

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 21, 2019
9:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Shelley Hughes, Vice Chair
Senator Chris Birch
Senator Mia Costello
Senator Tom Begich

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 30

"An Act establishing the middle college program for public school students; and relating to the powers of the University of Alaska."

- MOVED CSSB 30(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 6

"An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to funding for early education programs; and relating to the duties of the state Board of Education and Early Development."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 30

SHORT TITLE: COLLEGE CREDIT FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) STEVENS

01/23/19	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/23/19	(S)	EDC, FIN
01/29/19	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
01/29/19	(S)	Heard & Held
01/29/19	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/12/19	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

02/12/19 (S) Heard & Held
02/12/19 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
03/12/19 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/12/19 (S) -- MEETING CANCELED --
03/21/19 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 6

SHORT TITLE: PRE-ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS/FUNDING

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

WITNESS REGISTER

TIM LAMKIN, Staff
Senator Gary Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Reviewed the CS for SB 30, version K.

PAUL LAYER, Ph.D., Vice President for Academics, Students and
Research
University of Alaska
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information about dual enrollment
for high school students.

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Division Operations Manager
Student Learning Division
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Reviewed the fiscal note for SB 30.

POSIE BOGGS, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 30.

JACOB GERRISH, Staff
Senator Scott Kawasaki
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional for SB 6 on behalf
of the sponsors.

ANJI GALLANOS, Director
P-3 Office
Colorado Department of Education
Denver, Colorado
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 6.

APRIL BLEVINS, Early Childhood Coordinator
Lower Kuskokwim School District
Bethel, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 6.

ELWIN BLACKWELL, School Finance Manager
School Finance and Facilities Section
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Reviewed the fiscal notes for SB 6.

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Division Operations Manager
Student Learning Division
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Reviewed the fiscal notes for SB 6.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:00:41 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Begich, Birch, and Chair Stevens.

SB 30-COLLEGE CREDIT FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

[9:00:56 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the consideration of SB 30 and his intention to take up the Committee Substitute (CS) for SB 30, work order 31-LS0052\K. He solicited a motion.

[9:01:36 AM](#)

SENATOR BIRCH moved to adopt the CS for SB 30, version K, as the working document.

[9:01:45 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS objected for purposes of discussion and asked Mr. Lamkin to explain the changes in version K.

[9:01:54 AM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, explained that SB 30 is an effort to recognize the accomplishments of 47 other states that have established collaboration between secondary and postsecondary schools. The goal is to encourage students to finish their formal education. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Education show that in Alaska, of 100 freshmen, just 76 finish high school. Of those 100 freshmen, only 33 enter college and just 22 remain enrolled for their sophomore year. SB 30 will help these poor statistics by establishing a hybrid Middle College Program in Alaska, which is proven to help students finish high school and launch, if not finish, some type of post-secondary education, including vocational technical training.

MR. LAMKIN said that the traditional sense of middle college includes students going to a university campus. That clearly will not work for Alaska. Another model is early college high school. This bill crafts a hybrid between those two, where the university can come to the high school campus rather than the other way around. The bill sets goals and focuses on the outcomes, not the process. The goals are flexible for districts and responsive to the needs of those communities. The idea is to avoid creating barriers. Evaluation is key as well. The bill sets up some basic parameters and attempts to maximize flexibility between school districts and the University of Alaska.

[9:05:05 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO joined the committee.

MR. LAMKIN said he would present the CS in the same manner as a sectional:

Section 1 of the CSSB 30 on page 2, lines 8-11. "Alaska" was added to create the phrase "Alaska middle college program" to emphasize that this is a distinct, Alaska hybrid middle college program.

On page 2, lines 8-11 add the "rate of subsequent enrollment" to the report summary that is given to the legislature. Subsequent enrollment refers to how many students complete the dual-credit program and pursue postsecondary education. The second piece of data added is the number of students who complete the program and must complete remedial courses in college.

CHAIR STEVENS clarified that this requires the State Board of Education to make the report to the legislature. The information on enrollment and remediation rates would be available through the board's work with the university, but it is the state board who is responsible for the report.

MR. LAMKIN confirmed that the intention is that the state board would be responsible for issuing the report and the expectation is that they would collaborate with the university.

MR. LAMKIN reviewed Section 2:

Subsection (a) is intended to reduce barriers. Making the program accessible to students is important to the program's success.

Line 16 says a student "shall" earn both high school and college credit. That is needed to make it clear that a student who completes a dual credit course will get university credit along with high school credit.

Lines 18 and 19 make it clear that the credits are transferable between various campuses throughout the system.

SENATOR BIRCH asked if there had been any dialog with the Board of Regents and university in this effort.

MR. LAMKIN answered that he had not had any direct conversations with the Board of Regents. Most of his work and communication had been with the university administration, in particular with Dr. Paul Layer, the Vice President for Academics, Students, and Research, who will testify.

CHAIR STEVENS added that there will also be careful coordination between the district and university. He asked Mr. Lamkin to explain what type of classes would be offered.

MR. LAMKIN said the intention is that these would be core courses applicable to a high school diploma that in turn can be applied toward general education requirements at the university level.

[9:10:14 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES joined the committee.

[9:10:23 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO said she is very supportive of district efforts to accommodate all students, including those ready for classes through a middle college program. She noted that when Mr. Lamkin came to her office, they spoke about school districts that currently don't have a middle college program and how this bill would take effect. She asked if districts could talk about how this would affect their budget or how they foresee putting something in place if they don't have a program now. She also asked if there is adequate Internet access for districts that might offer online classes.

CHAIR STEVENS said adequate Internet is an important issue that needs work, but all districts are not equal. Some simply do not have adequate bandwidth to offer online courses.

[9:12:40 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said she was very pleased to say that students in her area have the middle college opportunity. She said she wanted the record to include discussion of whether online courses taken in a rural area without a campus would be comparable to courses taken in person on a campus. She said she doesn't want the state to have to provide funding to bring students to campus and house them but wonders if there is information to show that the two delivery systems are equitable.

MR. LAMKIN replied that subsection (b) in Section 2 addresses that question.

Subsection (b), page 2, lines 20-23. The intent is a not one size fits all. It is intended that every district enter into an agreement with the university. Each district will identify what it can and can't do. Some districts may find they do not have any eligible students. Their agreement could state that they have no one eligible for the program. Other districts may have one student and offer one class. That could be their middle college program.

MR. LAMKIN said the bill compels districts and universities to address and collaborate on things like inadequate Internet. There are efforts now to improve broadband. Presumably over time, broadband will grow and provide better opportunities for all students. SB 30 is carefully worded so the state is not put in a position that requires flying students to campuses to attend class. He said he is interested in reaching out to the attorney general's office to confirm that. He has been assured by Legislative Legal that the bill is crafted so that it does not trigger litigation on the basis of equity.

CHAIR STEVENS said it's an important question. He added that many students take classes online through the university today in places like Sitka, Ketchikan, Kodiak, and Kenai. He said it's happening right now but he would admit that it is not equitable. Taking a class in front of a professor is a better form of education than taking it online. Equity is an important issue but it can't be solved in this bill. He emphasized that there is no intention to fly students in to take these classes.

SENATOR HUGHES said many young people feel that if the course is interactive and live, they feel as though they are in the room and able to get to know the professor and classmates. She related a story to show that the generation coming up might consider online courses equitable. She noted the committee heard the bill about broadband funding and she has a bill that would set up a statewide virtual education system. She said she supports this concept because students should be given access. She suggested that if the university were to partner with DEED to set up a virtual education system and make the university courses that are suitable for middle college available, it would take the burden off districts. If the "shall" language in the bill was maintained, it would already be set up and students could be sent to the menu to select classes. She said that might be a solution for districts that are concerned about not being ready or have hesitation about the "shall" language. She acknowledged that other bills would need to pass for that to happen, but it would complement and dovetail nicely with the middle college concept.

CHAIR STEVENS said he knows she's right and commented on the enormous strides in technology.

MR. LAMKIN added that Dr. Layer will speak about an online portal that will complement what Senator Hughes is describing and the purpose of the bill.

[9:20:11 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said the changes in Section 2 addresses most of his concerns about a forced relationship that might exist between school districts and the university. The idea of the two entities negotiating and entering into an agreement is a unique and careful crafting of an answer to that question.

[9:20:52 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS highlighted that a district could negotiate to offer just one class if that suited their purpose.

MR. LAMKIN continued to review Section 2 of the committee substitute.

Subsection (c), page 2, lines 24-28, addresses eligibility and access. It is important that it be open not just to grades 11 and 12, but to grades 9 and 10 as well. In prior hearings it was mentioned that there could be gifted students who should be given the opportunity to do college work while in high school.

Subsection (d) on the bottom of page 2 going to page 3 is about awareness. One pitfall is that parents and students don't know these dual credit programs exist. This section requires that school districts provide information about the program when students are signing up for classes.

Lines 10-12 on page 3 address making it clear that there are specific academic and social responsibilities and consequences of failing. The costs and the benefits of enrolling in the program should be clear.

Subsection (e) goes into the financing of the program. Students are not required to pay. Lines 14-20 on page 3 speak to the agreements between the districts and university about what they can do and how to go about paying for it. The bill leaves it up to parties involved to sort it out

Subsection (f) on the bottom of the page 3 speaks to the quality of the program. A key component of middle colleges is that both the district and the university acknowledge and agree that the program itself and the courses taught are of high quality. They agree on the content and curriculum and the quality of instruction given at the high school level.

Subsection (g) on page 4 puts a cap on the numbers. Twelve credits is a full-time load. Students should not be burdened with more than 12 credits in a semester. The conversation to date has been about a student leaving high school with a diploma and possibly 60 credits toward an associate degree.

SENATOR HUGHES said she would prefer no cap, but she wouldn't hold up the bill for that reason. Occasionally there are students who can handle a higher course load. In some cases it saves the school district money if students take more credits through the middle college. She suggested the committee consider removing subsection (g).

CHAIR STEVENS said Paul Layer from the university may have more information about that.

MR. LAMKIN added that the cap is only on this program; students could take more classes on their own. Research shows a possible abuse of the system is a student lingering in high school to take advantage of free or cheap college tuition.

SENATOR HUGHES said student lingering is a good point. She asked if a student were to pay for additional courses, would those courses still apply for high school credit.

MR. LAMKIN responded that he would imagine the student would have two high school diplomas at that point, which would be a very unusual situation. That would be a super student.

[9:28:27 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said he too questioned the cap but the point about students lingering was convincing.

SENATOR COSTELLO said that she would like to get on the record a response about how these types of courses will appear on student transcripts.

MR. LAMKIN said that is a question for the districts. He suspects that every district has its own method.

SENATOR BEGICH pointed out that Section 2 on page 2 says that the way that credits are reported will be in the agreement between each school district and the university.

MR. LAMKIN continued the review of the committee substitute:

Section 2, page 4, lines 3-11 have no change from the original bill. That holds harmless school districts with funding for their enrollments and ADM [average daily membership]. It also provides that the parties can share transcript information.

Section 3, lines 13-25, syncs the University of Alaska statutes with this program, making it clear that the university and districts will form agreements and the university will evaluate and review courses.

Section 4 provides for an effective date of July 1, 2020.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Mr. Lamkin for the extensive work he's done, including talking to various agencies to find out what models are working in other states.

9:32:55 AM

PAUL LAYER, Ph.D., Vice President for Academics, Students and Research, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska, said the Board of Regents has a dual enrollment policy P10.05.015 that says, "Dual enrollment refers to enrollment at the university by a student who is simultaneously enrolled in a K-12 (or homeschool) for which the student may receive credit at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels. The university encourages dual enrollment. No additional restrictions on dual enrollment beyond those applicable to all students, or to avoid violations of law or ensure informed consent by a parent or legal guardian (including financial obligations), shall be allowed." He said the university and Board of Regents encourage this kind of collaboration. They also have regulation regarding minors being involved in classes.

DR. LAYER said that regarding the question about equity, in areas where a university center or university is nearby, the options will be wider. For online courses, student learning outcomes or objectives are the same throughout the system. A lot of students today prefer online option versus the face-to-face option. He explained that the university has developed a portal, which is going to be a one-stop shop for students to show what is available, both face-to-face and online. From the university's standpoint, students would be taking a university class and it would be shown on the university record as a college class. He said the university already has some very successful programs and partnerships. The university would like to see this option for parents and students throughout the state and is working toward this with districts right now.

SENATOR BIRCH asked how the costs associated with the program are allocated and shared between the participating school district and the university.

DR. LAYER replied that the university has agreements with Anchorage School District and Mat-Su School District and those districts use their student allocations to pay tuition at University of Alaska rates. The rates are low enough currently that it is affordable for districts to pay the university tuition, student fees, and transportation costs. The university views these students as regular students; there is nothing unusual about their funding pattern. The university may want to

look at that as it looks at options for other districts. Subsection (e) says students enrolled in the program may not be required to pay tuition or other associated costs. That is an agreement the university would have to make with the district and they are developing templates for that right now.

SENATOR BIRCH asked if the university allows students to audit classes on a space-available basis.

DR. LAYER confirmed that the university provides a mechanism for students to audit classes on a space-available basis. The student does not receive credit for the class.

[9:40:09 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked if he had any comments about the proposed cap of 12 credits per semester and 60 credits total per student.

DR. LAYER replied the university does not see the need to limit student access to their courses. If they are qualified, they are welcome. He noted that some students in the Anchorage and Mat-Su middle colleges take 15 credits and sometimes more working toward their baccalaureate degrees. He acknowledged that he had not thought about it from the district perspective of students exceeding what is needed for a high school diploma and that might be worth consideration.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if he sees the bill as a way to improve the problem of many students needing remedial classes when they enter the university.

DR. LAYER answered yes; students who participate in the program must meet the standards for college-level math and writing so they won't need remedial services. In essence, it puts pressure on the students and parents and schools to make sure those students are college ready. The Mat-Su program has existed long enough that the university is seeing this in the students who have graduated high school and are entering the university as full, degree-seeking students.

SENATOR COSTELLO asked if this would not affect any existing agreements with colleges outside of Alaska. She cited the example of students who are not in high school yet that are taking online language classes from Middlebury College.

CHAIR STEVENS answered no.

[9:43:57 AM](#)

DR. LAYER said UA would like parents and districts to think first about the university when they're considering college credit for students, but nothing in the bill precludes any existing agreements. Students who meet UA standards and have parent permission are welcome to come to the university.

SENATOR COSTELLO said the Anchorage School District has several language immersion programs in Japanese, Spanish, Russian, and German and those students want to take four years of language in high school. The bill will allow those language learners to advance further than what is currently provided in the high school setting.

CHAIR STEVENS asked the Department of Education and Early Development representative if the committee substitute affects the fiscal note.

[9:45:53 AM](#)

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Division Operations Manager, Student Learning Division, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, said the committee substitute does not change the fiscal note.

[9:46:13 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS opened public testimony.

POSIE BOGGS, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, said she fully supports SB 30. She shared that she graduated from high school one year early in 1975 because she took college courses every summer. If the Internet and strong broadband had been available, she could have graduated even earlier. She said it took a lot of strong self-advocacy on her part and her father's part to get the high school to accept those credits. She fully supports the ability of high school students to take college classes and to make a smooth way for high schools to accept those credits.

[9:49:00 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS closed public testimony.

SENATOR COSTELLO said the second paragraph on page 2 of the analysis of the fiscal note says that to be eligible, the student must have completed 10th grade. Her understanding is that the current version doesn't limit this to 11th and 12th graders.

CHAIR STEVENS replied that is correct and that is on the record.

[9:50:02 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS removed his objection and solicited a motion.

[9:50:17 AM](#)

SENATOR BIRCH moved to report CSSB 30, [Version 31-LS0052\K], from committee with individual recommendations and accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSSB 30(EDC) moved from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[9:50:27 AM](#)

At ease

SB 6-PRE-ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS/FUNDING

[9:54:41 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the consideration of SB 6. He noted his intent hold the bill in committee after discussion and public testimony.

[9:55:03 AM](#)

SENATOR TOM BEGICH, sponsor of SB 6, introduced the bill paraphrasing from the following sponsor statement:

Early education is imperative for our state. When examining Alaska's long-term economy, it is essential to consider how we can both increase Alaskan's productivity as well as reduce potential drains resulting from the unrealized potential of our citizens. Early education is an important part of that equation.

The markers for success develop early in life and brain science underscores that how we use our brains at those crucial early years before we enter Kindergarten - as well as how prepared we are when we enter our K - 12 education have a dramatic impact on how well we will do in school and life. In particular, research shows us that those who live in poverty have an incredibly difficult time catching up with others if 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 reported in national media identified that every dollar invested in high quality Pre-K can save up to \$7 in long-term government

expense by reducing the need for remedial education, and involvement in the criminal justice and public assistance systems.

High quality early education programs are an investment in our future. Universal early education available to students before they enter kindergarten improves school readiness, reading levels, and long-term economic performance. Long term studies such as the Perry Preschool project also suggest students with access to high quality pre-school are less likely to be incarcerated and less likely to receive government assistance as adults. Alaska's current pre-kindergarten programs - such as those in Anchorage, Mat-Su, The Lower Kuskokwim School District and Nome - and our early education programs including Head Start, Best Beginnings, and Parents as Teachers, provide access to families for such high quality early education, but are, according to our Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), only available to 10% of Alaska's 4 year olds. SB6 would take lessons learned from those programs and provide all school districts with the opportunity to provide high quality early education to their students if they so choose.

There is much to be said about early education, but the critical piece is that children's pace of intellectual development peaks before age six, making those years especially important for future success. School outcome data and academic research show that children who participate in early education programs exceed in developing soft skills tied to future success including conscientiousness, perseverance, sociability, and curiosity. We have seen those results nationally, but also have that data here for Alaska after over ten years of demonstration projects around Pre- K in our state. The current Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment, children in early education programs in Alaska show dramatic growth even comparing student aptitude changes between the Fall and Spring - and that is a success we should all share. It is time for all Alaskans to have an opportunity to participate in the success of these demonstration efforts. This legislation provides that opportunity.

SENATOR BEGICH said that for the last ten years Alaska has experimented with evidence-based prekindergarten programs and

the data shows dramatic successes. The Mat-Su data shows that special education Title I students who are participating in the program are overperforming the district average in letter/sound fluency and are nearly equal in letter naming fluency. The Lower Kuskokwim School District data shows a difference in performance by third grade for students who participated in the district's prekindergarten. The same goes for the Anchorage and Nome school districts. Those who attended prekindergarten, Nome in particular, perform well above those who did not attend. In each of these cases there is measurable achievement by third grade for those who went through the prekindergarten experience.

SENATOR BEGICH said SB 6 provides opportunities for every district to access prekindergarten. It is not mandatory, but it is a universal prekindergarten, meaning at some point it would be available to every district in the state. Parents would always control the ability to enroll their children in prekindergarten.

SENATOR BEGICH explained that the bill implements a cohort approach to limit the impact over years and to ensure the districts are provided necessary support from the Department of Education and Early Development to develop a high-quality prekindergarten program. He said a lot of bills in the past have said to just do prekindergarten, but that is not sufficient. The prekindergarten programs around the country that have not shown success received either no support from their education departments or did not have specific parameters designed around evidence. He said prekindergarten programs must demonstrate a working program, and he has faith that DEED can do that. The department has demonstrated this over the last decade, and it can do that through this bill for the rest of the state.

He said this is a small investment. The state has invested intelligently in oil and gas royalties. The state has invested to build a permanent fund. The state should do the same kind of investments for its children. Early education has the potential to create a generation of Alaskans who are prepared to take advantage of the opportunities of the 21st century.

[10:02:48 AM](#)

JACOB GERRISH, Staff, Senator Scott Kawasaki, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the sectional analysis for SB 6 on behalf of the sponsors:

Section 1.

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

Section 2.

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

Section 3.

Creates a stair-step, 3-year grant program to provide training and assist a school district in developing an early education program. In year one, the lowest performing 20% of school districts (as established in 2018) will be eligible for a grant to establish a district-wide, high quality early education program. In year two, the next lowest performing 20% of school districts will be eligible for the three-year grant program to establish an early education program. At the end of the three-year grant cycle, the Department of Education and Early Development (the Department) will be responsible for determining if the district's early education program complies with state standards. The next year, the grants be available to the next lowest 20% of school districts until all school districts are offered the opportunity to participate.

Section 4.

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

Section 5.

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

SENATOR BEGICH said this clarifies that Head Start and other early education programs that might receive other types of federal funding are not excluded.

MR. GERRISH continued the sectional:

Section 6.

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

Section 7.

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

Section 8.

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

Section 9.

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

Section 10.

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

Section 11.

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

CHAIR STEVENS asked whether half-day students qualify for exactly half of the average daily membership (ADM).

SENATOR BEGICH answered yes; that seemed to be fair and equitable.

[10:07:45 AM](#)

SENATOR BIRCH noted that Anchorage has had declining enrollment in the K-8 population. He asked if this would add to the enrollment in the Anchorage School District and how many students and associated teaching positions would be involved.

SENATOR BEGICH replied that Anchorage is in a unique situation because it already operates a form of prekindergarten. What is

likely is that the school district will apply to DEED to be certified as an existing evidence-based prekindergarten program. ASD could then potentially roll their pre-K population into their ADM. It would offset their declines to some degree. The pre-K ADM would be half a student. Statewide there are about 10,000 in the four-year-old cohort, which would be about 4,000 for Anchorage. ASD is already served to a great degree by prekindergarten, so it probably would not add a lot of teachers, but it would offset some decline in funding that would come to Anchorage from the base student allocation.

He said the fiscal note is substantial over time, but the fiscal impact may be minimal due to the statewide population decline. He highlighted an advantage of this bill is that it could immediately support districts that have evidence-based prekindergarten, and it would take resources to those districts that are some of the lowest performing in the United States. That would be the first cohort.

SENATOR BEGICH said he was just informed that 847 four-year-olds in Anchorage and 391 in Mat-Su are currently in pre-K.

10:11:03 AM

SENATOR COSTELLO asked how the department would accommodate the foundation formula chart that counts students in larger schools as less than one person as the multiplier while in certain communities one child is counted as up to four students. She noted that the fiscal note has taken the full state aid entitlement of \$1.1 billion and divided it by the average daily membership to come up with \$9,260. That number is halved and applied for every child in the pre-K system. Once a student becomes a kindergartener in a remote, rural community, they would bump up to four individuals. She said Sand Lake Elementary, which is in her district, is the largest elementary school in the state and those students would not even be counted as one. She asked if he has had a discussion with the department about what this investment in schools would look like.

SENATOR BEGICH said he would defer to the department for specific details but nothing changes in terms of a child entering school as a full time ADM under the current law. It just adds the half-time ADM position. No nuance is reflected in the fiscal notes. This prekindergarten program is based on the Oklahoma model where about 70 percent of kids that are eligible take advantage of the prekindergarten program. Florida is the state with the highest percentage at 77 percent. Washington D.C. has a slightly higher number. DEED calculated the fiscal notes

based on 88.45 percent participation in the pre-K program. He said he hopes that is true, but he suspects the number will be closer to 70 percent. He said the fiscal note might be overrepresenting the cost, but he was comfortable with it. It is based strictly on a \$4,630 average per student cost, half the \$9,260 average student cost. He deferred to the department to respond further to the question about an overcount or undercount.

CHAIR STEVENS invited Ms. Gallanos to testify.

10:15:39 AM

ANJI GALLANOS, Director, P-3 Office, Colorado Department of Education, Denver, Colorado, said she previously directed the early learning program for the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. She explained that DEED's approach when funding district-based pre-K programs was to support and build capacity in order to ensure coherent implementation of preschool supports. Districts that received the \$2 million state grants for preschool engaged in activities that coordinated resources, supported quality locally-designed options, and developed leadership understanding of learning in the early years. This led to high-quality district-led preschool initiatives. The Alaska preschool program was informed by implementation science and research indicating the most high-quality drivers for preschool outcomes. By supporting districts, DEED could ensure that sustainable preschool programs were being implemented to serve children in high-quality programs.

MS. GALLANOS said that SB 6 is perhaps the best way to sustain the impact of attending preschool. It is not an inoculation such that one year of preschool can be expected to achieve great outcomes, but when partnered within a district that supports quality implementation, the effects are great. The Alaska preschool program saw these impacts directly reported by school districts. While DEED could not report outcomes at a child-level, districts that participated could identify and track outcomes by using district assessments. District-based preschool has been proven to work well by districts that have implemented the program. SB 6 creates a structure that supports and guides districts to implement a coherent preschool system that plays a part in overall school achievement. In addition to meeting the access needs to quality preschool for four-year-old children, it requires local control over district preschool programs because Alaska district leaders and community members know the needs of their communities. She said she is pleased to see the call for

standards-based alignment and accountability measures within the bill to demonstrate impact.

MS. GALLANOS said that children most at risk need effective and timely intervention supports. For example, Colorado provides public preschool for at-risk children who meet eligibility criteria. One of the metrics is eligibility for free and reduced-cost lunch. In Colorado that is 24 percent of the student population. In Alaska it is 50 percent. Colorado legislated preschool slots 30 years ago for at-risk children by providing funding to school districts to choose how to serve three- and four-year-old children. Colorado preschool slots can be used in school district classrooms, childcare classrooms, and Head Start classrooms. Colorado has seen the tie between preschool and third grade outcomes. Colorado's more recent report has data that demonstrates that children enrolled in Colorado preschool programs show strong outcomes in later grades. Colorado's data shows that kindergarteners who participated in preschool were less likely to be identified with significant reading deficiencies than their peers who did not participate. Children funded through the Colorado preschool program were less likely to be retained during K-3 than their peers and more likely to finish high school. Every dollar saves seven dollars. This has been shown to be true through meta-analysis. The number ranges from four to nine dollars. Children who attend preschool are referred to special education less, are less likely to need intervention, and less likely to be retained in third grade. Colorado has seen these outcomes. She said she supports the structure in SB 6 because it supports quality implementation and guidance needed in a district to support coherent preschool systems that have goals and outcomes for student achievement.

SENATOR BIRCH asked whether the dollars follow the child to whatever program the child is enrolled in and how payments are made for preschool.

MS. GALLANOS replied that the Colorado legislature passed a slot-based system in which slots are allocated to 24,000 children. Slots, at the discretion of districts, can be used in district-identified preschool programs such as Head Start, childcare, or district programs.

SENATOR BIRCH asked if the money can be expended in private programs outside of the school districts.

MS. GALLANOS answered that in Colorado those slots are given to the school districts, so school districts choose which programs within the district boundaries qualify. A childcare program, for example, could apply for three slots and the district would determine whether the program met the criteria.

SENATOR COSTELLO directed attention to the chart that shows different results among programs and district averages. She asked Ms. Gallanos if she had that information from Colorado that she could share.

MS. GALLANOS replied that Colorado does not have outcome data for Head Start or childcare or individually-funded district programs, but they have outcomes based on the 24,000 slots.

SENATOR COSTELLO summarized that the Colorado education department approves programs to get slots but doesn't have statistics comparing the proficiency of students who have gone through the Head Start program.

MS. GALLANOS answered that Colorado Head Start, much like in Alaska, is a separate federally funded program so the state doesn't have a tracking system to measure four-year-old Head Start students as they transition into the kindergarten system. Head Start as a federal program is able to track growth outcomes during the year but there is no way to measure whether that child is meeting an outcome at third grade because they attended Head Start.

SENATOR BEGICH added that Head Start does report to Alaska because it receives some state funding. One of the elements of SB 6 that is different than Colorado is that it has standards that emphasize locally-based programs. Alaska DEED worked with school districts within a series of standards. That is unique about this bill and what is done in Alaska compared to other states. Alaska has such different cultural and rural vs. urban aspects that the bill allows more flexibility than other states.

[10:27:53 AM](#)

APRIL BLEVINS, Early Childhood Coordinator, Lower Kuskokwim School District, Bethel, Alaska, stated that the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) supports state funding policies that will ensure that Alaska provides access to high-quality early childhood education programs for all children to increase school readiness and to promote academic and lifelong success. She said sufficient resources must be available to provide for high-quality early childhood education that is free of charge and

accessible to all. Programs cannot become stable without the certainty of funding. Children in the LKSD early learning programs have demonstrated growth between fall and spring assessments in cognitive development, language and literacy skills, mathematics, and fine and gross motor skills. The data has shown significant long-term benefits. Students who attended their state-funded preschool program outperformed their peers who did not attend a preschool program on third and fifth grade assessments. Quality preschool programs also close academic gaps. She said their data shows an average LKSD four-year-old enters preschool with a receptive language of a two-and-a-half-year-old. When they exit the preschool program and enter kindergarten, most have gained 1.5 years of language.

MS. BLEVINS said LKSD programs provide other benefits that are not publicly acknowledged. Most of their programs employ local residents. If they had no preschool, that would create a domino effect. If children cannot attend preschool, then parents cannot maintain a job. Therefore, they must rely heavily on public assistance. This results in children going without proper nutrition, which the school provides twice daily. All these factors affect a community economically, socially, and academically.

MS. BLEVINS said that early intervention in their preschool programs have led to fewer special education referrals and services for entering kindergarteners. Developmental and language delays are lessened with preschool interventions. LKSD preschools provide a safe, happy environment in which children thrive. Young people who are experiencing trauma receive support services. Their programs also provide medical screenings, support for families, and information for parents about various types of services. Monthly parent events offer parent education, literacy materials, and social interaction with other families. Families value the LKSD early childhood education programs as advocates for children and their families. Early childhood programs have the potential for prevention and cost effectiveness. In the past two decades many studies have demonstrated the positive effects of participation in early intervention for school readiness, health status, academic achievement, grade retention, and special education services. Evidence supports delinquency prevention and attainment of higher education, yet every year their early childhood programs are on the list of budget cuts. Research has shown that money is best spent investing in early childhood programs. For every dollar spent the return is \$7.16. She said all Alaskans, especially rural communities, need and deserve pre-K funding.

SENATOR BIRCH asked what the percentage of preschool participation is in her communities and the youngest age served.

MS. BLEVINS replied that participation and attendance range between 80 and 91 percent.

SENATOR BIRCH asked if three-year-old children are in their program.

MS. BLEVINS answered that four-year-olds have priority for enrollment but three-year-olds are admitted if space allows. She have a shorter day than the four-year-olds.

SENATOR BEGICH clarified that SB 6 focuses on four-year-olds. Three-year-olds are included in the description because they are included in existing programs like Head Start. In SB 6, only four-year-olds and five-year-olds are eligible.

[10:34:32 AM](#)

ELWIN BLACKWELL, School Finance Manager, School Finance and Facilities Section, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, said he would review the two fiscal notes affected by the addition of four-year-olds to foundation funding. He explained that the fiscal note dealing with the fund capitalization is where the money needed to make the foundation program whole is recorded. This fiscal note takes the total amount of projected state aid and divides it by the total number of ADM to come up with the average cost per ADM. Since the bill funds the students at one-half of that average, \$4,630 is the estimated per student cost. He acknowledged that some districts would get more from the foundation formula.

MR. BLACKWELL explained that there will be five cohorts of students going through the program. The first cohort would transition into the foundation formula in 2023. The fiscal note assumes that all programs that were developed for the first cohort would be approved and transition in at the end of the three years. That assumption is carried through for each of the five cohorts.

MR. BLACKWELL said \$3.4 million shows up for FY 2023. That number doubles to \$6,806,100 in FY 2024. The \$3 million is added to FY 2025 and so on out to 2027 when the assumption is that all five programs would be fully transitioned into the foundation formula.

SENATOR BEGICH asked how DEED came to the assumption that pre-K programs would serve about 89 percent of the students.

10:38:39 AM

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Division Operations Manager, Student Learning Division Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, explained that the cohort of students every year is about 10,000 per grade. They looked at the number of students participating in preschool programs and tried to determine how many were not participating. The first year they anticipate 735 students and that would double the next year. That is how they came up with 88 percent.

SENATOR BEGICH said the colored chart in the packets shows that the annual cost, once all students are included in the ADM, would be \$17,015,250; that would be the increase to the base student allocation. He commented that is well below the number that might be spending on implementing Medicaid work requirements, for example. That is a fairly modest annual number being added to the \$1.2 or \$1.3 billion base student allocation. He asked if he were reading that correctly.

MR. BLACKWELL said that is the correct reading. By FY 2027, after all the programs had transitioned in, the foundation program would see an increase of \$17 million.

SENATOR BEGICH pointed out that the opportunity to prepare all Alaska's kids is one or two percent of the base student allocation number.

SENATOR COSTELLO asked Mr. Blackwell what the multiplier is for a special education student who is counted as one under the foundation formula.

MR. BLACKWELL clarified that she was referring to the school size adjustment. He explained that with the foundation formula, they identify the full-time equivalency students to generate an average daily membership (ADM) based on a 20-day count. If a student is enrolled for the full 20 days, the student is considered as one ADM. Then an adjustment is made based on the size of the school within that community. For very small schools, it can translate to about a 3.96, almost four, ADM increase for a very small school of between 10 and 19.9 ADM. Each one of those students gets weighted. A school of about ten students would get a weighting of about four ADM. The bigger the school, the smaller the weighting. For a school of about 1,000, one student is one ADM for the school size adjustment. Those

school size adjustments are added together and then go through the foundation formula and are multiplied by other multipliers, such as the district cost factor. Then there is a multiplier for special education and a multiplier for career and technical education. Each intensive-needs student is multiplied by 13. That is added to the product of previous calculations. At the end DEED looks at correspondence schools. Those students are multiplied by .9 and added to the total. At that point they take the adjusted ADM and multiply it by the base student allocation and come up with the basic need number.

SENATOR COSTELLO noted an earlier assertion that attending preschool programs reduces the numbers of special education students in schools. She recalled that the special education multiplier was 20 percent and suggested looking at the contemplated investment of this bill vs. what is spent for special education.

MR. BLACKWELL confirmed that the multiplier is 20 percent.

[10:45:30 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked if he was reasonably comfortable that the existing foundation formula is reasonably fair across the state.

MR. BLACKWELL answered that the current foundation formula provides funding to school districts in a systematic way.

SENATOR BEGICH said the legislature answered that question quite emphatically with the Augenblick study [Review of Alaska's School Funding Program prepared for the Alaska State Legislature by Augenblick, Palaich and Associates]. That study looked at every component of the foundation formula and the multipliers in detail and concluded that it was one of the fairest and most equitable foundation formulas in the country with two exceptions. One was something about a school count issue that the legislature fixed last year.

CHAIR STEVENS said that was his opinion as well.

SENATOR BIRCH asked if Anchorage students are weighted at less than one. He said he heard from the Anchorage School District that there is a disincentive to consolidate schools with school funding. If they have two undercapacity grade schools, for example, there is a disincentive to consolidate and close one.

MR. BLACKWELL replied that for school size, there would be instances in Anchorage, particularly for the very large high

schools, where a student may be weighted as less than one after going through the school size adjustment. For example, once 3,000 students in a school are run through the school size adjustment, the count might be 2,600 ADM.

He emphasized that those numbers were off the top of his head, but that is how the formula and school size works. The school size adjustment table assumes that smaller schools cost more money. The idea is that larger schools are more efficient so fewer resources are needed to operate that school. As a result, those students are weighted less for funding purposes.

SENATOR BIRCH commented that raises some questions about Anchorage having more square feet than it needs for the current number of students.

CHAIR STEVENS said school districts statewide are looking at consolidation so it would be a shame if there were a disincentive to consolidate.

MR. BLACKWELL noted that the legislature passed a school consolidation bill last year that provided a five-year step down to remove the disincentive. Districts that consolidated schools would see no decrease the first few years and then they would step down in years three through five to absorb the decrease over time.

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SENATOR COSTELLO recalled that bill tried to address the embedded economies of scale in the foundation formula which provides a disincentive for schools to combine. The foundation formula follows a student who moves from a smaller school for five years. She said the fact that the legislature had to remove the disincentive for consolidating tells her that that portion of the foundation formula is worth looking at because larger schools are able to offer more career and technical education than smaller schools. She said she would go on record as someone who is open to discussion of the foundation formula, regardless of how difficult and challenging that might be. It is important that legislators are all on board with how schools are funded. She expressed appreciation for the earlier description of the formula.

CHAIR STEVENS responded that foundation formula is clearly something they committee can spend time on trying to understand. He asked Mr. Blackwell to continue reviewing the fiscal notes.

MR. BLACKWELL said the second fiscal note, which is informational and has no associated cost, deals with the foundation program. The fiscal analysis explains that there is no fiscal impact on the foundation program because of the way the foundation is funded through the public education fund.

SENATOR BEGICH asked about the other fiscal notes.

MS. RIDDLE explained that one fiscal note is for the early learning coordination that proposes three positions and the associated costs amounting to \$350,000. The second fiscal note is the one that addresses the number of students and how that was calculated for the pre-K programs.

SENATOR BEGICH said if all potential students were rolled into the foundation formula without any preparation, it would be about \$17 million each year. He said he likes the way the fiscal note shows that the first five years are spent building capacity, to keep from creating bad pre-K. That is the one thing that must be done if this is to mean anything. He emphasized the importance of the grants program to prepare districts to do the right thing. It addresses such things as turnover issues and high-quality teachers. He said he appreciates that for less than 2 percent of the current base student allocation this will have a potentially significant impact on Alaska's kids as they graduate many years from now.

[10:57:34 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS noted that public testimony would be taken in a subsequent hearing. [He held SB 6 in committee.]

[10:57:51 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 10:57 a.m.