

# Alaska State Legislature



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## Representative Con Bunde District 18

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### **Competency Test Drives Achievement in Galena** **Small District Meeting the Challenge of New State Standards**

(JUNEAU) – One small Alaska school district is successfully meeting the challenge of the approaching state high school competency test by expecting better performance from teachers and students – and getting it.

Jim Foster, assistant superintendent of the Galena City School District, told the House Special Committee on Education today that his district used the 1997 competency test law as an opportunity to revise its curriculum, teaching and attendance policies to meet new higher state educational standards.

“This is certainly one case where a small district has received a challenge and has risen to the challenge, and is, I think, an excellent role model for other districts in Alaska,” said Rep. Con Bunde (R-Anchorage). “I was very pleased to note that they took the state seriously in 1997 when we said we would have competency tests and ask for accountability.”

Bunde sponsored the 1997 law requiring students to pass tests of competency in reading, writing and math to receive a diploma, not just a certificate of attendance. The test is scheduled to apply to students due to graduate in spring of 2002, but some high failure rates in practice tests have prompted calls to delay the test for four years or more.

Foster told the committee that Galena, a Yukon River community of about 600 residents, operates city schools, runs a boarding school, offers a home-school curriculum, and operates an innovative distance delivery program, Interior Distance Education Alaska (IDEA). The prospect of the tests prompted the district to spend an intense year realigning its curriculum, increasing teacher training and developing a strict attendance policy. Most of the district’s students are now meeting or exceeding state standards, and Foster expressed confidence that most students, in the city schools at least, will pass all three competency tests before graduation.

“I think we heard very clearly from Galena that if there is to be a delay in the high school competency test you have to have a very clear plan what you’re going to do with that delay, but delay for delay’s sake would be a disservice to students and to schools,” Bunde said. The education committee plans continued hearings on the competency tests in coming weeks.

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