

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 11, 2020
9:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Mia Costello

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 6

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

- HEARD & HELD

PRESENTATION: UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA--PROGRAM REVIEW, TEACHER TRAINING, ENROLLMENTS

- HEARD

REVIIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 6

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

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) BEGICH

01/16/19	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/7/19
01/16/19	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/19	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/21/19	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

03/21/19	(S)	Heard & Held
03/21/19	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/16/19	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/16/19	(S)	Heard & Held
04/16/19	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
01/21/20	(S)	SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED-REFERRALS
01/21/20	(S)	EDC, FIN
01/23/20	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM SENATE FINANCE 532
01/23/20	(S)	Heard & Held
01/23/20	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
01/28/20	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
01/28/20	(S)	Heard & Held
01/28/20	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/04/20	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
02/04/20	(S)	Heard & Held
02/04/20	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/07/20	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
02/07/20	(S)	Heard & Held
02/07/20	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/11/20	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Reviewed anticipated changes in the committee substitute for SB 6.

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner
 Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions about proposed changes to SB 6.

MONICA GOYETTE, Ph.D., Superintendent
 Matanuska-Susitna School District
 Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke in favor of SB 6.

MARK STOCK, Ph.D., Deputy Superintendent
 Anchorage School District
 Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 6 on behalf of Anchorage School District Superintendent Dr. Deena Bishop.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on UA Teacher Programs, Training,
and Enrollments.

STEVE ATWATER, Ph.D., Executive Dean
Alaska College of Education
University of Alaska Southeast
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on UA Teacher Programs, Training,
and Enrollments.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:00:27 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, Hughes, and Chair Stevens. Senator Coghill arrived shortly thereafter.

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

[9:00:48 AM](#)

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

He advised his staff will review the requested changes in the forthcoming CS. He stated his intention to hear invited testimony and hold the bill for further review.

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, gave a shoutout to the substantial amount of work done by Senator Begich's staff and the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). He said the forthcoming committee substitute (CS) incorporates 34 amendments.

9:03:10 AM

Item: 1

Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend

Language/Changes: Amends terms "literacy" used throughout bill to "reading"

Justification/Consideration: To clarify and better align language with intent of the bill and modern vernacular

Item: 2

Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert

Language/Changes: Parents as Teachers Program Language from SB 182 (2012)

Justification/Consideration: Ensures the PAT program continues and ties into the high-quality early ed program work of SB 6.

MR. LAMKIN said this language would separate the Parents as Teachers program from the Alaska Reads Act.

Item: 3

Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert

Language/Changes: K-3 educators, administrators and parents shall have an opportunity for annual commentary on the efficacy of the Alaska Reads Act. The department shall establish, by regulation, a tool for this purpose. Annually, the department shall convene a panel of K-3 educators, administrators and parents review the effectiveness of the Alaska Reads Act. The panel may convene electronically

Justification/Consideration: Ensure all stakeholders, parents, teachers, admin, students, have an opportunity to provide feedback on implementation and effectiveness of Alaska Reads Act.

Item: 4

Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend

Language/Changes: Makes explicit that a previously retained student may not be retained a second time under the Alaska Reads Act.

Justification/Consideration: policy decision, compromise;

Item: 5

Amend/Insert/Delete: 5 Insert

Language/Changes: Amends AS 14.03.080(d) by changing the date a child may enter kindergarten to June 1

Justification/Consideration: policy decision,
compromise;

[9:04:29 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN noted that the current date is September 1.

Item: 6

Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend

Language/Changes: Amends AS 14.03.080(g) by changing
the date a child may enter preschool to July 1

Justification/Consideration: Ensure a child is at
least 4 when they enter preschool

Item: 7

Amend/Insert/Delete: Delete

Language/Changes: As relates to the number of students
within a district being retained from advancing to the
next grade, Delete "and publish on the district's
Internet website".

Justification/Consideration: Duplicates efforts
already being performed by DEED

Item: 8

Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert

Language/Changes: districts shall report "the number
of students assigned to each classroom in grades k-3"

Justification/Consideration: Requires districts to
report on class size

Item: 9

Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert

Language/Changes: "number and percentages of students
in grades k-3 who demonstrated improvement on expected
grade-level skills on..

Justification/Consideration: Ensures districts will
report on student improvement

Item: 10

Amend/Insert/Delete: Amends

Language/Changes: Inserts "skills" after "grade
level", to read "grade level skills"

Justification/Consideration: Students are not assessed
by grade in Kindergarten

Item: 11

Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend

Language/Changes: Five two or more years of experiencing teaching

Justification/Consideration: Reduces years of experience teaching kindergarten or another early education program, but requires additional coursework related to reading instruction as determined and required by the department

MR. LAMKIN said item 11 is designed to make that process easier.

[9:06:58 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said after Mr. Lamkin finishes, it will be good to talk to the department about data collection in numbers 7 and 11.

Item: 12

Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert

Language/Changes: coursework requirements will be established by the department in regulation

Justification/Consideration: Align language with changes proposed by DEED and other states

Item: 13

Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert

Language/Changes: "establish a waiver process for districts to apply to the commissioner to use an evidenced-based reading screening or assessment tool that is already in use in the district, to administer to students in..."

Justification/Consideration: Establishes a waiver process for districts to continue to use their evidence-based reading screening or assessment tool that may already be in use by the district

Item: 14

Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend (SAME AS #16,18,30, below)

Language/Changes: Replace "phonic" with "phonemic"

Justification/Consideration: Fixes drafting error

Item: 15

Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend

Language/Changes: Replace "science of reading" with "evidence based reading"

Justification/Consideration: Clarification purposes, conformity/ consistency

Item: 16

Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend
Language/Changes: Amends 5 components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension
Justification/Consideration: Clarification purposes, modern vernacular

9:08:33 AM

Item: 17
Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert
Language/Changes: Require consideration of the Recommendations from the 2018-19 Task Force on Reading Proficiency and Dyslexia
Justification/Consideration: Ensure recommendations to department on screening or assessment tools meet needs of all students, and to honor the previous work of leaders in reading science.

Item: 18
Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend
Language/Changes: Amends 5 components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension
Justification/Consideration: Clarification purposes

Item: 19
Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend
Language/Changes: Amend 70 hour requirement to "...implemented outside of regular school hours as directed in the student's individual reading improvement plan"
Justification/Consideration: Ensures intervention is dictated by student needs

9:09:21 AM

MR. LAMKIN said items 20, 21, and 22 make the written requirements less stringent. For example, notifications could be done during parent-teacher conferences.

Item: 20
Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert
Language/Changes: "or in conference"
Justification/Consideration: Allows a district or school to notify parents or guardians in writing or in conference after a student is identified as having a reading deficiency.

Item: 21
Amend/Insert/Delete: Delete
Language/Changes: "written"
Justification/Consideration: Aligns with above amendment. Deletes the requirement that the notification to parents be written.

Item: 22
Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert
Language/Changes: "shall provide written notification".
Justification/Consideration: Cleans up a proceeding section that would require a district or school to provide written notification to parents at 45 days

[9:09:42 AM](#)

Item: 23
Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend
Language/Changes: Amend subsection (e) (1): "scoring at a proficient or higher achievement level on the statewide screening or assessment tool or on the statewide summative assessment."
Justification/Consideration: Clarifies language regarding which achievement level a student should achieve to be considered for grade progression

Item: 24
Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend
Language/Changes: Removes "a" and replaces with "the"
Justification/Consideration: Clarifies language regarding "a" statewide summative assessment to "the" statewide summative assessment

Item: 25
Amend/Insert/Delete: Delete
Language/Changes: Removes "certified under AS 14.20", DEED certification standards
Justification/Consideration: Removes potential barriers to ensure there is an existing pool of qualified reading teachers exist

Item: 26
Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend
Language/Changes: As relates to notification that a 3rd grade student is subject to being retained, Change from 30 days notification to 45 days

Justification/Consideration: Alignment/consistency
with remainder of the bill

Item: 27

Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert

Language/Changes: Insert definition of "evidence based reading intervention": means the instruction or item described is based on reliable, trustworthy, and valid evidence and has demonstrated a record of success in adequately increasing students' reading competency in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, including oral language skills, and reading comprehension.

Justification/Consideration: Language provides definition for "evidence based reading intervention"

[9:11:35 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN noted the need for a definition of evidence-based reading.

Item: 28

Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend

Language/Changes: Adheres selection criteria for selection of 10 schools, based on lowest performing 10% of school as defined by AS 14.03.123

Justification/Consideration: Ensures all comprehensive support schools meet the criteria to apply for school improvement resources.

Item: 29

Amend/Insert/Delete: Delete

Language/Changes: Strike entire section (h), for redundancy (120 days to 45 notice of retention candidacy)

Justification/Consideration: Redundant, Aligns with amended language from P 14, Line 12

Item: 30

Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend (SAME AS #18 above)

Language/Changes: Amends 5 components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension

Justification/Consideration: Clarification purposes

[9:13:15 AM](#)

MR. LAMKIN said item 31 is in response to requests that the bill include a definition of reading specialist.

Item: 31

Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert

Language/Changes: Inserts definition of "Reading specialist": A reading specialist: an applicant shall hold a professional teacher license with an endorsement in an approved content area; have completed an approved graduate program for the preparation of reading specialists at an accepted institution of higher education, including a supervised practicum or internship as reading specialist OR have three or more years of fulltime, demonstrated classroom teaching experience where reading instruction was a primary responsibility; shall be knowledgeable about literacy instruction and shall have demonstrated competencies including: - Understanding of the Five Components of Reading Instruction as identified by the National Reading Panel; - Knowledge of and experience implementing effective reading instruction strategies and intervention methods; - Experience designing and implementing school-wide Response to Intervention (RTI) programs and/or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS); - Understanding of and experience with reading/literacy screeners, including data analysis that informs instruction; - Knowledge of dyslexia and other learning disorders that affect reading achievement; - Knowledge of and ability to effectively articulate the methods, issues, and resources involved in support of student instruction to a wide variety of audiences including but not limited to staff, parents, and students with reading problems for whom English is not their native language; And shall have completed required Alaska Reads coursework as identified by the Department of Education and Early Development.

Justification/Consideration: To ensure education and professional requirements are clear

[9:15:28 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said he wanted to hear the department's interpretation of item 31 and he'd also like to give the university an opportunity to address it.

Item: 32

Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert

Language/Changes: Amends transition language: Allows department to use school accountability rankings from

2018-2019 and have that district ranking task completed by July 1, 2021.

Justification/Consideration: Allows department to use previous school accountability rankings to determine the lowest performing 10% of districts while the district develops processes to rank districts

Item: 33

Amend/Insert/Delete: Amend

Language/Changes: Report by Commissioner of Education and Early Development. Not later than 3 months after the effective date of this Act, and continuing annually not later than the 30th legislative day of each regular session, the commissioner of education and early development shall submit a report to the state Board of Education and Early Development and the education committees of the Alaska House of Representatives and the Senate describing the progress made to implement this Act. The report will include information collected under AS 14.03.120 including data on how districts are using Inservice days for professional development

Justification/Consideration: Amends language to require annually reporting by DEED to state Board of Education and education committees of both legislative bodies regarding implementation and effectiveness of this act.

Item: 34

Amend/Insert/Delete: Insert

Language/Changes: Report by Commissioner of Education and Early Development. Not later than 3 months after the effective date of this Act, and continuing annually not later than the 30th legislative day of each regular session, the commissioner of education and early development shall submit a report to the state Board of Education and Early Development and the education committees of the Alaska House of Representatives and the Senate describing the progress made to implement this Act. The report will include information collected under AS 14.03.120 including data on how districts are using Inservice days for professional development

Justification/Consideration: Amends language to require annually reporting by DEED to state Board of Education and education committees of both legislative

bodies regarding implementation and effectiveness of this act.

CHAIR STEVENS asked the commissioner to speak to data collection.

9:18:08 AM

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, said he appreciated the efforts of Mr. Lamkin, Loki Tobin, staff for Senator Begich, and Erin Hardin, DEED Legislative Liaison, in considering all the comments and incorporating them into the bill. He also thanked all those who have provided comments. He asked Senator Stevens to repeat his question.

CHAIR STEVENS asked for the department's plans to collect data.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied the department already does various data collection and they will continue to do so as efficiently and non-intrusively to districts as possible. Last year the department created a new web site to present data and they will try to incorporate the new data collected under this bill into the current online data presentation.

CHAIR STEVENS asked for an explanation of the difference between phonics and phonemic.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered that phonics is print and phonemic is sound. Phonemic awareness is an awareness that words are made up of different sounds. A child has to understand words are made up of sounds in order to learn to read. Phonics is understanding that letters represent those sounds.

CHAIR STEVENS asked about the definition of reading specialist in item 31.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied the bill tries to establish some qualifications and a high bar for people providing interventions and support for students while recognizing that the state has a recruitment issue. It is also important to recognize that in rural Alaska some of the best interventionists are paraprofessionals. Many have lived in the community for a long time and districts have invested a lot in their training. Many schools have turnover problems, but classroom aides stay longer. The state has to strike a balance between qualification requirements for training and higher education, while also not making the problem worse by discounting some of the

paraprofessionals. Some of the changes in the committee substitute address that balance.

CHAIR STEVENS asked what his expectations are for the university.

[9:24:13 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied he expects great cooperation and positive interaction with the university. If the legislature passes the Alaska Reads Act, DEED can take that act to the university and ask how the department and university can work together to make sure the university will prepare teachers to teach based on the bill.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON noted that the department asked for an increment in the budget so that the State Board of Education can meet more often in anticipation of meeting with the Board of Regents to ensure that the university is providing the teachers needed to implement the bill.

CHAIR STEVENS said he understands that the department will be an integral part of professional development. Districts will not be asked to figure this out on their own.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON responded that the bill includes positions for the department to provide staff development. The department will continue connecting with partners, including the university. A number of school districts are providing great professional development and the department hopes to facilitate that around the state.

[9:26:08 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES observed that the phrase "approved graduate programs" is used. She asked if there are programs already identified and whether DEED would identify them. She further asked if the University of Alaska has an approved graduate program.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON responded that getting students through the program and growing the state's own teachers starts with getting more kids reading because kids who read proficiently by third grade are more likely to graduate from high school and go on to the university and complete these programs. The university does have approved teacher education programs. Dean Atwater will give a presentation today about the list of UA's approved programs.

[9:27:44 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH shared that his hope for the report to the legislature, which will be part of the committee substitute, is that the legislature will learn from implementation about what is working and what needs to be retooled on a regular basis. He asked if that was his understanding.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON responded that the department has had excellent partnerships with many in the education community with the Alaska Education Challenge. If the Alaska Reads Act passes, he wants to interact with that same community on the implementation. This is an opportunity to refine and improve implementation. He looks forward to having a regular, annual ongoing opportunity to interact with stakeholders on how the implementation is going and what needs to be modified.

CHAIR STEVENS expressed appreciation to the commissioner and his department for being so intensely involved in this bill. He called on Dr. Goyette to testify.

[9:29:51 AM](#)

MONICA GOYETTE, Ph.D., Superintendent, Matanuska-Susitna School District, Palmer, Alaska, thanked Governor Dunleavy, Senator Begich, and Commissioner Johnson for their work on the Alaska Reads Act. She said the Mat-Su Borough School District legislative priorities include evidence-based literacy policies and practices. Over the past year the commissioner has repeatedly sought input from superintendents regarding reading proficiency and his goals for bringing forward legislation. The components of the bill, early education, evidence-based intervention systems, and school accountability, are not new to education. She is not concerned about any of the items in the bill if it passes. She is deeply concerned about Alaska's children who do not have access to evidence-based reading practices.

DR. GOYETTE said 750 students or 50 percent of next year's incoming kindergarten class are currently enrolled in district-funded preschool programs. The district funds these with federal education and special education dollars. All principals, including secondary, unanimously voted to set aside 10 percent of Title 1 funds to support early learning opportunities. If additional funding is made available, Mat-Su will expand its efforts. If not, it will still remain a district priority because the research supporting kindergarten readiness compels the district to do so.

DR. GOYETTE said that over the past decade the district has systemically implemented a comprehensive multitiered system of support (MTSS), formerly known as response to intervention. Each iteration gets better but the concept stays consistent. This includes a comprehensive screening and assessment system. This is not new to Alaska. In 2014 and 2015, DEED required early literacy screening. After several years, the direct funding from the state went away. However, the practice should not have stopped. It is a critical component to ensuring that all students are passing reading benchmarks. Early screening is inexpensive and quick to administer. This data is available in multiple formats for schools and communities to use. The system cannot get better if the districts and department are not willing to be transparent about areas of success and ones that need improvement.

[9:32:33 AM](#)

DR. GOYETTE stated that another key component of MTSS is evidence-based curriculum, both at the core grade level and for intervention materials. She noted that this was not new to education. In 2000, the National Reading Panel issued a report on the science of reading. This includes phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, reading and oral fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary development. Curriculums should align with the state standards, have a large literature base supporting its efficacy, and be implemented with fidelity. This year DEED awarded reading grants to districts to identify effective curriculum. This process will help smaller districts identify and implement evidence-based programs. The work of MTSS should be facilitated by reading experts. For over a decade, Mat-Su has supported an instructional coach in each of its comprehensive elementary schools. Through braided funding of general operating and federal funds, Mat-Su has secured these vital positions. Mat-Su does not view any component of this bill as an unfunded mandate. It is simply a prioritization of the funding the district already receives.

DR. GOYETTE observed that in listening to testimony, school accountability has brought the most concern. She questioned whether there would be the same concern if Alaska were first in the nation for reading. Transparency in data combined with targeted interventions and support has helped Mat-Su increase its Alaska Native graduation rates by 20 percent in the last four years. It started with working with local tribes and acknowledging inequities in the system. It is not easy to take responsibility for weaknesses, but it must start there, she said.

9:34:32 AM

DR. GOYETTE admitted that despite the systems in place, Mat-Su still has kids not reading proficiently by the end of third grade. That is critical because in kindergarten through third grade, children are taught to read. In fourth grade, the transition is to reading to learn when as much as half the curriculum in public schools will be delivered through reading.

DR. GOYETTE advised that students who are not reading by the end of third grade are statistically four times more likely to drop out of high school, and six times more likely if they live in poverty. Eighty-five percent of juveniles who interface with the court system are below proficient in reading. She emphasized that everyone should be more concerned about what happens when children are moved on without having learned to read than implementing a proficiency-based promotion policy.

DR. GOYETTE added that as the bill works through the legislative process, she hopes that it maintains the critical components that were proven effective in other states. This should not be about what all the adults can agree on. It should be about proven practices to ensure a high-quality education for every student every day.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if she has concerns about the retention provisions in the bill.

DR. GOYETTE replied not at all. The Education Commission of the States reviewed legislative reading policies in other states and identified early education, school accountability, and evidence-based practices as key components. One part of accountability is retention. It is one of many tools at the end of four years of reading instruction that can be available to students, parents, and staff. None of the states with retention policies saw a spike in retention rates. These states saw a spike in student achievement. If Alaska is looking to replicate this success, it is essential to replicate all of the components.

9:37:31 AM

SENATOR HUGHES asked if she would have concerns about a stronger proficiency-based promotion policy if it were phased in over time.

DR. GOYETTE replied not at all. In fact, she is concerned that through this process, the accountability in the bill is being weakened. Developmentally, children learn to read at different

rates. There are kindergarteners who know how to read, but by the end of third grade, the transition away from teaching reading to synthesis, evaluation, and analysis starts. Retention is important as a last resort. In education, time and support are variables. That is seen in this bill. Outside of the school term, reading time is critical. Some students need additional time and that may mean an additional year.

SENATOR HUGHES thanked her for having the courage to make that statement. Her commitment, whether or not a stronger policy is adopted, to work with Mat-Su schools as if there is a stronger policy is clear. Senator Hughes said she looks forward to the outcomes.

SENATOR BEGICH asked what parents' role is in a decision about retention.

DR. GOYETTE answered that parents should be the final decision maker in all aspects of their child's education. If the school district has been working with them and demonstrated that it has accessed all resources and believes additional time and support could be of benefit, she believes the district will have formed a good relationship with parents and the parents will come to the same conclusion. Things will not work without support from the parents.

CHAIR STEVENS said he appreciates her thinking that reading is foundational and that this bill is not an unfunded mandate but a requirement of all education. He called Dr. Mark Stock to testify.

[9:41:45 AM](#)

MARK STOCK, Ph.D., Deputy Superintendent, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, said that he would read a letter from the Anchorage School District (ASD) Superintendent Deena Bishop and then add his personal commentary.

DR. STOCK read Dr. Bishop's written testimony:

Dear members of the Senate Education Committee,
Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I want to begin with an affirmation for the bill considered, Sponsor Substitute for SB6. As the superintendent of the Anchorage School District, I want to communicate that Senator Begich and his cosigners' reading bill, the Alaska Reads Act, aligns with our district's strategic plan to have 90 percent of third grade

students reading on grade level. In addition, ASD's legislative agenda provides support to this statewide effort. Alaska depends on this legislation to empower our teachers to ensure students are readers and thinkers in today's global society.

The evidence is clear that Alaska's students are not performing as well as their peers in the nation in reading. Not only is our status on the exams evident of this, the fact that we are losing ground is also clear as we move further away from the mean in grade four to grade eight. Comments surrounding this bill have criticized the use of data to gauge success. Please know that whether or not we like national assessments, one question we must ask ourselves is, "WHY is there a difference between our students' abilities and students from other states?" I know our students and teachers are as smart, as hard working, and as caring as any other students and teachers in the nation. The delta between our achievement and other students in the United States should have all Alaskans demanding a change in how public schools are preparing our children to live in the information world.

9:44:08 AM

The science is clear on effective ways to teach students to read. It is inclusive of the five areas of reading grounded in brain-based research. You have proposed a bill to make a change in our state—to guarantee all students receive the benefit of excellent, evidence-informed instruction. Your courage to do this is highly respected. I have written earlier in the year of the need for this legislation. Our commissioner has asked superintendents on multiple occasions to provide input. Please know I am not interested in a consensus bill by which everyone can be happy with the outcome while picking apart the essential tenants that research has proven are good for students. Rather, I prefer a bill that will make a positive change, as improving the outcomes for Alaska's children is the primary reason public schools exist.

I understand that Alaska has not been down the reading road before. Just like any new road in our state, a great amount of dust is thrust about as one first

travels along a bumpy trail. The dust often makes it difficult to see the destination. However, continued forward momentum, with heightened awareness of needs, leads to a clearer vision. The dust around this bill will settle. I am confident that you have heard from stakeholders across the state who have provided feedback to allow DEED's Administrative Codes to guide us on this newly dusted trail.

In Anchorage, too many of our students are not reading at expected levels. Our student learning data are not what our community expects. Please know that I am not shamed by what our data represent, rather I am socially incentivized to improve our teaching and learning in the area of reading. Monitoring success is essential to growth. We should inspect what we expect.

In summary, I am grateful for your fiscal support of preschool. I understand the need for assessment and reporting. I accept accountability in public education. A school system that allows continued feedback to parents as well as their involvement and action is essential to schools and classrooms.

Thank you again for your courage to make a change. Legislation must remain relevant and uphold and reflect the values and beliefs of a society. The Committee Substitute for SB6 does just this as it provides for all Alaska's children to leave our schools with the fundamental skill of reading. A literate citizenry is paramount to a democratic society

[9:46:59 AM](#)

DR. STOCK shared that this is his fourth decade in public education. He has been a superintendent for 15 years and prior to coming to the Anchorage School district, he lived in Indiana and Wyoming. Those two states are in the top 10 in the nation of NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores for fourth grade reading. Those states took different approaches to reading but share some commonalities. First, Indiana and Wyoming raised their standards and expectations and eliminated some things, including lower-track classes.

DR. STOCK said Wyoming was different in that expectations came through its funding formula. Wyoming put in its formula things such as mandated reading tutors and extra support and

instructional coaches that were funded outside the BSA (base student allocation) model so that schools would make sure that money was spent on the right things. Both of those appear to be working. He noted that he also spent five years at a university training future superintendents. He said there was a time when reading, writing, civics, and math were the core focus that education provided, but in the 70s, 80s, and 90s the floodgates opened and more expectations were laid upon schools.

[9:48:59 AM](#)

DR. STOCK said this bill does two things. First, it will codify evidence-based instruction, which some educators know works well. However, it is not innovative, nor is Alaska a pioneer, since many other states have done this. Alaska would simply put in statute evidence-based instruction. Secondly, it will give principals and teachers permission to prioritize evidence-based instruction in grades K-3. Principals need accountability and permission to focus on what is most important, he said.

DR. STOCK said the issue of academic freedom has arisen in Anchorage in recent years, but that should only go towards success. There is no freedom to fail Alaskan students. This bill puts the state on the course to succeed.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if Dr. Stock's would expect to see greater student success and Alaska move up from the bottom in nationwide studies with passage of SB 6.

DR. STOCK replied absolutely, especially with the commitment to training. Recruitment and retention are secondary issues. The bill gets to the heart of it through raised expectations and accountability and permission to prioritize.

SENATOR HUGHES applauded the high bar that Anchorage has set for 90 percent of students being proficient. She asked if the district has a timeframe to achieve that. While concerns have been raised about a stronger state policy of proficiency-based promotion, based on her conversations, she sensed that Dr. Bishop did not seem concerned.

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DR. STOCK replied Anchorage School Board's current strategic plan requires 90 percent proficiency by 2020. However, the district has a long way to go to get to that point. The new strategic five year plan will outline a time frame for student proficiency. He agreed with Superintendent Goyette and Dr. Bishop that retention is a key leverage point. Making it a

priority draws attention and creates the energy and leverage. Carefully reading the legislation shows that there are plenty of places for alternative methods for proving proficiency. The retention policy is important but it must allow for waivers and alternatives. He pointed out that Superintendent Goyette said that if parents are not supportive of what happens with their child, it is a nonstarter.

SENATOR BEGICH clarified that he heard Dr. Stock say that he is comfortable with the way the bill addresses progression, early education, and those things.

DR. STOCK answered that is correct.

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CHAIR STEVENS held SB 6 in committee.

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At ease

Presentation: University of Alaska--Program Review, Teacher Training, Enrollments

[9:57:32 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting and announced the next item for consideration was a presentation titled "University of Alaska--Program Review, Teacher Training, Enrollments." He called Dr. Layer and Dr. Atwater to the table.

[9:57:48 AM](#)

STEVE ATWATER, Ph.D., Executive Dean, Alaska College of Education, University of Alaska Southeast, Juneau, Alaska, introduced himself.

PAUL LAYER, Ph.D., Vice President, Academics, Students, and Research, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska, said he and Dr. Atwater would follow up on items that UA President Johnsen addressed in his testimony [to the joint House and Senate Education Committees] a week or so ago. He and Dr. Atwater would also expand on their progress in teacher education and discuss student recruitment and strategies. As committee members know, enrollment has been dropping and each university has been innovative to improve recruitment, retention, and graduation.

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DR. LAYER noted that the presentation is an abbreviated version of one planned for the upcoming Board of Regents Academic and

Student Affairs Committee. He said he and Dr. Atwater would cover an accreditation overview, teacher education update, student recruitment and enrollment in their presentation.

DR. LAYER began with a briefing on accreditation on slide 4. Accreditation is the gold standard for any university. It is a recognition by an external group and by the U.S. Department of Education that academic programs and graduates are meeting standards. It is done by an independent evaluator. It allows students to be mobile to move through universities, be eligible for federal aid, and assures employers that students are of high quality. There are three types of accreditation: regional, national, and program/specialized.

DR. LAYER stated the Board of Regents Academic Student Affairs Committee receives a quarterly update from each university and the board receives an annual, extensive written report about accreditation. He noted that he provided a copy of last year's report to the committee.

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DR. LAYER pointed out on slide 5 that the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), and the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) are separately accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) and all are in good standing. NWCCU works on a seven-year cycle. UAF was scheduled for a site review by NWCCU last fall, but because of the uncertainty about budgets and the financial exigency declaration, the visit was delayed until September of this year.

DR. LAYER said most of the documentation he provided to the committee was about specialized accreditation. UA has over 60 specialized accreditations across the system. Slide 5 highlighted four of them, for engineering, business, nursing, and teaching. The Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP) accredits Alaska's teacher programs. Many organizations' licensure boards rely on students graduating from accredited programs. The Alaska Board of Education requires that students graduate from CAEP-accredited programs or those that substantially meet CAEP accreditation. Good standing with both the regional accreditor and the program accreditors is critical, and the board is constantly monitoring that.

CHAIR STEVENS stated that the legislature was shocked by the loss of UAA accreditation for the teacher training program. Everyone he spoke to was surprised to learn this was about to

happen. He asked if the annual report for the Board of Regents has red flags or a heads up of any potential problems with accreditation.

DR. LAYER answered that that is the intent of that report and updates. There were some communication lapses in reporting to the board the status of the accreditation review for UAA programs. The university is reviewing the lessons learned from that seismic event. It was a major loss for the university.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if the university has learned lessons so that something like this will not sneak up on anyone in the future.

DR. LAYER replied that is the expectation. He believes safeguards are in place now.

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SENATOR BEGICH shared that for three years he listened to the university tell the legislature how it would recruit and build teachers in the state. The data is showing that as a result of the loss of the accreditation, the university has failed the education system in the state. The number of teacher candidates has dropped almost in half. He does not see a plan but he sees the university upset that it got caught out. He expressed hope to hear about a plan by the end of the presentation.

DR. LAYER replied he would come back to that at the end. He thanked the State Board of Education and Commissioner Johnson for acting quickly to provide mechanisms for UAA students to get licensure. The board decided to discontinue those programs and have UAF and UAS develop programs in Southcentral to meet those needs.

DR. LAYER presented the timeline of the UAA College of Education and initial licensure accreditation review on slide 8. He said Dr. Atwater would speak to where UA is now and discuss the university's future plans.

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DR. ATWATER said slide 9 shows which education units at UAA, UAF, and UAS are functioning and offering programs. The UAA School of Education is not offering initial licensure, he said.

DR. ATWATER showed the accreditation status of the UA education units on slide 10. He emphasized that the CAEP accreditation is for the unit, the entire school, not an entire program. It would

be wrong to assume that an elementary program was at fault for the loss of accreditation. That is an important distinction.

DR. ATWATER reviewed how the spring semester enrollment numbers are dropping as shown on slide 11. This follows the university trend of dropping enrollment, and this is a national trend in teacher preparation programs, which is down 30 percent in the last decade.

DR. ATWATER showed in slide 12 how UAA enrollment in initial licensure and advanced program majors was dropping quickly in the last three years prior to the loss of accreditation. Fairbanks was flat and Juneau was dropping a little. Students transferring into UAF and UAS out of Anchorage are responsible for an uptick in Fairbanks and Juneau. Obviously, only 100 people enrolled at UAA is a concern. The university is tasked with the challenge of recruiting students into the teaching profession. It has become harder to recruit teachers into the profession across the country and particularly in Alaska, since people are simply not drawn to the profession. However, the university is making a concerted, coordinated effort to recruit students.

[10:12:00 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked why people are not drawn to the profession, particularly in Alaska.

DR. ATWATER answered that there are a variety of reasons. The teaching profession is more complicated than in the past because of a myriad of things going on in schools so a lot more is required of teachers now. There is a lot more challenging student behavior in schools and there are external factors such as salary and retirement, the incentives that bring people to the profession. All of these are coming together to help people decide to do something different. Finally, not all teachers that UA prepares work in the field. For a variety of reasons, only 60 percent of the graduates with teaching certificates take jobs the year following graduation, but they may get into the workforce later. He pointed out that hiring teachers into the K-12 system is outside of the university's control.

SENATOR BEGICH observed that the governor in his State of the State speech identified teacher recruitment and retention as critical issues. He expressed hope that that would be addressed later this year.

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DR. ATWATER showed the table of completions for all programs at UAA, UAF, and UAS from 2017-2019 on slide 13. The three education units have a variety of programs. While the number of completions is down, it is not dropping off quite as much. The number of completions reflects that initial licensure is not the only thing that UA does. It has advanced and graduate programs.

DR. ATWATER shared the number of first-time completers of UA initial licensure programs on slide 14. The expected number for this year is only 158. That is concerning because the number of vacancies in the state is well above that each year. The university is working hard to bring people into the fold to turn that number around, but the number was going down before the loss of accreditation at UAA.

DR. ATWATER showed that four students who transferred to UAF from UAA completed in the fall of 2019 and 28 are scheduled to complete in spring 2020. Seven completed at UAS in the fall of 2019 and 24 are scheduled to complete in spring 2020.

DR. ATWATER said UA education graduates are well received. Each year the three units participate in different surveys. One is of the principals who hired the teachers eight months later. That feedback is positive. The university uses the Network for Excellence in Teaching (NExT) Survey, which is nationally validated. NExT is used across the country so UA can compare itself to national survey statistics. He showed the results of the NExT Survey on slide 18.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if his assumption is that Alaskan students who become teachers are more likely to remain in Alaska than those hired from outside.

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DR. ATWATER replied UA knows that UA-prepared teachers are more likely to stay in the profession longer in Alaska and stay at the site of hire longer. It only makes sense when one thinks about the logistics of moving to a remote community. Many of UA candidates do their teaching in remote communities. These teachers are Alaskans, while those from the lower 48 often have a difficult adjustment.

DR. ATWATER said he would focus on what is happening in Southcentral Alaska because he knows that is a concern. The table on slide 21 summarizes what UAF is doing about UAA students with face-to-face courses on the UAA campus. UAF has a strong presence at UAA and this will only increase.

DR. ATWATER said one slide 22 shows the percentage of classes taken online vs. face to face is the same in Anchorage and Fairbanks. Much of the instruction is delivered by distance. At UAS, the majority of the instruction is delivered by distance. Students are taking advantage of multiple universities to pursue their degrees. Online options are critical to that.

CHAIR STEVENS asked whether he thought the use of online classes would increase in Anchorage and Fairbanks.

DR. ATWATER responded yes. It is also driven by need. Slide 23 captures the idea that there is not just one type of student pursuing an education degree. The slide shows how students in Southcentral have choices in location and course delivery method. Student B, for example, lives in Anchorage and is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in elementary but takes classes from UAF, UAA, and UAS. In the past there was criticism that courses across the UA system did not transfer. Now the university is set up to serve students in a variety of ways. The slide shows four scenarios with different approaches to meet the needs of students. All Anchorage students do not drive to the UAA campus to take classes, and the transfer credits are working quite well.

DR. ATWATER said the university is embracing the responsibility of the recruitment and retention of teachers. One of the primary ways is with the Alaska Statewide Mentoring Project. UA President Johnsen supports that with the university budget. Mentors are working with over 150 early career teachers in 26 districts. Districts are also spending their dollars on this. It is a shared fiscal responsibility. Districts recognize the value of this service.

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DR. ATWATER said the university has invested a lot of money into Educators Rising, a national organization that helps steer high school students to the teaching profession. Educators Rising has a presence in more than 35 districts, and more than 100 students will be in Fairbanks next month for the annual conference. It is too early to know if this is leading to more teachers, but the university is steering students into the profession in a coordinated way that has not been done before. Districts are also helping fund this effort.

DR. ATWATER pointed out that another service the university has provided for years is Alaska Teacher Placement, a clearinghouse

for job vacancies, job fairs, and recruitment across the country. It is funded by the university and by fees.

DR. ATWATER shared the history of Educators Rising on slide 25. Districts at the high school level are taking ownership of getting students interested in teaching. The university is extending the curriculum into middle school.

DR. LAYER reviewed university initiatives on slide 26, Going Forward. As described earlier, the university has established programs in Southcentral to meet student needs. The university must now inform students by coordinating websites, marketing, recruiting, and advising them, so students will have clear ideas of their options. UAF will continue to ramp up face-to-face classes in Anchorage and hire additional faculty as students return. Many students enrolled in the education program stepped out this year to see what would happen, due to budget uncertainty and to see what the university would do for potential teachers. The university wants to assure these students that pathways are available. For example, the university is aligning curriculum across the campuses and is working with the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to prepare curriculum in areas such as reading.

[10:27:14 AM](#)

DR. LAYER said as Dr. Atwater pointed out, the university wants to grow its own teachers with programs like Educators Rising and to encourage students to consider the teacher profession.

DR. LAYER said this year has been a time to reflect to make sure the university is on the correct pathway. This week President Johnsen will give a similar presentation to the board outlining a pathway and a process to look at where the university is regarding the creation of the Alaska College of Education and meeting teacher needs in Anchorage. The university will be soliciting proposals from stakeholders to guide UA to better meet state needs regarding teacher preparation. The university has a tight timeline. It will get feedback from all constituents this spring, look at the different options, and the board will implement those processes in the current budget environment and with current demographics.

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SENATOR HUGHES said she read an email from a teacher stating that excellent teaching in reading has not been a strength of higher education in Alaska. Senator Hughes pointed out that one way a person could become a reading specialist is through an

approved graduate program. However, the reading specialists work with the K-3 classroom teachers, some of whom came from the UA system. She expressed concern if K-3 teachers have an impression that the university does not equip them properly in reading methods. She asked whether the university is teaching science-based methods of teaching reading or if it needs to make adjustments so their graduates will be passing proficient readers out of their classrooms.

DR. ATWATER said:

To answer the last part of it, are we prepared to make changes. Absolutely. As part of all of our processes we're constantly changing, we're constantly improving, so that would be a regular thing that we do. I don't think that criticism is necessarily fair of the university, I really don't. However, I would like you to invite faculty members from UA to testify by invitation to this committee about what they do. I do have the learning outcomes for the reading courses. This notion that somehow that UA dismisses the science of reading is false. We are definitely teaching the main components of reading. We are definitely working very closely with the school districts once the students are into the clinical setting of the internship and the practicums that they do. I don't believe that we're setting our teachers up for failure. I think that's wrong."

He said the big five components that are referred to are a standard part of the foundations of literacy courses. Students are introduced to those right away and to interventions and progress monitoring. He could go into greater detail, but he feels the university is preparing students well to have success in classrooms.

DR. ATWATER said from his own experience, comprehension is the most important piece. This morning he looked at a fourth grade sample question for the NAEP. The question and the passage students have to read are complicated. It is not as simple as some might assume and completely dependent on comprehension. Since the Reading First Act in 2001, incredible attention has been paid to some of the big five, but comprehension has not been emphasized. As part of this process, he wants to make sure that comprehension gets equal footing because ultimately, the only reason to read is to comprehend.

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SENATOR HUGHES clarified that Dr. Atwater said the university is adequately preparing teachers. She asked if he has tracked the university-trained teachers to see if they are successful at creating proficient readers in their classrooms. If the university has not been tracking its teachers, she asked if that is something it will do in the future. She offered her belief that there is a breakdown in teacher preparation.

DR. ATWATER replied the university will be monitoring this more aggressively than it has in the past. It is not fair to say that the university was not cognizant of the need to prepare its teachers to teach reading, but [SB 6] has heightened that awareness. The surveys he shared earlier were broader and not specific about teaching reading. However, the university's goal is for its graduates to succeed in school districts. He acknowledged that university students may not have been introduced to a specific curriculum since the university does not teach a specific one. Instead, the university teaches the theory about why the curriculum is developed. The exposure to reading instruction is driven primarily by the clinical experience at the internship level. Teachers who show up in an elementary school in Anchorage will have a very specific expectation about curriculum. These teachers will have an understanding of why that curriculum was developed, but the teachers may not be familiar with the curriculum. That may require additional training, he said.

SENATOR HUGHES said DEED is taking on the role [with SB 6] of ensuring that teaching staff across the state receive professional development so that teachers will be equipped with methods. She said she hopes that the university will use that same type of teaching, so that students graduating will have that professional development and will not need DEED to retrain them. She asked if he will review what DEED will teach existing teachers, so that new teachers will have the same education and be taught the same methods.

DR. ATWATER agreed that it would since the university's responsibility is to serve K-12, but as things evolve, the university will change its practices.

10:38:17 AM

CHAIR STEVENS said he was surprised that only 60 percent of students who go through the teaching program go into teaching. He expressed concern that 40 percent do not teach. He asked if students are taking a year off.

DR. ATWATER clarified that percentage relates to the year following graduation, and the percentage of graduates who go into the field of teaching increases over time. For example, some teachers may seek a specific job in their community or their decision may be connected to family relationships. A higher percentage of teachers who already have a bachelor's degree and complete the intensive MAT (Master of Arts in Teaching) or MEd (Master of Education) go straight into teaching. These education students are typically older and more focused than a 22-year-old graduating with a bachelor's degree.

CHAIR STEVENS expressed interest in receiving the statistics for five years after graduation.

SENATOR BEGICH disclosed that he runs a scholarship program that funds students who predominantly go to the University of Alaska system for education or public service. For the first time in five years, those applying to go into the field of education is significantly higher than in the past. He does not know if it is connected yet to efforts like Educators Rising, but it is a little good news.

DR. LAYER displayed slide 28 and noted the decline in enrollment at all the universities since 2011 reflects a national trend in higher education. Alaska has one of lowest college rates in the country, which perhaps reflects the idea that college education in Alaska is not necessary to get a good job, but as the state transitions into more of an information economy, these jobs will need more college-educated graduates in the workforce.

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DR. LAYER said that in the fall 2019, UAA had a larger dip in enrollment, which is a concern. Many factors regarding student loans, the budget, and programs control that. That is something the university needs to continue to work on. He said he would not highlight what each university is doing to improve recruitment, retention, and graduation. As a system, the university has programs to bring students to the university, but each university has its own demographics and region and its own specialization. It is not a one-size-fits-all. Each university has developed its own strategy to reach its own markets.

DR. LAYER shared that UAA is looking at the student experience and the first semester is the most critical. UAA has focused on Southcentral to recruit students, as well as statewide, and on

that key first year experience. UAA has developed new tools to reach students and has ads about the unique aspects of UAA.

DR. LAYER showed UAA's major approaches to impact student success outcomes on slide 32. He said every employee at every one of the universities is a recruiter and retention specialist. That is the culture the university is building. It is not just the advising center's role.

DR. LAYER said UAA is starting to see some effects. Slide 34 shows the percent of students enrolled in math and writing their first semester. Students are getting better placement into courses right away, which allows quicker progression.

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DR. LAYER emphasized that for all the universities these are data-driven initiatives. UAF is looking at performance indicators for student success, how to target and prioritize student recruitment, and how to support students moving forward. One example of that is the Nanook Pledge, a merit scholarship for incoming first-year, transfer, and readmitted students. One issue is affordability and concern about debt at all the universities. Next to Utah, Alaska has the most debt averse students. Students are reluctant to take on debt and will postpone going to university or stop going to university to avoid debt. The Alaska Performance Scholarship no longer covers tuition. That scholarship and other state scholarships do not cover the full cost of tuition. UA is more affordable than its peers, but it is still an investment that students are sometimes reluctant to make.

SENATOR BEGICH said that was one of his concerns about UAA lacking accreditation. From his personal experience, all the students from the Anchorage area who have applied to his scholarship program are from lower-income brackets. More promotional material from the university about distance learning opportunities might address the debt and other issues.

DR. LAYER said the strategies he was sharing are for all programs, not just education programs. UAF has moved a number of programs completely online to compete with other schools that are recruiting Alaskan students. UA wants to show those students that the Alaskan education experience is superior because of the way it can reach students.

SENATOR HUGHES noted that Alaska has 10,000 students per grade level cohort, which means about 40,000 high school students.

Senator Stevens has a middle college school bill. The university is down about 10,000 students since 2011. For some districts, university enrollment cost less per student than high school enrollment. It seems that partnerships with districts should be happening.

SENATOR HUGHES shared that she saw a short testimony of a fellow who had access to Khan Academy while he was incarcerated for 15 years. Now he is at Stanford University. Alaska releases about 15,000 offenders each year and a high percentage of them struggled academically with reading. She hopes that can be changed within prison walls because to reduce crime and victims, offenders coming out need to lead meaningful, productive lives and have careers. She challenged the university to consider how to partner with the Department of Corrections. She opined that prisons need Internet access for education and job-seeking purposes. She calculated that between high school and offenders, the university has a possible 55,000 enrollees.

[10:52:22 AM](#)

DR. LAYER said UAF has a pilot program with the Fairbanks correctional facility for creative writing. Some other programs are being developed to reach that population. For high school students, less than 50 percent of graduates go to any level of higher education. UA has middle colleges with Mat-Su and Anchorage. A middle college is starting this fall with Fairbanks North Star School District. UAF also has agreements with over 30 school districts for virtual middle college. It is a voluntary, pilot program. It seems to be growing rapidly. Middle college is win-win-win for all parties involved, and the university wants to grow it.

DR. LAYER noted that UA is examining how to make sure Alaskan students complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) so students can identify available federal aid since Alaska has one of the lowest FAFSA completion rates in the country. For example, UAF e-Campus has created an online financial literacy class that will be part of middle college programs and students will complete the FAFSA during the class.

DR. LAYER said since UAF is a research university, it takes a more aggressive stance on recruiting out of state students.

DR. LAYER said one of seven Alaskans falls into the category of having some college but no degree. The university attempts to offer students who are in the workforce micro credentials in their fields.

DR. LAYER added that UAS is using data for enrollment strategies by looking at and targeting markets. He wanted to show that each university understands its target audience and is drawing on its strengths and regional areas. He mentioned that community campuses are working with industry partners to provide career and technical skills students need.

CHAIR STEVENS thanked Dr. Layer and Dr. Atwater for the presentation.

10:57:14 AM

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