

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

April 7, 2017

8:04 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 BILL NO. 102

"An Act relating to funding for Internet services for school districts; and relating to the Alaska higher education investment fund."

- MOVED SB 102 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 103

"An Act establishing the Alaska education innovation grant program; eliminating the Alaska education grant program and the Alaska performance scholarship program; redesignating the Alaska higher education investment fund as the Alaska education innovation grant fund; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED SB 103 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 104

"An Act relating to the duties of the state Board of Education and Early Development; and relating to school curriculum."

- MOVED SB 104 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 99

"An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to funding for early education programs; and

relating to the duties of the state Board of Education and Early Development."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 102

SHORT TITLE: INTERNET FOR SCHOOLS; FUNDING

SPONSOR(s): FINANCE

04/03/17	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/03/17	(S)	EDC, FIN
04/03/17	(S)	HUS WAIVED PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE, RULE 23
04/04/17	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/04/17	(S)	Heard & Held
04/04/17	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/05/17	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/05/17	(S)	Heard & Held
04/05/17	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/07/17	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 103

SHORT TITLE: ED GRANTS/SCHOLARSHIP; INNOVATIVE ED FUND

SPONSOR(s): FINANCE

04/03/17	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/03/17	(S)	EDC, FIN
04/03/17	(S)	HUS WAIVED PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE, RULE 23
04/04/17	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/04/17	(S)	Heard & Held
04/04/17	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/05/17	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/05/17	(S)	Heard & Held
04/05/17	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/07/17	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 104

SHORT TITLE: EDUCATION CURRICULUM

SPONSOR(s): FINANCE

04/03/17	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/03/17	(S)	EDC, FIN
04/03/17	(S)	HUS WAIVED PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE, RULE 23

04/04/17 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/04/17 (S) Heard & Held
04/04/17 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
04/05/17 (S) EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/05/17 (S) Heard & Held
04/05/17 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
04/07/17 (S) EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 99

SHORT TITLE: PRE-ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS/FUNDING

SPONSOR(S): BEGICH

03/29/17 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/29/17 (S) EDC, FIN
04/07/17 (S) EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

BRITTANY HUTCHISON, Staff
Senator Anna MacKinnon
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Reviewed SB 102, SB 103, and SB 104 on behalf of the Senate Finance Committee.

HEIDI TESHNER, Director
Administrative Services
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Addressed the fiscal notes for SB 102, SB 103, and SB 104.

PATIENCE FREDERIKSEN, Director
Division of Libraries, Archives, & Museums
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on SB 102.

STEPHANIE BUTLER, Interim Executive Director
Postsecondary Education
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Addressed two fiscal notes related to SB 103.

PAUL PRUSSING, Deputy Director
Teacher and Learning Support

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions related to SB 103.

SYDNEY KAUFMAN, Ph.D., Staff
Senator Tom Begich
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional analysis of SB 99 on behalf of the sponsor.

MEGHAN JOHNSON, Director
Learn and Grow in THREAD
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 99.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:26 AM](#)

CHAIR SHELLEY HUGHES called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Begich, Giessel, Coghill, Stevens, and Chair Hughes. She listed the bills to be heard, SB 102, SB 103, SB 104, which will pass out of committee if it is the will of the committee, and SB 99.

SB 102-INTERNET FOR SCHOOLS; FUNDING

[8:05:40 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES announced the consideration of SB 102.

[8:05:48 AM](#)

BRITTANY HUTCHISON, Staff, Senator Anna MacKinnon, Alaska State Legislature, reviewed SB 102 on behalf of the Senate Finance Committee. She related that the goals of the suite of bills are to prioritize K-12 education and how the legislature spends limited funds. They propose to improve outcomes for Alaska students and to provide for efficiency and streamlined deliveries of education processes and procedures. Alaska student outcomes are not where they should be to be prepared for life after high school. Alaska students deserve a 21st Century Education.

[8:07:01 AM](#)

MS. HUTCHISON addressed concerns regarding SB 102. According to the Alaska Telephone Association bandwidth can be prioritized within the network and each provider can control the traffic as

schools request it in their contract. All schools in Alaska are currently able to go up to 25 Mbps, even those using satellite. An increased internet capability can help resolve latency and buffering issues, depending on how many people/classrooms use it at once. The bill will not require any new infrastructure and does not pay for anything but internet services.

[8:07:56 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES noted she would distribute ATA's letter of support.

[8:08:35 AM](#)

HEIDI TESHNER, Director, Administrative Services, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), addressed the fiscal note for SB 102. She explained that the fiscal note is for a library operations component, with \$34,000 requested for the increased E-rate contractor to approve the applications, for technical assistance, and for regulation changes. She said \$16 million is estimated in the grant component to bring the 197 schools up to 25 Mbps.

[8:09:40 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH confirmed that name change is to the Higher Education Fund.

MS. TESHNER said yes.

[8:10:01 AM](#)

PATIENCE FREDERIKSEN, Director, Division of Libraries, Archives, & Museums, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), presented information on SB 102. She explained that the division has been running the School Broadband Assistance Grant (School BAG) program for three years. They have the capacity to add 64 more schools to the School BAG program.

[8:10:32 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked how many schools would be served.

MS. FREDERIKSEN replied that 133 schools are receiving services now; there are 197 schools that would need support to get to 25 Mbps.

[8:11:13 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said he would support passing the bill out of committee, but disagrees with the funding source. He wanted to have more than three days to vet the bill.

[8:11:50 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL thought the bill was a good solution.

SENATOR COGHILL moved to report SB 102, version A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note.

CHAIR HUGHES announced that without objection, SB 102 moved from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

SB 103-ED GRANTS/SCHOLARSHIP; INNOVATIVE ED FUND

[8:12:16 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES announced the consideration of SB 103.

BRITTANY HUTCHISON, Staff, Senator Anna MacKinnon, reviewed SB 103 on behalf of the sponsor. She addressed comments made by public testimony. According to the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS) Outcomes Report from 2011-2016, 8,606 students have received \$48,840,606 in scholarships. It is time to re-prioritize spending on K-12 education to better prepare 130,000 students for life after high school. The money is best served where it is constitutionally mandated.

She said, according to the University of Alaska FY18 budget overview, out of 100 average 9th graders, 29 won't graduate from high school, 40 won't attend college, 16 will attend college out of state, 10 will attend UA but are not graduated within 6 years, and 5 will graduate within 6 years. She opined that these are not positive outcomes.

According to the UA information system, since the inception of the APS, remediation rates were at 53 percent, decreased to 48 percent in 2014, and now are at 52 percent. Also, the number of high school seniors entering the university as freshmen has decreased every year. The APS has not increased the number of freshmen attending the university. She pointed out that 25 percent of APS recipients are also UA Scholars. There is some overlap and getting rid of the APS is not as detrimental as has been portrayed. Students have access to other scholarships, loans, and grants.

[8:15:26 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS spoke in support of the bill, but has concerns about doing away with the APS. He said the APS is a good idea and there has not been enough time to see if it works. He wondered if it is possible to leave the program in place but cut

the funding to it so that, when possible, it could be reinstated.

[8:17:06 AM](#)

MS. HUTCHISON said it is possible and it is a policy call.

SENATOR STEVENS said he is not suggesting that they change the wording in the bill, but to consider it later in the process.

[8:17:54 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES shared the same concern.

[8:18:06 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL had concerns that the APS was dipping too low - to C students. She appreciated the data from the university. She thought the University Honors Scholar (UHS) Program for the top 10 percent was a great program. She requested the amount of the scholar program.

MS. HUTCHISON offered to provide the amount of tuition paid for by the UHS.

SENATOR GIESSEL said she does support the bill, but the state is in financial times.

[8:20:07 AM](#)

MS. HUTCHISON clarified that the 25 percent overlap of the two scholarships is just for the 2015-2016 school year.

[8:20:44 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH voiced concern about the lack of time to work on the bill. He said they need time to debate whether the APS is working and whether to revisit it if it is not working. He agreed with Senator Steven's idea of leaving the APS in place and not funding it. All the public testimony, except for one letter, opposed eliminating the APS.

He opined that the Innovation Grants provide a laudable goal, however, you also must look at them in terms of the fiscal climate. It is a voluntary program, but no district can afford not to do it. Also, the bill directs districts to do specific kinds of programming and it should allow local communities to develop their own programs, not have to accept the four areas as listed on pages 1 and 2 of the bill. He said he may oppose SB 103 because of that, because it will force communities to compete for the grants, and because it is premature.

He voiced concerned that SB 103 does not have a fiscal note for DEED to establish innovative programs, nor does it show how much of the \$349 million will be spent. SB 102's fiscal note does. He commended the sponsor and the committee for their work on the bill, but suggested they work on it during the interim.

[8:25:07 AM](#)

MS. HUTCHISON explained that the fiscal note for SB 102 shows a repeating amount of \$16 million, an amount that should slowly decrease. The goal is that the fund would grow because it is invested at 7 percent annually.

She said SB 103 is a guideline and the legislature will not have a say in what kinds of grants are approved; the commissioner will deem what is necessary and appropriate. The expense will have to come from the commissioner's budget and be approved by the governor and the legislature.

[8:26:48 AM](#)

HEIDI TESHNER, Director Administrative Service, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), addressed the fiscal note for SB 103. She said there are three fiscal notes for SB 103. The first one is for the student and school achievement allocation and requests two permanent full-time positions, an education specialist and an education associate, for \$209,400 in the personal services line. Within the services line, \$23,300 is requested for department chargebacks and legal service costs.

[8:28:17 AM](#)

STEPHANIE BUTLER, Interim Executive Director, Postsecondary Education, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), addressed two fiscal notes related to SB 103. The first note applies to the repeal of the APS and shows a reduction from the original FY18 appropriation. It is an estimate. The second note is relative to the repeal of the Alaska Education Grant. It also shows a reduction from the original FY18 appropriation and is based on a statutory formula.

[8:30:29 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL thanked the sponsor of the bill. He commented that these are tough choices in the time of fiscal shortages. He said the bill has a goal to use the money more broadly to lift more people up.

He shared concerns. He would prefer that the top tier of students stay in the APS. He understood that, given the budget

situation, every dollar must provide the best benefit to students. He said he will support the bill.

[8:32:45 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES agreed it is a tough decision. She supports scholarships that allow students to go beyond high school, however, state finances are in different times. The constitution says the state must establish and maintain K-12 public schools. When it comes to the university, the constitution establishes it, but has no requirement to maintain it. The state's obligation is to children. She said her goal is to have K-12 students that graduate more ready and eligible for grants and scholarships. The APS has been a great program and has helped a lot of students and families. She said she will support the bill, but she is not opposed to keeping the APS statute on the books.

[8:34:46 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL moved to report SB 103, version 0, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal notes.

SENATOR BEGICH objected. He agreed that the key is to prepare children for college and with the idea of having more rigor in curriculum.

[8:35:54 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS expressed appreciation for Senator Coghill's comment on lifting people up. He spoke in support of the average student and the fact that they are also valuable. It is often the average student that accomplishes much in life.

[8:36:52 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH agreed.

CHAIR HUGHES said she appreciates the comments about rigor. She added that she heard from districts that rigorous courses motivate students. She encouraged districts to continue those offerings.

[8:37:36 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL pointed out that there is also a remediation issue. She spoke in support of the bill because it takes scant resources and drives them down to the K-12 level. She said her focus is on the K-3 grade level and reading. She agreed the APS is great, but stressed the importance of funding basic skills.

A roll call vote was taken. Senators Giessel, Hughes, Coghill, and Stevens voted in favor of moving SB 103 from committee and Senator Begich voted against it. Therefore, SB 103 passed out of the Senate Education Standing Committee by a 4:1 vote.

[8:39:22 AM](#)

At ease

SB 104-EDUCATION CURRICULUM

[8:40:49 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES announced the consideration of SB 104.

[8:41:11 AM](#)

BRITTANY HUTCHISON, Staff, Senator Anna MacKinnon, Alaska State Legislature, reviewed SB 104 on behalf of the sponsor. She addressed concerns of public testifiers. She said SB 104 is completely voluntary. The state plans to pay for the fiscal note and additional staff, if needed, curriculum research and professional development, but it will not come out of DEED funds or district funds. It would come out of the Alaska Education Innovation Grant Fund. The bill will not touch local control. The goal is to provide a curriculum in math and English to students in schools that don't have the necessary resources to come up with their own curriculum. It provides a three-year review reprieve to help the commissioner in implementing the Alaska Education Challenge.

[8:42:33 AM](#)

MS. HUTCHISON summarized that the three bills are not meant to make up for the difference in the BSA reduction. The bills should provide funding and cost savings to school districts and provide a funding stream to bridge the achievement gap and bring curriculum, students, and instruction in line with 21st Century technology.

[8:43:09 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked what the impetus for the bill was. Many districts testified that the bill would have no impact on them.

MS. HUTCHISON replied that Senator MacKinnon wrote a letter a few years ago to the State Board of Education regarding common curriculum to help districts. The sponsor has been contacted by smaller schools with a request for English and math curriculum help.

SENATOR BEGICH said that is a persuasive answer.

SENATOR STEVENS asked if the department could discuss the implementation.

[8:45:05 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES requested clarification of the fiscal notes for SB 104. It says that (DEED) must purchase and provide curriculum for the seven test districts and make it available to all districts.

MS. HUTCHISON explained that the department will purchase curriculum using the new Alaska Innovation Education Grant Fund.

CHAIR HUGHES asked if the department will pay for the quantities the districts need.

MS. HUTCHISON offered to find out.

[8:46:34 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked what happens if the Innovation Education Grant Fund does not pass.

MS. HUTCHISON replied it would come out of the Alaska Higher Education Fund.

[8:47:16 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked how the department would implement the program.

[8:47:29 AM](#)

PAUL PRUSSING, Deputy Director, Teacher and Learning Support, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), answered questions related to SB 104. He replied that it would be very challenging for the department to implement because they don't have a content specialist and the testing of the curriculum would be extensive and costly. Math would be cost \$328 per student, so for Anchorage it would be about \$30 million. The reviewing, testing, and implementing of the curriculum would be expensive. He shared his experience with the Reading First Curriculum and the work and expense involved. Eventually, they discovered an additional need to have supplemental programs for unique populations. The fiscal note is indeterminate because there are so many unknowns.

[8:50:07 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL appreciated the need for a curriculum process. She asked how a school district chooses a curriculum.

MR. PRUSSING explained that teachers know their kids and what works for them. There is discussion amongst districts and they share curriculum.

[8:51:22 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked if other states have taken this on. She said it sounds complicated.

MR. PRUSSING said he researched for three days, including talking with Education Northwest, a regional resource, and didn't find much information. A few states have undertaken this with varying degrees of success.

[8:52:05 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL said it is good information. He spoke of developed curriculum and the pressure to buy it. He asked if cyber education is changing the curriculum makeup.

[8:53:17 AM](#)

MR. PRUSSING said that some districts are not buying textbooks any more. There is a market for a state's unique needs and vendors are reacting to those needs.

[8:54:03 AM](#)

MS. TESHNER explained the indeterminate fiscal note for SB 104. There would be a need for three positions; two content specialists, one in math and one in Language Arts, and one support staff.

CHAIR HUGHES asked about the department purchasing and providing curriculum to districts.

[8:55:07 AM](#)

MR. PRUSSING explained that the state would be providing the curriculum to any district that would like it. It could be expensive because some may want books; some technology.

[8:55:44 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL asked if the department has done this before.

[8:56:06 AM](#)

MR. PRUSSING replied that the department has provided resources to districts. In 2005 the department worked on a project for lesson plans which were available on line. It was not used very much.

SENATOR COGHILL recalled an Alaska History curriculum.

8:57:03 AM

CHAIR HUGHES commented that the department would provide evidence-based curriculum to ensure that districts receive a quality product.

8:57:47 AM

MR. PRUSSING asked what happens when the kids are not successful when using a department-provided curriculum. He spoke of the importance of local knowledge and the need for yearly professional development.

8:58:42 AM

SENATOR STEVENS voiced concern about the role of local control in this process.

MR. PRUSSING thought the bill would change the role of local control because the curriculum might not have the approval of the local school board.

9:00:07 AM

CHAIR HUGHES pointed out that the curriculum is optional, and a district could continue with what they are currently doing.

9:00:29 AM

MR. PRUSSING referred to page 1, line 9, which says the State Board shall approve curricula used by the five largest districts.

9:00:41 AM

SENATOR GIESSEL pointed out that it also includes the Regional Education Attendance Areas (REAA).

9:01:02 AM

MS. HUTCHISON stated that the bill is voluntary and local control is not being touched. In the first section, the curriculum approval and review is only for the first three years. There will be curriculum available, but no one must use it. The bill provides a break for three years from having to establish new curriculum.

CHAIR HUGHES summarized that it gives the department the ability to approve the curriculum for five districts.

9:03:17 AM

MS. HUTCHISON corrected that since the five largest districts and the two REAAs have curriculum that is already approved, the department will approve it and make it available to everyone. They will allow it to be used for three more years.

[9:03:53 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL suggested to use "the board shall approve curricula currently used by" on page 1, line 9.

CHAIR HUGHES thanked Senator Giessel.

SENATOR COGHILL moved to report SB 104, version J, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note.

CHAIR HUGHES announced that without objection, SB 104 moved from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

She commented that it would be FY19 or FY20 before the Education Innovative Grant Fund would be available to districts. She asked the sponsor to consider making something available sooner.

[9:06:17 AM](#)

At ease

SB 99-PRE-ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS/FUNDING

[9:06:55 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES announced the consideration of SB 99.

SENATOR TOM BEGICH, sponsor of SB 99, presented the bill. He related the importance of quality early education. He stressed the value of providing students the opportunity, before they enter kindergarten, to prove school readiness. Research suggest that students who have access to high quality preschool are less likely to be incarcerated and less likely to receive government assistance as adults.

He related that Alaska's current pre-Kindergarten programs - such as those in Anchorage, Mat-Su, the Lower Kuskokwim School District, and Nome, offer opportunities and quality program which have been described to the education committees. Early education programs including Head Start, Best Beginnings, Parents as Teachers, the work of DEED, and grants, provide access to high-quality early education, beginning with the lowest performing districts.

He continued to say that high quality pre-K education can save up to \$7 in long-term government expense by reducing the need for remedial education and involvement in the criminal justice and public assistance systems.

[9:09:36 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said smart investments in oil and gas royalties and the PFD have made the state one of the most economically equitable in the country. Similar smart investments in early education have the potential to create a generation of Alaskans prepared to make the greatest impact on this state that we have ever seen. This is an example of the importance of research first then investment, in the long run.

[9:10:40 AM](#)

SYDNEY KAUFMAN, Ph.D., Staff, Alaska State Legislature, presented the sectional analysis of SB 99:

Section 1.

Establishes that elementary schools also includes an early education program, whether operated within a public school or by an outside organization.

Section 2.

Establishes that a four or five-year-old, who has not attended kindergarten, is eligible to attend a public school early education program.

Section 3.

Creates a stair-step, 3-year grant program to provide training and assist a school district in developing an early education program. In year one, the lowest performing 20% of school districts (as established in 2017) will be eligible for a grant to establish a district-wide, high quality early education program. In year two, the next lowest performing 20 % of school districts will be eligible for the three-year grant program to establish an early education program. At the end of the three-year grant cycle, the Department of Education and Early Development (the department) will be responsible for determining if the district's early education program complies with state standards. The grants will be available to the next lowest 20% of school districts until all school districts are offered the opportunity to participate included.

[9:12:10 AM](#)

Section 4.

Directs the department to supervise all early education programs and approve those early education programs created by the early education grant program.

Section 5.

Defines an "early education program" as a pre-kindergarten school for students 3-5 years old if its primary function is educational. The 3-year-old students are not included in the program this bill proposes, but are included to ensure they are not excluded from existing State and Federal programs.

[9:12:54 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH noted it is conforming language so there is not the unintended consequence of putting three-year-olds into an elementary school program.

[9:13:36 AM](#)

MS. KAUFMAN continued:

Section 6.

Directs the board to adopt regulations regarding funding as well as statewide and local goals for an early education program. Regulations shall ensure that early education programs have the flexibility to be locally designed and culturally appropriate, so long as they meet early education standards. An early education program may be either full day (6 hour) or half day (at least 2 hours)

Section 7.

For funding purposes, an early education student shall be counted in the school district's average daily membership as a half day student once the early education program has been approved by the department.

Section 8.

Adds early education to consideration for determining the number of elementary schools in a district.

[9:14:40 AM](#)

Section 9.

Ensures that early education students who currently receive State or Federal funding for early education are not included in the ADM for purposes of funding.

Section 10.

Directs early education program staff to be included in those organizations required to report evidence of child abuse.

Section 11.

Repeals the early education grant program in 10 years, once all school districts have had the opportunity to apply.

[9:15:22 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH clarified in Section 9, if a student is receiving federal money now for early education, the student is not included in the ADM for purposes of funding. The reason the Early Education Grant Program will be repealed in ten years is that every district in the state will have had the opportunity to join a universal voluntary preschool. He noted Oklahoma has the highest rate of voluntary early education. Alaska has done a good job of building quality preschools. The long-term goal is to create a sustainable, affordable, programmatic tiered approach, splitting districts into five cohorts.

He said the department will address the fiscal notes.

CHAIR HUGHES mentioned those who could answer questions about the bill.

[9:17:33 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES suggested that homes without parental support need preschool more than those with support. She said the grant targets low achieving students and inquired why it is available to those who might not need the grant.

[9:18:53 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH explained that they started with the lower achieving districts due to a constitutional obligation to do so. Educational opportunity must be offered to all students in Alaska, but it is a choice by parents to make use of them.

[9:20:13 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked if there is anything to prohibit a tribal organization from offering pre-elementary programs.

SENATOR BEGICH said no. The bill encourages tribal participation and is part of the reason for two sections in the bill. One ensures the ability to collaborate with Head Start, and the cultural component in the bill encourages participation by

tribes. The intent of the bill is to encourage continuing partnerships with existing entities.

[9:21:00 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL thanked him for the thoughtful bill. He liked the tiered process, but getting the money will be difficult. He struggles with the fact that grade 1-3 students should be able to read, and he was not sure the bill addresses that. He said the system fails many students. He hoped the bill would address this and supports the idea of reaching out to families.

[9:23:06 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH referred to a handout that shows research in Alaska where pre-K has taken place; those kids go to school ready to learn. He used the Lower Kuskokwim and Nome School District as examples. Research shows that it is time to stop the demonstration grant and ensure that pre-K is available to all students. Those are the critical years for learning.

[9:25:35 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL said they have tried Parents as Teachers and other methods to encourage parents to step up. He takes issue when the state relieves families of their responsibilities. He questioned where the funding will come from.

[9:26:28 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH addressed Senator Coghill's funding concern. He hoped in the future "the way we do these resources and how we do them will be identified."

[9:26:57 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS liked the bill. He did not know how rigor in education fits into preschool. He spoke in favor of local design and culturally appropriate needs in the bill, but he hoped there was substance in the program. He asked how to know if the program works and if the money is well spent.

[9:27:45 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said they know because on page 7, the criteria that are set out are the tested methodology that is used, such as high-quality teachers, types of programming, and standards. He said it is the Oklahoma standard that has been tested and measured. The quality of Alaska experience would also apply to this legislation. The department will write regulations using their models of quality outcomes.

He noted the backup data shows dramatic increases in school readiness because of this type of program. He said he would provide a copy of it to the committee. It will be measured against the standards of 9 years of experience and the department will have jurisdiction over whether programs will continue. After three years if the department deems a preschool is not meeting quality standards, it will not be approved.

[9:30:32 AM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES invited Ms. Johnson to testify.

[9:31:07 AM](#)

MEGHAN JOHNSON, Director, Learn and Grow in THREAD, testified in support of SB 99. She shared the goals of Learn and Grow. She said she will address what high quality early childhood education looks like. She implored the legislature to think about children's futures.

[9:32:34 AM](#)

She said there are approximately 40,000 children under the age of six in Alaska where both parents work and there is limited access to affordable, quality programs. A lot of quality practice has to do with what is appropriate for the development of birth to age 5 children. Parents play the primary role in supporting this development, but if they work, it falls to early childhood teachers and programs.

She shared the most recent early care and learning economic report by the McDowell Group. Early care and learning contributes \$2 billion to Alaska's economy each year. She listed financial benefits of early childhood education.

She said there is a lack of affordable early childhood programs. She noted that pre-K can be a high-quality choice for parents. She described the soft skills children need.

[9:35:07 AM](#)

MS. JOHNSON described several factors affect children's development and what is needed to support relationships with other children. Teachers have specialized training and work in partnership with parents in these areas. She said there are decreased costs for special education and incarceration due to early childhood education.

[9:37:33 AM](#)

She provided a story of a family that was not able to enter a pre-K program and how their son struggled in school.

CHAIR HUGHES thanked Ms. Johnson and held SB 99 in committee.

9:40:33 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Hughes adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 9:40 a.m.