

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 3, 2017

8:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Shelley Hughes, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens
Senator Cathy Giessel
Senator John Coghill
Senator Tom Begich

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 5
Proclaiming March 2, 2018, as Alaska Reads Day.

- HEARD & HELD

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 64(EDC)
"An Act relating to the establishment of the Task Force on Reading Proficiency and Reading Instruction for All Students and on the Effects of Dyslexia on Some Students."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 96
"An Act relating to education; relating to school districts; relating to course credit for students; relating to group insurance, self-insurance, and other cooperative arrangements between school districts and businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies; relating to funding for school districts; relating to school operating funds; relating to competency examinations for teacher certificates; relating to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission; relating to the duties and powers of the Department of Education and Early Development and the commissioner of education and early development; relating to a virtual education consortium; relating to the minimum wage for bus drivers; relating to the

investment, appropriation, and administration of the public school trust fund; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SCR 5

SHORT TITLE: ALASKA READS DAY

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) GARDNER

02/24/17 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/24/17 (S) EDC, STA
04/03/17 (S) EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: HB 64

SHORT TITLE: READING PROFICIENCY TASK FORCE; DYSLEXIA

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) DRUMMOND

01/20/17 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/20/17 (H) EDC
01/30/17 (H) EDC AT 9:00 AM CAPITOL 106
01/30/17 (H) Heard & Held
01/30/17 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
03/10/17 (H) EDC RPT CS(EDC) 7DP
03/10/17 (H) DP: TALERICO, PARISH, SPOHNHOLZ, KOPP,
JOHNSTON, FANSLER, DRUMMOND
03/10/17 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/10/17 (H) Moved CSHB 64(EDC) Out of Committee
03/10/17 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
03/24/17 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
03/24/17 (H) VERSION: CSHB 64(EDC)
03/27/17 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/27/17 (S) EDC
03/28/17 (S) EDC AT 5:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 96

SHORT TITLE: EDUCATION: SCHOOLS/TEACHERS/FUNDING

SPONSOR(s): EDUCATION

03/20/17 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/20/17 (S) EDC, FIN
03/22/17 (S) EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/22/17 (S) Heard & Held
03/22/17 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
03/23/17 (S) EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/23/17 (S) Heard & Held

03/23/17	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/24/17	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/24/17	(S)	<Bill Hearing Canceled>
03/27/17	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/27/17	(S)	Heard & Held
03/27/17	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/28/17	(S)	EDC AT 5:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/28/17	(S)	Heard & Held
03/28/17	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/30/17	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/30/17	(S)	Heard & Held
03/30/17	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/31/17	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/31/17	(S)	Heard & Held
03/31/17	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/03/17	(S)	EDC AT 5:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

SENATOR BERTA GARDNER
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SCR 5.

MEGAN HOLLAND, Intern
 Senator Berta Gardner
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on SCR 5.

KRISTIN KRANENDONK, Staff
 Representative Harriet Drummond
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HB 64 on behalf of the sponsor.

POSEY BOGGS, Member
 Alaska Reading Coalition
 Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions related to SB 64.

JOSHUA HUGHES, Staff
 Senator Shelley Hughes
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Presented changes in SB 96 from version T to version M.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:01:23 AM](#)

CHAIR SHELLEY HUGHES called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:01 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stevens, Giessel, Begich, Coghill, and Chair Hughes. She listed the bills to be heard and then turned the gavel over to Vice Chair Giessel. She noted that the meeting would be recessed to the call of the chair.

SCR 5-ALASKA READS DAY

[8:03:14 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL announced that the first order of business would be SCR 5.

[8:03:33 AM](#)

SENATOR BERTA GARDNER, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of SCR 5. She said early literacy has been a passion for her for decades. She shared a personal story about two of her children who have dyslexia. She has seen firsthand the difficulties of struggling with reading. She wondered if her children would not have been as successful as they are if they had not had the resources and support that they did growing up and in school.

She related that she has been to many conferences about reading proficiency and has heard many experts speak on the personal, social, and economic consequences of poor reading proficiency, particularly by the third grade. She heard military officials say that poor reading proficiency is a national security issue, as too many recruits are unable to read manuals and complete necessary tasks due to poor reading skills.

SENATOR GARDNER pointed out that Alaska students rate second to last, nationally, in 4th grade reading proficiency. Efforts to improve that have not been very successful. She said she introduces this resolution at the request of an advocate in order to help find a solution to this problem. She hoped the resolution will help to increase awareness and early exposure to reading, and to connect existing organizations within communities to families in need of support.

[8:05:39 AM](#)

SENATOR GARDNER stated that SCR 5 is part of a national effort taking place called the National Read Across America Day. She

encouraged the committee to consider SCR 5 as a small, simple part of a large and more complex set of efforts to improve reading proficiency.

8:06:17 AM

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL asked if anyone has identified the cause of low reading proficiency scores.

SENATOR GARDNER said not to her knowledge. She assumed it was due to more TV watching and less reading these days. She said there are no shortcuts to proficient reading; it is a matter of time and practice. She said there is a world of wonderful literature for children, but it is a matter of modeling and valuing frequent reading. Some children are not ready for school and reading due to lack of preparation by their families. She explained the connection between school readiness and reading.

8:07:55 AM

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL asked if there are particular school districts that are performing better.

SENATOR GARDNER recalled that a few years ago her staff compiled a graph of reading levels and income levels. There was a correlation between income levels and proficiency. Also, communities that have libraries open all year have more successful student readers.

8:09:18 AM

SENATOR STEVENS agreed with the importance of early literacy. He asked what would happen on Alaska Reads Day to improve reading skills.

SENATOR GARDNER thought it would highlight the cause and promote reading activities by organizations.

8:10:02 AM

MEGAN HOLLAND, Intern, Senator Berta Gardner, Alaska State Legislature, presented information on SCR 5. She offered to provide a list of the organizations that might take part in making this day a success.

8:10:32 AM

SENATOR STEVENS asked for examples of activities that would result in more kids reading.

MS. HOLLAND provided examples of what the national effort suggests: holding reading events for kids, giving books away, and connecting parents with reading resources.

SENATOR STEVENS said he spent the weekend reading to his granddaughter. Reading opens the world to children.

SENATOR GARDNER gave an example from years ago of an annual evening reading time at school. She maintained that kids like being read to well beyond the time that they can read to themselves.

[8:12:18 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL asked about the impacts of Best Beginnings which distributes books.

SENATOR GARDNER did not know directly. She used to have concerns about it because some children did not need that help because their families provided them books. However, a constituent, Ms. Hensley, explained that the program is prohibited from choosing children who do or do not qualify. Instead, they focused on supplying books to low income zip codes. There used to be a program where physicians provided a free book to every child.

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL wondered about the impact of Best Beginnings. She recalled a large display of free books for children in the Anchorage Airport, possibly sponsored by the PTA.

[8:14:59 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL noted the resolution has no fiscal note.

SENATOR GARDNER said correct.

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL held SCR 5 in committee.

HB 64-READING PROFICIENCY TASK FORCE; DYSLEXIA

[Contains discussion of SB 27]

[8:15:28 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL announced that the next order of business would be HB 64 [CSHB 64 (EDC) was before the committee].

[8:15:40 AM](#)

KRISTIN KRANENDONK, Staff, Representative Harriet Drummond, Alaska State Legislature, presented HB 64 on behalf of the sponsor. She thanked Senator Dunleavy for bringing this issue to their attention. She read from the sponsor statement:

HB 64 establishes a fifteen member task force on reading proficiency and instruction with the goal of making recommendations regarding reading practices for students across the state. The task force will examine how current regulations affect reading proficiency outcomes with the goal of increasing statewide reading proficiency scores within three years.

Approximately 47,000 students in Alaska did not meet state standards in 2015. Students who cannot read by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of school than those who can read. More than \$60 billion is lost annually in American business productivity due to a lack of basic reading skills. The statistics are staggering and we must identify evidence-based approaches to instructing students affected by dyslexia.

The fifteen member task force will consist of six members, three from the House and three from the Senate, the Commissioner of Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) (non-voting member), an active or retired K-3 teacher with significant experience teaching reading, a member from either the Association of Alaska School Boards or the Alaska Council of School Administrators, a member representing the Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals, a member representing the University of Alaska, and four member representing non-profit organizations that focus on issues related to reading, including one member who is a parent with a child who has a reading disability.

[8:16:42 AM](#)

MS. KRANENDONK said the task force will meet between six and ten times a year and will submit a report to the governor and DEED by January 1, 2018. All meetings will be done electronically and there will be no travel reimbursements; there is a zero fiscal note.

[8:17:41 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked how the task force will know if the regulations will affect outcomes.

[8:18:03 AM](#)

MS. KRANENDONK replied that the goal of the task force is to get educators at the table with legislators to discuss what is working now and seek ways to use those successes with more kids. There is no tracking mechanism in the bill because it would add a fiscal note.

SENATOR STEVENS opined that tracking outcomes is key.

[8:18:44 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL suggested talking to stakeholders about whether or not there have been reports or efforts that have looked at reading proficiency scores.

[8:19:31 AM](#)

MS. KRANENDONK believed there was a lot of information available. The task force will bring that information together to find ways of helping teachers in the classroom.

[8:20:24 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL suggested that Ms. Boggs may be able to address Senator Coghill's question.

SENATOR COGHILL restated his question.

POSEY BOGGS, Member, Alaska Reading Coalition, answered questions related to SB 64. She responded that they do know a lot about reading proficiency in Alaska and have looked at it through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Standards Based Assessment (SBA), and the Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP), which all showed that Alaska's reading proficiency has been stagnant going back decades. Results showed that some of the best students require remedial reading when starting college.

She stated that children who are incarcerated have trouble with reading. People have worked hard on this issue, but it is not improving. Some districts are still very low, or average.

[8:24:02 AM](#)

MS. BOGGS said the issues in Alaska mirror other states. One issue is, if teachers in K-3 do not have foundational knowledge about teaching reading, students will not be successful at reading. Skilled teachers of reading do matter regarding outcomes.

She sees the task force as recommending what can be done to increase and fix the reading problem in the state.

SENATOR COGHILL said it lends itself to a debate on the methodology of teaching reading. He asked if the task force will be able to address the philosophical and political issues in this area.

[8:25:53 AM](#)

MS. BOGGS hoped that they would consider the scientific evidence. She emphasized that it is not just about phonics.

SENATOR COGHILL thought it would be interesting to see what the university thinks about it.

[8:27:30 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH sees the task force as a group that will assemble all the data, look at all the issues, and have a goal to create a systemic view of how to teach reading in Alaska.

MS. KRANENDONK said yes. The task force is the starting place and the report will not be the conclusion of the task force. The process will continue through 2018 to ensure that the recommendations are working and having an impact on reading scores for all readers in the state, but not just dyslexic students. Changing the way to look at dyslexia is a good place to start.

[8:29:22 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH called all the information about reading "a mess of information." He saw an advantage of a systemic approach to reading, the compilation of a report or road map, and following up on the recommendations. He stated that HB 64 merits support.

[8:30:54 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL referred to a document of AMP results from the spring of 2015. She asked if it comes from Representative Drummond's office.

MS. KRANENDONK said yes. She explained that they got the information from NAACP who pulled it off the DEED website.

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL noted the document is from DEED and includes grades 3-10). It shows, in meeting the standards in English language skills, that the scores go from 35 percent at grade 3 to 28 percent at grade 10. For the category, partially meets standards, the scores go from 65 percent at grade 3 and it improves somewhat by grade 10. These scores substantiate the problem.

She requested a comparison between Representative Drummond's bill, which adds dyslexia, and Senator Dunleavy's bill.

MS. KRANENDONK related that Representative Drummond made several changes and they worked with Senator Dunleavy's office regarding all of them. She compared Representative Drummond's bill, HB 64, and Senator Dunleavy's bill, SB 27:

Page 1: lines 11-12 Language was changed to recognize the work the state is doing for students while still acknowledging that it could be improved

Page 2, line 27 Section C was added to examine what education reforms have already been implemented and to look at why those changes have worked or not

Page 2, line 27 - Page 3, line 2 Language was changed in this section to clear up the scope of the task force

Page 4, line 1 Allows one member to represent either the Association of Alaska School Boards or Alaska Council of School Administrators

Page 4, lines 4-5 Removed language having a nonvoting judge as a member of the task force and replaced that member representing the Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals

Page 4, line 13 Changed language to recognize all nonprofit organizations focused on reading and education issues and included language to ensure at least one of those members is also a parent of a child with a reading disability

Page 4, line 31 A definition of dyslexia was added

MS. KRANENDONK explained that they worked with a number of organizations that deal with dyslexia in order to come up with a definition. They chose not to do the DSM definition that is put on IEPs because of the way it is worded. They know that there are some undiagnosed students with dyslexia and the DSM definition requires an IEP first, before a student can be termed dyslexic.

She understood that Senator Dunleavy was ok with all the changes.

[8:35:59 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL asked Ms. Boggs to elaborate on the definition of dyslexia.

[8:36:17 AM](#)

MS. BOGGS agreed with the definition in HB 64 because most dyslexic children are not diagnosed. The DSM definition leaves out the majority of those children who are undiagnosed and are in the regular classroom. The definition in HB 54 comes from the Arkansas dyslexia bill.

[8:37:24 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL asked how long the Alaska Reading Coalition (ARC) has been in place.

MS. BOGGS explained that ARC, which is made up of the NAACP, the Alaska branch of the International Dyslexia Association, Decoding Dyslexia Alaska, Literate Nation Alaska, and the Alaska Literacy Program, as well as a dozen private tutors, have been in existence for about 24 months. Their depth of knowledge goes back a long way. The Alaska International Dyslexia Association has been in Alaska since 2009.

[8:39:02 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL said the Senate bill spells out that the Alaska Reading Coalition is also a member.

[8:39:44 AM](#)

MS. KRANENDONK responded that they worked with Legislative Legal on this section. The Alaska Reading Coalition is not an official member of the coalition because they are not a recognized 501(c)(3). They are working closely with all members of the Alaska Reading Coalition.

[8:40:47 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL appreciated the inclusion of a parent.

[8:41:03 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL referred to a document from December 2015. There was no mention about who wrote it.

He wished to become more informed on dyslexia and suggested hearing more about it before moving the bill.

[8:42:18 AM](#)

MS. KRANENDONK said she would provide that and there will also be further information on dyslexia during public testimony.

[8:42:48 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL noted the state is behind in reading in Alaska. The founders identified three reasons for education, reading, mathematics, and the basic understanding of religion.

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL held HB 64 in committee.

[8:43:42 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR GIESSEL recessed to the call of the chair.

SB 96-EDUCATION: SCHOOLS/TEACHERS/FUNDING

[12:06:18 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES brought the meeting back to order at 12:06 p.m. and announced that the final order of business would be SB 96.

[12:06:43 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL moved to adopt the CS for SB 96, labeled 30-LS0452\M, as the working document.

CHAIR HUGHES objected for discussion.

[12:07:12 PM](#)

JOSHUA HUGHES, Staff, Senator Shelley Hughes, Alaska State Legislature, presented changes in SB 96 from version T to version M.

1. Page 1, Lines 1-12: Multiple changes were made to the title in order for the title to focus on the specific issues effected by the bill.
2. Page 3, Line 6: Adds language to allow a student to challenge out of a career and technical education course.

[12:08:10 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked how to ensure standards are used when students challenge out of a course.

MR. BANKS said he understands that the standards will be set by school districts; several schools already allow this.

SENATOR STEVENS hoped there would be serious standards.

[12:08:58 PM](#)

MR. BANKS described the third change:

3. Page 3, Line 11 through Page 4, Line 21: Changes to the annual report filed by school districts in Section 5 of Version T are deleted. Language is added to the report required by the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) in order for DEED to compile information reported on by school districts. The ratios to be reported on in Version T are also reported on in Version M:
- Administrative employees to students
 - Administrative employees to teachers
 - Teachers to students

DEED will send this report to school districts who will make available to the public the portion of the report relating to their district on their website or by another easily accessible method. "Administrative employee" is defined as a certificated employee that does not provide direct classroom instruction for students.

[12:10:27 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked what page it is on.

MR. HUGHES said page 4, lines 19-21.

[12:10:47 PM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH brought up the issue of some employees being federal employees.

[12:11:21 PM](#)

MR. BANKS agreed that they had discussed it and it was inadvertently left out of Version M.

[12:11:42 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES said that Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) could address that.

[12:12:00 PM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said it was inadvertent and we will figure it out.

[12:12:17 PM](#)

MR. BANKS turned to the fourth change:

4. Page 5, Line 12: The pooling of health insurance is taken out of the definition of "administrative services" under AS 14.14.110 in order to avoid the possibility of the State requiring districts to pool health insurance.

[12:13:36 PM](#)

MR. BANKS reported on the fifth and sixth changes:

5. Page 6, Line 3: The reference to a self-insurance policy under AS 39.30.091 is deleted as this type of health insurance is only offered to State employees. The cooperative grant can still be used for a district to participate in a group health insurance policy under AS 39.30.090.

6. Page 6, Line 13: Sections 10 and 11 of Version T are deleted.

[12:14:31 PM](#)

MR. BANKS described the seventh change:

7. Page 13, Line 11: Sections 20 and 21 in Version T is deleted relating to the utilization of income of the Public School Trust Fund.

[12:15:12 PM](#)

He said in the eighth change a new section is added:

8. Page 13, Lines 25-30: Adds a new section relating to the Public School Trust Fund allowing the Legislature to appropriate 4.75% of the Fund's market value. This section also requires that the appropriation be used only for supporting the state public school program and to cover the administrative costs of the fund.

[12:15:37 PM](#)

He described the ninth change:

9. Page 14, Line 14: AS 37.14.140 is repealed as the additional section added under point 8 directs how the Public School Trust Fund appropriations may be spent.

[12:15:55 PM](#)

MR. BANKS described the last change:

10. Page 14, Line 15 through Page 15, Line 15: Requires DEED to analyze schools that are under 70% capacity and within 25 miles by road of one or more schools within the same district. The report will be due by the beginning of the 2018 Legislative Session and will look at the feasibility of merging schools within a district with consideration given to the following variables:

- If merging schools would result in overcrowding of schools.
- If facility design for each school under consideration will be appropriate for all grade levels within the schools under consideration.
- The estimated savings and costs associated with the merging of schools.
- Any legal and financial liabilities that a school district and the state could incur due to the closure of a school.

[12:17:35 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS had concerns about merging schools with different grade levels.

MR. BANKS explained that the school design and remodel cost would be considered, as stated on page 15.

SENATOR STEVENS assumed there would be separation of grade levels.

MR. BANKS agreed that could be considered.

[12:18:50 PM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH clarified that Commissioner Johnson expressed an interest in addressing all of those factors over the interim and then reporting back in order to prevent unintended consequences. The section provides for that to happen.

MR. BANKS said that was correct. The purpose of the analysis is to avoid any unintended consequences.

[12:19:47 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES said the department is reaching out to districts and may travel to districts to assess facilities. She encouraged districts to bring their concerns to the department.

[12:20:19 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES removed her objection.

CHAIR HUGHES held SB 96 in committee.

12:20:46 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Hughes adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 12:20 p.m.