

State Board of Education & Early Development
Unapproved Minutes
April 19, 2023
Virtual Platform Meeting
Department of Education & Early Development
333 Willoughby Avenue
Juneau, AK 99801

Wednesday, April 19, 2023

Chair Fields called the meeting to order at 3:02pm. Roll was called and the following members were present to provide a quorum: Members Jeff Erickson, Bob Griffin, Second Vice Chair Sally Stockhausen, Lorri Van Diest, Lt Col James Fowley, Student Advisor Maggie Cothron, Student Advisor Elect Felix Myers, and Chair James Fields.

After the pledge of allegiance, Member Van Diest motioned and Member Griffin seconded a motion to adopt the agenda. There was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously in a roll call vote. There were no potential conflicts of interests identified by board members.

Public Comment

Public comment opened at 3:05pm.

Stephanie Berglund – Stephanie is the CEO of Thread, a private non-profit that has provided childcare resources and referral services in Alaska for over 38 years. It assists over 10,000 families each year with referrals, 3,000 early educators with professional development, and more than 450 education programs. Thread also houses two programs: Learn 2 Grow and Alaska Seed.

Her public comment was in regards to the Alaska Reads Act proposed regulation change. Thread believes, that as Alaska moves forward with the expansion of publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs, all policies, regulations, and standards should be developed from a mixed-delivery perspective. A mixed-delivery system means that publicly funded services are provided within the public school setting, as well as community childcare settings such as Head Start, Military and Tribal childcare programs, and other licensed high-quality childcare settings. This mixed-delivery system gives parents broader school choice, supports community partnerships, and is considered best practices across the country.

As the Board considers the regulations for the early childhood components of the Alaska Reads Act, Thread encourages them to consider strategies for expanding and strengthening the mixed-delivery opportunities within Alaska's publicly funded pre-kindergarten system.

Public comment closed at 3:10pm.

Work Session

Agenda Item 1 - Regulations for Public Comment: Statewide Screening Tool

Introduced by Acting Commissioner Heidi Teshner and described in more detail by Deputy Director of the Division of Innovation and Education Excellence (IEE) Kelly Manning. The board is being asked to open a period of public comment on a regulation change to add a statewide screening tool to the list of

assessments. This statewide literacy screening tool is the result of the Alaska Reads Act and will align DEED's summit of assessment regulation with the requirements of the Alaska Reads Act.

Chair Fields asked about other screeners and their use by the districts. Susan McKenzie, Director of IEE answered that district can use a different screening tool of their choice that they would pay for if it gets approved by the department as it meets requirements of the Reads Act. Districts can use mCLASS by Amplify as the screener chosen by DEED. 96% of school districts have chosen to use that as their screening tool.

Second Vice Chair Stockhausen asked how this coincides with tribal compacting and making a culturally relevant screening tool. Director McKenzie answered that the screening tool was chosen with input from tribal director, Joel Isaak. It can be delivered either virtually or one-on-one. DEED is currently working with the University of Oregon to have a literacy screener developed for 10 languages over the next five years. Deputy Director Manning clarified that the proposed regulation does not specify the screening tool, just lists that it is a requirement to be included in the statewide summit of assessment.

Member Van Diest asked: Of the 96% mentioned earlier, are they already using mCLASS or going to use mCLASS in the future? Director McKenzie answered that The Alaska Reads Act goes into effect July 1, so it is not a requirement to use it yet, just an offer. DEED gave districts a choice to use it as a pilot, and we had between 10 and 20 districts that used the pilot and provided feedback.

Second Vice Chair Stockhausen asked if tribally compacted schools will be expected to use the screener and participate in the same summative assessment. Acting Commissioner Teshner answered that it is still to be discussed through the negotiation process.

Agenda Item 2 – Regulations for Adoption: Alaska Reads Act Regulations

Introduced by Acting Commissioner Teshner and Susan McKenzie, Director of the Division of Innovation and Education Excellence (IEE). The Board is being asked to adopt regulations for three of the four programs under the Alaska Reads Act: the Early Education Grant Program, the Department Reading Program, and the District Reading Improvement Program.

The Board received 31 written public comments before end of public comment date on March 3rd at 4:30pm. We received 9 public comments late. We responded to all. Many comments were about the language in the bill itself, not the regulations. Many comments mentioned the amount of time to implement and the cost of implementation. There were comments from individuals and also from organizations such as Thread, Coalition for Education Equity, ACSA, K-12 Principals, and one Senator. Comments were on early education, the district reading intervention requirement, and educator qualifications.

Deb Riddle, Division Operations Manager for the Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, described the changes in the regulation regarding early education, based off the public comment period. The changes included clarifying language about lead teach and minimum day in session.5 ADM in Foundation Formula to match clarifying language about lead teacher and minimum day in session. Clarified complaint process and the revocation of the ADM funding. Clarified language about early education program grant funding. Clean up on basic regulation format. Changed the requirement for the days to session to match regulations. Clean up language to reflect age appropriate topics in the standards. Clean up language for consistency.

Member Van Diest asked if there was leeway on the implementation date of July 1, 2023. Acting Commissioner Teshner answered that there was no leeway. Second Vice Chair Stockhausen asked what happens if we are not up to standards by that date (especially teacher qualifications). Director McKenzie answered that there is a grace period of two years; DEED is offering up to 1700 educator opportunities at no cost to them to receive professional development to meet those qualifications. Second Vice Chair Stockhausen had a follow up question about what the timeline looks like after May if a school did not receive good results or not up to standard. Director McKenzie answered that the Department Reading Program is a very intensive one year program but feels like two years based on assessment timing and ranking notification. Schools are ranked in fall, apply in April, make a plan in May, and implement the program the following school year. At the end of that school year, they may apply for another year, but it is meant to be one year.

Second Vice Chair Stockhausen commented that it is a bad idea that sufficient readers don't have to retake test in winter and spring; they should be tested all along the way. Director McKenzie agreed and shared publicly with districts that best practice would be screening three times per year. Districts are planning to do that even though it states otherwise in the Reads Act.

Chair Fields asked if the Board can put stronger 'best practices' language in the regulation. Susan Sonneborn, Assistant Attorney General for the Department answered that it is not appropriate to put in stronger language because regulations are meant to establish minimum standards. Instead, the Board can simply provide that message to school districts outside of regulation.

Member Erickson asked how the social and emotional support standard in the early education portion will be covered in rural since they have fewer resources. Deb Riddle answered that a lot of that can be handled by a counselor and most practices are already being handled in our pre-k programs and Head Start programs.

Member Erickson asked if the requirement for a reading specialist to have three semester hours of indigenous language will be a class offered through University of Alaska. Director McKenzie answered that they still need to work on that to put a course together.

Member Erickson asked what the plan is for kids who may fall under delayed progression. Director McKenzie answered that if student gets to the end of the year not at benchmark using the screener, then there will be a conversation with parents with holistic information, and the parents make that decision. Non-progression can only occur once in Alaska Reads Act. If parents choose their child to progress, teachers and district are responsible to provide support and intervention. If parents decide to retain the child, the district would plan for intervention, further assessment, and more support. It is individualized.

Member Erickson stated that this is not an equitable solution in rural districts, where they have the highest level of reading difficulties but lowest level of teacher support. A lot of public comment touched on how this is a big requirement without having adequately staffed schools and it will put pressure on teachers.

Student Advisor Myers echoed Member Erickson with his concern for one reading specialist managing forty individualized reading plans, and asked what kind of support they receive. Director McKenzie stated that the Alaska Reads Act requires change; it requires letting go of things that are not aligned with the science of reading in order to make space for the programs that will work. Student Advisor Myers

responded that all this expensive change during a time of funding restriction is difficult. Chair Fields commented that resources need to be redirected to priorities, such as reading in K-3rd grade.

Member Griffin agreed that one of the positives of the Alaska Reads Act is the re-prioritizing and refocusing on early childhood literacy through early screenings.

Acting Commissioner Teshner assured the Board that the department is putting extra supports and training for educators right now through federal funds and that the department will be very hands on in helping districts create plans.

Member Van Diest reiterated how important it is to make this change, despite how difficult change is, and that it will be a learning process.

Business Meeting

Agenda Item 3 - Regulations for Public Comment: Statewide Screening Tool

Second Vice Chair Stockhausen motioned and Member Griffin seconded the following motion: I move the State Board of Education and Early Development open a period of public comment on amendments to 4 AAC 06.710 Statewide student assessment system. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously in a roll call vote.

Agenda Item 4 – Regulations for Adoption: Alaska Reads Act Regulations

Member Van Diest motioned and Second Vice Chair Stockhausen seconded the following motion: I move the State Board of Education and Early Development adopt the proposed regulation changes to implement House Bill 114 including:

- adding new regulations 4 AAC 06.300 through 4 AAC 06.390 to implement a department reading program;
- adding new regulations 4 AAC 06.400 through 4 AAC 06.490 to implement a district reading improvement program;
- amending teacher certification regulations 4 AAC 12.300(g), 4 AAC 12.305, 4 AAC 12.310, 4 AAC 12.345, 4 AAC 12.407 and 4 AAC 12.900(a), adding new sections to teacher certification regulations 4 AAC 12.310, 4 AAC 12.392, 4 AAC 12.393, 4 AAC 12.409 and repealing 4 AAC 12.900(b) to address teacher certification requirements; and,
- adding new regulations 4 AAC 05.100, 4 AAC 60.190 through 4 AAC 60.990, adopting by reference *Early Education Program Standards*, and repealing 4 AAC 60.037 and 4 AAC 60.180 to implement an early education grant program.

Chair Fields gave thanks to the Legislature and the Governor for passing the Alaska Reads Act to benefit the students of Alaska. The motion passed unanimously in a roll call vote.

Agenda Item 5 – Commissioner’s Report

Acting Commissioner Teshner reminded the Board that the Science of Reading Symposium will be next week with 1,000 people attending in person and over 650 virtually attending. A virtual kick-off meeting with the five tribes to discuss Tribal Compacting will happen tomorrow. Mount Edgecumbe High School’s graduation is May 11, 2023. Last Friday, five schools were recognized as Purple Star School designation and Lt. Col. Fowley attended. A Request for Information (RFI) is currently out for the statewide alternative teacher preparation program. Lastly, we have hired a new Director of Finance and Support Services, Karen Morrison, pending Board approval and a new Public Information Officer, Caroline Hamp.

The next quarterly meeting will be June 7-8, 2023 in Kenai, Alaska.

Board Comments

Second Vice Chair Stockhausen asked how testing is going. Director McKenzie answered that it has been a much smoother process for testing this year. Deputy Director Manning reaffirmed that DEED has received positive reports on the assessment administration. Member Van Diest thinks from her conversations with a testing coordinator that participation rate will be greatly increased.

Member Griffin plans to attend the Science of Reading Symposium and is happy about the high attendance, and Chair Fields will also attend on Friday.

Chair Fields thanked previous members Sandy Kowalski and Keith Hamilton for their service.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15pm.