

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 23, 2020

3:31 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair  
Senator Shelley Hughes, Vice Chair  
Senator John Coghill  
Senator Mia Costello  
Senator Tom Begich

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative Grier Hopkins  
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux  
Representative Andi Story

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

**SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 6**

"An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to funding for early education programs; relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; establishing a reading intervention program for public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; establishing a literacy program in the Department of Education and Early Development; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**SENATE BILL NO. 151**

"An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to funding for early education programs; relating to a department literacy program; relating to a comprehensive reading policy; relating to the duties of the state Board of Education and Early Development; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 6

SHORT TITLE: PRE-K/ELEM ED PROGRAMS/FUNDING; READING

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) BEGICH

01/16/19	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/7/19
01/16/19	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/19	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/21/19	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/21/19	(S)	Heard & Held
03/21/19	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/16/19	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/16/19	(S)	Heard & Held
04/16/19	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
01/21/20	(S)	SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED-REFERRALS
01/21/20	(S)	EDC, FIN
01/23/20	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM SENATE FINANCE 532

BILL: SB 151

SHORT TITLE: PRE-K/ELEM ED PROGRAMS/FUNDING; READING

SPONSOR(S): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/21/20	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/21/20	(S)	EDC, FIN
01/23/20	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM SENATE FINANCE 532

**WITNESS REGISTER**

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified on DEED's support for SB 6 and SB 151.

LOKI TOBIN, Staff

Senator Tom Begich

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the sectional analysis for SB 6 and SB 151.

ERIN HARDIN, Legislative Liaison

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the sectional analysis for SB 6 and SB 151.

TOM KEILY, Policy Analyst  
Education Commission of the States (ECS)  
Denver, Colorado

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented on how ECS could support state policymakers regarding reading legislation.

JOEL MOORE, State Relations Strategist  
Education Commission of the States (ECS)  
Denver, Colorado

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented on how ECS could support state policymakers regarding reading legislation.

POSIE BOGGS, Member  
Alaska Reading Coalition  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave support and feedback on SB 6 and SB 151.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CHAIR GARY STEVENS** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Begich, Hughes, Coghill, Costello, and Chair Stevens.

**SB 6-PRE-K/ELEM ED PROGRAMS/FUNDING; READING**  
**SB 151-PRE-K/ELEM ED PROGRAMS/FUNDING; READING**

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CHAIR STEVENS announced the consideration of SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 6, "An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to funding for early education programs; relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; establishing a reading intervention program for public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; establishing a literacy program in the Department of Education and Early Development; and providing for an effective date" and SENATE BILL NO. 151, "An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to funding for early education programs; relating to a department literacy program; relating to a comprehensive reading policy; relating to the duties of the

state Board of Education and Early Development; and providing for an effective date."

[Before the committee was SSSB 6, Version 31-LS0159\S and SB 151, version 31-GS2993\A.]

He noted that SB 6, sponsored by Senator Begich, and SB 151, sponsored by the governor, are very similar and speak to early learning and literacy. He stated his intention to roll out both bills simultaneously, get the conversations on the table, understand the differences, and hold the bills in committee for further review. He called Senator Begich and Commissioner Johnson to the table.

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SENATOR BEGICH pointed out that the committee packets contained a document comparing the bills. He recognized Senator Hughes and Representative LeDoux as champions of reading and stated that a lot of Senator Hughes's work is reflected in the bills. He also acknowledged the work of the Commissioner of Education and the governor and their desire to see effective change in education policy. He met with the governor initially in December 2018 to assess the what makes for effective prekindergarten (pre-K). He and the governor have had a series of conversations since then on that issue. The Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) wrote some of the bill years ago and the pre-K bill section has had input from the early learning community.

SENATOR BEGICH said the governor's commitment and the districts' support for reading and literacy are critical components for successful pre-K. Further, effective reading cannot happen if kids are not prepared when they come to school. Those two components are merged in this bill. In the last three years, the committee has heard testimony about the importance of parental engagement with kids and with schools and the need for parents, schools, and teachers to be more integrated. He and the governor understand turnover and other comprehensive issues. Although everything cannot be dealt with in one bill, this bill will create a continuum from preschool to third grade to help prepare kids to graduate.

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SENATOR BEGICH said he has worked extensively with the governor on this bill, putting aside traditional partisan labels to focus on what kids need to learn. This resulted in these two bills, he said. The difference between the two bills is minor. First, the Department of Law and Legislative Legal Services draft things

differently. However, the same language is contained in different sections of the bills and the fiscal notes are identical. Second, the governor's bill has legislative intent language but SB does not. Third, SB 6 has transition language to give the commissioner more flexibility because of the complexities in these bills. He pointed out that there are slight differences in scheduling for pre-k, which was actually an error. Still, the bills are almost identical.

SENATOR BEGICH revealed that he and the governor have received some pushback on the bills. Some people have decided that there might be reasons not to support a piece of legislation if either he or the governor endorse or support it. "In the end, this won't be our bill. This will be your bill. It will be Alaska's bill. That is what we have intended from the very beginning. And so, we are willing to take the flak, we are willing to push for what's important for our kids. And we are doing so on the backs of the learning and advice that we have from the other members here at the table," he said.

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SENATOR BEGICH said that early learning is imperative for the state. When examining its long-term economy and opportunity for all Alaskans, it is essential to consider how Alaska increases productivity as well as how Alaska reduces potential drains resulting from the unrealized potential of its citizens. This bill will allow the state to be on that path. Early education and the ability to read makes that happen. The markers for success develop early in life, and brain science underscores that how people use their brains in the crucial early years and how well prepared children are before entering kindergarten will have a dramatic impact on their ability to learn. The state's ability to ensure that the supports are in place for reading and reading preparation will ensure that the state does not lose the gains made with prekindergarten.

SENATOR BEGICH said that research shows that children who live in poverty have an incredibly difficult time catching up with others when they come to school ill prepared. That same research shows that those who have a high-quality preschool experience go on to future academic and personal success. Studies such as the Perry Preschool Project Study, which, with a recent update, is multigenerational, show that every dollar invested in high-quality pre-K can save up to \$7 in government expense in the long run by reducing the need for remedial education and involvement in the criminal justice and public assistance systems. High-quality pre-K, supported by a strong learning

component, ensures that the state builds citizens who do not become a burden to the state. High-quality education programs are an investment in our children's' futures. Early education for students before they enter kindergarten improves school readiness, reading levels, and long-term economic performance. The state's own pre-K programs, such as those available in Anchorage, Mat-Su, the Lower Kuskokwim, and Nome school districts, which DEED has data on, show that these early education programs, including early education programs like Head Start, Best Beginnings, and Parents as Teachers, provide families with access to high-quality early education. Still, only 10 percent of Alaska's kids are covered with these programs.

SENATOR BEGICH stated that SB 6 would take the lessons learned from over a decade of the state's own pre-K programs and apply them across the state. This bill will also establish a statewide literacy program and intensive reading intervention services for students experiencing reading deficiencies from kindergarten through grade three. The DEED will provide direct support and reading intervention to up to 10 struggling schools for an entire school year. That bill section will provide up to five years of support. The DEED-funded reading intervention specialists will support staff in those districts, engage and build community understanding of evidence-based reading, and work with local teachers and staff to improve reading scores and assessments through evidence-based reading instruction. This bill would require reading proficiency screenings or assessments in first, second, and third grade. These two bills draw from the work of the Task Force on Reading Proficiency and Dyslexia and will consider different types of reading deficiencies.

SENATOR BEGICH emphasized the importance of early education since children's pace of intellectual development peaks at the age of six. Children develop all their synaptic connections in the brain by the age of two. The ones used are the ones kept between ages two and ten. That determines who people are going to be and how they are going to be. School outcome data and academic research show that if children participate in early education programs, soft skills tied to future success are developed, including conscientiousness, perseverance, sociability, and curiosity. Those results are shown nationally and in Alaska. Children in early education programs in Alaska showed dramatic growth between fall and spring. All should share in these successes, and it is time for all Alaskan children to have that opportunity to participate. This legislation, crafted

by the governor, himself, and the DEED, working with the advice they have received over the years, does that.

SENATOR BEGICH said the Alaska Reads Act will offer school 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. It is based on successful work in Oklahoma and other states. Smart investments in the past have made Alaska 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 anyone can imagine. He thanked Senator Hughes for her work as the chair of the Education Committee when he first became a senator and her work identifying the importance of reading in education.

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MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, noted that the work of the senators in the Education Committee is reflected in the bills. The governor came to this project as an educator, teacher, principal, superintendent, school board president, and often with comments about how as a father, it was important to teach his own kids to read.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON shared that the governor has spent substantial time the last few months digging into the details of this bill. He has held conversations with some of his former colleagues and others he has worked with on reading issues. The governor often referenced his own experience in the classroom as they worked through the bill. He often talked about the moral imperative that rises above politics when it comes to kids learning to read.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON pointed out that so many in the audience have dedicated so much time to making sure kids get a great education. They will have opportunities to share their perspective with the committee on how to make the best bill possible. He also acknowledged the work teachers are doing today to teach kids how to read.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON reviewed the mission statement of DEED: an excellent education for every student every day; and the vision statement in statute: all students will succeed in their education and work, shape worthwhile and satisfying lives for themselves, exemplify the best values of society, and be effective in improving the character and quality of the world

about them. He added that none of that can happen if students cannot read well. The department's role is to provide information, resources, and leadership to support educators and families around the state as they provide an excellent education for every student every day. For the last few years, many Alaskans have gathered, including members from both legislative education committees, to develop the Alaska Education Challenge. The challenge started with shared commitments to improve student success. Reading is fundamental to that. In September 2016, the State Board set strategic priorities, and the department recently received a grant aligned with those priorities.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON shared the first goal of five, support all students to read at grade level by the end of the third grade. Since so many people participated in the Alaska Education Challenge (AEC), the priority of reading came from many Alaskans. The AEC has three shared commitments, which are to increase student success, support responsible and reflective learners, and cultivate safety and well-being. This challenge includes five measurable goals, targeted priorities, and strategies.

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COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said the Alaska Legislative Task Force on Reading Proficiency and Dyslexia, which was led by Posie Boggs, noted that years of evidence show that almost all students are capable of learning to read. Students who do not learn to read by third grade fall further and further behind. He shared this quote from the task force:

"The students that do not read proficiently by third grade fall further and further behind. As their peers use reading skills to acquire new skills, these students remain on square one."

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said the need in the state is great. Lots of great instruction is happening, but the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data that he displayed on slide 10 of his presentation shows that Alaska is last in the nation for fourth grade reading. The state's PEAKS (Performance Evaluation for Alaska's Schools) assessment show 34 to 36 percent of grade three students are proficient in language arts.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON showed data on slide 12 that compared third grade reading proficiency to high school dropout rates. Districts with low reading proficiency levels have high dropout rates and districts with high reading proficiency levels have

low dropout rates. Reading proficiency rates in third grade correlate to graduation rates.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said the Alaska Reads Act turns a priority into policy. This bill represents the work of many people over many years. The Alaska Reads Act has three main components. It came from many discussions in the Senate Education Committee about how to address reading issues. Some people focused on pre-K, while others talked about reading intervention. These are combined into one act. The first part of the bill is high-quality pre-K. He stressed the importance of high-quality pre-K. The bill includes specific language about standards related to pre-K programs. The second part is a comprehensive K-3 reading intervention policy that includes specific language related to screening and intervention for dyslexia. The third part focuses on school improvement. The state has low performing schools that have been there for years. The bill provides specific opportunities for the department to provide resources, including people, in those schools to help build capacity for quality reading intervention and reading instruction programs.

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CHAIR STEVENS said he appreciated everyone working together on this. It is proof of what can be accomplished if people do not care who gets credit, which applies to the governor, the commissioner, Senator Begich, DEED staff, and this Education Committee. They have made great progress and he appreciated everyone's willingness to find a way to make this work and do what is best for the kids of Alaska.

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SENATOR HUGHES thanked the commissioner and Senator Begich for bringing this forward. It is so important to Alaska's children and their future and the future of this great state. She cannot think of anything more important to accomplish this session in terms of impacting the future. She likes the title Alaska Reads Act because it is for the state and the children of the state. She recalled the many types of meetings she has attended, such as on crime reduction or the budget. It did not matter what the topic was. When the question was asked, what can we do, she brought up reading because it does impact the future so much. For years, people have said that in America the great equalizer is education. However, if children do not master the objectives at each grade level and they move through the system, the diploma is meaningless. Education has not been the great equalizer it is supposed to be. She sees that children, perhaps for generations, have been trapped in families in poverty and

they have not been successful in school. The act will give them the tools to be successful. These are children who might otherwise be incarcerated at great cost to the state, as Senator Begich mentioned. These are children who might be on public assistance, on Medicaid. The act will open opportunities for these children. And what the state will look like in 15 to 20 years will be drastically different just because of the reading portion of this bill. She was happy to see it was getting traction, momentum, and support from across the aisle.

SENATOR HUGHES noted that the commissioner had said that DEED will provide support and resources for school improvement. She asked if there is an accountability piece for the school improvement part for the department and districts.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered absolutely. The Alaska Reads Act enhances the accountability system the department has in place through the federal Every Student Succeeds Act. The department will work to integrate all the work seamlessly for accountability purposes. The department does not want to create multiple accountability systems. It wants the current accountability system to work in sync with the Alaska Reads Act and the department believes it can do that.

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SENATOR BEGICH replied that a specific section directly relates to accountability. Agreement was reached about adding it in, partially because of what is happening with the Colorado Reads Act. Chair Stevens had introduced a bill, perhaps in the 2013 session, based on that original Colorado Reads Act. After that act passed, Colorado found some issues that needed to be corrected and addressed in a second act. Even today Colorado is looking at the accountability section of the Colorado Reads Act. As a result, accountable measures are embedded in the Alaska Reads Act.

CHAIR STEVENS asked for the sectional presentation.

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LOKI TOBIN, Staff, Senator Tom Begich, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, and Erin Hardin introduced themselves.

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ERIN HARDIN, Legislative Liaison, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, said that she would highlight the few differences between SB 6 and SB 151. The first difference between the two bills is simply a result of the

drafting differences between Legislative Legal and Department of Law, such as singular vs. plural references. The second difference is that in SB 6 the early education grants fiscal cycle in years four, five, and six are slightly more aggressive by 5 percent. That is equivalent to including a school district or two earlier in the grants program. The department is comfortable using the percentages in the sponsor substitute. The third difference is that SB 151 includes intent language. SB 6 establishes a deadline of August 1, 2020, for when DEED must conduct performance rankings of all districts with respect to the early education program grants, which will be discussed later in the sectional presentation. Those are the only four notable differences between the two bills.

MS. TOBIN said Section 1 of SB 6, which correlates to a portion of Section 13 of SB 151, establishes the Alaska Reads Act.

MS. HARDIN said that Section 2 of SB 6 is Section 1 of SB 151. This amends the language defining a public elementary school by including a reference to an early education program.

Establishes that elementary schools also include an early education program, whether operated within a public school or by an outside organization. Programs must be approved or supervised by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (the department).

MS. TOBIN said that Section 3 of SB 6, which is included in Section 7 of SB 151, establishes a new section.

Inserts AS 14.30.765, reading intervention services in addition to intervention strategies for early literacy.

MS. HARDIN said that Section 4 of SB 6 appears as Section 3 in SB 151.

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

MS. TOBIN said that Section 5 of SB 6 pertains to the last portion of SB 151, Section 13.

Establishes annual reporting requirements for school districts regarding student performance metrics in grades K-3.

SENATOR BEGICH explained that this section addresses the accountability question.

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MS. TOBIN said that Section 6 of SB 6 aligns with Section 4 of SB 151. This is the original language of SB 6, version M. This creates the stair step, three-year grant program to assist districts in establishing their early education programs. As noted earlier, some minor differences are in the grant schedule between SB 6 and SB 151. That is the 5 percent over years four, five, and six. These equate to when one or two schools will be able to apply for early education grants. As mentioned earlier, Commissioner Johnson and Senator Begich are in concurrence with the sponsor bill schedule. In both bills, in year one, the lowest performing 10 percent of school districts will be eligible for a grant to establish an early education program. In year two, 15 percent of the next lowest school districts will be eligible. In year three, the third lowest 15 percent of districts will be eligible. Then the bills diverge. In SB 6, in year four, the third highest 20 percent of school districts and SB 151 focuses on the third highest 15 percent. In year five, SB 6 and SB 151 are looking at the 20 percent second highest performing school districts. In the final year, SB 6 has the highest performing 20 percent and SB 151 has the remaining 25 percent of school districts.

SENATOR BEGICH added that there may not be a need to have a sixth year of the grants.

MS. TOBIN said that by the sixth year in both bills, all schools will have had the opportunity to participate in the grants program. At the end of the three-year grant cycle, the Department of Education and Early Development will be responsible for determining if the district's early education program complies with state standards, as established by the State Board of Education (board) in section 9.

MS. TOBIN said that in Section 7 of SB 6 and Section 5 of SB 151 the department is directed to supervise all early education programs, approve those early education programs created by the early education grant program, and establish a new literacy program, AS 14.07.065, and reading intervention programs of participating schools, AS 14.30.770.

MS. HARDIN said that Section 8 of SB 6 and Section 6 of SB 151 define an "early education program" as a pre-K program for students three to five years old if its primary function is

educational. The 3-year-old students are included in the definition but are not included in the program the bill proposes but are included to ensure those students remain eligible for existing State and Federal programs.

SENATOR BEGICH explained that this has come up a number of times with old versions of preschool bills. This was a recommendation from a number of early learning programs so that three-year-olds would not be inadvertently excluded, but this bill's grant program is exclusive to four- and five-year-olds. It took two years to address this with the early learning community.

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MS. HARDIN said that Section 9 of SSSB 6 and Section 7 of SB 151 allow the department to select and purchase supplemental reading materials and provide support to reading intervention services.

MS. TOBIN said Section 10 of SB 6 and Section 9 of SB 151 section 9 direct the board to adopt regulations establishing standards for an early education program that is (1) half-day, (2) full-day, and (3) less than half day and is locally-designed and evidence-based. The lead teacher of a program must hold a valid teacher certificate and have satisfactorily completed a minimum of six credit hours in early childhood education or completed the six credits within one year of the teacher's employment, or have five or more years of experience teaching kindergarten or other early education programs. Regulations must also establish the development of appropriate objectives and accommodations for all children, which allow districts to adapt content to be culturally appropriate to local communities.

MS. TOBIN said that Section 11 of SB 6, which aligns with Section 10 of SB 151, states that for funding purposes, an early education student shall be counted in the school district's average daily membership (ADM) as a half-day student once the early education program has been approved by the department.

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MS. TOBIN said that Section 12 of SB 6 and Section 11 of SB 151 include students in early education programs approved by the department in the definition of an elementary school.

MS. TOBIN said that Section 13 of SB 6 and Section 12 have a complete alignment of language to ensure that early education students who currently receive state or federal funding for early education are not included in the ADM for purposes of funding.

SENATOR BEGICH clarified that a lot of questions have come up about this before. This avoids double dipping so that a kid cannot be counted twice. If a district is already receiving funding for a kid, the district cannot use the grant program to get twice the amount for one kid. It is a way of avoiding federal restrictions on supplanting funding.

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SENATOR COGHILL asked if it would be allocated on what a student normally would get.

SENATOR BEGICH answered yes.

SENATOR HUGHES asked about the counting of an early education student as one half of ADM in Section 11, when the prior section referred to developing standards for different lengths of day.

SENATOR BEGICH replied that it is to provide consistency if a district should choose to provide a full-day program, but students will be funded for half a day.

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CHAIR STEVENS acknowledged the presence of Representatives Hopkins and Story.

MS. HARDIN said that Section 14 of SB 6 correlates to Section 8 and 13 in SB 151 and noted that this part of the bill transitions to reading intervention.

Establishes a comprehensive reading intervention program, designed to increase literacy for children in kindergarten through grade three. The department will be required to establish a system of support for teachers of kindergarten through grade three students, adopt a statewide screening or assessment tool to identify students with reading deficiencies, and provide support to teachers of kindergarten through grade three students through training on the use of the statewide screening or assessment tool and on the science of reading. The department will be required to administer the statewide screening or assessment tool three times each school year, once in the fall, once in the winter, and once in the spring, beginning in 2020. The statewide screening or assessment tool must determine specified skills at each grade level: kindergarten, first grade, and second/third grades.

School districts will be required to offer reading intervention services in addition to core reading instruction to all students in kindergarten through grade three who exhibit a reading deficiency as determined by the statewide screening or assessment. The reading intervention services must be provided by a district reading teacher, include explicit and systematic instruction with proven results based on scientific research, incorporate daily targeted small group reading instruction, and be based on students' needs as determined by regular monitoring of student progress. The reading intervention services must be reviewed based on department-approved response to intervention or multi-tiered system support models.

For each student participating in the reading intervention services, the district must establish an individual reading plan. For all students with an individual reading plan and who also score in the lowest achievement level on the district screening or statewide reading assessment, the district must provide the reading intervention services both during and outside the school term. Outside the school term, the reading intervention services must be staffed with reading teachers and include a minimum of 70 hours of instructional time.

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Districts or schools must notify parents in writing if a student exhibits a reading deficiency at any time during the school year. Notification must occur within 15 days of the deficiency being identified. Updates to parents are required every other week after initial notification. The initial notification must state the district or school identified the student as having a reading deficiency and that an improvement plan will be developed, describe the current services the student receives and the proposed additional services the student will need to remedy the deficiency, explain the progress reports that will follow every two weeks, and identify strategies the parent or guardian could use at home to help the student succeed in reading. If the student is in grade three, the notification must include a request for a meeting with the parent, the student's teacher, and other district staff to discuss appropriate grade level progression. The meeting must take place at least 45 days prior to the end of the school year. If the student's parent does not attend, the student's teacher and school personnel will determine grade level progression for the student.

Establishes that a student in grade three should demonstrate sufficient reading skills to progress to grade four. Multiple pathways are provided for students to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for progression to grade four, including performance on the statewide reading screening or assessment or an alternative reading assessment as determined by the State Board of Education, or, as evidenced through a student reading portfolio.

MS. HARDIN said she wanted to emphasize that there are multiple pathways provided for students to demonstrate proficiency.

CHAIR STEVENS asked for help understanding the portfolio.

SENATOR BEGICH deferred to the commissioner.

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COMMISSIONER JOHNSON explained that a reading portfolio would have parameters established by the state board. The student and teacher would put it together to demonstrate reading proficiency in ways other than a standardized assessment. It could be a teacher's record of reading with a student or student writing about something he or she has read. There are a number of elements that could be included in a portfolio for a student who may not be able to perform well on a standardized assessment but who is proficient in reading.

SENATOR BEGICH asked if it would accommodate different learning disabilities the task force addressed.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered yes and that others will testify about that.

SENATOR HUGHES reflected that some students freeze up when they take a test. She asked if a portfolio might include a videotape of a student reading to show proof of proficiency.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied absolutely. Other places in the country use this model for a student to show proficiency. A portfolio is a collection of evidence that shows a student is proficient in reading.

SENATOR HUGHES noted that the term "proficiency" was being used a lot. She asked if that is defined.

[4:31:05 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered that state standards define that, and state assessments assess those standards.

SENATOR HUGHES asked if the commissioner could briefly describe proficiency.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied that the science of reading talks about five things that need to happen for students to be proficient. First, students need phonemic awareness, hearing distinct sounds in words and understand that the print represents the sounds they hear. Third, students need to be able to do that fluently. Fourth, students need to have a growing vocabulary, and finally, students need comprehension, to understand what they have read. All of these things together create the context needed to be a proficient reader.

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CHAIR STEVENS noted the presence of Representative LeDoux.

MS. HARDIN continued presenting Section 14. The bill language includes good cause exemptions, such as having a disability, or the student is learning English as a second language. The bill provides a process for parents or guardians to request an exemption for their student.

Districts must provide intensive reading intervention services to all students who do not progress or receive a good cause exemption. For students who do not progress to grade four who previously experienced delayed grade level progression, an intensive acceleration class must also be provided by the district.

MS. HARDEN said Section 14 establishes annual reporting requirements for schools regarding student reading performance in kindergarten through grade three.

MS. HARDIN said that the literacy program of Section 14 of SB 6 is in Section 8 of SB 151.

Establishes a literacy program to provide direct support and intervention services to up to ten low-performing Alaska schools each year that apply for the services. The department will be responsible for providing each selected school up to two reading specialists. A reading specialist is defined as a certified teacher under AS 14.20 who is employed and funded by the department and who meets requirements established by the board. One specialist would

be focused on the implementation of reading intervention services consistently across classrooms, modeling effective instructional strategies, coaching and mentoring teachers and paraprofessionals, training teachers in data literacy, leading and supporting reading leadership teams, and reporting on school and student performance to the department. The supporting reading specialist would assist with all the activities described above or serve as the reading specialist for the school's early education program, depending on the makeup of the specific school.

The department will be required to establish a process for the reading specialists to report on program implementation, work with the reading specialists to establish improvement goals, including measures of interim progress, to select and purchase additional reading materials to supplement the reading intervention services, and pay travel costs for a reading specialist to attend relevant trainings identified or hosted by the department. The department will also be responsible for periodically reviewing staff development programs and recommending to the board programs that meet high quality standards as defined under AS 14.07.065 (10).

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SENATOR BEGICH emphasized that one reason for this section is the bill is not putting that burden directly on districts. The state, in a way, is fulfilling its obligation under Moore [v. State of Alaska lawsuit] to support school districts. He expressed his appreciation to the governor and the department for that.

SENATOR HUGHES said earlier the sectional talked about district reading teachers. Now the sectional is talking about reading specialists provided by the department and the board setting standards. The state wants to make sure teachers are well trained and well prepared. She wondered if there is a great program that has worked so that the state will be ready to train these teachers. She recounted a story of meeting a Mississippi teacher at an education conference this summer who told how she graduated from a program but was not equipped for the situation she was placed in. Later the teacher was so thankful when her state adopted a reading plan and she had the training and resources. Senator Hughes was curious about how the department is going to make the sure the district reading teachers and department specialists are prepared.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered that professional development is a large piece of this act. Part of the department's responsibility is to provide good quality professional development. Instead of having separate bills to establish different expectations, putting them all in the Alaska Reads Act establishes an expectation of quality from pre-K through third grade. The department will work to make sure those expectations are demonstrated in a consistent way across the board. The committee heard about standards for pre-K. When the department provides support services to districts, the department wants to make sure districts adhere to the same quality standards. He would not say at the meeting whether the department would pick one reading program or draw from multiple programs.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON added that from Best Beginnings to the Alaska Reading Coalition and others, there is great capacity to provide the professional development the state will need to train teachers and the state will draw on the experiences of other states. Staff development is a big piece of the Alaska Reads Act being successful and the department already, in hopes of a bill that passes, has been having meetings about how to provide those opportunities. This weekend a thousand educators will be at the Response to Intervention (RTI) conference, which happens every year. It is the largest conference in the state for educators. With a bill that passes, the department can work even more closely with organizations to make sure staff development is aligned to what the legislature and the governor have indicated in this bill.

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CHAIR STEVENS recognized the presence of Montana Senator Mike Huff, the president of PNWER, the Pacific Northwest Economic Region.

MS. HARDIN continued the sectional:

Schools selected to participate in the literacy program will be required to ensure that the reading specialist(s) were not required to perform functions that divert from the duties assigned by the department, coordinate with the reading specialists to redesign the school's daily schedule to provide time dedicated to literacy program activities, hold public meetings to present information on the literacy and reading intervention program services to parents and guardians, present an annual update to the public on these program services at a noticed public meeting, and create partnerships between the school, families, and community

that focus on promoting literacy and increasing time spent reading.

Under this new section, the department will be required to publish on its website and make available to the public a completed application from each school selected to participate in the literacy program, the literacy plan implemented at each selected school, and a data analysis of the success of the literacy program and intervention services conducted by an independent contractor.

MS. HARDIN pointed out that the independent contractor adds another accountability piece.

MS. TOBIN said that Section 15 of SB 6, which is in Section 14 of SB 151, directs early education program staff to be included in those organizations required to report evidence of child abuse.

MS. TOBIN said Section 16 repeals the early education grant program in 11 years once all school districts have had the opportunity to participate.

MS. HARDIN said the last three sections focus on the implementation timeline. Section 17 of SB 6 is in a portion of Section 4 of SB 151 and directs the department to conduct performance rankings of all districts. Section 18 of SB 6, which appears as Section 15 of SB 151, directs the commissioner of the department to provide an implementation progress report to the board no later than 30 days after the effective date. Section 19 establishes an effective date of July 1, 2020.

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CHAIR STEVENS asked Senator Begich to give a wrap-up of the sectional analysis.

SENATOR BEGICH said some might question why the grant program terminates and disappears. That is because every district will have had the opportunity to participate at that point. The intent was not for it to be an ongoing grants program.

SENATOR HUGHES noted the effective date of July 1, 2020. She asked when the program would be up and running in schools across the state.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied that he would plead for passage of the bill sooner rather than later. If the bill does not pass

until late in the session, it will be very hard to fully implement the bill next school year. The department is already working on what will be needed to implement bill. The department had a meeting today about the standards for early learning. The state got a large federal grant for reading that it is using to develop professional development opportunities. But to fully implement the bill, the sooner the better, after due consideration and public input.

SENATOR HUGHES clarified that if the bill passed in a timely fashion, by next school year, in August and September, the department could have things up and running.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered that the department is committed to implementing the act as much as possible whenever it passes because it does not want kids to wait another year for some of these things to be implemented. It is a tight timeline, even if the bill passed today. He pointed out that the recruitment for early education staff included people who might not have a certificate but who have experience in teaching pre-K. It will take a while to develop capacity and to recruit the right kind of people to do professional developmental. But the department is so excited about the opportunity that it is committed to do the hard work necessary. Department energy is focused on implementing this reading bill because it is so fundamental to all the other success the department wants kids to have in school.

CHAIR STEVENS responded that he could guarantee the commissioner that he will not hold the bill for any unusual reason. The committee will thoroughly study it and make sure it is the right bill. His intention is to move it out as soon as the committee is prepared to.

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SENATOR COGHILL asked about how the bill would interact with students who have [IEPs--Individualized Education Plans].

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied that the bill will not impact the IEP required by federal law. Those are a right for students identified as having a disability under special education law. Students in special education probably already have an IEP with a reading plan.

SENATOR COGHILL responded that he did not need an answer today, but he does wonder how the reading bill would work in concert with IEPs. He added that another question that he would like

considered for a later time is the issue of those who may learn late who are proficient but not highly proficient.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if the committee could have the answers at another time.

SENATOR COGHILL replied that would be fine because the questions are about implementation.

CHAIR STEVENS said that because of time constraints, the committee would not cover the fiscal notes or be able to hear all the invited testimony for the meeting. He then asked representatives for the Education Commission of the States for their presentation.

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TOM KEILY, Policy Analyst, Education Commission of the States (ECS), Denver, Colorado, thanked the committee for the opportunity to present on the national overview and policy trends, state examples, and lessons learned about implementation of early literacy.

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JOEL MOORE, State Relations Strategist, Education Commission of the States (ECS), Denver, Colorado, said he is the state liaison to Alaska. ECS is a national, nonpartisan education policy center that was founded by an interstate compact and authorized by statute in all 50 states. ECS has policy analysts who review all education bills in all states and DC. ECS examines trends and issues reports. ECS finds out what is happening around the country but does not state what is best for Alaska. ECS provides the national context and information about what is working in other states.

MR. KEILY reviewed the components of early literacy policy--prevention, intervention, and retention.

MR. KEILY noted that the slide titled State Examples: National Context gave information about five states just to provide a look at what some states are doing regarding early literacy policy. Twenty-six states have some form of early literacy policy. Twelve of those include elements of prevention, intervention, and retention.

MR. KEILY presented a slide showing which states have retention policies, either requiring or allowing retention.

MR. KEILY showed the last slide on Lessons Learned and Implementation from over the last 20 years across the states. He noted that, obviously, passing a law is only the beginning. One thing ECS keeps hearing from the states is what steps and engagement are needed once the law goes into effect to get the policy to the student level. Michigan and Alabama are in the process of rolling out their policies. ECS can provide more information about that and other topics to the committee.

CHAIR STEVENS called Posie Boggs to the table.

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POSIE BOGGS, Member, Alaska Reading Coalition, Anchorage, Alaska, thanked the governor, the commissioner, and Senator Begich for taking the risk to be bipartisan. They crafted a bill that has a lot of excellent things in it. On behalf of the Reading Coalition, she thanked the sponsors of bill. She noted the work of Senator Hughes and Representative LeDoux on reading. She noted the coalition first met with Representative LeDoux on HB 197, which was quite a long time ago. She thanked Representative Drummond and her staff, George Ascott, for getting the taskforce accomplished. She noted that she first testified in front of Senator Stevens in 2013 on SB 106 and he told her to keep working on the issues.

MS. BOGGS recounted an encounter with a former superintendent of the Alaska Gateway School District who told her that knowledge of evidence-based reading instruction was missing from the Moore [v. State of Alaska lawsuit] case.

MS. BOGGS spoke about phonemic and phonological awareness, which has been missing from teacher education and professional development. This idea gets pushback from preschool and early educators for various reasons. "They don't know what they don't know," she said.

MS. BOGGS expressed gratitude for the bipartisan nature of the Alaska Reads Act but observed that was not unusual in reading bills across the country. A survey she conducted shows that in 15 states passage of reading and dyslexia bills were almost all unanimous. Ensuring kids learn how to read is a moral imperative. They cannot be citizens if they cannot read. Adults in the state can continue doing what is comfortable for adults, in doing what they have always done. They can hire the same interventionists that have brought the state to where it is today. That will cause a delay in the implementation of this bill and a delay in students learning to read. The state needs a

highly defined, comprehensive reading plan with no wriggle room and no wishy-washy language. The state needs to teach superintendents and principals how to recognize when they are being exquisite consumers of reading instruction. They can be easily bamboozled by reading instruction that is not going to work and is not evidence based. In Arkansas, vendors just put a sticker on same old reading instruction and districts who bought that curriculum are stuck with it for seven years.

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MS. BOGGS said the Alaska Reading Coalition has a document with alternative statute language and rationales and publications to back up those rationales. She is most excited about universal preschool because that is an opportunity to screen kids for potential characteristics of dyslexia and adequate development of oral language for English learners. That screening should drive universal intervention that everyone gets. In preschool, it sets kids up to be successful in kindergarten and first and second grade.

MS. BOGGS said cutting edge work is being done in Boston Children's Hospital and the University of Connecticut to identify four-year-olds with the characteristics of dyslexia. The researchers are giving the app away. The state of Alaska should sign up to be part of the national standardization of that app.

MS. BOGGS noted that the bill has conflicting terminology that she hoped to take out. The bill needs to emphasize that it is a reading act, not a literacy act. The problem with the word literacy is that it gives wriggle room to not pay attention to reading. She cannot define literacy. She can measure reading, which is why scientists love reading. It can be easily measured with tight metrics, but who knows what literacy is. Reading is scientifically defined in the federal register. The Reading Dyslexia Task Force delineated what reading is. If the weak language is cleaned up, implementation of a comprehensive reading plan will not be delayed. The most controversial issue is retention. The coalition is not in favor of hard retention where parents, teachers, superintendents, and school boards have no choice. The coalition will not fight a soft retention. However, the coalition does not understand the logic of its use. She uses the word logic specifically because states with retention policies, Florida, Texas, Mississippi, were well into implementation of their comprehensive reading plan, some more than a decade, before they pushed the retention button. Alaska has never had a comprehensive reading plan, so what is the basis

for having retention. Teachers and school districts have never been supported well enough with a comprehensive reading plan.

MS. BOGGS shared that Mississippi discovered in the thirteenth year of its implementation timeline that school districts were not following the comprehensive reading plan nor were colleges of education following the reading syllabuses for science-based reading instruction. That is a huge delay. Mississippi gathered most of their reading professors and spent two or three years retraining them in evidence-based reading practices. The first part was fighting their indoctrination in what they had always done. Then Mississippi gave the reading professors good instruction.

MS. BOGGS revealed that she had been in a month-long email exchange with Bob Griffin of the Alaska Policy Forum and Mike Bronson of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] in Anchorage and in the end, they reached no real conclusion about retention.

MS. BOGGS asked how the committee knows if a reading plan or legislation is really addressing the adults in the room or is it addressing the kids. She advised them to look for key words, such as making decisions about how someone feels or someone's philosophy. Science is producing evidence-based reading instruction. If someone talks about the wonders of whole language, of reading recovery, of Marie Clay of New Zealand, then that person does not know what they do not know. If that person is indoctrinated into that and so committed to it, then that person needs their knowledge recalibrated. She noted that New Zealand banned that reading methodology.

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MS. BOGGS stated that if someone says the bill pushes drill and kill phonics, that person is out of date in knowledge about reading. How a program was implemented in a district perhaps 10 or 20 years ago is completely different from what is going on now because of changes in how to implement reading plans.

MS. BOGGS urged the committee members to read the testimony of superintendents in the Moore case. Without the support provided by the Alaska Reads Act, no wonder that superintendents are saying this is another unfunded mandate. If the act is done correctly, the state can support those superintendents and the state will get those concrete gains faster. She encouraged them to banish soft words about reading instruction.

MS. BOGGS said she was very excited about the correspondence school for all Alaskans in the bill. She also gave some cautions about how to look at data.

MS. BOGGS said the inability of the University of Alaska Anchorage to do what it was requested to do is a big barrier to kids and teachers receiving the proper education. She also noted that big publishers make billions from the failure of reading instruction. If the publishers had a product that taught reading, would they need to do so many trainings, she asked, and would a new curriculum be needed over and over. She suggested committee members listen to the story Emily Hanford of American Public Media did on Ken Goodman [At a Loss for Words].

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MS. BOGGS revealed that in some ways she has a heavy heart that language from the reading task force was not infused enough in this bill. The week after the task force report was submitted, it submitted a very drafty omnibus reading bill and the task force heard nothing back. SB 6 could have been spectacular if the coalition had been consulted. The coalition absolutely commits to working with the legislature and the Department of Education to working on this process. The Alaska Reading Coalition has a huge range of people. The state can make this act spectacular. It has to.

MS. BOGGS said the Department of Education may not have the reading expertise to send reading coaches into districts, but there are options to get that quickly. If Alaska thinks out of the box, Alaska can do something unique.

CHAIR STEVENS said that he knows that she will follow this bill as it moves through the legislature. He guaranteed that when the bill leaves the committee it will have a realistic fiscal note and will not be an unfunded mandate. He believes that the legislature is in a right position to make sure it is properly funded with the interest of the governor.

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CHAIR STEVENS held SB 6 and SB 151 in committee.

[5:43:13 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 5:43 p.m.