

Dr. Michael Johnson
Commissioner



Department of Education
and Early Development

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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DEED Awarded \$20.7M Federal Literacy Development Grant

JUNEAU -- The Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) has received a \$20.7 million five-year federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education to expand the state's efforts to improve literacy skills for all students, Alaska Education Commissioner Dr. Michael Johnson announced today.

"We intentionally applied for this grant to support the implementation of the first goal in the [Alaska's Education Challenge](#) – supporting all students to read at grade level by the end of third grade," said Commissioner Johnson. "There is no question that reading proficiently improves student outcomes and quality of life. I look forward to working with parents and educators to utilize this federal grant on behalf of Alaska's students."

Quoting from an ExcelinEd factsheet, Commissioner Johnson pointed out that, "Students who cannot read by the end of the third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school, and high school dropouts make up 75 percent of citizens receiving food stamps and 90 percent of the Americans on welfare. Nearly 85 percent of teenagers in the juvenile justice system cannot read to learn and seven out of ten adult prisoners cannot read above a fourth grade level."¹ The Commissioner also noted that a focus on reading outcomes is emphasized in the Alaska Legislative Task Force on Reading Proficiency and Dyslexia final report, "The students that do not read proficiently by third grade fall further and further behind. As their peers use reading skills to acquire new skills, these students remain on square one."²

DEED will use the grant funds to develop and implement a comprehensive state literacy program that will include reading coaches, professional development for educators, support for parents and caregivers, and competitive sub grants for school districts to advance literacy skills. More information for districts about the sub grant application process will be available in the coming weeks.

The federal grant provides funding to DEED over five school years, starting with \$4.9M in the current school year (2019-2020). For the following four school years, \$3.9M will be distributed to DEED each year. Details about the grant are available on the [Federal Register](#).

Commissioner Johnson also expressed his thanks to DEED staff, educators, legislators, the Reading Proficiency and Dyslexia Task Force, education partner organizations, the State Board

of Education and Early Development, and Governor Michael J. Dunleavy for their support of a statewide focus on literacy.

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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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- 1 ExcelinEd, K-3 Reading Communications Toolkit, January 2017, <https://www.excelined.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ExcelInEd.K-3ReadingCommunicationsToolkit.Jan2017.pdf>.
- 2 Harriet Drummond, et al. “Alaska Legislative Task Force on Reading Proficiency and Dyslexia: Final Report,” March 29, 2019, <http://akhouse.org/drummond/docs/TaskForce-FinalReport2.pdf>.