the Best Beginnings Matanuska Susitna Partnership. She explained that in the "Mat-Su" many children do not have the opportunity to go to preschool because they do not qualify for special education or their family's income is too high to qualify for Head Start. She noted that even if children do qualify for Head Start they may be on a waitlist. She reminded the committee of Mark Lackey's [executive director of CCS Early Learning with Head Start in the Matanuska Susitna Valley] testimony from a previous committee meeting, where he stated that out of about 400 eligible children in the "Mat-Su," there are only slots available for about 200 children. She stressed that there are about 1,200 4-year-olds this year in the "Mat-Su," of which about 850 do not have the opportunity to go to a free public preschool. She explained that in the "Mat-Su" about half of the students entering kindergarten are not ready to read and, on standardized assessments at the beginning of the year, 48 percent of the students are below proficient in the reading indicators.

She said during the previous school year the district had a pilot preschool program in one of its low socio-economic schools, with three students who had IEP's [Individual Education Plan] and the remainder of the classroom filled with typical peers. She explained that these students are now in kindergarten and every single one is proficient in reading, have better social skills, and are more ready to learn. She added that 70 percent of the children who attend the district's special education preschools will go to kindergarten needing either no services or solely speech therapy. She said "we know that here in Alaska early intervention works." She stressed that dollars spent on early education should not be looked at as solely an expense, but as an investment. Research has shown that students who attend preschool are less likely to repeat grades or to require costly interventions or special education services. She continued that students are also more likely to graduate from high school, have a job, and own a home. She urged the committee to pass SB 6.

8:08:14 AM

SENATOR FRENCH asked her to tell the committee more about the pilot prekindergarten program that the district ran last year and whether it was funded through the AP3 program or by the district.

MS. MCBRIDE replied that this was something that the Matanuska Susitna Valley District did on its own. She explained that as the coordinator of the special education preschools in the district, she had several 3- and 4-year-old children who lived near Willow and the closest preschool was two hours away at Big Lake Elementary School. She explained that, for this reason, the district created a half-time preschool in that area and added seven or eight regular children to the class.

SENATOR FRENCH asked if the teacher was a Matanuska Susitna Valley School District teacher.

MS. MCBRIDE replied yes.

SENATOR FRENCH asked for confirmation that this program was located at the Willow Elementary School.

MS. MCBRIDGE replied yes. She noted that "pilot" is not the correct word; it was a creative solution for what was needed in that setting.

SENATOR FRENCH said that he doesn't think the label matters. He noted that it is important to be creative where possible with such a large school district to cover.

MS. MCBRDIGE replied yes. She said that in looking at this creatively, SB 6 would give other districts the opportunity to create similar programs and give families more options.

[8:10:18 AM](#)

CARL ROSE, Lobbyist, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), testified in support of SB 6. He said that there is a growing awareness of the importance of early childhood development and learning. He said that AASB had a guest speaker at its conference last November, Dr. Lynn Fielding, an early childhood specialist, who covered the entire realm of ready for kindergarten and ready to read. He said that he was surprised to learn that children begin to group themselves in terms of trend lines and learning from the time that they are born and are set by the time that they are 5-years-old. He stressed that when taking particular care with infants and young children to prepare them for kindergarten, these children tend to "trend out" at the higher rates of learning. He emphasized that these trend lines may not change for the rest of a child's school career, since schools are good at teaching content, but not necessarily good at remediation or intervention.

He said that parents, families, and communities can address childhood development far better than the government until a child gets to be about 3 or 4 years of age. He explained that early childhood development and learning goes from infancy to 5-years-old and then kindergarten through third grade in terms of reading proficiency. He said that if a child is proficient in reading, writing, and math by third grade, they are prepared for success. If a child is not prepared, then they will struggle. He explained that the growing awareness of the importance of early education is a "game changer" and SB 6 is one component of how to prepare Alaska's children for success.

[8:14:36 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS commented that he thinks everyone in the committee believes that the time between birth and 5 years is an extremely important timeframe for learning. He said that the issue is trying to convince 30- to 60-year-olds of this importance.

CHAIR FRENCH asked if he is referring to the legislature.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS replied the legislature and the general public.

[8:15:39 AM](#)

CHRIS MURRAY, parent, testified in support of SB 6. He explained that he is the father of an 18-month-old son and whenever he asks for tips on raising a child, the discussion always turns to child care and early education. He said that the lack of quality, affordable child care affects his family on a daily basis and the issue remains as to how to find good child care at a reasonable cost. He added that his son's enrollment at a nonprofit school on a part-time basis in Juneau costs more than the current cost it would take for him to attend a state university.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked what daycare his son attends.

MR. MURRAY replied the Juneau Montessori School; for four hours a day, the family pays \$700 per month.

[8:19:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER closed public testimony.

He asked the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to give an update on the pilot prekindergarten program and how it could possibly join with SB 6.

[8:20:40 AM](#)

CYNTHIA CURRAN, Director, Division of Teaching and Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) referred the committee to an additional handout regarding the AP3 [titled Information on the Alaska Preschool Pilot Project, included in the document packet]. Page 1 discussed the selection of AP3 grantees and sites and the RFA [Requests for Applications] process that was used. She said that originally 24 school districts considered applying and that 12 actually applied. The successful applicants were listed in bold on page 1. She noted that a particular process was used to select districts using a scoring rubric and was located on the following 10 pages.

[8:22:29 AM](#)

PAUL SUGAR, Education Specialist II, Division of Teaching and Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), explained that the rubric was broken down into larger areas, followed by subareas. Part A, on page 2, included the applicant's need for a project. He explained that a list of questions was included specifically geared towards showing proof of that need. The bottom column included the amount of scoring for each question within that breakdown (page 2 and 3).

He said he believes that part B, the program design, is the largest component of the rubric. He noted that the structure is similar to the previous section and lists a number of questions that are designed for applicants to demonstrate what their specific design and approach would be with the pilot. He noted that some of the requirements included the implementation and use of the Early Learning Guidelines and developmentally appropriate practices.

Part C addressed parent support and involvement (page 5) and included the same question and scoring rubric structure.

Section D focused on the adequacy of resources. He explained that this section required applicants to describe their staffing for the proposed program, including job descriptions of the positions and the various types of professional development needed in order to provide for the children within the pilot.

Section E was the management plan. He explained that this section asked applicants to describe the organizational structure set for the program, the timeline for the program

implementation, and information on the materials that would be used for the program.

Section F was the program evaluation. He said that within this section applicants had to describe how the evaluation information would be used and include a list of the different types of data that would be used.

Section G focused on previous success or promise of success. He explained that this gave the applicant an opportunity to show what experience they have in providing quality early childhood education. And, if the applicant does not have the experience, explaining how the structure and model that they have proposed will lead them to success.

Section H was the budget. He said that all applicants submitted a proposed budget for the program. He explained that after the scoring was completed from DEED, the University of Alaska, and Best Beginnings, the applicant and the department entered into a negotiation process regarding the budget. He noted that no applicant received the full amount of dollars that was originally submitted in the proposed budgets. He explained that by doing this there was enough money to provide services to six districts and still maintain a small set-aside for intervention districts.

[8:27:37 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH asked, if this program continues, whether DEED will be starting from scratch on this project by soliciting new applications.

MR. SUGAR replied that DEED would be looking at one more year with the districts currently in the program in order to get a third set of data points for the pilot. He explained that after one more year, should the funding remain, the competition for that money would be open to all districts.

MS. CURRAN added that DEED will use the data it has collected from the current pilot to inform the next round of competition. She explained that the department will look for the pieces of programs that have, in the past, created the greatest results.

SENATOR FRENCH said that he hoped Ms. Curran or Mr. Sugar could address the different types of curricula used for the pilots (page 11).

MS. CURRAN replied that, keeping in mind that collaboration and transitioning children so that they are ready to learn in kindergarten was paramount in this project, it was important that grantees worked with other entities within the boundaries of the school district. She noted districts were allowed to choose its own curriculum, though it had to align with the early learning guidelines put out by DEED. She pointed out that there were a variety of curriculums. For example, Anchorage used the Houghton Mifflin (early literacy) curriculum, which is the literacy program used by the two Title I schools in Anchorage where an AP3 program was created.

She explained that the Creative Curriculum focuses on all curricular areas. She pointed out the literacy curriculums that were used by the various districts. There was an emphasis in all of the districts on social/emotional and self-regulation curriculums through Sharing and Learning Place, Conscious Discipline, and Second Step, she noted.

She said that each grantee was able to choose the curriculum that would work for it and DEED is currently collecting data on each of these curriculums. She noted that the results of the outcome assessments are included in the handout.

SENATOR FRENCH asked what Bering Strait, Nome Public Schools, and Yukon Koyukuk did in the way of math since these districts didn't have a specific math curriculum or use the Creative Curriculum.

MR. SUGAR replied that while Success for All is a literacy program, the Curiosity Corner is a multi-content area that includes math.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked for confirmation that the first year began in September of 2009 and whether there were any missteps that were changed for the program for the second year.

MR. SUGAR replied in terms of the curricular use, discussions, and assessments everything has remained the same. He added that the department did see some bumps in the road with regard to how processes and programs that have different administrations and structures work together; for example, when Head Start and a school district are working together. He explained that this tended to lead to the recognition of the hard work of developing new approaches through multiple systems and gave more depth to the discussion and level of collaboration.

MS. CURRAN noted that the last three pages of the handout include charts and a brief narrative regarding information on district level assessments [pages 13-15].

MR. SUGAR gave some examples of assessment data that was collected on the district level:

- On the PPVT [Peabody Picture Vocabulary test] children in Yukon-Koyukuk made the highest percentage of growth, with 31 percent of the children scoring in the top half on that assessment.
- Both Nome and Juneau saw 38 percent of children moving from the bottom half to scoring in the top half on the DIAL-3 [Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning, 3rd edition] Total Assessment. This assessment looks at all of language, development, motor development, and concept.
- Motor development was Alaska's children's strongest area on the DIAL-3. Nome showed the greatest growth with 35 percent of the children in the project moving from scoring in the bottom half to scoring in the top half when compared to their same-aged peers nationally.
- Juneau showed the most growth in Concept Development on the DIAL-3 with 27 percent of the children moving into the top half from the bottom half in scoring.
- With a 43 percent change from scoring in the bottom half in the fall to scoring in the top half in the spring, Nome made the most growth in Language Development.

[8:37:57 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER said the current funding for the AP3 is \$2 million. He asked if the funding amount was \$4 million whether twice as many children could be reached.

MS. CURRAN replied yes; the department would be able to reach additional children. She noted that cost varies depending on the area of the state. She said that she could not give the committee the number of students that the department could reach, because it would depend on which areas would want to have the grants and how much the cost would be in those areas.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if there are other sites that would like to participate in the program but weren't able to.

MS. CURRAN replied that there were originally 24 districts that considered applying, but, for whatever reason did not for this particular program. She noted that there were 12 districts that

did apply and unfortunately there wasn't enough money to give all of these districts a pilot program. She said that she believes the interest in the project is increasing as more is learned about the AP3 and there will be more districts that would apply in the future.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said after the second year of the program positive results are already showing and the demand for these programs exists. He said "why wouldn't we ask for more money to keep the program going?" He said that perhaps this question should be left for the Finance Committees, but, in his opinion, if there is something that is working, it should be exploited.

[8:40:29 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH concurred with Senator Meyer. He asked how school districts selected the children to participate in the program.

MR. SUGAR replied that as part of the application process, applicants needed to show the department their eligibility requirements. He explained that in terms of eligibility DEED was trying to target the "neediest of the needy" first.

CHAIR FRENCH asked if DEED was looking at income levels or learning abilities.

MR. SUGAR replied that it is very similar to the Head Start approach described by Mr. Lackey. He explained that the department looked at a variety of issues including income eligibility, special needs, other disabilities, children living in foster homes, etcetera. He noted that two-thirds of the AP3 programs are in partnership with Head Start. He explained that in terms of finding the children it sometimes meant going out and knocking on doors to inform parents about the program and how the application process in order for their children to enter the program. He noted that Nome in particular used that process.

SENATOR FRENCH asked if it was his sense that there were more kids than spaces or vice versa.

MR.S SUGAR replied that there were more kids in general, but it depended on the area.

[8:43:02 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked if the attempt was to create a representative group of kids in the particular area or if there was an inclination towards children that might potentially produce the most success.

MR. SUGAR replied that the department did not go into this trying to prove success, but rather to try and provide a service to those children in need.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS explained that his question was geared towards understanding whether each area had a representative group rather than a sorting process done by a community, which would lead to more success than could generally be expected. He noted that in having representative groups the results from the project could generally be used to understand what to expect in the future.

MS. CURRAN said that the department has a representative sampling of the neediest of the needy.

SENATOR FRENCH asked how large the program would need to get in order to accommodate the "average citizen's" child, such as Mr. Murray's.

MS. CURRAN said in order to be able to reach the greatest number of children it would require a statewide program. She reminded the committee that "one size never fits all," which means that a variety of programs and processes are necessary so that parents can choose where they want their child to be. She stressed that "we need to provide services for everyone, so that everyone will have a choice."

CO-CHAIR MEYER said that the answer to Senator French's question may be the fiscal note of SB 6. He noted that Senator Davis' goal is for a program that would include all students, not only low income.

[8:48:11 AM](#)

MR. SUGAR turned to the handout titled Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC) [included in the document packet]. He explained that the purpose of AECCC is to promote positive development, improved health outcomes, and school readiness for children prenatal through age eight by creating a culturally responsive, comprehensive, and accessible service delivery system. He said that the council will address the integration of multiple early childhood initiatives at the local, state, and federal level such as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C, Part B, and Part B-619 requirements, the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) plan, the Head Start Collaboration needs assessment and plan, the State Child Care and Development Fund plan, the Alaska Pilot Prekindergarten

Project, early childhood health and nutrition initiatives, and Best Beginnings priorities.

MS. CURRAN said that the council was created in October of 2010 and will meet quarterly, with the first meeting on May 2, 2011 in Anchorage. She explained that during the first year the council will be creating a statewide early childhood needs assessment and a statewide strategic report that would include recommendations for increasing participation of children in early childhood learning. She noted that the goal is not a duplication of services, but coordination of services so that individuals know what is available to them.

MR. SUGAR said that the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 was the vehicle that the federal legislature chose to move this project forward. He noted that even though the call for all of these various groups to be represented in a state-level council came through the Head Start Act, great care was taken to recognize that this was not a Head Start council; this is an all early childhood council.

He noted that in October the governor issued an administrative order designating what was then called the Intradepartmental Early Childhood Coordinating Council (IECCC) as the body that would become the new state-level advisory council. He explained that, at that time, only state department individuals were working on the council. However, now that the council is going statewide, the council has branched out and new individuals are being brought in to the structure, in particular from the private sector.

He explained that in terms of the public sector, the structure of the council will have staff from the governor's office, appropriate DEED staff, and representation from the University of Alaska system. In terms of the private sector, Best Beginnings, the Alaska Childcare Resource and Referral Network, the Alaska Chamber of Commerce, and a wide variety of associations including the Superintendents Association, the Association of Alaska School Boards, and the Head Start Association. He noted that the council will also include an Alaska Native health provider, a mental health provider, a member of the faith-based community, and a representative parent who has a young child. He added that the commissioners from DEED and the Department of Health and Social Services would serve as the co-chairs of the council.

MS. CURRAN said that as the council meets there will be a synopsis of what happens at the meetings, which can be provided to the Senate Education Standing Committee. She added that as more information comes out of the council and a report published, DEED can make copies of this available as well.

8:55:08 AM

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked why there are no members of the legislature on the council.

MS. CURRAN replied that the list was provided to the Division of Teaching and Learning Support. She noted that members of the legislature are welcome to attend the meetings. She explained that she thinks the goal was keep the group as small as possible. However, as the council's committee structure moves forward there would be opportunities for other people to join in on different committees.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said that the council should seriously consider including a member of the legislature. He explained that as the appropriating body it is important to keep the legislature's members educated on what is going on.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS said that this is a fairly lengthy list of council members. He concurred with Senator Meyer that it would be helpful to have the governor's office and members of the legislature discuss where the program is headed and how to get there. He asked if there is an anticipated date of delivering a final product or report.

MS. CURRAN replied that in the first year of the council, the hope is to have the report completed by next May.

CO-CHAIR MEYER noted that there are two different opinions as to how much money should go to AP3. He said that he would like to see the legislature more involved with the process. He noted that SB 6 is a more comprehensive approach, with a large fiscal note of \$83 million. He said, in his personal opinion, that the committee is not ready to move this bill forward yet. He said that a more comprehensive and unified approach to prekindergarten is needed and it seems this is what the council is trying to do as well. He noted that the committee looks forward to another update on the AP3 program next year.

8:59:51 AM

SENATOR DAVIS said she appreciates the testimony and the reports that have been brought forward for the committee. She noted that

very little has been done to address SB 6. She stressed that the bill is not going to happen overnight and more discussion is needed. She said that she does not want to expand the pilot program because it is already known to work. She stressed the importance of having a preschool program that will pick up all 4-year-olds that need to go to school. She said it is important to take the time to go through SB 6. She noted that even if the committee moves the bill out that does not mean that any money will be appropriated this year or next; the accompanying fiscal note is for 2013. She acknowledged that the department is doing a great job for the children that are being served, however there is a whole group of children that aren't eligible for these programs. She said that education should be considered more at the local level, rather than from the state level. She said that she plans to hold hearings on SB 6; however, the bill has not been addressed by Senate Education Standing Committee.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said he believes that the committee supports SB 6 in concept. However, he explained that he is not sure if the districts are prepared for it.

SENATOR DAVIS said "the school districts are saying they are ready for this program." She said that the legislature should help as many children as possible to get an early start in education. She questioned if the education committee can't step up to the plate then "who's going to do it?"

CO-CHAIR MEYER reiterated that he has not heard from any of the school districts, except from Superintendent Carol Comeau from Anchorage who briefly touched on the bill.

9:04:04 AM

SENATOR FRENCH said that he would like to hear a discussion with the administration over the fiscal note because it does bear some examination. He noted that there is a struggle to even get an increase to the BSA [Base Student Allocation] this year in the legislature. He said that he would rather have SB 6 sit in the Senate Education Standing Committee so that more work can be done on it.

SENATOR DAVIS agreed. She explained that she doesn't feel that the committee has put enough time into the bill. She noted that she never asked that the bill be moved out of the committee to the Finance Committee.

CO-CHAIR MEYER announced he would hold SB 6 in committee.

9:06:06 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Meyer adjourned the meeting at 9:06 a.m.