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## House Bill 164 – Early Ed Programs; Reading; Virtual Ed

### Sponsor Statement

The Alaska Reads Act is a long-term investment in Alaska's children and their future. By further investing in school readiness, Alaska can improve the academic success of students. Academic success gives students the knowledge and skills to succeed in life, which is the goal of Alaska's education system.

The scientific research into early learning empirically proves that every dollar invested in high-quality early education saves the government up to \$7 in the long run. This savings is achieved through improved high school graduation rates and reducing the need for remedial education. Early education also correlates to a reduced need for public assistance as an adult and less involvement in the criminal justice system. A key component of early learning is to improve the reading skills of students. The conclusion reached by thousands of research studies is that learning to read is imperative for future academic success.

Alaska's current pre-kindergarten early education programs give many families access to high-quality early education. However, the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development reports that only 10% of Alaska's 4-year-olds have access to early education programs. House Bill 164 builds on the lessons learned from Alaska's most successfully early education programs and expands early education opportunities to more of Alaska's children.

HB 164 would allow school districts to develop localized and culturally responsive pre-K programs through a six-year grant program. The bill also establishes a new statewide evidence-based reading program and provides intensive reading intervention services from kindergarten through grade three for students experiencing reading deficiencies. The bill calls for reading intervention specialists, funded by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, to be available to work with local teachers and support staff to improve reading scores and assessments through evidence-based reading instruction.

Historically, Alaska has made many smart investments. By investing in scientific management, Alaska has the most sustainable fisheries on earth. By wisely investing Alaska's oil and gas royalties, the Permanent Fund has become the envy of every state in the nation. The Alaska Reads Act represents another smart investment for the State of Alaska because early education has the potential to create a generation of Alaskans prepared to make the greatest impact on this state that we have ever seen.