

To the Honorable Senate Education Committee,

I commend you for introducing this bill, focusing on the greater need for pre-school programs to give a boost in reading and learning for early childhood. This is a smart and targeted move.

As a parent, and as a previous reading tutor in our local school district, I would like to weigh in on broadening the solutions. Often, we rush to fix problems in a myopic way, only addressing a problem with one solution. I believe there should be a multi-faceted solution to our lowest reading literacy status.

One of the issues I witnessed both as a parent and as a tutor, was the destructive nature of the Reading Counts program. This program, a competitive reading program designed to incentivise students into reading, didn't help students who were struggling. Only certain books were allowed to be part of the program, and for those who were lagging, I would see them give up.

In one of my sons, he had a hard time starting as a reader. It wasn't until he was introduced to book options he actually enjoyed the content of, that his reading took off. Eventually, because of Reading Counts, he lost interest as certain books weren't allowed to be read, and as he watched his peers accumulate a great number of points, while he lagged.

One of my other sons was a stellar reader (still is), but when Reading Counts kicked in, he lost interest in reading. He went from being a top speed, stellar reader, (reading for enjoyment) to being a person who is still a good reader, but never reads for enjoyment.

My current job has allowed me the privilege of traveling to villages across Alaska, visiting schools. It is these students that are most affected. Also, under-privileged students from urban schools. These students need a spark, a subject that grabs their interest.

My oldest son has Asperger's Syndrome (and was always a precocious reader), and because of his behavior with potty humor when he was young, I initially had "banned" Captain Underpants books from the house. When he was in 4th grade, he dragged home some of them from the school library. That turned out to be a wonderful thing. My son who had been having a hard time starting as a reader, glommed onto those books and finally learned to read. Subject, content, etc., is EVERYTHING.

In closing, I would like to encourage the committee to consider ways that these issues can be incentivised. Maybe more funding for libraries, more funding for reading tutors in villages and underprivileged urban schools, encouraging the curriculum committees both at the state level and borough level, to explore alternative methods, etc. However this can be nurtured that is in your power at the legislative level by casting a broad net.

Thank you for your time,

Elizabeth "Putt" Clark
Fairbanks, AK