

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

April 28, 2025

8:04 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. 174

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

- MOVED HB 174 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 183

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

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 12

"An Act relating to free breakfast and lunch in public schools."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

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
04/23/25 (H) Heard & Held
04/23/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
04/28/25 (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
04/23/25 (H) Heard & Held
04/23/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
04/28/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 12

SHORT TITLE: FREE BREAKFAST & LUNCH IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) DIBERT

01/22/25 (H) PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25 (H) EDC, FIN
02/24/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/24/25 (H) Heard & Held
02/24/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
04/28/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY

Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

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

JOSHUA COUGHRAN, Superintendent

Skagway School District
Skagway, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony on HB 183.

CYNDY FRY, Special Education Director

Petersburg School District
Petersburg, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony on HB 183.

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Operations Manager
Division of Innovation & Education Excellence, Department of
Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered committee questions on HB 183.

BECKY MOREN, Early Learning Administrator
Department of Education & Early Development
Talkeetna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered committee questions on HB 183.

REPRESENTATIVE MAXINE DIBERT
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HB 12 to the
committee.

DR. LISA PARADY, Executive Director
Alaska Council of School Administrators
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony on HB 12.

RACHAEL MILLER, Chief Advocacy Officer
Foodbank of Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony on HB 12.

RACHEL LORD, Advocacy & Policy Director
Alaska Food Policy Council
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 12.

LEAH WOOLARD
representing self
Chugiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 12.

EVELYNN TREFON
representing self
Newhalen, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 12.

TOM KLAAMEYER, President
NEA Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 12.

SUNNY GERAGHTY
representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 12.

DANIEL PARKS, General Manager
Southeast Alaska Food Bank
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 12.

CHARITY BLANCHETT, CEO
Dipping Spoon
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 12.

IRENE BOLL
representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 12.

DEBORAH BENNETT
representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 12.

BERNIE HOFFMAN
representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 12.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Representatives Schwanke, Dibert, Elam, Eischeid, Underwood, Story, and Himschoot were present at the call to order.

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

[8:05:33 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT announced that the first 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."

[8:06:28 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY moved to report HB 174 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 174 was reported from the House Education Standing Committee.

[8:07:08 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:07 a.m. to 8:11 a.m.

HB 183-EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

[8:12:31 AM](#)

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

[8:12:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 183 to the committee. She briefly remarked the importance of pre-kindergarten education and welcomed invited testifiers to speak on the proposed legislation.

[8:14:11 AM](#)

JOSHUA COUGHRAN, Superintendent, Skagway School District, gave invited testimony on HB 183. He said that he wanted to see the opposite of a "top down approach" to public education and said that the Skagway School District (SSD) is a good example of that. He explained how the pre-kindergarten programs in his school district positively benefit its students and said that he is "fortunate to live in a community" that supports and allows for pre-kindergarten education as a common opportunity for all students.

[8:18:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked Mr. Coughran if his school district administered full day pre-kindergarten instruction.

MR. COUGHRAN answered that pre-kindergarten education in the SSD district was delivered in a half day format.

[8:19:25 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Mr. Coughran to elaborate further on his school district's budgeting for its pre-kindergarten program and asked what about the Alaska Reads Act of 2022 makes pre-kindergarten education "tedious."

MR. COUGHRAN answered that the SSD put in an application for the 25 Average Daily Membership (ADM) funding after learning from the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) that some deal of the funding it had been utilizing was illegal and explained that the SSD does not have a federal head start program, which has made the implementation of the Alaska Reads Act policies difficult.

[8:24:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked Mr. Coughran how the SSD has been able to fund its pre-kindergarten program for the past 20 years.

MR. COUGHRAN answered that his school district's pre-kindergarten program was fully funded by the Municipality of Skagway until 2024. He emphasized how the SSD was put in a difficult position by changes to how special revenue funding was to be utilized.

[8:28:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked how the SSD distributed staff and class time to its pre-kindergarten program.

MR. COUGHRAN explained that the SSD is a single-site school district and said that it has never gone over 12 or 13 total students in a graduating class.

[8:31:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DIBERT asked Mr. Coughran how long the SSD has hosted its pre-kindergarten program and asked if there is a waitlist for the program.

MR. COUGHRAN explained that the SSD has offered pre-kindergarten curriculum for over 20 years and said that there is no waitlist for it.

[8:37:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked Mr. Coughran for his estimation of how many hours were spent on the creation of his school districts pre-kindergarten funding application.

MR. COUGHRAN replied that it took probably 200 hours between him and his Alaska Reads Act coordinator.

[8:40:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked about the landscape of daycare and early childcare in Skagway.

MR. COUGHRAN said that the daycare situation in Skagway is "pretty bleak" and explained that the seasonal nature of the Skagway's populous has a great impact on the needs of the community.

[8:44:19 AM](#)

CYNDY FRY, Special Education Director, Petersburg School District, gave invited testimony on HB 183. She read from a prepared statement on behalf of Heather Kahn, which described her experience working in special education and how that career brought her home to the Petersburg School District (PSG). The statement detailed the 17 head start programs that currently exist in Alaska and outlined how the PSG benefits from Alaska Reads Act grants. The statement emphasized the need for a full ADM of preschool students in Alaska and detailed how an early learning program would address physical wellbeing, social & emotional development, different approaches to learning, general knowledge & cognition, communication, language, and literacy in Alaska's early education students.

[8:50:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DIBERT asked about the early learning landscape in Petersburg.

MS. FRY answered that Petersburg needs a more holistic early learning program and said that the PSG is "extremely thankful" that its early learning programs were available to its students.

[8:54:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked why the application for Alaska Reads Act funding is so arduous and asked if there could be any way to reduce the amount of man hours spend writing that application.

[8:55:50 AM](#)

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Operations Manager, Division of Innovation & Education Excellence, Department of Education & Early Development, answered committee questions on HB 183. She explained that new legislation passed in the previous legislative session mandated a new set of accountability standards and said that administrative staff within the DEED has been working to assist school districts in creating Alaska Reads Act grant applications.

[8:59:55 AM](#)

BECKY MOREN, Early Learning Administrator, Department of Education & Early Development, answered committee questions on HB 183. She explained that the policy proposal of HB 183 would change two standards of grant application in the next fiscal year.

[9:01:44 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Ms. Moren to further detail the two proposed changes in HB 183.

MS. MOREN answered that legislation before the committee put forward two proposed changes to the dual language learner standard and the early childhood mental health consultant standard.

[9:06:07 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked how many school districts in Alaska have received early education funding or are on a conditional funding status and asked how a school might start an early education program if it is to hear the results of its grant application on September of the given year.

MS. MORAN explained that the Alaska Reads Act grant is a one-time application that stands for three years once the

application approved. She answered that 12 school districts have requested application forms and explained that the September 1 notification date of early education funding for the same year is statutory.

[9:14:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked Ms. Moren to describe the existing accountability standards in place related to Alaska Reads Act Funding and asked if early education program grants would be "discontinued if they were not successful".

MS. MOREN answered that value and criteria of accountability practices lie within academic testing standards and explained that early education program grants would stay in place as long as legislation determines so.

[9:19:58 AM](#)

MS. RIDDLE added "when we talk about accountability, there's a lot of accountability" and explained how the grant applicants work to meet the standards of accountability outlined by the early education program grant, such as monthly meetings, early learning progress data, and check-ins with the DEED.

[9:23:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY gave wrap-up comments on HB 183 and thanked the committee for hearing the proposed legislation.

HB 12-FREE BREAKFAST & LUNCH IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

[9:24:33 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 12, "An Act relating to free breakfast and lunch in public schools."

[9:24:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MAXINE DIBERT, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 12 to the committee. She briefly remarked that HB 12 would allow for students in Alaska to have access to free meals within its public schools.

[9:26:15 AM](#)

DR. LISA PARADY, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators, gave invited testimony on HB 12. She emphasized how the advancement of the proposed legislation would lead to enhanced academic performance, student behavior, and a lowered stigma towards reduced rate or fully subsidized school meals. She pointed to surveys conducted in 27 school districts in Alaska by the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) that found that 21 school districts in Alaska use their general fund dollars to fund its food programs and emphasized the higher cost of food and services in rural school districts in Alaska. She said that adequate state or federal support would be necessary to pay for what a school district's general fund might not be able to.

[9:34:49 AM](#)

RACHAEL MILLER, Chief Advocacy Officer, Foodbank of Alaska, gave invited testimony on HB 12. She emphasized that one in six children in Alaska experience hunger and highlighted how universal school meals could be a powerful tool to address malnutrition in Alaska's children. She pointed to the state's commitment to a viable public school system as evidence for the necessity of free school meals and said that the meals proposed by HB 12 would boost academic performance, decrease chronic absenteeism, improve student behavior, and contribute to the economic relief of families.

[9:41:24 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT opened public testimony on HB 12.

[9:42:01 AM](#)

RACHEL LORD, Advocacy & Policy Director, Alaska Food Policy Council, testified in support of HB 12. She shared how the Homer Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) would put on a pancake breakfast during statewide testing days, of which resulted in nearly zero students being late to school during those days. She emphasized the benefits of HB 12 and urged the committee's support of the proposed legislation.

[9:44:14 AM](#)

LEAH WOOLARD, representing self, testified in support of HB 12. She pointed to recent years where her children could receive free school meals and emphasized their outsized impact on her children and family as a whole.

[9:45:49 AM](#)

EVELYNN TREFON, representing self, testified in support of HB 12. She shared that the cost of living in Newhalen has skyrocketed in the past few years and stressed how universal school meals could work to alleviate costs to already burdened families in rural Alaska.

[9:48:42 AM](#)

TOM KLAAMEYER, President, NEA Alaska, testified in support of HB 12. He emphasized the National Education Association of Alaska's strong support for HB 12 and said that he has witnessed firsthand the impact that hunger has on schoolchildren. He said that hunger leads to behavioral issues, learning issues, and emotional issues in children and spoke to the need for the free meals to be free of stigma.

[9:51:11 AM](#)

SUNNY GERAGHTY, representing self, testified in support of HB 12. She said that food security is an "incredibly important fact of life" and urged the committee's support HB 12.

[9:52:03 AM](#)

DANIEL PARKS, General Manager, Southeast Alaska Food Bank, testified in support of HB 12. He said that the Southeast Alaska Food Bank helps to feed many families each week, which include about 100-150 kids. He echoed the previous testifier's remark that passing HB 12 would be an "investment in Alaska's future" and urged the committee's support of HB 12.

[9:54:24 AM](#)

CHARITY BLANCHETT, CEO, Dipping Spoon, testified in support of HB 12. She said that indigenous youth in Alaska have historically been forced to eat highly processed and malnutritious meals and emphasized how HB 12 could be used as an avenue of decolonization.

[9:56:24 AM](#)

IRENE BOLL, representing self, testified in support of HB 12. She explained how the burden of food debt places a major stress on families in Alaska and said that the passing of the proposed

legislation would end a great deal of worry for many families working to pay for their children's school meals.

[9:58:13 AM](#)

DEBORAH BENNETT, representing self, testified in support of HB 12. She explained that the proposed policies of HB 12 & their associated benefits are "well established" and urged the committee's support of HB 12.

[9:59:23 AM](#)

BERNIE HOFFMAN, representing self, testified in support of HB 12. She said that the Alaska State Legislature must "reach out and do whatever it can" to help the next generation of Alaskans.

[10:01:12 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 12.

[10:01:45 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:01 a.m.