



Governor Michael J. Dunleavy
STATE OF ALASKA

January 17, 2020

The Honorable Cathy Giessel
Senate President
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 111
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear President Giessel:

Under the authority of Article III, Section 18, of the Alaska Constitution, I am transmitting a bill relating to literacy and early education titled the "Alaska Reads Act."

A student's ability to read is a critical predictor of educational and lifelong success. Children with an early basic knowledge of reading are more likely than their peers to experience later academic success, attain higher levels of education, and secure employment. Sadly, Alaska's students have scored below the national average in Grade Four reading every year since 2003. Last year, over two-thirds of Pre-Kindergarten to Grade Three students attended schools in Alaska where 50 percent of Grade Three students were proficient in English language arts. A strong reading program, beginning in Kindergarten, continuing into Grade Three, and beyond, gives students the best possible chance to maximize their education.

The Alaska Reads Act would create a statewide comprehensive reading policy designed to improve our children's reading performance. Comprehensive implementation strategies for reading policies are necessary to ensure early identification of struggling readers and establish intensive reading intervention services for students who need more help to become successful readers. Early identification of students' reading skills – through assessments, strong reading programs, and additional supports for struggling readers – together form a pathway that leads to student success.

The first program in this bill, for our youngest students, would create an early education grant program for four and five year olds attending school district early education programs. School districts would receive a three-year grant designed to help these programs meet higher state standards, beginning with the lowest performing districts and progressing to encompass all early education programs over the course of ten years.

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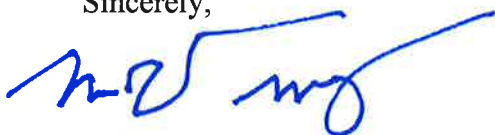
The second program is a targeted literacy program, designed to improve school literacy programs for young students, from early education through elementary school. As part of the literacy program, the Department of Education and Early Development would employ reading specialists that will initially focus on Alaska's lowest-performing schools. These specialists would help design reading plans, create school improvement goals, and coach district teachers in order to increase reading performance and outcomes.

The final program in this bill is a comprehensive reading intervention program, designed to increase literacy for children in kindergarten through Grade Three. First, the Department of Education and Early Development would establish a system of support for districts, including training, methods to monitor progress, and a statewide screening tool the department would administer to students three times every school year. Second, districts would offer students in Kindergarten through Grade Three reading intervention services, including a reading teacher for students with identified reading deficiencies. Districts would create tailored reading improvement plans for identified students and work with parents to improve reading skills both at home and in school. Multiple pathways are provided for students to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for progression to Grade Four, including performance on the statewide reading screening or assessment or an alternative reading assessment as determined by the State Board of Education, or, as evidenced through a student reading portfolio. The legislation also allows for good cause exemptions, which include being a student with a disability who operates with an individualized education plan or a student learning English as a second language.

A comprehensive reading program, beginning in Kindergarten and continuing into Grade Three and beyond, gives students the best possible chance to maximize their education.

I urge your prompt and favorable action on this measure.

Sincerely,



Mike Dunleavy
Governor

Enclosure