

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

May 2, 2025  
8:10 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Jubilee Underwood

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 183

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

- MOVED HB 183 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PRESENTATION: BOND REIMBURSEMENT AND GRANT REVIEW UPDATE

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

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
04/28/25	(H)	Heard & Held
04/28/25	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
05/02/25	(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.

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

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered committee questions on HB 136.

MICHAEL MASON, Staff  
Senator Loki Tobin  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered committee questions on HB 136.

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

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave a presentation titled "Bond Reimbursement and Grant Review Update".

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:10:14 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR REBECCA HIMSCHOOT** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:10 a.m. Representatives Elam, Eischeid, Dibert, Schwanke, Story, and Himschoot were present at the call to order.

^#hb183

#### **HB 183-EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

[8:11:05 AM](#)

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

[8:11:44 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 183 to the committee. She explained that the proposed legislation would change current funding for pre-kindergarten students from half full-time equivalent (FTE) to a whole and further explained how the Alaska Reads Act is causing for the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to adapt to regulations through feedback its pre-kindergarten programs that it established.

[8:15:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked how a series of recommendations to the Alaska State Board of Education made by an unspecified group were being implemented.

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT replied that the recommendations Representative Schwanke was referring had been submitted to the DEED without any response.

[8:16:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE shared her belief that the early learning program application process was too great for small school districts and shared a series of recommendations to ease the administrative burden that the applications pose to certain school districts in Alaska.

[8:23:07 AM](#)

HEATHER HEINEKEN, Director, Division of Finance & Support Services, Department of Education & Early Development, answered committee questions on HB 136. She explained that the original fiscal note associated with HB 183 was based off of the current Base Student Allocation (BSA) of \$5,960 and detailed how the proposed \$700 increase to the BSA would be reflected in the newer fiscal note for HB 183.

[8:26:36 AM](#)

MICHAEL MASON, Staff, Senator Loki Tobin, Alaska State Legislature, answered committee questions on HB 136. He contextualized Representative Schwanke's comments by detailing a change made to House Bill 148 of the 33rd Alaska State Legislature.

[8:28:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked why there was such a big difference between fiscal year 2026 and the following years.

[8:29:55 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:29 a.m. to 8:31 a.m.

[8:31:28 AM](#)

MR. MASON clarified that the proposed legislation would remove the limit on the number of pre-kindergarten students in programs that can be funded as outlined by the Alaska Reads Act.

[8:33:02 AM](#)

MS. HEINEKEN clarified that the expensive fiscal note for fiscal year 2026 was based off of a multi-million dollar appropriation made to the DEED.

[8:34:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DIBERT moved to report HB 183 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 183 was reported from the House Education Standing Committee.

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[8:35:41 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:35 a.m. to 8:40 a.m.

^PRESENTATION: Bond Reimbursement and Grant Review Update

**PRESENTATION: Bond Reimbursement and Grant Review Update**

[8:40:24 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT announced that the final order of business would be the Bond Reimbursement and Grant Review Update presentation.

[8:43:03 AM](#)

HEATHER HEINEKEN, Director, Division of Finance & Support Services, Department of Education & Early Development, gave a presentation titled "Bond Reimbursement and Grant Review Update". She began by providing a history of the Bond Reimbursement and Grant Review (BRGR) committee from its

incipience in 1993 and described the committee's role within the Alaska education system. She detailed the committee's recent meetings on April 9th, 2025 and April 10th, 2025 that both concerned the Capitol Improvement Project (CIP) grant report, school capital project funding, Regional Education Attendance Area (REAA) and small municipal fund reports, and CIP grant applications. She explained how the BRGR committee had created a subcommittee to review a supplemental CIP grant application that it did not have enough time to properly review and emphasized that the Average Daily Membership (ADM) figure used to evaluate CIP grant applications was not the same ADM figure that was being used in HB 183.

[8:58:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked if the DEED has made any effort to assist school districts in beginning CIP grant applications and asked if the BRGR committee has taken up review of the lack of funding for many CIP grant projects in Alaska.

MS. HEINEKEN clarified that the BRGR committee has worked to simplify the CIP grant application to reduce its administrative burden on school districts and agreed that the CIP grant application is costly and often not funded by the state. She opined that the CIP grant dashboard was not likely to encourage many more school districts to apply to the CIP grant but was a helpful tool in comparing costs and scope of projects across the state.

[9:08:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE shared her concern related to an experience of a rural school within her House District that had experienced major mechanical failures as a result of delays caused by an already lengthy CIP grant process.

[9:13:11 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT shared her agreement about CIP grant applications causing harm in rural school districts and asked about the membership of the BRGR subcommittees.

MS. HEINEKEN replied that the subcommittees are made from committee members and added that the DEED does not have a funding mechanism to respond to school district emergencies.

[9:15:45 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked how the DEED makes effort to change a school district's standing within the CIP grant waiting list in the case of a funding emergency.

MS. HEINEKEN explained that only some of the schools in the news with terrible learning conditions have applied for CIP grant funding.

[9:21:25 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY shared her opinion that the BRGR subcommittee provide recommendations for statutory changes to the CIP grant application process.

[9:23:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE expressed her concern that the current CIP grant application process might incentivize a school district to wait until catastrophic failure to apply for CIP funding.

[9:25:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked if the BRGR provides a CIP grant application rubric for school districts to be successful.

MS. HEINEKEN affirmed that the DEED does provide school districts with a rubric to be successful in their CIP grant application.

[9:26:54 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked if the BRGR committee discussed the upcoming moratorium on bond debt reimbursement funding and asked what the percentage split of a bond debt would be reimbursed by the DEED.

MS. HEINEKEN answered that the DEED would currently reimburse school districts 60-40 on necessary projects and 50-50 on non-necessary projects.

[9:29:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked how the bond debt reimbursement moratorium being lifted would affect REAA schools.

MS. HEINEKEN explained that the moratorium on bond debt reimbursement has negatively affected REAA schools and detailed how the lifting of the moratorium could increase new and maintenance construction in REAA schools.

[9:38:19 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked if the Alaska State Legislature has been periodically funding the REAA fund since the bond debt moratorium went into effect.

MS. HEINEKEN affirmed that the Alaska State Legislature has added funding to the REAA every year since the bond debt moratorium went into effect and said that the funding appropriated by the Alaska State Legislature would be given to a school district at the top of the CIP grant applicant list.

[9:43:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked if there are any bond debts that the DEED is currently expecting to immediately reimburse upon the bond debt moratorium's lifting.

MS. HEINEKEN answered that school districts with bond debts from 2015-2025 would not qualify to be reimbursed for their bond debts upon the lifting of the bond debt moratorium.

[9:44:36 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT thanked the invited testifiers and delivered committee announcements.

[9:45:20 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:45 a.m.