

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 29, 2014
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

SENATE BILL NO. 107

"An Act relating to school and school district accountability; relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; and establishing a reading program for public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 107

SHORT TITLE: ESTABLISH K THROUGH 3 READING PROGRAM

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

01/22/14	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/14
01/22/14	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/14	(S)	EDC, FIN
01/29/14	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

TIM LAMKIN, Staff
Senator Gary Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information regarding SB 107, on behalf of the sponsor.

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions about SB 107.

SUSAN MCCAULEY, Ph.D., Director
Teaching & Learning Support
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions about SB 107.

POSIE BOGGS, representing herself
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in favor of SB 107.

MIKE COONS, representing himself
Palmer, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on SB 107.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:00:42 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 Gardner, Dunleavy, Huggins, Stedman and Chair Stevens.

SB 107-ESTABLISH K THROUGH 3 READING PROGRAM

[8:00:51 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced that the only order of business would be SB 107. He said some refer to the bill as the READ Act. He stated that the committee would hear the bill, take public testimony, and hold it for further review.

[8:01:49 AM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided information regarding SB 107 on behalf of the sponsor. He related that the bill closely models legislation enacted in 2012 in Colorado - the Colorado READ Act. The bill recognizes a trend that if students are not proficient in reading by third grade, they have great difficulty in the rest of their academic career. SB 107 sets up a program to encourage districts and the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), to ensure that students are reading by the third grade.

MR. LAMKIN discussed the sectional analysis of the bill. Section 1 includes a requirement that low performing schools or districts identify in their improvement plans a reading program that would address K-3 reading deficiencies.

Section 2 requires DEED to implement reading assessments for K-3, and target instructional practices and staff development programs to coincide with the reading program in low performing schools.

Section 3 requires that schools attach accreditation to their having a K-3 reading program. He noted that few elementary schools pursue accreditation, an issue districts and DEED will have to sort out. Section 3 also requires DEED to review and approve reading assessments, instructional practices, and staff development programs, and post them on its website.

Section 4 requires that the State Board of Education review and adopt statewide assessments, instructional practices, and staff development.

Section 5 sets up the requirements of the K-3 reading program which every district would be required to have. It sets up the district's role regarding assessments, diagnostics, and reading plans, in conjunction with parents. There is an exemption for English Language Learners (ELL), for some disabled students, and for those students who have had an extended history of difficulty with reading. Section 5 contains a requirement that documentation be established for students and a retention procedure to follow if students continue to fail. Parents would retain the final word as to whether a student should be held back.

[8:06:46 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if the first section describes the response to intervention (RTI) for students who are not reading at grade level.

MR. LAMKIN said yes. He deferred to the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to explain RTI.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if the diagnostic reading assessment mentioned in the second section requires approval by DEED or by some other entity.

MR. LAMKIN responded that it is reviewed and recommended by DEED and ultimately approved by the State Board of Education.

SENATOR GARDNER inquired about the accreditation standards found on page 3, line 14, of the bill. She wondered if the standards applied to all schools, including charter schools.

MR. LAMKIN understood that accreditation is optional; it is up to local districts. Accreditation does require a reading program to be in place.

SENATOR GARDNER asked who does the accreditation.

MR. LAMKIN replied that there is a national accreditation organization.

SENATOR GARDNER requested more information about accreditation. She said she assumed that all public schools were accredited.

CHAIR STEVENS suggested asking DEED.

[8:09:00 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if "reading deficiency" in Section 5 means not reading at grade level, or failing to make a year of progress during a year of schooling.

MR. LAMKIN referred Senator Gardner to the last page of the bill where the definitions are listed. "Significant reading deficiency" means that a student does not meet the minimum skill levels for reading competency in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, and reading fluency, including verbal skills and reading comprehension, under standards established by the state board for the student's grade level.

CHAIR STEVENS invited DEED to present.

[8:09:53 AM](#)

LES MORSE, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, introduced himself.

SUSAN MCCAULEY, Ph.D., Director, Teaching & Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, introduced herself.

MR. MORSE began by explaining how accreditation works in Alaska. Schools choose to become accredited through a regional organization that has a strong Alaska presence. The organization recommends to the state board what the accreditation standards

should be. Recently, the regional organization decided to change accreditation standards and made the decision to work with a private international organization.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if "regional" means Northwest Accreditation Association.

MR. MORSE said yes; Northwest Accreditation Association (NAA) now uses the accreditation processes of AdvancED, an organization that works with international and American schools. The State School Board adopted AdvanceED's accreditation standards and rules.

He explained that schools choose to be accredited or not, and more often secondary schools make that choice due to scholarship eligibility requirements. Those schools that meet accreditation standards are accredited by DEED.

[8:13:42 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS requested examples of accreditation standards.

MR. MORSE related that the old accreditation system really got into counting things, such as books. The new standards from AdvancED revolve more around quality, such as quality of leadership, professional development, and recruitment. There is a lot of choice and flexibility of standards, depending on the location and school.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if there is data showing that accredited schools are better than unaccredited schools. She inquired how many schools are accredited.

MR. MORSE offered to provide data on public and private schools.

SENATOR GARDNER said she was very interested in the answer.

MR. MORSE said the new standards address quality of schools and this year is the first year of the new accreditation system. He suggested it would be useful to compare data after the newer system has been in place for a few years.

[8:17:09 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS recalled that college acceptance, grants, and athletics are affected by accreditation. He remarked that it is usually the principal that initiates a request for accreditation. He asked Mr. Morse to comment.

MR. MORSE thought that decision was dependent on districts. He said when he worked in the Juneau School District, every high school was required to be accredited. Mount Edgecombe, the one school that is under the authority of DEED and the State Board of Education, is now required to be accredited. For students, one of the biggest impacts of accreditation is the opportunity for NCAA scholarships.

DR. MCCAULEY agreed that accreditation standards resonate more at the school level than the district level. They consist of conditions that are under the control of school leadership, such as the quality of professional development.

CHAIR STEVENS remarked that at UAS, accreditation was a positive experience.

[8:19:45 AM](#)

MR. MORSE said he would like feedback in order to see if the committee finds the reading standards sufficient. He added that once the state board adopts the standards, they send a letter to the legislature which has the option to reverse the action.

He turned attention to page 5, language designed to find an appropriate balance between state and district responsibilities. The department is currently having a discussion about line 17, which deals with materials for the core content areas, line 23, which provides for instructional materials, and line 24, regarding coaching services or strategies.

[8:22:44 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if those reference the new state standards where the curriculum and approaches remain at the local level.

MR. MORSE said that is correct. Under current law the local school board is responsible for instructional material.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the aforementioned language means that the state would assume responsibility for some of the curriculum, resources, and approaches, instead of the local school board, if the bill would pass.

MR. MORSE clarified that for reading the state might provide a list of evidence-based resources. The department wants to balance that with local control.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY stated that the curriculum should remain in the hands of the local district.

MR. MORSE agreed with Senator Dunleavy. The current statute says that instructional materials are left up to the districts.

CHAIR STEVENS clarified that the intention of the bill is not to take the curriculum responsibly away from districts. He summarized that Mr. Morse was offering to provide assistance to districts that requested it.

MR. MORSE agreed. He said technical assistance would be available and appropriate, especially to small districts.

[8:26:21 AM](#)

MR. MORSE addressed the term "diagnostic assessment" versus a more general term or a more specific one. Typically, teachers give a screening assessment and then a diagnostic assessment if there is a concern. There is an on-going discussion whether to generalize terms related to assessment and leaving it up to regulation or to become more specific using current terms.

He said Section 5 related more to district responsibilities. On page 9, line 15, the terms "effective" or "highly effective" are used to describe teacher performance. The department would prefer to have flexibility at the regulation level to define those terms more clearly. The department would define them to mean "to achieve a higher level rating" on a teacher evaluation. He noted that districts could also make that determination.

[8:29:31 AM](#)

MR. MORSE stated the importance of dealing with standards and assessments at the earliest grade level. He opined that SB 107 provides an opportunity to have an incredibly important discussion between the department and the legislature. It contains good reading approaches.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked about a law regarding a reading program under former-Commissioner Sampson.

MR. MORSE replied that there were two reading-related bills proposed under Commissioner Sampson. One was about teacher recertification which addressed a reading requirement and did not pass. The second bill dealt with a voluntary, evidence-based reading program and did pass.

[8:31:50 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS stated that SB 107 was as a result of a discussion with Colorado legislators about their READ program. He asked Mr. Morse if some districts are already doing what is contained in the bill.

MR. MORSE recalled in the last two sessions the department put forth two proposals; a summer reading institute called "I Am Ready" in conjunction with Best Beginnings, and funding for screening assessments. Grants for those proposals will go out this year. He requested that Dr. McCauley address the question as to how many districts were already doing what is contained the bill.

DR. MCCAULEY remarked that the larger districts have programs that mirror many elements contained in the bill: strong response to instruction programs, evidence-based reading materials, screening and diagnostic assessment, and intervention. There is some variation across the state in the use of evidence-based programs. There is also a variation in terms of intervention structures, such as accommodating school schedule and professional development.

[8:36:04 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if Lindamood-Bell reading processes are still in practice.

DR. MCCAULEY said yes, but not at a district-wide level.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Senator Huggins to explain the processes.

SENATOR HUGGINS explained when the program was introduced in the Mat-Su District. He shared a story that showed how programs come and go on depending on who supports the program.

He expressed disappointment about the reading level in Alaska. He recalled asking a superintendent if he graduates students who can't read. There was a positive response. He wondered if waiting until third grade for reading mastery might be right; he suggested it might not be right for certain students. He had hoped this problem would have been solved years ago.

[8:39:51 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said it is surprising that some functioning adults still cannot read.

He said he understands the difficulties for smaller districts to implement an early reading program. He stressed that SB 107 is

not going to be rushed or pushed through the system. It merits further discussion.

SENATOR GARDNER addressed the issue of third grade being the correct cut-off place. She recalled developmental learning stages and shared a personal experience about reading.

DR. MCCAULEY agreed that developmental stages are a consideration, but also timing and teacher instruction. Good instructional programs include both developmental maturation and quality instructional standards. After third grade the curriculum expands and students who struggle with reading struggle across the board. She shared that reading success later in life is well established. It is harder after third grade to "catch a student up." Earlier on, the challenge to identify and diagnose is easier. Catching up is much more challenging.

[8:45:40 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS summarized that remedial training after third grade is expensive, difficult, and not always successful.

DR. MCCAULEY added time consuming. Problems compound when a child cannot master content.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY pointed out that Finland has a literacy rate of 100 percent. He asked what age they begin to teach reading.

DR. MCCAULEY said age 7.

[8:47:36 AM](#)

POSIE BOGGS, representing herself, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in favor of SB 107. She shared her involvement in literacy-in-reading programs. She said the bill will help her as a reading tutor and she expressed thanks for the bill. She shared that she still gets non-reading 8th graders to tutor.

She agreed that after third grade it is difficult to help students read, but maintained that the effort is worth it. She said she is familiar with the Colorado READ model. She suggested within teacher certification, candidates be required to pass a basic reading competency assessment to learn about intervention strategies. She said the MTEL Foundations of Reading Test is a good one to use. She gave a specific example of a vocabulary lesson in history class.

She remarked that kindergarten teachers and reading specialists need to be able to pass a reading competency exam. She offered

to send documents from Literate Nation to the committee. She concluded that SB 107 should become law to make it last. She agreed that programs come and go depending on the staff. She suggested assessing teachers' reading knowledge by using the MTEL Foundations of Reading Test.

[8:57:48 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked about the 8th grader with a reading problem who slipped through the cracks.

MS. BOGGS thought it happened all the time. The NAEP scores of 67 percent show that many students are not competent readers. Some teachers do not have the knowledge to teach remedial readers. She said she is troubled that SB 107 does not apply to students with IEP's or difficulties. She maintained that SB 107 should especially apply to them.

SENATOR GARDNER thanked Ms. Boggs. She asked whether phonological memory is an innate ability or if it takes practice.

MS. BOGGS said it is an innate ability that can be measured. She further explained that phonological memory is more difficult to remediate than phonemic awareness. She shared a personal experience and an example of a child's phonological memory issue.

[9:03:07 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER said the discussion was very interesting. She gave an example of "spaghetti" as a frequently mispronounced word.

[9:03:35 AM](#)

MIKE COONS, representing himself, Palmer, Alaska, testified on SB 107. He praised Ms. Bogg's testimony and Senator Huggins' comments. He referred to page 1, lines 13 and 14, and page 2, lines 1 - 5, and wondered about the causes of reading problems. He questioned the role of standards, assessments, and staff development.

He disagreed with the "fixes" for reading problems listed in the bill. He also thought teachers would not work more closely with parents on reading problems. He stressed the importance of student interest in the subject matter. He shared a personal experience.

He suggested students should not be passed on to the next grade if they do not have passing grades. He opined that all schools should be accredited. He reserved approval of the bill.

[9:10:44 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER referred to proposed legislation about teachers not being allowed to recommend a specific provider to a family when they believe the child has a problem.

SENATOR HUGGINS stated that teachers cannot make a diagnosis.

SENATOR GARDNER confirmed that teachers can only make a recommendation to the family.

SENATOR HUGGINS said he heard Ms. Boggs say that the number of students who graduate and cannot read is much higher than reported. He stated it is "time to get on with it."

CHAIR STEVENS agreed SB 107 should apply to special needs students.

He reiterated that SB 107 is a work in progress.

[9:13:41 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER asked if there are some children who cannot be taught to read.

DR. MCCAULEY said her experience and what she knows is indicated in research and various methods are successful with children. The research supports a skill-based approach to reading as most successful with those children. Diagnosis and intervention is vital. She concluded that most children can effectively learn to read when there are evidence-based systems in place early on.

[9:15:40 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked Dr. McCauley to respond to the story about the 8th grade student who could not read.

DR. MACAULEY said there are unknown variables that may have contributed to that student's inability to read. At that age, an inability to read would interfere with that child's daily education.

[SB 107 was held in committee for further consideration.]

[9:16:54 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee,
Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee
at 9:16 a.m.