

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 13, 2020

9:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 6

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

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 169

"An Act relating to special request registration plates celebrating the arts; and relating to the Alaska State Council on the Arts."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 6

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

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) BEGICH

01/16/19	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/7/19
01/16/19	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS

01/16/19	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/21/19	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/21/19	(S)	Heard & Held
03/21/19	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/16/19	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/16/19	(S)	Heard & Held
04/16/19	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
01/21/20	(S)	SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED-REFERRALS
01/21/20	(S)	EDC, FIN
01/23/20	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM SENATE FINANCE 532
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
02/11/20	(S)	Heard & Held
02/11/20	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/12/20	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
02/12/20	(S)	Heard & Held
02/12/20	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/13/20	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

TIM LAMKIN, Staff

Senator Gary Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave the sectional for the CS for SB 6.

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions about amendments to SB 6.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:02:44 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Coghill, Costello, Begich, Hughes, and Chair Stevens.

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

[9:02:59 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 stated his desire to move the bill from committee and asked the sponsor, Senator Begich, to comment.

[9:03:27 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH stated that SB 6 has emerged from its original inception as a voluntary, universal pre-K bill to the Alaska Reads Act. One of the key components of its evolution has been the ongoing partnership with the governor and the commissioner. Over the last six hearings, a number of provisions have been added. He has an agreement with the governor that the only amendments he would support in the committee substitute would be the amendments supported by himself and the governor. There is at least one amendment today that he, the governor, and the commissioner are in agreement with.

SENATOR BEGICH said the committee is trying to move a bill that both moves education policy forward but also has a chance of becoming law. He said he is looking forward to a robust discussion of any amendments, but he will express opposition to amendments that he and the governor did not agree to. He asked the committee to respect that arrangement. He said his staff will speak to the committee substitute, which has 34 different changes.

CHAIR STEVENS solicited a motion to adopt the committee substitute (CS) for SSSB 6.

[9:06:41 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES moved to adopt the CS for SSSB 6, work order 31-LS0159\G, as the working document.

9:06:51 AM

CHAIR STEVENS objected for purposes of discussion and asked Mr. Lamkin to present the sectional.

9:06:55 AM

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, delivered the following sectional for CSSSSB 6, version G:

Sec. 1: Assigns a title to the act as the Alaska Reads Act.

Sec. 2: AS 14.03.060(e) Is amended to recognize the inclusion of early education programs as being part of an elementary school, specifically head start programs, at the approval of the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED).

Sec. 3: AS 14.03.072(a) is amended to include a requirement for school districts to inform parents specifically of reading intervention services that are offered.

Sec. 4: AS 14.03.078(a), relating to school districts' requirement to provide annual progress reports to DEED, is amended to include data for K-3 students involved in the AK Reads Act as described below in Section 7, as well as including data relating to:

(8) how districts are using their in-service days for professional development; and

(9) the use and efficacy of the Parents as Teachers program as described in Section 8, below.

Sec. 5: AS 14.03.080(d), relating to minimum school age, sets June 1 as the new date by which a student must be age 5 in order to enter kindergarten the following Fall term. This subsection also allows for a waiver for a child to enter kindergarten earlier than age 5 if they pass an approved exam.

Sec. 6: AS 14.03.080(g) is a new subsection establishing that a four or five-year-old, who has not attended kindergarten, is eligible to attend a public Pre-K program.

9:09:50 AM

Sec. 7: AS 14.03.120(h) is added to establishes annual reporting requirements for school districts regarding student performance metrics in grades K-3. This includes data for the number 2 and percentage of students in K-3 who are proficient at grade level reading and are retained from advancing to their next grade level for cause.

Sec. 8: AS.03.410 is created to codify a state Pre-K program, providing a stair-step, three-year grant program to provide training and assistance to low-performing school districts in developing their local Pre-K program. Over six fiscal years, all school districts are offered the opportunity to participate.

14.03.420 codifies the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program as a program of the state within DEED and specifies criteria for PAT to demonstrate its efficacy in supporting school districts with Pre-K education. Sec. 9: 14.07.020(a), relating to the duties of DEED, is amended to add its general supervision over Pre-K programs in the state. This section also adds the DEED duty of (18) establishing a state reading and reading intervention program as described in Section 18, below.

Sec. 9: 14.07.020(a), relating to the duties of DEED, is amended to add its general supervision over Pre-K programs in the state. This section also adds the DEED duty of (18) establishing a state reading and reading intervention program as described in Section 18, below.

Sec. 10: AS 14.07.020(c), relating to the definition of "early education program" to mean an educational program for children ages 3 to 5. The 3-year-old students are not included in the program this bill proposes but are included in the statute to ensure they are not excluded from existing State and Federal programs.

9:12:13 AM

Sec. 11: AS 14.07.050, relating to locally-decided selection of textbooks, allows DEED to make textbook selections for reading material related to reading intervention programs described in Section 18, below.

Sec. 12: AS 14.07.165(a), relating to the duties of the state board of education and early development (Board), adds to those duties a requirement to establish regulations for PreK standards, and Pre-K teacher certification requirements.

Sec. 13: AS 14.17.500, relating to calculating a school district's average daily membership (ADM) for budgeting purposes, adds (d) to specify a Pre-K student is counted as a half-time student.

Sec. 14: AS 14.17.905(a), relating to counting the number of schools in a district, is amended to include Pre-K students as being part of an elementary school, and provides for an exception as described in Section 15, below.

9:13:26 AM

Sec. 15: AS 14.17.905, relating to counting the number of schools in a district, adds (d) to avoid letting school districts count Pre-K students twice in Foundation Formula ADM calculations. In other words, Foundation funding would only be provided to those districts that are not already being funded by another state or federal Pre-K program.

Sec. 16: AS 14.20.015(c), relating to teaching certificate reciprocity for teachers moving to Alaska from out-of-state, adds that such teachers must complete additional reading instruction training in order to be eligible for an Alaska teaching endorsement in elementary education.

Sec. 17: AS 14.20.020, relating to general issuance of teacher certificates, adds (l), that all teachers must complete additional reading instruction training in order to be eligible for an endorsement in elementary education.

9:14:36 AM

MR. LAMKIN advised that Section 18 is a major part of the bill. He stressed that the section states a student "can" be retained. He said a significant amount of legal language is in this section to carefully navigate if, when, and how a student might be retained for a second third grade year rather than advancing to fourth grade.

Sec. 18: AS 14.30 is amended to add Article 15, creating a Statewide Reading Intervention Program.

AS 14.30.760 Directs DEED to establish a statewide reading assessment and screening tool to identify students with reading deficiencies; assist teachers in monitoring student progress in reading proficiency, and provide training to teachers in reading intervention tools.

AS 14.30.765 District Reading Intervention Services must be offered by districts for K-3 students exhibiting a reading deficiency, and be implemented in a manner to include a high amount of communication between teachers, parents, administrators and the student. Considerable detailed attention is given under this section for instances when a student failing to progress toward reading proficiency can result in being withheld from advancing to the next grade level.

AS 14.30.770 Directs DEED to establish a statewide reading program, specifically to assist school districts in a variety of ways to affect the reading intervention services described in AS 14.30.665, above. DEED shall employ and deploy reading specialists to districts, in addition to making complementary tools and resources to districts in addressing student reading proficiency.

AS 14.30.775 aligns use of the word "district" in this Act with the definitions given elsewhere in statute when referring to a school district.

[9:17:08 AM](#)

Sec. 19: AS 47.17.290(12), relating to the Dept. of Health and Social Services (HSS), child protection, includes "early education" (Pre-K) program staff as an "organization" required to report any sign of child abuse or neglect.

Sec. 20: AS 14.03.410, relating to the Pre-K grant program described in Section 8 above, once all school districts have had the opportunity to participate, is repealed July 1, 2031.

Sec. 21: Is transition language, directing DEED to use 2018-19 school accountability rankings for purposes of determining the first cohort of lowest performing schools, to identify their Pre-K grant eligibility for FY 21.

Sec. 22: Sets an effective date of July 1, 2020.

9:18:13 AM

CHAIR STEVENS noted that Senator Hughes has three amendments and Senator Costello has two. He called on Senator Hughes to move the first amendment.

9:18:55 AM

SENATOR HUGHES moved to adopt Amendment 1, G.1:

31-LS0159\G.1
Caouette
2/12/20

AMENDMENT 1

OFFERED IN THE SENATE BY SENATOR HUGHES
TO: CSSSSB 6 (EDC), Draft Version "G"

Page 4, line 1, following "students":
Insert "and teaching staff"

9:19:03 AM

CHAIR STEVENS objected for purposes of discussion.

SENATOR HUGHES explained that the amendment asks districts to not only report the number of students per classroom, but also the teaching staff to get a sense of the ratio. She noted that the committee heard that Florida has small class sizes, and it will be challenging for K-3 teachers who have large classrooms. The committee needs to consider that and gather data to make policy decisions down the road. The districts also might choose to make policy decisions based on the information.

SENATOR BEGICH said his staff discussed this with the department. It was just an oversight that this was not included in the bill and he supports the addition.

9:20:28 AM

CHAIR STEVENS removed his objection and finding no further objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

He called on Senator Hughes to move the next amendment.

9:20:41 AM

SENATOR HUGHES made a motion to adopt Amendment 2, G.2:

AMENDMENT 2

OFFERED IN THE SENATE BY SENATOR HUGHES
TO: CSSSSB 6 (EDC), Draft Version "G"

Page 1, following line 11:

Insert a new bill section to read:

**** Sec. 2.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to read:

LEGISLATIVE INTENT. It is the intent of the legislature that each school district consider prioritizing funding to reduce student-to-teaching-staff ratios for grades kindergarten through three."

[9:20:45 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS objected for purposes of discussion.

SENATOR HUGHES said she would withdraw the amendment after some discussion, unless members would like to include it. She acknowledged that intent language does not carry the weight of law, but it can have value. The intent language would read that each school district should consider prioritizing funding to reduce student-to-teaching staff ratios for grades kindergarten through three. Intent language does not mandate that districts do that, but districts should have that conversation.

[9:22:16 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO expressed appreciation that the amendment will be withdrawn. She said she is aware that research indicates that there is a most effective class size and she hopes that districts will adjust class sizes to ones that are optimal for students as the address many other issues. She said local control is important and the legislature needs to impose mandates thoughtfully.

SENATOR BEGICH added that everyone supports the idea of smaller class size and he supports the intention of the amendment. However, he and the commissioner agreed that SB 6 would not have intent language. At least it has been put on the record, he said.

[9:25:01 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES expressed hope that districts will prioritize funding to create smaller class sizes and increase the chance of success for those students and teachers. She said the amendment was in response to concerns she heard from a number of teachers across the state.

SENATOR HUGHES withdrew Amendment 2, G.2.

[9:25:33 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked Senator Hughes to move the next amendment.

[9:25:38 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES moved to adopt Amendment 3, G.6.

31-LS0159\G.6
Caouette
2/12/20

AMENDMENT 3

OFFERED IN THE SENATE BY SENATOR HUGHES
TO: CSSSSB 6 (EDC), DRAFT VERSION "G"

Page 24, following line 2:

Insert new bill sections to read:

"* **Sec. 19.** AS 14.30.765(c), enacted by sec. 18 of this Act, is amended to read:

(c) If at any time during the school year a student in grades kindergarten through three demonstrates a reading deficiency, the district or school shall notify the student's parents or guardians in writing or during a conference. The district or school shall provide the student's parents or guardians with updates on the student's progress every two weeks after the initial notification. The initial notification must

(1) be provided to the student's parents or guardians not later than 15 days after identification of the reading deficiency;

(2) state that the district identified the student as having a reading deficiency and that a reading improvement plan will be developed under (b) of this section;

(3) describe current services that the district is providing to the student;

(4) describe the proposed evidence-based reading intervention and supplemental instructional

services and supports that the district will provide to the student to improve the identified area of reading deficiency;

(5) explain that the district or school will inform the parents or guardians in writing of the student's progress toward grade level reading at least every two weeks;

(6) identify strategies for the parents or guardians to use at home to help the student succeed in reading;

(7) explain that if the student has a reading deficiency at the end of the school year, unless the student receives an exemption under (g) of this section or has previously been retained in kindergarten, grade one, grade two, or grade three, the student may be prevented from progressing to the next grade level under (d) of this section; and

(8) explain that a student in grade three must [SHOULD] demonstrate sufficient reading skills to progress to grade four under (e) of this section, unless the student receives an exemption under (g) of this section or has previously been retained in kindergarten, grade one, grade two, or grade three.

* **Sec. 20.** AS 14.30.765(e), enacted by sec. 18 of this Act, is amended to read:

(e) A student in grade three must [SHOULD] demonstrate sufficient reading skills to progress to grade four. A student demonstrates sufficient reading skills for progression by

(1) scoring at a proficient or higher achievement level on the statewide screening or assessment tool or on the statewide summative assessment;

(2) achieving an acceptable score on an alternative standardized reading screening or assessment as determined and approved by the department; or

(3) demonstrating mastery of reading standards through a student reading portfolio based on criteria established by the department."

Renumber the following bill sections accordingly.

Page 24, following line 15:

Insert a new bill section to read:

"* **Sec. 24.** Sections 19 and 20 of this Act take effect July 1, 2024."

Renumber the following bill section accordingly.

Page 24, line 16:

Delete "This"

Insert "Except as provided in sec. 24 of this Act, this"

[9:25:44 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS objected for purposes of discussion.

SENATOR HUGHES stated while she appreciates Senator Begich's fervor, passion, and dedication to education, and the commissioner's too, legislators are the policy makers. He may have agreements with the governor and commissioner, but legislators have the opportunity during this process to make decisions about policy. She said she knows that there has been a concern that this amendment might derail the bill. She does not share that concern. Data and information show that this is the best route and she is putting forward this amendment because she thinks it will give students and teachers the greatest chance of success. As the committee has heard, Alaska's children are not different from others in the nation. It is not that their teachers are not as good as other teachers in the nation. It's that the system is broken and Amendment 3, G.6, is an attempt to fix it.

SENATOR HUGHES explained that the amendment allows the bill to move forward for three years. She acknowledged that she is grateful that the committee substitute allows the recognition program she suggested. That recognition program is to motivate school districts and teachers to bring their students to the level of reading proficiency prescribed in the bill. Three years allows time for districts and the department to get up to speed with resources, professional development, slightly different curriculum, and new activities using science-based methods. After the three year transition period, students must achieve a certain level of proficiency for promotion to fourth grade. The committee viewed a map during an earlier hearing of states colored dark blue that indicated good comprehensive reading policies. That map did not represent states with the best results; the map only represented states with comprehensive policies. She has updated the map with red dots showing states with good comprehensive policies and excellent results. She asked for and received permission to distribute copies of the map.

SENATOR HUGHES pointed out that the map on the third page had 10 states with red dots. These states all have strong promotion policies. The chart on the top page addresses Senator Begich's concern about the need to know the starting point when looking at achievement data. For example, a state that already has high scores may not experience much growth. This chart is an attempt to be more transparent. It reflects scores over a 16-year period for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for fourth graders eligible for free or reduced lunch. Those are students who come from homes struggling with poverty who often get left behind. The national average gain was 2.5 points. In a six-year period, the chart shows that Mississippi shot up to number three from 43rd out of 50 states with a gain of almost 18 points. That 18 points is significant because that is how much Alaska needs to climb to get to the U.S. national average.

[9:33:14 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said score growth is six times higher for states with strong promotion policies compared to states with weak promotion policies for fourth graders eligible for free or reduced lunch. The jurisdiction with a strong promotion policy with the largest growth was Washington, D.C., with an increase of 21 points from 2003-2019. The highest growth for a state with a weak promotion policy was only 6.2 points for New Mexico. States with a weak retention policy saw an average growth of 1.5, which is below the national average of 2.5. Seven of nine states with strong promotion policies improved faster than the national average.

SENATOR HUGHES said that people have referenced research that shows retention is bad. She would say that is true if something like this bill is not put in place. If a retained student just repeats a grade and nothing is done differently, that student will continue to struggle. Research that takes into account what the legislators are doing with this bill is different. The research is not unequivocally stating that retention is bad. A 2017 study by Harvard University, Boston University, and the University of Konstanz in Germany looked at what happens with intervention strategies for a child who is not proficient and repeats third grade. It involves more contact hours focused on accelerating that child so that child does achieve.

SENATOR HUGHES reminded everyone that the bill has exemptions for certain things, so it only addresses kids who could become proficient. When there is a strong promotion policy, it is a game changer. Data that states retention does not work does not apply here. The applicable research shows that if children are

not promoted until proficient, their grade point averages (GPAs) go up. These children learn more in all the other grades. Their GPAs in high school are higher, and these students do not tend to drop out. With the old way, dropouts went up with retention. If students are going to have higher GPAs with this policy in place, there will be no increased chance that these students will drop out.

[9:38:27 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said this is a whole new system that legislators are fixing for students. She suggested that this start in year 2024 to allow adequate time for districts and schools to ramp up and for DEED to implement. This policy would not apply to any third grader who did not have the full benefit of these policies. That is what this amendment does and why she thinks it is the right policy for students. It will be helpful to teachers to have classrooms filled with many more proficient readers.

CHAIR STEVENS asked for any comments the amendment.

SENATOR BEGICH stated opposition to Amendment 3. He said:

I admire the passion of my colleague in continuing to pursue the retention issue and defining the strong vs. weak retention elements. I think we need to just take a step back and remember that no single silver bullet [for education]. That's been said numerous times by all of our professional testifiers. It's a combination of different factors. It's how we educate our teachers, it's whether we do or don't have pre-kindergarten, it's whether we have a strong reading program or not. It might relate to class size. There are a number of reasons.

SENATOR BEGICH said that there are a number of data points and reports that significantly dispute some of the findings on retention. He said he would not debate that now but would address three factors in the bill and why Amendment 3 should be rejected. First, SB 6 supports local control, recognizing that decisions about retention are crafted at the local level. The superintendents of Haines, Mat-Su, Anchorage, Alaska Gateway schools testified to that. This amendment would impose on those districts a mandatory, universal state policy of retention. The reason "should" and not "must" is used is to retain local control. Second, the bill, as written, recognizes the role of the teacher, student, and parent in that discussion process. SB 6 specifically outlines that the issue of retention is

significant and should be a discussion point between those parties. Third, the bill includes universal, voluntary pre-K to give parents the final choice about whether their child should go into pre-K or not. It also provides parents a voice in retention decisions. Changing the language from "should" to "must" removes the parent from that final decision, including homeschool parents. Currently, homeschool parents can opt out of tests and assessments, but this amendment, would remove that option. He said he opposes [Amendment 3] because it takes away a piece of integrity within SB 6 that is essential for its successful development and application. He asked the committee reject Amendment 3.

9:44:17 AM

SENATOR COSTELLO observed that retaining a child from social promotion is a serious issue. She is encouraged by the states that have seen great improvement by doing that. She is concerned about the testimony from a district that advertised for a reading specialist and waited for two years to find one. The heart of this legislation is to train teachers in evidence-based teaching methods that will work with students. The state does not know where it will find reading specialists. The bill does not require existing teachers to get additional training. In addition, the state has a retention problem with teachers. Considering a bill to keep a child back who cannot read at grade level is a premature discussion. The state does not know if it can fill the spots for reading specialists required by the bill. At this point, she would be a no vote on the amendment. Her amendments address some of the issues that would put Alaska in a place to confidently do something like this. Now, districts are struggling to find reading specialists. The committee has heard that current classroom teachers are not necessarily trained in the methods that work. Those issues need to be fixed first before putting such a high-stakes statute on the books.

SENATOR HUGHES said everyone wants students to succeed. She understands the local control argument, but the whole bill is dictating and mandating policy. She said she relies on data about what will work best for teachers and students. Anchorage and Mat-Su School Districts, representing over 40 percent of students in the state, believe that a strong proficiency promotion policy will get the state where it needs to go. She recalled that small districts have said they favor this approach because in small communities school board members are often related to students. She said she respects Senator Costello's thoughts that this would be premature, but the language in Sections 19 and 20 would be implemented after four years, which

is ample time to get up to speed and be ready. She said she stands by the amendment.

[9:49:29 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS stated there is objection and called for a roll call vote.

[9:49:54 AM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Senator Hughes voted in favor of Amendment 3, G.6 and Senators Begich, Costello, Coghill, and Stevens voted against it. Therefore, Amendment 3 failed by a vote of 1 to 4.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Senator Costello to move Amendment 4.

[9:50:07 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO moved to adopt Amendment 4, G.3.

31-LS0159\G.3
Caouette
2/12/20

AMENDMENT 4

OFFERED IN THE SENATE BY SENATOR COSTELLO
TO: CSSSSB 6 (EDC), Draft Version "G"

Page 1, line 7, following "**Development;**":

Insert "**establishing a teacher retention working group;**"

Page 24, following line 15:

Insert a new bill section to read:

"* **Sec. 22.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to read:

TEACHER RETENTION WORKING GROUP. (a) A teacher retention working group is established to review issues and make findings related to challenges with teacher retention at public schools in the state and make recommendations for improvement in teacher retention. Members of the working group serve without compensation.

(b) The teacher retention working group consists of the following members:

(1) the commissioner of education and early development or the commissioner's designee;

(2) two members of the Alaska Council of School Administrators, one from an urban area and one from a rural area;

(3) two members of the National Education Association - Alaska, one from an urban area and one from a rural area;

(4) two members of the Association of Alaska School Boards, one from an urban area and one from a rural area; and

(5) the chairs of the legislative committees having jurisdiction over education.

(c) The teacher retention working group shall select a chair from among its membership.

(d) The teacher retention working group shall meet periodically and prepare a report of its findings and recommendations. The working group shall submit the report to the governor and to the senate secretary and chief clerk of the house of representatives for distribution to all legislators on or before January 15, 2021, and shall notify the legislature that the report is available. The working group expires January 16, 2021."

Renumber the following bill section accordingly.

[9:50:19 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS objected for purposes of discussion.

SENATOR COSTELLO said Alaska struggles to retain teachers. This bill provides an opportunity to look into this issue and come up with some recommendations. Amendment 4 creates a teacher retention working group comprised of the commissioner of education or a designee; two members from the Alaska Council of School Administrators, one from an urban area and one from a rural area; two members from the National Education Association, one from an urban area and one from a rural area; two members from the Association of Alaska School Boards, one from an urban area and one from a rural area; and, finally, the chairs of the legislative committees having jurisdiction over education. The amendment asks the group to meet and prepare a report of its findings and recommendations to the legislature, on or before January 15 of next year.

[9:52:56 AM](#)

At ease

[9:55:06 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH moved to adopt conceptual Amendment 1 to Amendment 4:

On line 17, after the word "two," I add in the words "teachers who are". On line 19, after the word "two," add "superintendents who are." Last would be to add a new category of a member of the Alaska State Board of Education, which is missing. That addition will require renumbering.

SENATOR HUGHES asked whether "superintendents" should be on line 15.

SENATOR BEGICH answered yes and restated the conceptual amendment:

My amendment would be first to amend line 15. It would say "two superintendents who are members of the Alaska Council of School Administrators; "two teachers", on line 17, "who are members of the National Education Association"; and adding a sixth category, which would be a board member of the Alaska State Board of Education.

SENATOR BEGICH clarified that teachers and superintendents are wanted, but not just anyone.

[9:57:21 AM](#)

At ease

[9:58:04 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting and asked Senator Begich to withdraw his amendment so the committee could go on to another one.

[9:58:13 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH withdrew conceptual Amendment 1 to Amendment 4.

SENATOR BEGICH moved to adopt conceptual Amendment 2 to Amendment 4, which he read:

On line 15, after the word "two," add "superintendents who are." On line 17, after the word "two," add "teachers who are." And add a sixth category that would be two members of the Alaska State Board of Education, one from an urban area and one from a rural area.

CHAIR STEVENS asked for Senator Costello's thoughts.

SENATOR COSTELLO replied she considered it a friendly amendment and she would support it.

[9:59:03 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS called for a roll call vote.

[9:59:20 AM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Senators Begich, Costello, Coghill, Hughes, and Stevens voted in favor of the conceptual amendment to the amendment. Therefore, conceptual Amendment 2 to Amendment 4 was adopted by a vote of 5 to 0.

CHAIR STEVENS asked for any comments on Amendment 4, as amended.

SENATOR BEGICH said the idea is absolutely right on the button and consistent with the governor's State of the State speech. He clarified that his initial resistance was because he thought the governor planned to unroll his own resolution regarding a working group. He offered his view that since that has not happened, the committee should act on it.

[10:00:10 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS called for a roll call vote on Amendment 4, as amended.

[10:00:31 AM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Senators Begich, Costello, Coghill, Hughes, and Stevens voted in favor of Amendment 4, as amended. Therefore, Amendment 4, as amended, was adopted by a vote of 5 to 0.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Senator Costello to move the next amendment.

[10:00:40 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO moved to adopt Amendment 5, G.4.

31-LS0159\G.4
Caouette
2/12/20

AMENDMENT 5

OFFERED IN THE SENATE

BY SENATOR COSTELLO

TO CSSSSB 6 (EDC), Draft Version "G"

Page 12, lines 29 - 30:

Delete "meet additional reading instruction coursework requirements established"

Insert "complete three semester hours of coursework in reading instruction approved"

Page 13, lines 2 - 3:

Delete "meet additional reading instruction coursework requirements established"

Insert "complete three semester hours of coursework in reading instruction approved"

Page 24, line 12, following "TRANSITION.":

Insert "(a)"

Page 24, following line 15:

Insert a new subsection to read:

"(b) A person who holds a certificate issued under AS 14.20.020 with an endorsement in elementary education but who has not completed the coursework required under sec. 17 of this Act shall complete the three semester hours of coursework in reading instruction required under sec. 17 of this Act not later than two years after the effective date of this Act."

[10:00:46 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS objected for purposes of discussion.

SENATOR COSTELLO explained that the committee learned that to improve children's reading proficiency, Alaska needs to employ evidence-based, proven methods for how to teach reading. The reading specialist is the heart of the legislation since it is important to get reading specialists in classrooms so students can learn to read.

She said that Amendment 5 would require teachers to receive three semester credit hours of reading instruction to obtain an elementary certificate. She has been a classroom teacher in two districts in the state and worked with students who dropped out of school. Teachers have requirements in order to retain their certification. She recalled testimony that some elementary school teachers do not have access to the most up-to-date, evidence-based methods of delivering reading instruction to students. Therefore, it is important that the bill require at

least three semester hours of coursework. Although teachers currently choose their courses for recertification, the state must provide students with teachers who are trained to teach reading in methods that work. Research shows there are ways to teach reading that are successful.

SENATOR HUGHES said she has concerns about determining the requirement now. It might not be enough for what teachers need. Districts or teachers may have to cover course costs. She asked if the professional development that DEED could prepare might be better or accomplish the same outcome without the cost. Further, DEED and the State Board of Education and Early Development might decide that six credits are required. She respects the intent of Amendment 5 to make sure teachers receive specialized training, but she is not sure that the committee should make that decision today. She expressed concern about putting the cost burden on districts and teachers when DEED has expressed a willingness to shoulder the responsibility of educating teachers. She said she would be interested in hearing from Senator Begich and the commissioner.

SENATOR BEGICH said he thought Senator Hughes was addressing the fact that DEED on record has expressed a desire to provide coursework. This amendment is potentially prescriptive. The committee heard a university presentation, and he was not convinced that the university has the capacity to fully provide for the provisions in the bill. "Hours of coursework" in the amendment implies a university course.

[10:07:28 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH moved to adopt conceptual Amendment 1 to Amendment 5. He read:

On line 4 "of" be deleted and "or equivalent" be added; that on line 9 "of" be deleted and "or equivalent" be added; and then on line 18 "of" would be deleted and "or equivalent" be added.

SENATOR BEGICH said those three areas would cover what he thought Senator Hughes was speaking to and what he believes is the intent of the department. It would be consistent with the rigor that Senator Costello seeks.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Senator Costello to respond and said he would be willing to call the commissioner up.

SENATOR COSTELLO replied she considered it a friendly amendment.

10:08:39 AM

SENATOR COGHILL objected for purposes of discussion.

He said he wanted to hear from the commissioner. It is not just the university that is going to certificate people. The credit hours may narrowly dictate what can be done with certification. He said he wanted to know if reading certifications could be obtained outside the university and not necessarily based on the state's university.

SENATOR HUGHES said she appreciates the attempt to make it work, but it could be from colleges and universities from across the country or world. The committee does not know whether those three hours by a particular university will meet DEED's requirements. It might not equip teachers at the level that DEED needs. The amendment to the amendment would now give teachers a choice that might not meet the need. She is still concerned and wondered whether "approved by DEED" would need to be included somewhere.

CHAIR STEVENS asked the commissioner to comment.

10:11:14 AM

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, said Senator Costello is right to connect teacher quality and the quality of instruction with the success of this reading bill. If Alaska passes the Alaska Reads Act without addressing the quality of instruction, then it will not be successfully implemented.

He said the conceptual amendment to Amendment 5 does not necessarily connect the coursework with content. That coursework could be reading strategies that are not evidence-based. If coursework or professional development is going to be mandated, it should be based on the science of reading, as indicated in the bill, to make sure the intent of the Amendment 5 is fully realized.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said, for example, before his time the department spent a lot of money developing an Alaska reading course based on the science of reading. The department paid for professionals to create some videos associated with it. Some of the people the committee heard testify were involved in the development of the course. DEED has not been providing it, but this could resurrect that course. There have been conversations around microcredentialing. Instead of three university credits,

teachers could receive three different microcredentials in different aspects of reading.

SENATOR HUGHES said it sounds like the commissioner has some hesitation with the amendment. Once "or" is used instead of "and" it may be a legal situation. She asked the commissioner if he would be comfortable if it said something like three semester hours of science-based reading instruction approved by the department.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied he is a bureaucrat and is not elected, so his opinion should not be the deciding factor. He offered his view that Amendment 5 is a great amendment, with a couple of modifications to broaden what would count as coursework. It is smart to address the need to equip teachers to teach well, based on the science of reading, but maybe that is not just done through the university. He suggested that it could allow other types of professional development to count.

SENATOR HUGHES asked what language would address microcredentialing, for example.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said microcredentialing could be another way to provide professional development if the language is broad enough. The legislature already funds professional development in school districts. DEED could work with school districts so that the professional development days already in place could count to something equal to three credits. Those are opportunities teachers already sit through. He is saying be specific enough about the robustness of the coursework but leave it broad enough so that it can be delivered to teachers in a number of ways.

SENATOR COGHILL said he sees the breadth of what the committee is trying to do. Before the amendment, there already was a "must require" with a regulation cited. It brings all stakeholders to the table. The amendment says that one stakeholder holds all the information. He likes the idea of a regulation bringing everyone to the table with public comment. That is different from requiring coursework with a certain number of hours. He said he is probably going to default to the language already in the bill.

[10:19:15 AM](#)

At ease

[10:29:01 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked Senator Begich to withdraw conceptual Amendment 1 to Amendment 5.

[10:29:09 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH withdrew conceptual Amendment 1 to Amendment 5.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Senator Costello to withdraw Amendment 5.

[10:29:12 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO withdrew Amendment 5, G.4].

[10:29:22 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said this issue needs to be settled before the bill leaves the committee. The committee will try to flesh this out with the commissioner and then meet to move the bill.

[SB 6 was held in committee.]

[10:29:42 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 10:29 a.m.