

- 40 yrs. of National Institute of Health research is found *outside* of the education system.
- Teachers *cannot* teach what they don't know.
- Those *who do know* this research, face huge systematic barriers to applying this research.



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Contact the Coalition to help

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Testimony on The Alaska Reads Act, Senate Education Committee, 23 January 2020

Introduction

My name is Posie Boggs, I'm testifying on behalf of the Alaska Reading Coalition comprised of our leaders: Literate Nation Alaska, the NAACP Anchorage Education Committee, the Alaska Literacy Program, International Dyslexia Association Alaska Branch, Anchorage School District, Decoding Dyslexia Alaska, Juneau Dyslexia, whose parents are so busy seeing to their children's reading needs, that they report it is impossible for them to advocate. Private businesses who are experts in evidence-based reading, who are begging for schools to reduce their wait list of students by providing evidenced reading instruction and intervention. Stephanie Cornwell, of ITV Education & Disability Support Services, Reading Write Alaska, Turning Leaf Literacy Center, the Missing Links, Connections that Work, LLC. Further, we have a network of friends who support our work ranging from parents of preschool students, parents of students with

dyslexia, and even parents of adult children with dyslexia, consulting firms in oil spill prevention plans, engineering, lobbyists and even janitorial businesses.

Thanking the legislature for taking up the Alaska reads act.

We especially Thank Gov. Dunlevy, Commissioner Johnson, and Sen. Begich and their collective staff for taking the risk of strong bipartisan efforts in crafting The Alaska Reads Act. We thank the sponsors of both versions of the bills. We also want to thank Sen. Hughes for her work on previous reading related bills as well as Rep. Gabrielle LeDoux going back to HB 197 when the Alaska Reading Coalition first met you. We also want to thank Representative Drummond and her staff, George Ascot, for getting the HB64 task force bill passed and accomplished. I want to think my team have given me tons of support. I owe a special thank you to Superintendent Spike Jorgeson who reviewed The Blue Print for a Literate Nation by Cinthia Coletti. Spike called two weeks later telling us that the book and the knowledge of evidence-based reading instruction was what was missing from the Moore Case. That it was missing in the knowledge of all the people working on it from the educators to Judge Gleason herself. Spike encouraged me to gather all supporters and to not give up. Thank you Superintendent Jorgeson.

The bipartisan nature of the Alaska Reads Act might feel amazing, new, and risky, however; the bipartisan nature of reading and dyslexia has led to many recent bills across our nation often

passing unanimously or with one or two dissents. We offer strong praise for Alaska in these bipartisan efforts. Working across party lines and across people with deeply held, and often opposites beliefs and experiences on other issues important to our State. The importance of ensuring Alaska children read well is a moral imperative. We cannot have a democratic government without citizens who are strong readers. Foundational documents of this country are written on at least a 12th grade level. People in this room may not have that reading level to comprehend these original documents. Further reading well, is a human right. It is a justice issue. We cannot overstate the fact that being sidelined from learning to read or learning to teach reading to Alaska children is just as egregious as the events that led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Often when adults are in the room, reading instruction, intervention, screening, and assessment stops being about the kids. It becomes about the egos, feelings, and indoctrination of the adults in the room. We can never overstate that this needs to stop immediately.

The adults in our state have a choice. We can do what is comfortable for adults, what we've always done, turn to people we've always turn to, and continue decades of reading failure resulting. It will be caused by years of delay in fully implementing a high quality, well defined Comprehensive Reading Plan. Or we can think of the box, use every tool available, and be exquisite consumers of evidenced-based reading practices.

Turning to the Alaska Reads Act we have specific recommendations and have created a document with alternative language, our rationales, and publications that backup our rationales. We hope that it is loaded up in the documents soon.

First, one of the most important features of this bill is universal preschool, universal reading screening, universal intervention, and the definition of what a high-quality preschool is. First, Scandinavian countries are identifying struggling readers via imaging within months of birth.

Are we going to do that? Of course not. In my personal work I start screening families with risk such as those with dyslexia, at three years old. More importantly University of Connecticut and Boston Children's Hospital connected to Harvard are in their final phases of national standardization of a screening app that identifies students with characteristics of dyslexia at four years of age with about 90% accuracy. The scientists insist on giving this to our nation for free. Why would we identify at risk for reading failure at four-year-olds? Because we know the exact universal interventions to help prevent reading struggles years later. A universal intervention is one that, every child gets for example, don't smoke cigarettes, wear your motorcycle helmet, don't drink and drive. Those are universal interventions and we now know exactly what they should look like in playing with oral language in the preschool years. Sen. Stevens, would you like an example of an age-appropriate oral language universal intervention

for preschoolers? Screening and providing universal interventions can drive the desire for universal preschool as designed in the Alaska Reads Act.

But we have some work to do. We need to root the conflating terminology of two terms:

reading and literacy. Reading is reading. Reading is measurable. Reading is so measurable that

most of the measurement tools are created outside of education in the sciences. Literacy is a

term that allows adults to wiggle away from ensuring our children learn to read. It is not

scientifically measurable. If this is the Alaska Reading Act, then it needs to stay focused on

reading all the way through. Reading is scientifically defined in Federal Statutes 20 U. S. C. &

6368(3)(4)(5)(6)(7). This was well delineated in the testimony at the Alaska Reading and

Dyslexia Task Force and in the resulting report. We submitted a document that maps

checkpoints for the science and compliance delineated in federal statute for a comprehensive

literacy plan. Yes, I know even the federal government uses the word literacy, however; this

section is of the US Federal Education is completely about reading. We recommend going back

to this statute and tightening up the language in the Alaska Reads Act so that it exactly matches

The Essential Components of Reading Instruction (ECORI) and we recommend that language

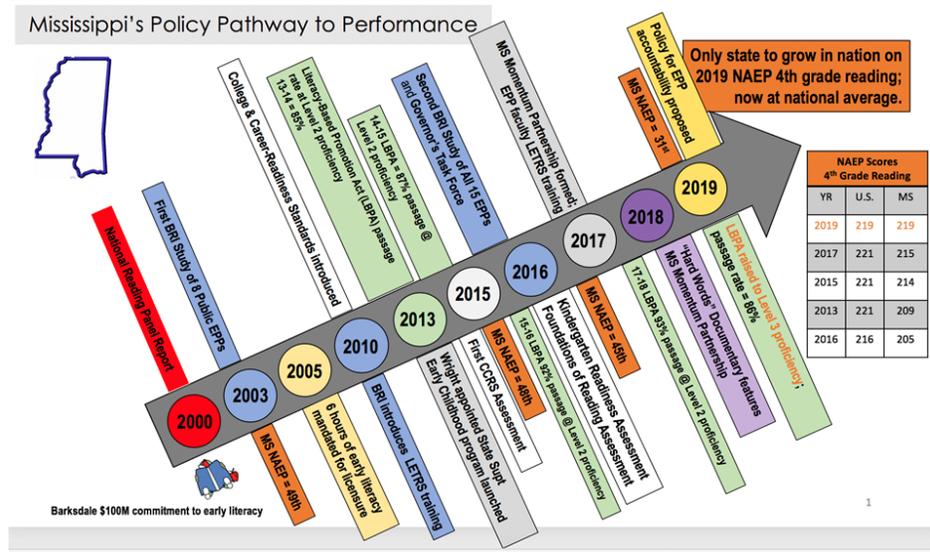
be consistent throughout the Act. If terminology in the rate plan is not specifically mentioned in

the essential components of reading instruction in the federal statutes, the result is the

inefficient teaching of reading. We really want to pay for inefficiency?

If Alaska chooses to follow the intent of The Alaska Reads Act by cleaning up weak language, we will not delay for years the implementation of a Comprehensive Reading Plan.

It appears that the most controversial issue in the Alaska reads act is the language around retention. The Alaska Reading Coalition is not in favor of a hard retention statutes where children, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, nor school boards have any choices. If the language of the bill stays in as a soft retention policy, while we cannot see the logic of it, we will support the rest of the bill. Why do we use the word logic? Therefore. States with retention policies such as Florida, Texas, Mississippi were well into attempting to implement their comprehensive reading plans for at least a decade before finding out that school districts and college professors refused to follow their state' s comprehensive reading plans. In fact, look at this timeline of Mississippi. Do you see the problem? Dr. Angela Rutherford and Dr. Susan Lee presented at the November 2019 International Dyslexia Association Conference, in Portland Oregon. They provided this timeline. Picture an arrow going up with improvements in reading outcomes. The graphic will be submitted to the Committee.



1. 2000 Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI) established (teacher training and statewide studies on teacher preparation)
2. 2003 BRI study revealed gaps in pre-service prep - MS mandated EL1 & EL2 courses for teacher prep
3. 2005 MS mandated 6 hours EL training for licensure
4. 2010 Barksdale introduces LETRS training
5. 2013 - 3rd grade retention & revised in 2016 (KEY: must do something different & it's spelled out, also includes graduated benchmarks) ALSO - Foundations of Reading Test mandated for licensure to be effective 2016

1. Science of Reading (SoR) in-service PD had been available in MS 13 years

2. EL teacher prep mandated 10 years (not properly implemented)
3. EL mandated for licensure 8 years (not properly implemented)
4. Highest quality SoR training for in-service available 3 years

2015 - Study revealed EL1 & EL2 still not being properly taught. Governor's task force

outcomes: explicitly mandated syllabus for EL1 & EL2 + retraining of professors.

What was the push back from school districts when the MS legislature was considering 3rd grade retention in 2013?

If there was any push back it mostly fell on unsympathetic ears. The general sentiment was, if you aren't ready, shame on you, what have you been doing these years?

Regarding retention, this is the issue. We are presenting three statements about retention and we remind you the Alaska Reading Coalition is not a fan.

1. Years of data showing big reading gains in Florida and Mississippi don't indicate that repeating a grade by itself causes reading improvement. Instead, the results show that what improves reading skill is more and better reading instruction in any grade. "

2. There is not *conclusive evidence* for using retention for the purpose of improving reading outcomes. None. States such as Florida, Texas, and Mississippi have had comprehensive reading programs implemented over a decade ago which has resulted in improved reading levels.

3. If the data is not conclusive across states that have had comprehensive reading plans like Florida, Texas, and Mississippi, what is the basis for Alaska to have a retention policy, especially a hard retention policy, when we have never had a comprehensive reading plan with full support for districts and superintendents?

Reading or Literacy?

Alaska needs to do this right and not waste another couple of generations of our children's reading progress. We can turn the state around in five years, if we stop being so afraid of the word *reading*! You either have an Alaska Reads Act that is strong, or you have the Alaska Literacy Act that allows so much wiggle room for avoiding change in reading instruction across the state.

The Alaska reads act must be about the kids in Alaska and not the adults. So, how do you know if you are hearing language that is about the adults in the room. You look for keywords and language such as saying they're making decisions on how something "feels" you are talking about the adults in the room and not the children. If someone is talking about that's not my philosophy, "that's not my science", you are talking about the needs of the adults in the room and not the needs of the children. If you are talking to somebody who tells you about the wonders of whole language and Marie Clay's Reading Recovery you need to know that New

Zealand banned that teaching method because it did not work and was very expensive. If you are being told that phonological and phonemic awareness is not part of oral language development or that direct instruction in these two are not developmentally appropriate, you are talking to someone who is thinking about the adults in the room and not the kids in the room.

If you are talking to someone who says this bill is just pushing drill and kill phonics then that person has not updated their knowledge about reading in a very long time. If a person cannot define phonemic awareness or orthographic mapping in an understandable way, that person needs their knowledge recalibrated. If someone keeps on talking about reading implementations that happened 10 or 20 years ago, that implementation process is out of date. In 2013, implementation science in education was in its infancy. It's no wonder districts would not desire to implement what is being proposed in the Alaska Reads Act is talking about today, if all they are remembering is an implementation from years ago. We simply did not have the knowledge that we have today. I encourage you to go deep into the Moore Case and look for testimony from Superintendent Davis. Look at what he and his district went through to implement the best reading science of the time. It's understandable that school districts and superintendents are gun shy about the Alaska Reads Act when you read what sparse resources Superintendent Davis of the Baring Straights School District had to use to implement with

fidelity only 1/5 of the Essential Components of Reading Instruction. On the other hand, Superintendent Davis made some excellent progress. Just think how many resources he would've saved had the knowledge better supported him we have today and by a strong reading leadership at the Department of Education that potentially could be the result of some of the language in the Alaska Reads Act. Superintendent Davis made reading instruction about the kids in his district. In the Success for Reading program the desires of the adults in the room were set aside so the reading instruction was all about what worked for kids.

I encourage all of us that in this process we banish any words, terminology, phrases that are about the adults in the room and not about the children. That is what matters.

At a very high level this bill has some excellent intentions and some ideas that are indeed spectacular. Some of the wording and ideas in this bill will draw national attention from people who study reading bills and indeed it could well draw international attention, if we do this right.

I would project that in five years of careful, deliberate, funded resources, smartly applied, we will ensure the success that Mississippi should have seen if districts and Colleges of Education had followed their reading plan saving years of delay and money.

Does Alaska have growth? Sure, in small enclaves. However, watch out. Growth from very poor to mediocre is not what we want. Watch out for data that is presented to you. Make sure

someone is checking the Ethical Data Canons from the National Forum on Education Statistics (the Forum) before relying on data presented. The Forum's goal is to improve the collection, reporting, and use of elementary and secondary education statistics.

I want to tell you about the Peter Effect, Peter 3:18. as applied to reading instruction. Please recall that Mississippi had to have their reading professor do. The Peter Effect demonstrates that, you can't teach what you do don't know. You might reach out to our Alaska Reading Coalition member, the Anchorage School District for the rationale for pulling their support for the Leadership Masters to another university. It was because the University of Alaska, Anchorage would not provide what ASD needed and asked for. Over the years various staff at ASD have said the same thing about the preservice teacher preparation many teachers received. I was told UAA refused to adjust what was taught to the teachers even when asked to do so. It is not like we have 52 institutions of higher education as the city of Boston does in Alaska. This means that UAA needs to meet the needs of its state and not the adult's philosophy of reading. That is unacceptable.

If we cave-in to this silliness, we are delaying for 20 years the financial benefits that are gained. For example, in five school districts in Ohio, the hotbed of "whole language literacy instruction" when they targeted reading instruction. After an initial investment for each district

of \$40,000 in evidenced reading instructional training, the cost savings in tier 3 interventions were an average of \$1100 per student.

<https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Special-Education/Students-with-Disabilities/Specific-Learning-Disability/Dyslexia-Pilot-Project/DPP-Year-3-Evaluation-and-Final-Report.pdf.aspx>

Big publishers that make billions of dollars from reading failure.

They simply mash scientifically-based reading instruction and whole language resulting in curriculums that take 300 minutes or more a day from a teacher to deliver that curriculum with fidelity. Big publishers took the easy way out.

Big publishers also make money from reading failure. Big publishers make billions of dollars from reading failure. If they had a product that taught reading well, would they need to sell us so many trainings? Would you need to buy a new curriculum over and over again? You would not. They are making money from the failure of their reading instruction.

I strongly advise that you listen to the full interview that Emily Hanford from American Public Media did with Ken Goodman who is one of the major players bringing this flawed idea of how to teach reading. His idea is teaching millions of kids how to be poor readers instead of excellent readers.

It is with a heavy heart that after all of the work of the members of the HP 64 Reading and Dyslexia Task Force that this bill did not reflect the definitional language of what reading is, how it should be assessed and screened, and how it should be instructed and interventions provided for according to ECORI, however; my team and I look forward to working with the authors of the bill to improve the language so that we can truly have an Alaska Reads Act. This is why.

When we know better, we do better. A veteran special education teacher reached out to me late last year. She said I have this young second-grader who is brilliant yet cannot read his own name. He knows maybe 10 letters their sounds. He has excellent phonemic awareness. This very unusual for a student with dyslexia as only about 15% of students with dyslexia have excellent phonemic awareness. I meet this student and I do my thing. I kind of feel things out. I check them out. I say, "Oh okay, I know what is missing in his ECORI. It's fluent recognition of letters. I'm going to teach you, Ms. Teacher how to do orthographic mapping. In maybe a total of 40 minutes at the most, I showed her what orthographic mapping is and what to do with this young student. She called me about two weeks later and she said excitedly her student knows many more letters and their sounds. He can read his name. Then she called me a week later and she said that this young student ran into the classroom screaming, "I can read. "I can read." I feel bad for him because he's way behind but going from not being able to read the word cat or run or dog to be able to read them is a great start. All I did was just gave her this

tiny bit of missing information. That's all. This boy was so, so happy. This veteran teacher was asking, "Why? Why did I know this before?"

Thank you for allowing me to testify and for all that you do for kids like me.