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Dear Representative Drummond and House Education Committee:

Please support House Bill 64 to create a legislative task force for improving reading proficiency statewide.

As you know, students in Alaska have scored low in English reading and writing for a long time. Now is the time for the Legislature to take the lead for important changes needed in reading instruction statewide.

I have a background in Secondary Education with a specialization in Social Studies. I have worked with many high school students in my career, it astonished me how many of them struggled to read material that was at grade level, and even below. By the time I had worked with them at the secondary level, their excitement towards learning had considerably diminished, or so it seemed. Academics had taken a back seat and it was not from a lack of support at home. As I worked with my students, I would see an incredibly brilliant individual. I wondered why reading had become so challenging, what happened in their early academic career?

When I moved up to Alaska, I started tutoring part time at a clinic that specializes in dyslexia. The answer to my question had been answered. The second student I worked with was diagnosed with dyslexia. Despite working so hard on her academics, she would consistently receive a failing grade. The first months working with me were very challenging. I would present a brief paragraph with short vowel, single syllable words, it brought her to tears. It would take us 30 minutes to read through the passage together. However, with a generous amount of praise, she was able to decode it. The program we used was an Orton-Gillingham based, multi-sensory reading and spelling program.

Three years later, she decided she would like to apply to give the speech at her 6th grade graduation ceremony. She was selected. A girl who would cry at the thought of reading in front of her peers three short years prior, had written a speech and was selected to read in front of the entire school. She did it!

With explicit, structured, sequential, multi-sensory instruction, students with dyslexia can become confident individuals who love to learn. While I have the opportunity to work at a clinic that works with over 300 clients with a dyslexia diagnosis, I know there are thousands more in Alaska who need teachers who are trained in screening, early intervention techniques.

It is time for Alaska to acknowledge the importance of literacy for all of our students.

Kind Regards,

Ashly Beckes
Anchorage, Alaska