

Educating Young Alaskans and Promoting Life-Long Learning

“The single largest appropriation ever to pass the House went to education. There were a couple of other helpful bills that benefited education. One allowed school districts to retain a teacher who had already been in the classroom for three months, but were awaiting the results of a fingerprint check. Prior to this, the teacher was required to be removed from the classroom. Another bill dealt with flexible teaching hours, enabling some schools, such as boarding schools, to compress their school year into fewer months and still retain the required contact hours.”

– Representative Carl Gatto, Chairman House Special Committee on Education

“Certainly the \$82 million dollars in education funding was the most substantial piece of legislation the Twenty-third Legislature could do for Alaska students. It was the largest single increase to education in the State's history. We in Senate Finance were happy to work on it early, and that was our intention to work on it early, so school districts could make choices and decisions about keeping staff, keeping programs and continuing everyday life as they exist now. We still have a lot of work to do when it comes to checks and balances. There's always that question in the mind of the public about the efficiency, the priorities and the way funds are being used, so there's that balance certainly on behalf of advocates of education and the people who are in the trenches for it. There's always going to be the need and desire for more. But we still have to balance it out with how it's being used and we do have a responsibility when it's 50 percent of our budget.”

–Senator Lyda Green, Co-Chair, Senate Finance Committee; Vice-Chair, Health Education and Social Services Committee

The Legislature returned to Juneau this winter, poised to make education funding a top priority in our state. Both the House and the Senate recognized that our schools were in need of increased funding, and that the future of this state depends on schools producing well-educated, productive students.

We responded with Senate Bill 283 and House Bill 233. SB 283 provided the largest single appropriation of education dollars in the State's history, increasing K-12 funding by \$82 million, including \$33.9 million for the public employees' and teachers' retirement systems. An accompanying bill, House Bill 233, increased the per student allocation to \$4,576 through a funding formula increase that will give school districts the tools they need to plan ahead, knowing that they can rely on the state to provide those dollars. In all, the Twenty-third Legislature has increased the per student dollar by \$566 since 2003. In addition to the per pupil funding increase, school districts across Alaska received \$5.8 million for the Department of Education's top 11 major maintenance projects.

Additionally, the legislature provided \$15.8 million dollars for the University of Alaska, including \$5.8 million for the public employees' and teachers' retirement systems.

Many teachers were waiting for passage of sufficient education funding in SB 283 to avoid layoffs. The real benefactors of this appropriation are the children and parents who are assured that their schools will continue to retain quality teachers, not only today, but also far into the future.

From increased funds per student, to help for the University system statewide, to ensuring that districts retain quality teachers, to guaranteeing the teachers' retirement system, the Legislature has taken major steps in improving the educational environment for all Alaska's students.

2004 Second Session

HB 233: Increase Education Funding

Increases the base student allocation in the state foundation formula. Will assist state local school districts to meet, or exceed the public's expectations and demands. Adds \$407 dollars per student to the foundation formula, an increase of \$82 million dollars for education.

Sponsor: Rep. Peggy Wilson

HB 252: OCC Licensing: Terms Of Board & Cont. Educ

Modifies the State Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers, and Land Surveyors' existing term limit statute so that serving a partial term of less than two years would not represent a full term on the AELS Board; however, serving a partial term of two or more years would count as a full 4-year term. Provides the AELS Board statutory authority to develop mandatory continuing education programs for the professions it serves.

Establishes a continuing education program and standards for that program.

Sponsor: Rep. Lesil McGuire

HB 282: University Employee Research Contacts

Gives the President of the University of Alaska authority to enter into contracts with employees involved in research and development of intellectual property. These contracts allow both the employee and the University to benefit from businesses associated with that development.

Sponsor: Rep. Hugh Fate

HB 338: Entry Into School

Accomplishes two simple, but necessary, statutory changes that govern the entry age for attendance into public school and the process by which local school districts may allow early entry applicants to be accepted. One, it adjusts the date certain, from August 15th to September 1st, by which a child must have attained the age of five for standard entry in kindergarten. Two, it allows school boards to delegate the authority to admit younger students to their chief school administrator, thus relieving the boards from this minor administrative burden more appropriately left to education professionals. Defines school age.

Sponsor: Rep. Lesil McGuire

HB 405: School Performance Designation/Report

Holds districts and public schools accountable, but does not increase their administrative burden. Although this bill retains the requirement that a school not meeting adequate performance must draft a school improvement plan, the bill removes from statute the detailed descriptions of a school improvement plan.

Sponsor: Rep. Carl Gatto

HB 489: AVTEC Administration

Allows the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to administer and set rates for Alaska Vocational Technical Center's programs and services. This authority was not provided for in the transfer of AVTEC to the department, from the Department of Education.

Sponsor: House Rules Committee by Request Gov. Frank Murkowski

HB 539: University Student Practicum Liability/Wages

Provides the same employment liability for university intern programs that already exist in statute for high schools throughout the state.

Sponsor: Hou. Judiciary Committee

HB 559: STEP Program Continuance

Reauthorizes the State Training and Employment Program (STEP), which was established by the Legislature in 1989.

Sponsor: Hou. Finance Committee

SB 179: Criminal Background Checks/Teachers

Allows teachers to receive a name-based background check, for purposes of a teaching certificate, if their fingerprints are illegible or nonexistent. Gives the Department of Education and Early Development the ability to grant a 60-day extension following the 3-month application period if an applicant's prints are backlogged and not processed in time. Conforms Alaska statute to federal law to avoid jeopardizing Alaska's ability to get federal background checks on anyone in the state.

Sponsor: Senator Gene Therriault

SB 239: Length of School Term

Allows a school district to use a school term different than the 180 days in current law, if approved by the Commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development.

Sponsor: Senator Fred Dyson

SB 283: Appropriation: Education/CBR/Courts/Grants/PCE

Increases funding for public K-12 education by \$82 million, including \$33.9 million for the public employees' and teachers' retirement systems. Increases funding for the University of Alaska by \$15.8 million, including \$5.8 million for the retirement systems. Includes the \$1.6 billion capital budget, using less than \$200 million in State money to maximize more than \$1.4 billion in federal monies. Includes \$5.8 million for the Department of Education's top 11 major maintenance projects, \$1 million for the Yuut Elitnauriviat People's Learning Center in Bethel and \$2 million for further erosion control in Shishmaref.

Sponsor: Senator Lyman Hoffman, Senator Gene Therriault, Senator Lyda Green, Senator Ben Stevens, Senator Kim Elton, Senator Johnny Ellis

SB 289: Extending the Special Ed Service

Extends the Special Education Service Agency (SESA) for another nine years, assisting schools and infant learning programs to serve children with severe disabilities.

Sponsor: Senator Lyda Green

SB 328: National Forest Income Program/DCED Regs

Changes the way the State disburses federal timber receipts to communities within the Tongass National Forest. These monies fund schools, roads and other special projects within the communities of Southeast Alaska.

Sponsor: Senator Bert Stedman

SB 373: Physician Interns & Residents

Extends residency and internship permits issued by the State Medical Board for residents participating in the Washington, Alaska, Montana and Idaho (WAMI) Family Practice Residency program from 18 months to 36 months.

Sponsor: Senate Health, Education & Social Services Committee

SB 393: Take Perm Fund Dividend for University Fees

Gives the University of Alaska the ability to collect outstanding debt by garnishing a person's permanent fund check. Provides the University with one additional avenue to collect revenue that has previously been un-collectable and written off as bad debt. Allows the University to collect an estimated \$400,000 of debt that is over 180 days old. Given the number of Alaska resident students, \$800,000 of the \$1 million owed to the University could be collected from students receiving a PFD.

Sponsor: Senate Finance Committee

SJR 31: Federal Funding for Education

Urges the United States Congress to appropriate just compensation to the State of Alaska for the effect of federal land ownership on the state's ability to fund public education.

Sponsor: Senate Rules Committee by Request Senator Gene Therriault

2003 First Session

HB 154: Under School Age Students

Removes a school district's ability to offer early entry as standard practice to access the foundation formula and provide state funded pre-school programs. Prohibits districts from constructing curriculums that offer two years of kindergarten as a standard program.

Sponsor: Hou. Rules Committee by Request Gov. Frank Murkowski

HB 171: Repeal Charter School Grants

Discontinues the state start-up grants for charter schools.

Sponsor: Hou. Rules Committee by Request Gov. Frank Murkowski

HB 174: Correspondence Study

Eliminates the Alyeska Central School's summer program in summer 2003, and the entire program in summer 2004.

Sponsor: Hou. Rules Committee by Request Gov. Frank Murkowski

HJR 13 : Implement Federal Education Law Of 2001

Requests the U.S. Department of Education consider Alaska's unique challenges when implementing the No Child Left Behind Act.

Sponsor: House Rules Committee by Request Gov. Frank Murkowski

SB 25: Teacher's & Nurses Housing/AHFC Loans

Provides an incentive for trained teachers, counselors, and administrators to enter into the profession and settle in local communities by providing them with no-money-down financing for a home.

Sponsor: Senator Gary Wilken

SB 95: 72-Hour Notice of Teacher Strike

Requires public school employees to provide a school district with written notice of an impending strike at least 72 hours prior to any labor action, thereby protecting students and giving parents adequate time to be notified of a change in the school schedule.

Sponsor: Senator Lyda Green

SB 192: DOLWD Teachers & Training Programs

Grants statutory authority to the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to employ teachers who are members of the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) and would enable current Alaska Vocational Technical Center instructional staff to remain members of the TRS after AVTEC transfers to the Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Allows future AVTEC instructional staff to become TRS members.

Sponsor: Senator Gary Stevens

SB 202: Education Funding & Pupil Transportation

Revises the way local school districts are reimbursed for pupil transportation costs.

Increases the K-12 education funding per student amount to \$4,169, an increase of \$159.

Sponsor: Senate Finance Committee