

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

March 17, 2025

3:32 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Mike Cronk

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Ky Holland
Representative Andi Story

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): UAA TEACHER APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

- HEARD

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 69(RLS) AM

"An Act relating to education; relating to open enrollment in public schools; relating to school and student performance reports; relating to school and district accountability; relating to charter schools; relating to an annual report for correspondence study programs; relating to the base student allocation; relating to reading proficiency incentive grants; relating to wireless telecommunications devices in public schools; relating to the duty of the legislature to pass a public education appropriation bill; relating to the duty of the governor to prepare a public education appropriation bill; establishing the Task Force on Education Funding; relating to a report on regulation of school districts; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 69

SHORT TITLE: EDUCATION FUNDING: INCREASE BSA

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) HIMSCHOOT

01/24/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25 (H) EDC, FIN
01/27/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
01/27/25 (H) Heard & Held
01/27/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
01/29/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
01/29/25 (H) Heard & Held
01/29/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
01/29/25 (H) EDC AT 5:00 PM DAVIS 106
01/29/25 (H) -- Public Testimony --
02/03/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/03/25 (H) Heard & Held
02/03/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
02/06/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519
02/06/25 (H) <Pending Referral>
02/12/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/12/25 (H) Heard & Held
02/12/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
02/12/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519
02/12/25 (H) <Pending Referral>
02/18/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519
02/18/25 (H) <Pending Referral>
02/19/25 (H) MOTION TO DISCHARGE FROM EDC, RULE
48(D)
02/19/25 (H) DISCHARGE FROM EDC, RULE 48, PASSED Y21
N18 E1
02/19/25 (H) RESCIND ACTION TO DISCHARGE FAILED Y19
N20 E1
02/19/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519
02/19/25 (H) Scheduled but Not Heard
02/20/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519
02/20/25 (H) Moved HB 69 Out of Committee
02/20/25 (H) MINUTE(FIN)
02/21/25 (H) FIN RPT 5DP 4DNP 1NR 1AM
02/21/25 (H) DP: HANNAN, GALVIN, FOSTER, JOSEPHSON,
SCHRAGE
02/21/25 (H) DNP: TOMASZEWSKI, STAPP, ALLARD,
JOHNSON
02/21/25 (H) NR: JIMMIE
02/21/25 (H) AM: BYNUM
02/21/25 (H) MOTION TO WITHDRAW FROM RLS TO CAL,
RULE 18

02/21/25 (H) WITHDRAW FROM RLS TO CAL, RULE 18,
 FAILED Y18 N20 E2

02/24/25 (H) MOTION TO WITHDRAW FROM RLS TO CAL,
 RULE 18

02/24/25 (H) WITHDRAW FROM RLS TO CAL, RULE 18,
 FAILED Y19 N19 E2

03/05/25 (H) RLS AT 8:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

03/05/25 (H) Moved CSHB 69(RLS) Out of Committee

03/05/25 (H) MINUTE(RLS)

03/06/25 (H) RULES TO CALENDAR PENDING RLS RPT/REF

03/06/25 (H) NOT TAKEN UP 3/6 - ON 3/10 CALENDAR

03/10/25 (H) RLS RPT CS(RLS) NEW TITLE 4DP 3AM

03/10/25 (H) DP: EDGMON, KOPP, SCHRAGE, STUTES

03/10/25 (H) AM: VANCE, COSTELLO, TILTON

03/10/25 (H) DEADLINE FOR ALL AMS AT 12 P.M. TODAY
 Y21 N19

03/11/25 (H) BEFORE HOUSE IN SECOND READING

03/11/25 (H) TAKE AM 23 FROM TABLE UC

03/12/25 (H) MOTION TO RETURN TO EDC COMMITTEE, RULE
 39 B, FAILED Y19 N21

03/12/25 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)

03/12/25 (H) VERSION: CSHB 69(RLS) AM

03/12/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

03/12/25 (S) <Pending Referral>

03/14/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS

03/14/25 (S) EDC, FIN

03/17/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

DENISE RUNGE, Provost
 University of Alaska Anchorage
 Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented UAA Teacher Apprenticeship
 Program.

TONIA DOUSAY, Dean
 School of Education
 University of Alaska Anchorage
 Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented UAA Teacher Apprenticeship
 Program.

REPRESENTATIVE REBECCA HIMSCHOOT, District 2
 Alaska State Legislature
 Sitka, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 69.

MICHAEL ROBBINS, Superintendent
Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on HB 69.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:32:00 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:32 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Cronk, Stevens, Kiehl, Bjorkman, and Chair Tobin.

PRESENTATION(S) : UAA TEACHER APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

[3:33:33 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the presentation UAA Teacher Apprenticeship Program.

[3:33:56 PM](#)

DENISE RUNGE, Provost, University of Alaska Anchorage, Anchorage, Alaska, Co-presented UAA Teacher Apprenticeship Program. She expressed enthusiasm about discussing teacher apprenticeships and moved to slide 2, Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Program (T-RAP). She stated that the University of Alaska Anchorage's School of Education was the first in the state to develop a registered apprenticeship program for early childhood education, but other institutions are expected to follow. She explained that the program began in the fall with approval from the Board of Regents and was designed specifically to meet Alaska's unique needs through a place-based approach. She emphasized the importance of offering pathways for individuals already living in communities who cannot leave to attend traditional university programs. She highlighted the program's success in increasing educational attainment and addressing the high demand for teachers, adding that future similar programs will likely emerge across other universities.

[3:35:47 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE moved to slide 3, Innovative Apprenticeship Model, a graphic showing the connection between employer, sponsor, and the School of Education at the University of Alaska, Anchorage (UAA). She explained that the innovation of the program lies in its structure as a true apprenticeship, which includes an employer, a sponsor, and an education provider. She stated that UAA has offered a Bachelor of Arts in early childhood education for several years, which is approved by the Department of

Education and Early Development (DEED) for preschool through third grade teacher licensure. She highlighted that many current sponsors are Alaska Native corporations, although other entities like DEED can also serve as sponsors. She emphasized that apprentices earn while they learn, never needing to pause employment to pursue education, and that sponsors often cover tuition, books, and fees, reducing or eliminating student debt upon graduation.

[3:37:32 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE moved to slide 4, Pathway to Education Careers, and described UAA's use of a stacked credential model that allows students to advance through progressive stages of teacher preparation while staying employed. She explained that students often begin while already working in schools or early childhood settings, starting with an 18-credit Occupational Endorsement Certificate focused on infant and toddler development. After completing the certificate, students can move directly into a 42-credit associate degree in early childhood development, which prepares them for roles such as teaching assistant or preschool owner. The final stage is a 60-credit bachelor's degree, leading to a Type A, preschool through third grade (P-3) teaching license from the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), all completed through remote learning with support from local educators.

[3:40:01 PM](#)

TONIA DOUSAY, Dean, School of Education, University of Alaska Anchorage, Anchorage, Alaska, Co-presented UAA Teacher Apprenticeship Program. She moved to slide 5, Growing Education Workforce, and highlighted aspects of the apprenticeship program:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Growing Education Workforce

Tremendous Early Results

- +50 apprentices in schools with +24 employers and partners
- Rural Focus - Alaska Native 63 percent
- Expanding program to meet needs of state and communities - ex. ASD

Supporting Apprentices for Success

- Dedicated teams for personalize coaching

- Early Intervention and proactive outreach
- Limits turnover and increases achievement
- Creates opportunity for Alaskans in Education

[3:42:20 PM](#)

MS. DOUSAY moved to slide 6, Apprentice Teachers for Alaska, and highlighted the personal stories of three current apprentices—Marita, Aubrey, and Olive who are pursuing teacher licensure in their home communities through the program. She shared that each has faced significant personal challenges, including trauma and adversity, and credited the apprenticeship model with making their educational progress possible. She emphasized that their experiences demonstrate the critical importance of expanding apprenticeship opportunities. She concluded that these stories underscore the need for continued support and investment in developing more classroom apprentices across Alaska.

[3:43:25 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE expressed strong support for the apprenticeship program, describing it as a promising solution to close the gap between the demand for teachers and the capacity of universities to prepare them. She emphasized that many Alaskans cannot relocate for traditional education, making the remote, community-based model especially practical for the state's geographic challenges. She stated that the program offers an inclusive alternative that better fits Alaska's needs.

[3:44:07 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked whether the bachelor's degree requires a total of 60 credits or if the program uses a stacked model totaling 120 credits.

MS. RUNGE clarified that the credits do stack, resulting in a total of 120 credits to complete the bachelor's degree. She noted that this aligns with the standard credit requirement for bachelor's degrees across the university system.

[3:44:43 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked whether all 120 credits required for the bachelor's degree are education credits.

MS. RUNGE responded that not all 120 credits are education-specific. She explained that, like any bachelor's degree, a general education component is included, which is especially important for early childhood teachers. This ensures they receive a well-rounded foundation in subjects such as English,

math, history, social studies, and science to effectively support early learners.

[3:45:12 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL requested clarification on how the apprenticeship program differs from working full time while attending an online education program part time to earn a 120-credit bachelor's degree.

[3:45:30 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE explained that the key difference in the apprenticeship program is the intentional support system built around each student. She noted that sponsors typically cover tuition, books, and fees, removing financial barriers while the student continues working. She added that apprentices receive personalized support from an apprenticeship coordinator who provides coaching and proactive outreach. Another distinction is the course structure. Classes are offered in shorter semester formats to better accommodate full-time employment, allowing students to take fewer classes at a time while maintaining academic progress.

[3:46:49 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked whether the traditional student teaching period is shortened or integrated into the apprenticeship, or if apprentices still complete a separate student teaching semester after finishing their coursework.

MS. RUNGE explained that the student teaching component is fully integrated into the apprenticeship program, so there is no separate semester required after completing coursework. She emphasized that apprentices often gain even more in-classroom experience than traditional student teachers because they are already employed in schools. Apprentices are partnered early with mentor teachers and spend extensive time working directly with young children throughout the program.

[3:47:30 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS congratulated the presenters and praised the program, noting that in every village he has represented, there has always been a paraprofessional with the potential to be a great teacher but without access to traditional education. He then asked whether apprentices are as qualified as those completing a traditional teacher preparation program. He also inquired whether there are plans to expand beyond preschool through third grade (P-3) licensure and whether UAA's accreditation issue has impacted the program.

[3:48:11 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE stated that there is no difference in the qualifications of teachers who complete the apprenticeship route compared to those who attend the traditional program in Anchorage. She explained that all students are enrolled in the same courses, taught by the same faculty, and held to identical standards, assessments, and evaluations. Regarding accreditation, she noted that the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) is not currently accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), which is the accrediting body recognized by the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). UAA has DEED's and the Board of Regents' approval to offer this one teacher preparation program. MS R stated that UAA plans to apply for CAEP accreditation in 2027 after gathering several years of graduate and program data. Once accredited, UAA will seek approval to expand into additional teacher preparation programs.

[3:49:55 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN thanked the presenters and shared that she is writing her dissertation on alternative pathways to teacher preparation. She expressed particular interest in the apprenticeship program at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), as well as the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) program, the Grow Your Own Teachers initiative, Alaskans Teaching for Alaska, and efforts led by the Alaska Council of School Administrators. She stated that these efforts will provide valuable data to help determine which programs merit continued statewide investment.

[3:50:27 PM](#)

At ease.

HB 69-EDUCATION FUNDING: INCREASE BSA

[3:51:37 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 69(RLS) am "An Act relating to education; relating to open enrollment in public schools; relating to school and student performance reports; relating to school and district accountability; relating to charter schools; relating to an annual report for correspondence study programs; relating to the base student allocation; relating to reading proficiency incentive grants; relating to wireless telecommunications devices in public schools; relating to the duty of the legislature to pass a public education appropriation bill; relating to the duty of the governor to

prepare a public education appropriation bill; establishing the Task Force on Education Funding; relating to a report on regulation of school districts; and providing for an effective date."

[3:52:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REBECCA HIMSCHOOT, District 2, Alaska State Legislature, Sitka, Alaska, Sponsor of HB 69. She stated that her district spans a 500-mile stretch of coastal Southeast Alaska from Yakutat to Hydaberg. She noted that the district includes 21 communities, 11 school districts, 10 tribes, and nine village corporations. She moved to slide 2, Contents, and said the presentation would cover the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Contents

- Rising Costs and Rising
- 1. Vacancies
- 2. Timeline of HB 69
- 3. Provisions of the Bill
- 4. Open Enrollment
- 5. Charter Support
- 6. Proficiency to Growth
- 7. Reads Act Amendment
- 8. Questions?

[3:53:15 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT moved to slide 3, Rising Costs, and explained that HB 69 originally aimed to address the issue of flat funding in the Base Student Allocation (BSA), which is the core of Alaska's education funding formula. She emphasized that funds outside the BSA often fail to reach classrooms, cannot be used for contract bargaining and create instability for hiring due to their one-time nature. She noted that while districts have received some one-time funding, overall school funding policy has not kept pace with inflation—nearly 40 percent inflation compared to less than 7 percent BSA growth since 2011. She stated that HB 69 sought to restore the BSA's purchasing power to its 2011 level through a phased increase of \$1,808 over three years, starting with a \$1,000 increase and then adding \$404 with inflation proofing.

[3:55:51 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT moved to slide 4, Rising Vacancies, which displays three graphs: Cultural Exchange Educators in Alaska, Alaska First Day Certified Position Vacancy Rates and

Number of Emergency Certificates. She stated that flat funding has led to several challenges, including a high number of unfilled teaching positions. On the first day of school in 2025, there were 600 certified staff vacancies statewide, meaning 600 classrooms lacked a certified teacher. She noted a rise in the use of emergency certificates, which was previously uncommon, indicating districts are struggling to recruit fully certified educators while competing in a national labor market. She added that Alaska teacher salaries now lag about 25 percent behind the national average and that some districts have resumed international hiring to fill persistent vacancies.

[3:56:40 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT moved to slide 5, Timeline of HB 69, and discussed the various changes to the bill:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Timeline

- Introduced in the House: January 24, 2025
- Heard in HEDC 4 times: January 27, January 29, February 3, February 12
 - 1 amendment offered
- Public testimony in HEDC: January 29
 - 143 testifiers, 5 hours and 32 minutes of verbal testimony, 90.2 percent in favor, >800 emails received
- Heard and moved from HFIN: February 20
- Heard in HRLS: March 5
 - 4 amendments offered, 1 adopted
- Debated on House Floor: March 10, 11, 12
 - 54 amendments offered, 4 adopted

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated that HB 69 was heard four times in the House Education Committee, during which the amendment deadline was extended, resulting in the submission of one amendment. She reported that public testimony lasted five and a half hours, with over 800 emails received. Approximately 90 percent of the emails were in support of the bill. After passing quickly through House Finance, the bill entered the Rules Committee, where additional policy measures beyond funding were added, as requested. She emphasized that funding itself is a form of policy and noted that the bill reached the House floor last week with 54 amendments offered.

[3:57:54 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT moved to slide 6, Provisions of the Bill, discussed what the bill currently contains:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Provisions of the Bill

- Codifies open enrollment in public schools within districts
- Expands accountability reporting to include student academic growth
- Expands authorization avenues for charter schools
- Increases the BSA
- Regulates cellphone use in schools
- Provides reading proficiency incentive grants
- Establishes a task force to evaluate school funding
- Requires education funding to be passed early in the legislative session

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT acknowledged that the current version of HB 69 has changed significantly from the original and includes several additions she has not fully studied. She noted that the bill now includes provisions for intra-district open enrollment, aligning with trends in other states, with nine having existing statutes. HB 69 expands accountability measures to include student academic growth rather than relying solely on single-day proficiency scores, recognizing Alaska's strengths in student growth. The bill also streamlines the charter school renewal process for high-performing schools and includes other procedural updates, such as shorter appeal timelines.

[3:59:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT highlighted that the bill increases the Base Student Allocation (BSA), which benefits all public education forms in Alaska, including charter, neighborhood, and correspondence schools. The bill also requires school districts to develop policies on cell phone use with guidance from the Department of Education. It adds reading proficiency incentive grants for students in grades K-6 and establishes a task force to examine broader school funding issues such as transportation formulas, funding adequacy, and insurance billing. Finally, the bill mandates early passage of education funding during the legislative session.

[4:00:00 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT moved to slide 7, Open Enrollment, to discuss this provision in more detail:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Open Enrollment

Included

Choice within districts
Capacity-based admission
Lottery-based admission

Not Included

State-funded transportation
Private school access
Guaranteed placement

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT explained that HB 69 includes a provision for intra-district open enrollment, allowing families to choose a school other than their assigned neighborhood school within the same district. She described the value of neighborhood schools, especially in areas with limited options, where schools foster close-knit community relationships. Under the new policy, families may apply to other schools outside their zoned boundaries but must provide their own transportation. Enrollment would be determined through a lottery system, and districts would set policies based on each school's capacity.

[4:01:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT moved to slide 8, Charter Provisions, AND stated that the charter school provisions in HB 69 currently include reauthorization language and an expanded appeal process. She noted that the bill contains approximately seven new measures related to charter schools and preferred to discuss those in detail during Sectional Analysis to ensure accuracy. Additionally, the bill establishes a charter school coordinator within the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to assist families with starting charter schools, navigating policy and regulations, managing renewals, and working with districts to support new school launches:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Charter Provisions

- Streamlined process for reauthorization
- Expanded appeal process
- State support through the establishment of a charter school coordinator in DEED
- Policy and regulation guidance
- Assist with charter applications

- Coordinate with districts

[4:01:45 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT moved to slide, Proficiency to Growth, and highlighted a key shift in HB 69 from measuring student proficiency at a single point in time to focusing on academic growth:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Proficiency to Growth

- An amendment that shifts the perspective on testing from benchmarks to growth
- Section 5: AS 14.03.120(a) "A district shall annually file with the department, and make available to the public a report that (3) includes a means of measuring student academic performance over time
- Acknowledges the spectrum of learning and abilities within the classroom

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT explained that standardized tests reflect only one moment and can be affected by factors such as lack of sleep, hunger, or personal trauma, making them unreliable as sole indicators of a student's abilities. The bill incorporates growth-based assessment, building on existing tools like the MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) tests, and requires the state to emphasize growth in statute.

[4:02:35 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT moved to slide 10, Reads Act Support, and described incentive grants included under the READS Act. She said \$450 per student in grades K-6 who either reads at grade level or demonstrates improvement would be awarded to districts. While the grant does not directly fund interventions like after-school or summer programs, she noted it offers meaningful rewards for student progress:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Reads Act Support

- Introduces reading proficiency incentive grants

- \$450 for each student in grades K-6 who reads at grade level OR shows improvement in reading
- Grant awarded at the district level

[4:03:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT began the sectional analysis for HB 69:

[Original punctuation provided.]

HOUSE BILL 69
SECTIONAL ANALYSIS
Version W.A

Section 1: AS 14.03.080 (a) is amended so that a school age child is entitled to free public education at their assigned school or a parent selected school within the district.

Section 2: Makes conforming changes to sunset the open enrollment provision in the bill after three years.

Section 3: Adds new subsections to AS 14.03.080 (i), (j), and (k) that establish that parents may apply for transfers within the student's district, with lottery-based enrollment and sibling priority. Districts are required to report data on the number of vacancies, number of applications approved and denied, and explanation of the reasons for the denials. The department shall develop an appeal process for denials.

Section 4: AS 14.03.120(a) is amended so that the annual district report includes information on student academic performance over time in place of information on the achievement of district goals and priorities.

Section 5: AS 14.03.120(d) is amended so that the annual district report includes specific information on norm referenced achievement tests that measure student academic performance over time and the requirement for districts to provide information on parent, student and stakeholder involvement in learning is eliminated.

Section 6: AS 14.03.123(a) is amended so that the performance designation of each school is based on student academic performance over time.

Section 7: AS 14.03.123(f) is amended to require the department to also establish standardized assessments that measure student academic performance over time as part of the accountability system for schools and districts.

Section 8: AS 14.03.123 is amended by adding two new subsections that mandate assessments do not take more than three hours of instructional time each school year and that the National Assessment of Educational Progress cannot be used to measure student academic performance over time.

Section 9: Amends AS 14.03.253 (b) to specify that the State Board of Education must issue a decision regarding an appeal of the denial of the charter school application within 45 days instead of the existing 90 day requirement.

Section 10: Amends AS 14.03.255 (c) to specify that before a local school board terminates a charter school contract, written notice and a reasonable opportunity to remedy the issue is provided.

Section 11: Adds new subsections to AS 14.03.255 (e) and (f) that specify that a charter school may carry forward up to 10 percent of its unreserved budget, with annual review of the year-end budget by the local school board. The local school board is directed to make the contract renewal process as simple as possible.

Section 12: Amends AS 14.03 by adding a new section that allows a charter school to appeal to the commissioner when a local school board terminates a contract and requires the commissioner to issue a written decision on the appeal within 90 days.

Section 13: Amends AS 14.03.260 (a) to increase the allowable administrative costs that a local school board can deduct when calculating a charter school's budget from 4 percent to 8 percent.

Section 14: Clarifies AS 14.03.275 to specify that charter school contracts can be renewed for successive terms.

Section 15: Amends AS 14.03 by adding a new section that establishes a charter school coordinator in the department of education.

Section 16: Amends AS 14.03.300 to add new subsections (c) and (d) that specify that school districts and the department must submit an annual report on correspondence programs, covering enrollment, demographics, fund use, assessment scores, and curriculum reviews, with the department forwarding reports to the State Board of Education.

Section 17: Amends AS 14.07.020(a) so that the department is required to use an assessment of student academic performance over time when determining an end date for department intervention in a low performing district.

Section 18: Amends AS 14.07.168 to require that the report in Section 16 (d) of the bill be included in State Board of Education's annual report to the Legislature.

Section 19: Amends AS 14.07.168 to require that the report in Section 16 (d) of the bill be included in State Board of Education's annual report to the Legislature.

Section 20: AS 14.11.019 is amended with conforming language relating to the requirement in Sections 27 and 28 of the bill for a separate appropriation bill to fund public education.

Section 21: AS 14.11.100(c) is amended with conforming language relating to the requirement in Sections 27 and 28 of the bill for a separate appropriation bill to fund public education.

Section 22: Increases the BSA \$1,000 from \$5,960 to \$6,960.

Section 23: Adds a new section, AS 14.30.733, that provides that, subject to appropriation, school districts are eligible to receive reading proficiency incentive grants of \$450 per student for kindergarten through sixth grade students.

Section 24: Conforming changes to account for the existing sunset of the Reads Act in 2034.

Section 25: Adds new section of law, AS 14.33.300, to require the department to create a model policy regulating non-school issued wireless device use in public schools, with exceptions for medical, translation, emergency, or educational use. School districts must adopt and share a policy, which must also have exceptions for medical, translation, emergency, or educational use. A school district may adopt the model policy established by the department or it may adopt its own policy. Defines "Wireless telecommunications device."

Section 26: AS 24.20.140(a) is amended with conforming language relating to the requirement in Sections 27 and 28 of the bill for a separate appropriation bill to fund public education.

Section 27: AS 37.07.014 is amended with a new subsection that requires a separate appropriation bill for public school funding to be passed by the legislature by March 15.

Section 28: AS 37.07.020(a) is amended to require the governor to prepare a separate appropriation bill for public school funding by December 15.

Section 29: Repeals AS 14.03.123(c)(2), 14.03.123(c)(3), and 14.03.123(c)(5) relating to the requirements for a statewide student assessment system and Sections 6 and 7 of the bill that require student academic performance overtime to be the principal indicator of school performance. Section 29 also repeals 14.03.123(e), eliminating a program to recognize high performing schools.

Section 30: Repeals the open enrollment provisions on July 1, 2028.

Section 31: Adds new section to uncodified law that establishes a legislative Task Force on Education Funding to analyze funding and accountability, make recommendations, and submit a report by the start of

the Second Regular Session of the 34th Legislature. The Task Force expires on January 31, 2026.

Section 32: Adds new section to uncodified law that specifies that the Alaska Department of Education must submit a report on recommendations to reduce regulatory and statutory burdens on school districts by the start of the Second Regular Session of the 34th Legislature, notifying legislators once available.

Section 33: Adds applicability provisions to uncodified law that specify that sections 9 - 14 of this Act apply to contracts that are legally binding on or after the effective date of this Act.

Section 34: Repeals the open enrollment provisions effective on July 1, 2028.

Section 35: Conforming changes to account for the existing sunset of the Reads Act in 2034.

Section 36: Conforming changes to account for the existing sunset of the Reads Act in 2034.

Section 37: Provides an effective date of July 1, 2025, with exceptions for repeal provisions outlined above.

[4:05:19 PM](#)

SENATOR CRONK asked for clarification on the scope of the open enrollment policy in HB 69. He inquired whether the policy applies only to brick-and-mortar schools or if it would allow, for example, a student in Fairbanks to enroll in a homeschool program based in Galena.

[4:05:35 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated that, after checking with the legal department, HB 69 only addresses within-district enrollment.

SENATOR CRONK asked whether the within-district open enrollment policy only applied to brick-and-mortar schools.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT replied correct, for neighborhood schools.

[4:05:52 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN SENATOR TOBIN asked whether the proposal would guarantee students the opportunity to attend their neighborhood school or would it require neighborhood schools to have a lottery process.

[4:06:16 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated her belief that students would have the right to attend their neighborhood school as a first priority but could choose to attend a school in a different neighborhood.

[4:06:35 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN referenced existing statutes that define charter school admission processes and priority admissions. She asked how the proposal would affect those specific provisions and statutes.

[4:06:53 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated she did not know how the proposal would affect charter school admissions. She noted that charter schools currently use a lottery system and questioned whether students from other neighborhoods would be added to the existing lottery, included in a separate lottery, or excluded entirely.

[4:07:12 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked whether there had been any discussion or questions regarding the administrative impact on school districts related to the reporting requirements.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT replied she didn't know.

CHAIR TOBIN asked whether the term "parent" in SB 69 includes legal guardians, step-parents, or other individuals responsible for the child. She sought clarification on whether "parent" is broadly defined or limited to specific roles.

[4:07:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated she did not know the definition of "parent" in SB 69 and would need to review the current statute. She noted that her school district uses the term "Family" because it is more encompassing.

[4:07:53 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN found no further questions on SB 69 Sections 1-3 and stated her belief that the next few sections detail academic performance over time.

[4:08:07 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT remarked that she wished she had created a map outlining the purpose of each section because some later sections relate to topics discussed in early sections of SB 69. She explained that Section 4 addresses student academic performance over time, which she interpreted broadly as student growth. She noted this growth is tied to the district's annual goals, priorities, and school improvement plan.

[4:08:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT explained that Section 5 requires districts to report student growth using norm-referenced tests to provide objective evidence rather than subjective evaluations. She stated that Section 6 would revise the existing performance designation to focus on growth instead of proficiency. Section 7 reinforces the need for standardized assessments to ensure growth is measured beyond teacher opinion. She identified Section 8 as the final section addressing the shift from proficiency to growth and noted it eliminates use of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which currently samples about 5 percent of students every other year and does not accurately represent statewide performance. She expressed concern about Section 8's restriction of assessment time to three instructional hours, explaining that current assessments like Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), administered three times a year, often require more time depending on the student, making the time limit problematic.

[4:10:41 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS expressed appreciation to Representative Himschoot for defending a bill she did not fully write. He asked for clarification about the NAEP test, specifically whether federal funding depends on participation and if those funds would be at risk if NAEP is no longer administered. He then raised a second question related to funding, referencing the Base Student Allocation (BSA). He stated that while some claim a BSA increase would not affect charter or homeschool students, his understanding is that funding would follow each student across all public education programs.

[4:11:11 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT acknowledged expressing concern on the floor and stated she supports shifting the focus from proficiency to growth but is uncertain whether federal reporting on the NAEP is still required. She noted she has not yet confirmed the federal requirements. In response to the question

about the Base Student Allocation (BSA), she confirmed that it supports all types of public education, including homeschool programs, charter schools, and neighborhood schools. She emphasized that any increase in funding would benefit all students across the system.

[4:12:02 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL stated that the NAEP is mentioned in the section of SB 69 related to the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) assigning performance designations to schools. He said he did not interpret the bill to mean Alaska students would stop taking the NAEP or that the state would stop reporting scores, but rather that NAEP results would no longer be included in individual school performance designations. He asked for clarification on this interpretation.

[4:12:38 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated her understanding is that the NAEP will still be administered but will no longer be used in statute as the measure of a school's success or failure. She emphasized that she is not completely certain but believes that is the intent.

[4:13:05 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked a question specific to Section 4, which requires school districts to report on academic growth. She noted that DEED already collects and reports this data for districts. She questioned whether this requirement would add an administrative burden by duplicating reporting responsibilities. She expressed confusion about the purpose of having both districts and DEED report the same information.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated she could not say for certain whether Section 4 creates an additional burden. She noted that the public report card on the website for DEED already includes academic growth data. She suggested the requirement may be redundant and districts might not need to take further action, but she could not confirm that.

[4:14:02 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN referred to Section 8, which limits schools and districts to using no more than three hours of instructional time per school year for assessments. She noted the existence of multiple assessments, including the AK-STAR, progress monitoring, and reading proficiency assessments required under the Alaska Reads Act. She asked how this time restriction might

affect other types of assessments teachers routinely conduct in the classroom.

4:14:30 PM

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT noted that while each Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) test takes about one minute, the total time adds up when combined with other assessments such as MAP testing and possible selection for NAEP. She raised concern about the broad use of the term "assessment" and questioned whether it includes formative assessments, such as weekly spelling tests. She suggested the language in Section 8 needs further clarification to avoid confusion.

4:15:02 PM

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT explained that the next sections of HB 69 focus on charter schools. Section 9 shortens the state board's deadline to decide on a denied charter application from 90 days to 45. Section 10 requires that school boards provide charter schools an opportunity to remedy issues before termination. Section 11 permits charter schools to carry over up to 10 percent of their unreserved budget annually, which some districts already allow, or cap. Section 12 introduces a new appeals process allowing charter schools to appeal terminations to the commissioner, who must issue a written decision within 90 days. Section 13 adjusts the administrative indirect cost rate that districts may deduct from charter school budgets from 4 percent to 8 percent, seeking a balance after reducing it from the previous 10 percent. Section 14 clarifies that charter school contracts may be renewed for successive terms, a point not currently addressed in statute. Section 15 adds a charter school coordinator position to the Department of Education.

4:17:02 PM

SENATOR BJORKMAN referring to Section 13, questioned the use of an arbitrary percentage for administrative costs that charter schools must remit to districts. He suggested an alternative approach where districts track actual administrative expenses and bill charter schools accordingly, possibly through interagency transfer or a similar model. He wondered which party would benefit more under that system and asked whether this approach had been considered.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated that to her knowledge, the alternative model had not been considered. She explained that administrative costs often include functions such as record keeping and test administration, including the need for a

district test coordinator for assessments like the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA ACCESS), which not all students take. She noted that some specialized paperwork is also involved. While she acknowledged that calculating exact costs might be possible, she suggested it could be difficult.

[4:18:32 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS referring to Section 12, asked whether the Commissioner of Education would have the authority to require a school district to keep a charter school open after the district decides to terminate it. He questioned if the commissioner's written decision within 90 days could override the local board's judgment, thereby forcing the district to continue managing a school it no longer considers legitimate.

[4:19:20 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT replied in the affirmative.

[4:19:27 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL referred to the appeal process and noted a concern raised by the Senate President about the status quo. He questioned whether the 45-day deadline for the State Board to act might lead to a rushed or ill-considered review, especially if the process lacks sufficient time or information and risks becoming political rather than substantive. He stated that, as he reads the statute, the Commissioner can review and possibly supplement the school board's record before issuing a decision. He asked whether the 45-day limit applies only to the State Board after the Commissioner completes her review, or if it also constrains the Commissioner's timeline.

[4:20:46 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT clarified that Sections 9 and 12 address different processes: Section 9 sets a 45-day deadline for decisions on denied charter school applications, while Section 12 pertains to the termination of existing contracts. She noted that the State Board meets quarterly, so a 45-day deadline could fall between scheduled meetings, which might create logistical challenges.

[4:21:16 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL responded that the Commissioner may not be subject to a specific deadline before the State Board's involvement, making the timeline potentially manageable in coordination with the Board that employs her. He then asked about the necessity of the language in Section 14 regarding charter school renewals. He questioned what problem it aims to solve, noting that the

charter school in Juneau has operated continuously for decades without issue.

[4:22:01 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated that although it may not have been included in the sectional analysis, HB 69 includes language requiring "as simplified a process as possible" for charter school renewals. She explained that the issue being addressed is that while charter schools are allowed to renew, the current practice often requires them to repeat the entire original application process. The intent of the bill is to clarify in statute both the right to renew and the expectation that the renewal process be simplified.

[4:22:31 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL questioned the use of the phrase "as simple as possible" in statute, suggesting it could be interpreted to mean that a charter school need only send an email stating, "We'd like to keep going." He asked whether this is the limit the language places on the board's review.

[4:22:50 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT responded that she would need to look more closely at SB 69 but believed the language allows the local school board to determine what constitutes "as simple as possible" for the renewal process. She stated that if a board considered a single email sufficient, that could meet the requirement under the bill.

SENATOR KIEHL asked whether the board could make the process any simpler than a one sentence email request.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT remarked that, theoretically, a statement expressing intent to continue, without even an email, is simpler.

SENATOR KIEHL suggested that allowing some level of substantive review during the charter renewal process may be appropriate. He recommended discussing possible adjustments to the language in HB 69.

[4:23:39 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS questioned the constitutionality of allowing the State Board of Education to overturn a decision made by a local school board. He referenced the principle of local control in the state constitution and asked whether the issue had been reviewed from a constitutional standpoint.

[4:23:59 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT replied no.

SENATOR STEVENS suggested getting a legal opinion on the matter.

[4:24:11 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL referring to the indirect cost cap, he asked whether Representative Himschoot knew what the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) charges for its indirect rate on federal grants.

[4:24:28 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT responded that she did not know the exact rate and believed it varies rather than being a fixed amount. She added that the chair might have that information.

[4:24:41 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL stated he does not have a philosophical objection to placing a cap on indirect costs but suggested it would be useful to determine whether the proposed rate is close to an appropriate balance. He recommended hearing from financial experts to ensure the cap is set within a reasonable range.

[4:25:31 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT followed up on Senator Kiehl's question regarding Section 11 and charter school renewals. She clarified that HB 69 states the "renewal process must be as simple as possible," emphasizing the word "process." She explained that this language implies the local school board would require more than just an email, as a process involves defined steps or documentation.

[4:25:49 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN said the committee would take note of the discussion and may invite representatives from the 32 school districts with operational charter schools to provide insight on administrative costs and overhead. She also noted that federal indirect rates, especially for tribal organizations, are often substantial.

[4:26:13 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN stated that she consulted the legislative legal regarding the appeal process for a terminated charter school contract. She was directed to AS 43.82.445, which addresses the administrative termination of contracts. According to legislative legal, because a contract is an administrative component of a school board's relationship with another entity,

termination of a charter school contract would follow this statute. This pathway includes provisions, also reflected earlier in HB 69, that give charter schools the opportunity to address issues identified by the school board before termination. Additionally, if a contract is terminated, the charter school may pursue a court proceeding to present its case. She noted there appears to be confusion about the correct process following termination and suggested Section 12 could be reconsidered in light of the broader protections already outlined in AS 43.82.445.

[4:27:45 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN expressed concern about Section 14, which allows charter schools to be renewed for successive terms but does not clearly define a "successive term" as an additional 10 years. She noted that feedback from both the charter school and school board communities has highlighted the need for local school boards to have the authority to impose additional checks and balances when an application raises concerns. These measures would help ensure compliance with state statutes, record-keeping requirements, and student learning standards. She stated that this is an area she would like to explore further.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT noted that Section 14 states a charter school contract may be for a term of not more than 10 years. She interpreted this to mean that a district could choose a shorter term, such as five years, though she acknowledged she is not fully certain.

[4:29:02 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN said the committee would move to the sections of HB 69 dealing with correspondence programs.

[4:29:15 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated that Section 16 is the only section addressing this topic and explained that it continues the reporting requirement initially created by House Bill 202, sponsored by her colleague from the Palmer area. Although House Bill 202 focused on making Narcan kits and training available in schools, an additional education measure was added at the end of the session requiring a report on correspondence schools. That report includes data on enrollment, demographics, fund use, assessment scores, and curriculum reviews. Under Section 16 of HB 69, this report would no longer sunset but instead become an annual report submitted to the State Board of Education.

[4:30:12 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS referenced a recent statewide poll indicating that Alaskans want assurance that education funds are spent wisely and that students are achieving success. He expressed concern that, while assessment scores are required for correspondence programs, the opt-out rate is high. He recalled that approximately 60 percent of correspondence students participate in assessments compared to about 80 percent in brick-and-mortar schools. He asked whether there had been consideration of tightening the opt-out provision to ensure more correspondence students are tested. He shared an anecdote about a parent valuing a homeschool program because it made it possible for her child to take horseback riding lessons, which raised concerns for him about whether education funds are being used effectively and whether student outcomes are being adequately measured across all school types.

[4:31:46 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT responded that the amendment adding this reporting language to the bill did not include changes to the assessment opt-out provision, and she did not seek to expand it at the time, though she believes there is room for discussion. She clarified that the opt-out language applies to all public school students. However, while brick-and-mortar schools have a testing participation rate around 92 percent, correspondence or homeschool programs have a much lower rate, closer to 14 percent, which brings the overall public school participation rate down to the 80 percent range.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT noted that some districts offer increased allotments to students who choose to test. She also acknowledged challenges specific to homeschool testing, particularly with online delivery of norm-referenced assessments. She raised concerns about test administration in homeschool settings, where having a parent serve as proctor may not ensure a valid testing environment. Despite these challenges, she emphasized that there is growing interest in strengthening accountability across all public education settings.

[4:33:14 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS acknowledged the participation rates shared by Representative Himschoot; 92 percent in brick-and-mortar schools and 14 percent in homeschools. He remarked that he knew she would have those figures.

[4:33:23 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN noted that homeschooled students across the state have lower graduation rates, which she finds significantly concerning. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that all students, including those in homeschool programs, are career-ready upon graduating from high school.

[4:33:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT explained that some students enter homeschool programs as a credit recovery option, which can contribute to lower graduation rates. She acknowledged that this context makes the data understandable but emphasized the need to be mindful of how low those rates are and opined that it is an area that should be monitored.

[4:33:51 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN resumed discussion of the next sections of HB 69.

[4:33:56 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated that Section 17 continues the bill's emphasis on shifting from proficiency-based measures to growth-based metrics. She explained that this section relates to how the Department of Education determines where to intervene, using growth data to identify and support the state's lowest-performing districts. Section 18 requires that the Correspondence School Report be included in the State Board of Education's annual report to the legislature. Section 19 contains conforming language. She noted that Section 20-21 are the portion of statute requiring the governor to create a separate education budget, and requires the legislature to act on that budget by March 15.

[4:35:27 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN said for a summary of Sections 27 and 28 also.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT explained that Sections 27 and 28 require the governor to prepare a separate education appropriation bill by the existing December 15 deadline. These sections also require the legislature to pass the education funding appropriation by March 15. She noted that these provisions are directly tied to the earlier sections on education budgeting.

[4:36:24 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated that Section 22 is especially important to her. She explained that HB 69 removes the automatic escalators of the 404 successive fiscal years in an effort to reach a compromise that could gain broader support, noting that

BSA increases have been proposed in the last four legislatures, but none have passed. She emphasized that funding within the BSA provides districts with stability and predictability, allowing for strategic planning and collective bargaining, often leading to increased educator salaries and direct support to classrooms. She explained that Section 23 establishes a Reading Incentive Grant of \$450 per student for kindergarten through sixth grade, which was amended in the Rules Committee. Regarding Section 24, she clarified that it includes conforming changes and addressed confusion caused by her earlier use of incorrect terminology in the Rules Committee. She stressed that the bill does not repeal the Alaska Reads Act, which already contains a 2034 sunset clause. Instead, the conforming language ensures that the new provisions continue beyond that sunset date.

[4:37:57 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT explained that Section 25 requires the Department of Education to address cell phone use in schools. Local districts must adopt a policy, either by using a model policy provided by the department or creating their own, but they cannot opt out, action is mandatory. She noted that the policy must allow exceptions for medical needs, translation, emergencies, or educational purposes. Additionally, in small districts or other cases, a superintendent or teacher may permit cell phone use beyond the standard policy.

[4:38:43 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked whether the language in Section 23(2) extends the READS Act requirements to teachers in grades 4 through 6. He specifically questioned whether those teachers would now be required to complete additional training similar to that required for K-3 teachers, such as training in Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) or other modalities. He sought clarification on what the provision entails for upper elementary educators.

[4:39:17 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT explained that Section 23(2) was written separately for grades 4 through 6 because those students do not participate in DIBELS or other benchmark tests used under the READS Act for younger grades. Instead, a different English Language Arts assessment would be used to determine which students meet the requirement. She clarified that this provision does not affect educators or require additional training for teachers in grades 4 through 6; the separate section was necessary solely due to the use of a different assessment measure.

[4:39:47 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN referred to Section 25 on cell phone policy, noting that the Education Committee recently heard a different bill on the same topic that proposed a stricter approach. He shared that principals, as well as his own experience as an educator, indicate that vague or flexible ("squishy") cell phone policies tend to be ineffective. He asked for an explanation of why HB 69 uses more flexible language instead of a firmer standard.

[4:40:35 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT explained that the language in Section 25 originated from another bill already moving through the House. She added that, in her home district, cell phone use has been effectively managed, meaning banned, at the middle school level for at least five years. She emphasized that local school boards, principals, and school leaders are often best positioned to determine what type of policy works for their specific context, whether strict or flexible.

[4:41:13 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL requested confirmation on whether the tests used to determine eligibility for proficiency incentive grants in grades K-3 and subsequently 4-6 are administered once per year.

[4:41:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT responded that she was not fully certain where the READS Act requirements currently stand but explained her understanding that students in grades K-3 are tested until they reach proficiency. She believed that proficiency must be demonstrated multiple times, possibly three times, but welcomed correction on the specifics.

[4:41:48 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN clarified that under the current approach, if a student demonstrates proficiency on the first assessment, no additional assessments are required. However, if the student shows signs of struggling, they may take a second and third assessment to help educators determine whether the student is making progress toward proficiency.

[4:42:06 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked whether proficiency occurs every year.

CHAIR TOBIN replied yes.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated her belief that continuous progress monitoring occurs throughout the school year. She explained that proficiency is typically demonstrated by showing proficiency on three separate tests. In cases where that benchmark is not met, the student would continue to be monitored and tested regularly to track progress.

[4:42:29 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked for clarification on the criteria for receiving the proficiency incentive grant. He questioned whether demonstrating improvement on any one of the three assessments qualifies a student for the grant, or if the student must show improvement across all three—or the remaining two if the first does not indicate proficiency. He sought a clear explanation of what specifically qualifies a student for the funding.

[4:42:49 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT responded that the specific criteria for qualifying for the proficiency incentive grant would likely be defined in regulation.

SENATOR KIEHL suggested that the legislature should decide when the money is spent, rather than leaving that decision to regulatory authority. He stated his belief that there is a constitutional separation of powers issue.

[4:43:15 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN referred to [HB 69, page 13,] line 25, which mentions "the statewide screener." She noted that while many schools have adopted DIBELS, not all have, and the Alaska Reads Act allows for alternative screeners or student portfolios. She expressed concern that these alternatives are not referenced in the current bill language. She warned that this omission could exclude emergent students, such as those learning Indigenous languages for which no established screener exists, from receiving funding, which she finds troubling.

[4:43:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated that Section 26 contains conforming language related to Sections 27 and 28, which address the requirement for the Appropriations Bill to be passed by March 15. She explained that Section 29 continues the bill's emphasis on shifting the focus from proficiency to growth. She then requested to move ahead to Section 31.

[4:44:32 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked about Section 29, noting that it repeals the ability for schools to receive a special designation based on performance and includes language related to federal funding, such as Title I. She expressed concern about whether this change could affect schools that currently receive special state designations tied to performance or low-income status. She specifically questioned if the repeal could impact eligibility for certain federal funding streams, such as Title I, which allows some schools to provide all students with free lunch based on full Title I designation.

[4:45:20 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT replied she did not know those details.

[4:45:32 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated that Section 30 repeals the Open Enrollment provision after three years, allowing the policy to be tested and revisited later. She explained that Section 31 creates a task force on education and funding to analyze current systems and make recommendations. The task force could examine various components, including the foundation formula, transportation funding, and insurance pooling. Section 32 directs the Department of Education to recommend ways to reduce regulatory and statutory burdens on school districts, essentially producing a "report on reports" to identify which requirements are unused, unhelpful, or unnecessary at the federal or departmental level.

[4:46:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said the remaining sections are conforming and repealing language.

[4:47:00 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced invited testimony on HB 69.

[4:47:19 PM](#)

MICHAEL ROBBINS, Superintendent, Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District, Ketchikan, Alaska, testified by invitation on HB 69. He provided the following testimony.

[Original punctuation provided.]

For the record, my name is Michael Robbins, and I have the honor of serving as the Superintendent of the Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District.

I speak in support of House Bill 69—a bill that is critical to breaking the cycle of budget cuts, frustration, and division that has been weighing down our schools in Alaska for far too long.

Schools should be the place where we all come together—where parents, families, teachers, school boards, communities and legislators rally around a common goal: doing what's best for kids, investing in them and their future. But let's be honest—that's not what's happening in Alaska right now.

[4:48:13 PM](#)

MR. ROBBINS continued his testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Instead, for years and years, we have been stuck in this exhausting cycle of division over school funding. Every year, districts across the state struggle to balance budgets that don't stretch far enough. Every year, we have to make impossible choices about which programs to cut, which staff to reduce, and which students will lose access to something that could change their lives.

Administration has been cut first to protect the classroom. In my district we have cut the Deputy Superintendent, Curriculum Director, Technology Director, and a Vice Principal. Only 1.7 percent of our district budget is made up of district office administration.

In some cases, School board meetings have turned into battlegrounds, people pointing fingers instead of working together. It's not just happening in Ketchikan—it's happening across the state. And it's tearing communities apart, pitting board members against teachers, teachers against administration, parents against schools, and schools against the state. Including students and parents crying at the House Education Committee.

One of the most overlooked but most critical aspects of education funding is its direct connection to economic development. Investing in our schools isn't just about improving test scores—it's about building a stronger workforce, attracting businesses, and creating long-term economic stability for Alaska. This includes my district where we are part of the

apprenticeship program talked about earlier. Trying to find teachers and having over 600 openings in the state causes a crisis, not only for administrators who have to hire but also students.

[4:49:50 PM](#)

MR. ROBBINS continued his testimony on HB 69:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Here's the reality:

- A strong education system attracts families and businesses. Companies want to set up in communities where their employees can send their kids to high-quality schools. If Alaska wants to attract and retain talent, we need a public education system that people have confidence in.

- A well-educated workforce drives economic growth. When students graduate with strong literacy, math, and career skills, they are better prepared to enter the workforce, fill high-demand jobs, and contribute to the economy.

HB 69 is more than a school funding bill-it's an economic investment. It's a chance to strengthen our schools, prepare our workforce, and build a future where Alaska is a place where people want to live, work, and invest.

Let me paint a picture of Ketchikan.

- Over the past two years, we've had to cut 22.2 percent of our staff-going from 415 employees to 323.

- Our Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs have been slashed. That means fewer opportunities for kids to learn real-world skills and find pathways to careers. Specifically our aviation program, culinary arts program and our maritime program has been reduced or eliminated.

- We had to cut back our summer school program for middle schoolers-kids who need that extra support to stay on track.

- Our pupil-to-teacher ratio has increased at the middle and high school by seven students and elementary school by five students.
- We've had to cut back on our district office staff. That might not seem like a big deal to some, but it's affected everything-from curriculum development to grant writing. In my first two years at the school district we brought in over \$5.5 million grants. This year we've brought in \$0 because we don't have the people to manage or write our grants in our district office.
- Let's talk about the \$1,000 per student increase in the Base Student Allocation-what it actually means for us. This isn't just about "more money for schools." This helps us close our \$5,800,000 deficit that we would have.
- It will help us rebuild support RTI/MTSS program for our 4th-6th graders, who need structured interventions to get back on track after COVID-related learning loss.

[4:51:53 PM](#)

MR. ROBBINS added that a lot of schools in Alaska, particularly Western and Northern Alaska didn't go to school for a year. When students returned they were wearing masks which affected language development for the students that are now in 4th - 6 grade. He stated that while he supports the READS Act it takes money away from intervention programs these lost grades.

MR. ROBBINS continued reading his testimony:

One of the most important aspects of HB 69 is the investment in early literacy through the READS Act and the incentive model for student growth.

Our K-3 reading scores need to improve. And we know that when students are reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade, their chances of long-term academic success skyrocket. But if they fall behind in those early years, it's a long, uphill battle to catch up.

This bill provides the funding and support to create sustainable literacy interventions that will not only help students. This is more than just one time funding. It builds long-term literacy systems that we need in our schools. Not only in K-3rd grade, but

K-6th grade. Also, it creates reading teachers in the high school. You can have students that know how to read but know how to read for content, which is critically important. The resources given for the READS Act help as a waterfall affect for our high school teachers.

[4:53:48 PM](#)

MR. ROBBINS stated the Ketchikan school district is in favor of HB 69 and believes it will significantly help the district and students.

[4:54:10 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN stated that in various education circles, fourth, fifth, and sixth graders are increasingly referred to as the "lost generation." She emphasized that it is unacceptable to consider any group of students lost due to a lack of investment. She affirmed the commitment of the committee to work toward ensuring that students receive the resources they need to recover and succeed.

[4:54:55 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN [held HB 69 in committee.]

[4:55:06 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 4:55 p.m.