

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

January 24, 2024

3:30 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

SENATE BILL NO. 192

"An Act relating to screening reading deficiencies and providing reading intervention services to public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three."

- HEARD & HELD

PRESENTATION: ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGE LITERACY UPDATE

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 192

SHORT TITLE: SCREENING/READING INTERVENTION K-3

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

| | | |
|----------|-----|-----------------------------------|
| 01/18/24 | (S) | READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS |
| 01/18/24 | (S) | EDC, FIN |
| 01/24/24 | (S) | EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg) |

WITNESS REGISTER

DEENA BISHOP, Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced SB 192 on behalf of the administration.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the sectional analysis for SB 192.

KATHY MOFFIT, Director
Division of Innovation and Education Excellence
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Commented during discussion on SB 192.

JOEL ISAAK, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Delivered an update on Alaska Native Language Literacy.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:30:09 PM](#)

CHAIR LÖKI TOBIN called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Bjorkman, Stevens, Kiehl, Gray-Jackson and Chair Tobin

SB 192-SCREENING/READING INTERVENTION K-3

[3:31:21 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 192" An Act relating to screening reading deficiencies and providing reading intervention services to public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three."

This is the first hearing of SB 192.

[3:32:05 PM](#)

DEENA BISHOP, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Anchorage, Alaska, introduced SB 192 on behalf of the administration:

I want to share that the [Alaska] Reads Act requirement for screening assessments is paramount to student learning, as curriculum-based measurements

provide information about the knowledge and skill base of the student. They're important for determining the most appropriate starting point for instruction, for planning instructional groups, and for readjusting instruction. These data are truly invaluable for making good curriculum decisions. The data identify those students who need intervention and the essential reading skills to meet reading proficiency by third grade, along with identifying those who show characteristics of dyslexia.

The original language in the bill only required students in K-3 in the fall to test that they met proficiency. However, this bill proposes an amendment to have students assessed three times a year, as per best practices. The data help teachers, staff, and leadership determine if the core curriculum is working for students and if any necessary changes are needed. As curriculum-based measures and those benchmarks are dynamic throughout the year, meaning that the goalpost gets higher as students learn, it is necessary to know if students who meet the fall expectations continue to meet those in the winter and the spring. Again, the bar gets higher for each testing window as the expectations for knowledge and skills in our students increase throughout the year.

Finally, these data allow you to look at the student relative to his or her peers in a classroom, school, state, and, of course, around the nation. They're very user-friendly and easy to report to parents, showing progress or perhaps the need for intervention. Additionally, we propose a change to the progression decision for teachers to utilize the data at the end of the year. While teachers may have a view of many students' progress 45 days out from the end of the year, it was requested to utilize the end-of-the-year data in discussions about retention, especially for those students who are right on the bubble of proficiency progress. So, it doesn't disallow the use for 45 days but gives you additional time to make those very important and weighty decisions in discussions with parents.

Through the feedback from school districts and teachers over the last year, we propose these changes.

[3:35:12 PM](#)

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Operations Manager, Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 192:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**SB 192 - Screening/Reading Intervention K-3
Sectional Analysis**

"An Act relating to screening reading deficiencies and providing reading intervention services to public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three."

Section 1:

Amends AS 14.30.760 *Statewide screening and support* paragraph (a) by removing language that only required students in grades K-3 to take the statewide literacy screener once in the fall if they met the proficiency benchmark on the first try. By having all students take the screener three times a year educators and parents can track progress throughout the year. It also allows for progress monitoring to inform additional instruction to increase reading skills beyond just proficiency.

Section 2:

Amends AS 14.30.765 *Reading intervention services and strategies; progression* paragraph (f) by adjusting the date of the meeting between parents, the teacher, and other pertinent district staff to discuss whether a third-grade student is ready for grade four. The adjustment is from 45 days from the end of the school year to 15 days. By changing this timeframe, data from the third administration of the statewide literacy screener can be used in the conversation. This additional information allows the parents to make a more informed decision regarding their child's education and better reflects the overall learning levels of students at the end of the grade level.

[3:36:07 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked for an explanation of parental involvement knowing retaining students is possible.

3:36:34 PM

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that if a student is far below proficiency or below proficiency, an Individual Reading Improvement Plane (IRIP) is made. Teachers are required by law to have a discussion with parents each time students take an assessment. The beginning, middle, and end of the year assessments provide data points for teachers to use in creating instructional groups and monitor progress.

3:37:39 PM

SENATOR STEVENS asked if parents are given feedback and instruction on how to help their child at least three times a year before their child reaches 4th grade.

3:37:54 PM

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied absolutely. The meeting comes with discussion in the IRIP to share what the school will do for the student, as well as ideas for parents. Checks and balances along with communication is what DEED desires. IRIPs are time consuming but powerful tools for opening teacher-parent-student dialog.

3:38:33 PM

SENATOR KIEHL asked about the 15-day timeline. He stated during the legislative session it was difficult for teachers to contact him. He opined that 15 days before the end of the school year is a short window of time to contact busy parents.

3:39:43 PM

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that she would understand parents having concern about the 15-day timeline if it were the only conversation that occurred. However, she emphasized that if a student is significantly behind, discussions about retention are ongoing throughout the year. These discussions are part of the individualized reading plan (IRIP) process, which is mandatory when students are far below the expected level. She noted that conversations also occur at the beginning and middle of the year, so parents are already aware of their child's status and options.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP explained that while the 15-day notice might seem short, it is not the only time parents are informed. Teachers utilize data from various points in the year, including the springtime data, to make decisions about retention. She

highlighted that teachers prefer to continue teaching and updating parents using the most recent data, rather than relying solely on mid-year assessments.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP acknowledged the concern but clarified that the law requires multiple opportunities for discussions about student progress and potential retention throughout the year, not just within the 15-day period before the end of the year.

[3:42:33 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL replied that Commissioner Bishop's description of the process is great and acknowledged it is the ideal scenario everyone aims for. However, he noted that as he reads the language in SB 192, it is based on the spring screening and is unamended. He requested a follow-up from the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to clarify how the schedule will work based on the spring screening, as this is the language currently proposed in the law.

[3:43:09 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if "days" are defined as school days or calendar days.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that although the law does not define the term, she believes that "days" should be interpreted as school days. She has had discussions with staff and thinks educators should be provided with time during the school day to have these discussions; "days" exclude weekends.

[3:43:51 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN responded that 45 days aligns with the end of the third quarter, approximately a month from now in Juneau schools. He noted that 15 days would be about three weeks before the end of the school year. He mentioned that in his experience, retention conversations typically occur as Commissioner Bishop described. However, he pointed out that retention is rarely considered because studies show poor outcomes and significant pressure from families against it.

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked how retention conversations currently happen at the elementary level and how they might change if this law were to go into effect.

[3:45:28 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that communication is key and noted that progress reports are provided regularly, whether in high school or elementary school. She explained that updates are

given quarterly to parents about students' progress in all grades. According to the Alaska Reads Act, there is a mandatory contract with parents called the individualized improvement plan, detailing the additional services the school will provide to children who fall below the expected mark and may not have the necessary reading skills by third grade. These discussions start in kindergarten, although the trigger for non-progression is the transition from third to fourth grade.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP stated that students in the school system have these conversations three times a year as part of the individualized reading plan and through data reports generated by the screener. The screener includes a parent newsletter that shares student progress and additional support information. She clarified that the requested change does not mean conversations will only happen at the end of the year or within 15 days. Instead, it ensures that the screener is used as one aspect in determining retention.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP noted that teachers felt data from December may not fully represent a child's progress by May or February. They wanted to use end-of-year data to make more informed decisions about retention and have discussions with parents if they foresee a child may not need to stay back. She emphasized that the current law requires these conversations to take place, but they seek to use the most recent data for decision-making. She acknowledged the difficulty of these conversations and referenced research on the support and opposition to retention.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP also mentioned that if a parent chooses to promote a child despite being significantly below the expected level, the law mandates 20 hours of summer school as a requirement for moving to the next grade level. She concluded by reiterating that the schools are requesting to use end-of-year data, not just winter data, to make informed retention decisions, noting that the spring testing window finishes on May 1 or May 2.

[3:49:05 PM](#)

BJORKMAN asked if it is correct that DEED is discussing a timeline requirement for an initial discussion to happen with a parent about possible retention.

[3:49:26 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that is not correct. What they are discussing is the final recommendation. She explained that through the IRIP, which occurs three times a year for students

who are far below, the discussion about retention has already happened. Parents are informed that retention may be a possible outcome if students are not making progress.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP said the current request is to utilize the spring data, which is the final data, to have a final discussion 15 school days before the end of the school year. The initial discussion typically happens in September when the first IRIP is designed and written with the student. Parents are given three opportunities to engage through the official IRIPs, as well as through additional progress monitoring. The IRIPs are mandated by law, so this would be the third and final discussion.

[3::38 PM](#)

KATHY MOFFIT, Director, Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Anchorage, Alaska, shared that yesterday DEED received a call from a principal who said the IRIP has stimulated the best communication with parents that the school has seen. She articulated that there were 22 IRIPs written at the beginning of the year, and by the middle of the year, only four remained, as the rest of the students had achieved a different level of proficiency.

MS. MOFFIT emphasized that this does not mean teachers stop monitoring progress. She also mentioned that ongoing communication is required, which she believes is mandated ten times throughout the year. She highlighted the power of the Alaska Reads Act, emphasizing its focus on ongoing communication. The principal noted that parents appreciate this communication, are asking how they can help, and are actively involved in their child's education, which is making a difference.

[3:51:47 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN said that, as someone who worked closely on this legislation, she wanted to provide context for why it was written in its current form. Two sections were heavily discussed with an education stakeholder group. She suggested reconstituting this group before making any changes to the legislation to ensure a transparent and robust public policy approach. Key stakeholders included the National Education Association (NEA), advocates for reading fluency and dyslexia, and Commissioner Johnson, who was involved in dialogues with Senator Begich.

CHAIR TOBIN emphasized the importance of elevating educator discretion and minimizing classroom time spent on various standardized assessments, which could reduce critical contact hours. Regarding section one, she noted that the initial assessment should allow educator discretion, but the chosen assessment might not be fulfilling its intended purpose. She suggested reviewing and potentially amending the process to align with the original public record.

CHAIR TOBIN stated the second piece concerns the 45-day mark and the need for parental involvement and engagement. Despite sending multiple notifications, some parents might not engage in the process. The 45-day letter serves as a crucial step to prompt parental participation, stressing the importance of their involvement to avoid difficult decisions. This timeframe also allows for summer program engagement if necessary. She proposed re-engaging stakeholders to collaboratively improve the legislation and extended an invitation for their involvement.

[3:54:02 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN held SB 192 in committee.

[3:54:14 PM](#)

At ease

PRESENTATION: ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGE LITERACY UPDATE

[3:55:52 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of an update on Alaska Native Language Literacy by the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED).

[3:56:32 PM](#)

JOEL ISAAK, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Kenai, Alaska, said that while he would speak predominantly about Alaska Native Language efforts in the department, he would highlight how to use the same playbook for other cultures and languages.

MR. ISAAK moved to slide 1, the mission, vision and purpose of the Department of Education and Early Development:

[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.

[3:58:42 PM](#)

MR. ISAAC moved to slide 3, Alaska's Education Challenge and shared strategic priorities:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Five Shared Strategic Priorities:

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

[3:59:32 PM](#)

MR. ISAAC moved to slide 4:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Agenda

- Nudench'tidałtey We Are Growing Stronger Again - Community of Practice
- Alaska Native Language Literacy Playbook
- Alaska Native Language Reading Arts k-3 Standards
- Alaska Native Language Literacy Screeners

- Naqenaga Tsił Nich'tidulał We Are Bringing Our Languages Together - Alaska Native Language Summit

[4:00:12 PM](#)

MR. ISAAK moved to slide 5:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Overview

The Department of Education and Early Development Alaska Native Language Literacy efforts are designed to promote literacy in Alaska Native Languages. The goal is to provide support to districts, teachers, families, and departmental staff to collaborate towards a common outcome of developing literacy in Alaska Native Languages.

[4:00:39 PM](#)

MR. ISAAK moved to slide 6 and explained an Ahtna metaphor of fire being a positive element for cooking and staying warm, but also keeping a fire going takes work. Language and efforts around literacy are similar in that they require constant and appropriate tending.

Nakon' tnestnak - The Fire is Going Out

"Now today we have been thrown together, put into this predicament we need to support each other. The fire is going out, everywhere in Alaska."

-Markle Pete, Ahtna Dene (2009)

He said Alaska Native Language Literacy work is similar to the fire metaphor in that it is something Alaska must constantly be tending because time is not on our side in working to preserve Alaskan native languages and is in response to legislation from the past that aimed to eliminate Native Alaskans and languages.

[4:02:26 PM](#)

MR. ISAAK moved to slide 7 and said that last year, as a preconference to the Alaska Science of Reading symposium, a language summit was held in Anchorage. From the summit came the idea to have an ongoing virtual opportunity for language workers around the state to share efforts. That group is called the Community of Practice:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Nudench'tidaltey - We Are Growing Stronger Again

- Supporting
- Share Resources
- Discuss Language Topics
- Co-design
- Share Collaborative Space

To learn more about the community of practice email:
Kari.shaginoff@alaska.gov

MR. ISAAK noted the DEED positions that focus on Ahtna and Dena'ina, but recognized there are 18 other Native languages. Most of the language work takes place with the tribes. Currently, tribes are not districts, so the department and Native communities must figure out how to bring tribes and the Alaskan Native language working community into the department to support districts. He stated this effort requires the straddling of a lot of geopolitical landscapes.

[4:04:31 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked if additional resources are needed to support the other 18 language branches.

[4:05:08 PM](#)

MR. ISAAK replied that he would highlight the use of resources and funds that would answer the question as he continues the presentation.

[4:05:16 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS commented that Native languages vary. He questioned how these varying levels of language are being addressed to help students and whether having a written language is necessary.

[4:05:41 PM](#)

MR. ISAAK replied that the linguistic situation is a key part of the Community of Practice's strategy. He said there are orthographies, or alphabets, for languages throughout the state, but they are in the very early stages of development. English has had over a thousand years to develop writing structures, whereas these languages have had only about 50 years. As a result, the progression into literacy varies among languages,

depending on the time, number of speakers, and available written materials.

MR. ISAAC highlighted that some languages would find it easier to advance into literacy due to these factors. For instance, Yupik is the most frequently spoken indigenous language in the state and has the most available materials and speakers. In contrast, some languages are currently referred to as dormant, lacking highly proficient speakers but having the tools for revival, like how Hebrew was revived. This range spans from sleeping languages to those still endangered but with active young speakers.

[4:07:43 PM](#)

MR. ISAAC moved to slide 8 and discussed at length another project that is underway in partnership with Region 16 to promote Native spoken and written language learning that also incorporates YouTube videos:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Demonstrates the Alaska Reading Playbook

- Demonstrates the Alaska Reading Playbook
- Demonstrates Examples of Teaching the 5 Pillars of the Science of Reading in Alaska Native Languages
- Helps Educators Learn More About How to Teach Literacy in Alaska Native Languages and Other Cultures

[4:10:57 PM](#)

MR. ISAAC moved to slide 9 and discussed the various sections of the Alaska Native Language Literacy Playbook:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Introduction
- Alaska Native Languages Connection
- Impacts of Reading & Writing
- Considerations of Linguistic Distinctions
- Benefits of Reading & Writing in Native Languages
- Conclusion and Sustainability
- References

[4:14:23 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN commented that the committee has heard testimony from educators in rural and remote areas regarding indigenous immersion school students and their struggles in kindergarten, first, and second grade in meeting the stipulations of the Alaska Reads Act. She wondered if the legislature needs to provide exemptions while some of this work is being done, or to accommodate when immersion school students begin to learn to read in English and reach the third-grade mark. She asked if Mr. Isaak had any recommendations or thoughts on this matter.

[4:15:03 PM](#)

MR. ISAAK stated his belief that immersion programs are an ideal place to discover what is needed. He said he regularly communicates with Joshua Gill and has visited his program, which has gone through a waiver process for aspects of the Alaska Reads Act. Having a strong program helps navigate issues. While a waiver is a gap stop, long-term solutions are needed. He said standards development and assessment tools for target languages are long-term solutions that DEED utilizes. He acknowledged that his response does not directly address what areas should be waived until the long-term solutions are in place, but it is the approach he would use.

[4:16:28 PM](#)

MR. ISAAK moved to slide 10:

[Original punctuation provided.]

K-3 Alaska Native Language Arts Reading Standards

The purpose of this project is to develop Alaska Native Language Arts Standards for kindergarten through 3rd grade for adoption by the Alaska State Board of Education. There is a clear statewide policy directive that all students should be able to read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade. These developed standards will provide a critical support for instruction of Alaska Native languages because the standards will make it clear that reading in Alaska Native language is valid for demonstrating 3rd grade reading proficiency.

MR. ISAAK stated that having assessments and standards that are aligned helps develop curriculum. The term can mean different things to different people. In the Alaska Native Working Community, there was often discussion that Native language is

not standardized; it is a dynamic, living reflection of place. He stated that the Alaska Native Language Working Community now drives the standards. DEED sent out a request for proposals, and the contract was awarded to Sealaska Heritage Institute. He discussed how a multicultural approach to standards varies from traditional English standards. He stated he is unaware of any other state in the nation that is doing this kind of work.

[4:19:58 PM](#)

MR. ISAAK moved to slide 11 and said the screener is being developed in conjunction with the University of Oregon, which developed DIBELS 8. He discussed the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Alaska Native Language Literacy Screeners

Year 1- 2

- First Four Languages (Yup'ik, Inupiaq, Tlingit, and a Dene language)

Year 3

- First Four Languages: Activities
- First Four Languages: Reporting and Documentation
- Second Batch of 4-6 Languages: Activities

Year 4

- Second Batch of 4-6 Languages: Activities
- Second Batch of 4-6 Languages: Reporting and Documentation

Year 5

- 1-6 Languages: Activities, Reporting, and Documentation concludes
- Sustainability

MR. ISAAK stated the project is a heavy lift, so they are starting with the languages that have the most capacity. Limited staff are attempting to do thirty years of work in five years.

[4:23:15 PM](#)

MR. ISAAK moved to slide 12 and said exciting events are planned and provided some details:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Alaska Native Language Summit

Naqenaga Tsil̄ Nich'tidul̄
We Are Bringing Our Languages Together

Alaska Native Language Summit
Thursday, April 18, 2024
Dena'ina Civic Convention Center, Anchorage, Alaska

For more information contact:
kari.shaginoff@alaska.gov

MR. ISAAK named supportive stakeholders and said convening allows 200 people to gather and provide critical feedback. Last year's conference offered a safe place for discussion and healing. This year's conference will offer trauma-informed tools to further help with healing.

[4:26:23 PM](#)

MR. ISAAK moved to slide 13 and concluded the presentation with a quote that summarizes the approach that the department is taking towards Native language literacy:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Conclusion

"It takes one generation to
lose a language and three
generations to regain it back."

Keiki Kawai'ae'a, Ph.D. Director of Ka Haka
"Ula o Ke'elikōlani
College of Hawaiian Language
University of Hawai'i Hilo

MR. ISAAK further likened language restoration to growing a garden; the first generation clears the land, the second generation prepares the soil, the third plants the seeds, and the fourth gets to see the garden grow. The work can seem daunting, but it must be done together and with care.

[4:28:49 PM](#)

MR. ISAAK moved to slide 14 and provided contact information:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Contact Information

Eiq'a yes, Joel Isaak, Deputy Commissioner
Joel.Isaak@alaska.gov
(907) 465-2800

4:30:20 PM

CHAIR TOBIN thanked the presenter, stated the presentation was illuminative and that she looked forward to discussing ways to strengthen culturally relevant components of the Alaska Reads Act and education.

4:30:46 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 4:30 p.m.