

DATE: March 3, 2021
TO: The Alaska **Senate Education Committee**
FROM: Santa Claus, North Pole, Alaska
RE: 2021 **Senate Bill 8**

Dear Education Committee Members:

Regarding SB8, I'm writing as a long-term volunteer child advocate and former educator. I am pleased that Senator Begich introduced this Bill and that Senators Kawasaki and Gray-Jackson have co-sponsored it. As an elected official, myself, I appreciate your interest in and support of education.

Although children comprise 25% of Alaska's population, they represent 100% of our state's future. The only collective voice they have in their future and our political arena is presented by organizations, including the Alaska Children's Trust, Thread, and others, who advocate for them and strive to guard their experience, oversee their growth, and improve their future.

SB8 is a comprehensive Bill that addresses early education, eligibility, parent involvement, DOE duties, teacher certification, proactive young reader intervention, and teacher retention.

In particular, those areas include funding for expanded pre-K opportunities for children throughout our state and a reading intervention program for children in kindergarten through third grade.

It is worth noting that investments in early childhood education stimulate substantial tangible returns throughout each child's lifetime; funding increases access to high-quality early education programs and better prepares our youngsters to start school; and, early education support paves the way for students to succeed in school.

In my opinion, approving and funding SB8 would help improve Alaska's extraordinarily poor ranking in education. **U.S. News and World Report** notes that Alaska nationally ranks #47 in pre-K to 12th grade, #36 in higher education, and #44 overall.
(<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/alaska>)

I'm certain Alaska can do better and recognize the responsibility and ability your Committee has to ensure that our children benefit from a better education. Ultimately, that will enable our State to prosper. I urge you to vote YES on SB8!

Thank you for your consideration, **Santa**