

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 31, 2017

8:05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Ivy Spohnholz
Representative Lora Reinbold (alternate)
Representative Geran Tarr (alternate)

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Tom Begich

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): EARLY EDUCATION

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

DEBI BALDWIN, Director
Child Development Division
Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "House Education Committee and Early Childhood," dated 3/31/17; provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Parents as Teachers"; answered questions.

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director

Best Beginnings
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "House Education Committee and Early Childhood," dated 3/31/17; provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Best Beginnings Alaska's Early Childhood Investment," dated 3/31/17; answered questions.

LISA MORENO, Director
Strategic Initiatives; Program Director
Anchorage Realizing Indigenous Student Excellence
Cook Inlet Tribal Council
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Anchorage Realizing Indigenous Student Excellence (ARISE) Kindergarten Preparedness in Anchorage," dated 3/31/17.

DIRK SHUMAKER, Executive Director
Kids Corps, Incorporated; Representative
Alaska Head Start Association
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Head Start and Early Head Start in Alaska," dated 3/31/17.

STEPHANIE BERGLUND, CEO
thread

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "thread," dated 3/31/17, and answered questions.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:05:36 AM](#)

CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. Representatives Drummond, Parish, Johnston, Kopp, and Talerico were present at the call to order. Representative Fansler arrived as the meeting was in progress. Also present was Senator Begich.

PRESENTATION(S): Early Education

[8:06:22 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the order of business would be several presentations on early education.

[8:07:22 AM](#)

DEBI BALDWIN, Director, Child Development Division, Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc. (RurAL CAP), informed the committee healthy and strong children are necessary for a strong and prosperous Alaska, and a dialogue to address this issue will ensure an early care and learning system is available in the state.

[8:08:29 AM](#)

ABBE HENSLEY, Executive Director, Best Beginnings, stated exuberant families are the goal of the work discussed today.

MS. BALDWIN introduced the programs that would be presented and directed attention to a document provided in the committee packet entitled, "House Education Committee, March 31, 2017 Early Childhood Programs with DEED Investment," which contained the attributes of each program. Also provided in the committee packet was a document entitled, "Alaska Early Childhood Coordination Council Statewide Strategic Report," dated November 2012. Ms. Baldwin stated the full report is available upon request of the committee.

MS. HENSLEY said the following presentation would include information on how reduced funding may impact the aforementioned programs. As an introduction to the programs, she advised there are 63,943 Alaskan children under the age of six, and provided the numbers of children in various childcare programs as follows: licensed childcare, 13,650; Head Start (three to five years of age), 3,293; Early Head Start (birth to three years of age), 853; Alaska state Pre-K, 289; school district pre-elementary programs, 2,477; Early Intervention, 2,000; Parents as Teachers, over 550; Imagination Library, 19,156.

[8:12:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked if these are state and federally funded programs.

MS. BALDWIN responded some of the programs receive federal and state support.

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP asked whether any of the numbers are duplicative between programs, or if each program represents individual pre-kindergarten students.

MS. HENSLEY explained a child enrolled in a Head Start program may also attend a licensed day care, and a child receiving a book from the Imagination Library may be enrolled in other programs.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether all Head Start programs are federally funded.

MS. BALDWIN said yes, with some state match. She added that the foregoing is an array of programs, some that target a goal such as promoting early literacy, and some are highly comprehensive, such as Head Start. She cautioned that the numbers of children participating in programs do not indicate that a majority of the children in Alaska are benefiting from an "early childhood experience."

[8:16:12 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND questioned which age group is targeted for early intervention.

MS. BALDWIN said early intervention is at ages zero to three, and special education is at ages three to five. In further response to Chair Drummond, she said school district Pre-K is for ages three to four, and state Pre-K is for age four only.

[8:16:48 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY added some school district programs vary.

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO asked for clarification on the number of children served by Parents as Teachers.

MS. BALDWIN explained 200 children are sponsored through the state and over 300 children receive funding through the U.S. Department of Education, targeted to support Alaska Native children.

MS. BALDWIN pointed out there are over 60,000 children age six and under in the state, and about 10,000 children per age range, which is helpful for education planning.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked for the source of the total number of 63,943.

MS. BALDWIN said the number is based on information from the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and census data.

MS. HENSLEY returned attention to the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC) which was created in response to a requirement by Head Start that each state have an advisory council to report on early childhood systems. [AECCC] is tasked to promote the positive development, improved health outcomes, and school readiness for children prenatal through eight years of age. Also, AECCC supports the creation of a sustainable, comprehensive system of early care, health, education, and family support, and facilitates the integration and alignment of early childhood services, planning, policy, resources, and funding. Additionally, AECCC serves to establish connections between health, mental health, education and family support systems, and public and private sectors.

[8:21:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked for the membership of the council.

MS. HENSLEY noted the membership is available online; the council is divided between members from the private sector and members from government, including: Ms. Baldwin, Ms. Hensley, Ms. Berglund, public members, and representatives from the Department of Education and Early Development (EED), DHSS, and the Department of Corrections (DOC). [AECCC] is intended to look at the broad spectrum of what is available and what is needed for young children. Ms. Hensley continued, dividing the Alaska early care and learning system in the terms of main categories and individual programs. Within the category of coordination and advocacy are AECCC, the early childhood comprehensive systems framework, and the Head Start collaboration office. Within the category of policy frameworks are the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines, Alaska SEED Core Knowledge and Competencies, Pyramid Foundation, Strengthening Families, and the Alaska State Standards for Literacy and Math. Within the category of program improvement is Learn and Grow: Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS). Within the category of educator professional development are SEED, school district-based professional learning, Head Start training and technical assistance, and the Alaska Parents as Teachers state office. Within the category of childcare infrastructure is licensing, and within the category of pre-elementary infrastructure is pre-elementary approval.

[8:26:50 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[8:28:05 AM](#)

LISA MORENO, Director, Strategic Initiatives, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, said she has also been the program director for Anchorage Realizing Indigenous Student Excellence (ARISE) for almost four years. Ms. Moreno informed the committee ARISE is a community partnership - not a program - but a collaborative strategy consisting of 15 organizations in Anchorage with the goal to ensure every Alaska Native child in Anchorage leads a healthy and empowered life with access to unlimited opportunities, successful academic transitions, social, emotional, and physical wellbeing, and knows his/her heritage, culture, and role in the community (slide 2). Ms. Moreno said ARISE originated after a report found there was little coordination between the Anchorage School District (ASD) and organizations dedicated to Alaska Native student success. She noted Best Beginnings, thread, and Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CTIC) were early partners in ARISE that identified eight measurable outcomes sought for Alaska Native students and children in Anchorage, including improvements to academic and social and emotional wellbeing outcomes. To achieve this goal, in 2014, ARISE turned its focus to early care and learning for the purpose of preparing Alaska Native children for kindergarten. Ms. Moreno advised there is a known achievement gap between Alaska Native students and non-Native students beginning at the kindergarten level in Anchorage (slide 3).

CHAIR DRUMMOND expressed concern about the low percentages of students prepared for kindergarten.

MS. MORENO further explained ARISE is currently engaging parents and others in the lives of Alaska Native children and leveraging partnerships to assess challenges using data, communications, and community organizations to identify challenges and to develop effective methods for change. ARISE receives no state funding but asks of the state: What's the system? What are the unmet needs for services? What are the strengths and deficits of families? What is meant by "prepared for kindergarten" and how can that be measured? Why are some children prepared and others are not, and why? Ms. Moreno pointed out data compiled on minority populations tends to be limited and biased without consideration of family and community aspects. Further, gathering information on children is difficult until they enter the school system, and it is important that data on children

includes their living experiences. ARISE spent two years to determine what it means to be prepared for kindergarten and how preparedness is measured. In that process, ARISE developed an image of an Alaska Native child who is prepared for kindergarten by access to certain resources, and identified the factors that support and challenge kindergarten preparedness (slides 4-5). Ms. Moreno cautioned there is no perfect method by which to measure kindergarten preparedness; however, the indicator chosen was a score of 20 or more on the Alaska Developmental Profile (ADP) [Department of Education and Early Development (EED)] (slide 3).

[8:34:33 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND inquired as to the source of ADP and how it is used in schools.

MS. MORENO explained ADP is an observational assessment used by kindergarten teachers for 4-6 weeks at the beginning of the kindergarten year to record data on each child; subsequently, the assessment is sent to EED. Ms. Moreno then related children's brains develop based on attachment relationships with their caregivers. Without an accurate way to track children before school age, ARISE, through community organizing, engaged a group of thirty families with children under the age of five. From that group, dedicated families spent one summer looking closely at issues around early care and learning. The group of families - with support from thread, Best Beginnings, and RurAL CAP - held meetings, researched data, and developed skills, confidence, and community. Afterward, the families told ARISE what needed to change: families need to be provided with information about early learning and child development; there is a disconnect between what families need and what is easily accessible; medical providers need to communicate in a better manner.

[8:37:39 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND recalled years ago hospitals provided a significant amount of information to families of newborns.

MS. MORENO clarified ARISE families said the manner in which the information is shared is not useful. The parents decided to work with Best Beginnings, thread, RurAL CAP, the Parents as Teachers program, ASD, CITC, and Southcentral Foundation to develop an action plan. The action plan requested ASD to provide training for all kindergarten teachers in how to

implement ADP, and in Alaska Native and American Indian cultures in the state. The plan also included a design for a collaborative communications campaign around early learning, child developmental issues, and parental resources. [ARISE] compiled over 45 pages of data on Alaska Native children in Anchorage related to population, housing, childcare providers, Head Start programs, school boundaries, and pre-elementary programs; in addition, ARISE invested in a survey to look at the availability and usage of childcare in Anchorage. The data revealed: 5,000 Alaska Native children under the age of six in Anchorage; parents are unaware of kindergarten assessments, and assessments vary; Alaska Native and American Indian families use childcare at the same rate as non-Native families; all families face difficulties finding and affording childcare in Anchorage; there is no way to assess the quality of childcare. In response to Chair Drummond, she confirmed ARISE's statistics are based on Alaska Native children in Anchorage.

[8:41:09 AM](#)

MS. MORENO continued that ARISE found Alaska Native children have the highest rates of ear infections in the U.S., and only Head Start programs routinely test hearing in Alaska between birth and kindergarten. In response to Representative Fansler, she said "public health" reports environmental factors are why Alaska Native children have the highest rates of ear infections, and surgeons have pointed to the shape of their Eustachian tubes; however, the reason is not as important as establishing a protocol for hearing testing, which could easily be accomplished at every well-baby check (slide 6). In response to the data compiled by ARISE, CITC established the Clare Swan Early Head Start Child Care Center which will provide all day, year around care for seventy Alaska Native children between the ages of zero and three years. The center will also host two Yup'ik immersion classrooms, and will add a federally funded Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program (MIECHV) program. Also in response, ASD has trained all kindergarten teachers in Alaska Native and American Indian cultures in Alaska, and in the implementation of ADP. Finally, ARISE partners created a social media campaign to contact families and provide information on topics including large motor skills, self-regulation, expressive and receptive language, curiosity learning, and persistence (slides 6B and 7). Ms. Moreno concluded ARISE is possible because of its partners that receive EED funding, and EED funding has contributed to CITC's new role supporting early childhood care and learning; however, there remains an unmet need in the community of Anchorage.

[8:47:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON disclosed that she was involved in this effort/process from the beginning, until last year. She observed one aspect missing from the project was involvement by health and social services and asked whether ARISE was interested in collaboration with Southcentral Foundation, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and DHSS.

MS. MORENO said ARISE welcomes any collaborators who will work with the community and improve resources with a focus on children; in fact, Southcentral Foundation and other medical providers seek to incorporate routine hearing tests into well-baby and pediatric checkups.

[8:49:17 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[8:50:02 AM](#)

DIRK SHUMAKER, Executive Director, Kids Corps, Incorporated, and representing the Alaska Head Start Association, informed the committee Kids Corps, Incorporated (KCI) provides Head Start and Early Head Start in Anchorage. He said his experience with Head Start programs has been in urban Alaska, and Ms. Baldwin would provide further information on Head Start and Early Head Start in rural Alaska. As has been previously discussed, young children are a vulnerable population and comprehensive child services look at children and their families to support school readiness. Families may be struggling with issues, but they remain the primary nurturers and problem-solvers and need to be strengthened. Further, it is important to have a systems approach. Mr. Shumaker said 17 grantees across the state provide Head Start and/or Early Head Start together to provide programs from birth to five years. During the early years development takes place that contributes to school readiness, which is the goal of Head Start: that children will be successful in kindergarten and later in school. The programs are a comprehensive model to address all obstacles to a child's growth and development, whether it is economics or other issues. In addition, Head Start takes a two-generation approach in its efforts to provide services to a child and to strengthen his/her family and parents. He advised Head Start services can be center- or home-based, ranging from a minimum level of services. Center-based services provide a minimum of 3.5 hours per day and

there is a goal of 1,080 hours per year for Early Head Start, with an emphasis on intensity and duration. Home-based services provide a minimum of 46 home visits utilizing a research-based curriculum which is reviewed and evaluated. Assessments occur at least three times per year using a valid and reliable assessment tool to measure progress, which in Alaska is the My Teaching Strategies, LLC., Gold assessment. In response to Chair Drummond, he clarified the home-based program requires 46 home visits per family, not per child.

[8:56:02 AM](#)

MR. SHUMAKER continued to explain comprehensive service also includes screenings to identify health and mental health needs, and to set a 45-day timeline for remediation, if needed. At center-based programs only, there are minimums for nutritious daily meals. Returning to the family component, he restated parental involvement as volunteers at the centers is encouraged so that children and parents benefit from education to strengthen self-sufficiency. He provided a slide entitled, "Who Head Start & Early Head Start Serves" which listed Region 10 Head Start and Early Head Start programs and Region 11 American Indian Alaska Native Early Head Start grantees; also indicated on the slide was in 2016 there were 2,047 children enrolled in Head Start and 858 enrolled in Early Head Start, of which about two-thirds were home-based. Mr. Shumaker advised center-based programs are especially for families with teen parents or parents who are working.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether the enrollments shown were statewide or for Anchorage.

MR. SHUMAKER said statewide. He turned attention to a slide entitled, "Who Head Start & Early Head Start serve (total enrollment=3,779)," and pointed out about two-thirds of the children are enrolled because they met federal poverty guidelines; however, other reasons for enrollment were foster care, referrals by the Office of Children's Services, DHSS, and homelessness, thus the primary focus of Head Start programs is to serve children who are most needy. He provided a slide subtitled, "Prevention and Early Intervention," and stressed the importance of mental health consultation to the social and emotional development of children and to address trauma experienced due to adverse childhood experiences; mental health consultations are a way to prevent children from coming to kindergarten with challenging behaviors. Continuing to the slide subtitled, "School Readiness" he said every program in the

state uses observation-based assessments of children which are reported to the state three times per year to reveal the progress children are making in early learning settings; in fact, significant growth is being recorded from fall to spring in school readiness. Further, families receive emergency services and other services.

[9:02:04 AM](#)

MR. SHUMAKER explained Head Start is mostly a federally funded program along with a required 20 percent match from local and state funds; he cautioned a reduction in state funding would result in a loss of federal funds that are currently leveraged. In addition, in a comprehensive program, there is a limited amount of flexibility to reduce the cost of certain services, such as screenings or meals.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON surmised intervention is primarily for health and mental health, and asked how the care is delivered.

MR. SHUMAKER responded that care is provided in partnership with community-based services, so after a need is identified, Head Start would seek to refer the family to an appropriate provider.

MS. BALDWIN added that in rural Alaska, Head Start and Early Head Start programs hold memorandums of understanding and memorandums of agreement with Indian Health Service providers such as the Norton South Health Corporation, but there are not enough providers to complete health and mental health screening; in fact, funds from RurAL CAP have been used to create contracts and fly private providers to rural areas to conduct health screenings. In addition, RurAL CAP is bringing students and supervisors from the University of Alaska Anchorage nursing program to provide screenings in rural areas. Ms. Baldwin stressed providing care is a huge issue in rural Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked whether the aforementioned care is Medicaid reimbursable.

MS. BALDWIN offered to provide further information in this regard.

MR. SHUMAKER reviewed the unique aspects of Head Start and Early Head Start, which include: provides comprehensive services - not duplicative; provides statewide valid and reliable child outcomes assessment system through My Teaching Strategies Gold; provides professional support for children through mental health

consultation; does not expel or suspend children with challenging behaviors.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked if My Teaching Strategies Gold is a national assessment tool.

MR. SHUMAKER replied the assessment was developed for programs nationwide in an opt-in or opt-out capacity; however, it is used by every program in Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON questioned the cultural and or subjective aspects of the assessment.

MR. SHUMAKER explained the assessment tool is based on observation, which can and should take into consideration the evidence presented by the family - and other sources - as well as what is observed in the classroom. To form a rating, the teacher offers many observations and accounts from the child's family, to justify the rating. In further response to Representative Johnston, he said My Teaching Strategies Gold provides a framework, dimensions, indicators, and definitions of skill levels on a scale of 1-9.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON said she was interested in whether the assessment reflects a child's progress and a measurement of resiliency.

[9:09:48 AM](#)

MS. BALDWIN pointed out an assessment differs from a screening in that a screening results in a "yes or no" on whether a certain skillset has been attained. An assessment is a tool to understand "learning gains" and growth in a child's stage of development over time.

MR. SHUMAKER, returning to the unique qualities of Head Start and Early Head Start programs, said there is a high level of accountability at federal and local levels. Finally, he noted some of the collaborations are mandated, but the goal is to provide services in every local community.

[9:11:35 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[9:13:10 AM](#)

MS. BALDWIN directed attention to a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Parents as Teachers," and said RurAL CAP and Kids Corps Inc. provide Head Start and Early Head Start services and receive funding for the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program from the state. RurAL CAP has been providing Head Start services throughout the state for over 50 years. Through a talented staff at each center and at its central office, RurAL CAP documented that children in rural areas are entering Head Start at least 16-18 months developmentally behind. In response, RurAL CAP adopted Early Head Start in a home-based model to engage parents in their children's education. At this time there are six Early Head Start programs, and in areas where Early Head Start is not available, RurAL CAP introduced PAT. Ms. Baldwin said gains have been seen in the developmental levels of children transitioning into Head Start at three years of age.

[9:15:21 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Ms. Baldwin to repeat her statement related to children's level of development.

MS. BALDWIN reviewed her statement and stressed that Early Head Start was not expanded due to its higher cost, so Parents as Teachers was instigated, and major improvements were soon evident. She paraphrased from a prepared statement, which read [original punctuation provided]:

The Parents as Teachers (PAT) program, is an evidenced-based parent education and home visiting model that serves families from pregnancy until their child enters their next educational setting. Parents as Teachers, PAT, provides a two-generation approach to services. Grounded in the most recent research, the program aims to support families through direct interaction with children and parents in the most intimate of settings: their home.

Parents as Teachers has four main goals; increase parent knowledge of early childhood development and improve parenting practices; provide early detection of developmental delays and health issues, prevent child abuse and neglect and increase school readiness and school success.

During the 2015-16 program year, the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development provided funding to

four grantees. 206 children and 167 families were served, with a vast majority of the children being between ages 0 to 3.

Services were provided in five communities, expanding to nine communities in 2016-17. 24 children were identified with potential delays or concerns; 56 percent of families had one or more high needs characteristics, and 78% of families set individual goals for their family. The average cost of providing PAT services per child is \$3,012.

The PAT program model is comprised of five main components: Personal home visits Individualized strength-based visits are provided an average of twice a month. The number of monthly visits can also be determined by the high needs characteristics of the family.

Parent educators focus on child development, promoting positive parent-child interactions, school readiness and family well-being. Parent educators help parents to develop confidence - or a sense of self-efficacy - in their efforts with their newborns and young children, promoting the parent as the child's first and best teacher.

Hearing, vision, and developmental screenings Children's overall development, health, hearing, and vision are all assessed to ensure children are thriving. Screening provides regular information about each child's health and developmental progress, increases parents' understanding of their child's development, and identifies strengths and abilities, as well as areas of potential concern.

Group connections:

Group connections are designed so that families build social connections with each other, engage in parent-child interaction, and increase their knowledge of ways to support children's development. Group connections are staffed by at least one certified parent educator or supervisor and are focused on the major areas of the PAT model and on parents needs.

Resource referrals:

Each PAT program assists families in connecting to needed resources, strengthening protective factors and fostering positive change. Each program takes an active role in the community, establishing relationships with other programs and organizations that serve families. Research shows that parents and caregivers who have support are more likely to provide safe and healthy homes for children (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).

Family Assessments are used to identify and reflect on family competencies and other factors affecting family dynamics. Helping parents to identify their strengths and stressors helps families understand how those factors may influence their parenting. Building resiliency and protective factors are program goals along with providing support for individual goals that each family selects.

Through PAT program self evaluations and third party external evaluations, Parents enrolled in the PAT program exhibit one or more of the following outcomes: improved parenting practices, increased knowledge and practice of positive discipline techniques, more realistic expectations of age-appropriate developmental milestones, a home environment conducive to healthy child development, increased parent-child attachment, reduction of stress, fulfillment of basic needs, opportunities to interact with other parents, and increased awareness and access to sources of information and support.

Moreover, research suggests that prevention programs are shown to be more effective when they involve parents as partners (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). When parents are involved, they are then more likely to make lasting changes as they are empowered to identify solutions. The Parents as Teachers program provides this much needed, deeper approach to building strong families. Ultimately this will result in strong communities, healthy families, and children who are healthy, safe, and ready to learn.

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development requires PAT programs maintain Affiliate status to receive funding. Affiliate status means that

the program has implemented the 17 Essential Requirements of the PAT Model including Quality Standards related to Organizational Supports and Quality Improvement, Staff Competencies and the primary components of Parents as Teachers services. A Quality Assurance Blueprint is used to measure fidelity to the model.

Any reduction in Parents as Teachers state funding will result in several impacts to children and families. Loss of services, loss of educator jobs in under-employed communities, children arriving in the formal school environment with undetected developmental delays, fragile families at higher risk for entering state intervention, limited longitudinal data regarding the impact of early childhood, inequities in access to quality programs, parents feeling less confident about leading their child's education in the K-12 system, reduction in the state's well child completion rates and the higher costs of starting up and ramping down programs continually.

[9:27:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON directed attention to the handout page titled "Parents as Teachers 2015-2016 Alaska Performance Report" and asked if Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a grant program.

MS. BALDWIN said correct.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON questioned why the communities being served are primarily in Southcentral and Southeast Alaska. She then asked whether the qualifying criteria for the children served is universal for each community.

MS. BALDWIN answered the communities served are strategic in that RurAL CAP, as one of four grantees, also has a federal three-year project demonstration grant that provides services only to Alaska Native children. Although RurAL CAP provides other PAT programs in rural Alaska, state funds are all RurAL CAP can use to provide PAT services to families regardless of ethnicity or race. To Representative Johnston's second question, she said the original PAT model was meant for all parents, however, due to a shortage of funding, RurAL CAP must direct services to families with high-risk characteristics such as teen pregnancy, low income, or medical factors.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked how families are located.

MS. BALDWIN described referral processes and RurAL CAP's active recruitment plan through organizations, such as the Cook Inlet Housing Authority, and RurAL CAP's known presence in rural areas. In further response to Representative Johnston, she explained there is no dedicated federal funding or grant source for PAT; however, RurAL CAP aggressively seeks funds to provide PAT to rural areas as part of its mission.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON inquired as to state funding to meet the need identified by RurAL CAP for ages zero to three.

MS. BALDWIN said the model can serve ages zero to five, but RurAL CAP has prioritized the need is greatest for ages zero to three.

[9:33:27 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[9:35:07 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY directed attention to a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Best Beginnings Alaska's Early Childhood Investment." She said Best Beginnings is a public-private partnership mobilizing people and resources to ensure all Alaska children begin school ready to succeed by implementing the core values of collaboration, strategic thinking, innovation, and sustainability (slide 2). Since Best Beginnings began in 2006, it partnered with EED to develop the Alaska State Literacy Blueprint. Best Beginnings provides early literacy information through public services announcements (PSAs) in movie theatres and supports Pre-elementary grants (slide 3). Slide 4 was a map of the locations of Imagination Libraries throughout the state. Imagination Library provides age-appropriate, new, quality books to children from birth to age five. In April 2009, there were 3,673 children who benefited, but by May 2015, a high of 23,789 was attained. Due to funding cuts in fiscal year 2017 (FY 17), books are now provided to 19,156 children at a cost of \$30.00 per year per child. In addition to providing books, all the libraries engage in family activities (slide 5). Slide 6 listed how books impact a child's academic achievement. In Alaska, research in 2009 and 2011 has shown parents reported their children were more prepared for kindergarten and in Juneau, children scored higher on the ADP literacy and language development goal (slides 7-8).

[9:41:51 AM](#)

MS. HENSLEY said based on a December 2016, family engagement survey, the Imagination Library impact in Anchorage reported 92 percent of parents increased their knowledge of parenting and 84 percent increased their reading time with their child (slide 9). A similar survey was conducted among Alaska Native parents in January 2017, that garnered positive comments from parents (slide 10). Best Beginnings resources and outreach efforts include radio and TV PSAs, and she stressed the importance of the communications aspect, noting that Best Beginnings provides activity guides and cards in Spanish and Yu'pik (slide 11). The Words Count activity is designed to close the "30 million-word gap" (slide 12). StoryTRACKS is another activity project (slide 13). Ms. Hensley provided a list of collaboration and networking in place and said Best Beginnings has a leadership role in the ARISE collective impact initiative, and the 90 percent by 2020 collective impact initiative (slide 14). Turning to the topic of reductions in state funds, she advised state funding provided about one-half of Best Beginnings' budget in FY 16. When funding was reduced from \$937,500 to \$320,000 in FY 15, the following occurred: 4,633 fewer children received early literacy services; no funding and technical assistance for six community partnerships across Alaska was available, reducing family support activities; staff was dramatically reduced and reorganized; less capacity to support statewide early childhood education and outreach (slide 15). Ms. Hensley said Best Beginnings continued with its services after the funding reduction to \$320,000; however, additional cuts cannot be made up by community fundraising. Furthermore, Best Beginnings is an efficient and effective steward of both state and private funds (slide 16).

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON disclosed that her daughter-in-law serves on the Best Beginnings' board of directors.

[9:47:30 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[9:47:51 AM](#)

STEPHANIE BERGLUND, CEO, thread, provided an overview of her organization, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Hello, I'm Stephanie Berglund, CEO of thread, Alaska's Child Care Resource & Referral Network. Thank you to the chair and members of the committee for the opportunity to join in this hearing today and to participate by phone. I appreciate your focus and interest to learn more about the specifics of early learning.

thread is a private non-profit and has been working for 30 years to increase access to affordable and quality early care and learning. thread delivers services through the thread Network- a unique business partnership between three sister organizations. We provide direct services to families, early educators, early care and learning programs and communities.

For families, thread specializes in providing tips and tools for finding and selecting high quality early learning programs including free referrals. These services result in more families being informed consumers and selecting high quality early learning services that meet their needs. This results in more families able to participate in the workforce and a greater likelihood of having continuity of services for their young children. thread also provides training, technical assistance and professional coaching to early childhood teachers and early care and learning programs and classrooms. These services advance early childhood teachers' skills and knowledge and support stronger teacher/child interactions- these teacher supports have proven results in more positive outcomes for young children. Also, thread provides services to communities to help address needed early learning services. Lastly, thread provides leadership and partnership to help advance the larger early care and learning system. We are a committed partner in working toward more efficient and effective systems to help families and young children thrive.

thread partners with the Department of Education and Early Development deliver and support Professional Learning.

- We are currently working with the 14 Pre elementary School District grantees, Head Start grantees and community partnership leadership

- thread provides training, technical assistance and professional coaching to these early childhood teachers and district principals
- This professional learning is delivered with focus on increasing quality interactions between teachers and children and uses national best practices to most effectively impact school readiness and more positive child outcomes.

Specifically, thread uses the CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) to train and professionally coach teachers. CLASS is a research-based approach for improving teaching so children can learn and achieve more. CLASS helps teachers improve what matters most in the classroom—the quality interactions that drive learning and development.

In addition to CLASS, thread's professional development services include providing training on the Strengthening Families protective factors and the Pyramid Model Foundations.

- Strengthening Families is a proven, cost-effective approach to building Protective Factors around children by supporting family strengths and resiliency. Research shows when Protective Factors are well established in a family, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes and families are supported in preventing ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences).

- The training introduces the 5 protective factors every family needs along with strategies to build relationships between the family and the early childhood teacher to improve communication and decrease conflicts.

- The trainings help teachers understand how building relationships with families can prevent child abuse and neglect and provide for optimal child development; recognize the importance of building relationships with families; understand family support principles and protective factors and how to implement these into their program/classroom; and become aware of their own beliefs and values that may help or inhibit relationship building with families.

- The Pyramid Model is national best practice framework focused on supporting the Social Emotional Competence of Young Children. The Pyramid training

offered is aimed at helping teachers promote the social emotional competence in early childhood. Teachers learn how a well-established foundation is necessary for developing nurturing relationships, supportive environments, strong knowledge in developmentally appropriate practices, and positive guidance strategies which allow early childhood teachers to resolve challenging behaviors.

- Objectives of the training are: understand the elements of early childhood social emotional development; understand how to implement the PM into the classroom setting; identify how understanding the needs of young children relates to building positive relationships; identify communicative behaviors in young children; and describe the form, function, intensity, frequency, and duration of behavior.

These professional learning supports strengthen teacher's quality interactions with young children to positively affect children's success in school and beyond. Without partnership with the Department of Education and Early Development, thread would not be able to support these quality teacher education and supports.

thread also partners with the Department of Education and Early Development in the policy framework and quality improvement system areas referenced in the earlier Early Care and Learning System graphic, to support and grow early learning services.

We support the Pre elementary grantees with alignment to this larger early care and learning system and with connecting to broader program quality standards and teacher professional development systems in the state.

This alignment is important as our state needs more quality early care and learning programs for families and young children. Families and communities are wanting and needing more options for affordable and quality early learning programs. Our current supply of licensed and regulated programs is only meeting 50% of the demand of working families. This need for more access to quality learning includes our goals to expand PreK, Head Start/Early Head Start, and Child Care in addition to the family supports and home visiting programs you heard about earlier.

Thank you again for your interest in thread's partnership with DEED. I encourage the committee to continue to look at ways to strengthen the early education piece of the department.

[9:54:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON inquired as to all the sources of thread's funding.

MS. BERGLUND explained part of thread's funding is federal pass-through from the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act to support quality childcare. The state administers the grant and matching funds from the state are required. The focus of the funds must be on supporting families' access to quality early care and learning. In addition, thread receives about \$250,000 from EED for professional learning for teachers. In further response to Representative Johnston, she said the federal block grant funds are managed and delivered through DHSS and the Child Care Program Office, Division of Public Assistance, DHSS, thus the grant supports three aspects of childcare in Alaska: licensing and regulation of childcare; access to childcare services; support for quality childcare.

[9:57:16 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:57 a.m.