

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
February 26, 2020
9:02 a.m.

[9:02:27 AM](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair von Imhof called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Natasha von Imhof, Co-Chair
Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair
Senator Click Bishop
Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Donny Olson
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Senator David Wilson

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Senator Tom Begich, Sponsor; Löki Tobin, Staff, Senator Tom Begich; Michael Johnson, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development; Heidi Teshner, Director, Finance and Support Services, Department of Education and Early Development; Senator Cathy Giessel; Senator Gary Stevens.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Dianne Shibe, Mat-Su Education Association, Palmer; Sandi Ryan, Self, Fairbanks; Judy Eledge, Self, Anchorage; Mike Bronson, Anchorage Branch NAACP, Anchorage; Bob Griffin, Alaska Policy Forum, Anchorage; Jodi Taylor, Self, Anchorage; Deena Bishop, Superintendent, Anchorage School District, Anchorage; Peter Hoepfner, Cordova School Board, Cordova; Ellis Ott, Fairbanks North Star School District, Fairbanks; Melanie Hadaway, Executive Director for Teaching and Learning, Fairbanks North Star School District, Fairbanks; Nick Schollmeier, Dillingham City School District, Dillingham; Posie Boggs, Self, Anchorage; Brad

Galbraith, Foundation for Excellence in Education in Action, Phoenix, Arizona; Tom Klaameyer, Anchorage Education Association, Anchorage; Stephanie Berglund, CEO, Thread, Anchorage; Donna McCarrey, Self, Anchorage; Christine Villano, Self, Fairbanks; Denise Lisac, self, Dillingham.

SUMMARY

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

SB 6 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#sb6

SENATE BILL NO. 6

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

9:03:00 AM

Co-Chair von Imhof read the title of the bill. She noted that the bill was the only item on the agenda. It was the first hearing on the bill.

9:03:51 AM

SENATOR TOM BEGICH, SPONSOR, commented that the complexity of the bill title underscored the complexity of the bill. He discussed the process by which the bill came to be. He had introduced SB 99 three years previously, which was directly related to Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) education. He had consulted with a variety of stakeholders including: early education specialists, the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), and a number of superintendents, school board members and educators in the state. He had discovered that research showed there needed to be a strong reading program to go along with Pre-K education, or educational gains would be lost. The previous year SB 6 had been introduced as a universal, voluntary, evidence-based Pre-K bill.

Senator Begich noted that the previous October the commissioner of Department of Education and Early

Development (DEED) had approached him on behalf of the governor and had discussed the bill. Principals were discussed such as strong evidence, cultural basis, and local control. He emphasized the evidence-based nature of the bill. The sponsor did research in other states to identify best practices. He had also looked at efforts within the department for intensive intervention with largely failing schools in order to perhaps gain insight or use resources.

[9:07:20 AM](#)

Senator Begich discussed the concept for SB 6, which was intended to be a template and conversation starter. He relayed that prior to the introduction of the bill, he had met with stakeholders to get as much input as possible. In the process of developing the initial template, the Senate Education Committee had considered the bill through eight hearings in which the bill was substantively changed. The committee substitute included 34 changes from the original bill. He stressed that there had been input from hundreds of educators, school board members, and superintendents.

[9:09:10 AM](#)

Senator Begich read from the Sponsor Statement (copy on file):

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

The markers for success develop early in life and brain science underscores that how we use our brains at those crucial early years before we enter Kindergarten - as well as how prepared we are when we enter our K - 12 education - have a dramatic impact on how well we will do in school and life. Research shows us that those who live in poverty have an incredibly difficult time catching up with others if they come to school ill-prepared. That same research shows that those who have a high-quality preschool experience go on to future academic and personal success. Studies

such as the Perry Preschool Project Study and others report that every dollar invested in high quality pre-K can save up to \$7 in long-term government expense by reducing the need for remedial education, and involvement in the criminal justice and public assistance systems.

High quality early education programs are an investment in our future. Universal voluntary early education available to students before they enter kindergarten improves school readiness, reading levels, and long-term economic performance. Long term studies, again such as the Perry Preschool Project Study, also suggest students with access to high quality preschool are less likely to be incarcerated and less likely to receive government assistance as adults. Alaska's current pre-Kindergarten programs - such as those in Anchorage, Mat-Su, The Lower Kuskokwim School District and Nome - and our early education programs including Head Start, Best Beginnings, and Parents as Teachers, provide access to families for such high quality early education, but are, according to our Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), only available to 10% of Alaska's 4 year-olds. CS SSSB6 (EDU) would take lessons learned from those programs and provide all school districts with the opportunity to provide high quality early education to their students if they so choose.

CS SSSB 6 (EDU) also establishes new statewide literacy program and intensive reading intervention services for students experiencing reading deficiencies starting in Kindergarten through grade three. Initially, up to ten struggling schools will have the opportunity to apply for an on-the-ground reading intervention specialist to be engaged and present in their school for an entire year.

DEED funded reading intervention specialists will support existing school staff, engage and build community understanding in evidence-based reading and work with local teachers and support staff to improve reading scores and assessments through evidence-based reading instruction.

Thrice annual reading proficiency screenings or assessments provide teachers and school officials with

the required insight into each student's reading proficiency. For students experiencing reading deficiencies, each student will receive personalized and individual attention to improve their reading proficiency.

There is much to be said about early education, but the critical piece is that children's pace of intellectual development potential peaks before age six, making those years especially important for future success. An important partnership between a parent and child begins before the child enters kindergarten, when the parent helps the child develop rich linguistic experiences that help form the foundation for reading and writing, which are the main vehicles for content acquisition.

High quality early education prepares students for reading readiness, allowing students to enter kindergarten armed with the knowledge and tools for future academic success.

Senator Begich affirmed that under the legislation, local school districts would still be able to use high-quality screening instruments and would not replace existing texts. He referenced the Moore v. State of Alaska lawsuit [a 2004 lawsuit in which a variety of plaintiffs challenged the adequacy of the education system under the state constitution], and identified that one of the judge's key findings was that the support by DEED had been insufficient to help school districts teach children to learn. The lawsuit had focused on low-performing districts. He noted that the bill would provide additional support at the departmental level. The bill would identify a number of reading specialists that would be available within each district. The legislation would provide the opportunity for reading specialist training and other supplemental support from the department.

Senator Begich emphasized that investment in education was important. He believed the bill would transform the way children were educated in the state, in a way that would add to the state's economic and overall success.

[9:13:49 AM](#)

LÖKI TOBIN, STAFF, SENATOR TOM BEGICH, addressed a Sectional Analysis (copy on file):

CS Sponsor Substitute Senate Bill 6 (EDU)
Version: 31-LS0159\0

Section 1.

Establishes this Act as the Alaska Reads Act.

Section 2.

Amends AS 14.03.060(e) to include an Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (the department) approved early education program, including head start, as part of an elementary school.

Section 3.

Amends AS 14.03.072(a) to include reading intervention services in addition to intervention strategies for early literacy.

Section 4.

Amends AS 14.03.078(a) which directs the department to include information collected under AS 14.03.120, Parent as Teachers, and AS 14.30-760 - 14.30.775, the Alaska Reads Act, including data on how districts use their professional service days, in their annual report to the legislature.

Section 5.

Amends AS 14.03.080(d) by changing the date a student is eligible to enter kindergarten and establishes an eligibility waiver process.

Section 6.

Amends AS 14.03.080 by adding new subsection (g) which changes the date a child is eligible to enter a public early education program.

Section 7.

Amends AS 14.03.120 by adding new subsection (h) which establishes annual reporting requirements for school districts regarding student performance metrics in grades K-3. This includes data relating to class size, the number and percentage of students in K-3 who are proficient at grade-level skill reading, and number and percentage of students who are retained from advancing in grades K-3.

Section 8.

Creates AS14.03.410 which codifies a statewide pre-K program, providing a stair-step, three year grant program to provide training and assistance to school districts in developing their local pre-K program. Over six fiscal years, all school districts are offered the opportunity to participate.

AS 14.03.420 codifies the Parents As Teachers (PAT) program as a program of the state within the department, and specifies criteria for PAT to demonstrate its efficacy in supporting school districts with pre-K education.

Section 9.

Amends AS 14.07.020(a) and directs the department to supervise all early education programs, approve those early education programs established under AS 14.03.410, establishes a new reading program, AS 14.07.065, and reading intervention programs of participating schools, AS 14.30.770.

[9:17:12 AM](#)

Ms. Tobin continued to address the Sectional Analysis:

Section 10.

AS 14.07.020(c) is amended to define an "early education program" as a pre-K program for students three to five years old if its primary function is educational. The 3-year-old students are not included in the program this bill proposes but are included to ensure they are not excluded from existing State and Federal programs.

Section 11.

Amends AS 14.07.050 to allow the department to supply supplemental reading textbooks and materials related to intervention services established under AS 14.30.765 and AS 14.30.770.

Section 12.

Amends AS 14.07.165(a), relating to the duties of the state Board of Education and Early Development, by adding to those duties a requirement to establish

regulations for Pre-K standards and pre-K teacher certification requirements.

Section 13.

Amends AS 14.17.500 by adding new subsection (d) that establishes an early education student shall be counted in the school district's average daily membership (ADM) as a half day student once the early education program has been approved by the department.

Section 14.

Amends AS 14.17.905(a) to include students in early education programs approved by the department in the definition of an elementary school.

Section 15.

Amends AS 14.17.905 by adding new subsection (d) to avoid letting school districts count pre-K students twice in Foundation Formula ADM calculations.

Section 16.

Amends AS 14.20.015(c) to ensure teaching certificate reciprocity for teachers moving to Alaska from out-of-state and adds that such teachers must complete at least three credits or equivalency in evidence-based reading instruction in order to be eligible for an Alaska teaching endorsement in elementary education.

Section 17.

Amends AS 14.20.020 by adding new subsection (l) that requires all teachers to complete at least three credits or equivalency in evidence-based reading instruction in order to be eligible for an endorsement in elementary education.

Section 18.

Establishes Article 15, Reading Intervention Programs. Establishes AS 14.30.760, which directs the department 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.

Establishes AS 14.30.765, which directs each school district to offer intensive reading intervention services to K-3 students exhibiting a reading

deficiency. Services must be implemented in a manner to include a high amount of communication between teachers, parents, administrators and the student. Considerable detailed attention, including written and verbal parental notification is given under this section for instances when a student failing to progress toward reading proficiency that may result in the student not advancing to the next grade level.

Establishes AS 14.30.770, which directs the department 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. The department 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.

[9:21:38 AM](#)

Senator Olson asked about the issue of retention and asked how the sponsor could allay concerns about children being held back.

Senator Begich referenced page 2, line 19 of the bill, which showed current state policy. The bill did not change current retention standards in state law, but did change the parameters around reporting. Currently there was no law to require retention reporting. He asserted that the bill also strengthened the relationship between parents, teachers, and the administration, which was not a current requirement. He referenced page 17, line 6 of the bill, which had new language pertaining to demonstration of reading capability. There was no requirement in the bill that a student be mandatorily retained. He discussed exceptions listed on page 19 of the bill.

Senator Begich continued to address Senator Olson's question. He thought there was a number of protections in the bill. He reiterated that the bill did not do anything to add retention language to existing law. He thought the bill would ensure the final retention decision was informed

and was a joint decision. He mused that there could be stronger protection for parents in the bill.

[9:25:14 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof referenced reporting requirements in Section 7. She asked if there was intent to create a new series of tests or if the intent was to use the existing MAP testing.

Senator Begich understood that existing programs such as MAP testing would be acceptable under the bill.

Co-Chair von Imhof asked who would receive the data mentioned in the bill and what would be done with it.

Senator Begich reported that the data would be received annually by the department as well as the House and Senate Education Committees. There was a provision in the bill that would create a review group of parents, instructors, and principals; that would also review data produced from the report and would report on the efficacy of the act. The provision had been an addition in the Senate Education Committee.

Co-Chair von Imhof referenced continuing education and teacher certification in early reading. She asked if teachers would need to pay for the certification.

Senator Begich noted that currently every teacher was required to recertify and was responsible for the cost. the bill required that three credits of the required continuing education would have to be in reading education. The bill would not change the current policy on payment for continuing education.

Senator Wielechowski mentioned a constituent that had worked on the bill with the sponsor. He referenced Section 18, pertaining to the department adopting an assessment tool to administer to students in kindergarten through third grade. There was a suggestion to move the age back to Pre-K. He asked for the sponsor to comment.

Senator Begich stated that initially the stakeholders had discussed screening at the Pre-K level to identify learning disabilities. There was federal law that required some screening. There were two reasons the change was not made

in the bill: not every child had Pre-K, and there was a question whether the screening was age appropriate. He was unfamiliar with the screening tools for the Pre-K age. He was not averse to the idea and deferred further comment to a subject matter professional.

[9:29:50 AM](#)

Senator Wielechowski had a question about Section 14 on page 20, which required the department to establish a reading program for the lowest-performing ten percent of schools. There had been a suggestion to increase the number to 40 or 50 percent.

Senator Begich stated that the matter had come up in the Senate Education Committee. He thanked Senator Gary Stevens and staff for their work. There had been discussion that the pool of 10 percent of schools might be too small for the intensive effort. He had spoken to the commissioner and the governor about the issue of potentially expanding the size of the pool. He suggested that the program be open to the bottom 25 percent of lower performing schools. He had read a note from Senator Wielechowski's constituent earlier in the day. He shared a concern about the suggestion of larger groups that all the money would go to those that needed the money less than others. He affirmed that he felt the pool should be larger, and a former member of the Alaska Board of Education had suggested the same in testimony.

Co-Chair von Imhof commented that any increases in the number of schools would change the fiscal note. She reminded that there were many competing needs in the state (including school bond debt reimbursement), and the committee would need to prioritize. She referenced the price of oil.

[9:32:07 AM](#)

Senator Wielechowski discussed teacher education and how the state educated teachers to teach reading.

Senator Begich stated that the bill included a number of provisions related to teacher education and how reading was taught. There was a number of departmental responsibilities that were identified, such as paying for teachers to attend regional conferences. He continued that specificity was

spoken to in a number of provisions regarding what was entailed in reading comprehension and the additional required credits for teachers. He stated that he had worked with teachers on the provisions.

Senator Begich spoke to Co-Chair von Imhof's comment on the expanding pool. He asserted that the bill provided for intensive support for up to ten schools, and the cost would not change. He thought there would not be a change to the fiscal note if the number of eligible schools increased; there would only be increased competition for the grants. He estimated that there was a total of 505 schools. An expanded pool would increase the number of eligible schools from 50 to about 150.

Co-Chair von Imhof understood that Senator Begich was referring to increasing the number of schools that would qualify for the grants, but not increasing the number of schools that would receive the grants.

Senator Begich agreed.

Senator Bishop asked about teacher retention and if the subject had been discussed.

Senator Begich stated that teacher retention had come up numerous times in the work on the bill. There was a provision in the bill related to the topic.

Ms. Tobin specified that the provision was in Section 22, which established a teacher retention working group.

Senator Begich stated that the provision had been proposed in committee by Senator Mia Costello. The group would be a task force and would include teachers, principals, superintendents, and board of education members to do a deep dive on the issue. The group would come up with strategies for recruitment and retention. He thought the provision was a critical component of the bill.

Senator Bishop wanted to expand on Co-Chair von Imhof's earlier comments regarding data when DEED staff was testifying on the bill.

Co-Chair von Imhof understood that rural teacher housing was a challenge and thought that there had been several ideas in the past to build rural housing for teachers in

areas where it was needed. She thought it was another funding question.

[9:36:42 AM](#)

Ms. Tobin continued to address the Sectional Analysis:

Section 19.

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

Section 20.

Repeals AS 14.03.410, the early education grant program, in 11 years once all school districts have had the opportunity to participate.

Section 21.

Establishes a Teacher Retention Working Group as a new uncodified law of the State of Alaska.

Section 22.

Is applicability language, relating to endorsements in elementary education issued on or after the effective date of this act.

Section 23.

Is transition language, directing the department 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.

Section 24.

Establishes an effective date of July 1, 2020.

Co-Chair von Imhof asked about Section 19. She asked if it would be a criminal offense if a teacher did not report evidence of child abuse.

Senator Begich did not know the answer to the question with regard to criminality, but the situation would place the organization under a reporting requirement. The section was conforming language to the statute.

Co-Chair von Imhof asked if the sponsor could look into the matter and let the committee know.

Senator Begich agreed to provide the information.

Senator Bishop brought up the issue of teacher training with regard to Section 19.

Senator Hoffman referenced Section 23 and using the information from 2018-19 for school ranking. He asked if the ranking had been completed and when the information would be available.

Senator Begich thought the ranking had been completed. He thought the commissioner could speak to the topic.

[9:40:29 AM](#)

MICHAEL JOHNSON, COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT, thanked the bill sponsor, the governor, Senator Gary Stevens, the Senate Education Committee, staff, and anyone that had contributed to the bill's development. He stated that the Alaska Reads Act represented multiple years of work. He mentioned the state board of education's strategic planning process, which resulted in the priority of increased reading proficiency. He thought there had been thoughtful dialogue over a number of years. The bill was a comprehensive approach, and had three main parts: a Pre-K section, K-3 reading interventions, and resources and support for low performing schools. He thought the bill provided the structure and support to help students.

Commissioner Johnson continued his remarks. He thought that the bill gave everyone a voice. The bill required that parents be part of the decision-making process. The bill allowed a number of interventions by teachers to serve students. The bill provided a process by which a principal or superintendent had a consistent, thoughtful, and effective decision-making process for student's progress toward reading proficiency. The bill would provide legislators with annual progress reports.

Commissioner Johnson thought most importantly, the bill provided students multiple pathways to demonstrate proficiency in reading, and would provide evidence-based interventions if needed. The bill provided students multiple safeguards. He summarized that the bill provided

and opportunity for everyone involved to have the structure and support needed to make the best decisions for students.

[9:44:56 AM](#)

Senator Bishop asked the commissioner if he could identify one thing to improve the bill.

Commissioner Johnson stated he would pass the bill. He referenced increasing the pool of schools that could be eligible for increased resources and supports. He thought that by expanding the pool there was a greater chance of applying the resources effectively and reaching more schools over time.

Senator Hoffman recalled that several years ago the administration intervened in administering education in the Yupik School District. He asked if there was information as to how the department had improved education for the Yupik School District.

Commissioner Johnson agreed to provide the information. He thought the bill envisioned a different type of intervention than what Senator Hoffman was referencing. He asserted that the bill proposed a more cooperative arrangement with schools.

Senator Hoffman referenced Section 23 and asked if the commissioner could provide school accountability rankings for 2018-19.

Commissioner Johnson stated that the department could provide the information. He informed that the data was part of the Every Student Succeeds Act, which was in its second year.

Co-Chair von Imhof OPENED public testimony.

[9:49:20 AM](#)

DIANNE SHIBE, MAT-SU EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, PALMER (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. She had been a high school English teacher since 1993. She encouraged the committee to support the idea that parents should have the final decision on matters concerning students. She commented on reduced funding in education. She pondered what would happen with the passage of SB 6

with no increase in funding for districts to successfully implement the program. She cited kindergarten classes with a size of 27 to 28 students. She noted that the State of Florida was a success model and had a constitutional amendment limiting kindergarten through third grade class sizes to 18. She asked the committee to consider appropriate funding.

[9:51:26 AM](#)

SANDI RYAN, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke in favor of the bill. She was a math and computer science teacher and served as the president of the Fairbanks Education Association. She was happy to see that the state recognized the importance of reading education. She emphasized the importance of Pre-K education. She hoped the committee was considering the strain of placing unfunded mandates on school districts. She asserted that if funding continued to decrease, or if a program was added, class sizes would be impacted. She was concerned with the prescriptive nature of the current bill. She noted that public education was facing a \$30 million cut across the state. She asked members to keep in mind that schools had reached a point where it was impossible to do more with less.

[9:53:58 AM](#)

JUDY ELEDGE, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. She had been a teacher since 1981. She had worked in the lowest performing schools since 2003. She had been a principal and teacher. She questioned whether more money would make schools more successful. She asserted that the bill could be implemented without additional funds. She thought there was nothing in the bill that could be considered an unfunded mandate. She reminded that all five of the state's largest school districts supported the bill, including the retention component. She did not support retention unless supports were ensured, which she thought the bill included. She agreed with the commissioner in expanding the number of low-performing schools that would be eligible for additional supports to 25 percent.

[9:56:25 AM](#)

MIKE BRONSON, ANCHORAGE BRANCH NAACP, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill. He thanked Senator Gary Stevens and Senator Cathy Giessel for their work on the bill. He thought the bill brought to bear two or three important tactical approaches to helping improve students' reading. He expressed concern about the fiscal note addressing the scale and urgency of the concern and that the number of interventions provided to schools were too little. He mentioned concern about the number of pre-schools allocated around the state.

[9:57:48 AM](#)

BOB GRIFFIN, ALASKA POLICY FORUM, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill. He noted that Alaska was one of 14 states without a comprehensive reading policy. He cited that Alaska rated 51st in fourth grade scores for low-income and upper-middle income kids. The point spread indicated a grade level of achievement. He recalled that someone had testified that poverty rate was to blame for the test scores but cited other states with higher poverty rates and higher scores. He cited that Alaska was near the bottom in eighth-grade reading. He mentioned reading improvements in Florida after a law similar to the proposed bill was enacted. He thought there were a least 14 improvement strategies in the bill, and he thought the retention provision was the most contentious. He referenced improvements in states with retention models. He hoped that SB 6 would be effective, however if the state continued to show scores far below average, he recommended that a stronger retention element be considered.

[10:00:46 AM](#)

JODI TAYLOR, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill. She had helped facilitate a college prep testing course and had discovered that children started lagging behind in third grade. She was a parent working on the advisory board for her children's school, and she felt the bill gave parents a voice. She thought the bill would hold the schools accountable. She thought reading should be a core function of a school. She discussed the importance of reading in life outcomes. She discussed the success of her daughter being retained one grade.

[10:02:23 AM](#)

DEENA BISHOP, SUPERINTENDENT, ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in favor of the bill. She communicated that the bill aligned with the Anchorage School District's (ASD) strategic plan to have 90 percent of third grades students reading at grade level. She thought that the legislation would empower teachers to ensure students learned to read. She commented on the difference in student's abilities in Alaska as compared to other states. She was not interested in a consensus bill. She preferred a bill based on research and one that would make positive change. She thought continued forward motion would provide clarification of student needs. She thought the sponsor had heard from stakeholders that would inform the process. She understood the need for assessment and reporting. She commented on the importance of literacy.

[10:06:09 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof disclosed that she had served on the Anchorage School Board from 2012 to 2013. She discussed the work of the board. She believed that reading performance had improved after the board president increased the reading requirement by 90 minutes for elementary schools in Anchorage.

[10:06:46 AM](#)

PETER HOEPFNER, CORDOVA SCHOOL BOARD, CORDOVA (via teleconference), discussed his concerns with the bill. He supported additional Pre-K funding. He was concerned about the funding level for Pre-K, which he thought would lead to larger classes. He thought the retention piece was bothersome because of all the exceptions. He cited research that indicated retention regressed students up to two years. He was concerned about school capacity for fill out grants. He wondered what would happen when the bill was not successful in increasing scores. He commented on the size and complexity of the bill and thought there were good and bad parts. He was concerned that the Alaska Reads Act was putting the cart before the horse. He mentioned the effect of Adverse Childhood Experiences. He wondered if the bill would address the issues students had.

[10:09:43 AM](#)

ELLIS OTT, FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR SCHOOL DISTRICT, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke to his concerns with the bill. He had serious concerns with the third-grade retention component of the bill. He thought evidence clearly showed that there was damage caused by retention. He thought evidence-based policy should dictate that retention was used a rare last resort. He thought if followed statewide, the retention provision could cause Alaska to have the highest rate of third-grade retention in the country. He recommended that the third-grade retention component be removed from the bill. He thought fourth-grade reading assessments had been contaminated. He discussed urban versus rural school district achievement. He thought legislation should avoid being over prescriptive.

[10:12:15 AM](#)

MELANIE HADAWAY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING, FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR SCHOOL DISTRICT, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified in opposition to the bill. She thought the intent of the bill was admirable but had concerns with the prescriptive nature of the bill. She was worried about the ability of small rural districts to meet the requirements of the legislation. She was glad to see the inclusion of evidence-based reading instruction. She referenced statewide screening and pointed out that the process of administering state assessments was labor and time intensive. She hoped the cost impact on smaller districts would be considered. She thought a missing component was how proficiency would be reported to align with other assessment systems. She recommended adding a fifth consideration on page 15 of the bill. She had considerable concern with Section 18 of the bill, and thought the prescriptive nature was problematic. She thought the phrases "daily targeted instruction" and "small group reading instruction" was too prescriptive. She had problems with the retention provision. She thought the approach to retention presented limited exceptions and ignored the long-term evidence of negative outcomes. She thought retention also contributed to misrepresentation of achievement scores. She thought the sponsor should be commended.

Co-Chair von Imhof encouraged testifiers to provide written testimony if the time allotted was not sufficient.

[10:15:45 AM](#)

NICK SCHOLLMEIER, DILLINGHAM CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT, DILLINGHAM (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. He was an elementary principal. He thanked the legislature for recognizing the importance of reading. He was concerned with Section 18 of the bill pertaining to progress reports, and felt it was cumbersome. He had 57 students that scored below the 30th percentile on a national assessment test. He thought line 27 would have required a progress report for each student every two weeks, which would result in many hours being spent away from teaching students. He highly recommended for the provision to provide for sending progress reports quarterly or annually to ensure teachers could maximize content time.

[10:17:27 AM](#)

POSIE BOGGS, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill. She had submitted written testimony. She agreed with Commissioner Johnson in that the bill should be amended to increase the number of schools that were eligible for the three-year grant. She recommended that to keep the integrity of reading program that the grants include a couple of schools at each performance level. She recommended aligning the Parents as Teachers Program with evidence-based early reading instruction. She wanted to add terminology found in federal law pertaining to reading and evidence components. She cited that having books in the house and being read to increased oral comprehension but did not help pre-reading skills as much as educating parents. She thought the state could save money if it took a deeper look at not duplicating screening efforts and asking DEED and school districts to partner via the federal reading mandate.

[10:21:25 AM](#)

BRAD GALBRAITH, FOUNDATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION IN ACTION, PHOENIX, ARIZONA (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill. He recognized the importance of reading achievement by the third grade as a skill for success. His organization had worked on reading policies throughout the country and had identified 14 key principles. He was encouraged that the bill covered many of the principals; some of which focused on strategies to support students, home reading strategies, and retention.

[10:23:03 AM](#)

TOM KLAAMEYER, ANCHORAGE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill. He had worked for 24 years teaching social studies in Anchorage. He appreciated the collaborative bipartisan work on the bill. He did not think there was debate on the importance of student reading. He commented on the Anchorage School District (ASD) budget and thought it was difficult to focus on new demands while struggling to meet current requirements. He was excited by the Pre-K opportunities in the bill. He was worried that rather than empowering teachers to be better at teaching reading; it would make jobs more difficult with larger class sizes, increased demands, and less resources. He implored the legislature to fund school districts for reducing class sizes and increasing educational efficacy.

[10:25:31 AM](#)

STEPHANIE BERGLUND, CEO, THREAD, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), supported the bill. She thought current Pre-K resources were working, and thought expanding the services would better maximize parental choice and early learning options. Her organization estimated that there was currently only half the capacity for quality early childhood programs that were needed. She encouraged diversity of services through collaborative, mixed-delivery systems. She emphasized the importance of high-quality programs. She discussed teacher education. She was worried that degreed teachers would gravitate to Pre-K and leave fewer highly educated teachers in other early childhood settings. She thought quality pre-K education needed to be a part of the state's economic infrastructure.

[10:27:42 AM](#)

DONNA MCCARREY, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke to the retention provision of the bill. She was a retired teacher in ASD. She discussed her sons' positive experience with being retained. She did not think all cases of retention should be considered negative.

[10:29:00 AM](#)

CHRISTINE VILLANO, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), shared her concerns with the bill. She was a retired

teacher that had taught in Fairbanks and rural areas. She had focused on teaching reading and writing. She loved many components of the bill such as additional Pre-K funding. She was concerned about potential unfunded mandates in the bill. She questioned whether districts would reprioritize spending. She wondered how much time and materials would be needed. She asserted that early primary teachers often faced large class sizes and would be hard pressed to do the extra components in the bill. She thought there were many prescriptive elements in the bill. She was concerned with Section 14.3 on page 15. She thought educators needed to be involved with the selection of materials, training, and other elements in the bill. She believed that people with classroom experience in the state had much to offer the legislature on the matter. She thought teachers had to be a part of the process of how the legislation evolved and how it would look in the future. She mentioned the importance of class size.

[10:32:38 AM](#)

DENISE LISAC, SELF, DILLINGHAM (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill. She was a retired reading teacher. She had been involved in writing standards for No Child Left Behind and testifying for the Common Core. She questioned how the bill was different. She referenced low teacher retention in rural Alaska. She discussed class sizes. She thought it seemed like there was a lot of accountability and communication in the bill, which could be accomplished in smaller classes. She spoke to teacher improvement and thought teachers should agree on a good reading program. She stressed the importance of students in grade 4 through 12. She mentioned the importance of math and science.

[10:35:08 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof CLOSED public testimony.

Co-Chair von Imhof wanted to address the fiscal notes.

HEIDI TESHNER, DIRECTOR, FINANCE AND SUPPORT SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT, explained that she would address five fiscal notes. She addressed FN 1 from the Department of Education and Early Development, OMB Component 141. She explained that the fiscal note did not show any costs as the note involved the foundation

program and was a General Fund transfer from the Public Education Fund. She stated that FN 5 would show the actual costs related to students that would flow into the foundation formula after the costs had flowed through the three-year early education grant program once it was approved. The fiscal notes assumed that the programs would be approved, and the students would flow into the formula. Starting in FY 24, there would be a \$1.7 million cost to the foundation formula.

[10:37:05 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman asked for more explanation of the bill mechanics within Base Student Allocation (BSA) formula funding.

Ms. Teshner stated that the \$4,685 referenced in the fiscal note was an estimated average cost per student. The actual students, once districts submitted counts to the department, would be put into the formula.

Co-Chair Stedman asked if the number went through multipliers.

Ms. Teshner answered in the affirmative.

Co-Chair Stedman asked for details on the estimated \$4,685.

Ms. Teshner relayed that the department had looked at the FY 21 state entitlement projected amount of a little over \$1.2 billion, divided the amount by the total project average daily membership, and then halved the number.

Co-Chair von Imhof referenced FN 4, which had a table that broke down the numbers further. She thought FN 1, FN 4, and FN 5 were discussing the same numbers.

Ms. Teshner answered in the affirmative.

Senator Bishop thought there were 5 fiscal notes. He looked at the analysis on page 2 of FN 4, and thought the bill was creating three new programs.

Ms. Teshner stated that all the fiscal notes and bill covered three new programs.

Senator Bishop asked if the fiscal notes all rolled into a total. He asked for a more detailed explanation.

Co-Chair von Imhof asked if Ms. Teshner had a summary of the fiscal notes with totals.

Ms. Teshner stated that the projected total of all the fiscal notes for FY 21 was \$6,347,700. By 2026, the total for all fiscal notes was \$91,356,900 over the span of time. She offered to provide a chart that went from FY 21 to FY 29, when the proposed education grants were projected to close.

Co-Chair von Imhof asked to address FN 2 and FN 3.

[10:41:51 AM](#)

Ms. Teshner addressed FN 2, OMB Component 2796. The fiscal note reflected the costs associated with the School Improvement Literacy Program and the Comprehensive Reading Intervention Program. She read from the Analysis on page 2 of the fiscal note:

The school improvement literacy program, created under AS 14.30.770, is established in the Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) to provide direct support and intervention in district and school literacy programs. During the first year, up to 10 schools identified from the lowest 10 percent of schools, would each be served directly by Reading Specialists employed by DEED and up to 20 schools would be served in the second year and beyond. Depending on school size and need, either one or two Reading Specialists would be assigned to each school. DEED anticipates employing from 0 to 20 Reading Specialists in year one and 20 to 40 Reading Specialists in the subsequent years.

Ms. Teshner noted that salary and benefit costs for staff were reflected in the fiscal note: there were department charge-back costs of \$9,600 per student, and one-time costs of \$5,000 per person for supplies and equipment. In FY 21 there was a one-time cost for legal services associated with regulation adoption. The purchase of supplemental reading textbooks and materials for the School Improvement Literacy Program would be \$255,000.

Ms. Teshner continued to address FN 2 and spoke to the Comprehensive Reading Intervention Program as described in Analysis on page 2 and page 3 of the note. She detailed that DEED would manage and support the program and would provide direct support and training for all K - 3 teachers on the use of the statewide screening or assessment tool. The staff reflected in the fiscal note was four staff members as well as the department chargebacks for the staff and one-time costs for supplies and equipment. The staff would be required to participate and present at statewide professional development, and there were associated travel costs of \$1000 per employee.

Ms. Teshner detailed that there was funding of \$320,000 for the program's adoption of the statewide screening or assessment tool. There was a projected cost of \$53,000 associated with a grant for districts to attend the statewide professional development to learn the use of the tool. The fiscal note showed an overall estimated cost for FY 21 of \$4,221,700. She noted that there was a chart on page 3 of the fiscal note that outlined the two programs and funding by line item, as well as combined totals.

[10:45:10 AM](#)

Senator Bishop asked for reasoning as to why there was not a geographic cost differential included in the fiscal note. He referenced the second paragraph of the Analysis on page 2.

Ms. Teshner noted that it was not known where staff would be located, and therefore it was hard to estimate any geographic cost differential.

Co-Chair von Imhof observed that there would be an additional approximately \$25 million per year going towards education if the bill were to pass. She thought the fiscal note indicated a BSA increase on an annual basis. She emphasized that the fiscal notes represented a pivotal change and a financial commitment rather than a short-term grant.

[10:46:56 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman commented on the sensitivity of the education funding formula and thought it would be a good idea for the committee to examine the calculations. He

wanted the committee to be familiar with how the BSA formula worked. He commented on the political sensitivity of the issue. He wanted to see the proposed funding within the formula.

Co-Chair von Imhof noted that the committee modelled many fiscal scenarios. She asked if the commissioner had the ability to model different student demographics within the education formula and show how it might change the formula.

Co-Chair Stedman wanted to examine a potential reduction in the BSA.

Co-Chair von Imhof thought the funding in the bill was focused. She pointed out that there were accountability mechanisms in the bill. She wondered if the bill was slowly moving the BSA to more focused funding. She thought the committee should consider how class sizes affected the BSA. She wanted committee members to mull over the bill presentation. She asked members to communicate with her office regarding any thoughts on the bill.

10:50:00 AM

Ms. Teshner addressed FN 3, OMB Component 2912. The fiscal note addressed costs associated with early learning coordination. The costs were for operation of the Early Education Grant Program, as well as providing training and support for the grantees. There were three estimated staff members to operate and manage the program. Aside from salary and benefits, there were department chargeback costs of \$9,600 per person. There was a one-time cost of \$5,000 per person for supplies and equipment. There was a one-time cost for \$6,000 for the state board to adopt regulations for standards. In FY 21, it was estimated to be \$401,900

Ms. Teshner addressed FN 4, OMB Component 3028. The fiscal note addressed costs associated with the early education program grants. She referenced the table on page 3 of the fiscal note, which provided a breakdown of costs. The fiscal note estimated participation from 10,000 students from a four-year-old cohort. There were an additional 3,675 students that would be served by the legislation. Table 2 showed costs of when different cohorts would flow through the program. Table 3 showed which students in cohorts would be included in the math. Table 4 showed the number of students that would be served. It was estimated that over

the course of the three-year grant program, starting in FY 21 and going to FY 29, there was an estimated total cost of \$51,652,125.

Senator Bishop assumed the Parents As Teachers (PAT) Program would be inside the bill. He referenced FN 3. The appropriation for PAT was currently housed in Department of Health and Social Services.

Senator Wilson thought the PAT Program federally qualified the state for funding for the Families First Services Initiative through the Office of Children's Services. He was not sure the moving the program would have an effect on qualification.

Co-Chair von Imhof set the bill aside.

SB 6 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#

ADJOURNMENT

[10:54:26 AM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 10:54 a.m.