

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

March 2, 2012

8:01 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. 120

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

- MOVED CSSB 120(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 197

"AN ACT ESTABLISHING A GRANT PROGRAM IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT FOR ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 120

SHORT TITLE: EARLY CHILDHOOD ED: PARENTS AS TEACHERS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) FRENCH

04/06/11	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/06/11	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/29/12	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/29/12	(S)	Heard & Held
02/29/12	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/02/12	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

EMILY COATE, Coordinator
Parents as Teachers (PAT)
Association for the Education of Young Children Southeast Alaska
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 120.

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director
Best Beginnings
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 120.

NORM ECK, Superintendent
Northwest Arctic Borough School District
Kotzebue, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 120.

MELISSA PICKLE, Volunteer
Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)
Eagle River, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 120.

PAM PENROSE, Director
Special Education
Hydaburg School District
Hydaburg, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 120.

JANET STONE, Early Education Specialist
Lower Yukon School District
Mountain Village, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 120.

CYNTHIA CURRAN, Director
Teaching and Learning Support
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Addressed questions related to PAT.

PAUL SUGAR, Teaching Specialist
Teaching and Learning Support
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Addressed questions related to PAT.

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Addressed questions related to PAT and the Moore Settlement.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:01:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOE THOMAS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:01 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators French, Stevens, Davis, Co-Chair Meyer and Co-Chair Thomas.

SB 120-EARLY CHILDHOOD ED: PARENTS AS TEACHERS

[8:01:47 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS announced the consideration of SB 120.

[8:02:44 AM](#)

EMILY COATE, Coordinator, Parents as Teachers (PAT), Association for the Education of Young Children-Southeast Alaska, Juneau, supported SB 120 saying that the newest PAT program, now in Southeast Alaska, started in October and was funded from the Alaska Children's Trust, Best Beginnings, thread, and United Way. In three weeks it was completely full and has had a steady waiting list ever since. PAT applies to all different types of family structures including single family households, two parent households, and a range of socio-economic statuses.

She explained that parents involved in PAT have shown a lot more patience with their children within the first three years of their child's life. The 17 families in PAT reach out to other families that are not in PAT, helping them gain more confidence in what they know.

SENATOR DAVIS commented that she supports the program. She asked where PAT gets its funding.

MS. COATE answered that PAT gets its funding from the following independent sources: Best Beginnings, Alaska Children's Trust, United Way and thread. It did not get state funding because SB 120 did not pass last year.

SENATOR DAVIS asked what other resources could be called upon.

MS. COATE answered that PAT is a non-profit organization and that they get other funding through partnerships.

SENATOR DAVIS asked if any PAT advertising is being spread to church groups and organizations that might have children eligible for the program, and they could then seek funding from those potential organizations.

MS. COATE answered that the program is currently at full capacity and no advertising is being done. Their hope is to hire at least one more family visitor that will allow them to take in 20 more families.

[8:06:59 AM](#)

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director, Best Beginnings, Anchorage, supported SB 120 and said that parents are a child's first teacher. "Babies on Track" is an introduction for families to the PAT program. It really sets the stage for all early brain development and other developing skills that children need to be successful.

MS. HENSLEY said adding home visiting to Babies on Track would get the most benefit out of the program. Home visitors in Parents as Teachers are well-trained with a rigorous set of requirements. Having in-state trainers makes adding to the cadre of trained home visitors even easier. The state already has a vigorous network of PAT programs. For example, when Juneau wanted to start its PAT program, they didn't have to make it up. They knew who they could turn to, who to get advice from and how to get the training and be on their way.

She said that she serves on the state advisory group for PAT and has a firsthand look at the professionalism of the whole program and she had been their personal advocate for many years. From being on the advisory group she sees the new rules and regulations that are coming down as well as the new requirements for the home visitors. It is becoming a more rigorous training so when visitors come into families' homes they have all the tools they need to insure that they interact appropriately. Families learn to trust them, but what's important is that the home visitors know a lot and know how to share that information with the families.

MS. HENSLEY said that PAT isn't the only program that works, but it is an important part of what is available on the spectrum of everything from very intense intervention all the way to something like the Imagination Library, which is a very much less expensive with books and activities.

[8:11:36 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY said the Early Childhood Partnership in Juneau knew best what their children needed and how to find it, and PAT was their first choice. Like Juneau, after reviewing many programs, Kodiak picked PAT after receiving one of only two federal grants to do a home visiting program. PAT's ultimate goal is to see that children go to school ready and that they have what they need to be successful.

MS. HENSLEY said the new Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council came up with seven priorities that were presented to the committee a few weeks ago. One was to serve an additional 5,000 children and this program fits well with that priority. Best Beginnings has joined with four other organizations to come up with a set of priorities for this legislative session and PAT is a part of that list.

[8:13:46 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH, sponsor of SB 120, asked her to compare and contrast Head Start to the PAT program.

MS. HENSLEY answered that Head Start and PAT are very different programs, but they are very complimentary to each other. She stated that in some communities PAT serves children from birth to three and then those children might go on to Head Start. Looking at community by community, some communities want a pre-kindergarten program or a Head Start program and have the children to support a centrally based program. In other communities with fewer children, for example, a PAT program would be appropriate rather than saying no service is available because there aren't enough children. They are different programs, but both of them have a requirement for parent engagement, which is a major component of ensuring that children have what they need when they get to school. Parent engagement with their children throughout the school year has proven to make children more successful learners.

[8:16:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if there is one central location that serves as an umbrella for all the different programs that can decide which areas need which programs. He then asked if DEED should be the decision maker.

MS. HENSLEY answered that a central location for information is a good idea and the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC) could direct families with children to the variety of programs and services that are available.

CO-CHAIR MEYER commented that funds must be efficiently used and they need to be sure there isn't any duplication and that areas have the right program. He said somebody needs to be held accountable and if it is not the Department of Education and Early Development, then he wondered who that would be.

MS. HENSLEY answered that part of what the AECCC is doing is inventorying programs that currently exist and determining which programs have waitlists. Knowing there are lengthy waitlists for Head Start, for example, would help in deciding where to direct resources efficiently and effectively as possible. Their strategic report was due to the governor and the legislature at the end of June.

CO-CHAIR MEYER commented that he looked forward to seeing that report.

MS. HENSLEY said that additional in-depth communication is welcomed as they move forward.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS agreed that efficient use of funds without duplication was important and then invited Norman Eck to testify.

[8:22:32 AM](#)

NORMAN ECK, Superintendent, Northwest Arctic Borough School District, Kotzebue, supported SB 120 and said Parents as Teachers is the one program he would choose over the others, because early learning is critical. Parents are a child's first teacher; they are the most important and influential teacher the child will ever have. If the child is taught in these early years, it will likely determine his success later in life. If a learning problem isn't handled right away, years of constant remediation may or may not help make the correction. Closing the achievement gap can be effectively attained through early learning methodologies. For parents who are not ready or able to take on PAT, two years of kindergarten for the 4 and 5 year olds would be needed. Early childhood education is a must for children who otherwise would come to school two years developmentally behind other students.

[8:25:07 AM](#)

MR. ECK shared a personal story about how he and his wife adopted a child who was born with cerebral palsy. Using the elements that are now part of the PAT program as tools they were

able to diminish the effects of the cerebral palsy over the course of the last two years.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS invited Melissa Pickle to testify.

8:27:38 AM

MELISSA PICKLE, Volunteer, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Eagle River, supported SB 120, and said research has shown that families and children who enrolled in the PAT program experience many positive things. The parents have increased knowledge of child development and positive child practices that lead to fewer documented cases of child abuse and neglect. Alaska has one of the highest rates of child abuse and neglect, and nearly half of the reports of harm involve children ages zero to five years.

She said that many children come into CASA because of a lack of parenting knowledge based on positive child rearing practices. These parents don't have knowledge of proper child development and some of them have inappropriate expectations for a young child and use inappropriate disciplinary practices. She stated that some parents get frustrated and that could lead to violence. Furthermore, having someone to talk to about the stressors related to parenting can help alleviate the stress many parents experience. The PAT program also connects families with other agencies and can provide additional information and support for families.

MS. PICKLE said that abuse and neglect have a tremendous impact on a child's development, particularly for young children birth to five years whose brains are still developing. With advances in technology, differences in the structure of a brain of a healthy child in a normal environment versus that of a child who has experienced severe abuse and neglect can be seen.

MS. PICKLE said that the PAT program has many positive impacts on a child's abilities and social/emotional development. The largest impact comes from providing parents with the information and skills they need to keep their children healthy and safe.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS invited Pam Penrose to testify.

8:31:38 AM

PAM PENROSE, Director, Special Education, Hydaburg School District, Hydaburg, supported SB 120 and said that the needs of the PAT program are driven by the needs of the child and the family. Also critical is that the PAT program uses evidence-

based practices that meet the State of Alaska's early learning guidelines. The parent component meets a profound need for all families, especially families in crisis.

She said that PAT staff model teaching techniques for the parents as they engage the children in fun, motivating activities. PAT hosts group socials that provide parents and children a safe and comfortable environment in which to play each month and they are well attended. Children are given opportunities to develop their motor, social emotional, language, and problem solving skills that are necessary for school readiness.

She stated that she was fortunate to have two paraprofessionals who assist students in an educational classroom, kindergarten through second grade. PAT staff spends most of their time working with the students who did not attend the PAT program. These children began kindergarten without the benefits of learning how to pay attention to a story, follow directions, or play successfully with their classmates. These paraprofessionals are both young mothers whose children are active participants in the PAT program. They find the information that they receive about healthy births, discipline, temperament, stress and family driven problem solving to be extremely helpful for developing wellness for the whole family.

She said the PAT staff is always part of the development of the IET (Institution of Engineering and Technology) for students who have been identified with special needs. These students would not have made any substantial gain without the support and expertise of the PAT program. PAT's early learning program helps parents understand the impact and importance of early learning on school success. Children need a chance to develop a love of learning and to experience the feeling of success that increases self-esteem and ultimately results in self-sufficiency.

CO-CHAIR THOMAS invited Janet Stone to testify.

[8:34:46 AM](#)

JANET STONE, Early Education Consultant, Lower Yukon School District, Mountain Village, said she is a veteran teacher of 30 years with a broad range of experiences including multicultural, all socio economic levels, pre-school, public school, general and special education. She had been a consultant for the pre-school programs for two years and had the unique opportunity to visit all 11 villages in the district multiple times. She had worked in kindergarten classes, observed in Head Start programs,

visited the Teachers as Professionals and had direct interaction with the families with the children under the age of five.

MS. STONE said the PAT program is one way to help bridge the gap between the normally expected developmental experiences of children on the road system and the vastly different experiences of children in rural Alaska. Children in town have the time for life experiences that are expected and assumed to be the ones children bring to school by most text book publishers and curriculum developers. However, children who have never seen trucks, cars, trains, traffic signals, restaurants, signs and billboards, have not had the opportunity to explore environmental prints or had the kind of language interaction that leads to concept development. PAT and other early interventions in preschool programs have been critical in rural Alaska to help bridge that gap in cognitive developmental areas.

More importantly, she said they help raise parents' awareness of a need for even more language interaction with their children. Parents are their children's first and most important teacher and in many of the villages, some of the parents are as young as 17 years old or younger. Then it becomes even more important to have an agency or known organization such as PAT to help develop successful parents with the skills and abilities they need to raise successful learners.

MS. STONE said that often, this program is the only access some families have for child development. From it they can receive reassurance that their child is developing normally or get support in areas their child may need. Most studies show that early intervention is the most critical act. The more time and money spent getting children started successfully leads to less need for special education services later.

[8:37:56 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS closed public testimony and asked if the CS would impact the existing December fiscal note.

[8:38:47 AM](#)

CYNTHIA CURRAN, Director, Teaching and Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development, said that the change in the CS was in the dates, so there would be no impact to the fiscal note.

[8:39:01 AM](#)

PAUL SUGAR, Teaching Specialist, Teaching and Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development, introduced himself and was available to answer questions.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked how many children would be covered by the \$3.9 million fiscal note.

MS. CURRAN answered that approximately 940 families would be impacted by this program. To get that number they estimated 53,000 children were between one month and five years of age and came up with an average of 1.34 of pre-kindergarten children per household. They came up with 39,000 families and used a multiplier for those families that might be seeking services and came up with 1,740. The 800 families that were already receiving services through federal funding were deleted and that left 940 families.

SENATOR DAVIS asked why PAT targets children between the ages of zero and five instead of zero and three. She said normally five year olds would be in kindergarten.

MS. CURRAN answered that it's because kindergarten is voluntary in the state of Alaska.

SENATOR DAVIS commented that if parents are not going to send their children to kindergarten, then it is likely that they will not send their children to the PAT program. She then stated that age should be based on the target group of zero to three years. With that target, the PAT program would be able to serve more children.

[8:42:27 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if the department already operates or supports any PAT Programs.

MS. CURRAN answered yes: the DEED grants \$300,000 to RurAL CAP for its PAT program.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if the program has been successful.

MR. SUGAR answered yes, the Department of Education and Early Development is the largest single provider of PAT programs in the state and a small amount of the \$300,000 helps run the state office.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if the administration supported SB 120.

MS. CURRAN answered that the department believes strongly in the deliberative process and will work with the legislature to do what needs to be done.

CO-CHAIR MEYER said the PAT program works. It gives children a head start and could save the state and society time and money later down the road. He then asked if the department would coordinate all the activities and hold people accountable and make sure that the money is being spent efficiently.

[8:45:47 AM](#)

MS. CURRAN answered that the department is responsible for making sure that funding is spent in the way it is supposed to be spent and that accountability measures need to be considered.

MR. SUGAR said that different programs use different tools.

CO-CHAIR MEYER asked if the program could assist with the Moore vs. State of Alaska Settlement that Judge Gleason recommended. It required more funding for pre-kindergarten kids.

MS. CURRAN deferred that question to the deputy commissioner.

[8:48:33 AM](#)

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, Juneau, said that PAT's potential relationship with the Moore Settlement was that \$2 million a year was to be applied toward pre-K programs for each of three years (a total of \$6 million). The pre-K programs need to be generated by the community putting forth what they think will work in the community. He understood that they were to target four-year olds and he didn't see why the settlement would preclude a community from using part of that funding for a PAT program. Then they might have to augment it for the early age levels.

SENATOR FRENCH said he thought the Moore Settlement was aimed at a two-year pre-K program conducted by a school district in classrooms. The approved program must be standards based and for four years; it must prepare students for school and involve parents as part of the program including three activities of parent engagement in staff duties (the PAT aspect).

CO-CHAIR THOMAS asked if the reduction to the cost of remediation as a result of using the PAT program was reflected in the fiscal note.

MR. CURRAN answered that the department did not factor in remediation.

MR. MORSE said that the fiscal note reflected the bill which says "cohorts" under five years old; that would be five cohorts, because there is birth to one, one to two, and so on.

[8:52:55 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS asked the department what it is doing in the area of early childhood education and how much money is allocated in the present budget for children zero to three years of age and zero to four years of age. The reason the legislature changed the name of the department to the Department of Education and Early Development was to include the younger children and she didn't see them doing that. She wanted to know if there be any money for early childhood education without this bill.

MR. MORSE answered that he would get that information for the committee. He said state money supports Head Start and \$300,000 worth of grants support Rural CAP and PAT. Other money comes through the state's budget that goes to Best Beginnings along with some coordination money. The department works with the Department of Health and Social Services and with the Early Childhood Coordinating Council.

[8:54:55 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS found no further questions or comments and removed his objection. Finding no further objection he asked the will of the committee.

[8:55:07 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER moved to report CS for SB 120, version 27-LS0788\M, from committee with individual recommendations and accompanying fiscal note(s).

CO-CHAIR THOMAS announced that without objection CSSB 120(EDC) moved from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[8:55:42 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Thomas adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 8:56 a.m.