

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 14, 2020
9:00 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

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Harriet Drummond

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."

- MOVED CSSSSB 6 (EDU) OUT OF COMMITTEE

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
02/13/20	(S)	Heard & Held
02/13/20	(S)	MINUTE (EDC)
02/14/20	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions about teacher certification.

ERIN HARDIN, Legislative Liaison

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Reviewed SB 6 fiscal notes.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:00:26 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 Costello, Hughes, and Chair Stevens. Senator Begich joined the committee shortly thereafter. Senator Coghill arrived while the meeting was in progress.

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

[9:01:04 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 noted that this was the eighth hearing on the bill since January 23. He asked Senator Begich for his comments as the bill sponsor.

[9:01:38 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH thanked the staffs of Senator Stevens and Senator Costello and his staff for crafting the amendment that was under discussion during the last meeting. He said he looked forward to a swift meeting and he would offer some comments at the end of the meeting.

[9:02:11 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS expressed appreciation for everyone's efforts to work on the amendment under discussion yesterday. He said the draft committee substitute (CS) for SB 6, work order 31-LS0159\G, as amended yesterday, is the working document.

He called on Senator Costello to offer an amendment.

[9:02:35 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO moved to adopt Amendment 6, G.9.

31-LS0159\G.9
Caouette
2/14/20

AMENDMENT 6

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 credits or the equivalent
of coursework, training, or testing requirements in
evidence-based reading instruction approved"

Page 12, line 31, following "department.":

Insert "A teacher may apply coursework, training,
or testing requirements completed under this
subsection toward continuing education requirements
established by the board in regulation."

Page 13, lines 2 - 3:

Delete "meet additional reading instruction
coursework requirements established"

Insert "complete three credits or the equivalent
of coursework, training, or testing requirements in
evidence-based reading instruction approved"

Page 13, line 4, following "department.":

Insert "A teacher may apply coursework, training,
or testing requirements completed under this
subsection toward continuing education requirements
established by the board in regulation."

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:

APPLICABILITY. Section 17 of this Act applies to
endorsements in elementary education issued on or
after the effective date of this Act. An endorsement
in elementary education issued before the effective
date of this Act may not be renewed on or after the
effective date of this Act unless the teacher has
completed three credits or the equivalent of
coursework, training, or testing requirements under
sec. 17 of this Act."

Renumber the following bill section accordingly.

[9:02:41 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS objected for purposes of discussion.

SENATOR COSTELLO said as the committee discussed yesterday, the heart of the bill is reading specialists and getting evidence-based instruction to students. Elementary classroom teachers need six credits to renew their certification and currently are able to choose the topics of those credits. Amendment 6 would require teachers renewing their certification to meet additional reading instruction coursework by completing at least three credits or the equivalent of coursework, training, or testing requirements in evidence-based reading instruction approved by the board.

SENATOR COSTELLO explained that there are new, effective science-based and evidence-based methods of teaching reading. Alaska wants current teachers to have the benefit of that training. Under the bill, as written, teachers could earn three credits or their equivalent through coursework, training, or testing requirements. Teachers already renew their certificates every five years, so Amendment 6 would not change that. As their renewal comes up, this would be the requirement and teachers would have the opportunity to take that training.

[9:05:28 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked whether this applies to pre-K through third grade teachers or high school teachers as well.

SENATOR COSTELLO suggested the commissioner to speak to the question because the department has a menu of certifications. The intention here is for the lower grades, she said.

CHAIR STEVENS called the commissioner to the table.

[9:06:16 AM](#)

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, explained that as the department understands it, Amendment 6 would only be for those teachers with an elementary education endorsement.

SENATOR BEGICH asked whether this amendment would be rolled into the normal process of teacher recertification.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered that is correct. Senator Costello considered input from teachers and their representatives as she was making the amendment. Teachers renew their certificates every five years. Part of that requirement is six credits of coursework. That is integrated into the amendment and is not an

additional burden for teachers. It is a specific application of current practice so that it is focused on reading.

SENATOR BEGICH asked if Amendment 6 provides the flexibility needed by the department and teachers.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered yes. In some ways, it provides more flexibility for teachers renewing their certificates because they will be able to use department-provided training as part of those credits. There are many opportunities to work with partners on department-approved trainings.

[9:08:56 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES pointed out that a recently-certified teacher would not have to meet this until 2025. She asked if between now and 2025 there is any requirement that teachers get training from the department so that five years will not go by before these teachers are equipped to use evidence-based methods in the classroom. She expressed a preference for teachers to be trained as soon as this coming year.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON responded that teachers could accomplish the requirements any time within that five years. If the Alaska Reads Act passes and is signed into law, the department is already preparing and working with its partners to provide training as fast as it can to as many teachers as it can. Teachers can meet the requirements of Amendment 6 next year and use that to renew their certificate in 2025.

SENATOR HUGHES summarized that teachers could wait for five years, but his intention is that the training begin soon and that all teachers have access to that training. She expressed hope that district administrators will get the word that there should be no delay in training. She said she understands from Posie Boggs that there is some free, wonderful online training.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied he completely agrees and will work toward that end.

[9:11:36 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS acknowledged the presence of Representative Drummond, the chair of the House Education Committee.

SENATOR COSTELLO said yesterday, the question came up about whether the department has the flexibility to not burden teachers by requiring training that they have already received. The purpose is to arm teachers with the best tools and not

restrict teachers from taking classes in other areas if they already have this training. She asked the commissioner to respond.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON agreed. He said Senator Costello was very thoughtful about the input received yesterday and made that change in Amendment 6. The Alaska Reads Act will provide opportunity for the department to connect with all its partners to develop regulations that are creative but provide the flexibility that Senator Costello is describing.

9:13:40 AM

CHAIR STEVENS removed his objection and there being no other objections, Amendment 6 was adopted.

CHAIR STEVENS asked the department to present the fiscal notes for SB 6.

9:14:21 AM

ERIN HARDIN, Legislative Liaison, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, said her comments would be brief since the five fiscal notes were reviewed in a previous meeting. She noted that a summary spreadsheet shows the totals of the fiscal notes through FY 2026. DEED carried that out another three years because it will take until FY 2029 for all school districts to move through the preschool grant cycle. The department has begun to review the committee substitute and the amendments and does not believe the fiscal notes will need substantial changes, but they will change some of the narratives to reflect the additions. The Parents as Teachers language will be included in the early learning coordination fiscal note. The department has begun preliminary discussions about what support is needed in the fiscal notes for the teacher retention work group. To allow that group to meet one or two times, the department is looking at about \$1,000 per person for travel, which would add \$20,000 to the fiscal note. She said the department will continue to evaluate that as the bill moves to the next committee.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if \$20,000 is an addition on an annual basis.

MS. HARDIN answered that she believes there was an expiration.

9:16:40 AM

At ease

[9:16:53 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting and asked Ms. Hardin to continue.

MS. HARDIN advised that the teacher retention work group would be added to the student and school achievement fiscal note. The department anticipates adding no more than a one-time cost of \$20,000 to support the work of that group. The amendment notes that the work group could meet electronically or telephonically.

SENATOR HUGHES asked if the fiscal note shows the increase in formula spending once a pre-K grant expires and a child is then counted as a .5 in the average daily membership (ADM).

MS. HARDIN said yes.

SENATOR BEGICH directed attention to the third line, number three and five, the public education fund. He said the increase begins in FY 24. As [pre-K] kids roll into the public education fund, that replaces grant funds, which eventually expire. The fiscal note shows that by 2029, the public education fund increases by about \$17 million.

SENATOR HUGHES asked if the ongoing cost are expected to be \$17 million once 80 percent of four-year-olds are enrolled in voluntary pre-K.

SENATOR BEGICH confirmed that would be the cost, which is .02 percent of the current education budget.

[9:20:12 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS opined that the bill deserves a fiscal note from the university about what it is going to do to train teachers already in the field, as well as students in the system working for a certificate. He expressed hope that would shortly be forthcoming from the university.

SENATOR BEGICH asked the commissioner, assuming the bill passes and the effective date is July 1, if he plans to make some accommodation for teachers whose credentials happen to expire on that date so those teachers are not lost inadvertently. He said he believes this could be handled through regulation but he wanted it on the record to reassure those teachers caught in this impossible time constraint.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON confirmed that he was able to honor the legislature's intent to make sure that teachers get training in

reading skills and also accommodate those teachers whose credentials expire on that July 1 cusp.

CHAIR STEVENS noted that public testimony has been heard and was closed on SB 6. He asked if there were any further comments.

SENATOR HUGHES said she'd like the sponsor to comment on the talk she'd heard about a possible policy tweak to the pre-K grant program outlined in the bill. As currently written, the first round of grants is for the lowest 10 percent and she heard that might be changed to the lowest 25 percent. She said this is the policy committee and she'd like the committee to be updated about that possibility.

[9:24:00 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH replied the request is not about pre-K. He explained that the

bill has a provision that the state will provide intensive support for up to 10 schools that are not performing well. Those 10 schools are drawn from the lowest performing 10 percent. Former board member Judy Eledge suggested expanding the universe from which those 10 schools can be selected to the lowest performing 25 percent of schools. It is her belief that the bill might not have enough reach otherwise. He said that seemed reasonable and it could be fixed in the next committee of referral.

SENATOR HUGHES said that seems to make sense.

CHAIR STEVENS opined that it seems to be a legitimate fiscal issue that the Finance Committee can address. He asked if there were further comments.

SENATOR HUGHES noted that homeschooling was mentioned during the discussion yesterday but her understanding is that the things that were discussed apply to districts. She said she has a large homeschool population in her district and she wants it a matter of record how this impacts the homeschooling population in the state. Homeschool parents want their children to be proficient in reading and they are not inclined to socially promote.

CHAIR STEVENS asked the commissioner to update the committee on the impact this bill will have on homeschool students.

[9:27:10 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON responded that a student is a student, so the bill will apply to homeschool students. The goal is for all students to learn to read proficiently by the end of third grade, but the bill provides flexibility that homeschool families might want. One is with the screener. A statute that applies to all students says families can opt out of statewide assessments, so homeschool families can opt out of screening if that is their choice. Homeschool families generally keep pace with the kinds of policies that improve student outcomes so the bill will work fine for homeschool families. Furthermore, the department will work with homeschool families and educators who work with homeschool families to make sure the regulations are appropriate for homeschooling.

SENATOR HUGHES said she looks forward to seeing the training on science-based and evidence-based methods. She asked if homeschool parents will have access to training and if the department will promote that so those parents can be equipped.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied that has been the department's intention since it began working on the bill. The department wants the Alaska Read Act to be a movement across the state and provide those opportunities not only to homeschool parents and educators, but superintendents, principals, school board members, and community members. If the Alaska Reads Act is signed into law, he wants to engage the business community to focus on students becoming proficient in reading.

SENATOR BEGICH shared that he has seen letters from homeschool organizations indicating that the bill mandates retention of homeschool students. He asked if the bill, as written, does that.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON answered no.

CHAIR STEVENS asked Senator Begich for his closing comments.

[9:30:47 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said he spoke to or met with at least 30 superintendents, 50 to 60 school board members, 30 principals, an uncountable number of teachers, and the homeschool community in Juneau and has sent letters to a number of homeschool parents. He has spoken to colleagues in the House and Senate, oftentimes battling presumptions about the legislation, because people find it incredible that people of different political persuasions could agree on this bill. Organizations with such vast differences as the Alaska Policy Forum to the National

Education Association have talked about the need for policy and to put politics aside. He echoed the comments from Senator Hughes that the Senate Education Committee is the policy committee and it must make these decisions.

SENATOR BEGICH said this policy committee has done its job. It took a good idea that was translated into a bill and made it a much better bill. Robust discussions will continue. Every single member of the committee has added to this legislation, as have most Alaskans. He looks forward to it moving on to the next committee of referral. He said he also looks forward to robust debate on the floor of the Senate with the opportunity once again for members to talk about the value of education and teachers and how parents have a right to ensure that their kids receive a good education. The legislature wants to do that in a context doable in the state of Alaska. He thanked everyone for the work to make SB 6 a better bill.

[9:33:34 AM](#)

At ease

[9:38:06 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting and acknowledged the presence of Senator Coghill. He removed his objection and solicited a motion.

[9:38:24 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES moved to report the committee substitute (CS) for sponsor substitute for SB 6, version G as amended, from committee with individual recommendations and attached and forthcoming fiscal notes.

There being no objection, CSSSSB 6(EDU) was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[9:38:32 AM](#)

At ease

[9:38:39 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting.

[9:40:54 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 9:40 a.m.