

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

April 8, 2013

8:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Charlie Huggins

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 15

"An Act relating to prekindergarten programs within a school district; relating to pre- elementary students and pre-elementary schools; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED SB 15 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 15

SHORT TITLE: PREKINDERGARTEN SCHOOL PROGRAMS/PLANS

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) FRENCH

01/16/13	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/13	(S)	EDC, FIN
04/03/13	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
04/03/13	(S)	Heard & Held
04/03/13	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/08/13	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

SENATOR HOLLIS FRENCH
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 15.

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

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided departmental input for SB 15.

MIKE COONS, representing himself

Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified against SB 15.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:01:05 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:01 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stedman, Gardner, Dunleavy, and Chair Stevens.

SB 15-PREKINDERGARTEN SCHOOL PROGRAMS/PLANS

[8:01:24 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the consideration of SB 15. He noted the committee has previously heard the bill.

SENATOR HOLLIS FRENCH, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of SB 15, shared Carol Como's exit interview after she retired as Superintendent of the Anchorage School District. When asked if she had any regrets, she said the following:

The biggest regret, I feel, is more of a statewide issue. We worked really hard over the last twelve years to get legislators and governors to understand how important preschool is, especially for kids who are in Title I schools. Families who are struggling just don't have the money to send their kids to an excellent preschool. They don't have a lot of books in their homes. We have a large number of our kids who come to us very far behind in kindergarten every year compared to kids who come from what I call 'enriched backgrounds.' The discrepancy of kids coming in the door in kindergarten is huge. So many little kids never catch up.

[8:02:56 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS requested a run-through on the funding issue.

SENATOR FRENCH explained that SB 15 proposes a half-day program for pre-kindergarteners. He opined that the fiscal note was on the high side, given that the fiscal note anticipates that every eligible child will attend the first day. He expected the actual

expense to be much lower. He suggested the program could also be made available to only a third of the kids one year, two-thirds the second year, and all of them the third year.

[8:03:54 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if Senator French considered having the program offered by Title I schools or having a needs-based approach.

SENATOR FRENCH replied that they did think about that. He said there is a lot of discussion about whether to aim the program at lower income kids. He noted that Head Start serves that population. He believed that it should be available to everyone.

SENATOR GARDNER responded that she agreed, but said funding may not be available.

SENATOR FRENCH replied that it was a great policy discussion, but he reiterated that preschool should be available to everyone.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY stated that he applauded Senator French's desire to include all preschool Alaskans. He said he was working working on a K-12 bill. He noted that inclusion will cost money. He did not want to choose one group over another to receive an education opportunity.

SENATOR FRENCH agreed. He said it is a difficult policy choice.

[8:06:52 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked about the pre-kindergarten pilot program.

SENATOR FRENCH showed a graph that depicts the vocabulary of children from different economic levels as they age from zero to 36 months. Lower income children had 300 vocabulary words by 36 months; working class kids had a 600-word vocabulary, and children of college educated families had a 1,200-word vocabulary.

He addressed test results that show that 77 percent of children enter school in the bottom two quartiles in the fall. By spring, 28 percent have moved up to the top two quartiles. He said the numbers were powerful and accurate. He stressed that the numbers from the November 2012 report show the same growth pattern.

[8:10:15 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the fiscal note is about \$46 million.

SENATOR FRENCH answered yes.

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education & Early Development, offered to answer questions.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Mr. Morse to comment on the pilot program.

MR. MORSE replied that the data on the pre-K program shows that it is successful so far. He offered to forward the report to the committee.

SENATOR GARDNER said she wished to see the report.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Mr. Morse to give the report to the staff.

MR. MORSE agreed.

[8:12:41 AM](#)

MIKE COONS, representing himself, testified in opposition to SB 15. He questioned the motives, cost, and results of the program.

[8:16:23 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS closed public testimony.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the next committee of referral is finance.

CHAIR STEVENS said yes.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY said he was not sure it would pass finance.

CHAIR STEVENS suspected that Senator Dunleavy was correct, but stressed the issue warrants considerable discussion.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY moved to report SB 15 from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note. There being no objection, SB 15 was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[8:17:57 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the Senate Education Committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the meeting at 8:17 a.m.