

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 1, 2021

9:02 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Roger Holland, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Shelley Hughes  
Senator Peter Micciche  
Senator Tom Begich

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 8

"An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to school age eligibility; relating to funding for early education programs; establishing early education programs and a voluntary parent 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; establishing a teacher retention working group; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 8

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

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) BEGICH

01/22/21	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
01/22/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/21	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/15/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
02/15/21	(S)	Heard & Held
02/15/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)

02/19/21 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205  
02/19/21 (S) Heard & Held  
02/19/21 (S) MINUTE(EDC)  
02/22/21 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205  
02/22/21 (S) -- MEETING CANCELED --  
03/01/21 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

#### **WITNESS REGISTER**

TOM KLAAMEYER, President  
National Education Association of Alaska  
Anchorage, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 8.

KERRY BOYD, President  
Alaska Superintendents Association  
Fairbanks, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 8.

KYMYONA BURK, Ed.D., Early Literacy Policy Director  
ExcelinEd  
Tallahassee, Florida  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented on Mississippi's Literacy-Based  
Promotion Act.

DR. DEENA BISHOP, Superintendent  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 8.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[9:02:41 AM](#)

**CHAIR ROGER HOLLAND** called the Senate Education Standing  
Committee meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Present at the call to  
order were Senators Begich, Micciche, Hughes, Stevens, and Chair  
Holland.

[9:03:17 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND solicited a motion.

[9:03:21 AM](#)

**SENATOR STEVENS** moved that Senator Holland as chair of the  
Senate Education Standing Committee be delegated the duties and  
responsibilities under AS 24.08.060(a) to introduce a bill or  
withdraw a bill previously introduced in the name of the

committee during regular and special sessions of the 32nd Alaska Legislature.

[9:03:41 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH objected. He stated this gives the chair power to introduce committee bills on his or her own without full consultation of the other members of the committee. He suspects the chair would consult with the other members on a regular basis, but he would find it difficult to support a bill that carries his name if he does not know the content of the bill or if he feels that it fails to move education policy forward for the state. Further, if such action were to be taken without his consultation or agreement, he would find it difficult to remain on this committee. As a consequence, he would ask for a Committee on Committees referral to remove himself from this committee if that is indeed the case and the committee moves forward with this particular motion. He maintained his objection.

[9:04:46 AM](#)

At ease.

[9:09:03 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS withdrew the motion.

[9:09:19 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND stated that the motion is withdrawn.

**SB 8-PRE-K/ELEM ED PROGRAMS/FUNDING; READING**

[9:09:29 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 8 "An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to school age eligibility; relating to funding for early education programs; establishing early education programs and a voluntary parent 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; establishing a teacher retention working group; and providing for an effective date."

He stated his intent to hear invited and public testimony and to hold the bill in committee. He invited bill sponsor Senator Begich to the table.

[9:10:05 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH stated that SB 8 deals with three components of education to help build successful citizens for the state: 1) high-quality voluntary early education, 2) high-quality reading, and 3) substantive support from DEED to ensure that teachers are prepped and ready. He said these elements are critically intertwined, and in combination provide the chance of moving education and policy forward.

SENATOR BEGICH referenced the massive alcohol bill that Senate President [Senator Micciche] has shepherded for nearly a decade. He said one common attribute between that bill and SB 8 is they both build on the previous work. Whether it is this version of SB 8 or a modified version SB 42, whatever bill comes from this committee must be the product of hundreds of hours already invested in this process by the administration, professionals in the field, parents, and teachers, all of whom have been working on the bill. The role of this policy committee is to set policies in statute that are necessary to achieve success. The ability to do that and establish a legacy for education is something the committee has struggled with. If the committee does less than that as a policy committee, it is doing less than it could for kids and parents. Members can dispute the fiscal issues around the bill, but their job is not to worry about the cost now but about the policy and whether it will or will not succeed. Whether it is SB 8 or SB 42 or a committee substitute for either, what matters is that the policy the committee produces is one that parents, teachers, or superintendents can stand up and say, that is going to change things. The state is in last place [on the National Assessment of Educational Progress] and cannot stay in last place. It is not fair to the children or parents or professionals. He won't agree with everything the committee will hear today from the testifiers, but it takes a group who actually have to get their fingers dirty in this work to make good policy.

[9:14:51 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND began invited testimony.

[9:15:10 AM](#)

TOM KLAAMEYER, President, National Education Association of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, thanked Senator Begich and Governor Dunleavy for focusing their efforts on the fundamental skill of reading, which began last legislative season. He noted that Senator Stevens and Senator Hughes have also been leaders focused on reading. He recognized DEED Commissioner Johnson for

his continued engagement. SB 8 represents the input and collaboration of hundreds if not thousands of Alaskans working together, he said. From the perspective of educators, this bill represents the best of what is possible when legislators, the department, and stakeholders all work together to craft evidence-based policy that puts students and student learning first.

MR. KLAAMEYER said that as a social studies teacher and former Air Force member, it pleases him that this is a model of civic engagement. He wanted to frame the conversation and convey how extensive this process has been. It began before work on the bill with Commissioner Johnson's leadership in convening the Alaska Education Challenge (AEC). According to long-time education policy observes, the AEC was the largest, most effective convening of stakeholders, parents, educators, administrators, and policy makers. Members of this committee members were part of the AEC. For the first time in many years, all hands were on deck focused on improving student outcomes. SB 8 arguably addresses all five priorities from AEC and at least three of these directly:

- Close the achievement gap by ensuring equitable educational rigor and resources;
- Improve the safety and well-being of students through school partnerships with families, communities, and tribes; and
- Support all students to read at grade level by the end of third grade

[9:18:25 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER quoted the following excerpt from the AEC document: "Research suggests that school readiness at an early age is one critical strategy for improving future student outcomes and closing racial/ethnic and socioeconomic achievement gaps." If the state is serious about improving reading proficiency by third grade, it must increase access to voluntary, prekindergarten education by making it available to students who need it most. The collaborative effort of the AEC crystallized into legislation last year. Many from all across Alaska worked together to craft policy language that puts students first. This was a collective and deliberative effort, and the policies detailed in SB 8 represent that collective effort. Educators felt they were heard, respected, and consulted in the policy-making process. A quality reading program is a good start. Sound pedagogy and best practices in reading instruction is essential and appropriate interventions and support for students is also necessary. These are all included

in the bill. Alaska educators know any effort to improve reading and student outcomes must begin with enhanced early learning opportunities. Alaska is one of only a handful of states that does not offer statewide, voluntary pre-K education. In comparison, states that have been cited as reading successes such as Florida and Mississippi, do offer voluntary, early childhood education programs.

[9:20:28 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER stated that there is a critical and obvious connection between high-quality, early learning opportunities and improved student outcomes. The research is definitive in its findings that these students not only become more proficient readers but because reading is such a fundamental skill for knowledge acquisition, their success extends into other academic areas as well. The gains persist far beyond the early years. These students are more likely to be successful as adults and live as more productive citizens. High-quality, culturally responsive pre-K programs aligned with kindergarten standards help provide a strong foundation for prereading and school readiness skills, including academic and nonacademic. Examples of nonacademic skills are social and emotional competency and self-regulation. It also allows for early identification of learning difficulties and subsequently earlier interventions for special-needs students, students who are struggling, and English language learners. This helps students get on track by third grade.

MR. KLAAMEYER reported that many students who are reading well by third grade typically are from affluent homes with a strong support network of parents and other adults. It has been shown that students who are read to regularly have a million-word reading advantage by the time they enter kindergarten compared to those who are not read to. These children are disproportionately from economically disadvantaged households and are disproportionately students of color. This is why a publicly funded, statewide early education program is so important. According to a report from the All Alaska Pediatric Partnership published last year, depending on where young children live in the state, there may be few resources in their communities to meet needs for healthcare, nutritious food, family supports, early interventions, and early childhood education. They may be more likely to live in poverty. He was shocked to learn that 36 percent of young children in Alaska, from birth to age 8, live in poverty. That means that more than a third of young Alaskans would likely benefit most from early childhood education.

[9:23:22 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER stated that through this investment, the state better assures that students most in need get the support they need to live up to the promise of public education in Alaska. The Education Commission on the States cited a study from Nobel laureate James Heckman who followed two generations of low-income families whose children participated in high-quality, early learning programs. These students were more likely to graduate from high school, they had higher IQs, experienced better overall health, and were less likely to be incarcerated than their peers who did not experience high-quality, early learning programs. These results held constant across socioeconomic status and race. All of these factors led to society paying less for these students later in life. Heckman calculated the rate of return on investment at 13 percent per year for every dollar invested in learning. The Education Commission on the States also cited a 2016 report from Duke University that indicated the impacts of early child education programs can be seen through fifth grade. The study showed that students in participated in state-funded, early education programs in North Carolina scored higher on math and literacy tests from third to fifth grade than their peers who did not participate in high-quality pre-K. Schools were less likely to retain those students in third through fifth grade and they were less likely to need special ed services.

[9:25:13 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER said that an Alabama study showed gains in early education persisted at least until seventh grade. These studies show that gains made in the pre-K space are fundamental to student academic success and provide students an equitable entry into education. Additional research shows additional, significant, and measurable effects of a voluntary, high-quality publicly funded prekindergarten education on the economy and crime reduction. Economist Robert G. Lynch found that investment in high-quality prekindergarten programs generates billions of dollars in economic benefit.

MR. KLAAMEYER said educators agree on that investments in high-quality pre-K programs will lead to improved outcomes. The state has an obligation to offer those opportunities to students who need them most. Alaska school districts with pilot pre-K programs have shown improvements in outcomes in readiness. It is long past time to extend these opportunities to students statewide who need the support the most. SB 8 embodies the best ideas and best efforts of years of careful collaboration. It is

the culmination of collective efforts of the entire education community. It is a serious and sincere policy collaboration between the governor, the Department of Education, legislators, and stakeholders. If the state is serious about improving outcomes for Alaskan students, the state must start with voluntary, high-quality pre-K opportunities. Moving forward with a bill without providing this early robust education program could appear shortsighted in only a few years. That would be a missed opportunity. SB 8 can have an impact on improving reading for Alaskan students. He offered to provide copies of the research he cited.

SENATOR BEGICH stated that he just read that there are 170,000 words in the English language. The million-word gap that has been mentioned comes from an Ohio State University study that says a child who has not gone through pre-K hears 1.5 million fewer words and as a consequence doesn't develop vocabulary.

MR. KLAAMEYER thanked Senator Begich for citing the source. That is what he meant. Those students have heard a million more words in a structured way as a result of being read to.

[9:29:03 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE asked him to send the chair the citations for the data he referenced.

MR. KLAAMEYER agreed to do so.

[9:29:52 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked if his personal reading experience was in pre-K.

MR. KLAAMEYER replied that he was an Air Force brat who moved a lot, and both his parents worked. He attended early learning programs part of his pre-K years, but his parents read to him every day. When his father was stationed in Thailand at the end of the Vietnam War, his dad recorded himself reading children's books from Thailand.

[9:31:31 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said a lot of the studies are looking at children who go to preschool but haven't necessarily gone through a great literacy program. She would agree with those studies that the kids who had the advantage of pre-K did better, but many studies show kids catch up regardless. If there is a fantastic literacy program in a district, she asked how kids who did and did not go to preschool would compare. That is where the research is

lacking. Those in the committee must consider the state's fiscal picture. In the past, every child learned to read without pre-K. Schools were strict about teaching children to read. She asked if there are studies that look at fantastic literacy programs and compare children who did and did not go to pre-K.

[9:33:44 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said that a number of studies talk about the integration of the two. The seminal work of the Heckman Perry Preschool study identifies the relationship between prekindergarten and a strong literacy program. A Tennessee study shows a strong reading program without a strong pre-K did not get a lot of success. When a universal pre-K program was combined with a strong reading program, it worked. Oklahoma is another example of that process. In Alaska, many urban and rural students come to school as second language learners. State data shows that the pre-K advantage has contributed to kids being able to read in first grade. The pre-K boost gives them a better ability to comprehend. Without a strong literacy program, a number of studies have shown that the gains are lost; the two work in tandem. Kids are prepped so they are able to learn. His district has the largest minority population in an urban district in Alaska. It is one of the most diversified districts in the nation. In rural districts, the second language learners need that pre-K preparation to succeed. The data demonstrates this. He noted this data was in the committee packet.

[9:36:13 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND recalled a Tennessee study of an \$85 million a year plan covering 18,000 students that showed that all the pre-K advances were lost at the end of the first kindergarten year.

SENATOR HUGHES highlighted that Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Singapore, and South Africa and some parts of Australia have delayed starts and these older children learn readily when they begin to read. She opined that this could be as much an advantage as pre-K with no cost factor.

SENATOR BEGICH replied that Sweden, Finland, and Denmark also have rates of 90 percent or more for early learning. He said the Tennessee study caused that state to combine the two, which is precisely why the bill was written the way it is. If high-quality education is done without literacy, the gains are not retained. If kids are not prepped to access high-quality literacy education, they don't get the gains. He and others spent literally hundreds of hours trying to develop what will work for Alaska and its unique situations. There are first and

second language learners. There are kids in rural, urban, and semiurban environments. The state must find the mix that works. The AEC was not done to feel good but to do good. SB 8 builds on all of that work. If the committee wants additional information about what scientists have said about the impacts of early education, he has additional research he can provide. He hopes the committee has time to look at all of it. The most recent study he has is a 2017 study on the impacts of early childhood education on medium and long term educational outcomes. They want to know if these things are retained over time. The entire bill has been built on the available research. It includes not just the Heckman study, which is ongoing and multigenerational, but also the most recent research.

[9:40:26 AM](#)

KERRY BOYD, President, Alaska Superintendents Association, Fairbanks, Alaska, said she has been the superintendent of the Yukon Koyukuk School District for the last 14 years. The Alaska Superintendents Association (ASA) has been closely reviewing and studying SB 8 since last year, when it was SB 6. ASA members have provided extensive feedback to the bill sponsor and the commissioner of Education, including countless discussions that led to improvements in the bill, which is widely accepted and endorsed in the education community. ASA formally voted to support SB 8. The extensive transparent and thorough vetting process resulted in a good, nonpartisan bill with broad support. The Alaska Reads Act provides districts with a solid reading plan, continuity for areas of the state that have such a high turnover, and clear expectations about what is expected of reading programs. It is critical to expand access to high-quality pre-K programs to all children and combining that with an evidence-based reading program and intensive intervention for struggling students provides the best opportunity to ensure improved reading outcomes for Alaska students.

MS. BOYD said the support and resources from DEED, such as professional development, intensive reading program specialists, are exactly the kind of capacity-building necessary for DEED to support school and students to ensure successful and effective implementation of the reading program. Having a statewide reading plan is what the state needs. According to the 2019 Alaska Developmental Profile, nearly 70 percent of Alaska students enter kindergarten lacking foundational preparation for learning. ASA supports the definition of elementary education to include pre-K, thus ensuring equitable access to fully funded, sustainable birth to age five learning programs. This provides a foundation of critical social, emotional and cognitive

instruction to students. Research demonstrates early intervention instruction is one of the best ways to decrease opportunity gaps across all demographics create the greatest opportunity for all students to learn to read proficiently by third grade and to minimize dropout rates.

MS. BOYD said she heard some of the discussion about literacy programs, which are essential for students. When students enter school below where schools expect them to be, it makes it difficult for teachers, who have to gravitate toward the mean and spend more time getting students caught up to where they need to be. Along with Governor Dunleavy, DEED Commissioner Johnson, and bill sponsor Senator Begich, ASA supports adequate early childhood education and pre-K funding as part of the Base Student Allocation as outlined in the bill. Families, young children, and early childhood educators in Alaska have experienced the negative impacts associated with no pre-K funded program for many years. She asked the committee to please move forward with SB 8 with all its components. She added that she had gone to a German preschool.

SENATOR BEGICH pointed out that the committee packet has an article about how Tennessee is not giving up on pre-K.

[9:45:16 AM](#)

KYMYONA BURK, Ed.D., Early Literacy Policy Director, ExcelinEd, Tallahassee, Florida said she led the implementation of Mississippi's Literacy-Based Promotion Act from 2013 until 2019. Her role at ExcelinEd is to support states that are passing or developing early literacy policies and to support state chiefs and state agency literacy leaders during the implementation of the process.

DR. BURK said one thing often overlooked with Mississippi's Literacy-Based Promotion Act is that at the same time the state also passed an Early Learning Collaborative Act that focused on pre-K. It was not funded nearly as much as the Literacy-Based Promotion Act, but the focus was to create early learning collaborative pilots that included either a Head Start agency or a private or public early childhood program that collaborated with a school district to ensure that four-year-olds were ready to enter kindergarten.

DR. BURK said that she would talk about the components--Educator Training, Coaching for Teachers, Early Identification, Parent Communication, Individual Reading Plans, and Prevention over Retention--shown on slide 2 that were included in the Literacy-

Based Promotion Act. Educator training was important because the state had to develop a common language for reading instruction. The state knew from experience and from being last in the nation that the state's teacher preparatory programs weren't necessarily preparing teachers how to teach reading to all students, even students with reading challenges. The state provided professional development in the science of reading for K-3 teachers, special ed K-8 teachers, and elementary school administrators. The state then invited reading professors from institutions of higher learning to attend training as well. Initially that didn't go over well. Many professors said they didn't have the time for the rigorous training. A bill that passed three years later included an elementary education licensure exam in the science of reading. That is what got buy-in with institutions of higher learning. They began to see themselves in the outcomes of kindergarten-grade 3 students.

[9:50:35 AM](#)

DR. BURK said onsite coaching was the next critical piece. Someone in the building could assist teachers with the transfer of knowledge about teaching reading to the classroom. The literacy coaches were onsite in the lowest performing schools for the entire school year. They also coached administrators as well. In Mississippi, an elementary school administrator doesn't necessarily have elementary experience and needed to know how to provide feedback to teachers on effective instruction.

DR. BURK said that early identification includes testing with intention and universal screeners to do baseline testing to know where students are at the beginning of the school year. Early identification is key. For parent communication, parents had to know they were partners. Her first two years consisted of public relations. She went across the state having parent meetings. The law was passed in 2013 with the retention piece, but that was not going to go live for two years in 2015. The state had two years to prove stakeholder that what the state was doing was best for children. The state educated parents on good cause exemptions and what types of reports parents should expect. Parents had to be empowered to be part of the conversation and notified often and early about their children's progress and what the school was doing to address reading deficiencies.

[9:53:28 AM](#)

DR. BURK said the law was amended three years later in 2016 to add individual reading plans. The state realized it had put into law that students had to receive intensive interventions, but didn't realize that the language of intensive intervention was

different across the state. The state fashioned its law on Florida's individual reading plans to ensure accountability, that teachers were providing interventions and progress monitoring. With prevention over retention, Mississippi does have retention but its focus was on prevention and intervention rather than retention. Once students are identified early in the year, schools know which students are at risk of failing. Then the question is what schools are doing from August to April, when state testing begins, to ensure students will be ready for the final comprehensive assessment of students.

[9:55:35 AM](#)

DR. BURK displayed the Mississippi legislative appropriations on slide 3, noting that the Promotion Act did not get a lot of money. Some states appropriated \$40 million in all these things. Tennessee invested \$100 million over the next few years in the literacy law it just passed. In 2013, Mississippi legislature appropriated \$9.5 million for the first year. Since then, the legislature provides an annual \$15 million appropriation. The largest priority for funding is 60 percent for literacy coaching support. That includes salaries and space rentals to host professional development. She always says Mississippi invested more in people than programs. Seventeen percent of funds went to professional development for K-3 teachers, K-8 special ed teachers, and elementary administrators. Since spring of 2014, 14,000 educators and 38 reading professors have been trained. Now Mississippi has extended professional development in the science of reading to K-12 teachers. Some students in middle school and high school are struggling readers and teachers don't know how to address those deficiencies. Fifteen percent was for the assessment system; school districts are reimbursed for their screeners. Three percent went to K-3 literacy support. Mississippi had some gaps at the state department and could not support schools because the department was lacking personnel. It had no Office of Early Childhood when the Early Learning Collaborative Act and the Literacy-Based Promotion Act were passed. Her position as literacy director K-3 became K-12 and an Office of Intervention Services was created. These are not large offices. The office may have been a director or director and one other person. Mississippi had put 5 percent into summer reading support grants. School districts could submit applications for \$50,000 per summer to host summer reading camps.

[10:00:24 AM](#)

DR. BURK presented slide 4, why a comprehensive state-led approach. She said early literacy efforts yielded successful "pilots" but did not advance sustainable statewide improvement.

The Barksdale Reading Institute is a partner to the Mississippi Department of Education. In the year 2000 Jim Barksdale invested \$100 million into Mississippi over 10 years to support early literacy efforts. The year 2000 is also when the National Reading Panel report came out. Those efforts mirrored the suggestions in the report. The Barksdale initiatives were pilots in some of the lowest-performing districts. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for Mississippi were inconsistent. The pilot districts would have success for a period of time but once the money and support were gone, would fall into the same practices. It was not until 2013 when Mississippi passed the Literacy-Based Promotion Act that it began to see gains and those gains have steadily increased over the years. In 2019, Mississippi had the only [NAEP] reading gains in nation, but it also had significant gains in 2015, two years after the Literacy-Based Promotion Act passed and the year retention went into place for third grade. This was the fourth grade group that scored 214 in 2015. The former Mississippi governor, Phil Bryant, said the Literacy-Based Promotion Act did that for Mississippi. The state started training those teachers when those students were in second grade. Those students had had teachers trained in the science of reading. The current Mississippi Superintendent of Education, Dr. Wright, says it is a combination of the act, the adoption of college and career-ready standards, and adoption of an assessment aligned to those standards and just as rigorous as NAEP. That is when the state began to see success and an increase in NAEP scale scores every year. The state started in 2013 with literacy coaches in 50 schools (one coach in two schools). Now the state is up to about 75 coaches in 180 schools on a gradual release model. Schools receive various levels of support depending on need.

[10:04:53 AM](#)

DR. BURK showed a graph on slide 5 of the 10-year gains in NAEP scores in fourth and eighth grade for Mississippi. An unintended consequence is that as scores in reading increased, the math scores increased as well.

[10:06:00 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH referred to the components of the Literacy-Based Promotion Act on slide 2, and highlighted that those are all part of SB 8. Mississippi had to make adjustments, and Alaska learned from that and incorporated in SB 8 many things she described, such as individual reading plans, early assessments, and multiple contacts with parents. She had mentioned the Early Learning Collaborative Act, which he has some notes on. The 2019 report to the Mississippi legislature showed a general trend

that children who attended pre-K did better on tests than the control groups. The report said that a closer look at those sites with statistically significant improvements could provide valuable insights into what factors contributed to positive results. To reinforce something Senator Hughes said earlier, Mississippi is studying the impact and the close relationships between early learning and this success. Some reports are starting to show correlation. He asked her to comment.

[10:07:49 AM](#)

DR. BURK said with the Early Learning Collaborative Act, the legislature first appropriated \$3 million per year. Now it is \$6 million per year with a match from the Kellogg Foundation. The early learning model mirrors the K-3 model with literacy coaches, professional development, and a kindergarten readiness assessment. Mississippi has done comparison of the data. After the law was passed, one component was added to the student information system about where kids went for pre-K. Mississippi is now able to do comparison of preschool students in various settings. All of the Mississippi data shows that students in the early learning collaboratives are outperforming all other students. The state superintendent is a fearless advocate of early childhood education. Students are more prepared when they get to kindergarten because of that early childhood experience and the teachers are prepared to receive them because of their training. The state data shows that students in the early learning collaboratives are outperforming students from any other entry way into kindergarten.

SENATOR BEGICH said the newest data shows that relationship, and SB 8 has included all of those elements.

SENATOR HUGHES shared that she heard from Mississippi teachers at an ExcelinEd conference that they were excited about the turnaround in Mississippi. Dr. Burk mentioned that in 2013 the legislature passed the Literacy-Based Promotion Act with the Collaborative Act. She asked what percentage of kids are in public pre-K now compared to then. She noted that Dr. Burk mentioned that there was no funding for the Collaborative Act.

DR. BURK replied there was funding with the Collaborative Act. She doesn't have the percentage, but Mississippi has a low percentage in pre-K. It does not have universal pre-K. Mississippi has 18 state-funded early learning collaboratives. Any other pre-K in Mississippi is funded through Title I by districts that choose to offer it. The only state investment in

pre-K is through the early learning collaboratives. In 2014, the legislature appropriated \$3 million. It started with 11 collaboratives and now those are up to 18. She can send information about how many four-year-olds are funded through the early learning collaborative.

10:12:18 AM

SENATOR HUGHES asked, to give a sense of perspective of Mississippi funding for the Promotion Act and Collaborative Act, what the K-12 population of Mississippi is. She shared that Alaska has around 130,000 K-12 students.

DR. BURK replied she would send that information.

SENATOR HUGHES noted that Dr. Burk said that Mississippi had trouble initially with its higher education institutions training teachers. She shared that she was online with about a dozen superintendents about a week ago and they were honest and forthright about newly graduated teachers from the Alaska university system. One campus is doing well but the other two are not doing well with reading instruction. She asked Dr. Burk if testing or a grade point average for reading instruction is associated with the licensure requirement she mentioned.

DR. BURK explained that there is an assessment of the science of reading called the Foundations of Reading exam. In addition to the Praxis tests that preservice teachers take, there is a third assessment, the Foundations of Reading, for the elementary education license. In order to be licensed to teach in elementary school, the cut score is 229. Mississippi is talking about raising the score. Initially parents and families called her at the Mississippi Department of Education to say their children could not pass the test after spending the money for a four-year education. When students cannot pass a test, it catches the attention of parents who invested in a college education. Mississippi began to offer trainings to not only professors but preservice candidates as well. The department has so many emails from students who said they were able to pass the assessment after attending the training. That lends itself to a conversation about what is going on in classes for teacher prep. The state should not have to pay for training after preservice teachers leave college when they should have received it during regular teacher preparation programs. Mississippi has a higher ed literacy council now. Barksdale Reading Institute is leading an initiative with colleges of education where college reading professors have a coach. The Kellogg foundation has invested in

that as well. That collaboration has been done without legislation. It was that higher ed had accountability.

10:16:20 AM

SENATOR MICCICHE asked if getting parents to work with and read to their children was part of the program, because that would be the most efficient use of state dollars.

DR. BURK answered that the early learning collaborative funded parent academies such that there is an entire professional development series for parents. School districts can send parent liaisons or curriculum coordinators to trainings and then they would host trainings in their districts for parents about ways to support literacy at home. The Literacy-Based Promotion Act has a strong parental component called the read-at-home plan. If parents receive a universal screening report that says their child has a deficit in a certain area, then here is a resource to help with that deficiency. Mississippi informed parents and also gave them resources. The individual reading plan must be developed with parents. When there is talk about retention, the parents want to know what they can do. She says at the end of the day, there is enough accountability for everyone. Parents and teachers all play a role.

SENATOR STEVENS asked what her early learning experience was.

10:21:05 AM

DR. BURK said she had a babysitter. Her mother and father were educators. She watched a lot of Reading Rainbow and Sesame Street. She did not have a formal prekindergarten experience, but she had a strong kindergarten experience. Class sizes were not as large as they are now.

CHAIR HOLLAND announced that public testimony would be heard at a subsequent hearing.

10:22:08 AM

DR. DEENA BISHOP, Superintendent, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, stated her belief that the content of SB 8 with preschool access, evidence-based reading instruction, and a focus on DEED's ability to support districts will be the most important bill heard this legislative session. The future of the state has a stronger relationship to what students can know and be able to do now as well as 20 years from now than any singular financial or social impact legislation. Her 31-year education experience, including her time as superintendent of the largest two school districts in Alaska, has brought the issue of student

reading outcomes front and center as a crisis. Alaska cannot improve student achievement without a strong reading base. Alaska is last in reading. The reading research is clear about the science of reading. The premise of a successful business is return on investment. Real dollars matter. Early literacy via pre-K and strong reading instruction provides the best value for the legislature's financial investment in schools. Research from the Business Roundtable says that by embracing the science of reading, the state will get return on investment by using policy to ensure reading proficiency by third grade.

[10:24:35 AM](#)

DR. BISHOP emphasized that the legislature should not just say it wants change. Change cannot be done without collective investment in these policy steps. 1) Expand access to high-quality pre-K learning. Some kids win the lottery when they are born into families with resources for early learning. 2) Offer high-quality kindergarten. The state scores high here because it pays for full-day kindergarten. 3) Use data and assessment to track progress. Alaska has the data and must use the data to inform reading instruction. 4) Equip and train pre-K-3 educators to be great reading instructors. The reading wars are over. Science-based reading instruction in the five areas is critical. Teachers must instruct students in phonemic awareness and phonics 5) Require systematic intervention for struggling readers. 6) Coordinate governance of pre-K and grades K-3 to promote efficiencies and maximize impact. Strong state-level leadership and administrative oversight are needed.

DR. BISHIP said SB 8 makes actionable additional steps needed to produce significant changes in reading outcomes. This legislation is essential.

[10:27:34 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said he would carry on with his personal poll. He asked about her personal pre-K experiences and how she became a good reader.

DR. BISHOP replied that it didn't start out that way. Both her parents worked. She was in a daycare preschool from the age of two. She suffered with poor spelling because of learning whole language at first.

SENATOR MICCICHE said he had lots of questions on this subject. Since the committee is running short on time, he can put those questions in an email to send to others who testified today.

10:28:50 AM

CHAIR HOLLAND apologized to other invited testifiers for the lack of time and the over 20 people waiting to testify.

He held SB 8 in committee.

10:29:54 AM

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