

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 18, 2013
8:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Mike Dunleavy, Vice Chair
Senator Bert Stedman
Senator Charlie Huggins
Senator Berta Gardner

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION ON EARLY LITERACY: BEST BEGINNINGS AND ALASKA
PARENTS AS TEACHERS

- HEARD

WITNESS REGISTER

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director
Best Beginnings
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of the Best Beginnings program.

ESTRELLA "STAR" LEE, State Coordinator
Parents as Teachers
Rural Alaska Community Action Program (RurAL CAP)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of Parents as Teachers (PAT).

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information on Parents as Teachers (PAT).

JOY LYON, Executive Director

Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC)-Southeast
Alaska

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of AEYC.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:00:17 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stedman and Dunleavy, and Chair Stevens.

**PRESENTATION ON EARLY LITERACY: Best Beginnings and Alaska
Parents as Teachers**

[8:00:38 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced that the committee would hear a presentation on early literacy in Alaska.

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director, Best Beginnings, provided an overview of the Best Beginnings program. She stated that progress has been made in the area of early literacy. She reported that early literacy is a collaborative effort of many organizations. She referred to a handout which highlights the collaborative effort. She listed several of the group's goals and compared its efforts to the wise planning and timing needed to build a pipeline.

[8:03:06 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY addressed "Alaska Facts" as follows: there are 53,996 children under the age of five and more than 10,000 entered kindergarten. She called attention to Alaska's early childhood legislative priorities for 2013: Parents as Teachers, Best Beginnings, the Quality, Rating and Improvement System, and professional development for teachers.

MS. HENSLEY related that an increase for the programs was not requested this year in the Governor's budget. Instead, the group wanted to continue to build on what already being done. She requested that funding for Best Beginnings and for Parents as Teachers not be cut, as was done in the House.

She stressed the importance of the comprehensive "Early Childhood System."

[8:05:57 AM](#)

ESTRELLA "STAR" LEE, State Coordinator, Parents as Teachers, Rural Alaska Community Program (RurAL CAP), provided an overview of Parents as Teachers (PAT). She explained that PAT is an evidence-based model consisting of four components: personal visits, screening, group connections, and resource referrals.

SENATOR HUGGINS joined the committee meeting.

[8:07:45 AM](#)

MS. LEE explained that group connections provides parents with the opportunity to share experiences, discuss problems, learn from other parents, and observe their child with other children. She related that she recently attended Sprout group connection meetings in Homer.

CHAIR STEVENS asked what "Sprout" is.

MS. LEE answered that it is an infant learning program in Homer. She related her experience with the Sprout program.

[8:09:07 AM](#)

MS. LEE described resource referrals as a program that brings community services and programs, as well as information, to families.

MS. LEE highlighted the PAT model. It is a program where the parent educator helps parents to understand the different stages in their child's development. She shared the goals to increase parent knowledge of early childhood development, to improve parenting practices, to provide early detection of developmental delays and health issues, prevent child abuse and neglect, and increase school readiness and success.

CHAIR STEVENS asked how one knows if the program works.

MS. LEE said surveys of the parents provide some data. It is also known that parents who invest in early childhood education stay more invested in their child's whole education.

[8:11:51 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked what happens when a parent educator goes to a house and finds something that they do not like.

MS. LEE answered by describing the PAT national model, which uses the Life Skills Progression assessment to rate certain categories. As a result, some families are referred to the

Office of Children's Services (OCS). The focus is on the strengths of the families.

[8:14:14 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if PAT is required by law to report certain things.

MS. LEE said yes.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if PAT is ever invited into abusive households.

KRISTIN RAMSTAD, Director, Parents as Teachers, Rural Alaska Community Action Program (RurAL CAP), provided information on Parents as Teachers (PAT). She explained that there have been times when PAT has had to notify OCS. The best practice is to ask the family to self-report to OCS.

[8:16:00 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked how many staff work with families.

MS. RAMSTAD reported that RurAL CAP has 20 staff throughout the state and 39 parent educators going into homes.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if staff are trained in tolerance for varying child-rearing methods.

MS. RAMSTAD replied that staff attend five days of training, which includes information about going into a home. Additionally, training in child abuse and neglect reporting is required.

MS. LEE added that quality reflective supervision is built into the model in order to help keep communication channels open.

[8:18:45 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked when the education system enters into developing individual education plans (IEP's) for special needs children.

MS. RAMSTAD responded that RurAL Cap deals with infant learning programs through age 5 and helps with transition into the school district.

[8:20:01 AM](#)

MS. RAMSTAD talked about PAT as Alaska's investment. She related that PAT first came to Alaska in 1995 in Hoonah through federal

funding. In 1998 the Fairbanks Native Association received federal funding to add PAT, and in 1999 RurAL CAP worked with UAA to serve 27 families through a demonstration project. In 2012, 996 children in 38 communities were served by PAT.

She described PAT as an economically viable program. The average cost is between \$4,000 and \$6,000 per family, depending on location.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if that cost was per year.

MS. RAMSTAD responded that it was per year. She added that the cost for most families is closer to \$4,000.

She related that in 2010 the Alaska legislature put \$300,000 into PAT, which served 92 children in four communities. Last year that amount expanded to serve 271 families in 16 communities. She added that PAT is a model that works in both rural and urban communities.

[8:22:33 AM](#)

MS. RAMSTAD said that PAT is now serving more military families, teen parents, and children in shelters. She reported that PAT is having an impact on multicultural and bi-lingual families and families with developmental delays.

MS. RAMSTAD showed a map of communities PAT and RurAL CAP serves. In Anchorage only 88 families are being served, however, PAT is working to serve more families there.

[8:26:19 AM](#)

MS. RAMSTAD addressed PAT outcomes. She said that PAT parents are more involved in their child's schooling, they report a higher level of confidence and engagement in parenting, and they engage in more language and literacy promoting activities with their children. Some children have exited PAT before entering public school.

MS. RAMSTAD discussed the evaluation system at RurAL CAP; it conducts pre-parenting and exit surveys. Parents also complete evaluations annually. There is also a preschool and kindergarten readiness skills assessment and preschool and kindergarten teachers are surveyed. Data from children in Head Start is shared with RurAL CAP for comparison purposes.

[8:28:15 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS requested information about PAT's work with teen parents.

MS. RAMSTAD related that all PAT programs serve teen parents. She described an active teen parenting group in Anchorage.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if PAT follows Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) standards of reporting.

MS. RAMSTAD said no, but it does follow Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requirements regarding confidentiality of reporting.

[8:30:18 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if there was data on parent educational levels of parents who are served by PAT.

MS. RAMSTAD said RurAL CAP collects that data. She said it varies, but most parents do not have college degrees.

MS. HENSLEY addressed Best Beginnings. She said it is a private, public partnership and is community-based, made up of volunteers through Imagination Libraries. Best Beginnings also develops early learning materials for parents, such as the "Babies on Track" DVD and board books, and does research and advertising campaigns.

She showed a map of 103 communities where Best Beginnings takes place and shared examples of how communities such as Ketchikan, Anchorage, and Mat-Su make use of the program.

[8:35:28 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY referred to a handout that shows funding sources for the partnership's work. Best Beginnings is state funded, along with financial contributions from communities. Partnerships require matching community funds.

CHAIR STEVENS asked how the program works in Old Harbor.

MS. HENSLEY said the volunteer program Imagination Library is in Old Harbor. The community requested the program and RurAL CAP made it happen.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if a group of people contacted RurAL CAP.

MS. HENSLEY said yes. Five people are needed to make a request.

[8:37:56 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY gave examples of some of the books provided. She shared how the monthly book program works. Books come in the mail every month and cost about \$30 per child per year. Often, people come together to read and discuss books.

[8:40:09 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY reported that in March of 2010, 32 communities participated in Imagination Library; today, there are 103 communities that do so, and 20,384 children enrolled. She related that children who have books in the home are better prepared for kindergarten.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if family need or income is a consideration.

MS. HENSLEY said it is not; children are not singled out and any child can be enrolled. She added that children who are enrolled in the program and who are entering kindergarten have a common context of understanding.

[8:43:11 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY addressed what was happening with the Quality Rating & Improvement Systems (QRIS) in Alaska. She said it is a rating system designed to help parents make good choices and to assess the quality of programs. She noted that many federal grants make reference to the QRIS in the application process.

[8:46:35 AM](#)

JOY LYON, Executive Director, Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC)-Southeast, provided an overview of how all programs work together. She expressed excitement about the direction AEYC is headed with addressing long-term educational outcomes.

SENATOR GARDNER joined the committee meeting.

MS. LYON stressed that the first thousand days of life are the most important. She noted that PAT is one of the few programs that addresses that age group. She showed an example of parental guidelines and a tool kit for Child Abuse Prevention Month. She shared activities and materials families would be seeing this year.

[8:51:18 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY summarized early childhood legislative priorities: to encourage the Governor's budget numbers for PAT and Best

Beginnings. She thanked the committee for its support of past funding.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Ms. Hensley and requested statistical information about the successes of the programs.

[8:53:37 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY replied that long-term study information is available regarding the positive benefits of early childhood education.

SENATOR HUGGINS noted that Hoonah began early childhood programs 17 years ago. He asked if there was any data about the success of that program.

MS. RAMSTAD offered to provide information about improved graduation rates in Hoonah.

[8:56:14 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked for any additional information about program success.

MS. LYON noted that in Juneau, children were enrolled in the Imagination Library at birth in 2006. After five years, those children showed a dramatic increase in readiness for kindergarten.

[8:57:29 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the Senate Education Standing Committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the meeting at 8:57 a.m.