



Representative Harriet Drummond

Sponsor Statement

CS HB 153: Alaska Reads Act
House Bill 153 Version 31-LS0928\U

Early education is imperative for our state. When examining Alaska's long-term economy and opportunity for all Alaskans, it is essential to consider how we can both increase Alaskans' productivity as well as reduce potential drains resulting from the unrealized potential of our citizens. Early education and the ability to read is an important part of that equation.

The markers for success develop early in life and brain science underscores that how we use our brains at those crucial early years before we enter kindergarten – as well as how prepared we are when we enter our K – 12 education – have a dramatic impact on how well we will do in school and life. Research shows us that those who live in poverty have an incredibly difficult time catching up with others if they come to school ill-prepared. That same research shows that those who have a high-quality preschool experience go on to future academic and personal success. Studies such as the Perry Preschool Project Study and others report that every dollar invested in high quality pre-k can save up to \$7 in long-term government expense by reducing the need for remedial education, and involvement in the criminal justice and public assistance systems.

Alaska's current pre-kindergarten programs – such as those in Anchorage, Mat-Su, The Lower Kuskokwim School District and Nome – and our early education programs including Head Start, Best Beginnings, and Parents as Teachers, provide access to families for such high quality early education, but are, according to our Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), only available to 10% of Alaska's 4 year-olds. The CS for HB 153 would take lessons learned from those programs and provide all school districts with the opportunity to provide high quality early education to their students if they so choose.

The CS for HB 153 also establishes new statewide reading program and intensive reading intervention services for struggling readers starting in kindergarten through grade three. DEED funded reading intervention specialists will support existing school staff, engage and build community understanding in evidence-based

reading and work with local teachers and support staff to improve reading scores and assessments through evidence-based reading instruction.

There is much to be said about early education, but the critical piece is that children's pace of intellectual development potential peaks before age six, making those years especially important for future success. An important partnership between a parent and child begins before the child enters kindergarten, when the parent helps the child develop rich linguistic experiences that help form the foundation for reading and writing, which are the main vehicles for content acquisition. High quality early education prepares students for reading readiness, allowing students to enter kindergarten armed with the knowledge and tools for future academic success.