

April 3, 2014

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to support HB197 – the Learn to Read, Read to Learn bill. As a teacher with the Anchorage School District for 22 years I know the importance of literacy for a student’s success in all academic settings and in life. I also over my 22 years know that ASD has made literacy a focus and implemented policies for identifying students who were not reading at grade level followed by intervention plans for supporting students to learn to read. But ASD does also allow social promotion which many times allows students that do not have the reading skills to be successful in the next grade to advance anyway (hoping for the best - that interventions, time, maturity, *something* will make it work)

Research shows us that there is a definite correlation between the ability to read by 3rd grade and reducing high school drop out rates and improving student achievement on reading tests.

I support HB197 as it addresses a problem head on. It is very disconcerting that our schools are amongst the highest funded in the Nation and our kids are just as bright as anywhere else and our educators and parents are just as dedicated and yet we are at the bottom for achievement (4th grade NAEP scores 2011)

Literacy is a responsibility for students, parents, schools and government. We need to make a commitment to take a stand for the importance of literacy and to raise the accountability for that responsibility.

HB197 provides a policy that guides the following factors:
Identification of students who are not reading at grade level,
Communication - Parental Communication on literacy acquisition/strategies for intervention and support activities.
Training for all “Stakeholders” parents, teachers, students – provide intervention training and involvement for research based best practice
Intervention practices (recommended and/or required that involves teacher, student, family and school district to create a plan for the student),

Retention - the accountability piece –This is one part of the bill that will provide incentive for greater parental involvement. And the bill is modeled after other (ie. Florida) successful reading programs which provides for “good cause exemptions” so that only students that will benefit from the policy will be included.) Please note: retention is not the goal, student academic success and literacy is the goal.

I have cut and pasted paragraphs that are compelling that were part of the files to support the bill.

Retention itself is not the goal here, it’s strong instruction and intervention coupled with the test-based promotion that makes it a successful combination. In addition to Florida data

PROMOTING ILLITERACY: THE HARMFUL IMPACTS OF PREVAILING POLICY

Each year, millions of children, including a disproportionately high number of low-income and minority children, fail to learn basic literacy skills in the developmentally critical grades. Rather than addressing these problems head on, standard practice involves simply socially promoting students to the next grade. Our collective failure to reform this shameful practice preserves a system of schooling that routinely gives the least to the students who start with the greatest needs. For students, the impact lasts a lifetime.

The prevailing practice of social promotion proves especially destructive for children in the early grades. Learning to read does not get easier with age. As a result, illiterate 3rd graders move on to become illiterate 4th graders, and then 5th, 6th and 7th graders.

“Education Reform – Why not Alaska ?

There are plentiful examples of proven school reforms that are sweeping the nation and are producing dramatic improvements.” Bob Griffin

Our students deserve no less. Please support HB197.

Thank you,

Lynnette Sullivan

ASD K-12 EdTech Coach, K-6 teacher