

Introduction to the Alaska Reading course

COMMISSIONER ROGER SAMPSON: “Alaska has done a great job on the development and implementation of both content and performance standards, identifying what students should know and be able to do. We have developed assessments to measure students’ progress toward meeting the standards. We are now ready for the next step, and the next step is developing instructional knowledge, strategies and skills that will help students meet those standards.”

THE OBJECTIVE

The goal of the Alaska Reading course is to give every teacher, regardless of grade level or content area, the skills necessary to deliver reading instruction through a systematic approach that results in students who are proficient readers.

THE CHALLENGE

Approximately one-third of Alaska’s students enter high school not reading at their grade level. This inability denies them the knowledge base to succeed in school and it damages their self-esteem. The inability to read at grade level is the main reason students qualify for special education status, and is one of the reasons that students drop out of school.

THE BACKGROUND

The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development and nationally prominent reading experts developed the course over the past two years. It is not a classroom curriculum. Rather, the course will be taken by adults, who will use its principles and methods to teach reading to children or to improve their reading skills. The course is open to members of the public, such as parents who home-school their children, as well as to professional educators.

The course will be taught only by instructors who have been formally trained in the course. Trained instructors will offer the course through entities such as universities, professional-development organizations, and school districts. The course will be offered in person or by videoconference. The course contains about 30 hours of instruction. The fee-based course is worth three college credits. Participants must pass a test to receive credit.

COMPONENTS

The scientifically based course focuses on the five critical elements of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The Alaska Reading course has added word study and comprehension through the writing of text. Research clearly shows that children learn better when teachers use direct, multi-sensory instruction. Research supports the importance of teaching reading as a sequential and structured process.

WHAT TEACHERS WILL LEARN:

Alaska Reading course participants will understand the components of a well-balanced reading program.

1. Alphabetic foundation: phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, and early spelling, which link phonemes to letters within words.
2. Word study: acquiring decoding skills, building a sight vocabulary, reading words by analogy, predicting words, and spelling words.
3. Fluency: reading words and text not only accurately but quickly and with expression.
4. Vocabulary learning: building knowledge of words, their meanings and usages.
5. Language comprehension: listening to text and reading text, and understanding what is heard and read.
6. Improving comprehension through writing: composing meaningful text.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE ALASKA READING COURSE

Suzanne Carreker is a Certified Academic Language Therapist and Director of Program Development at Houston, Texas-based Neuhaus Education Center, which has offered professional development in scientifically based reading methods to over 36,000 teachers since its inception in 1980. Ms. Carreker frequently speaks at regional and national conferences, has authored a number of multisensory curricula, and consults nationally.

Linnea Ehri is a Distinguished Professor at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She is a member of the faculty in Educational Psychology and in Speech and Hearing Sciences. She conducts research on literacy acquisition. She is especially interested in how children learn to read and spell and what causes some children difficulty in becoming good readers and spellers.

Marcia Henry has 44 years of experience in the field of reading and dyslexia, working as a teacher, diagnostician, tutor, and professor. A past president of The International Dyslexia Association and former director of the Center for Educational Research on Dyslexia at San Jose University, Henry speaks frequently at conferences, consults with school districts, and writes for and serves on the editorial boards of several professional journals.

Andrew Pudewa is Director of the Institute for Excellence in Writing. Presenting throughout North America, he addresses issues relating to teaching, writing, thinking, spelling, and music.

Michael Pressley, deceased, was a Professor of Educational Psychology and Teacher Education at Michigan State University. In recent years, he documented the nature of primary-grades classrooms where engagement and achievement are high. His greatest expertise in reading was comprehension instruction. He wrote one of the foremost books on the research basis for balanced literacy instruction, "Reading Instruction That Works."

Betty Sue Crain has published several articles about teaching reading in rural Alaska. Trained and certified as an Academic Language Therapist, Crain used her knowledge of the Orton Gillingham multi-sensory approach to reading while working with students K-

12. Crain developed a procedure to diagnose the particular needs of the Chugach School District population.

Kit Roberts, owner and director of Emerald Speech & Learning Clinic in Anchorage, is the Program Coordinator of, and Professor in, the Speech-Language Pathology Distance Program at the University of Alaska Anchorage. She has worked as a Communication Disorders Specialist and Speech Therapist in public schools and as a Speech-Language Pathologist in private practice.

Kay Stahl has had an extensive career in education with a primary interest in reading comprehension. A former reading specialist and classroom teacher, she is an Assistant Professor at the Steinhardt School of Education at New York University. She researches reading fluency and comprehension.

Judy Norton-Eledge consults with Alaska school districts in professional development and personnel matters. She has developed training modules for the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development. She was a teacher for 13 years, a migrant education supervisor for five years, and a school administrator for eight years.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact Paul Prussing, Acting Director of Teaching & Learning Support at the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, at 907-465-8721 or paul.prussing@alaska.gov.