

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT MEETING
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE
HOUSE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE
March 16, 2018
8:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Harriet Drummond, Chair
Representative Justin Parish, Vice Chair
Representative Ivy Spohnholz
Representative Jennifer Johnston

HOUSE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Ivy Spohnholz, Chair
Representative Geran Tarr
Representative Jennifer Johnston

MEMBERS ABSENT

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky
Representative Chuck Kopp
Representative David Talerico
Representative Lora Reinbold (alternate)
Representative Geran Tarr (alternate)

HOUSE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky, Vice Chair
Representative Sam Kito
Representative David Eastman
Representative Colleen Sullivan-Leonard
Representative Matt Claman (alternate)
Representative Dan Saddler (alternate)

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: HIGH QUALITY EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

SANA EFIRD, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of Department of Education and Early Development Early Learning Programs.

DUANE MAYES, Director
Senior & Disabilities Service
Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced the presenters of the programs.

MAUREEN HARWOOD, Chief
Developmental Programs
Senior & Disabilities Service
Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program: Addressing Special Needs Populations.

MONICA WINDOM, Director
Division of Public Assistance
Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on High Quality Early Care and Education.

STEPHANIE BERGLUND, CEO
thread
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on the Thread program.

TAMAR BEN-YOSEF, Executive Director
All Alaska Pediatric Partnership
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on the Help Me Grow program.

JIMAEL JOHNSON, Program Officer
Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHT)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on the Alaska Mental Health Trust.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on the Alaska Children's Trust role as funder of other organizations.

BRIAN HOLST
Juneau Economic Development Council (JEDC);
Juneau Board of Education;
Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as a member of JEDC.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:56 AM](#)

CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND called the joint meeting of the House Education Standing Committee and the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee to order at 8:04 a.m. Representatives Parish [via teleconference], Spohnholz, Tarr, Johnston, and Drummond were present at the call to order.

Presentation: High Quality Early Care & Education

[8:05:25 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the only order of business would be a presentation on High Quality Early Care & Education [included on committee packet].

[8:06:51 AM](#)

SANA EFIRD, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), gave a brief overview of the programs in the early learning collaboration. She specified the presentation would not cover the federal title programs.

MS. EFIRD began the presentation on slide 3, "Overview of DEED Early Learning Programs":

DEED Funding Allocation
Pre-Elementary
Head Start

Best Beginnings
Parents as Teachers
thread

MS. EFIRD addressed slide 4, "Allocation of Deed Spending FY17" showing a total of \$9,837,600. Of the total, Early Learning Coordination is broken out as follows:

\$6,857,700 Head Start
\$500,000 Parents as Teachers
\$320,000 Best Beginnings
\$159,900 thread

Pre-Elementary Grants
\$2,000,000 Pre-Elementary

[8:10:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked whether the programs listed are all the Head Start programs in the state or only those which operate through DEED.

MS. EFIRD answered there are 16 grantees in the state. She added it does not include the federal money that goes directly to the Head Start programs.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether the funds listed on the slide are state general funds (GF).

MS. EFIRD answered in the affirmative.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR asked whether the money shown is required for a federal match.

MS. EFIRD answered the federal Head Start program requires a non-federal match of 20 percent.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether Title I programs begin at preschool.

MS. EFIRD said she would provide an answer.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON added that it depends on the school district.

MS. EFIRD said that in addition to the funds listed in the slide, in FY 18 there was also \$1.2 million for Moore settlement schools which was a continuation of funding.

[8:13:29 AM](#)

MS. EFIRD advanced to slide 5, "Pre-Elementary":

Definition of Pre-Elementary and School Readiness
Alaska Statute AS 14.07.020 defines pre-elementary as school for children ages three through five years if the school's primary function is educational.

DEED programs are consistently working towards helping young children become "school ready." School readiness describes both the preparedness of a child and their family to engage in and benefit from learning experiences.

In order to best prepare young children for school, families and community service providers must work collectively to ensure that every child is ready for higher engagement in learning

MS. EFIRD moved to slide 6, "FY 17 to FY 18 Pre-Elementary". The slide showed 354 children ages 4-5 were served through 11 school districts in FY 17, which expanded to over 700 children in 18 school districts in FY 18.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether it was due to the Moore settlement.

MS. EFIRD answered in the affirmative.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether the \$1.2 million was specific to the two fiscal years and would go away.

MS. EFIRD answered it was a one-time continuation for the Moore settlement in FY 18. She said the governor has included it for one more year for pre-elementary grants.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked for the breakdown of the funding.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR suggested there was the Moore settlement and the legislature provided additional \$2 million for Pre-K.

MS. EFIRD answered the total is \$3.2 million in funds - \$2 million plus the \$1.2 million for Moore settlement schools that was being continued in the governor's budget for FY19.

MS. EFIRD spoke to how the grants were being used. She said developmental grants were being used to help districts begin pre-elementary programs.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR surmised the process involved helping programs develop by selecting a handful of districts, getting them "up and running" then move on to the next group of school districts.

MS. EFIRD answered that is the goal. She added that not all districts are ready or have the capacity to begin the program.

[8:17:58 AM](#)

MS. EFIRD advanced to slide 7, "FY 17 Head Start", showing \$49,317,560 total funds going directly to Head Start programs. Of this, 84 percent is federal funding, 13 percent is state funding, and 3 percent (Other) is from Parents as Teachers funding.

MS. EFIRD addressed slide 8, "FY 17 Head Start by the Numbers" which shows 180 classes in 104 sites serve around 3,152 Head Start students ages 0-5.

MS. EFIRD continued to slide 9, "Measuring Growth". She spoke to Teaching Strategies Gold as the observational assessment for children. The slide showed the four developmental areas - cognitive, language, literacy, and math.

MS. EFIRD advanced to slide 10, "FY17 Final Growth Data" showing a graph for fall and spring growth for each of the four categories.

[8:21:16 AM](#)

MS. EFIRD spoke to slide 11, "FY 17 Best Beginnings". She reiterated the funding for the program is \$320,000. She explained the program focuses on literacy skills for children. She pointed to the Imagination Library and how reading to children can increase students' literacy skills. She commented one of the best things that can be done for children is to read to them. She compared speaking to children with the value of adding vocabulary through reading. She added that 35 percent of Alaska children are enrolled in Imagination Library. She said 231,887 Imagination Library books were delivered to families at no cost in FY17. She pointed out that 85 percent of parents

reported that receiving Imagination Library books increased that time they spent reading with their child.

[8:23:13 AM](#)

MS. EFIRD moved to slide 12, "FY 17 Parents as Teachers" showing that 186 children were served in FY 17. Of these, 81 were part of Rural CAP (Haines, Kake, and Kodiak, Alaska), 55 were in Southeast AEYC (Juneau, Alaska), 33 Kid's Corp (Anchorage, Alaska), and 17 were in Sprout (Homer, Alaska).

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked whether the communities come up with interest then apply for the Parents as Teachers program.

MS. EFIRD answered she believed representatives from the program would be presenting and may know the answer.

MS. EFIRD advanced to slide 13, "thread - Alaska Child Care Resource and Referral":

Thread provides resources and referrals for early learning throughout the state.

They have been successfully providing professional development, including coaching and training for over 30 years.

Thread is partnering with DEED to establish Learn & Grow, Alaska's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS). Learn & Grow provides a framework with quality standards and activities for all early care and learning programs to help those programs participate in continuous quality improvement.

MS. EFIRD said Learn and Grow has already started working with child care providers and Head Start to begin developing levels of quality to move through the QRIS system.

[8:25:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked about the programs participating in QRIS.

MS. EFIRD answered that the representatives of the programs would address the issue.

[8:27:37 AM](#)

DUANE MAYES, Director, Senior & Disabilities Service, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), introduced the presenters of the programs. He recognized Kristen Bradshaw, president of the Alaska Infant Learning Program Association; Jamael Johnson, Program Officer of the Alaska Mental Health Trust (AMHT); and Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director of the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education.

[8:29:22 AM](#)

MAUREEN HARWOOD, Chief, Developmental Programs, Senior & Disabilities Service, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), presented Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program: Addressing Special Needs Populations.

MS. HARWOOD addressed slide 16, "What Services are Required to be Provided Under IDEA Part C?":

- Family Training
- Special Instruction
- Speech-language pathology and audiology services, and sign language and cued language services
- Physical Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Psychological Services
- Service Coordination Services
- Medical Services (only for diagnostic or evaluation purposes)

MS. HARWOOD stated the department and programs have to find and blend funding resources as part of the mandate. She said there is federal money as well as state resources.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked about the Office of Children's Services (OCS) and the risks and liability of not filling out the proper paperwork.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether most funds come from Medicaid or from private insurance.

MS. HARWOOD answered that most come through Medicaid. She added that many of the private insurance [companies] don't pay for the services.

CHAIR DRUMMOND spoke to the Anchorage, Alaska, school district, which she said had figured out it could be reimbursed through Medicaid.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR asked about the new Medicaid billing system and whether the resulting crisis has been resolved.

MS. HARWOOD answered she would find the information. She added that the division was going through a fiscal assessment and was reaching out to the private insurance industry to determine whether it could be a resource.

MS. HARWOOD advanced to slide 18, "Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) Required under IDEA, Part C". She said the division competes with school districts for qualified personnel.

- Our personnel standards for Early Intervention Service providers were created as one activity to meet our requirement under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to establish and maintain qualifications to ensure personnel necessary to carry out Part C Services are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained.
- Who Provides Services?
 - Early Childhood Specialist Educators
 - Occupational Therapists
 - Speech-Language Pathologists
 - Family Therapists
 - Physical Therapists
 -
 - Vision Specialists
 - Social Workers

MS. HARWOOD addressed slide 19, "How Many Providers in Alaska?":

- 124 Providers + contractors at local early intervention agencies
- Nearly half of our providers hold master's degrees in fields such as Early Childhood Special Education, Speech-Language Pathology, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Communication Disorders, and Social Work.
- 5 providers hold doctorate degrees

REPRESENTATIVE TARR asked about partnerships with the University of Alaska.

[8:39:37 AM](#)

MS. HARWOOD answered the division does partner with the University. She added that there is never a delay in service as there is not a payment source.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether the division works with the Alaska Commission on Post-Secondary Education for the training aspect.

MS. HARWOOD answered she would get the information.

[8:42:13 AM](#)

MS. HARWOOD advanced to slide 20, "Part C to part B Transition Requirements":

Part B is the over age 3 part (section) of the Special Education law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – IDEA)

- Transition Plan: A transition plan must be developed at least 90 days and not more than 9 months prior to a child's 3rd birthday
- LEA Notification: Local Education Agency (LEA) must be notified that a potentially eligible for preschool special education services will be referred to the LEA
- Transition Conference: Transition conference must be convened at least 90 days and not more than 9 months prior to a child's 3rd birthday

MS. HARWOOD informed that the average time in the program is actually 11 months. She stated one aspect of the law is moving children from Part B to Part C, or from the home or community-based setting to the services that DEED provides. She said the databases speak to one another and there is an automatic referral from which families can opt out. She said reporting to federal entities includes showing whether "the numbers match."

[8:44:47 AM](#)

MS. HARWOOD moved to slide 21, "Results Driven Accountability".

- Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has shifted its primary emphasis on compliance to a framework that focuses on improved results for children with disabilities while continuing to ensure States meet IDEA requirements.
- States are required to a State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) as part of their State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR)

MS. HARWOOD stated there are a number of reporting requirements including state and federal reports of growth targets and results.

[8:46:45 AM](#)

MS. HARWOOD spoke to slide 22, "State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)":

- In developing, implementing, and evaluating the SSIP, OSEP expects States to focus on innovation in the use of evidence-based practices in the delivery of services to children with disabilities, which will lead to improved results.
- States are required to identify a measurable result referred to as the State Identified Measurable Result (SIMR).
- Alaska Part C's SIMR Statement: Alaska Part C's infants and toddlers with show greater than expected growth in their social-emotional development.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked how the data is handled.

MS. HARWOOD answered there is an in-house data manager. She said the division is on the data committed for AECCC. She added the database is very specific to infant learning.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON reiterated her concerns about risk and liability with OCS. She said she wonders whether the data can be used for an application in order to make data collection as easy as possible.

MS. HARWOOD answered she was not sure about the status of an application.

[8:50:45 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND commented there is a workforce and education-related statistics program and there is an effort to expand the memoranda of agreement between the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DLWD), University of Alaska, and DEED. She said adding Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and a link with the Alaska Commission on Post-Secondary Education would be crucial for a continuum for residents from early childhood into the workplace.

[8:52:16 AM](#)

MONICA WINDOM, Director, Division of Public Assistance, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), presented on High Quality Early Care and Education. She addressed slide 24, "High Quality Early Care and Education":

- Child Care Licensing
- Child Care Grant Program
- Alaska Inclusive Child Care Program (Alaska IN!)
- Child Care Resource and Referral

MS. WINDOM explained the role of Child Care Licensing. She said Child Care Licensing does two inspections of child care facilities each year. She added they investigate reports, provide technical assistance to those wishing to become licenses, and offer ongoing support to licensed providers. They work with DEED to raise awareness on nutrition and healthy snacks. She added they help with Learn and Grow.

CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ asked about child care licensing and whether there have been changes in inspections.

MS. WINDOM said she would find the information.

CHAIR DRUMMOND requested a copy of the statistics in the presentation.

MS. WINDOM stated a child care facility can have up to four children without acquiring a license.

CHAIR DRUMMOND mentioned Ms. Windom had said there are 533 licensed child care facilities with a [total] capacity of

upwards of 17,000 children. She asked about the ages of the children.

MS. WINDOW answered child care assistance is available up to age 13.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked how the unlicensed facilities can be tracked.

MS. WINDOW answered she could get information about the known facilities.

[8:58:53 AM](#)

MS. WINDOW said participating providers can get a monthly reimbursement based on child attendance - around \$30 to \$50 per child - and on local cost of living.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether the amount is per month.

MS. WINDOW answered in the affirmative. She listed categories of allowable expenditures. The child care provider must be licensed by the state or municipality of Anchorage, Alaska, and participate in the Child Care Assistance Program.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether all of the details fall under child care licensing.

MS. WINDOW answered it is under the Child Care Program Office.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked whether Anchorage, Alaska, numbers are included.

MS. WINDOW answered she would check but that she believes so.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR asked whether the Child Care Grant Program has to be in partnership with families who are also receiving child care assistance.

MS. WINDOW answered in the affirmative.

MS. WINDOW described the Alaska Inclusive Child Care Program (Alaska IN!). She explained it helps by increasing the quality and availability of programs for children with special needs. She said that in order to be eligible for the program, the child has to be 12 or younger, be diagnosed with a disability, and participate in the child care assistance program, and receive

child care from a provider who participates in the program. She added that currently, there are 10 children in 8 families participating in that program.

MS. WINDOM said that DEED works very closely with thread to identify accommodation and training specific to a child's special needs. She said the Child Care Resource and Referral provides funding to offer referral services to parents. She said the purpose of the Child Care and Development Fund is to promote parental choice of child care services.

[9:03:34 AM](#)

STEPHANIE BERGLUND, CEO, thread, presented a PowerPoint on the thread program aims and initiatives [included in committee packet]. She stated she is a member of AECCC. She shared the vision of thread that all early care and learning be accessible, affordable, and high quality. She added thread houses two programs - Learn and Grow and the System for Early Education and Development (SEED).

MS. BERGLUND presented slide 3, "thread Connects Early Care and Learning to Alaska":

- Provide free early care and learning referrals to families
 - Results in families being more informed consumers
 - More families select early learning services that meet their needs
- Provide training, technical assistance, and professional coaching to early childhood educators/early care and learning classrooms
 - Results in greater skills and knowledge
 - Results in stronger teacher/child interactions which supports more positive outcomes for young children
- Provide leadership and partnership to help advance the early care and learning system
 - Results in more efficient and effective systems

MS. BERGLUND moved to slide 4, "DHSS and DEED Partnership and Services":

We have a distinctive focus on aligning the early care and learning system for more positive outcomes for

young children. This alignment aims to increase access to high quality early care and learning including:

- Expanding professional learning to all early educators across the state following the Alaska Early Learning Guidelines and the Early Care and Learning Core Knowledge and Competencies
- Aligning Quality Standards for all early care and learning environments/types through Learn & Grow, Alaska's Quality Recognition and Improvement System

MS. BERGLUND said this includes Head Start, child care, pre-elementary, early Head Start, Military, and tribal child care programs. She said that while each of those programs may be funded and regulated differently, thread works to align services and support for the professionals in all of those environments.

MS. BERGLUND addressed slide 5, "Common Goal of Healthy, Successful Children". She described how Learn and Grow and SEED work together. She said that children grow and develop in relation to their caregivers in and outside the home.

CHAIR DRUMMOND mentioned the list of child care providers including the military. She asked how many of the children are served by the military child care system.

MS. BERGLUND answered she could provide that information with a breakdown by borough.

[9:09:01 AM](#)

MS. BERGLUND advanced to slide 6, "What is Learn & Grow?":

- Quality Recognition & Improvement System (QRIS)
- QRIS is in 43 states. Includes quality standards and activities for Child Care, Head Start/ Early Head Start, State & Private Pre-K, and Licensed School-age Programs
- Comprehensive continuous quality improvement framework
- Financial and educational supports to Early Care and Learning programs
- Helps families to become better consumers of quality
- Promotes accountability for policy makers and funders

- Learn & Grow is voluntary

MS. BERGLUND said Learn and Grow had been launched in July 2016. She reiterated that quality early learning has positive outcomes for later success. She said that QRIS is defined nationally as the method to assess, improve, and communicate the quality of early care and learning. She said there are currently 43 states operating within the system and it is a growing focus of the federal child care and development block grant and is promoted in the federal Head Start standards. She said Learn and Grow uses active subcommittee groups with representatives of the field. The system provides the opportunity to bring parity of quality across all early learning types.

[9:11:28 AM](#)

MS. BERGLUND described the aims of Learn and Grow. She said the program works to ensure that parents are actively participating in their child's development. She added that it works to ensure that communities have a healthy and sustainable workforce, that early care and learning professional earn a living wage and have access to education, and that children have access to high quality early care and learning environments that foster social, emotional, and developmental skills to prepare them for kindergarten and success in life.

MS. BERGLUND advanced to slide 7, "Learn & Grow Framework":

Learn and Grow has 5 levels of program quality.

- Level 1: Learning about higher quality
- Level 2: Moving into higher quality
- Level 3: Committing to higher quality
- Level 4: Growing into higher quality
- Level 5: Thriving into higher quality

MS. BERGLUND listed the four quality domains within each level:

- Administration and Leadership
- Staff Qualifications and Professional Development
- Learning Environment, Adult-Child Interactions & Child Outcomes
- Family & Community Engagement

[9:15:43 AM](#)

MS. BERGLUND shared a story from one of the participants in the program. The story highlighted the quality of training for the program. The testimonial stated that encompassing compassion with professional growth has stabilized the program as a whole.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked about a regional map of participants.

MS. BERGLUND answered she would provide one. She described some of the participants.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked how long she has participated in AECCC.

MS. BERGLUND answered she has been participating in AECCC since the beginning. She said she thinks that is eight years.

[9:19:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked whether Ms. Berglund thinks the program has developed and gone beyond defining the approach.

MS. BERGLUND answered that the council has seen growth. She underlined that AECCC is unfunded and understaffed. She stated she thinks there is more opportunity for growth.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON said she is always concerned that with an administrative approach, the connection is lost. She said, "let's not rush."

CHAIR DRUMMOND said she thinks [the council] was started with an administrative order under the Parnell administration without administrative support.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON opined there tends not to be transformation when there is a lot of money and there needs to be "a nice balance."

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked what the legislature can do to help.

MS. BERGLUND answered that building in stronger partnerships through policy and funding will help meet the needs of children in the program.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked what is needed in terms of funding and what results would come from that funding.

MS. BERGLUND said funding could aid in supporting the early learning workforce. She said the barriers to the workforce include access to education and a low wage. She said supporting the workforce with education and compensation is important. She underlined the importance of being able to ensure the services provided are high quality and accessible.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH spoke to an encounter with a child care provider who participates in QRIS Learn and Grow. After being on level 1 for some time, she was finally able to move to level 2. Then a member of her staff left to go work for the school district. He asked Ms. Berglund whether she is familiar with Best Starts program and whether she thinks it can work as a model.

[9:26:50 AM](#)

MS. BERGLUND answered the committee would hear a presentation about Best Starts. She said the presentation would cover how professionals and programs are supported.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR asked about the funding aspects and how incentives are provided. She asked whether the child care grant can be used for Learn and Grow.

MS. BERGLUND said that before Learn and Grow was in existence, the Child Care Grant Program was the only specific support available.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked about scholarship participation in the programs as well as other financial opportunities for participants.

MS. BERGLUND answered there are built-in supports such as free training and scholarships. She added there is an incentive award after Level 2 is reached.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked whether it is a one-time incentive.

MS. BERGLUND answered it is an annual incentive support.

[9:31:36 AM](#)

TAMAR BEN-YOSEF, Executive Director, All Alaska Pediatric Partnership, presented a PowerPoint on the Help Me Grow program [included in committee packet]. She described the All Alaska Pediatric Partnership. She spoke to the Help Me Grow Alaska

program. She said Help Me Grow is a system that connects children and families with the services they need. She added the program had been identified by AECCC Healthy Start and Strengthen Families subcommittee as a priority initiative. She spoke to the Strengthen Families protective factors. She explained the two guiding philosophies of Help Me Grow are universal developmental screening and the Strengthening Families framework. She said the first few years of a child's life are crucial to later success. Help Me Grow identifies potential or existing behavioral or developmental issues, intervening early, and helping families to thrive.

[9:35:46 AM](#)

MS. BEN-YOSEF spoke to slide 4, "There are NO wrong doors". She described the process whereby parents, child health providers, and child care providers and other caregivers can go through a Help Me Grow call center to access community-based services and supports for all children and their families such as early care and education, child health, early intervention, and family support. Help Me grow works with the family until their needs are met. She relayed other states with Help Me Grow systems have reported seven points of contact with families before an issue is "resolved." She stressed that the Help Me Grow program empowers parents to be active and engaged participants in their child's development.

MS. BEN-YOSEF advanced to slide 6, "Development Screening Priority." She said Help Me Grow sees the developments screening tool as an opportunity to engage with families and as a tool to identify any concerns. She shared an example of a child in Kodiak, Alaska, who was diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). The family was referred to Help Me Grow to learn more about the child's needs and development.

[9:40:39 AM](#)

MS. BEN-YOSEF returned to slide 5, "The Four Core Components of Help Me Grow". The four components are listed as:

- Centralized Access Point
- Family and Community Outreach
- Child Health Provider Outreach
- Data Collection and Analysis

MS. BEN-YOSEF advanced to slide 7, "Centralized Phone Access Point": to connect children and their families to services and care coordination. The call center is the "go-to" place for families, child health care providers, and other professionals seeking information, support, and referrals for children. Call center staff are trained in telephone casework, cultural sensitivity, and child development. Call centers use a computerized resource directory and an automated client-tracking system.

[9:42:01 AM](#)

MS. BEN-YOSEF moved to slide 8, "Data Collection & Analysis": to understand all aspects of the Help Me Grow system, including gaps and barriers. Call centers are in a unique position to collect data that reflect system-level issues - information not only on who calls and why, but also on what happens to families seeking help. This includes identification of gaps in and barriers to services. Data collection also includes gathering information on how well the other components of the HMG system are operating.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON asked whether the data collection is voluntary and whether it only includes families and providers who are working with Help Me Grow.

MS. BEN-YOSEF answered the license used to collect data is through the infant learning program. She added that data can be combined through partnership with other agencies. She stated the goal is to have a comprehensive picture of the children in Alaska.

MS. BEN-YOSEF advanced to slide 9, "Family & Community Outreach" to promote Help Me Grow and bolster healthy child development through families. A community presence encourages support for and participation in the Help Me Grow system. It also facilitates the building of a robust resource directory and helps keep the directory up-to-date. Outreach staff engage families by participating in community meetings, forums, and fairs, and facilitating sessions that help families learn about child development and the role of Help Me Grow. She explained that the outreach component is contracted with a local corporation as the "face on the ground" for Help Me Grow. She added that Help Me Grow is collaborating with ECCS program and the upcoming Child and Family Developmental Services Clinic to integrate outreach with programs on the ground in communities

such as the community health aid and behavioral health aid programs and their curriculums.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked what ECCS means.

MS. BEN-YOSEF answered Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) is one of the programs under the Division of Public Health. She added that ECCS program has three place-based communities (Kodiak, Norton Sound, and Mat-Su) which each has a community coordinator who is also the Help Me Grow outreach liaison. She added the developmental clinic has a structure with 4 regional teams with nurse case managers who in turn serve as outreach coordinators for Help Me Grow.

CHAIR DRUMMOND suggested linking with the workforce and education statistics program which follows outcomes.

MS. BEN-YOSEF advanced to slide 10, "Child Health Provider Outreach" to support developmental promotion, early detection, and intervention. Help Me Grow staff conduct targeted outreach to child health care providers through office-based education and training. Trainings help providers:

1. Conduct developmental surveillance and screening of children from birth to age five;
2. Use the call center; and
3. Systematize surveillance and screening and the use of Help Me Grow in their practices.

[9:48:30 AM](#)

MS. BEN-YOSEF advanced to slide 11, "Partnership are Key". She said Help Me Grow is looking for technology that can streamline the process and connect organizations. She spoke to the outreach partnership with ECCS and the developmental clinic. She added they are working with the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education and the leadership team is comprised of cross-sector partners, many of whom sit on the AECCC. She added that the All Alaska Pediatric Partnership is actively advocating for more empowered leadership for early childhood through the AECCC in order to maximize the effectiveness of current programs and align new ones with the coordinated state plan.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether all of the pediatricians in Alaska recognize the critical nature of the issue.

MS. BEN-YOSEF answered that the short answer is no. She said the partnership started under the children's hospital in 1995. As the needs were recognized, it evolved into a space for collaboration with anyone who works with children across the state. She added they provide education to pediatricians through a yearly conference and through monthly meetings. She stated the meetings serve as an opportunity to learn what is happening in communities around the state. She highlighted engagement is also through emails. She added the example of Bethel, Alaska, which now has an unofficial coalition. She said there is some funding through DHSS. She said Help Me Grow would certainly expand the reach of the partnership.

CHAIR DRUMMOND remarked the Bethel practitioners serve 50 communities.

MS. BEN-YOSEF said the infant learning program in Bethel is understaffed and the positions are hard to fill. She added that the organization is currently funded through blended funding with private and public money, and it hopes to expand statewide once additional funding is obtained.

[9:55:20 AM](#)

JIMAEEL JOHNSON, Program Officer, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHT), presented on the Alaska Mental Health Trust role as funder for other organizations.

[9:56:40 AM](#)

TREVOR STORRS, Executive Director, Alaska Children's Trust, presented on the Alaska Children's Trust role as funder of other organizations. He said Alaska's Children's Trust is a direct member of AECCE.

MS. JOHNSON spoke to the mission of AMHT. She listed beneficiaries of the trust. She mentioned the many collaborations between programs and departments. She spoke to why early childhood education is important to the Trust. She remarked the Trust is able to use Alaska data to illustrate how beneficiaries are formed by their early childhood experiences. She mentioned the return on investment for early childhood intervention. She said the initiatives include Bring the Kids Home and the Alaska Resilience Initiative.

[10:02:43 AM](#)

MR. STORRS said the Alaska Children's Trust's (ACT) focus is on prevention of childhood abuse and neglect. He said ACT strives to look at the whole child, the whole family and, whenever possible, the whole community. He spoke to collaboration with organizations and communities to foster relationships across the state. He said the science of early childhood brain development must be applied for better outcomes. He mentioned the use of new and innovative methodologies. He added ACT has invested over \$5 million in organizations to support programs across the state.

[10:05:28 AM](#)

MS. JOHNSON said AMHT emphasizes its support of the state's current efforts. She said the Trust looks forward to the opportunity to engage with legislators, commissioners, and other stakeholders. She said as funders and conveners, AMHT sees great opportunity to build on the current momentum. She added that the leadership of AECCC would guide and support the programs mentioned in the presentations and would move to improve outcomes.

[10:07:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR asked about funding support.

MS. JOHNSON answered there have been community organizations looking for resources. She mentioned non-monetary resources such as technical assistance to look at other funding streams.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR asked how many people qualify as AMHT beneficiaries in the state.

MS. JOHNSON answered about 100,000 experience mental illness, of whom about 22,000 experience severe, often debilitating mental illness; 12,000 traumatic brain injury; 7,000 Alzheimer's; in the age range 12-17, 2,100 illicit drug dependence or abuse, 1,500 alcohol dependence or abuse. For ages 9-17, 5,500 severe emotional disturbance; 17,500 overall with illicit drug dependence or abuse; overall 44,000 alcohol dependence or abuse; just under 12,000 with developmental disabilities. She underlined some of the numbers may be duplicated.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR asked where Alaska ranks among other states.

MS. JOHNSON said she would find the information.

CHAIR DRUMMOND said she appreciates the comments about seeking direction and partnership with AECCC.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR asked whether there were things to highlight in the mental health budget.

MS. JOHNSON said she would research and provide recommendations.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ spoke to the nationwide change of the role in providing services from government to non-profit organizations. She shared a personal family experience with the programs. She said she appreciates that public nurses are focusing in on the zero to six age group. She mentioned that a lot of connections are taking place and asked to hear on a yearly basis from the AECCC about progress.

[10:17:56 AM](#)

BRIAN HOLST, Juneau Economic Development Council (JEDC); Juneau Board of Education; Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council, testified in his capacity as member of JEDC. He said the JEDC focuses on, amongst other aspects of economic development, talent development. He said that focus has lead them to understand the importance of early education. He listed a series of challenges faced by residents such as high cost of living. He spoke to structured collaboration. He said Alaska ranks low in early childhood education. He indicated there is slow progress. He said the five largest school districts in the state have identified Pre-K education as a priority, even though they don't have funding for it. He said 70 percent of the nation's non-working poor are not working due to the cost of child care.

[10:24:00 AM](#)

MR. HOLST spoke to policy in King County, Washington, where residents have voted to tax themselves to fund early education. He said the City and Borough of Juneau, Alaska, has funded some Pre-K initiatives and programs to support retention. He spoke to AECCC. He said more local figures and business representatives need to be a part of the group. He stated in 1940, 1 in every 10 households had both parents working, now about 7 in every 10 households has both parents working. He said it costs more to participate in childcare in Juneau, Alaska, than to attend the University of Alaska - Southeast. He said jobs are changing and require more training and education. He said low investment in education has impacts. He said the U.S. is not keeping up in

standardized testing and innovation. He said early child education reduces abuse and crime and increases earnings and tax revenues.

MR. HOLST said that making small improvements can have lifetime impacts. He said for a world-class workforce, a world-class education system is needed. He spoke to a Federal Reserve conference in which returns on investment for education and health were examined. He quoted Director of Research Art Rolnik of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis as saying, "Investment in early childhood development programs brings real total return, public and private, of 16 percent. We are unaware of any other economic development effort that has such a public return." He said the return on investment is why JEDC is focusing on early childhood development. He said, "It's about the economy."

[10:31:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR opined that spending more in early education would result in savings in corrections in the long term. She suggested the base student allocation (BSA) of \$6,000 is a fraction of the cost of funding corrections.

CHAIR DRUMMOND said she thinks what the state spends on all the preschool opportunities is roughly \$4,000 per child but is only serving roughly 25 percent of the children in the programs. She referenced HB 52 and said it has a fiscal note of \$51 million. She suggested if the states spent a little bit more now on the young ones, it would not need to spend it on them later.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked how much it would cost per child to achieve the benefits through the Best Start program.

MR. HOLST responded the cost in Year 1 would be \$800,000 investment to make 400 kids kindergarten-ready. In Year 5, 800 children [indisc] for a \$2.4 million-dollar investment. There would be a need to leverage other investments out there. The Juneau School District has a Pre-K program in every building. He referenced a Head Start program for free in the school district. He added the board is trying to find resources for transportation to support them. By adding a small amount of resources, the programs can be made more helpful.

[10:37:03 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND remarked the Anchorage, Alaska has a large investment on public school buildings and is offering space to private pre-school programs. She mentioned a drop in the student population.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH said he thought it seems \$2,000 per child in the first year and about \$3,000 per child a few years down the line was the answer to his question.

MR. HOLST answered in the affirmative. He said the formula is somewhat complicated because as the quality of the programs improves, the programs can receive incentives.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH shared his appreciation of the Best Starts program. He stated the private sector is bearing a large portion of the burden of child care. He said a step-wise progression backed up by some source of state dollars is an "impeccable investment." He shared a concern that government dollars might be going to private businesses. He asked how Mr. Holst would answer that concern.

MR. HOLST answered he did not share the concern. He gave examples of infrastructure that allows for a functioning society. He said tapping into the entrepreneurial spirit is important, but that child care is a poor business model. He said some people are not making money at all. He suggested that with proper support the business model can be improved.

[10:42:01 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committees, the Joint House Education Standing Committee and House Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:42 a.m.