

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 14, 2020

1:03 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

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

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
03/09/20	(H)	Heard & Held
03/09/20	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/11/20	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
03/11/20	(H)	Heard & Held
03/11/20	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/14/20	(H)	EDC AT 1:00 PM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

VANESSA ADNEY
Palmer, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 153.

ASHLEY BIRD
Wasilla, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 153.

MADISYN REEM, Teacher
Alaska Children's Academy
Wasilla, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 153.

APRIL BROWN, Owner
Alaska Children's Academy
Wasilla, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 153.

SHEILA BARRICK
Fairbanks, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 153.

ROBERT BROWN
Wasilla, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 153.

EMILY SPINZLER
Wasilla, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 153.

REBEKAH SIMCO
International Dyslexia Association
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

STEPHANIE KILCOYNE
Wasilla, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 153.

POSIE BOGGS
Alaska Reading Coalition
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 153.

VALERIE BROOKS
Ketchikan, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

JUDY ELEDGE

Alaska State Literacy Coordinator
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

BOB GRIFFIN

Alaska Policy Forum
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

KERRIE SPAIN

Bright Lights Learning Center
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 153.

KARIN HALPIN, Principal

Rocky Mountain School
Goodnews Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

RONDA SCHLUMBOHM, Teacher

Salcha Elementary School
Salcha, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 153.

ASHLYN ANDERSON

Alaska Children's Academy
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 153.

MARY MARKS

Tlingit & Haida Community Council
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 153.

MOLLY CARVER, Interim Policy Specialist

Alaska Children's Trust
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

MARY KRETZSCHMAR

Decoding Dyslexia Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

JOSEPH PICHLER

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

LEIGH SLOAN

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

BETHANY MARCUM, Executive Director

Alaska Policy Forum

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

VICKI CAMPBELL

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 153.

LONDA CASQUEIRA

Big Lake, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 153.

REBECCA HIMSCHOOT

Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 153.

WILLIAM BROWN

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 153.

BRITTANI CLANCEY

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

TERRI WALKER, Superintendent

Northwest Arctic Borough School District

Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

LISA VILLANO

Alaska Council for Exceptional Children

Shishmaref, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

JENNIFER WAISANEN

Chugiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

LESA MEATH

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

ABBE HENSLEY

Best Beginnings

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

KATIE BOTZ

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 153.

STACY FOSHEE

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 153.

STEPHANIE BERGLUND, Chief Executive Officer

Thread Alaska

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

JODI TAYLOR

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 153.

PEGGY COWAN

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 153.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:03:11 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. Representatives Story, Hopkins, Tuck, Zulkosky, Prax, Johnson (via teleconference) and Drummond were present at the call to order.

HB 153-PRE-ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS/FUNDING

[1:04:15 PM](#)

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." [Before the

committee was the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 153, Version 31-LS0928\U, Caouette, 3/4/20, adopted as a working document during the House Education Standing Committee meeting on 3/9/20.]

[1:05:21 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND opened public testimony on HB 153.

[1:05:41 PM](#)

VANESSA ADNEY noted that she currently works for a daycare service in Palmer. She expressed concern that HB 153 would push children under the age of three into unlicensed care that lacks guidelines and safety precautions. She said the bill would impact young children who cannot yet voice their opinion if any grievances were to occur. She opined that children's development could be negatively impacted if their parents can't afford to place them in childcare that follows state and city guidelines.

[1:07:42 PM](#)

ASHLEY BIRD shared her belief that under HB 153, children under the age of three would be placed into unlicensed care. She opined that the bill would negatively impact parents who are priced out of the childcare market; further, she said this could lead to a "day care market crash." She offered her understanding that income from providing a preschool program often funds costs, such as the building lease. She approximated that providing infant/toddler care would only bring in enough to pay for teachers because of a low child-to-teacher ratio. She said without a building to lease, childcare centers would close, leaving only unlicensed care options available. Additionally, she posited that that half-day preschools located in public schools are currently being taught by people without an early child development degree.

[1:10:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK pointed out that no one would be forced into the early education component of HB 153, as it is "universal voluntary." He pointed out that a parent/teacher component would also be available for parents who would like to keep their children at home. He sought to clarify Ms. Bird's position on the bill.

MS. BIRD said she is opposed to HB 153. She offered her belief that the cost of infant/toddler care would increase in response to school districts offering free early education programs. She explained that childcare services offered from homes or centers would be less inclined to accept children over the age of three because "the school system [will] try to take them anyway."

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked for Ms. Bird's opinion on the bill's literacy component.

MS. BIRD offered her understanding that children are already being taught how to read in kindergarten. She said her concern is based on the expectation that K-12 teachers are capable of successfully teaching early childhood education, which in her opinion, "it's not realistic."

[1:13:23 PM](#)

MADISYN REEM, Teacher, Alaska Children's Academy, expressed concern that HB 153 would force children into Alaska's school system prematurely. She pointed out that children between the age of three and four have a hard time controlling their emotions; furthermore, she surmised that they wouldn't be able to safely expel their extra energy, as schools do not have appropriate playgrounds for preschoolers. She said if her childcare center offered infant/toddler care exclusively, she would not be able to afford the lease or electric bill. She opined that under HB 153, children under the age of three would not be taught age appropriate material from teachers with early childhood education degrees. She posited that Alaska's low standardized test scores attest to a lack of "proper education" in the state's schools; consequently, she opposed turning more children over to the school system. Additionally, she said studies show that prematurely sending children to a brick-and-mortar school can negatively impact their development. Overall, she said [HB 153] is not in the best interest of Alaska's children.

[1:16:42 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked Ms. Reem what she would like to do with her early education degree.

MS. REEM said she is hoping to become an administrator at the Alaska Children's Academy.

[1:17:35 PM](#)

APRIL BROWN, Owner, Alaska Children's Academy, stated that she opposes HB 153. She said the child-to-teacher ratio for infants and toddlers is low, so childcare services make little money from that age group. She posited that providing free care for preschoolers would cause a "daycare desert." She expressed concern that Alaska's education system employs K-12 teachers in [preschool] classrooms. She argued that these teachers do not have an early childhood education degree and cannot teach appropriate curriculums for preschoolers, which hinders the children's development. Furthermore, she said losing preschoolers would require the Alaska Children's Academy to raise rates to cover the cost of the [building] lease, workers' compensation, and daycare insurance, which would cause many parents to look elsewhere for childcare. She opined that unlicensed care options cannot provide the same quality of care to the state's most vulnerable age group.

[1:23:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK reiterated that the early education component of HB 153 is a voluntary, universal pre-K program that would initially be available in 10 schools. He explained that children would not be required to enroll in the program, adding that the goal is to ensure reading proficiency by grade three.

[1:24:12 PM](#)

SHEILA BARRICK said she opposes HB 153 because it is financially irresponsible. She questioned the proposal of free daycare when the state is in a financial crisis. She said the bill would hurt daycare businesses and would not be in the children's best interest. She opined that Alaska needs to find more responsible ways to "trim the fat" and spend the money that is available.

[1:25:33 PM](#)

ROBERT BROWN, said, "I oppose this bill. I don't think you guys should be taking our dividend for whatever this bill is about."

[1:26:19 PM](#)

EMILY SPINZLER said she opposes HB 153. She expressed concern that the bill would impact children's mental health, adding that children ages three to four require a different environment than what public schools currently provide. She opined that daycare offers an environment that encourages creativity, whereas

schools adhere to rules and guidelines that restrict learning and lack support. She offered her belief that placing young children in a school environment before they are ready is a misuse of state money.

[1:28:04 PM](#)

REBEKAH SIMCO, International Dyslexia Association, said as an educator who is invested in delivering high-quality reading instruction, she supports HB 153 and urged the committee to pass it with full funding. She recounted her struggle working as an immediate resource teacher in the Anchorage School District where the struggle to read qualifies most of her students for a specific learning disability. She explained that reading is often the reason her colleagues refer students for a special education evaluation. She related that reading interventions that should be delivered by trained staff are being implemented by teachers who are either untrained or improperly trained. She explained that effective reading instruction requires the integration of high-quality, evidence-based practices; however, currently, students are being filtered into the same reading groups every year, leaving them to fall behind until being referred to special education services. She further noted that half of her students are "identified" around third grade. She applauded the Colorado READ Act for supporting educators and students by equipping them with reading strategies and said she strongly supports HB 153.

[1:32:35 PM](#)

STEPHANIE KILCOYNE stated her opposition to HB 153. She offered her understanding that children under the age of five should not be in an educational setting for more than three hours. She suggested that schools provide two hours of preschool in replace of the bill's current proposal; she opined that providing a whole day of care would be inappropriate.

[1:35:05 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND noted that the preschool program included in the Alaska Reads Act would be a half-day program. She reiterated that it is strictly voluntary. She explained that the program would work in coordination with ongoing preschool programs in the state, including Head Start, Parents as Teachers, and Best Beginnings.

[1:35:46 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY added that when district enrollment drops, so does the funding for schools.

[1:36:08 PM](#)

POSIE BOGGS, Alaska Reading Coalition, opined that HB 153 is "bold." She offered her understanding that implementing a comprehensive statewide reading policy with evidence-based instruction and intervention is designed to move Alaska's students into reading proficiency. She offered her belief that the bill would translate into preparation for kindergarten and allow the students to follow a consistent reading plan to grade three. She added that it would provide opportunities to enhance evidence-based reading instruction as early as preschool. She suggested that the legislature consider helping parents pay for daycare to ensure that childcare businesses continue to make a profit. To conclude, she expressed her support for the committee's effort.

[1:41:35 PM](#)

VALERIE BROOKS informed the committee that she completed her doctorate in education and is currently a reading specialist in Ketchikan. She stated her support for HB 153, adding that she is in favor of universal kindergarten for all Alaskan students, as well as a reading specialist in every school. She highlighted research from the learning policy institute that found investing in quality preschool programs can bolster students' success; however, the benefits can be negated when preschoolers are placed in large classrooms. Consequently, she opined that HB 153 should also emphasize smaller class sizes. Furthermore, she offered her belief that educators must be part of the discussion and urged the committee to consult those with direct experience in early and elementary education. She emphasized the need for preschool instruction, targeted small group instruction, assessments, progress monitoring and reporting. She added HB 153 goes a long way towards addressing students' skill deficits and, provided time and funding are available, could beneficially impact student learning in Alaska.

[1:45:13 PM](#)

JUDY ELEDGE, Alaska State Literacy Coordinator, said she strongly supports HB 153 because additional support is necessary to ensure all students read by grade three. She added that she is in favor of the pre-K component because it is voluntary and

clearly outlines necessary preparations for students entering kindergarten. She offered her belief that this legislation is necessary to ensure all teachers are trained in professional development for preschool children. Furthermore, she said HB 153 brings an element of state level support, which has been missing for some time. She opined that the bill would encourage consistent policy across districts for the betterment of all students. She addressed the poor reading proficiency in Alaska's students, later adding that the bill would hold everyone accountable for the education that all students deserve.

[1:50:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY inquired as to why retention, if not mandatory, is included in this legislation.

MS. ELEDGE opined that [retention] provides the opportunity to discuss a student's progress and contemplate strategies for his or her success; further, it holds everyone responsible for each student's development.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY surmised that the provisions included in the legislation outside the scope of retention could suffice if the intention is to have a conversation about students' progress.

MS. ELEDGE deferred to the commissioner.

[1:53:21 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked what research suggests for children who struggle with the alphabet and colors.

MS. ELEDGE offered her belief that if a child has those gaps, he or she will not learn to read without filling them. She said in her experience, children will catch up quickly if an educator works with them.

[1:55:40 PM](#)

BOB GRIFFIN, Alaska Policy Forum, said he is speaking in support of HB 153, adding that there is urgent need for this legislation. He discussed Alaska's low-ranking test scores and acknowledged the need to promote students' literacy proficiency. He opined that to get Alaska's K-12 system back on track, adopting the reading policy in this bill is a necessity. He

noted that the reading component in HB 153 has been tested and proven by some of the highest [ranked] schools in the nation.

[1:59:16 PM](#)

KERRIE SPAIN, Bright Lights Learning Center, said she strongly opposes HB 153. She posited that despite the proposed preschool program being voluntary, parents would opt for the more affordable option, consequently raising the cost of childcare services for infants and toddlers. She questioned what the student-to-teacher ratio would look like in the bill's preschool component. She maintained that HB 153 would not provide the same small class sizes that private daycare services currently offer.

[2:02:26 PM](#)

KARIN HALPIN, Principal, Rocky Mountain School, stated that she strongly supports HB 153. She encouraged the committee to consider adding a mandatory kindergarten requirement in Alaska, as educators currently have no leverage with chronically absent kindergarten students. She applauded the state for investing in early childhood education. She suggested replacing the term "phonemic awareness" with "phonological awareness," to encompass all the steps included in acquiring phonemic awareness. Additionally, she questioned how small rural schools could provide interventions outside of the school day with limited staffing capabilities. Regarding retention, she opined that it has a negative effect on student learning and consequently, encouraged the state to contemplate its use. Lastly, she recommended using the word "literacy."

[2:05:42 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK questioned whether retention has a negative impact on students of all ages, including those in grades K-3.

[2:06:09 PM](#)

MS. HALPIN remarked:

Sometimes we have kindergarten children that come into school that are not developmentally ready. ... So, what's going to change for that child if he or she is repeating a grade level. Is the child getting the same thing, or will things be tweaked to better

support that child; and if things are going to be tweaked, can that be done in the next grade.

[2:07:16 PM](#)

RONDA SCHLUMBOHM, Teacher, Salcha Elementary, emphasized the complexity of teaching children to read. She said there is a false impression that giving kids "screeners" and progress monitors will pinpoint the exact issue; however, that's not necessarily true, as screeners measure reading rate, not fluency. She offered her belief that children struggling to read need "all hands on deck." She applauded the idea of "adding additional time for children with extra reading outside of the core reading program." Additionally, she said reading instructors in all buildings would be ideal. She addressed testimony from the House Education Committee meeting on March 9 and contended that kindergarteners should be working on vocabulary and comprehension through shared reading with their teacher. Furthermore, she argued that students in higher grades would also benefit from reading lessons because they need to understand argument and inference, which requires explicit teaching. Lastly, she recommended that HB 153 should include writing in addition to reading.

[2:10:47 PM](#)

ASHLYN ANDERSON, Alaska Children's Academy, opined that toddlers would not do well in a school setting because they require constant individual support and care. She expressed her opposition to the bill.

[2:12:15 PM](#)

MARY MARKS, Tlingit and Haida Community Council, said she felt conflicted by HB 153 because a majority of Alaska Native students perform below state academic standards. She emphasized the importance of utilizing the Alaska Native performance standard in school districts. Additionally, she recommended collaborating with Alaska Native tribes and granting them access to the resources provided in this bill.

[2:16:19 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK questioned whether tribes are eligible for the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program.

MS. MARKS said there is collaboration with the TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families] program through the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes, which provides families with the opportunity to earn a CDA [Childhood Development Associate] award.

[2:17:33 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Ms. Marks to follow up with additional information on Alaska Native Performance Standards.

[2:18:15 PM](#)

MOLLY CARVER, Interim Policy Specialist, Alaska Children's Trust, said as the statewide leader in the prevention of child abuse and neglect, Alaska Children's Trust is in support of HB 153. She explained that early childhood education has been shown to reduce several factors that put children at risk of experiencing abuse and neglect. She offered her understanding that the goal of this bill is to invest early and insure children are ready to be contributing members to the collective success of Alaska. She commended HB 153 for recognizing that investing early provides the best outcome. Nonetheless, she pointed out that children arriving at school must be ready to learn. She added that if a child arrives hungry, homeless, or without health care, his or her ability to learn is greatly hindered. She said it will be important to remember the role of social determinants on a child's ability to learn as this legislation moves forward.

[2:19:57 PM](#)

MARY KRETZSCHMAR, Decoding Dyslexia Alaska, offered her support for HB 153. She emphasized the importance of a strong comprehensive statewide reading policy that uses evidence-based instruction strategies. She noted that the five essential components of reading instruction, or "the big five," are currently included in Alaska's English Language Arts (ELA) standards; however, she surmised that school districts are not utilizing the adopted standards. She reasoned that if school districts were practicing evidence-based and universally designed reading instruction it would benefit all students, even those that struggle with learning disabilities. She remarked that learning to read is a fundamental expectation of Alaska's education system, adding that there is no excuse for failing to teach all children to read. She opined that reading is

fundamental and should be a priority in how the state uses its funding.

[2:24:10 PM](#)

JOSEPH PICHLER offered his support for HB 153. He advocated for implementing one-on-one reading instruction in schools.

[2:26:19 PM](#)

LEIGH SLOAN expressed her support for implementing retention with intervention. She offered her belief that age doesn't necessarily correspond to ability; therefore, she reasoned that children should be placed "at their level." She continued to explain that the purpose of assessments is to influence teachers' behavior and to hold school districts accountable. She opined that action should be taken to benefit struggling learners. She offered her support for HB 153.

[2:27:38 PM](#)

BETHANY MARCUM, Executive Director, Alaska Policy Forum, reported that research by the Alaska Policy Forum found statistics for literacy among Alaska's children to be "dismal;" further, that Alaska's K-12 education system has the worst student outcome in the nation. She added that Alaskan students have been ranked in the bottom 10 states in fourth grade reading since scores were first published for all 50 states in 2003. Nonetheless, she indicated that proven solutions exist; most notably, the implementation of comprehensive reading reform with performance-based promotion. She said the most current and rigorous academic studies of performance-based promotion show the most effective accountability measure is to direct required interventions at students who struggle with reading; however, if those interventions and resources fail to help the student attain grade level proficiency by the end of grade three, repeating grade three is required with the addition of targeted, focused attention. She asserted that implanting high expectations and the right tools would make success possible. She stated that there is no better return on investment than making a difference in the lives of Alaska's children.

[2:30:56 PM](#)

VICKI CAMPBELL recounted her personal experience teaching children to read using a similar methodology to that which is proposed under HB 153. She offered her belief that teachers

have not been properly trained to implement the five essential components in their reading instruction. She advocated against a "hard-stop retention," adding that the bill's current retention component is adequate. She said she is opposed to holding a student back unless they received quality reading instruction in grades one through three.

[2:33:55 PM](#)

LONDA CASQUEIRA, shared her "strong" opposition to HB 153. She offered her belief that it would create difficulties for daycare services. She opined that daycares currently provide satisfactory reading instruction and placing children into a school environment prematurely would be inopportune. She shared several personal anecdotes. She asserted that "there is too much government interference."

[2:37:20 PM](#)

REBECCA HIMSCHOOT acknowledged the importance of maintaining daycare services across Alaska. She suggested capitalizing the service that daycares offer by subsequently providing a continuous system of education in which the students enter a high-quality preschool program where they learn tools that improve their disposition to learning. She related her experience working with English language learners and emphasized that a quality daycare is essential; however, many cannot afford preschool. She said providing them with the option of a publicly available preschool would bolster the continuous system of education that would work for every child in the state. She opined that the NAEP [National Assessment of Educational Progress] should not be used to measure the success of HB 153 because its assessment is broad. She applauded the bill's inclusion of culturally responsive education and encouraged the committee to consider doing more with it in this legislation. She addressed Alaska Native students and said through the process of colonization their languages were taken from them. She pointed out that Alaska Native students have not had the same exposure and opportunity to learn as other children. She added that by lacking first language fluency, they are less able to build second language fluency in English. She encouraged employing English language specialists that are culturally appropriate and understand the specifics surrounding English language learners who are not immigrants. She indicated that HB 153 could explore English language learning from an indigenous perspective.

[2:43:11 PM](#)

WILLIAM BROWN said he strongly opposes the pre-elementary component of HB 153. He shared a personal anecdote and indicated that the student-to-teacher ratio is too large in Alaska. He applauded the caliber of early educators in Anchorage's daycare programs. He expressed concern that the early education component of HB 153 would be funded by property taxes and PFD cuts; further, that the bill would put daycare employees out of work. He maintained that this legislation would not improve children's literacy proficiency.

[2:48:57 PM](#)

BRITTANI CLANCEY related her experience working with struggling readers in her children's school. She pointed out that when these students pass to the next grade level, expectations increase and their chances of succeeding at reading diminishes. She opined that the education system is doing them a disservice when that happens. She noted that 60 percent of fourth graders in Alaska are not reading at grade level, which in addition to the state's test scores, have caused her to consider relocating her family somewhere with a better school system. She offered her support for the "firm" reading policy in HB 153.

[2:51:29 PM](#)

TERRI WALKER, Superintendent, Northwest Arctic Borough School District, stated her support for HB 153; however, she noted that parts of the bill would strain the Northwest Arctic Borough School District (NWABSD) staff. She explained that NWABSD doesn't have the same resources as schools located in urban areas, such as additional staffing, specialists, libraries, Head Start programs, or daycare. Nonetheless, she said NWABSD runs a pre-K program with certified teachers because the school board is a strong supporter of early childhood education. She said HB 153 would help fund their pre-K program; furthermore, she offered support for the professional development included in the bill. She recommended removing the bill's retention component and discouraged the extensive reporting requirements.

[2:56:28 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked if NWABSD has chronic attendance issues in its kindergarten classes. She asked if the age requirement for kindergarten should be lowered.

MS. WALKER said pre-K attendance is at 70-80 percent. She acknowledged that encouraging the younger students to attend school is difficult in her community and agreed with lowering the age requirement.

[2:58:31 PM](#)

LISA VILLANO, Alaska Council for Exceptional Children, noted that Alaska Council for Exceptional Children (AKCEC) appreciates and supports the legislature's efforts to support early childhood education, reading instruction and intervention. She expressed "cautious support" for HB 153, with the exception of several concerns. Firstly, she expressed concern about the lack of cultural relevancy provisions for students in rural Alaska; secondly, the prescriptive nature of the bill - specifically in the reading intervention program. The third concern, she said, is that the proposed retention factor could lead to larger class sizes, thus leading to larger case loads for special education teachers. She noted that according to information on DEED's website, approximately 19,500 students in Alaska are already receiving special education services. Furthermore, she pointed out that Alaska Native students and students of color are at disproportionally higher risk for retention and special education referral.

[3:03:43 PM](#)

JENNIFER WAISANEN commended the proposed funding for early education and reading. She provided a description of her educational background and work experience, including a three-year masters of education in the acquisition of language, later adding that she is nationally board certified in reading/language arts and spent over \$25,000 to attend a five summer reading and writing institute at Columbia University. She directed attention to page 3, line 12 of the Alaska Reads Act, and cautioned the exclusive use of in-service days for reading instruction. She said in-service days are "precious" to the Anchorage School District (ASD) and currently being used for six professional development days. She opined that reading needs to be taught in context. Furthermore, she stated that children should be taught how to create, build, work, have quality conversations with peers, and problem solve to create innovators. She turned attention to page 17 and expressed concern about the proposed assessment method. She cautioned the use of Chromebooks for assessments, explaining that many of her students don't know how to use them. Lastly, she stated that teachers require support and time, adding that a balance between

assessment and instruction is necessary. She offered her strong support for HB 153.

[3:10:48 PM](#)

LESA MEATH, said she is generally in favor of HB 153; however, she was disappointed that the critical literacy components of writing, speaking, and listening are not included. She said research regarding the long-term positive impact of early education is well established. She related her support for the voluntary pre-K component of HB 153; also, the robust professional development, balanced reading initiative, and the retention and recruitment of educators. She expressed concern about prescriptive programs, assessments, reporting requirements, and the language regarding the retention of underperforming students. She noted that many of the lowest performing students have the greatest social and emotional needs; consequently, she asked the committee to consider how retention would impact them and what further obstacles it could create. She emphasized the importance of "student choice and voice," adding that curriculums require careful evaluation to ensure they are developmentally and culturally appropriate. She suggested designing professional development for paraprofessionals, because in rural Alaska, these are the long-term educators that are invested in the communities.

[3:16:35 PM](#)

ABBE HENSLEY, Best Beginnings, opined that it's time for Alaskan families to have greater choices and access to high-quality preschool programs. She said it makes sense to connect that opportunity with a statewide commitment that ensures reading proficiency by the end of grade three. She addressed a detail in the bill that changes the cut-off date for kindergarten from September 1 to June 1. That change, she said, would affect 2,500 children that turn five between June 1 and August 31, making them ineligible for school that year. She offered her belief that the change was well-intentioned; however, she insisted that it would take more than changing a date to ensure more children are prepared for the challenges of kindergarten and learning to read. Referencing a publication by the National Governors Association entitled, "Governor's Pocket Guide to Early Literacy," she encouraged the state to focus on children ages 0-5 and "invest in programs that increase families' capacity to build their children's language and literacy skills."

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KATIE BOTZ acknowledged that the Alaska Reads Act is important; however, she expressed her frustration with the school closures resulting from COVID-19. Consequently, she said as much as she would like to support HB 153, she does not. She indicated that children would not learn how to read if they are kept out of school for the rest of 2020. She urged the committee to reopen Alaska's schools.

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STACY FOSHEE expressed concern with the retention language in HB 153 and urged the committee to consider removing it. She stated that retention is not instruction and offered her belief that there should be additional opportunities for teachers' voices to be included in the bill. She opined that HB 153 would stretch the already thin resources in rural schools. She suggested employing the research-based program, ReadyRosie, which uses video modeling to create partnerships between families and educators. Referencing specific language in the bill, she questioned how the department would exercise general supervision over public schools and asked the committee to revise this statement. She asked why Section 14 mentions a school bus training course. Furthermore, she emphasized the importance of ensuring that textbooks are culturally relevant to Alaska's diverse population.

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STEPHANIE BERGLUND, Chief Executive Officer, Thread Alaska, stated that Thread strongly supports expanding quality early childhood education services, including pre-K. She added that decades of research demonstrate that pre-K makes a short-term difference in children's readiness for school, as well as a long-term difference in students' ability to gain employment and contribute to the economy. In Alaska, she said, current pre-K services are working. She opined that expanding the early childhood education through HB 153 would continue to promote school readiness and identify and provide support to children who need it most. Additionally, she argued that expanding pre-K would provide families with more choices by creating affordable and more accessible opportunities for children to learn. She addressed one element of the bill that she said would not support family choice: the earlier cut-off date for school start eligibility. She expressed concern that changing the date would increase demand for an already fragile and expensive childcare

system. Instead, she encouraged the committee to keep the existing school age cut-off date intact and to deliver pre-K childcare services by implementing a collaborative mixed delivery system, which provides continuity of care for full-day and full-year services that working families want and need. She noted that Alaska's quality recognition and improvement system, Learn and Grow, provides framework for activities and can be used for all early childhood education programs, including pre-K. Regarding the prevalent concern that offering pre-K could affect the childcare market, she reported that 100,000 children are in need of early childhood education, while there are less than 25,000 licensed and regulated spaces available. She indicated that Alaska is only serving one-quarter of the kids in need of care services. She explained that often, the neediest children and their families do not utilize the existing private childcare market due to lack of affordable access. She reiterated that expanding quality pre-K options would support more families while continuing the supply and demand of the childcare sector. She maintained that quality early education, including pre-K, must be part of Alaska's economic infrastructure as a means of creating a strong and prepared workforce.

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JODI TAYLOR shared a personal anecdote and related that by grade three, a child's ability to read correlates with the likelihood that he or she will attend college or have a successful career. She opined that HB 153 holds both the state and Alaska's students accountable for becoming literate and developing to their full potential. She urged the committee to pass HB 153.

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PEGGY COWAN expressed support for universal preschool and the intent of the bill's reading component. Nonetheless, she opined that the bill should be modified to change the retention provisions and reflect different school district's needs. She explained that some schools will need infrastructure and others will need teacher housing and qualified staff. She encouraged the support of reading and professional development across the state and asked the committee to consider the diversity of Alaska's districts and to modify the bill accordingly.

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CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND clarified that HB 153 does not ask districts to retain students. She explained that retention is a local control issue and therefore, retention policy is set by each district.

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REPRESENTATIVE TUCK acknowledged the prevalent concern regarding keeping local daycare centers operational and vibrant. He noted that the intent of this legislation is not to eliminate the need for those daycare facilities, especially those that are educating children. He encouraged daycare centers and early childhood education programs to take advantage of Parents as Teachers.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND pointed out that there are 100,000 kids in the state of Alaska that need care and only 25,0000 childcare spaces available. She said HB 153 is not a threat to daycare services.

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REPRESENTATIVE PRAX opined that if the state is subsidizing a daycare service, the nonsubsidized programs will have a difficult time competing.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND clarified that preschool is not daycare. She explained that families have need of daycare in order to return to work, adding that it's an economic issue. She said providing more preschool spaces would help make spaces in the daycare market available. She encouraged the childcare industry to convene with Stephanie Berglund of Thread Alaska.

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CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that HB 153 was held over.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.