

Parental Involvement Improves Education

By Senator Loren Leman

Charter schools, correspondence programs, private schools and traditional home schooling have grown since I first came to the Legislature in 1989 and are now the choice of many Alaskans.

The education delivery system of choice for nearly 90 percent of Alaska students remains the site-based public school—and many students are thriving in this environment as well. Successful students in alternative and site-based schools have one important element in common: committed, involved parents who are personally invested in their achievement.

When parents set education as a priority, children see its importance firsthand and take it more seriously. I have seen this in practice with my own children.

This is why I opposed the proposed regulations that the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) issued in December. These regulations, if imposed, would severely tie the hands of parents using State-supported distance learning programs to teach their children at home.

Correspondence and home school study programs provide an opportunity for quality education at a lower cost; better yet they allow parents to be directly involved in the education of their children.

The proposed DEED regulations would restrict these successful and innovative programs by forbidding parents to use *privately* purchased religious materials in their curriculum. That's right, DEED proposed to limit how personally-owned books could be used in home schooling. The Department also set new, restrictive rules for a number of home school activities, such as assigning grades and reviewing progress.

Accountability is important in any approach to education, including statewide correspondence study programs. By law, the children participating in these programs must take the statewide assessments.

DEED's proposed regulations would force correspondence programs to divert funds to additional unneeded bureaucracy – as originally written, the regulations would have severely hampered the success of statewide correspondence study programs.

Many home school parents expressed concerns regarding the proposed regulations. If enacted, thousands of students across our state would be negatively affected. I shared these concerns with Commissioner Shirley Holloway and worked with Senator Lyda Green to draft [Senate Bill 346](#). This legislation, and its companion, [House Bill 464](#) by Representative Jeannette James and Representative Fred Dyson, would eliminate the problem areas in the regulations.

In late March the Department announced it would delay enactment of the proposed regulations and incorporate many of the suggestions that friends of home schooling made in a revised

proposal. At the State Board of Education meetings in early April the Board voted to submit the new regulations for public comment. The amended regulations will be available on the DEED website at www.eed.state.ak.us/regs/. My colleagues and I will continue to monitor the Department to ensure that parents have the flexibility necessary to teach their children.

I commend the DEED for listening. The involvement of the Legislature, Department of Education and Early Development and parents from all over Alaska in the discussion of school regulations is a good example of the public process at work.

The late Francis Keppel (1916-1990), educator and U.S. Commissioner of Education once said, "Education is too important to be left solely to the educators." I concur. Students, parents and educators must be active participants. Nothing the State can do will take the place of parents investing time in their children's future. Get to know your child's teacher and school environment. Show your children that their education is as important to you as it is to their future.

Loren Leman is Senate Majority Leader in the Alaska Legislature. The father of three children, he represents Senate District G, which includes Northwest Anchorage and Elmendorf Air Force Base.