

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 8, 2017

9:05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Harriet Drummond, Chair
Representative Justin Parish, Vice Chair
Representative Zach Fansler
Representative Ivy Spohnholz
Representative Jennifer Johnston
Representative Chuck Kopp
Representative David Talerico

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Lora Reinbold
Representative Geran Tarr

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 52

"An Act relating to providing a pre-elementary program within a school district; and providing for the certification of early childhood education plans."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 52

SHORT TITLE: PRE-ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS/PLANS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) KAWASAKI

01/18/17	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/17	(H)	EDC, FIN
02/08/17	(H)	EDC AT 9:00 AM CAPITOL 106

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE SCOTT KAWASAKI
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced HB 52 as prime sponsor.

OLIVIA GARRETT, Staff

Representative Kawasaki
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Responded to questions during the hearing on HB 52.

ABBBE HENSLEY, Director
Best Beginnings
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with support for HB 52.

TREVOR STORRS, Executive Director
Alaska Children's Trust
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with support for HB 52.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:05:51 AM](#)

CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Representatives Drummond, Talerico, Parish, Spohnholz, Kopp, Johnston, and Fansler were present at the call to order.

CHAIR DRUMMOND announced intent to follow statutory process for introduction of committee bills. She said:

I would like the committee to entertain a motion to allow me to introduce a committee bill pertaining to the Alaska State Council on the Arts. It is my intent to introduce committee bills on a case by case basis after talking with each committee member. We may not always have unanimous consent on all committee bills, but I do want everyone on this committee to have a chance to weigh in on bills before they are introduced on behalf of the committee. I would also like to invite committee members to come talk to me if they have bills they would like introduced by the committee as a whole. I think everyone here agrees more than we disagree on education issues and I welcome input from everyone.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH moved to allow the chair of the House Education Standing Committee be delegated the duties and responsibilities in AS 24.08.060(a) to introduce legislation

pertaining to the Alaska State Council on the Arts on behalf of the committee. Without objection it was so moved.

HB 52-PRE-ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS/PLANS

[9:07:43 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 52, "An Act relating to providing a pre-elementary program within a school district; and providing for the certification of early childhood education plans."

[9:08:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCOTT KAWASAKI, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HB 52, paraphrasing from the sponsor statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Alaska remains one of the only states that does not provide pre-kindergarten education to its children on a statewide basis. HB 52 seeks to add Alaska to the ranks of the majority of states that have recognized the need to properly invest in our children's future.

Children who benefit from early education earn higher incomes as adults, enter the job market in much larger numbers, are more likely to obtain a college education, remain off of public assistance and stay out of prison. A report published by the National Center for Education Statistics found that 53 percent of prison inmates are either illiterate or have a very low literacy level. Children who enroll in early education programs have a much higher literacy rate than those who do not.

Alaska has a responsibility to provide the best education possible for its children. Currently, outside of a few school district classrooms, the state only provides early education through the Head Start program, which is only available to low-income children and which is chronically underfunded. Due to lack of funding, the Alaska Head Start Association estimates that more than 50 percent of children who qualify cannot receive Head Start education. Providing additional opportunities is a crucial stepping stone to improving the future of young Alaskans.

Extensive research shows that a child's intellectual development is especially important before age 6. A study by the National Institute for Early Education in 2004 found that children who attended state-funded pre-Kindergarten programs showed improvements in vocabulary 31 percent greater than other children, and 44 percent greater in math. Young children who receive high quality early education do better academically, show behavioral improvements in school, and are more likely to stay in school, graduate, and go on to complete post-secondary education.

There is also a significant economic impact of providing early education. Multiple studies have shown that funds invested in early education pay substantial dividends in the long run. Every dollar invested in high-quality pre-K programs save taxpayers up to \$7 long-term. Pre-K saves money by reducing the need for remedial and special education, welfare programs, and criminal justice services. An ongoing study of 40 year-old adults in Michigan who participated in the 1962 Perry Preschool project found that adults with pre-K were more likely to be employed and earned 33 percent higher average incomes than their peers who did not have state-funded early education.

Additionally, a study prepared for the SEED program at the University of Alaska Southeast state that 87 percent of Alaska residents think it is important for state government to provide financial support for early education and childcare. It's time to start thinking long-term and ensuring a prosperous future for all of Alaska's children.

[9:12:28 AM](#)

OLIVIA GARRETT, Staff, Representative Kawasaki, Alaska State Legislature, provided a sectional analysis of HB 52, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]

Section 1.

Establishes that elementary schools shall also consist of a pre-elementary program for children 3-5 years of age which operates as a Head Start Program or located in a public school. Pre-elementary students, however,

do not count towards a school's average daily membership.

Section 2.

Establishes that a child may enter a public school pre-elementary program if they are three years old on or before September 1st.

Section 3.

Defines "pre-elementary school" as a pre-kindergarten program provided by a school district for children ages 3-5 years whose primary function is educational.

Section 4.

Directs the board to adopt regulations regarding funding as well as statewide and local goals. Directs the board to develop approval regulations for charter, state boarding, or public schools before they can provide domiciliary services. Directs the board to develop regulations for the certification and implementation of a statewide plan to implement early childhood education.

Section 5.

The number of schools in a district is subject to a community having an average daily membership between 10 and 100. A community with an average daily membership between 101 and 425 is considered as either one elementary school (with a pre-k program) or one secondary school. Communities with an average daily membership over 425 are administered as separate schools.

Section 6.

A school district cannot include students in their average daily membership who are part of the pre-elementary program or who receive funding other than funding from this legislation

[9:14:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked whether the funding attached to the proposed bill could effectively be used to enlarge Head Start programs.

[9:14:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI explained that the concept is for any early education effort in a school district to have a possibility to qualify for the program, which could include Head Start. To a follow-up questions he said the governance would be provided by the State Board of Education but the district school boards would tailor programs specific to locales.

[9:15:43 AM](#)]

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO questioned whether every school district would be required to offer a voluntary pre-K program.

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI responded that the bill provides permissive language authorizing districts to act on their own behalf and interests.

[9:16:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP pointed out the fiscal note is \$51 million, representing a huge number given the state's current financial situation.

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI opined that education is the foundation of the state, it's addressed in the constitution and educational investment is a priority. However, the early development aspect of education has, heretofore, not been prioritized. He acknowledged that it's an expensive ticket, but the value gained by implementing early learning is well documented.

[9:18:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP acknowledged that the House Finance Committee will review the fiscal viability, and the policy call is to provide avenues for early education. He asked whether Alaska has performed any rigorous studies that track randomly assigned students, attending pre-school early learning programs and children who do not, which aren't from a singular community. The studies that have been available, are from singular communities and based on a narrow sample group, he noted. Two broad studies, one based in the U.S. and one in Europe, have

indicated that children do better when entering school at age six; citing the importance of a healthy early home life. The majority of the benefits touting universal preschools point to statistically small scoped programs, and follow-up studies indicate that whatever lead the study group may have had quickly fades, when they enter school. Unless something is rigorously documented to benefit youth, he maintained, caution should be taken in adopting a policy change of this magnitude and cost.

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI pointed out that many studies have been conducted, and called attention to several contained in the committee packet. Further, in 2009, a pilot program was introduced in Alaska, and still continues. Like any good pilot this program is ready to go prime time. The data analysis have been conducted to assess a variety of standards, and show good result. He directed attention to a chart, which he offered to make available to the committee and read the percentages that it contained, indicating outcome of the state's pilot program.

[9:23:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked whether the sponsor is aware of the current assessment efforts of the State Commission of Education regarding Alaska's educational approach.

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI acknowledged that the new administration will review and address the state approach. However, early education has been, and will possibly remain, at the top of the priority list; the outcome of the review is not yet available.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON regarding the allocation of funds, she asked, "Does this leave an opportunity for other than Head Start and other than school districts?"

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI responded that the program could be expanded to Head Starts, Early Head Starts, and possibly private parochial schools. The intent is to open-up opportunities for 3-5 year olds through voluntarily programs. The parents will make the decision for placing their child in a program. The HB 52 language will augment, not detract from any existing programs, he opined.

9:26:07 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ referred to the sponsor's statement, "Every dollar invested in high quality pre-K programs saves tax payers up to seven dollars in the long term," and asked for elaboration.

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI responded that reports indicate the socio-economic savings as a generally accepted principle and documentation is available. He offered to provide further information.

9:27:39 AM

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH noted that many working families struggle with the high cost of child care, neither can they afford to stay home with their children. He asked if any of the figures in the packet account for savings to individual working families.

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI answered that available statistics are based on assumptions that either a parent will participate in the program or be home with the child.

9:29:32 AM

ABBBE HENSLEY, Director, Best Beginnings, stated support for HB 52, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Last week was my second week of Grand Jury duty. I can't share details with you, but, if you've been reading the Alaska Dispatch News during the past few months, you can imagine the felony cases we've had to review. The ADN provides information about murders, attempted murders, robberies, thefts, and so on - and so many of those charged have been so young - just in their teens or early 20s - some with young children whose parents may spend the rest of their lives in prison. And the murder victims who leave young children behind. It's heartbreaking to think about all those little kids. We know there's no one big

fabulous idea or program that can prevent things like this.

But we do know about one kind of effort that can make a big impact. That is high-quality early care and learning programs. Early and sustained participation in quality PreK and early learning settings leads to:

More children graduating high school
Higher earning rates
Reduced public spending on remedial education and services, and
Lower incarceration rates.

We support state investment in educational programs for young children whether they are called preschool, pre-elementary, PreK, early kindergarten, Head Start, Parents as Teachers, Imagination Library, quality child care - all of which can be included under the umbrella term "early care and learning programs." And it almost goes without saying, here in Alaska especially, that these programs should all be voluntary.

The bill under discussion today, HB 52, focuses on "providing a pre-elementary program within a school district and for the certification of early childhood education plans."

Thank you, Rep Kawasaki, for making sure this issue gets a hearing. I would like to focus on two sections of the bill in particular.

Section 4. (a) (5)

"The board shall adopt regulations for the certification and implementation of a statewide plan to establish an effective means for providing early childhood education using the model curriculum developed by the department."

I would add that it is also critical that the Department of Education & Early Development have the capacity to provide technical assistance to districts to help ensure their programs are research-based, show outcomes, and reflect community needs. The technical assistance provided by DEED to current Pre-elementary Grantees demonstrates the value of this kind of

ongoing support and should be part of any new state-funded PreK effort.

Section 6 (c) (1) and (2)

(1) This point is confusing to me because it says that children in programs that comply with the statewide plan mentioned earlier may not be counted in the average daily membership of a school. I thought those were the children we are trying to include rather than exclude.

(2) While I expect it is unintentional, this point would continue to promote providing services in silos, an inefficient and uneconomical way of doing business, something neither the state nor private sector can afford these days. We need to be able to blend funds to make the best use of them, with the best outcomes.

Many states offer PreK in what are called mixed or diverse delivery settings. For example, North Carolina and New Mexico offer more than half their PreK classrooms through child care centers. This works because parents need full-day care for their children, not full "school day" care but full "working day" care.

Of course, there are some families and communities who would want a traditional, half day preschool program for their children.

PreK can be school-based, but does not have to be to meet the needs of children and families. Supporting quality PreK in community-based child care programs is a sound example of public-private partnership. How will we know which programs are of high quality and eligible for this kind of partnership? Alaska's recently launched voluntary quality recognition and improvement system for early care and learning programs, called Learn & Grow, will help.

Our own Pre-Elementary Grant program encourages collaboration with community-based early childhood programs - and children reap the benefits through partnerships with Head Start, a private preschool, and others. It doesn't appear that this would be possible for programs provided under this bill.

I think we can all agree that we want our children to grow and develop into happy, healthy, productive citizens who contribute to the vitality of our state. Research tells us the best time to build that foundation is when children are very young. Providing opportunities for families to have choices among various programs and supports for their children's growth, development, and learning is critical.

Thank you to Rep Kawasaki for inviting me to testify today. I encourage you, Rep Kawasaki and others who are interested in moving this bill forward, to meet with the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC) to flesh out the ideas in the bill to ensure the best possible outcomes for children. The AECCC includes both public and private sector members with expertise and experience that I believe will be helpful. As one of my early childhood colleagues said to me when we were discussing the bill, our partners are ready to do this.

[9:36:26 AM](#)

TREVOR STORRS, Executive Director, Alaska Children's Trust, stated support for HB 52, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today on HB 52. I'm Trevor Storrs, Executive Director of the Alaska Children's Trust, which is the statewide lead organization focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

Over the past decade, we have come to understand one of the most effective ways of preventing child abuse and neglect is by addressing the social determinants that foster an environment that promotes trauma and does not build the skill set (i.e. resilience) necessary to manage it.

Children are our most valuable resource. As our state struggles to find a solution to the nearly three-billion-dollar deficit, HB 52 provides a long term solution.

Various economic solutions are being examined from new revenue sources, changing current revenue sources, privatization, and even further cuts. All of these may address the budget challenge we are faced with today but it does not address the issue for tomorrow.

With all of these solutions, it does not change the level of demand for the services that cost our state the most. Eligibility for services can be changed but it does not change the demand. A great example of truly addressing the demand is the work our state has completed in the area of criminal justice reform and Medicaid expansion.

The demand on our justice system was increasing annually - reaching costs we could not sustain. With reform, the state re-examined how we held our citizens accountable to better reflect our community norms and values resulting in major cost savings across all departments, not just the justice system while still keeping our communities safe.

HB 52 is another step our state can take to address the issue of demand. Nearly 8% of Alaska's population is under the age of 5 and each year, 12,000 new babies are born in Alaska.

Zero to five is the most critical time in a children's life. It is a time that can greatly influence on who that child becomes as an adult. It is a time when the vast majority of brain development occurs.

Science shows that when a child experiences toxic stress like poverty, child abuse or neglect, witnesses domestic violence, historical trauma, it impairs the development of their brains and bodies so profoundly that the effect persists throughout their life and is passed on to the next generation. This experience is known as Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs.

ACEs cause most of the physical, social and behavioral ills our communities struggle with every day. These include diabetes, obesity, not graduating, substance abuse, homelessness, and entering the justice system.

While exposure to some adversity during childhood is normal and necessary for healthy development,

sustained or repeated exposure to severe adversity without supportive relationships is toxic for children.

HB 52 is offering one solution to reduce these adversities and provide the needed space for children and families to develop the skill set - the resilience - they need to bounce back from these adversities.

By investing in our children at the start of their lives versus addressing their struggles later in life, we begin to address the issue plaguing our fiscal struggle - high demand.

James Heckman, a noble laureate economist, has shown that for every dollar we invest in early childhood we save taxpayers up to \$7 long-term. Heckman says, "In an era of tight government budgets...the real question is how to use the available funds wisely. The best evidence supports the policy prescription. Invest in the very young".

How do we do this?

Early childhood development programs help remove the economic stress placed on families. No parent wakes up one day and says they will want to expose their child to adversities like child abuse and neglect. Yet, nearly 3,000 Alaskan children experience child abuse and neglect each year. Nearly 50% of those are under the age of 6.

Early childhood development programs provide one of the key protective factors for both the child and parents - support. When a child has 2-3 loving adults in their life other than their primary care providers, the impacts of adversity are greatly decreased. For parents, they gain access to social supports that help them through those stressful times.

Early childhood development programs are certified and implement evidence based programming. These programs show they provide children the skill set they need to be prepared for school and workforce.

Children who have attended early childhood programming have a higher rate of graduating, higher rate of

employment, healthier, and less strain on the state system.

Children in these programs experience less adversity and when they do, they and the family gain the resilience they need to overcome it.

Alaska Children's Trust supports investment in early childhood development. HB 52 is one investment. But I would be remiss to not take this opportunity to also support the existing funding for other key programs for early childhood development. It is important that we also safeguard these current investments and build on to them with HB 52. We need to continue to support home visiting programs like Parents as Teachers, work of Best Beginnings, child care subsidies, and current head start programs. Although we have these programs, the investment is small or their impact is limited.

I want to echo Abbe Hensley's suggestion of connecting with the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECC) to get their perspective of how best to invest in early childhood programming.

[9:44:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH recalled that, annually, about 3,000 Alaskan children are abused and neglected, and he asked what percent are under the age of six.

MR. STORRS responded it would be about 50 percent.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH queried by how much that number might be reduced if pre-K programs were implemented.

MR. STORRS said offering an answer would require a crystal ball; however, for families that can't afford childcare, having a pre-K program reduces stress. Many of the participants may come from working poor households, and he predicted that a decrease in abuse and neglect would be evident.

CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that HB 52 would be held.

[9:47:16 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked the participants and announced the next meeting.

ts9:47:30

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:47 a.m.