

Helping Our Students

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By Senator Ben Stevens

It's that time of the year again when school has begun and the streets are busy with buses and children. As a parent, it's a real joy sending my young children off to school, wishing them well, and then afterwards, listening to their stories about teachers, friends and other happenings at school. As a legislator, it inspires me to spread the message about the importance of parental involvement in our children's education. Our involvement and support is the best way we can ensure their successes, both in school and in life.

The National Parent Teacher Association, www.pta.org, has a great website with a wealth of information for parents. The "parental involvement" link provides excellent suggestions and tips for parents on what can be done to help children succeed and how parents can make a difference in their children's lives. The website also has a "parent talk" link that provides good information on improving communication between parents and children. Children are faced with more serious issues at earlier ages than when we were in school, so it is very important that we talk to our children.

For local information, the Anchorage School District is on line at www.asdk12.org. This website provides information on all of the schools in the district, important dates and meetings, updates on school construction, and district news headlines. For those parents who want to become more involved, the Anchorage School District makes the following suggestions: Volunteer to work in your child's classroom or school. Join your school's PTA, PTSA, advisory group or booster club and participate in its events. Ask the principal where he or she needs extra help. To find more information about your local PTA, contact the Anchorage Council of PTAs at 742-4206.

There has been a lot of news lately about the performance of Alaska's public schools under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that passed Congress in January of 2002. NCLB requires schools to meet 31 adequate yearly progress targets within groups of students or otherwise be designated as needing improvement. The State Department of Education recently released a list of 283 schools that did not meet all of the targets out of a total of 488. The targets are very rigorous, but will allow educators to pinpoint the problem areas in our schools and among students. To answer your questions about NCLB, there is a website at www.eed.state.ak.us/nclb/, which allows access to the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and benchmark tests results of every school.

Our schools will need to be making the necessary adjustments to meet these targets in the future, so now would be a good time to offer support to our teachers. If Internet access is not available for the above websites, contact the Anchorage School District or your legislator's office.