



Alaska State Legislature
Senator Con Bunde
Senate District P

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - January 26, 2004

CONTACT: Traci Kempert, Senator Majority Press

907-465-3803

***Senator Con Bunde To Give Presentation
on the
High School Graduation Qualifying Exam***

Juneau – Senator Con Bunde (R-Anchorage)

Senator Bunde, in a press availability held today, gave a preview of a presentation he will offer to legislators, legislative staffers, and the public on January 26th regarding the “exit exam.”

Senator Bunde sponsored the original legislation that created the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam, or “exit exam” in 1997, and was one of the legislators most involved when the law was re-written in 2001.

Senator Bunde said that in 1997, he saw too many University of Alaska students having to take basic skills remediation classes and dropping out from discouragement. The University system was spending millions on such programs and some there suggested they should be reimbursed from the K-12 Funding Formula. In addition, employers were angry that they could not find employees with basic reading, writing, and math skills and were spending time and money to train young people right out of high school. Senator Bunde said, “Many business owners told me they’d support no additional state revenue measures for education while so many of our students graduated unable to read at a high school level.”

In 2001, after twenty-three hearings in seven committees, the Legislature delayed the requirement to pass the test for a diploma for three years. Senator Bunde told reporters today, “We made some adjustments to ensure it would be fair for everyone and delayed the test’s effective date until February 2004. After giving everyone three more years, and spending \$65 million just to help schools and students be ready for this exam, I would not support any further delay.”

Showing information provided by the Department of Education and Early Development, Bunde continued, “*At least 76%* of seniors statewide have already passed the HSGQE. They have another opportunity February 17th through the 19th to pass before graduation, and unlimited opportunities after that.

Bunde also pointed out that many of those who have not passed yet *also* do not have enough credits to graduate. While there will likely be some students who don’t get a diploma this spring, in many cases it will be because they did not fulfill their local district requirements.

Additionally, a number of students will not have to pass the test in order to receive a diploma, such as severely disabled students who have never been on the regular diploma track, and students of military families who have arrived in the state during their senior year.

Senator Bunde also noted that four districts have a 100% passing rate for this year’s seniors already – Pelican, St. Mary’s, Yakutat, and Yupiit School Districts. Passing rates in Alaska’s urban districts are at least: Anchorage, 76%, Fairbanks, 85%, Kenai, 85%, and Juneau, 80%.

Senator Bunde closed his portion of the press availability with four points:

- Alaska needs a high stakes exit exam.
- The exam is fair, valid, and reliable.
- The HSGQE has fostered real change in our schools.
- If we remove high stakes, it’s very likely much of that change will erode.