



Anchorage School District

Education Center

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February 10, 2020

Dear members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I want to begin with an affirmation for the bill considered, Sponsor Substitute for SB6. As the superintendent of the Anchorage School District, I want to communicate that Senator Begich and his cosigners' reading bill, the Alaska Reads Act, aligns with our district's strategic plan to have 90 percent of third grade students reading on grade level. In addition, ASD's legislative agenda provides support to this statewide effort. Alaska depends on this legislation to empower our teachers to ensure students are readers and thinkers in today's global society.

The evidence is clear that Alaska's students are not performing as well as their peers in the nation in reading. Not only is our status on the exams evident of this, the fact that we are losing ground is also clear as we move further away from the mean in grade four to grade eight. Comments surrounding this bill have criticized the use of data to gauge success. Please know that whether or not we like national assessments, one question we must ask ourselves is, "WHY is there a difference between our students' abilities and students from other states?" I know our students and teachers are as smart, as hard working, and as caring as any other students and teachers in the nation. The delta between our achievement and other students in the United States should have all Alaskans demanding a change in how public schools are preparing our children to live in the information world.

The science is clear on effective ways to teach students to read. It is inclusive of the five areas of reading grounded in brain-based research. You have proposed a bill to make a change in our state—to guarantee all students receive the benefit of excellent, evidence-informed instruction. Your courage to do this is highly respected. I have written earlier in the year of the need for this legislation. Our commissioner has asked superintendents on multiple occasions to provide input. Please know I am not interested in a consensus bill by which everyone can be happy with the outcome while picking apart the essential tenants that research has proven are good for students. Rather, I prefer a bill that will make a positive change, as improving the outcomes for Alaska's children is the primary reason public schools exist.

I understand that Alaska has not been down the reading road before. Just like any new road in our state, a great amount of dust is thrust about as one first travels along a bumpy trail. The dust often makes it difficult to see the destination. However, continued forward momentum, with heightened awareness of needs, leads to a clearer vision. The dust around this bill will

Educating All Students for Success in Life

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settle. I am confident that you have heard from stakeholders across the state who have provided feedback to allow DEED's Administrative Codes to guide us on this newly dusted trail.

In Anchorage, too many of our students are not reading at expected levels. Our student learning data are not what our community expects. Please know that I am not shamed by what our data represent, rather I am socially incentivized to improve our teaching and learning in the area of reading. Monitoring success is essential to growth. We should inspect what we expect.

In summary, I am grateful for your fiscal support of preschool. I understand the need for assessment and reporting. I accept accountability in public education. A school system that allows continued feedback to parents as well as their involvement and action is essential to schools and classrooms.

Thank you again for your courage to make a change. Legislation must remain relevant, and uphold and reflect the values and beliefs of a society. The Committee Substitute for SB6 does just this as it provides for all Alaska's children to leave our schools with the fundamental skill of reading. A literate citizenry is paramount to a democratic society.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DBishop', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Deena M. Bishop, Ed.D.
Superintendent