



SB151 – Alaska Reads Act

Sectional Analysis – Version A

“An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to funding for early education programs; relating to a department literacy program; relating to a comprehensive reading policy; relating to the duties of the state Board of Education and Early Development; and providing for an effective date.”

Section 1:

Establishes that elementary schools also include an early education program, whether operated within a public school or by an outside organization. Programs must be approved or supervised by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (the department).

Section 2:

Directs school districts to provide annually to parents and guardians of children in grades K-3 current information on the importance of early literacy, including program services provided under the new sections, AS 14.30.760 Alaska Reads Act and AS 14.30.770 Comprehensive reading policy for school districts, established in section 13.

Section 3:

Establishes that a four or five year old, who has not attended kindergarten, is eligible to attend a public school early education program.

Section 4:

Creates a stair-step, three-year grant program to provide training and assist a school district in developing an early education program. In year one, the lowest performing 10% of school districts will be eligible for a grant to establish a district-wide, high quality early education program. In year two, the second lowest performing 15% of school districts will be eligible for the three-year grant program to establish an early education program. In year three, the grants will be available to the third lowest performing 15% of school districts, then the third highest performing 15% of school districts in year four, then the second highest performing 20% of school districts in year five, and finally, the highest performing 25% of school districts in year six. Over six fiscal years, all school districts are offered the opportunity to participate.

At the end of the three-year grant cycle, the department will be responsible for determining if the district's early education program complies with state standards, as established by the State Board of Education (board) in section 9.

Section 5:

Directs the department to supervise all early education programs and approve those early education programs created by the early education grant program.

Section 6:

Defines an “early education program” in this section as a program for children ages 3-5 years old if its primary function is educational. The 3-year-old students are not included in the program this bill proposes, but are included to ensure they are not excluded from existing state and federal programs.

Section 7:

Allows the department to select and purchase supplemental reading textbooks and materials to support the reading intervention services provided under the new section, AS 14.07.065. Literacy Program, established in section 8.

Section 8:

Establishes a literacy program to provide direct support and intervention services to up to ten low-performing Alaska schools each year that apply for the services. The department will be responsible for providing each selected school up to two reading specialists. A reading specialist is defined as a certified teacher under AS 14.20 who is employed and funded by the department and who meets requirements established by the board. One specialist would be focused on the implementation of reading intervention services consistently across classrooms, modeling effective instructional strategies, coaching and mentoring teachers and paraprofessionals, training teachers in data literacy, leading and supporting reading leadership teams, and reporting on school and student performance to the department. The supporting reading specialist would assist with all of the activities described above or serve as the reading specialist for the school’s early education program, depending on the makeup of the specific school.

The department will be required to establish a process for the reading specialists to report on program implementation, work with the reading specialists to establish improvement goals, including measures of interim progress, to select and purchase additional reading materials to supplement the reading intervention services, and pay travel costs for a reading specialist to attend relevant trainings identified or hosted by the department. The department will also be responsible for periodically reviewing staff development programs and recommending to the board programs that meet high quality standards as defined under AS 14.07.065 (10).

Under this new section, schools selected to participate in the literacy program will be required to ensure that the reading specialist(s) were not required to perform functions that divert from the duties assigned by the department, coordinate with the reading specialists to redesign the school’s daily schedule to provide time dedicated to literacy program activities, hold public meetings to present information on the literacy and reading intervention program services to parents and guardians, present an annual update to the public on these program services at a noticed public meeting, and create partnerships between the school, families, and community that focus on promoting literacy and increasing time spent reading.

Under this new section, the department will be required to publish on its website and make available to the public a completed application from each school selected to participate in the literacy program, the literacy plan implemented at each selected school, and a data analysis of the success of the literacy program and intervention services conducted by an independent contractor.

Section 9:

Directs the board to adopt regulations establishing standards for an early education program that is (1) half-day, (2) full-day, and (3) less than half day and is locally-designed and evidence-based. The lead teacher of a program must hold a valid teacher certificate and have satisfactorily completed a minimum of six credit hours in early childhood education or completed the six credits within one year of the teacher’s employment, or have five or more years of experience teaching kindergarten or

other early education programs. Regulations must also establish the development of appropriate objectives and accommodations for all children, which allow districts to adapt content to be culturally appropriate to local communities.

Section 10:

For funding purposes, an early education student shall be counted in the school district's average daily membership (ADM) as a half day student once the early education program has been approved by the department.

Section 11:

Includes students in early education programs approved by the department in the definition of an elementary school.

Section 12:

Ensures that early education students who currently receive state or federal funding for early education are not included in the ADM for purposes of funding.

Section 13:

Establishes a comprehensive reading intervention program, designed to increase literacy for children in kindergarten through grade three. The department will be required to establish a system of support for teachers of kindergarten through grade three students, adopt a statewide screening or assessment tool to identify students with reading deficiencies, and provide support to teachers of kindergarten through grade three students through training on the use of the statewide screening or assessment tool and on the science of reading. The department will be required to administer the statewide screening or assessment tool three times each school year, once in the fall, once in the winter, and once in the spring, beginning in 2020. The statewide screening or assessment tool must determine specified skills at each grade level: kindergarten, first grade, and second/third grades.

School districts will be required to offer reading intervention services in addition to core reading instruction to all students in kindergarten through grade three who exhibit a reading deficiency as determined by the statewide screening or assessment. The reading intervention services must be provided by a district reading teacher, include explicit and systematic instruction with proven results based on scientific research, incorporate daily targeted small group reading instruction, and be based on students' needs as determined by regular monitoring of student progress. The reading intervention services must be reviewed based on department-approved response to intervention or multi-tiered system support models.

For each student participating in the reading intervention services, the district must establish an individual reading plan. For all students with an individual reading plan and who also score in the lowest achievement level on the district screening or statewide reading assessment, the district must provide the reading intervention services both during and outside the school term. Outside the school term, the reading intervention services must be staffed with reading teachers and include a minimum of 70 hours of instructional time.

Districts or schools must notify parents in writing if a student exhibits a reading deficiency at any time during the school year. Notification must occur within 15 days of the deficiency being identified. Updates to parents are required every other week after initial notification. The initial notification must state the district or school identified the student as having a reading deficiency and that an improvement plan will be developed, describe the current services the student receives and the proposed additional services the student will need to remedy the deficiency, explain the progress reports that will follow every two weeks, and identify strategies the parent or guardian could use at home to help the student succeed in reading. If the student is in grade three, the notification must

include a request for a meeting with the parent, the student's teacher, and other district staff to discuss appropriate grade level progression. The meeting must take place at least 45 days prior to the end of the school year. If the student's parent does not attend, the student's teacher and school personnel will determine grade level progression for the student.

Establishes that a student in grade three should demonstrate sufficient reading skills to progress to grade four. 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. Good cause exemptions are included, such as having a disability or the student is learning English as a second language. Provides a process for parents or guardians to request an exemption for their student.

Districts must provide intensive reading intervention services to all students who do not progress or receive a good cause exemption. For students who do not progress to grade four who previously experienced delayed grade level progression, an intensive acceleration class must also be provided by the district.

Establishes annual reporting requirements for schools regarding student reading performance in grades K-3.

Section 14:

Directs early education program staff to be included in those organizations required to report evidence of child abuse.

Section 15:

Directs the commissioner of the department to provide an implementation progress report to the board no later than 30 days after the effective date.

Section 16:

Repeals the early education grant program in 11 years once all school districts have had the opportunity to participate.

Section 17:

Establishes an effective date of July 1, 2020, with the exception of section 16.