

Dr. Michael Johnson
Commissioner



Department of Education
and Early Development

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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Alaska Science of Reading Symposium to Lay Groundwork for Early Literacy Improvement

Symposium to be held April 29 – May 1 in Anchorage

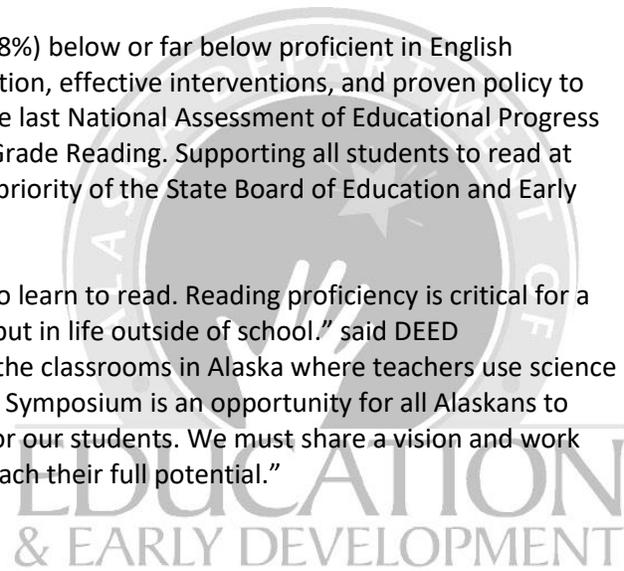
JUNEAU – Later this month parents, educators, policy makers, student advocates, and literacy experts will convene in Anchorage to learn how evidence-based literacy instruction can improve the reading abilities of Alaska’s students. For attendees, the [Alaska Science of Reading Symposium](#) will establish a foundation for understanding and applying the Science of Reading. The Symposium will feature both keynotes from internationally recognized literacy experts and breakout sessions with experts from across the country and Alaska.

The Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) is partnering with the Region 16 Comprehensive Center (R16CC) to offer registration for the Symposium for free. Educators, paraprofessionals, school board members and other policy makers, parents, homeschool leaders, early learning providers, and any other education stakeholders are encouraged to attend. Educators will be able to receive continuing education credits through the University of Alaska Anchorage.

“Reading proficiency is the foundation for learning,” said Governor Mike Dunleavy. “The latest reading scores illustrate that Alaska’s educational system has some work to do, but the good news is that we recognize the challenge and are coming together to help our children who need a little extra assistance with reading. The Alaska Science of Reading Symposium will bring together Alaskan educators and nationally recognized literacy experts on the science behind improving literacy skills and how to best bring that into the classroom.”

In 2019, Alaska had more than 38,000 students (60.8%) below or far below proficient in English Language Arts. Our students deserve quality instruction, effective interventions, and proven policy to support their pathway to reading proficiency. On the last National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Alaska was the lowest scoring state for 4th Grade Reading. Supporting all students to read at grade level by the end of third grade remains a top priority of the State Board of Education and Early Development and the Department.

“Every student in Alaska deserves the opportunity to learn to read. Reading proficiency is critical for a student to be successful not only in the classroom, but in life outside of school.” said DEED Commissioner Dr. Michael Johnson. “We celebrate the classrooms in Alaska where teachers use science of reading strategies. The Alaska Science of Reading Symposium is an opportunity for all Alaskans to commit ourselves to improving reading outcomes for our students. We must share a vision and work together so that our students will be prepared to reach their full potential.”



Alaska Science of Reading Symposium Event Information:

When: April 29 – May 1, 2022

Where: Egan Convention Center, Anchorage

Who: All Education Stakeholders

Cost: Free

Registration: <https://aksorsymposium.org/>

Background

The Science of Reading is an ongoing field of study that examines approximately the last fifty years of research to determine the most effective way to teach reading. A scientific approach to reading instruction includes explicit, systematic, instruction in phonological awareness (sounds), phonics, fluency (ability to read accurately and at an appropriate rate), vocabulary, and comprehension.

DEED supports evidence-based teaching practices. With support from other educational partners, DEED has provided training and resources to equip educators with the knowledge needed to apply these best practices.

In February 2022, DEED and the R16CC published [Alaska's Reading Playbook](#), a practical guide for teaching reading in Alaska's unique educational landscape. The *Playbook* combines decades of nationwide research with examples and resources developed in Alaska to provide clear, step-by-step examples of evidence-based instructional practices. DEED and R16CC consulted with educators who are well-versed in Alaska Native language and culture so that the *Playbook* could tie the rich oral traditions of Alaskan communities with what is known from research about the acquisition of literacy. This Spring, the R16CC has hosted both introductory and in-depth training sessions on the *Playbook*. Physical copies of the *Playbook* will be available at the Alaska Science of Reading Symposium.

In March 2022, 100 Alaskan K-5 educators enrolled in the CORE Online Elementary Reading Academy, a 10-week intensive course on the Science of Reading. This joint learning opportunity was offered by DEED in partnership with NWEA and the Consortium on Reading Excellence in Education (CORE).

This summer, DEED and the R16CC will offer Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training to up to 60 educators and 30 administrators. Carol Tolman, Ed.D., co-author of LETRS, is one of the keynote presenters at the Alaska Science of Reading Symposium.

Also this summer, DEED and Education Northwest will host the Alaska Science of Reading Leadership Academy. The free online course is for school leaders interested in building their capacity to support teachers in the use of evidence-based instructional leadership practices, with a specific focus on Alaska Native communities.

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*The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development provides information, resources, and leadership to support over 130,000 students in 505 public schools across the state of Alaska. The mission of the department is to ensure an “**Excellent Education for Every Student Every Day.**”*

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