

To: Committee Chairs, Members, and all Legislators:

Subject: Testimony in Opposition to SB 08 as it is written now

My name is Rhonda Harvey, I live in Fairbanks, Alaska, and I am the secondary literacy coach for the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. I would like to begin by thanking you for your efforts to address the need for a strong and robust reading and literacy plan for our Alaskan students.

There are many parts of this bill that I do agree with and that match the science of how children learn to read. I appreciate that the bill addresses the Pre-K students and provides for consistent preschool opportunities for all students if it is fully funded. I also appreciate the emphasis on making parents as partners in the literacy of their child.

What I do not agree with in this bill is the focus on retention and documentation (i.e. data on parent involvement, data on student assessments and screening, data in the type of in-service offerings) without providing the real, sustainable teacher professional development in literacy that needs to take place in order to make screening and retention plausible options.

I am a strong advocate for direct, explicit teaching of reading and literacy skills, but without a focus on training and preparing teachers to engage in this work, retaining students is not going to solve the problem. If we retain a child, and that child ends up in the same classroom, going through the same material in an inefficient or ineffective way, then what good was retaining the child? Direct, explicit reading instruction is necessary to help students build and strengthen their literacy skills, no matter what grade they are in or subject they are studying (Moats, "Teaching Reading is Rocket Science", 2021). If the students are retained and put into a class where they do not get that direct instruction, then, once again, what good is retention?

The screening mandates of this bill will put extra strain upon a group of people who are already overworked and under trained. There is not enough time within the school day for teachers to engaged in the time-intensive, specific reading screenings that need to occur, and without the proper training in how to screen students for reading difficulties, the results of these screenings will be inaccurate.

While retention and screening were a part of the Mississippi literacy program discussed during the hearing today, the majority of the success in Mississippi came from the development of teachers, through teacher preparation programs, literacy coaching (on a schoolwide, small group, content area, and individual teacher basis), literacy conference,

and partnering with parents.

The bill is missing a vital piece of the puzzle, a strong teacher professional development program focused on literacy and built with intentionality, allowing teachers to practice what they have learned, receive feedback from a mentor or coach, and reflect on their experiences - just the way we expect our students to learn.

Sincerely,

Rhonda S. Harvey  
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Fairbanks North Star Borough School District