

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 23, 2025

8:05 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Rebecca Himschoot, Co-Chair  
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair  
Representative Maxine Dibert  
Representative Ted Eischeid  
Representative Jubilee Underwood  
Representative Rebecca Schwanke  
Representative Bill Elam

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 90

"An Act establishing a financial literacy education program for public schools; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED HB 90 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 174

"An Act relating to the regional educational attendance area and small municipal school district fund; relating to Mt. Edgecumbe High School; and relating to teacher housing."

- HEARD & HELD

PRESENTATION(S): "MOUNT EDGECUMBE HIGH SCHOOL: HISTORY AND CURRENT OVERVIEW"

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 183

"An Act relating to district-wide early education programs; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 90

SHORT TITLE: FINANCIAL LITERACY PROGRAM IN SCHOOLS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) EISCHEID

02/10/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/10/25	(H)	EDC, FIN
04/04/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/04/25	(H)	Heard & Held
04/04/25	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/07/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/07/25	(H)	Heard & Held
04/07/25	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/16/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/16/25	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
04/23/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 174

SHORT TITLE: REAA FUND: MT. EDGE CUMBE, TEACHER HOUSING

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) BURKE

04/07/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/07/25	(H)	EDC, FIN
04/16/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/16/25	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
04/23/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 183

SHORT TITLE: EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) STORY

04/11/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/11/25	(H)	EDC, FIN
04/23/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

#### **WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE TED EISCHEID

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, offered closing comments on HB 90.

REPRESENTATIVE ROBYN NIAYUQ BURKE

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented HB 174 to the committee.

CALVIN ZULOW, Staff  
Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke, prime sponsor, presented HB 174 to the committee.

HEATHER HEINEKEN, Director, Division of Finance  
Department of Education & Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke, prime sponsor, presented the fiscal note for HB 174.

SUZZUK MARY HUNGTINGTON, Director  
Mount Edgumbe High School  
Sitka, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave a presentation titled "Mount Edgumbe High School: History and Current Overview"

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented HB 183 to the committee.

TAMMY SMITH, Staff  
Representative Andi Story  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Andi Story, prime sponsor, presented HB 183 to the committee.

HEATHER HEINEKEN, Director  
Division of Finance  
Department of Education & Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Story, prime sponsor, presented the fiscal note for HB 183.

DR. CHRISTINA WEILAND, Professor  
Marsal Family School of Education  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Andi Story, prime sponsor, gave a PowerPoint presentation on HB 183.

JORDAN BERNE, P.HD Candidate  
University of Michigan  
Ann, Arbor, Michigan

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Andi Story, prime sponsor, gave a PowerPoint presentation on HB 183.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:05:53 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR STORY** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. Representatives Eischeid, Underwood, Himschoot, Schwanke, Elam, Dibert, and Story were present at the call to order.

**HB 90-FINANCIAL LITERACY PROGRAM IN SCHOOLS**

[8:07:35 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 90, "An Act establishing a financial literacy education program for public schools; and providing for an effective date."

[8:07:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TED EISCHEID, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, offered closing comments on HB 90. He said that the proposed legislation would create a good opportunity to begin conversations concerning financial wellbeing and thanked the committee for hearing HB 90.

[8:09:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY shared her concern that HB 90 might impose an unrealistic graduation requirement on school districts in Alaska.

[8:09:35 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT moved to report HB 90, 34-LS0460\A, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 90 was reported from the House Education Standing Committee.

[8:10:14 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:10 a.m. to 8:12 a.m.

**HB 174-REAA FUND: MT. EDGE CUMBE, TEACHER HOUSING**

[8:13:06 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 174, "An Act relating to the regional educational attendance area and small municipal school district fund; relating to Mt. Edgecumbe High School; and relating to teacher housing."

[8:13:36 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:13 a.m. to 8:14 a.m.

[8:14:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ROBYN NIAYUQ BURKE, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 174 to the committee. She began a brief PowerPoint presentation [included in the committee packet] on slide 2, which detailed the policy goals of HB 174 and moved to slide 3, which explained the necessity of the proposed legislation. She concluded the presentation on slide 4, where her staff Calvin Zulow read the sectional analysis for HB 174.

[8:18:03 AM](#)

CALVIN ZULOW, Staff, Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke, prime sponsor, presented HB 174 to the committee. He read the sectional analysis for HB 174 [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Sec. 1: Amends language in AS 14.11.025(a) that authorizes the Department of Education and Early Development to make grants from the REAA fund to REAA districts and small municipal school districts.

Adds Mt. Edgecumbe to the eligibility list for school construction and major maintenance grants.

Adds eligibility for major maintenance projects for teacher housing in eligible areas that is owned by the district or by the state

Sec. 2: Amends language in AS 14.11.030(a) that adds Mt. Edgecumbe High School and major maintenance for

teacher housing to the description of the purpose of the REAA fund.

Sec. 3: Deletes language in AS 14.11.030(b) that the unobligated and unexpended cash balance of the fund may not exceed \$70,000,000.

[8:19:24 AM](#)

HEATHER HEINEKEN, Director, Division of Finance, Department of Education & Early Development, on behalf of Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke, prime sponsor, presented the fiscal note for HB 174. She explained that the proposed legislation would create 2 positions in the facilities section of the division of finance support services within DEED, one being a school finance support specialist and the other being a building management specialist.

[8:21:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked what the proposed school finance position's duties would entail.

MS. HEINEKEN answered that the Department of Education & Early Development (DEED)'s Division of Finance Support Services does not currently have the necessary workers that the proposed legislation would require and explained that the proposed positions within the DEED would be specialized for the needs of HB 174.

[8:24:131 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked Ms. Heineken how many school districts in Alaska are equipped with teacher housing and asked if it would make more sense to "draw from the expertise of other state departments" to fill the role of the proposed school finance position. She asked how teacher housing is funded in built and asked if any of the proposed policies in HB 174 would cover major maintenance needs at Mt. Edgecumbe High School (MEHS).

MS. HEINEKEN replied that the DEED does not keep track of teacher housing offered by school districts and said that it would be "a lot to ask of another department" to address teacher housing issues. She said that the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) does offer grants for teacher housing to school districts, but local communities are often responsible for the funding that might build teacher housing in a Regional Education Attendance Area (REAA).

REPRESENTATIVE BURKE added her understanding that the major maintenance needs of MEHS are minimal and said that one person is generally responsible for all

[8:30:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked how MEHS differs from other REAA schools in Alaska.

MS. HEINEKEN answered that MEHS is considered a state facility, wherein all of its deferred maintenance is handled through the state rather than the local school district.

[8:34:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked about the history of the 70 million dollar fund cap for REA school districts in Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE BURKE said that her office would follow-up with information later.

[8:38:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on HB 174. After ascertaining that there was no one who wished to testify, she closed public testimony on HB 174.

[HB 174 was held over].

**PRESENTATION(S): "Mount Edgecumbe High School: History and Current Overview"**

[8:38:55 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the next order of business would be a presentation titled "Mount Edgecumbe High School: History and Current Overview"

[8:39:35 AM](#)

SUZZUK MARY HUNGTINGTON, Director, Mount Edgecumbe High School, gave a presentation titled "Mount Edgecumbe High School: History and Current Overview" She began on slide 2, which highlighted the Mission, Vision, and Purpose of MEHS and moved to slide 3, which described how MEHS is meeting the five strategic priorities of the DEED. She moved to slide 4, which displayed

an organizational chart of the staff at MEHS and continued through slides 5-6, which listed historical data and statistics associated with MEHS. She moved to slide 7, which detailed the capacity of the dormitory halls at MEHS and continued to slide 8, which listed a series of "fun facts" about MEHS. She moved to slide 9, which described the student composition of the MEHS attendees for the 2024-2025 school year and continued to slide 10, which detailed the MEHS admissions process. She moved to slide 11, which listed a series of academic highlights for MEHS and continued to slide 12, which highlighted the various industry certifications and career & technical education (CTE) classes that are offered at MEHS.

[9:09:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked for the "financial algebra" class offered by MEHS.

MS. HUNGTINGTON said that she knows that MEHS students appreciate the financial literacy classes offered at the institution.

[9:11:33 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked if the financial algebra class is a graduation requirement at MEHS.

MS. HUNGTINGTON answered that not all students are enrolled in financial literacy classes offered at MEHS.

[9:12:32 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked how many students enrolled at MEHS are from Sitka.

MS. HUNGTINGTON answered that there are currently 17 students from Sitka attending MEHS.

[9:14:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked how MEHS goes about priority and decision-making within its admission process.

MS. HUNGTINGTON explained that the MEHS admission process is outlined in Alaska Statute.

[9:17:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked what the total expenditure per student is at MEHS.

MS. HUNGTINGTON explained that MEHS is working with DEED to provide a solid answer and said that she would follow-up with an answer later

[CO-CHAIR STORY handed the gavel to Co-Chair Himschoot.]

**HB 183-EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

9:19:10 AM

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 183 "An Act relating to district-wide early education programs; and providing for an effective date."

9:19:57 AM

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 183 to the committee. She read from the sponsor statement for HB 183 [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Student learning is highly valued and desired in Alaska. One key-way to gain strategic momentum is by investing in voluntary, early learning pre-k programs for our four and five year old children. Pre-k programs improve children's language, literacy, social and emotional skills, math, and executive functioning at kindergarten entry. Coming to school kindergarten-ready allows children to thrive in their learning environments and eliminates the costly expense of remediation efforts in education.

According to the Department of Education and Early Development, the 2024 statewide Alaska Developmental Profile (ADP), for preschoolers, approximates only 31 percent of our children in Alaska come ready for kindergarten. This is one of the lowest in the nation. However, our state has had proven success in helping prepare our children for kindergarten. Data from the Department of Education and Early Development in doing evaluations on our state sponsored pre-schools, found that children in preschool entered more prepared for kindergarten than their peers who did not attend

preschool. Other Alaska school districts with preschool programs also report seeing this success.

The Alaska Reads Act, passed in 2021, set out to build on this momentum and increase the ability of more districts to offer voluntary pre-k programs. However, the goal has fallen short. Currently, only three school district's pre-k programs are approved for annual funding through the Foundation Formula. House Bill 183 seeks to remove limits on the number of pre-k children and district pre-k programs that can be funded in a year. Currently it caps the spending for state funded pre-school at 3 million a year. This bill also seeks to change the calculation of the Average Daily Membership (ADM) to count pre-k children as full-time rather than one-half time. This will allow more districts to afford to implement and expand pre-k programs. Importantly it gives families who want access to a quality pre-school programs for their children this opportunity. Research shows that positive learning effects are even greater for children from low-income families who attend pre-k programs. Reports show many families want access but are not able to find affordable, quality preschool programs.

The Alaska Reads Act requires high quality early learning standards, early educator training, and evaluations to be in place for approval to receive state funding for pre-k programs. It is critical to have quality early childhood programs to get higher learning results. Our children are the most precious resource we have. Investing in their early learning sets Alaska up for future success.

[9:24:23 AM](#)

TAMMY SMITH, Staff, Representative Andi Story, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Andi Story, prime sponsor, presented HB 183 to the committee. She read from the sectional analysis for HB 183 [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 1.

Amends AS 14.17.500 by allowing enrolled pre-kindergarten students to count as full-time students in the Average Daily Membership rather than one-half.

Section 2.

Repeals statutes repealing the Alaska Reads Act district approved pre-kindergarten program sunset clauses under Section 47 Chapter 40 SLA 2022. The statute repeals the current pre-kindergarten funding system in 2034. Section 2 removes these repeals protecting pre-kindergarten funding in perpetuity.

Section 3.

Repeals a subsection of AS 14.17.500 limiting state funding for district approved prekindergarten programs. Section 3 repeals the limits on pre-kindergarten foundation formula funding that caps the annual funds at \$3 million.

Section 4.

Establishes an effective date of July 1, 2025.

[9:26:04 AM](#)

HEATHER HEINEKEN, Director, Division of Finance, Department of Education & Early Development, on behalf of Representative Story, prime sponsor, presented the fiscal note for HB 183. She explained that the first fiscal note outlined how the proposed legislation would change funding for DEED-approved district-wide early education programs operated by the local school district and said that the other zero fiscal note concerned the foundations program.

[9:29:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked for clarification on the numbers listed on the fiscal note for HB 183.

MS. HEINEKEN explained that the amount of money written in the first fiscal note was meant to reflect the current financial need of HB 174.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY added her understanding that school districts would first have to meet the requirements of the Alaska READS act of 2021 in order to qualify for the funding proposed by HB 183.

[9:32:29 AM](#)

DR. CHRISTINA WEILAND, Professor, Marsal Family School of Education, University of Michigan, on behalf of Representative Andi Story, prime sponsor, gave a PowerPoint presentation on HB 183. She began the PowerPoint presentation on HB 183 [hardcopy included in the committee packet] on slide 2, which displayed a bar graph that compared the percentage of pre-kindergarten (pre-k) students that have low proficiency in math and literacy and moved to slide 3, which displayed a series of graphs that compared the disparity in pre-k proficiency among children of lower socio-economic status.

[9:35:56 AM](#)

JORDAN BERNE, P.HD Candidate, University of Michigan, on behalf of Representative Andi Story, prime sponsor, gave a PowerPoint presentation on HB 183. He picked up the presentation on slide 4, which emphasized the outsized impact that a pre-k education has on a child's preparedness for kindergarten and moved to slide 5, which highlighted the long-term positive impact of a child's pre-k education. He continued to slide 6, which detailed a series of less-examined outcomes of a pre-k education and moved to slide 7, which highlighted evidence of the positive impacts of a pre-k education on a person's adulthood.

[9:42:09 AM](#)

DR. WEILAND resumed the presentation on slide 8, which displayed a bar graph that compared the various measures of qualities of pre-k programs around the United States and moved to slide 9, which listed a series of academic sources regarding the quality of a pre-k curriculum. She continued to slide 10, which displayed a bar graph that highlighted certain "active ingredients" that contribute to positive outcomes within a state-funded pre-k program and moved to slide 11, which emphasized the policy needs of a mixed-delivery pre-k program. She continued to slide 12, which highlighted investments that are currently being made into pre-k research and concluded the presentation on slide 13, which detailed two academic documents relating to pre-k education published by the University of Michigan.

[9:48:33 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT opened public testimony on HB 183. After ascertaining that there was no one who wished to testify, she closed public testimony on HB 183.

[HB 183 was held over].

[9:49:32 AM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:49 a.m.