



# Alaska State Legislature House and Senate Democrats

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## *Senator Guess Tries Again with an Improved High Stakes Exam*

JUNEAU – In an effort to ensure the legislature has every opportunity to implement the High School Qualifying Exam (HSQE) wisely, Senator Gretchen Guess (D-Anchorage) introduced a sponsor substitute for Senate Bill 248. The revision of Senator Guess' legislation keeps the "high-stakes" exam but minimizes the possibility of mistakenly failing students who know the material. Differential diploma concepts remain well covered in Representative Peggy Wilson's House Bill 457.

"This is the year we implement the High School Qualifying Exam," said Senator Guess. "Let's do it right, and that means considering students with learning disabilities."

Concerned about students who have diagnosed or undiagnosed learning disabilities, Senator Guess reintroduced her bill to provide a second rigorous method for students to show they know the material on the exam.

"Some students, mainly those with learning disabilities, have trouble showing their expertise on multiple choice exams," said Sen. Guess. "This new approach provides them with a more rigorous requirement but one where they can show their stuff."

The purpose of the new SB 248 is two-fold: to ensure we have a high stakes exam minimizing these "false negatives" and to clarify the legislative intent regarding severe cognitively disabled students. The portfolio system in this bill mimics a similar system in the state of Indiana, which has been very successful in ensuring an alternative means by which students can demonstrate proficiency.

The legislative intent clarified in the bill allows students with severe cognitive disabilities (e.g., down syndrome students) to be granted waivers from the HSQE, with the school district deciding their graduation requirements instead.

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## ***Putting Alaskans First • Moving Alaska Forward 2004***

Sen. Bettye Davis, Sen. Johnny Ellis, Sen. Kim Elton, Sen. Lyman Hoffman, Sen. Hollis French, Sen. Gretchen Guess, Sen. Georgianna Lincoln, Sen. Donny Olson, Rep. Ethan Berkowitz, Rep. Sharon Cissna, Rep. Harry Crawford, Rep. Eric Croft, Rep. Les Gara, Rep. Max Gruenberg, Rep. David Guttenberg, Rep. Reggie Joule, Rep. Mary Kapsner, Rep. Beth Kerttula, Rep. Albert Kookesh, Rep. Carl Moses

This legislation puts in place two methods for students to demonstrate they know the material set forth in the HSQE. Before becoming eligible to earn a high school diploma, a student may either pass the qualifying exam or, as this bill now provides, they may demonstrate they know the material through a portfolio process in their senior year.

The rigorous requirements of the portfolio process are designed to demonstrate that the student has mastered the material covered in the HSQE. Students must provide a portfolio demonstrating the following.

1. A 95 percent attendance rate
2. A 2.0 GPA
3. Letter(s) from the student's teacher(s) in the area(s) failed stating the student knows the material required by the exam
4. Supporting documentation of the student's competency in the area(s) failed
5. Proof the student is on track to meet state and district requirements for graduation
6. Proof the student has completed available remediation in the area(s) failed

The portfolio must be reviewed and approved, in sequence, by the student's school principal, superintendent, and a state panel of three members, all of whom must certify the student has mastered the material required on the HSQE before final approval.

"The portfolio process is certainly the more difficult option for demonstrating proficiency," concluded Sen. Guess, "but it provides an alternative method to ensure that students who are deemed eligible for a diploma can read, write, and compute."

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