

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 27, 2012
8:04 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

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 & 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)
04/01/11	(S)	Heard & Held
04/01/11	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/08/11	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

04/08/11 (S) Heard & Held
04/08/11 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
02/27/12 (S) EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

THOMAS OBERMEYER, Staff
Senator Bettye Davis
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Addressed the committee substitute for SB 6.

LYNN REYNOLDS, representing himself
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Did not support SB 6.

LOLITA BRACHE, representing herself
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 6.

JOHN ALCANTRA, Director
Government Relations
National Education Association-Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 6.

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions related to SB 6 and Moore Case Settlement.

CYNTHIA CURRAN, Director
Teaching and Learning Support
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions related to SB 6 and Moore Case Settlement.

ACTION NARRATIVE

8:04:36 AM

CO-CHAIR JOE THOMAS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stevens, Davis, Co-Chair Meyer and Co-Chair Thomas.

SB 6-PREKINDERGARTEN SCHOOL PROGRAMS/PLANS

8:05:03 AM

CO-CHAIR THOMAS announced the consideration of SB 6. He said SB 6 was heard last year along with several presentations on the importance of early childhood education and the economic value of Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) programs. He said many of the major Alaskan organizations involved in early childhood education provided information; Best Beginnings, Alaska Head Start and Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc. He said the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) presented an update on their Pilot Pre-K Project. He noted that Senator French led a group of legislative aides to Allakaket and Mento to see their Pre-K programs in action. He said there was also a statewide council on early childhood education that initiated meetings in May, 2011 and was scheduled to present a final report in June, 2012.

He asked for a motion to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for SB 6.

8:06:21 AM

CO-CHAIR MEYER moved to adopt the CS for SB 6, labeled 27-LS0058\I, as the working document.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS objected for the purposes of discussion.

8:06:43 AM

THOMAS OBERMEYER, Staff to Senator Bettye Davis, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of SB 6, said the CS would change the age for a student enrolled in a public Pre-K program from four and five years of age to four years of age. He said the CS would provide for the inclusion of Pre-K students in the student count without providing for an exception for the first year of the program in order to allow for an estimated count. He said the CS would change the inclusion from part-time student to not more than half-time student. He noted that the change was significant because it would potentially cut the fiscal note in half.

SENATOR STEVENS asked why the fiscal note was cut in half.

MR. OBERMEYER answered that the original bill counted Pre-K students as full-time rather than half-time.

8:09:03 AM

SENATOR DAVIS said Alaska should have a statewide Pre-K program. She noted the proven benefits from other states and emphasized the importance of a Pre-K program.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked if there were any substantial changes in the bill from the CS.

SENATOR DAVIS replied that the changes were noted by Mr. Obermeyer.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked if the changes noted by Mr. Obermeyer were the only ones.

SENATOR DAVIS answered yes.

MR. OBERMEYER said the Pre-K program would be optional to school districts and DEED would be obliged to provide funding if a district elected to participate. He noted that parental participation would not be mandatory.

[8:11:43 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH joined the meeting.

SENATOR DAVIS noted that Pre-K would be similar to kindergarten as an optional enrollment program. She said parents had a better understanding that early education prepared children for first grade. She said the state could not go wrong by initiating a statewide Pre-K program and noted that nothing would be taken away from other programs.

SENATOR FRENCH said he would go over some of the results from the Alaska Pilot Pre-Kindergarten Project (AP3) Year Two Report.

He said the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) provided information on vocabulary and receptive language development from age 2 years 6 months, to age 7 years and 4 months. He said PPVT was an English language assessment that was used with large numbers of early childhood settings for many years and was known for its correlation to later school success. He said PPVT allowed for national comparison and for growth model use in a pre and post methodology.

[8:15:06 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH said PPTV measured different aspects of learning and boiled down to how much children were growing in relation to normal growth patterns. He said 78 percent of AP3 students had shown more than expected growth.

He said the Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning Third Edition (DIAL-3) was a separate set of tests for screening cognitive developmental delays in children who were ages 3 years to 6 years 11 months. He said DIAL-3 had three subtests that measured motor, concept and language skills. He said fall versus spring results for the total score percentages increased from 12 percent to 41 percent for the top quartile and decreased from 47 percent to 24 percent for the bottom quartile. He said the AP3 program was pushing kids up the ladder and worked on the bottom just as strongly as it worked on the top.

[8:19:29 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH said the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) was a multi-valued test that measured: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure, and Parents and Staff. He said ECERS reached the same conclusions as in the other test that AP3 students had higher rates of growth. He noted that the structured set of measurements had shown that the money being spent on AP3 was going to good use.

He said some of the AP3 kids were not moving up, but generally most children were making large strides in their development. He noted that some detractors had pointed out that a Pre-K program put children in school at too early of an age. He said every piece of data shows that Pre-K programs work.

[8:22:29 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH noted the recent Senate Judiciary Committee's Crime Summit and the presentation given by Annie Pennucci, a researcher for the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP). He said Ms. Pennucci addressed the long term benefits from a Pre-K program that included lowered crime rates, reduced cost in special education, decreased grade repetition, improved high school graduation rates, lowered child abuse rates and higher paying job attainment. He said the AP3 program should continue to be pushed out until it was available statewide for any child.

SENATOR STEVENS asked if the long term cost savings from a Pre-K program could be quantified.

SENATOR FRENCH answered that he did not know and would get back to the Senator with information. He noted that WSIPP had analysis that showed upfront Pre-K investment made more over time.

SENATOR STEVENS responded that it was easy to say "this causes that" without proof. He said reviewing the facts and figures would be valuable.

[8:25:47 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if SB 6 would satisfy recommendations in the Moore Case Settlement.

SENATOR FRENCH answered that the Moore Case Settlement addressed poor performing schools and SB 6 would move kids up the ladder. He said it may take a few years, but SB 6 would certainly be within the keeping of the spirit of the Moore Case Settlement.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS commented that DEED would be asked to address the bill's fiscal note and impact regarding the Moore Case Settlement.

[8:27:25 AM](#)

LYNN REYNOLDS, representing himself, Wasilla, said he was concerned about funding a Pre-K program and the effects of group-learning at an early age.

LOLITA BRACHE, representing herself, Homer, said she was an educator and an advocate of early childhood education.

[8:35:01 AM](#)

JOHN ALCANTRA, Director, Government Relations, National Education Association-Alaska (NEAA), Anchorage, said NEAA supported Pre-K programs.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS announced that public testimony was closed.

[8:37:03 AM](#)

CYNTHIA CURRAN, Director, Teaching and Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development, Juneau, said the fiscal note was originally written for full-time and the amount would change if the CS was adopted. She said DEED would redo the fiscal note from \$83 million to approximately \$41 million.

She said with regard to the Moore Case, AS 14.17.905 was amended by adding a new subsection to read:

A school district may not include in the average daily membership of a school, students who are four years of age, if the students are enrolled in a program that

receives funding, other than funding under this chapter.

She said DEED would like to seek the opinion of the attorney general due to the possible impact on the Moore Case Settlement.

[8:38:29 AM](#)

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, said SB 6 may or may not affect the Moore Case Settlement. He said there were Pre-K components in the Moore Case Settlement and DEED would ask the attorney general for his opinion.

SENATOR DAVIS asked in which way the language in SB 6 would impact the Moore Case Settlement. She said there could not be a negative impact from SB 6 and the money was set aside regardless if the state moved forward with a Pre-K program.

MR. MORSE answered that there was funding language that had to be clarified. He said he did not think there would be a problem, but he would like the attorney general to weigh in.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS responded that contacting the attorney general would be helpful.

[8:41:01 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH said there was a very strong Pre-K component in the Moore Case Settlement. He noted there was a rationale in the settlement to include a Pre-K component.

MR. MORSE responded that he would not want to speculate having not directly participated in the settlement discussions.

SENATOR FRENCH asked if \$6 million (\$2 million over three years) was appropriated for Pre-K via the Moore Case Settlement and the annual amount was similar to the funding for AP3.

MR. MORSE answered that was accurate.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked if it was reasonable to say that the new fiscal note would be simply derived from cutting the previous fiscal note in half.

MR. CURRAN answered yes.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS responded that the fiscal note would be approximately \$41.8 million.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said the fiscal note did not include additional cost to facilities, assuming there was room for additional students at schools. He asked if DEED had an idea on added classroom space expense if schools were maxed out.

MR. MORSE answered that DEED did not know. He said DEED did not have information on classroom capacity.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS responded that the questions regarding the fiscal note were fairly critical items that DEED would have to address.

[8:44:47 AM](#)

At ease from 8:44 a.m. to 8:46 a.m.

[8:46:40 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER noted that the next committee meeting would address a bill with a parents-as-teachers component, a subject that could combine with a Pre-K program. He asked the SB 6 sponsors if it would be prudent to hold the bill to address an updated fiscal note and possible parents-as-teachers tie in.

SENATOR DAVIS asked if Senator Meyer meant for the two topics to come forward at the same time, not to actually combine them in one bill.

CO-CHAIR MEYER answered correct.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS responded that there was no intention to try to make one bill out of two.

SENATOR FRENCH replied that was a fair approach and a new fiscal note was coming forward. He noted that he would like to get back to Senator Stevens with a dollar value for Pre-K programs.

[8:48:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS stated that SB 6 would held in committee.

[8:48:39 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Thomas adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 8:48 a.m.