

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education,

I am writing to voice my support for LD 360.

When children read books or have book read to them, it has been proven to improve their language and brain development as well as their social skills. It also allows for imagination through mental images while listening to stories, vocabulary exposure, comprehension skills and so much more. All of these things listed above are very difficult if children don't have access to books and the Dirigo Reads program has been that for our first grade students and their families for the past few years and we hope that this continues.

Another positive that Dirigo Reads provides to the students of our school is that the reading and access to books has been shown to increase empathy and improve mental health and all of us in education know how much that specific area has been impacted

As a mother to a first grader who is a recipient of Dirigo Reads books this school year and as a teacher who works hard to ensure my students have access to books and helps build their classroom libraries, I will always advocate to the best of my ability for all students, primary-aged students especially, have access to books that will help them succeed and Dirigo Reads helps first graders across this state achieve just that.

Paige Osgood  
Second Grade Teacher and Surry Elementary School liaison for Dirigo Reads  
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Reading to children in early childhood is important because it helps with language development, social skills, and brain development.

Reading to young children is an important way to help them build language skills. It exposes them to new words and ways of using language. It also helps them learn general information about the world, which makes it easier for them to learn about new subjects once they get to school.

Access to books for children is crucial for their overall development, as it significantly impacts their language skills, vocabulary, imagination, critical thinking, and academic success, essentially laying the foundation for a lifelong love of learning and literacy; studies show that children with regular exposure to books tend to perform better in school and have greater opportunities for personal growth compared to those with limited access to reading materials.

Books and reading have also been shown to be wonderful tools for fostering empathy and promoting positive mental health.

There has been a significant rise in mental health issues among primary grade students, with reports showing an increase in anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to concerns about the need for more accessible mental health services in schools.