

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 9, 2020

8:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair
Representative Grier Hopkins
Representative Chris Tuck
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky
Representative DeLena Johnson
Representative Mike Prax

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 153

"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

HOUSE BILL NO. 204

"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 AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 153

SHORT TITLE: PRE-ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS/FUNDING

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) DRUMMOND

05/07/19 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
05/07/19 (H) EDC, FIN
03/09/20 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 204

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

SPONSOR(s): HOUSE RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/21/20 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/21/20 (H) EDC, CRA, FIN
03/09/20 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

SENATOR TOM BEGICH
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 153.

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ed.D., Commissioner
Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

LOKI TOBIN, Staff
Senator Tom Begich
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Covered the Sectional Analysis for HB 153.

ERIN HARDIN, Legislative Liaison
Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 153.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:03:14 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Representatives Tuck, Prax, Story, and Drummond were present at the call to order. Representatives Zulkosky, Hopkins, and Johnson arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 153-PRE-ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS/FUNDING
HB 204-PRE-K/ELEM ED PROGRAMS/FUNDING; READING

[Contains discussion of SB 6.]

[8:04:05 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 153, "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" and HOUSE BILL NO. 204, "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."

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND explained that she was the prime sponsor of HB 153, while HB 204 was sponsored by the governor. She said both bills are versions of the Alaska Reads Act, which was also introduced in SB 6, by Senator Begich, and through other legislation proposed by the governor and heard by the Senate. She expressed her hope that the committee would adopt a proposed committee substitute, which was drafted to match CSSSSB 6(EDC), which passed out of the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[8:04:40 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 153, Version 31-LS0928\U, Caouette, 3/4/20, as a working document.

[8:04:59 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND objected for the purposes of discussion. She recalled her time spent working on the Alaska Task Force on Reading Proficiency and Dyslexia which included the passage of House Bill 64 [enacted during the Thirtieth Alaska State Legislature]. She described the task force as consisting of members of the public representing non-profits, school boards, teachers, principals, parents, and students. She indicated that aspects of [HB 153] were developed with input from the task force. She further indicated that Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) was considered to be of fundamental importance for children to be able to read and succeed in life. She urged support for voluntary pre-Kindergarten (pre-K) and evidence-based reading programs. She offered that public testimony would be important for consideration of the proposed legislation.

[8:07:13 AM](#)

SENATOR TOM BEGICH, Alaska State Legislature, lauded the collaboration between both bodies in developing and proposing legislation for reading and early education. He commented that the committee substitute for HB 153 currently under consideration is identical to the sponsor substitute for SB 6. He offered background information that the original versions of HB 153 and SB 6 were also identical and suggested that this was demonstrative of the collaboration and research that had taken place, including cultural relevance to many of the unique considerations of early education in Alaska. He suggested that while both bills had been in development in both bodies, research revealed a strong link between reading and early education. He referred to research that suggests that strong reading programs offered to children who are not prepared to learn are often not successful. He suggested that a strong pre-K in the absence of a strong reading program also does not lead to student success. He explained that the conclusion was drawn that pre-K and reading should be conjunctively addressed in the

same legislation. He suggested that the Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) has a constitutional obligation to provide education, and that pre-K, reading, as well as DEED's role, are all addressed within the proposed legislation.

8:11:18 AM

SENATOR BEGICH added that following the development of the language in the bill, he had expressed the intention that the introduction of [HB 153] should be a starting point for dialogue. He noted that eight separate hearings on [SSSB 6] had taken place in the Senate Education Committee. He explained that the hearing process added value by customizing the bill to the unique needs of Alaska. He explained that he had had interactions with superintendents, school board members, educators, the Alaska Policy Forum, and the Alaska Education Association, and each provided valuable feedback to achieve language that enhanced [SSSB 6]. He stated that [CSSSSB 6(EDC)] is being heard by the Senate Finance Committee and should be passed out of committee to the full Senate. He expressed his support for the hearing process and allowed that more work can and should take place on the development of the language that would best meet the needs for student success.

8:13:32 AM

SENATOR BEGICH emphasized that many changes had taken place to the initial language of the bill that was heard by the Senate Education Committee, and he reiterated that those changes are in the proposed committee substitute for HB 153. He expressed his endorsement of all of the changes and reemphasized that the changes were collaborative. He asked the committee to be prudent in examining the language to ensure passage of [HB 153].

8:15:07 AM

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ed.D., Commissioner, Department of Education & Early Development, testified in support of HB 153. He explained that HB 153 is a product of years spent in collaboration to ensure that every student is afforded the opportunity to learn to read. He referred to DEED's Alaska's Education Challenge

(AEC) goals, commitments, and priorities for student success, which includes learning to read. He indicated that AEC garnered over 18,000 responses to a survey and ideas generated by over 100 people among committees. He added that guided by three commitments, of those ideas, 13 recommendations were further construed into 5 measurable goals. One of the emergent goals is to support all students to read at grade level by the end of Third Grade. He shared with the committee a quote he indicated explains the rationale of the necessity of a reading bill: "The students that do not read proficiently by the end of Third Grade fall further and further behind. As their peers use reading skills to acquire new skills, these students remain on square one." He distinguished a critical juncture exists between the Third and Fourth Grades, wherein students begin to read to learn, as compared to learning to read.

[8:18:24 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON referred to available data on the national ranking of reading among Alaska students, and he postulated that there exists a general consensus on the need for improvement. He referred to data obtained through the Performance Evaluation of Alaska's Schools (PEAKS) Assessment and noted that in the course of evaluating students over three consecutive years, 73-74 percent of students who are not proficient in reading remain deficient in their subsequent school years. He suggested that these students continue to experience deficiencies throughout their academic careers or experience limited academic mobility. He offered this as a basis of the importance of legislation for reading in education. He referred to exiting data that show a correlation between low reading skills and high dropout rates in those schools and schools with high reading skills inversely achieving higher graduation rates. He correlated limited academic mobility and subsequent limited economic mobility for students who do not achieve success in public education. He summarized the three main components of the bill as: high quality pre-K, a comprehensive reading policy focused on intervention, and school improvement. He suggested that the three components purposefully work [in synergy]. Commissioner Johnson offered that all individuals who participate in a child's education would realize benefit from the proposed bill,

including students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, and legislators.

[8:22:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX expressed support for the ideas proposed in the bill; however, he expressed his reticence of imposing "top down" standards. He asked whether some schools or districts have already implemented some of the [proposed strategies] and whether schools would elect to implement these standards without a mandate to do so.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON allowed that a mandate for children to become proficient at reading at grade level by the Third Grade is imposing a standard [where none exists].

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether the proposed legislation imparts measurable goals and standards.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON expressed that reading is an area of education that is well-understood. He explained that observation and evidence- or science-based reading consists of five components: phonemic awareness, words made up of sounds; phonics, print representing sounds; fluency, or putting words together to make sense; vocabulary, background to know what words mean; and comprehension, putting it all together to understand meaning. The proposed legislation would require screeners to take into account those five aspects from kindergarten through Third Grade in a progressive manner.

[8:25:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether a particular test, such as the PEAKS Assessment, exists to assess reading skills.

[8:26:00 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON explained that the proposed bill allows for multiple methods to measure proficiency. He suggested that the diversity of testing would result in an intervention process that is not punitive and allows for multiple screenings of

methods in different areas. He exemplified that by the end of First Grade, readers should be able to read a certain number of words per minute. Those that cannot are not on the trajectory of reading proficiency.

[8:27:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked for a brief explanation of the three main components of the bill, specifically the comprehensive K-3 reading policy and that of school improvements.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON explained that the bill would prescribe that the comprehensive reading policy maintain gains achieved, especially for students who may be struggling, by the use of a screener. He explained that screening for reading takes many forms, including a verbal screening, and any deficiencies in any of the five areas would result in a plan for intervention in cooperation with the parent. He added that progress would be tracked to ensure improvement.

[8:29:25 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH interjected that the K-3 reading policy had been the most-revised portion of the bill due to factors referred to during this hearing and considering local and cultural relevance. He noted that in a previous version of the bill, the assessments were too onerous according to extensive stakeholder feedback. He suggested that the proposed committee substitute would allow for a more individualized approach with parental involvement.

[8:30:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked for additional explanation of the school improvements portion of the bill.

[8:31:17 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH explained that the Constitution of the State of Alaska requires the state to support and maintain an education

system. He said that school boards and the Alaska State Legislature partner with the DEED to meet that responsibility. He referred to the Moore, et al. v. State of Alaska case ("Moore v. State"), in which the ruling provided very specific guidance as to the roles and responsibilities in education and ruled that the state had failed to meet that obligation at the lowest performing schools in the state. He recalled having participated in the litigation and, following the ruling, having begun discussions with DEED to identify specific areas of deficiency and propose solutions. He explained an experimental intervention in 2018 where low performing schools were contacted on site with intensive intervention to enhance capacity at the school and coordinate with the community and school, which he predicted would be met with success. He explained that the proposed bill would provide a contractual agreement vehicle for support of a low-performing school using federal funds in addition to the Base Student Allocation (BSA). He explained that this program is intentionally constrained to only 10 schools so that progress and efficacy can be measured and scrutinized. He lauded this pilot program as a highlight of the proposed bill.

[8:34:36 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON lauded the three components of the bill as its strength. He stated that years of collaboration had led to the development of the proposed legislation, and the interventions proposed in the bill are collaborative in nature through a memorandum of agreement (MOA) rather than an imposition by DEED. He explained that the intent of the bill is to increase literacy rates which are not necessarily in English as a first language. He indicated that learning an indigenous or foreign language first aids students in becoming more proficient in reading.

[8:36:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked what the role of individuals deployed on site for interventions should be and expressed her concern as a representative of those in rural schools for the problems faced, such as recruitment and retention and new

standards with limited resources for support. She asked for additional information on the retention portions of the legislation.

[8:38:28 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH recalled a previous joint hearing which included a presentation by the Coalition for Education Equity, and consented to provide that presentation to the committee. He recalled that a survey conducted throughout the year, of rural teachers on the matter of retention, indicated that teachers were not connecting with their communities. He indicated that this data point was a major consideration in the development of the language pertinent to school improvement and teacher retention. He explained that one aspect of the proposed intervention through a MOA would be coordinated effort to connect educators and the community. He shared his observation that periodic visits by specialists had lacked consistency, which led to failures litigated in Moore v. State. He suggested that the DEED intervention was not successful and that a more collaborative approach was deemed necessary.

[8:40:51 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH suggested the possibility exists of misinformation regarding the [student] retention language proposed in the bill. He emphasized that it is the purview of individual districts to administer student retention policy. He stated that the proposed legislation does not contain a mandatory retention policy. He recalled that a suggestion had been made to amend the proposed bill to include a mandatory retention policy and it had failed by a vote of 5-1. He indicated that the proposed retention language requires parental and teacher involvement in the decision of whether to retain a student. He suggested that mitigating considerations could consist of whether English is the student's first language and whether a student has an identified learning disability. He shared a personal anecdote of a family member who suffered from a learning disability which challenged his school progression and, while the student took an additional number of years to complete high school, he was able to progress, graduate, and

attend a year of college. He exemplified this experience where his family member was not retained during early schooling years but later in his academic years, and early retention would not have been in the best interest of this student's education. He clarified that while retention is an important consideration for students who do not demonstrate proficiency, it should be the final consideration after other interventions have been exhausted and the proposed intervention plan is deemed ineffective.

[8:44:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked how the proposed bill would mandate school accountability in achieving the desired student outcomes.

[8:44:54 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH stated that the bill contains reporting requirements from districts to DEED with the intent of evaluating efficacy. He suggested that the reporting requirements would create an unprecedented exchange between districts and DEED to evaluate programs and outcomes. He suggested that existing reporting requirements for pre-K exist, are effective for program evaluation and development, and have led to increased student success. He added that standards and reporting requirements may provide consistency for teachers, with the hope that positive impacts on retention will follow. He added that the bill also contains a series of robust but not onerous reporting requirements from DEED to the legislature to aid in increasing transparency and accountability.

[8:47:46 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON added that public education in Alaska does not have a comprehensive reading policy and there exists an opportunity for the legislature to make a statement in statute about the importance of reading. He purported that teaching children to read is the fundamental purpose of public education. He said the proposed legislation is an attempt at quality policy development based on known factors for student success. He proffered that many of the components of the bill are already in

practice by many districts, and the implementation of the bill would ensure equal opportunity for all students to achieve increased success regardless of school or district size.

[8:50:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked whether districts would lose funding should they not follow the proposed guidelines.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered that pre-K funding requires program compliance prior to obtaining funding. He added that the school improvement portion of the bill imposes accountability through the MOA process.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked what the implications for a district would be in the case of egregious noncompliance. She stated her support for the bill.

[8:51:37 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH responded that noncompliance would certainly result in loss of funding. He suggested that communities also hold districts and their school boards publicly and politically accountable. He explained that reporting requirements are unequivocally precedent to districts receiving funding.

[8:53:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON recalled earlier testimony regarding the changes that have taken place during the development of the proposed legislation and asked whether DEED would concur with all the changes on behalf of the administration.

[8:54:30 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON explained that DEED has been fully engaged in contemplating proposed changes and consensus does exist. He added that should the bill pass, the development of regulations and policy development should maintain this level of collaboration.

8:55:27 AM

SENATOR BEGICH offered that the methodology of collaboration in the development of the proposed legislation was unique, in that the initial considerations were defined as common goals and not competing or disparate goals. He suggested that this approach enabled the advancement of goals rather than a series of compromises. He added that by addressing the priority of student outcome, continual improvement can and would take place.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON indicated that her district has in it some Waldorf [Method] charter schools, and their reading programs are delayed implementation. She asked how this type of school would be affected by the proposed bill.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON expressed caution prior to speaking to the impacts on any specific program in the absence of a review of that program; however, he expressed that the impacts of a child not learning to read are well-understood. He spoke in favor of innovative approaches to reading programs with the caveat that evidence is taken into consideration in the development of the program[s].

8:58:09 AM

SENATOR BEGICH added that the pre-K component is not mandatory, and students participate at the will of their parents. He drew a parallel to the Waldorf [Method of delaying reading] and the non-mandatory pre-K provisioned in public education as a similar parental decision. He suggested that estimates suggest that 88 percent of districts would take advantage of the pre-K program, as proposed. He stated that the design of public education policy is such to allow parents to make the most informed decisions on the path to success for their student.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON indicated her cursory understanding that brain development for language and reading changes at or about Third Grade age, and what are known ramifications that might occur should a child of that age be retained.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON explained that the decision whether to retain or promote a student is one of great consequence. He referred to the proposed legislation providing for an Individual Learning Plan as a tool to evaluate and inform decisions on student retention. He noted that in several communities, students will have the same teacher regardless of promotion or retention, because teachers instruct multiple grade levels at some schools. He suggested that retention of a struggling student is not the important factor; the important factor is to change the way the student receives instruction for a different outcome. He noted that academic mobility is proven to hinge upon student proficiency at about the Third Grade. He stated that current policy does not regulate retention, and the proposed bill compels an individualized approach with a variety of interventions other than retention.

[9:03:40 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH noted his experience in dealing with brain science in his career in juvenile justice and offered that the majority of neurological brain development generally occurs between the ages of two and ten. He suggested that the aspects of the brain that are used during this developmental stage shape the brain.

[9:05:12 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND mentioned that the Anchorage School District has had a Waldorf Method school and offered a point of clarification that reading preparation does take place prior to the Third Grade with success.

[9:05:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK added that Anchorage School District Waldorf Method schools serve students from pre-K to the Eighth Grade.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND referred to an Individual Learning Plan currently in place based on student needs. She asked whether an individual reading plan proposed in the bill is a new

undertaking and whether it would apply to some or to all students.

[9:06:38 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON noted that the existing provisioned Special Education Individual Education Plan is a comprehensive and lengthy document and process, whereas an Individual Reading Plan, as proposed, would be less so. He noted that parents participate in the development of the plan, and it would be a new requirement for a student who is struggling to read. He added that some districts are using these plans in practice. He added that once the legislation was passed, the regulations for the bill would codify the desired elements to include in plans and the technology and progress-tracking methods to best implement the plans.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether some existing funded or unfunded mandates would be revised or eliminated should the bill pass. She expressed her concern that new mandates may either overburden or conflict with current mandates in place.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON referred to a previous version of the bill, wherein reporting would have been required every two weeks, and he noted that that had been revised to incorporate reporting on an individualized basis.

[9:09:31 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH added that a previous version of the bill also directed more than 70 hours of work with a student, which was determined to be arbitrary. There were a number of burdensome requirements which were eliminated or revised under the current version of the bill.

[9:10:47 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked for confirmation that the reporting requirement through the Individual Reading Plan would be for struggling readers, not necessarily every reader.

SENATOR BEGICH answered yes. He added that the process of screening may appear to be onerous; however, the screening process allows for tracking progress and growth targets.

[9:11:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY suggested that Tier I programs in Alaska appear to consist of some of the same measurements proposed under the CS, and she asked whether the proposed legislation would increase certainty and consistency in interventions.

[9:13:21 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered that the pre-K portion of the bill dictates standards based in evidence and would compel a school to participate in the standards. He added that the K-3 standards would have the foundational standards upon which a school would build. He added that a portion of the bill requires evidence-based reading training to be obtained for teacher recertification either through university level classes or DEED training resources.

[9:15:22 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH added that the proposed bill allows DEED to provide direct support to districts, an element that he suggested was omitted by previous statute erroneously. He added that the bill provides for additional screeners and expanded training opportunities.

CO-CHAIR STORY suggested that the committee investigate what the University of Alaska includes as part of its education program reading training to ensure consistency prior to teachers entering the workforce. She noted that professional development has suffered in many districts due to budget cuts and has led to a decline in reading scores. She expressed her concern that teachers may need additional support for professional development should this bill pass. She asked how teachers coming into Alaska would be assessed to ensure that the provision of three additional credits for those teachers would be met.

9:19:08 AM

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON offered that the committee would benefit from testimony provided by a certification specialist. He drew a distinction between the requirements for teachers who join the workforce with any certification and those who have no certification. He added that a teacher with no certification would be required to demonstrate that qualifying program requirements had been part of his/her training and education. He agreed to provide additional information to the committee subsequently.

CO-CHAIR STORY asked whether the bill includes a provision for resourcing Head Start programs.

SENATOR BEGICH answered that there are no specific resources specified in the proposed bill; however, it would require that pre-K programs coordinate with Head Start in communities. He expressed that consideration had been made to hold harmless Head Start programs should the bill pass.

CO-CHAIR STORY asked whether the bill provided for collaboration and information sharing between the state schools, DEED, and Head Start programs.

9:22:10 AM

SENATOR BEGICH answered that the concerns voiced by Co-Chair Story are the rationale for the collaboration language included in the bill, which would foster community engagement in program development. He added that the Kawerak region, near Unalakleet and Nome, has a variety of pre-K programs, including Head Start. He emphasized the importance of consistency in pre-K programs and suggested that the proposed bill would impart that consistency.

CO-CHAIR STORY asked how soon DEED would be prepared to aid districts in implementing pre-K programs.

SENATOR BEGICH explained that the bill contains two proposed paths to pre-K: the grants program over three years and an alternate to the grant by which a school would be able to obtain funding through the Base Student Allocation. He added that the latter would be contingent on the timing of the bill becoming law.

[9:26:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND reminded the committee that additional hearings to consider the sectional analysis and fiscal note analysis were forthcoming.

[9:26:52 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON stated his strong support for the three main components of the bill, and he said work would begin immediately to implement the law once the bill passed. He explained that following passage, time consuming regulation development would need to take place. He added that DEED has been making preparations in anticipation of the bill passing.

[9:28:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS expressed his support for the pre-K portion of the bill. He expressed concern for teachers who may have in excess of three-quarters of students not demonstrating proficiency, and he asked how teachers should be expected to provide Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs) for multiple students with limited resources.

[9:29:22 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON acknowledged the significance of the question posed and that teachers are very busy. He suggested the challenge brought about by the need for remedial intervention would result in opportunities for teachers in the future to experience increased proficiency among students. He suggested that there may be common areas of deficiencies among students that would allow for efficiencies in developing ILPs. He acknowledged that parental communication requirements in

ILPs, while demanding, are a crucial component in increasing proficiency among struggling students. He noted that the parental communication requirements have been relaxed in the proposed CS to allow flexibility but advised that it is an important component to student success.

[9:31:30 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH suggested that quality teachers understand the importance of ILPs and the added work as a means to student success. He recalled testimony in multiple hearings from educators expressing their concern about class sizes. He allowed that the bill does not directly address class size; however, reporting requirements may result in class size being addressed in future policy development. He added that other legislation addresses other problems in public education.

[9:33:59 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON added that the largest education conference in Alaska is hosted by the Alaska Council of School Administrators and is attended by approximately one thousand educators each year. He stated that the focus of the conference is Response To Intervention (RTI) and is a resource that supports the work of teachers in this area.

[9:34:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS noted that funds designated for RTI in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District have been cut, and teachers have assumed additional responsibilities to support RTI. He acknowledged the importance of class size in the context of the discussion. He asked whether the bill would allow for individual schools to utilize the proposed voluntary pre-K programs based on merit or would be restricted to implementation at the district level.

SENATOR BEGICH explained that the districts are the applicant for DEED pre-K programs on behalf of schools.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON stated his intention that all students in Alaska should benefit from pre-K. He explained that districts will be compelled to prioritize, and he said DEED may impose its own priorities for districts and schools through its approval process.

[9:37:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked how prescriptive teaching standards would be and whether teachers and schools would retain autonomy in selecting methods they believe best meet the needs of students.

[9:38:35 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON explained that there are five essential questions to ask regarding every student every day in the classroom: What do we want them to know and do; how will we teach them what we want them to know and do; how will we know if they have learned it; what will we do if they don't learn it; and what will we do if they already know it? He rhetorically answered each of the questions, respectively: by effective standards, by effective instruction, by effective assessments, by effective interventions, and by effective enrichment and advancement. He stated that following standards development, professional teachers maintain discretion to select and implement through available methodologies.

[9:40:14 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH postulated that in particular, new teachers would benefit by having clear standards. He welcomed the question posed by Representative Hopkins regarding the needs of individual schools as compared to districts who may not elect to participate in the voluntary pre-K program, and he recommended further research to determine whether the program could be made available for a particular school in need.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS referred to the five questions asked of every student every day and asked whether a specific assessment is in place.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON emphasized that there are several tests in place for measuring proficiency, including a portfolio of assessments. He indicated that the variety of screening options is intentional.

[9:43:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK expressed his endorsement for the three main principals proposed in the bill. He added that in the Moore v. State ruling, it was determined that adding funding alone does not address the shortcomings ruled in that case. He added that effective program development is key to solving the problems that were identified. He noted that the Alaska Performance Scholarship Program was an example of effective education policy, and he suggested that the proposed reading bill would contribute to a more complete and effective education policy. He lauded sections of the proposed bill, including professional development in reading instruction, teacher certification, and an opt-out contingency for students who demonstrate proficiency. He complimented the apparent customization and flexibility articulated in the proposed bill. He emphasized the importance of the teacher retention working group. He suggested that parental involvement is of utmost importance to a student's education.

[9:46:52 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH echoed Representative Tuck's observation of the ruling in Moore v. State instructing policy revision and implementation. He noted that the University of Alaska's education program is a vital training program and, while the proposed bill does not compel the university to align its education programs with the proposed legislation, a future legislative endeavor could be instrumental in aligning the university's training and education to policy. He indicated that the Moore v. State ruling contains guidance to that end.

[9:48:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY, with regard to parental involvement, asked how the proposed bill would accommodate children in nontraditional family structures, such as foster children.

[9:49:26 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON stated his belief that the entirety of the bill is structured in service to students in nontraditional family structures to become proficient in reading. He added that the absence of parental involvement would still allow the school to develop ILPs to aid struggling students.

[9:50:48 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH noted that the bill specifies "parent or guardian(s)" and should include all family structures. He recalled his experience in juvenile justice where he observed Alaska Native children disproportionately adversely affected due to the omission of nontraditional family structures. He agreed to determine whether adequate definition exists for "guardian(s)" to ensure that disproportionate negative impacts due to nontraditional family structures may be fairly mitigated.

[9:52:39 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND removed her objection to the motion to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 153, Version 31-LS0928\U, Caouette, 3/4/20, as a working document. There being no further objection, Version U was before the committee.

[9:52:50 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND indicated that she was setting aside HB 204; [however, subsequent testimony makes comparisons between HB 153 and HB 204].

[9:53:11 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[9:53:47 AM](#)

LOKI TOBIN, Staff, Senator Tom Begich, Alaska State Legislature, co-presented the sectional analysis on Version U for HB 153. She referred to Section 1 of the sectional analysis included in the committee packet, which defines HB 153 as the Alaska Reads Act. She said Section 2 aligns with Section 1 of HB 204 and amends Alaska statute to include an early education program subject to DEED approval as part of elementary education.

[9:55:38 AM](#)

ERIN HARDIN, Legislative Liaison, Department of Education & Early Development, co-presented the sectional analysis for Version U of HB 153. She referred to Section 4 of the analysis, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 4

Amends AS 14.03.078(a) which directs DEED to include information collected under AS 14.03.120, Parent as Teachers, and AS 14.30-760 - 14.30.775, the Alaska Reads Act, in their annual report to the legislature.

MS. HARDEN stated commitment on the part of DEED and the Alaska Department of Health & Social Services (DHSS) to integrate parents as teachers. She said Section 5 of the analysis addresses a change in the date a child reaches eligibility age to enter kindergarten from September 1 preceding the start of the school year to June 1.

[9:57:09 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked why June 1 was selected.

MS. TOBIN answered that the date was selected to ensure a child's maturity to begin school.

MS. HARDIN pointed out that Section 6 pertains to age eligibility for a child to enter an early education program. She shared Section 7 of the sectional analysis, which read as follows:

Section 7

Amends AS 14.03.120 by adding new subsection (h) which establishes annual reporting requirements for school districts regarding student performance metrics in grades K-3. This includes data relating to class size, the number and percentage of students in K-3 who are proficient at grade-level skill reading, and number and percentage of students who are retained from advancing in grades K-3.

[9:59:13 AM](#)

MS. TOBIN explained that Section 8 of Version U pertains to early education grants and the timeline for implementation of the program, and the sectional analysis explaining Section 8 read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 8

Creates AS 14.03.410 which codifies a statewide pre-K program, providing a stair-step, three-year grant program to provide training and assistance to school districts in developing their local pre-K program. Over six fiscal years, all school districts are offered the opportunity to participate. AS 14.03.420 codifies the Parents As Teachers (PAT) program as a program of the state within DEED, and specifies criteria for PAT to demonstrate its efficacy in supporting school districts with pre-K education.

[10:00:36 AM](#)

MS. TOBIN noted that Section 9 of Version U aligns with Section 5 of HB 204, and the sectional analysis of Section 9 read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 9

Amends AS 14.07.020(a) and directs DEED to supervise all early education programs, approve those early education programs established under AS 14.03.410.

This section also establishes a new reading program, AS 14.07.065, and reading intervention programs of participating schools, AS 14.30.770.

[10:01:20 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked Ms. Hardin and Ms. Tobin for beginning the sectional analysis, which she said would be continued on 3/11/20.

[HB 153 and HB 204 were held over.]

[10:02:16 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:02 a.m.