

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

EDUCATION

ETHICS

HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

RULES



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SENATOR Tom Begich

Senate Democratic Leader

Alaska Reads Act Sponsor Statement

Senate Bill 8

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The markers for success develop early in life. School preparedness has a dramatic impact on how well one will do academically and throughout life. Rigorous scientific research, like the Perry Preschool Project empirically prove that for every dollar invested in high quality early education up to \$7 in long-term government expense is saved by reducing remedial education, improving high school graduation rates, diverting involvement in criminal justice systems, and eliminating the future need for public assistance.

High quality early education programs are an investment in our future. Students who participate in universal, voluntary early education programs improve their school readiness by preparing to become readers. In reviewing over thousands of published reading studies, the National Reading Panel, which was convened by the U.S. Congress, concluded that learning to read is imperative for future academic success. In light of these unprecedented times and in examining Alaska's long-term economy recovery, it is essential to consider how we increase Alaskan's productivity.

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. SB 8 takes lessons learned from Alaska's most successful programs. SB 8 not only offers a six-year pre-K grant program to school districts develop their locally designed, culturally responsive pre-K curricula, it also establishes a new statewide, evidence-based reading program and provides intensive reading intervention services from kindergarten through grade three for students experiencing reading deficiencies.

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.

Smart investments in our oil and gas royalties and the PFD have made our state one of the most economically equitable in the country. Similar smart investments in early education have the potential to create a generation of Alaskans prepared to make the greatest impact on this state that we have ever seen. Supporting universal, voluntary pre-K and improving reading scores in early education means you are making a significant and strategic investment in Alaska's future.