

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.

Thank you,

Mike Bronson  
Rev. W. Greene  
NAACP Anchorage  
P O Box 200089  
Anchorage, Alaska 99520

Dear Representative Drummond and House Education Committee,

I am writing to ask that you will please support House Bill 64 to create a legislative task force for improving reading proficiency statewide.

My husband and son both have dyslexia. The Alaska public school system (Anchorage School District) failed my husband 20 years ago and now continues to be failing my 10 year old son by not mitigating the effects of dyslexia on reading proficiency. Knowing the hereditary nature of dyslexia, I began asking teachers if they thought my son could have dyslexia as early as kindergarten when I began seeing red flags. I had wonderful, well intentioned teachers who were puzzled by this otherwise bright, inquisitive, tenacious, student who was not progressing in reading. When I requested testing during his first grade year, I was told the district does not test for Dyslexia and after evaluation, my son did not qualify for Special Education. He was retained in first grade and after a private evaluation, was officially diagnosed with dyslexia. It was two years later that the school re-tested him and found he now qualified for special education under the category of Specific Learning Disability (SLD). Even with a strong parent advocate, it took the public school over three years to identify my son as having a learning disability, and now with an IEP for SLD, the school still refuses to write that my son has dyslexia in his IEP.

My son is now in the fourth grade and receives private tutoring to address his dyslexia. He receives no specialized reading instruction at school even though each quarter I receive a reading improvement report that places him well below average and recommends individualizing his program. His special education consists of modifications and accommodations and classroom supports.

It has been my goal to teach him to be a strong advocate for himself. By identifying his dyslexia he knows there is a reason why he struggles more than his friends and why he has to work 5 times as hard as the other students in his class to get a lesser grade. Thankfully he is tenacious enough that he hasn't given up. It breaks my heart to think of the many other students who may not have a strong parent advocate, who have the same struggles as my son yet are not being identified and have given up.

"Dyslexia is the most common specific learning disability, affecting between 3 and 17 % of the student population," (HB64 pg. 1) yet teachers and administrators will not use the word in an IEP. HB 64 will not only shed light on Dyslexia as a real issue, but will help educators identify other students without dyslexia who are non-proficient readers and help them understand how to better help all struggling readers. Now is the time for the Legislature to call on reading experts from outside our state to help guide us in making the important changes needed to address reading proficiency in Alaska. Let's not wait for our public schools to fail another generation of non-proficient readers.

Thank you,  
Stacie Gracey

Dear Representative Drummond and House Education Committee:

I am in favor of HB 64.

My daughter is a smart, hard working young lady. And she has Dyslexia.

Her journey through the maze of the Anchorage School District has been arduous, frustrating, and, as far as reading literacy goes, largely unproductive, as it ultimately did not produce results on reading proficiency.

Her 1st grade teacher noticed her struggle to read proficiently. The teacher tested her and based on the results, recommended summer school. My daughter was further tested and was entered into the MSI summer program after 1st grade. She attended every day; the educator commended her on her attendance and active participation. My daughter's response was she was bored out of her mind. Moreover, she had no improvement in reading fluency.

In second grade, I kept getting push back about my concerns for my daughter's poor reading performance. "Don't worry, she'll catch up" and " You'll see, a switch will turn on" were common refrains and I was discouraged from having her tested. I was finally told by a teacher that if a parent requested a student to be tested, the district would have to comply. She also added that I was not to tell anyone that the information came from her and I was to say "A little birdie told me" if I was pressed.

An IEP was developed due to her well below level reading level. Intervention was inappropriate and ineffective: she was given remediation to address her Dyslexia. ASD does not even recognize the diagnosis, despite the fact I had a professional evaluation which determined my daughter does, in fact, have Dyslexia (paid for out of our own pocket). The reading curriculum used by the school was not helping her, if was confusing her even more. When I asked for the independent, third party research to support that it was appropriate instruction for dyslexia, it could not be provided. Repeatedly, the administrators pointed to a website that was the curriculum publisher's - not an independent source. Moreover, that website said nothing about it being corrective action for Dyslexia. Through my own research, I learned the school district had purchased and trained special educators to use an Orton-Gillingham based curriculum which is appropriate intervention for Dyslexia. It was even used at another local elementary school. The

teachers and administrators at my daughter's school wanted nothing to do with it. Meanwhile, my daughter was getting more and more frustrated. She was not put in a resource class for reading; she was lumped together with children with many other disabilities more severe and unrelated to reading. She is very bright and comprehends very well. She was made to feel insignificant because her needs were not being addressed. I finally requested that she be pulled out of the recourse class. We sent her to a tutor specializing in instruction for dyslexics. She completed the program and now is reading proficiently and is a successful, confident student (solid Bs with after school sports and extracurricular activities).

The whole process was brutal, for my daughter and my family. She felt stigmatized by the other students. My heart breaks when she recalls being pulled out for the useless resource time was "the worst time of her life". All because she learns to read differently.

Education is important in our family and we got her the services that she needed. What about all the other school children in Alaska who are falling through the cracks because the school systems fail to address reading illiteracy? They are there and it is real - look at the data.

With heartfelt passion, I urge you to support HB 64.

Thank you for your consideration and all the hard work you put in.

Mary Claire Kretzschmar  
[maryclaire729@yahoo.com](mailto:maryclaire729@yahoo.com)

Dear Representative Drummond and House Education Committee

I am writhing in support of HB 64 and I hope you and committee do also, in creating a legislative task force for improving reading proficiency across all regions of Alaska.

For the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on Alaska school education, we have failed the children greatly. In 2015 AMP testing 57% in grades 3 thru 10 were not proficient readers. We can and must do better for the children now and the future generations. Never never forget that the children now will be the ones taking the helm and guiding their communities and the State of Alaska into the not far off future.

The wrong can be corrected, give our great teachers the resources so they can teach proficient reading skills. Develop a model that is simple but works for all teachers and children.

I'm a Child of the Territory and was a student that was moved thru the system, having been a poor reader, writer. It was not until I was researching reading education and looking for a way to help my young daughter, Katelyn age 10 who attends school in Juneau, that I discovered the word Dyslexia and realized they were writing about me. I will not allow my daughter to be moved thru the system like the 20% that are not proficient readers by MAP scores in the local district. Its time as government leaders, community members, parents we made sure faults in the Alaska education system are corrected.

We are a big Stat, yes, with 52 school districts and several culture regions with way to many education

models, the system needs to be simplified and reading proficiency delivered.

Thank you,

David R. Scott  
[PO Box 210243](#)  
[Auke Bay, AK. 99821](#)

Hello,

My name is Dee Dee Feghali. I live in Anchorage Alaska. I support HB-64. I am dyslexic. I found out as an adult, after our young children were diagnosed with reading difficulties in elementary school. We had them tested and found they were dyslexic and then I found out it runs in families. We then moved to Alaska and found out it is not even a word teachers are encouraged to say in the schools here.

My dyslexic daughters work very hard each day to just do the average work that others ease through. They learned to read (with lots of extra help) but are not great readers. Often I have to read the instructions for one of my daughters so that she can know what her homework is asking her to do. This means that she cannot read well enough to read the instructions on her homework accurately. This isn't right. She nearly kills herself each day to get all her work done and get correct answers. Often she works on her 6th grade homework for 3 or 4 hours each night-- AFTER having worked in school all day. Her teachers say, "She is a great student. She works very hard." SHE DOES. And she doesn't need to continue this way. I don't want her to continue this way. I don't want others to have to continue this way either.

This task force would help identify kids, like my daughter(s), who work so hard and still struggle to read. Understanding this phenomena called dyslexia is backed up with over 40 years of research that shows our teaching professionals how to screen, identify and teach kids to read. Learning to read is a fundamental right that our schools should be held accountable for as well as evidence based data driven instructional methodologies that are proven to work for dyslexic kids and others who struggle with reading. I don't see this happening in our public schools because this "difference" is not even recognized as valid or true or real by my district. Establishing educational policy based on scientific evidence and best practices for reading seems like a good use of legislative time. Thank you for listening.

Most Sincerely,  
Dee Dee Feghali

Dear Representative Drummond-

Thank you for sponsoring this bill that calls for establishing a Task Force on Reading Proficiency and Reading Instruction for All Students and on the Effects of Dyslexia on Some Students charged with evaluating and making recommendations regarding reading instructional practices for all public school students in Alaska--and the diagnosis, treatment, and education of children affected by dyslexia. This bill acknowledges recognition that Alaska is not currently meeting the needs of struggling readers, including those with dyslexia and those who are English learners. Especially in a state like Alaska, with such a large and diverse population of English learners, early screening, early identification, and early intervention are particularly critical.

### **English Learners**

Many of the vast majority of English learners who struggle while learning a second language (Hamayan et al 2007; Gaviria and Tipton 2012) do not have an intrinsic disability. However, it is very important to identify those English

learners who do have dyslexia or a related disability—since the prevalence of disabilities in English learners should be at least equivalent to occurrence in the general population. Early identification resulting from screening and assessment, as well as appropriate and timely intervention, are supported by research (Birsh, 2011; Nevills & Wolfe, 2009; Hall & Moats, 1999; Cardenas-Hagan & Pollard-Durodola, 2007).

Unfortunately, because it is difficult to distinguish between poor English reading skills resulting from dyslexia and reduced exposure to English, English learners are typically identified as having dyslexia much later in their academic careers, if ever, in comparison with other students. This disparity contributes to an inequality in English proficiency and educational attainment, leading to income and health disparities for English learner populations (Snyder Dillow 2013; National Center for Education Statistics 2015; Zong and Batalova 2015; Education Commission of the States 2013. National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 1997.

### **Socio-Economic Status**

In consideration of the role of environmental factors in the development of reading skills for all students, studies that have investigated the progression of phonemic awareness in children found that socio-economic status and maternal education were significantly correlated with the level of phonemic awareness of children. These correlations with socio-economic status and maternal education were found to be much stronger than those of race or ethnicity (Lonigan et al 1998; Fernandez-Fein and Baker 1997). However, this prediction of increased difficulty with learning phonemic awareness for students living in a low socio-economic environment does not mitigate the need for effective phonemic awareness instruction as a critical foundation for learning the alphabetic principle—especially for students already known to be at risk; this prediction makes the provision of this effective instruction even more imperative.

### **Screening and Early Intervention**

Universal screening tools need to be evidence-based and user friendly to provide data that support early intervention. For each grade level, it is important that screenings target the following areas: phonemic awareness; letter knowledge; sound-symbol correspondence; single word decoding for real and pseudo-words; naming speed for colors, objects, letters and numbers; spelling; listening comprehension and oral expression; reading comprehension; oral reading fluency [accuracy-rate prosody]; and written expression, including handwriting.

All children need teachers who are knowledgeable and highly skilled in the teaching of reading. Teachers must be familiar with evidence-based strategies that have proven to be effective for all children, including English learners and students with dyslexia and related learning disabilities. Evidence from decades of scientific research has shown that with appropriate, intensive instruction, students with all but the most severe reading disabilities can be effectively taught in the early grades so that they stay on track toward academic success (Lyon 2002, 2016).

**According to NICHD researchers, for 90 percent to 95 percent of poor readers, prevention and early intervention programs that combine instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency development, and reading comprehension strategies—provided by well-trained, linguistically informed teachers—can increase reading skills to average reading levels or above (Lyon, 1997).** The use of evidence-based strategies can provide students with the education they need in general education settings so that only the most severe cases will need special education services.

In 2016, the International Dyslexia Association Board of Directors identified “Structured Literacy” as a term that encompasses approaches to reading instruction that conform with IDA’s *Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading*. While there are many approaches with different names that fall under the “Structured Literacy” umbrella, all have content (*what* is taught) and principles of instruction (*how* it is taught) in common.

Early intervention has been proven to be highly beneficial for all types of disabilities. Although an official diagnosis of dyslexia may not be made until a student is reading and writing, there are many factors that parents and educators can observe, measure, and remediate long before kindergarten or first grade. Waiting until the student demonstrates a reading or spelling problem wastes precious time that could be spent building a foundation of oral language, for example, on which to build later literacy skills.

Again, thank you for your efforts in sponsoring this bill.  
Sincerely,

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Certified Academic Language Therapist (CALT) and Qualified Instructor (QI) #1133 ([www.altaread.org](http://www.altaread.org))

Board Certified Educational Therapist #10041 ([www.aetonline.org](http://www.aetonline.org))

Licensed Dyslexia Therapist #1750—Texas Department of State Health Services

Certified Dyslexia Therapist

—  
International Dyslexia Association

([www.dyslexiaida.org](http://www.dyslexiaida.org))

Member-California AB 1369 Dyslexia Guidelines Work Group

California Learning Handicapped Specialist Credential (Life) #TC221314—pre-school, K-12, adult

California Severely Handicapped Specialist Credential (Life) #TC221315—pre-school, K-12, adult

California Standard Elementary Credential (Life) #STC113534—K-9

California Administrative Services Credential (Clear) #960146833—pre-school, K-12, adult

Crosscultural, Language and Academic Development (CLAD) Permit

#080118066—K-12