

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 31, 2018

7:59 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator John Coghill

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

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 99

SHORT TITLE: PRE-ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS/FUNDING

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(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
04/07/17	(S)	Heard & Held
04/07/17	(S)	MINUTE (EDC)
01/31/18	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

SYDNEY LIENEMANN, 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.

ANJI GALLANOS, Director
Head Start Collaboration
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on SB 99.

MINDY LOBAUGH, School Finance Specialist II
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on SB 99.

APRIL BLEVINS, Early Childhood Coordinator
Lower Kuskokwim School District
Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 99.

DAVID NEES, Research Associate
Alaska Policy Forum
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Opposed SB 99.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[7:59:13 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 7:59 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Begich, Giessel, Hughes, and Chair Stevens.

SB 99-PRE-ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS/FUNDING

[7:59:40 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the consideration of SB 99. [SB 99, version 30-LS035\0, was before the committee.]

[8:00:08 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of SB 99, said the Alaska Early Education Program Act is an attempt for Alaska to have universal, voluntary pre-K, similar to the Oklahoma model. Early education is imperative for Alaska when considering its long-term economy in that its students must be prepared to be productive. High quality early education programs improves school readiness, reading levels, and long-term economic performance, something of great concern to this committee. For

over nine years, Alaska has had demonstration programs that show kids are better prepared when they have been exposed to and experienced quality pre-K programs.

[8:02:49 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said SB 99 offers districts the opportunity to develop high-quality, early education programs that are culturally appropriate and tailored to their students through a three-year grant process. The bill is designed so there is no immediate massive economic impact like previous pre-K proposals. It starts with the lowest performing cohort of schools. The cohort is divided up into five different years. For the first cohort, schools with no preschool programs begin a three-year process with the Department of Education and Early Development (EED). Studies show teachers must be trained and mentored to provide quality preschool services, so DEED will provide guidance and mentoring. Each year, for five years, another cohort would be added to begin the three-year process. At the end of three years, DEED would determine whether to certify the program so that students in the preschool program would be funded at half the cost of a full-time student. This would help offset enrollment declines the state.

[8:05:14 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said the bill would integrate, over time, coordinated, evidence-based, culturally appropriate early education programs that would complement and not contradict the early education work already done over the past eight years.

[8:05:40 AM](#)

SYDNEY LIENEMANN, Ph.D., Staff, Senator Tom Begich, Alaska State Legislature, presented the sectional analysis of SB 99:

Section 1.

Establishes that elementary schools also include 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 2018) 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.

[8:07:04 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.

[8:07:22 AM](#)

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.

[8:07:47 AM](#)

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)

[8:08:13 AM](#)

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.

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.

[8:08:48 AM](#)

Section 10.

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

[8:09:00 AM](#)

Section 11.

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

[8:09:11 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said he read an article that suggested there is no evidence to support the idea that children who go through preschool programs perform better than those who do not.

[8:09:29 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH responded that most data are quite persuasive. James Heckman [American economist] reports that investment in early childhood education is the best way to reduce [economic] deficits. Heckman states that investment in early childhood development caused reduced needs for special education remediation, better health outcomes, reduced needs for social services, and lower criminal justice costs, and increased self-sufficiency and productivity among families. The Perry Preschool Project followed children into adulthood and compared them to children from the same background who did not have access to high-quality preschool. They showed significant results in better personal and life success in the long term. The Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) has data that indicates improvements in outcomes in the Lower Kuskokwim School District, Nome, and to a lesser extent, in Mat-Su and Anchorage. The follow-up research for Oklahoma's preschool programs, which SB 99 is modeled on, with eighth, ninth, and tenth graders who attended preschool programs underscores their success.

[8:11:50 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said so there is ample evidence to show early education has an impact. This is a different kind of dividend program that pays out over a lifetime. Pre-K alone is not the answer to successfully educate children, but it is a key component.

[8:13:35 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES noted the sizeable fiscal note and asked whether the programs would be optional for districts and families. She also asked how many children did Senator Begich envision in each cohort. Ten percent of students in the state are in Best Beginnings and Head Start.

[8:14:44 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said the program would be voluntary for districts and parents always have the option about whether their children would participate. DEED could answer in more detail about the numbers. For each year of preschool-age students, there are about 10,000 students statewide. The percentage of students that participate in preschool in states that have programs range from 20 to 30 percent on the low end to 80 percent on the high end. Alaska would probably be in the middle. The fiscal note speaks to 2,500 students per cohort. The fiscal note probably would be high because the state values education.

[8:17:04 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked how the state would know that families that most needed preschool programs would choose them.

[8:18:45 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said DEED would provide mentorship to train preschool teachers to understand the importance of outreach. DEED would work to improve the quality of teachers so that districts and teachers could effectively let know families of the services available.

[8:20:51 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said Head Start and Best Beginnings programs are good at involving parents. She wondered whether there would be family engagement and any requirements for family involvement.

[8:22:41 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said evidence-based programs must have family involvement. DEED can give details about what is working now and why it is making a difference.

[8:23:54 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked for a definition of "cultural appropriateness."

[8:24:15 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH responded it is about ensuring that elements of local culture will be incorporated. If a district is developing programs for a Yupiit or Inupiaq village, it would incorporate elements of that culture, so families are engaged in the process. His short answer means including a cultural component without sacrificing evidence-based practices for academic rigor.

[8:26:54 AM](#)

ANJI GALLANOS, Director, Head Start Collaboration, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), presented information on SB 99. She said that when she was a preschool teacher, her greatest success came from engaging families. That background is reflected in the goals set by DEED for pre-elementary program grantees. Districts must work on engaging and collaborating with families to create locally designed programs reflective of cultures and families in communities.

[8:29:15 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said the fiscal note is large, but that is spread over time. He asked for an explanation of the number of students in the fiscal note.

[8:30:59 AM](#)

MS. GALLANOS said DEED's first step was to identify the number of federally funded Head Start students to avoid duplicating existing services. DEED also identified the number of students that would be served in the lowest performing districts.

[8:32:51 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked for the actual numbers.

[8:32:59 AM](#)

MS. GALLANOS said the first step is to determine which districts are the lowest performing and by what measure. For the initial determination of numbers, DEED identified 11 districts with about 700 students to be served. Currently, \$3.2 million is provided from pre-elementary grant programs that serve 754 students. The first cohort would be 11 districts serving about 750. The numbers can change each year.

[8:34:34 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said about 10 percent of students in this age are being served now. After the 5 years, how many of 10,000 students at each age would be served under the proposed program.

[8:35:16 AM](#)

MS. GALLANOS said currently pre-elementary programs are serving about 20 percent of 4-year-olds. The grant would roll through cohorts and could reach 80 percent, which is similar to numbers in other states. Head Start students would not be included in the grant.

[8:36:25 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES calculated that the fiscal note was too low because 5,500 out of 10,000 students was not 80 percent.

[8:36:52 AM](#)

MS. GALLANOS said district enrollment varies.

[8:37:12 AM](#)

MINDY LOBAUGH, School Finance Specialist II, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), presented information on SB 99. She said these students would be funded at half of the full-time equivalent (FTE).

[8:37:41 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said other proposed pre-K attempts had immediate costs of \$50 million. This is a slow roll out from the worst performing to the best performing districts and integrates preschool funding into the Base Student Allocation funding. It is a limited grant program that ends after 10 years.

[8:38:42 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked if her calculation of 5,500 students was correct and how does that match the projection of 80 percent participation.

[8:39:11 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said the cohort is based on the number in school districts, not a statewide number. The first 11 districts that would be served are among the smallest in the state. Anchorage would probably never be in the cohort. It depends on the size of districts and whether there are existing pre-K programs.

[8:40:19 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said then she was mistaken in multiplying 700 by 5.

SENATOR BEGICH responded exactly.

[8:40:28 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL asked if Head Start is federally funded.

[8:40:47 AM](#)

MS. GALLANOS said by federal and state funds.

[8:40:53 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL asked about the reference to four-year-olds in pre-elementary programs separate from Head Start. She asked who funds those programs.

[8:41:02 AM](#)

MS. GALLANOS said pre-elementary students in the DEED's grants are funded through state general funds.

[8:41:11 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL said she is confused because if some students are already in pre-K programs, such as Head Start, why is a new grant program needed.

[8:41:33 AM](#)

MS. GALLANOS said federally funded Head Start serves students who meet poverty guidelines. The state has 3,500 Head Start slots for students from birth to age five. The age ranges are 0-3 and 3-5. About 762 students are aged birth through three. If over 9,000 students enrolled in kindergarten this year, there are approximately that many three- and four-year-olds. Not many students are being served. The state provides \$3.2 million for pre-elementary programs in 19 districts that serve 750 students. Some of these students also receive Head Start services if the district and Head Start partner, such as in Bering Strait School District and the Anchorage School District. The total statewide is 10 percent being served.

[8:43:43 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL asked why Head Start programs cannot be expanded.

[8:43:53 AM](#)

MS. GALLANOS said that is a federal decision. Head Start has had no significant expansion for several years. Head Start cannot serve all students and not all students would qualify because of poverty guidelines. Head Start costs about \$14,000 per kid.

[8:46:19 AM](#)

APRIL BLEVINS, Early Childhood Coordinator, Lower Kuskokwim School District, supported SB 99. She said Alaska should provide access to high quality early childhood education to all children to increase school readiness and promote academic and lifelong success. The state offers only limited pilot funding for early childhood education. Many communities do not meet Head Start guidelines for funding.

Children in the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LK) early education programs show growth between fall and spring assessments. LK data shows sign long term benefits to students who attended preschool. Preschool programs also employ local residents. When parents are employed, everyone has more access to a variety of services, such as counseling and employment services. LK has preschool programs in ten of its village sites and Bethel serving 200 students. LK could serve 13 more village sites with preschool funding. LK could also provide professional development for staff, family engagement, and community partnerships.

[8:48:45 AM](#)

DAVID NEES, Research Associate, Alaska Policy Forum, opposed SB 99. He said DEED has never produced a report showing actual results of preschool programs. Nationally, nine out of ten studies show no measurable outcomes for preschool programs, including for Head Start. The judge in the More [vs. State of Alaska] decision ruled the Alaska Constitution does not include the right to a public, preschool education. DEED has failed to produce one paper to show academic benefits down the road.

[8:51:26 AM](#)

MR. NEES said this is an answer looking for a problem. No evidence exists to show pre-K is working.

[8:51:58 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked Mr. Nees to provide the studies.

[8:52:21 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL asked Ms. Lobaugh to explain why the four fiscal notes are more than \$100 million when she adds them together.

[8:53:11 AM](#)

MS. LOBAUGH said she completed the public education fund and foundation program fiscal notes. The kindergarten enrollment figure (assuming the pre-K count would be similar) was multiplied by the basic per student cost for the state and then halved to come up with a per student cost of \$4,590.

There would likely be about 515 students in the cohort that might be included in the first year of the grant program. The cost of the first year, 515 students times \$4,590, is approximately \$2.3 million.

Figures for subsequent years show more districts involved, but funding for students would also begin to be integrated into the student funding formula [and not be part of the SB 99 grant program]. That is the method for arriving at \$11 million.

[8:55:31 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL asked whether her number of over \$100 million was accurate.

[8:55:56 AM](#)

MS. LOBUGH said she could only speak to the fiscal notes she prepared.

[8:56:26 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said DEED has provided publicly available evidence about these pre-K programs. He was disappointed to hear the comment that DEED had not. When he adds up the fiscal notes, he does not get that number.

Chair Stevens held SB 99 in committee.

[8:57:32 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 8:57 a.m.