

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 13, 2023

3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION STATE-AID FOR SCHOOL CAPITAL PROJECTS: GRANT AND DEBT

- HEARD

PRESENTATION ALASKA READS ACT OVERVIEW

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

HEIDI TESHNER, Acting Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented State-Aid for School Capital Projects: Grant and Debt.

JOE WILLHOITE, Facilities Manager
School Finance and Facilities
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented State-Aid for School Capital Projects: Grant and Debt.

ELWIN BLACKWELL, School Finance Manager
School Finance and Facilities
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented State-Aid for School Capital Projects: Grant and Debt.

HEIDI TESHNER, Acting Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented an overview of the Alaska Reads Act.

SUSAN MCKENZIE, Director
Innovation and Education Excellence
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented an overview of the Alaska Reads Act.

DEB RIDDLE, Division Operations Manager
Innovation and Education Excellence
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented an overview of the Alaska Reads Act.

TOM BEGICH, Former Senator
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on the Alaska Reads Act.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:34 PM](#)

CHAIR LÖKI TOBIN called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Kiehl, Gray-Jackson, Bjorkman, Stevens, and Chair Tobin.

PRESENTATION
STATE-AID FOR SCHOOL CAPITAL PROJECTS:
GRANT and DEBT

[3:32:54 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of a presentation on State Aid for School Capital Projects.

[3:33:42 PM](#)

HEIDI TESHNER, Acting Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, turned to slide 2 and stated the mission, vision, and purpose of the department are:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Mission

An excellent education for every student every day.

Vision

All students will succeed in their education and work, shape worthwhile and satisfying lives for themselves, exemplify the best values of society, and be effective in improving the character and quality of the world about them. - Alaska Statute 14.03.015

Purpose

DEED exists to provide information, resources, and leadership to support an excellent education for every student every day.

[3:34:23 PM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER moved to slide 3, Strategic Priorities: Alaska's Education Challenge, and shared the following five priorities:

[Original punctuation provided.]

1. Support all students to read at grade level by the end of third grade.
2. Increase career, technical, and culturally relevant education to meet student and workforce needs.
3. Close the achievement gap by ensuring equitable educational rigor and resources.
4. Prepare, attract, and retain effective education professionals.
5. Improve the safety and well-being of students through school partnerships with families, communities, and tribes.

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ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER moved to slide 5, and briefly spoke to the history of school capital funding on the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

1. Federal
2. State Funding Mechanisms (General Fund)
 - Grants (~1970)
 - General Obligation (G.O.) Bonds (2003, 2011)
 - AHFC Revenue Bonds (1999, 2001, 2002)
 - Debt Reimbursement (1971)
 - School Fund - AS 43.50.140 (FY1999-present)
 - Others (i.e.: Insurance Fund - AS 22.55.430)
3. Local Educational Agency (LEA)
 - Capital Reserves
 - Municipal Debt

[3:36:11 PM](#)

JOE WILLHOITE, Facilities Manager, School Finance and Facilities, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, turned to slide 6, Recent Funding (SB 237 Report) and spoke to the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- SB 237 (Chapter 93 SLA 2010) - AS 14.11.035
 - Annual report on school construction and major maintenance funding
 - First report completed in February 2013
- \$1,585,824,383 in funding
 - Total project value for Debt projects
 - State share value for Grant projects
- Supplementary handout
 - February 2022 AS 14.11.035 (SB 237) Report
 - Project Funding by District (report Appendix A)
 - Project Listing by District (report Appendix B)

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ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER clarified that DEED provided the committee members with copies of the February 2022 report. The 2023 report will be ready in February.

[3:37:44 PM](#)

MR. WILLHOITE advanced to slide 7, Current Funding Options, and primarily addressed the first three of the following four points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

1. School Construction Grant Fund (1990) AS 14.11.005
2. Major Maintenance Grant Fund (1993) AS 14.11.007
3. Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) and Small Municipal School District School Fund (2010) AS 14.11.030
 - Indexed Fund
 - DR Funding divided by percent of municipal schools multiplied by 0.244 AS 14.11.025
4. School Debt Reimbursement (DR) Funding AS 14.11.102

[3:38:24 PM](#)

MR. WILLHOITE moved to slide 8, Current Project Categories (AS 14.11.013), and discussed the categorization of school construction and major maintenance projects as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- (A) avert imminent danger or correct life-threatening situations;
- (B) house students who would otherwise be unhoused; for purposes of this subparagraph, students are considered unhoused if the students attend school in temporary facilities;
- (C) protect the structure of existing school facilities;
- (D) correct building code deficiencies that require major repair or rehabilitation in order for the facility to continue to be used for the educational program;
- (E) achieve an operating cost savings;
- (F) modify or rehabilitate facilities for the purpose of improving the instructional program;
- (G) meet an educational need not specified in (A) – (F) of this paragraph, identified by the department

[3:39:46 PM](#)

MR. WILLHOITE turned to slide 9, which showed a matrix of the funds in relationship to category and entity. He noted that debt reimbursement does not necessarily fall under school construction and major maintenance. It does not apply to REAA, but it does apply to small municipal districts and city and borough districts.

[3:40:38 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked if the number three in parenthesis indicated districts with access.

MR. WILLHOITE replied yes. There are 19 districts that are REAA. Three districts are classified as small municipal districts. The remaining 31 are organized city and borough districts.

[3:41:01 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL said he recollected that there was a relationship between major maintenance and debt reimbursement historically. He stated his understanding that filters and scoring were used in determining major maintenance program eligibility.

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ELWIN BLACKWELL, School Finance Manager, School Finance and Facilities, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, said major maintenance and construction are the categories for debt reimbursement projects. He said that once voters have affirmed their desire for a project, the department reviews its scope and cost and approves it. Debt reimbursement projects are not scored or prioritized. The department has not experienced a need to keep a list.

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SENATOR KIEHL said he misused the term scoring and asked if the legislature considered projects based on students' needs.

[3:43:01 PM](#)

MR. BLACKWELL replied that DEED reviews debt projects to see if they are appropriate and adjusts as necessary. Once the department and voters approve a project, bonds can be sold. He noted that the process had not occurred for several years because the program had been closed.

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SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if there are REAA schools within municipal school districts.

[3:44:08 PM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER replied that REAA schools are near municipal school districts but not within school boundary lines.

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if that means within school attendance areas or the same borough.

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ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER said an example would be Prince of Wales Island. It has an REAA and two municipal school districts. They are separate attendance areas with boundary lines. A waiver is needed for students to attend a school district outside their boundaries.

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MR. WILLHOITE moved to slide 10, Capital Improvement Project (CIP) Eligibility. He described CIP as a second overall organizational filter. The following six eligibility requirements apply to all projects:

[Original punctuation provided.]

1. Six-year capital improvement plan
2. Functioning fixed asset inventory system (FAIS)
3. Proof of required property insurance
4. Certified Preventive Maintenance and Facility Management Program
5. Capital project and not maintenance
6. Participating share

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CHAIR TOBIN said school districts had mentioned rising insurance costs. She asked if requirement number three is eroding the quality of the BSA due to increased building replacement costs resulting from inflation.

[3:48:21 PM](#)

MR. WILLHOITE said it would depend on how insurance companies reimburse the school district. DEED does not participate in what insurance a school district carries. DEED's concern is that districts show proof of having 100 percent coverage. He said he would provide the committee with additional information.

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CHAIR TOBIN stated she knows an individual whose insurance company refused continued home coverage because the home's replacement would cost too much.

[3:49:34 PM](#)

MR. WILLHOITE turned to slide 11, Grant Participation and Eligibility, and spoke to the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

1. Capital Improvement Project (CIP) Grant Application
Due from school districts on or before September 1 (annually) CIP Application materials are posted on our website
(<https://education.alaska.gov/facilities/faciliti escip>)
2. Project
Ranking Ranked in accordance with criteria in AS 14.11 and 4 AAC 31
3. Eligibility
Districts must have a six-year plan, a fixed asset inventory system, adequate property loss insurance, and a preventive maintenance and facility management program certified by the department
4. CIP Priority Lists
Initial lists are released on November 5
Final lists are released after any appeals for reconsideration are finalized

3:50:45 PM

MR. WILLHOITE said the graph on slide 12 shows the ratio of eligible major maintenance and school construction projects for each year. It depicts the applications submitted, not funded. DEED strives to have zero ineligible applications submitted, so the department holds a seminar every spring to assist districts with the application process.

3:51:50 PM

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON compared slide 10 to slide 12 and asked for more information concerning ineligibility.

MR. WILLHOITE moved back to slide 10 and said a school district must meet all six requirements to be eligible. A school district becomes ineligible if even one requirement is not met.

3:53:04 PM

MR. WILLHOITE turned slide 13, Grant Awards FY 2014 - FY 2023, and spoke to the dollar amounts awarded to the School Construction Grant Fund, Major Maintenance Grant Fund, and the REAA/Small Municipal School District School Fund. He also spoke to slide 14, Total Eligible Grant Projects and Actual Grant Funding by Fiscal Year, which shows the amount eligible, and the number of projects funded. He said that if inflation continues

and funding remains the same, the number of projects will decrease.

[3:54:14 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked whether the dollar amounts listed under the REAA and Small Municipal School District School Fund column reflect the lawsuits Alaska faced.

[3:54:31 PM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER replied that the Kasayulie case resulted in the creation of the REAA fund, which morphed and added small municipal school districts. The primary focus of the fund is school construction. However, several years ago, it expanded to include major maintenance projects.

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SENATOR STEVENS asked if the funding was from the Kasayulie case.

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ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER responded no and said the case formed the fund, and the state makes appropriations to it. DEED tries to award as many eligible projects as possible.

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SENATOR STEVENS asked whether the state still had obligations to the Kasayulie case.

[3:55:33 PM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER stated it is her understanding that the state funded the last project for the case, and the only obligation left is the continuance of REAA funding.

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MR. WILLHOITE turned to slide 15 and said it shows the appropriations into the REAA and small municipal school district fund from FY 2013 - FY 2024. The total appropriated amount with interest is \$443,279,906.

[3:56:05 PM](#)

MR. WILLHOITE turned to slide 16 and stated it shows the allocations from the REAA and Small Municipal School District Fund from FY 2014 - FY 2023.

[3:56:25 PM](#)

MR. BLACKWELL advanced to slide 17 and discussed the parameters and eligibility requirements of the Debt Reimbursement Program as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

1. Debt Reimbursement program is established in AS 14.11.100
2. Capital Improvement Project (CIP) Debt Application
 - a. May be received at any time the Debt Reimbursement program is open
 - b. CIP Application materials are posted on our website
(https://education.alaska.gov/facilities/facilities_cip)
3. Project Ranking
 - a. Projects are not ranked or evaluated for prioritized need
4. Eligibility
 - a. All types of Cities, except 3rd Class
 - b. All types of Boroughs
 - c. Districts must have a six-year plan, a fixed asset inventory system, adequate property loss insurance, and a preventive maintenance and facility management program certified by the department

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MR. BLACKWELL moved to slide 18 and spoke to debt reimbursement trends as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Percentage of Annual Debt Service
 - FY1971 - FY1977 100 percent
 - FY1978 - FY1983 90 percent
 - FY1984 - FY1994 80 percent
 - FY1995 - FY1999 70 percent
 - FY2000 - FY2015 70 / 60 percent *
 - SB64 (Chapter 3 SLA 2015) implemented a moratorium on additional debt reimbursement through FY2020
 - HB106 (Chapter 6 SLA 2020) extended the moratorium on additional debt reimbursement through FY2025
- FY2026 - FY20xx 50 / 40 percent **

*Northwest Arctic Borough at 90 percent for bonds between 1990-2006

**Rates shown are reflective of current statute after the moratorium is lifted

[4:00:11 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL said his recollection of the major maintenance program's operation differs. He stated his belief that urban and rural school districts used to apply for major maintenance projects, and a prioritized list of all projects was maintained. Based on the list, the legislature would decide how much to appropriate. The legislature would then specify how much each district would receive. How districts used the money was apparent. Grant funds corresponded with the top-ranked projects for REAA districts. He asked if his recollection of the process was correct.

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MR. BLACKWELL recalled a period when structured amounts were put into statute for specific municipalities. During that period, any projects funded went through the Debt Reimbursement Grant program, except REAAs which lack the authority to issue bonds. Usually, projects were identified, so the dollar amount received seemed to match the project's budget. He did not recall whether projects were selected from the grant list; usually, the legislature was aware of the various projects. He said he knew of a few instances where projects were pulled from the list and moved forward.

[4:03:07 PM](#)

MR. BLACKWELL turned to slide 19, which displayed a graph of project values by percent of reimbursement. He said the graph provides a recent historical view of debt funding by the reimbursement rates of 100, 90, 80, 70, and 60 percent.

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MR. BLACKWELL moved to slide 20, State Share of Outstanding Debt, and said the graph shows a future look at the outstanding bonds in the reimbursement cycle. It shows the principal, interest amount, and the amount the state will reimburse.

[4:04:09 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked if the graph displays any future debt.

MR. BLACKWELL replied that the graph does not represent expected debt, only outstanding debt.

[4:04:31 PM](#)

MR. BLACKWELL turned to slide 21 and said the graph represents the amount eligible for reimbursement from 1976-2014. It also shows the actual amount of state aid. For many years the state reimbursed 100 percent of the amount eligible. There were a few years where the appropriation was less than a school district's eligibility for reimbursement, so the state prorated the difference. The state reimbursed underfunded debt entitlement amounts in FY 2022 through supplemental appropriations in House Bill 281 for FY 2017, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

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MR. BLACKWELL moved to slide 22, Debt Proceed and Refundings, and spoke to the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Initial Bond Sales
 - After bonds are sold, the department identifies how much of approved projects are funded by the new bond
 - Establish any proration's for bonds based on approved project reimbursement rate. (AS 14.11.100(a))
- Refunding of Bonds
 - Refunding of current bonds must follow the requirements in AS 14.11.100(j)(2)
 - Department evaluates refundings by comparing the annual debt service of the refunding package to the original annual debt service of the bond(s) that are refunded. The refunding must show an annual savings

[4:07:27 PM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER turned to slide 23, Funding Comparison, and said it summarizes DEED's presentation. She noted a participation share of 2 percent for REAAs; small municipalities are between 10 - 20 percent. All other school districts have a participating share requirement between 2 - 35 percent.

[4:08:15 PM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER turned to slide 24, Additional Handouts and Resources, which provided the following information:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Supplementary handouts
- FY2024 School Construction Grant Fund List
- FY2024 Major Maintenance Grant Fund List
- DEED's Facilities website:
<https://education.alaska.gov/facilities>
- School Facility Database
https://education.alaska.gov/doe_rolodex/schoolcalendar/facility
- Preventive Maintenance & Facility Management Program
<https://education.alaska.gov/facilities/PM>
- CIP Application and Support
<https://education.alaska.gov/facilities/facilitiescip>
- CIP Grant Priority Lists
<https://education.alaska.gov/facilities/facilitiespl>

[4:08:55 PM](#)

At ease.

PRESENTATION ALASKA READS ACT OVERVIEW

[4:10:07 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN reconvened the meeting.

[4:11:00 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of an update on the implementation of the Alaska Reads Act.

[4:11:39 PM](#)

HEIDI TESHNER, Acting Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, turned to slide 26 and said the department would discuss the following items:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Alaska Reads Act Alignment
- Implementation Supports
- Alaska Reads Act Overview
- Alaska Reads Act Educator Qualifications
- Regulation Review

[4:12:34 PM](#)

SUSAN MCKENZIE, Director, Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, turned to slide 27 and said the department's mission,

Alaska Education Challenge, Alaska Strategic Reading Plan, and Alaska Reads Act are aligned to achieve reading proficiency by third grade.

[4:13:09 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE moved to slide 28 and said that before the legislature passed the Alaska Reads Act, the department had created the Alaska Strategic Reading Plan to support schools in achieving Alaska's education challenges. She stated that the department integrated components of the Reads Act into the Strategic Reading Plan to ensure alignment.

[4:13:58 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE moved to slide 30 and said DEED had conducted webinars since January 12. She said users' feedback was positive and noted a symposium on April 28. The webinars will continue weekly until May 11. The webinar schedule is on DEED's website.

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CHAIR TOBIN said the Alaska Reads Act requires stakeholders to convene to review regulations. She asked if a meeting had occurred.

[4:15:58 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE replied that in September, DEED spent a week meeting with stakeholders and provided draft guidance for feedback. DEED then continued to work on regulations and met with stakeholders in small groups. The department held a leadership summit in November and posted regulations for public comment.

[4:17:07 PM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER said DEED is still working on the process of convening. The Reads Act takes effect on July 1, 2023. The plan is for stakeholders to convene with accumulated data sometime in 2024.

[4:17:43 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE turned to slide 31, Alaska Reads Act Timeline and Resources, and spoke to the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

TIMELINE

- o Regulations
 - o August 2022 - December 2022
- o Preparation

- o September 2022 - March 2023
- o State Board of Education regulation package
 - o January 25, 2023
- o Public Comment
 - o February 2023 - March 2023
- o Anticipated Adoption
 - o April 2023

WEBSITE RESOURCES

<https://education.alaska.gov/akreads>:

- o Webinar schedule and registration
- o Recordings of webinars
- o Slide decks
- o Draft documents shared during webinars
- o One-page supports
- o FAQ
- o Continue to develop resources

[4:19:32 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE moved to slide 32 and said DEED has set up the following to facilitate communication concerning the Reads Act:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Send questions to akreads@alaska.gov
- Request presentation for your district
- Reading Newsletter
- Alaska Reads Website (education.alaska.gov/akreads)
 - Weekly updates
- Planning in-person meetings around the state

[4:20:26 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE advanced to slide 34 and mentioned the following components of the Alaska Reads Act:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Reads Act Programs:

- 1) Pre -K/Early Learning & Parents as Teachers
- 2) Department Reading Program
- 3) District Reading Improvement
- 4) Virtual Education

Other Requirements:

- 1) Reporting/Data Collections
- 2) Educator Preparation

[4:21:03 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE turned to slide 35, Alaska Reads Act: Department Reading Program, and spoke to the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Voluntary through application and acceptance

- Offered to the lowest-performing 25 percent of schools
- One year support (renewal options)
- Reading specialist support
- Reading Improvement Plan

[4:23:08 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN noted that reading support would be offered through distance learning. However, she recollected that a reading specialist would be living in the community to work with the population to create a culture of reading. She asked why the department did not include that portion of the Reads Act in the regulatory discussion.

[4:23:35 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE responded that funding was not provided.

[4:23:51 PM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER replied that when the legislature and DEED debated the bill, that was the intent. Part of the struggle with implementing the Reads Act is hiring reading specialists. Through recruitment, the department has located some teachers. These reading specialists' time will be shared among various communities to serve more students statewide.

[4:24:54 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE turned to slide 36, District Reading Intervention, and spoke to the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Required of all districts receiving state funds
- Components:
 - Department-approved RTI/MTSS plan
 - Literacy screener to identify students with reading deficiencies
 - Individual Reading Plan for students with reading deficiencies
 - Grade progression consideration following spring screening for students with reading deficits

- Intervention must be based on the science of reading

[4:27:51 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN stated that the Reads Act contains a waiver process and alternatives to screeners, such as reading portfolios. The Reads Act also includes language to create culturally responsive screeners for immersion programs. She inquired about DEED's development of screening.

[4:28:10 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE replied that the department created a waiver and developed a webinar to explain the waiver process and reporting requirements. DEED has also developed a draft portfolio for teachers to demonstrate third-grade reading proficiency. The department has begun to work on developing literacy screeners in other languages and is reaching out to experts, like Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), for assistance.

[4:30:09 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked for a definition and example of DIBELS.

[4:30:23 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE said DIBELS is an acronym for Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills. It is an assessment and literacy screener for foundational skills.

[4:30:53 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked how long it would take to assess a student using DIBELS.

MS. MCKENZIE responded that it would take 5-7 minutes to do a screening. Progress monitoring occurs when a screener identifies a reading deficiency. The monitoring takes about 2 minutes and occurs every one to two weeks. It is a quick check to determine if a student has made progress.

[4:31:34 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked if someone other than certified teachers could administer DIBELS.

[4:31:45 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE replied yes if trained adequately.

[4:32:33 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN commented that DEED supports the professional development necessary to implement a reading screener in each district.

[4:32:43 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE said that is correct.

[4:32:51 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE advanced to slide 37 and spoke to the district reading interventions by the department as follows:

Preparation for Implementation

- Focus on required District Reading Intervention
- Webinars and in-person support in writing the K-3 MTSS Plan
- Q & A work sessions with step- by- step directions
- Step-by-step guide with dates to remember

Improvement Supports

- K-3 MTSS Plan submission
- Feedback with plan for improvements needed
- Monthly webinars to address improvements
- Improvement areas addressed the first year

[4:34:07 PM](#)

DEB RIDDLE, Division Operations Manager, Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, moved to slide 38 and discussed three components of early education and parents as teachers as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

EARLY EDUCATION

- **Voluntary** grant program for eligible districts (three year)
- Purpose: to develop high-quality early education programs
- Standards will be adopted by SBOE
- 5 ADM for qualifying districts not receiving other state or federal funds for the program

PARENTS AS TEACHERS

- **Voluntary**
- Purpose: enhance school readiness and increase parental involvement
- For children younger than five years old

- Evidence-based early childhood program that involves parents

[4:36:12 PM](#)

MS. RIDDLE turned to slide 39 and said DEED is creating bylaws that would come out as a regulation package. The implementation date for the bylaws is July 1, 2024. She spoke to the following points regarding the virtual education consortium:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Voluntary
- Purpose: to provide virtual education and professional resources to students and teachers
- Consortium formed between AK DEED and school districts
- Teacher training on virtual instruction delivery
- Reading specialist available to provide reading intervention services virtually
- Must be available on or before July 1, 2024

[4:37:53 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if the department had selected a learning management platform (LMS).

MS. RIDDLE stated that the department currently uses the eLearning system, which houses many teacher resources. DEED will expand the platform as needed.

[4:38:44 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if high school classes would look like current eLearning modules.

[4:38:54 PM](#)

MS. RIDDLE replied not necessarily; a vendor would help determine how classes look.

[4:39:01 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN opined that development by a vendor would be more meaningful than simply selecting an answer to a question.

[4:39:12 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked whether there are regulations governing how districts interact with the consortium.

[4:39:31 PM](#)

MS. RIDDLE replied that the department would determine processes as they organize regulations.

[4:39:41 PM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER said DEED is finalizing regulations for the consortium. She said she would get back to the committee based on draft regulations, which would not be public for a few months.

SENATOR BJORKMAN opined that it would be helpful if the state worked within the LMS platforms used by districts. Parents and teachers want to avoid another login and another place to search for student work. Many people opposed the idea of a virtual learning consortium when it was introduced.

[4:40:45 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE moved to slide 41 and said the following are the educator qualifications necessary for the Reads Act:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Training, coursework, or testing in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, oral language skills, and reading comprehension
- Approved by the state board in regulations

MS. MCKENZIE noted that the three categories for educator qualifications are early education, K-3 Educators, and District Reading Teachers.

[4:41:51 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE moved to slide 43 and said DEED is proposing regulations for educator qualification tracking by adding endorsements to an educator's certification to ensure teachers and administrators meet the requirements of the Alaska Reads Act. The endorsements would be:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Reads Act Verified Early Educator Lead
- Reads Act Verified K-3rd Teacher
- Reads Act Verified K-3rd Administrator
- Reads Act Verified Reading Teacher

[4:42:54 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE moved to slides 44-46 and spoke to each endorsement as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

EARLY EDUCATION

Endorsement: Reads Act Verified Early Educator Lead

- Two years to complete
- Requirements for the endorsement:
 - Valid teaching certificate
 - Training/Experience:
 - Six credit hours in early childhood education
 - OR
 - Two or more years experience teaching kindergarten or an early education program and successful completion of an evidence-based reading training course approved by the department that includes a summative assessment

K-3 EDUCATORS:

Endorsement: Reads Act Verified K-3 Teacher

Endorsement: Reads Act Verified K-3 Administrator

- Phased in over the next two years
- Requirements for the endorsement:
 - Valid teaching certificate
 - Training/Experience:
 - Successful completion of a three-semester hour (or equivalent) evidence-based reading training course approved by the department that includes a summative assessment OR
 - Evidence of obtaining a passing score on a department approved assessment

DISTRICT READING TEACHER:

Endorsement: Reads Act Verified Reading Teacher

- Two years to complete
- Requirements for the endorsement:
 - Valid teaching certificate
 - Training/Experience:
 - One of the following:
 - Successful completion of a three-semester hour (or equivalent) evidence-based reading training course approved by the department that includes a summative assessment OR

- Evidence of obtaining a passing score on a department approved assessment
- Submission of a reading instruction efficiency evaluation form certified by a district representative

[4:46:42 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked Ms. McKenzie to speak about developing the standards underlying the efficiency evaluation form.

[4:46:59 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE stated that DEED had developed a form for school districts to fill out for teachers seeking a Reads Act endorsement. Submitting the form would signify that the teacher had the training and expertise to develop intensive reading intervention plans for students with deficiencies. Part of the documentation teachers provide to a district would be the students' improved reading scores.

[4:48:03 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked how the process developed and whether the evaluation form is part of the current regulation package.

[4:48:13 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE replied that the verified teacher requirement is in the Reads Act. DEED's teacher certification team developed the form to meet the requirements of the Reads Act.

[4:48:45 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL opined that verification is functionally an occupational license endorsement and should probably be adopted by regulation since it relates to a person's ability to earn a living. He questioned whether the development of the form considered languages other than English, where assessments might be limited. He wondered whether the department consulted rural educators and experts.

[4:49:46 PM](#)

MS. MCKENZIE replied that the documents for world and Native languages are in the process of development, and the availability of assessments is a valid concern.

[4:50:03 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN said pages 38 and 39 of the authorizing legislation discuss verification and efficiency evaluation forms.

[4:50:37 PM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER turned to slide 48, Proposed Regulations Evidenced-Based Reading Exams, and stated the following tests and scores are in the proposed regulations that are open for public comment:

<u>Examination</u>	<u>Test Code</u>	<u>Required Score</u>
ETS Praxis II Teaching Reading	5204	159
ETA Praxis II Teaching Reading: Elementary	5205	159
ETA Praxis II Teaching Reading: K -12	5206	156
Pearson Foundation of Reading	n/a	240

[4:51:06 PM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER moved to slide 49 and said the following are the evidenced-based reading training courses proposed in regulation:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Evidence -based reading course or training

- phonemic awareness,
- phonics,
- vocabulary development,
- reading fluency,
- oral language skills, and
- reading comprehension

Three semester hours or the equivalent

Includes a summative assessment

Department of Education & Early Development approved

[4:51:22 PM](#)

ACTING COMMISSIONER TESHNER advanced to slide 50, Alaska Reads Act: Regulation Review, and spoke to the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Formal written public comment period
- Closes on March 3, 2023, at 4:30 p.m.
- Anticipated adoption by the State Board of Education and Early Development on April 19, 2023
- Proposed regulations and summary document:
<https://aws.state.ak.us/OnlinePublicNotices/Notices/View.as.px?id=209771>

[4:52:16 PM](#)

TOM BEGICH, Former Senator, Anchorage, Alaska, said the Kasayulie lawsuit contains an active consent decree, so failing to replenish the fund regularly would put the state in violation of the ruling. On page 35, line 26 of the enrolled legislation says, "State funding provided to participating schools for implementation of the reading program is an addition to the amount of funding provided under AS 14.17." He said the Reads Act intended funds to go to specific school districts and not count against their base student allocations. On page 37, line 9, he said there is language to ensure school districts would not use reading specialists for other purposes. The legislature inserted the language to avoid school districts diverting reading specialist positions to full-time instructors. He reminded the committee that Fiscal Note 6 speaks to locating reading specialists in communities across the state and providing them with a geographic cost differential. The estimate identifies that there would be travel and other costs. He said he does not understand why funding would not be available to place reading specialists in communities throughout Alaska. The statements in Fiscal Note 6 clearly indicate the bill's intent to place reading specialists in local communities supported by funding from DEED.

[4:59:13 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 4:59 p.m.