

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

May 3, 2021
8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky
Representative Grier Hopkins
Representative Mike Prax
Representative Mike Cronk
Representative Ronald Gillham

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 53

"An Act relating to residency requirements for public school enrollment for certain children of active duty military and National Guard members."

- MOVED CSHB 53 (MLV) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 164

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

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 53

SHORT TITLE: MILITARY CHILDREN SCHOOL RESIDENCY WAIVER

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) MCCARTY

02/18/21 (H) PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
02/18/21 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/18/21 (H) MLV, EDC
03/04/21 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/04/21 (H) Heard & Held
03/04/21 (H) MINUTE(MLV)
03/09/21 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/09/21 (H) Moved CSHB 53(MLV) Out of Committee
03/09/21 (H) MINUTE(MLV)
03/10/21 (H) MLV RPT CS(MLV) 6DP
03/10/21 (H) DP: CLAMAN, TARR, SHAW, STORY, NELSON,
TUCK
04/28/21 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/28/21 (H) Heard & Held
04/28/21 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
05/03/21 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 164

SHORT TITLE: EARLY ED PROGRAMS; READING; VIRTUAL ED

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) TUCK

04/07/21 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/07/21 (H) EDC, FIN
04/21/21 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/21/21 (H) <Bill Hearing Canceled>
04/23/21 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/23/21 (H) Heard & Held
04/23/21 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
04/26/21 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/26/21 (H) Heard & Held
04/26/21 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
04/30/21 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/30/21 (H) Heard & Held
04/30/21 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
05/03/21 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

LOKI TOBIN, Staff
Senator Tom Begich
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional analysis for HB 164 on behalf of the Senate Education Standing Committee, sponsor of companion bill SB 111.

KAREN MELIN, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Education & Early Development
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information and answered questions during the hearing on HB 164.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:36 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ANDI STORY called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Cronk, Gillham, Zulkosky, Drummond, and Story were present at the call to order. Representative Hopkins was present via teleconference. Representative Prax arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 53-MILITARY CHILDREN SCHOOL RESIDENCY WAIVER

[8:03:44 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 53, "An Act relating to residency requirements for public school enrollment for certain children of active duty military and National Guard members." [Before the committee was CSHB 53 (MLV).]

[8:05:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on CSHB 53 (MLV). After ascertaining that no one wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[8:06:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND moved to report CSHB 53 (MLV) out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHB 53 (MLV) was reported out of the House Education Standing Committee.

[8:06:48 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:06 a.m. to 8:10 a.m.

HB 164-EARLY ED PROGRAMS; READING; VIRTUAL ED

[Contains discussion of HB 69.]

8:10:48 AM

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 164, "An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to school age eligibility; relating to early education programs; establishing a parents as teachers program; relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to certification of teachers; establishing a reading intervention program for public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to a virtual education consortium; and providing for an effective date." [Before the committee, adopted as a working document during the 4/23/21 House Education Standing Committee meeting, was the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 164, Version 32-LS0731\I, Klein, 4/20/21, ("Version I").]

8:12:05 AM

LOKI TOBIN, Staff, Senator Tom Begich, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of the Senate Education Standing Committee, sponsor of companion legislation SB 111, presented the sectional analysis for HB 164, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

(Page 26, starting on Line 5) Section 35 establishes AS 14.30.765 - Reading intervention services and strategies.

For any K- 3rd-grade student who is struggling to read, districts must offer individualized reading intervention services to the maximum extent possible. This ensures local control and flexibility.

Interventions are in addition to core reading instruction. They should be provided (when practical) by or under the supervision of a reading teacher, be rooted in evidence-based methods that are proven to help a student learn to read within a single school year, provide clear instruction and a detailed explanation to the student, be individualized, be offered during or outside the regular school day, provide assistance and support to parents/guardians at home, and support opportunities for parents/guardians to learn about resources for adult literacy.

(Page 27, Line 10) Individual reading improvement plans must be implemented at least 30 days after a student is assessed to be struggling. Individual reading improvement plans must be culturally responsive and be monitored regularly to allow for adjustments. Parents/guardians/family members must be kept updated on their student's progress, and additional resources to support individual reading improvement plans at home must be provided to the family.

[8:14:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked whether the reading plan implementation would occur at home or within the school environment.

MS. TOBIN replied that the plan is intended to be implemented in school or at home.

[8:15:42 AM](#)

MS. TOBIN resumed her presentation of the sectional analysis, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

(Page 28, Line 2) Once a student is identified as a struggling reader, a family member must be notified within 15 days.

This notification, which can be verbal or written, must include a clear description of how the student was identified as a struggling reader and details of individual reading plans. Districts are asked to provide information on what future retention/progression options, waivers, and good cause exemptions may apply if the student continues to struggle to read. Parents/guardians must also receive information on how mid-year progression works within the district.

At 45 days (or before), if a student continues to struggle to read, districts are asked to have a parent/guardian/family member conference to discuss grade retention/progression and its potential impacts on the student - both academically and socio-emotionally.

Teachers and district staff will explain the student's situation and how retention may impact the student's future academic and social performance. At the end of the conversation, if all the parties are not in agreement as to what is the best course of action, the parent makes the final decision.

Parents/guardians/family members may request a good cause exemption for students with an individualized education plan, a student who has received at least two years of intensive reading intervention services, a student who has previously been retained, and a student who is an English Language Learner.

For students who are retained, school districts must provide individual reading improvement plans, evidence-based intensive reading intervention strategies, supplemental tutoring, increased time focused on reading, and a plan for homebased reading interventions.

As Commissioner Johnson has noted on the record: There is a lot of evidence that promoting a student who cannot read has consequences. At the same time, there is mixed/indecisive evidence that retaining a child has sustained positive consequences. What is known with certainty is that every student identified as a struggling reader should receive effective reading interventions. This legislation is not a retention bill; it is a reading bill, which means, as described above, this legislation focuses on effective interventions and accountability.

Effective means meeting commonly accepted standards of evidence-based practices.

Intervene means accurately and routinely identifying students who are struggling.

Accountable means establishing in statute the expectations of the legislature in reporting.

[8:18:45 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opined that only one meeting seems "prescriptive."

8:20:11 AM

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK pointed out that there would not be only one meeting, but that if there is a meeting that a parent or guardian cannot attend, the superintendent's designee would proxy.

CO-CHAIR STORY expressed confusion about the number of meetings.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK pointed out that the proposed legislation, on page 27, lines 26-27, would mandate providing at least 10 reading progress updates each year to the student's parent or guardian.

8:23:19 AM

KAREN MELIN, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education & Early Development (DEED), explained that there would be regular communication with parents as soon as a student is identified as a struggling reader. A truly effective intervention process would be done with the parents' full cooperation, she said, and the entire "ecosystem" of the child would be addressed.

8:25:31 AM

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY referred to page 29, line 8, of the proposed legislation, which she characterized as the school district "stepping in and making the decision on behalf of the parent or guardian." She said, "It gives me some pause, and some concern, that in state statute, we would be divesting parent and family and guardian decision-making to the superintendent."

8:27:06 AM

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK responded that the limit of 10 meetings per year was recommended by the National Education Association - Alaska, to not overly burden the classroom teacher while still providing continuous updates. The decision on whether a student advances to the next grade would have to be made at some point, he said, and he pointed to page 31, lines 4-10, of the proposed legislation, which read as follows:

(j) If no parent or guardian attends the meeting, and a superintendent or superintendent's designee decides that a student in grades kindergarten through three

will not progress to the next grade under (d) or (f) of this section, the district or school in which the student is enrolled shall provide immediate oral and written notification to the student's parent or guardian. The written notification must explain that the parent or guardian may reschedule the meeting provided under (d) or (f) of this section and that during a meeting

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK pointed out that a student can't be held back without a waiver, which must be signed by the parent or guardian.

[8:29:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX opined that attempts to work with unengaged students and parents are futile. He shared an anecdote of attempting to help students with unengaged parents.

[8:32:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK discussed that it typically takes five adults to raise a child, such as two parents, two grandparents, and a teacher. He said there was a study that followed children who were denied entry to charter school and found that their education results were the same as the children who were admitted entry to charter schools. The finding, he said, was in parental involvement; parents who are engaged enough to attempt to have their children educated in charter schools will remain engaged. He stated, "We are trying, with this bill, to encourage as much parental involvement as possible." He expressed that, while the proposed legislation may not see 100 percent success, it would have more success than is currently being experienced in the state. He then shared an anecdote of meeting an intelligent student who he described as "probably falling behind" because he was easily distracted, and he pointed out that when a teacher has up to 40 kids in a classroom, and there is little parental involvement, the teacher faces an extra challenge.

[8:36:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX shared observations of student engagement in a youth detention center.

[8:37:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND pointed out that in Representative Tuck's earlier reference to page 31, lines 4-10, the "final meeting" actually contains a lot of information, so it's not actually a final meeting. She noted the amount of vague language in the proposed legislation, and she suggested that a flowchart would help committee members visualize the assessment process. She stressed that there are dozens of opportunities between kindergarten and third grade for parents to respond to requests for meetings, and that if parents aren't responding by the time the child is in the third grade, there could be a serious issue. She shared that many foster care children, who often have many placements with different guardians, need guides to make sure they stay on track; if a parent or guardian isn't engaged, the child still needs to be helped. She pointed out Representative Tuck's reference to charter schools, which can require engaged and involved parents.

[8:42:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY commented that a visual depiction of interventions, classroom engagement, and family engagement would be beneficial. She said that she appreciates that HB 164 is not intended to be a "retention bill."

[8:44:42 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY agreed that the goal of the proposed legislation is progression instead of retention.

[8:45:15 AM](#)

MS. TOBIN noted that it would be helpful to know how many students could potentially be under discussion with respect to retention, but there are no statewide statistics; reporting metrics are included in the proposed legislation, so future decisions could be more informed. She resumed her presentation of the sectional analysis and said:

I'm on page 31, starting on line 16. For a student who is retained, this section denotes what the district is responsible to offer, to ensure student is able to progress and/or address their reading deficiencies.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked whether this portion of the proposed legislation would be mandatory for school districts.

MS. TOBIN replied that this is one of the mandated sections, as it would require intervention for a student who is retained.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked how DEED would support teachers in potentially under-resourced school districts.

MS. TOBIN pointed out that components of individual reading plans are discussed in the section. She then deferred to Ms. Melin.

[8:48:20 AM](#)

MS. MELIN said DEED could offer information and resources, as well as professional development opportunities.

[8:49:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked Ms. Melin to discuss reading intervention positions.

MS. MELIN responded that reading interventionalists would be embedded in the district to support teachers and deliver intervention opportunities to students, establish an intervention process, and provide professional development for teachers who are learning reading intervention. She said the state could support 11 schools; if there were 40 reading interventionalists, the state could support 40 schools.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked whether interventionists would be for schools or school districts.

MS. MELIN replied that they would be assigned to individual schools; however, teachers from other schools could attend training days.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked Ms. Melin to clarify whether the interventionalists would support the school as opposed to individual teachers.

MS. MELIN replied, "Yes. They would be a resource to the entire school to support all teachers, or any teacher, that would need support."

[8:52:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY mentioned a concern about teacher tenure in rural Alaska schools. She asked what DEED has considered

with respect to individual teacher capacity beyond professional development.

MS. MELIN replied that DEED has no authority within school districts. She said support, hiring, training, and mentoring lies with the district. Support for districts from DEED can include information, resources, and leadership.

[8:55:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked whether consideration has been given to the possibility of placing reading specialists within a community for a year.

MS. MELIN responded that the models with the most success involve the specialist being deeply embedded in the community and into the school culture.

MS. TOBIN interjected that the subject would be covered in the next section.

[8:57:44 AM](#)

MS. TOBIN resumed the sectional analysis for HB 164, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

(Page 32, Line 29) Section 35 establishes AS 14.30.770, department reading program.

DEED will develop and offer a direct support reading-intensive intervention program. The lowest-performing 25% of schools that serve K-3rd grade students are eligible, and DEED may select up to 5 schools.

MS. TOBIN noted that in previous legislation, DEED could select up to 10 schools.

[This part of the sectional analysis would conclude later in the meeting.]

[8:58:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND pointed out that the sectional analysis specified "the lowest-performing 25% of schools," not school districts. She noted that Alaska has over 500 individual schools, and she asked how support for the lowest-performing 25

percent of schools could be achieved by focusing on only five schools per year.

MS. TOBIN replied that the schools considered would be those serving only students in kindergarten through third grade. She said the previous legislation limited the number of schools for consideration to 10 percent, instead of 25 percent, with 10 participating schools in the trial program, of which its efficacy is still being explored.

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND expressed concern about reaching every child when focus is only on a small fraction of communities that need help. She then asked Ms. Melin for a list of schools, with grade levels, in each school district.

[9:01:00 AM](#)

MS. MELIN agreed to provide the information.

CO-CHAIR STORY commented that the intention is that support and progress would be demonstrated in each school district. She said MAPS assessment data shows that 60 percent of Alaska students are not reading at grade level.

MS. TOBIN commented that Representative Tuck, as prime sponsor of HB 164, would likely be amenable to an amendment on the section under discussion.

[9:02:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX said, "I don't think it is necessarily a bad idea to ... implement it, see how it works, in a limited, focused number of districts." He opined that there's no point to launching a program broadly without testing it in a smaller "market."

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY expressed approval of pilot programs, and she opined that the reading proficiency element is one of the most important in the proposed legislation.

[9:05:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND commented that there are 10,000 students per year in each grade level, and she stated need to reach as many communities as possible. She added that this would be an evidence-based program that has been proven to work, so there is

no need for pilot programs; she expressed the need for broad deployment.

[9:06:50 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY commented that many of the programs proposed in HB 164 are currently in place, but that there often isn't enough staff to carry out the programs, and that it's unrealistic to add the requirements when there's not enough staff to do the work.

[9:07:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked Ms. Melin to discuss the application and approval process for the reading interventionist program.

MS. MELIN replied that the state's accountability system would identify schools approved for the reading interventionist, which considers several different indicators to identify the lowest-performing schools. Depending on where a school falls in proficiencies, that school will either be approved or rejected for the program.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY referred to the test of HB 164, page 33, lines 10-11, which read, "(2) establish an application process for school districts to apply to participate in the program;". She said, "If the schools are identified through the accountability system ... how does the department intend to utilize the application process outlined on line 10?"

MS. MELIN responded that the identification process would identify more schools than staff available. She said some schools may choose to use their own processes rather than apply for the program.

[9:11:07 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY commented on the number of components to HB 164. She said the first component is the requirement that school districts have an evidence-based reading program, which many already do. She asked, "To what extent does the bill provide funding for K-3 teacher training and reading assessments and interventions, and the instructional strategies?" She expressed that it's important to build the expertise of the teachers. She expressed that missing out on funding for teacher training would result in more children requiring reading specialists, and she

shared the belief that the intended goal of the proposed legislation is fewer children who require intensive instruction.

MS. MELIN replied that she would check.

MS. TOBIN pointed out that page 25, lines 5-9, of the proposed legislation, may address Co-Chair Story's question. The text in question, Section 35, subsection (a), paragraph (3), read as follows:

(3) provide training to school district staff related to using the results of the statewide screening or assessment tool and understanding evidence-based reading interventions, including explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, oral language skills, and reading comprehension;

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked whether DEED would provide the resources for school districts to develop culturally appropriate assessment tools.

MS. TOBIN replied that a suggested amendment from Nome School District would create that component within the virtual education consortium. She said there's no national or international vendor that produces culturally-responsive reading criteria, particularly, criteria rooted in the indigenous knowledge structures of Alaska, so school districts have created the resources on their own. She said the potential amendment would allow for DEED to support a platform containing such information.

[9:15:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY referred to page 34, lines 9-11, which read as follows:

(B) provide explicit and systematic skill development in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, oral language skills, and reading comprehension;

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked whether the potential amendment would provide DEED with the resources to ensure any material touches all of the components of skill development.

MS. TOBIN replied that it's possible.

[9:16:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether DEED has an estimate of available resources, as well as how many schools and students, could be involved in the reading intervention program over the next five years.

MS. MELIN responded that processes and resources would need to be evaluated in the context of the legislation that ends up being passed.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX surmised that, after the legislation passes, it would take two or three years to implement the program.

MS. MELIN replied that there are many moving parts in implementation of a bill of this size, and DEED would implement any statutes as efficiently and quickly as possible.

[9:19:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK commented that HB 164 reminds him of "Obamacare," and he said, "Let's pass it until we figure out what's inside of it." He expressed that many educators are not in support of the proposed legislation because it's not simple. He said if the state is investing money in education, the state must invest money in development, so education has a purpose. He expressed the need to keep the proposed legislation simple.

[9:22:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND discussed the committee substitute for HB 69, and she reference a paragraph that she said would "lay the groundwork for what we're looking to accomplish here." She commented that HB 164 is not operating in a vacuum; schools are already teaching kids to read, and at least 40 percent of children are reading at grade level. She read from the text of CSHB 69(FIN), Version 32-GH1509\D, page 10, lines 23-30, which read as follows:

It is the intent of the legislature that a baseline assessment of current practice in Alaska's 53 School Districts, including but not limited to adopted K-3 reading curriculum and assessment tools; Dyslexia screening tools; intervention strategies and timeline; frequency of parent teacher conferences for those students experiencing reading deficits; teacher and

staff training offered to support K-3 reading instruction; and number of certificated K-3 teachers with reading endorsement. The Department is to provide a report of findings to the Finance co-chairs and the Legislative Finance Division on or before December 1, 2021, and notify the Legislature that the report is available.

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND stated that she doesn't believe HB 164 would be moved out of the House Education Standing Committee before the legislature adjourns for the year, so there's time to gather data and understand where school districts stand.

[9:25:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY expressed agreement with Representative Drummond's comments, and discussed opportunities for public testimony.

[9:26:45 AM](#)

MS. TOBIN resumed presenting the sectional analysis for CSHB 164 Version I, noting that she would conclude the portion of the sectional analysis that she began earlier in the meeting, which discussed Section 35 establishing AS 14.30.770, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

DEED must provide direct support to school districts to implement a district reading program that includes a DEED-supported reading specialist to assist teachers and staff in learning evidence-based reading strategies.

(Page 33, starting on Line 17) there is a detailed description of the job responsibilities of the assigned reading specialist. These responsibilities include coaching, mentoring, training, facilitating, and leading district teachers and staff in evidence-based reading instruction methodologies and data analytics.

DEED is also required to work with assigned reading specialists in developing progress reporting and measurable success metrics. DEED must purchase additional reading support materials, pay for any associated costs like travel, and assist in building

professional development plans for district staff in evidence-based reading instruction.

Reading specialists will work with district staff and community members to improve school reading skills. Reading specialists must provide annual reports to the community on the effectiveness of the district reading program.

(Page 34, lines 18-22) DEED will convene an annual panel of educators, parents, and classroom teachers to provide feedback to DEED on the implementation of Section 35. The intent is for DEED to use this feedback in adjusting or augmenting the implementation of this section.

(Page 34, line 25) AS 14.30.770 provides additional guidance for districts and DEED on implementing the department reading program to ensure a collaborative approach.

(Page 35, line 28) Section 35 includes a detailed job description for a reading specialist that requires the educator to have experiential and academic experience in evidence-based reading instruction.

(Pages 36-37) Section 35 includes definitions for the district, evidence-based reading instruction, and an inclusive definition of parent and guardian.

(Page 38, lines 24-27) Section 37 includes a definition for culturally responsive.

(Page 39, starting on line 11) Section 42 adds applicability language for teachers who begin teaching on or after the effective date of this act - pertaining to previous sections on educator coursework in evidence-based reading.

[9:30:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked how DEED envisions implementation of "culturally responsive" techniques.

MS. MELIN responded that the vision for the proposed legislation lies with the bill sponsor, so DEED would work to implement that vision.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX said, "If someone grew up in the Greek culture, and English was their second language, there would be some difficulty in fitting what's going on in the development of this program into the Greek culture."

MS. TOBIN pointed out that the original language acknowledged that Alaska already has standards for culturally responsive schools, which were adopted in 1992. She commented that the definition could receive some suggested amendments, and she said she looks forward to seeing how the amendments could ensure that HB 164 remains rooted in the state's cultural traditions while acknowledging the many individuals from other cultures.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked, "And that is in statute, or in regulation?"

MS. TOBIN offered to provide the committee with a copy of Alaska's standards for culturally responsive schools.

[9:34:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked how DEED intends to navigate potential conflicts between any evidence-based reading components that may not align with cultural methods of learning.

MS. MELIN replied that DEED would work with experts and stakeholders to ensure the components of HB 164 are implemented in the ways intended by the sponsor.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked what actions DEED would take if a situation arose in which a school district's immersion program puts forward recommendations that don't align perfectly with the evidence-based reading components as outlined in HB 164.

MS. MELIN responded that DEED would need to work with each specific situation. She said HB 164 specifies components for reading in English, so DEED would need to work with experts and stakeholders to understand how components would work in another language.

[9:37:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX shared his understanding that there are Russian and Filipino communities in Alaska, and he asked whether DEED intends to address "cultural variability to that level."

MS. MELIN answered that DEED's intention would be to work with all stakeholders to implement HB 164. She pointed out that there are many distinct cultural communities and languages, and she said that DEED has always worked to ensure that any regulations are implemented appropriately.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked, "Do you feel that the department has the ... capacity to do that, or would that take more people than expected?"

MS. MELIN replied that it's difficult to identify whether DEED has adequate resources until expectations are known. She said, "Once we have a clear law in place, then we can evaluate capacity of department and our ability to implement it."

[9:40:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked for discussion about required training for reading interventionalists.

MS. TOBIN said page 36 of the proposed legislation contains a detailed job description for a reading specialist, which clearly outlines the experiential and academic experience a reading specialist would need to have in order to practice in Alaska. She noted that subparagraph (F) on page 36 discusses ensuring expertise in teaching students whose primary language is not English. She stressed that the bill's sponsor views HB 164 as focusing on evidence-based reading strategies based on the National Reading Panel's review of over 100,000 recommendations of learning to read in any language, rather than it being an "English reading bill."

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked whether there are currently individuals in Alaska who have the credentials required under HB 164.

MS. TOBIN clarified that development of the job description was done to ensure that there would be Alaskans who qualify.

[9:44:48 AM](#)

MS. MELIN said DEED could provide details on how many educators currently hold a reading endorsement.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked whether training would be developed by DEED.

MS. MELIN stated that DEED is ready to prepare such training.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS commented that it appears a certain level of proficiency would be required.

[9:46:39 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY said she would like to know how many teachers are trained in working with students with dyslexia.

MS. MELIN said she would inquire whether such data is collected.

CO-CHAIR STORY asked for discussion on whether a level of proficiency would need to be demonstrated for teachers and/or reading specialists.

MS. TOBIN interjected that Co-Chair Story may be referring to Section 33 of the proposed legislation. She said there has been discussion regarding how educators are prepared, and she asked Ms. Melin for comments.

[9:48:26 AM](#)

MS. MELIN explained that elementary educators must achieve a minimum score on the Praxis test, which is a national test given to educators across the country. As far as university preparation, she said, programs and schools across the country vary widely, so she wouldn't be able to say how educators are prepared. She expressed that it would be important that educators who become part of the program as outlined in HB 164 have consistent training addressing the science of reading.

MS. TOBIN interjected that Section 33 was added based on the reading plan established in Mississippi, which emphasized individual reading plans, early education, and support for school districts.

[9:51:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK opined that for HB 164 to be effective, reading specialists would have to train teachers.

[9:52:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY referred to page 26 of the proposed legislation, lines 23-24 and lines 27-29, and commented that these proposals

would require extra resources. She asked how the resources would be implemented and funded.

MS. TOBIN referred to page 26, line 11, which says, "The intensive reading intervention services must, to the extent practicable," and she explained that if those provisions were not practical or possible for a school district to implement, they would not be required. She pointed out that many school districts have after school programs or summer school, and that it would be a school district's decision regarding possible interventions.

[9:53:50 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that HB 164 was held over.

[9:54:49 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:55 a.m.