



# Alaska State Legislature House and Senate Democrats

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## *Democrats Make Education the Big Winner in FY05 Budget* *23<sup>rd</sup> Legislature agrees to largest classroom funding increase ever*

JUNEAU – Bipartisan end-of-session negotiations between House and Senate leadership of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Alaska Legislature on the Fiscal Year 2005 budget tonight produced the largest increase in K-12 public education and University funding the state has ever seen.

The K-12 education funding formula receives an \$82 million boost, plus \$1.4 million in transitional funding for the “eroding floor,” a deal that should prevent layoffs and fill holes in the teacher retirement system. The University of Alaska sees an increase of \$15.8 million. The FY05 budget also commits \$8 million for major maintenance and construction.

“This is a major achievement for public school students statewide,” said Senator Bettye Davis (D-Anchorage). “I’ve made it my life’s work to look out for our children. Tonight I can say we’ve made a difference.”

House and Senate Democrats said tonight they joined with Alaska parents, teachers, and administrators across the state in finding the best deal for education.

“Education is our top priority, and that is reflected in our package,” said Senator Donny Olson (D-Nome). “Added up, this deal represents a bit over \$90 million in new money for K-12 education.”

Alaska schools this year face what some districts say are the worst budget cuts ever. Inflation and higher overhead costs, combined with under-funded government mandates, have proven to be a recipe for devastation in schools statewide.

“I stand here proud to report the legislature took a bold step this year with public education funding,” said Senator Hollis French (D-Anchorage). “For years the Democratic legislators called for adequate funding for education, and this year our colleagues from both sides of the aisle heard the call.”

Democratic legislators said there is still a long way to go. Inflation proofing the education funding formula, directing adequate resources to comply with No Child Left Behind, and recalibrating the high school exit exam to accommodate those with learning disabilities remain priorities for Democrats.

“We still have work to do,” said Representative David Guttenberg (D-Fairbanks). “We hope the Governor will sign this quickly so districts know the money is coming.”

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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