

Thank you for allowing me to testify Chair Holland and members of the Senate Education Committee.

The Northwest Arctic Borough School District (NWABSD) is testifying in support of SB 8. One wouldn't consider building a house that you wanted to last without first building a solid foundation. Similarly, reading is fundamental to all other lifelong learning. Two components of SB 8 are particularly important to us. One is the inclusion of Pre-k. The second is the proposed reading support for students, school and teachers in Kindergarten to the third grade.

The NWABSD has invested in Pre-Kindergarten and we have seen how the program positively impacts our students. NWABSD provides Pre-Kindergarten in 11 communities for a total of 105 students. We have seen how the Pre-K program has helped prepare our students to be successful in kindergarten and beyond. We have found that school success develops early on and early school preparedness has a positive impact on how well our students perform academically. Unfortunately, our federal funding for this program will end this year. SB 8 would allow us to continue with our Pre-K program.

The state has recognized that our students are not achieving reading proficiency at the levels they should be and has set a goal of having proficient readers by the third grade. We can all agree with this goal, but we must be provided the resources to reach this target. For the last several years, schools have been flat funded and we have been asked to do more with less handicapping any real progress. We must be given the tools necessary to address reading proficiency gaps. The first tool would be a quality Pre-K program so we can start as early as possible on reading readiness followed by reading support and intervention when needed from Kindergarten to the third grade. Any reading program should provide support for schools, teachers, and students to assist students in achieving reading proficiency. The emphasis should be on bringing students up to grade reading level rather than grade retention unless absolutely necessary. These measures are provided for in SB 8.

Senator Begich, Governor Dunleavy, and Commissioner Johnson have worked tirelessly the last two years in drafting SB 6 which became SB 8. Stakeholder's input, including ours, has been incorporated into SB 8. It is now time to move forward, please pass SB 8 as is so that we can all work to achieve reading proficiency by the third grade.

Thank you for your consideration and time on behalf of the Northwest Arctic Borough School District Board of Education and the Students and families of the Northwest Arctic Borough.

Margaret Hansen, President  
Northwest Arctic Borough School District Board of Education