

Our children must read by 9

By: Jodi Taylor (/authors/jodi-taylor),

Guest commentary

Post date: Wed, 03/27/2019 - 11:16am

Right now, Alaska's public-school children are ranked dead last in the nation in fourth-grade reading proficiency, a key indicator used to measure academic success.

In terms of school years, they are up to a full year behind their counterparts in other states. This means many of our fourth graders cannot read *Charlotte's Web* or *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. While it may seem like such a simple, basic issue, the ability to read is actually the foundation of a child's educational success; the value of reading cannot be stressed enough.

By not guaranteeing that grade-school students become proficient readers, we are failing our children. We must do everything in our power to ensure that every child is able to read well enough so that when they enter middle school and begin learning harder material, they can read to learn.

Through the third grade, students learn to read. As they enter the fourth grade, they read to learn.

If a child does not develop this skill, he or she will also fall behind in social studies and science. Word problems in math will be unsolvable, navigating the rich world of literature impossible, and communicating complex ideas in written and spoken word unthinkable.

Students who cannot read well almost never catch up and their future is in peril. Statistics compiled by groups like ExcelinEd are sobering.

Advertisement

Students who cannot read by the end of the third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. High school dropouts make up 75 percent of food stamp recipients and 90 percent of those on welfare. Nearly 85 percent of teenagers in the juvenile justice system cannot read to learn and seven out of 10 adult prisoners cannot read above a fourth-grade level.

Evidence-based research shows that a strong reading initiative can make a big difference. The Alaska Policy Forum supports a "Read by 9" policy which provides a common sense and proven solution. It starts by making sure kindergartners know the ABCs and the sounds they make.

Strategies, guided by science, focus on developing critical skills through the third grade so students can read with ease, understand the material, and are starting to think critically. We need to implement a system of instruction that places a heavier emphasis on making sure our children leave

third grade with the ability to read. We want each child entering the fourth grade to do so with confidence and with the skills he or she needs to learn.

As a final safeguard, students unable to read proficiently at their grade level may be retained and given an extra year of enhanced instruction so that before promotion to the next grade, they can learn to read well. Because learning to read is so important and catching up so difficult to do, students must be proficient readers before they move on to more difficult materials.

Regardless of where they go to school, every child deserves the opportunity to reach his or her full potential and to fully embrace the American dream. Let's work together: parents, teachers, administrators, and policymakers to ensure that Alaska implements the Read by 9 reading initiative so that all our children can read to learn and love to learn.

Jodi Taylor is an Alaska Policy Forum board member, a life-long Alaskan that attended public school, an entrepreneur at heart, and mother of five children.

Updated: 03/27/2019 - 11:16am

Alaska Journal of Commerce

300 W. 31st Avenue

Anchorage, AK 99503

Phone: 907-257-4200

Outside Anchorage, toll-free: 800-478-4200

Copyright © Binkley Co. All rights reserved.

Contact Us (/contact)