

January 27, 2017

Representative Drummond
House Education Committee
Capital Building
Juneau, AK 99801

Senator Hughes
Senate Education Committee
Capital Building
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for SB 27 and HB 64 for a Reading Proficiency Task Force

Dear Senator Hughes and Representative Drummond,

We have an extreme dichotomy of what we know about teaching reading and what we do. We know how students develop reading skills. We know how to teach more than 90% of our students to read. Unfortunately, the National Assessment of Educational Progress consistently finds that we choose to teach only 30% of our Alaska kids to read proficiently. Go online. Look at the history of the reading outcomes we Alaskans choose for our kids.

I am a teacher currently taking classes in reading science because my degree at Ohio State did not prepare me to teach reading adequately. The philosophy of Ohio State was “love books, love writing, immerse students in the love of literature. Reading will come to them.” It doesn’t. As our numbers attest, reading will come to 30% of the students.

When I was getting this degree, we all kept waiting for when we’d be taught how to teach reading. We agreed about the importance of appreciating good books, but all of us future teachers wanted more. At one point, a head professor got all riled up and loudly dismissed the Ohio law that required the teaching of reading science. None of us students knew this law. The head professor waved a copy of the phonetics page of a dictionary passionately declaring, “This is all you need to teach that way.”

Now, I understand that this professor thought she was defending us from the science of reading. That professor didn’t know that students can dig deeper into literature when the school system purposely builds a strong reading foundation. For example, when we directly teach that the suffix -ed represents an idea that happens to have three sounds, we’re showing students that written English is structured around ideas. When students discuss who is the antagonist in a second grade read aloud, they are discovering that big ideas are all around if they just practice digging deeper.

How tragic that this professor stood in the way of teachers wanting to know more about teaching reading. Don’t follow her lead.

Sincerely,

Serena Elftman Mollenkopf