

Westside Pulse

October, 2001

By Senator Ben Stevens

Providing our children a valuable education is one of the most important issues facing us today-for parents, educators and for the Alaska State Legislature.

During the last session, legislators showed their support for education in a number of ways. Education funding was increased at all levels, from pre-school programs to the University of Alaska, and incentives were created for new and veteran educators to help fill the teacher shortage.

Legislators also made changes to the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam in response to concerns expressed by many Alaskans. Beginning with the graduating classes of 2002 and 2003, students will take the exam and receive an endorsement in reading, writing, or math if they pass these portions of the exam. The endorsements will be on the student's diploma and transcript. A student in the graduating class of 2004 and beyond must pass all sections of the exam in order to qualify for a diploma. There are exceptions to this for students with disabilities and local school boards may grant a student waiver. A transfer student who has passed another state's graduation qualifying exam will not be required to pass Alaska's exam in order to graduate.

I encourage you to visit the Department of Education and Early Development web site at <http://www.eed.state.ak.us>, to find out more information regarding student testing and the graduation exam. The web site is a valuable tool and includes a practice test that you can use to help your children prepare for the competency exam.

I believe that as parents, we have an obligation to be involved in our children's education and there are many ways to do this. *Parade* magazine printed an article in August titled "Thank A Teacher" that listed five ways people can be involved with public education:

- See your child's teacher as a partner. (Parents and teachers should work together in the best interest of the child.)
- Work to achieve good teacher-parent communication.
- Show an interest in your child's education. (Go to the school play or the class party.)
- Volunteer, whether or not you have children. (Spend an hour a week reading with a child.)
- Ask a teacher, "What I can do to help?"

You can also become involved with your local Parent Teacher Association. The PTA is an excellent organization for parents, educators, students, and other community members to work together to benefit our schools and children. You can contact the Alaska PTA at 279-9345 or access their website at <http://www.akpta.org>.

Whether your children are entering kindergarten or preparing for the High School Qualifying Exams, parental involvement is essential for student achievement and success. Alaska's future is dependent upon our children and we will all benefit by helping to provide them with a positive and productive learning experience.