



Alaska State Legislature House & Senate Democrats

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE • January 23, 2001

CONTACT: Julia O'Malley • (907) 465-3842, Fax: 465-5125

Toll-free: (888) 465-4919, Julia_OMalley@legis.state.ak.us

Actualities: (907) 465-5001

by Senator Georgianna Lincoln
Alaska State Legislature

The High School Graduation Exit Exam aims to ensure that Alaskans receive a basic quality education; however, recent testing shows that 25% of our students failed the reading test, 52% failed the writing test, and 67% failed the math test. With a mandate for all high school seniors to pass the exit exam by 2002, Alaska could be facing the largest dropout rate in our educational history. Alarming, students living outside of urban Alaska have already failed the first round of exams at a disproportionate rate. Many rural students face an uphill challenge, studying in deteriorating schools that inhibit learning. Worrying about keeping warm and dry usually takes precedence over knowing the Pythagorean theorem. Another problem hitting rural Alaska is attracting and retaining qualified teachers.

I believe that many students will be too embarrassed or too frustrated to pursue multiple retakes of the exam. Alaska will be confronted by an uneducated, young population with limited skills and opportunities. Alaska can't afford to have more of our youth drop out. If many of Alaska's students become high-school dropouts, who should shoulder the burden for their failures? Is the exam too hard? Are our teachers sufficiently trained in teaching our children the necessary skills required? Currently, overcrowding exists in our schools. The legislature has yet to alleviate the overcrowding by funding schools with \$155 million for deferred maintenance or \$544 million replacement costs of unsafe schools. While parents expect their children to receive a quality education, your legislators should be accountable for providing adequate resources. Kicking our kids out of school by prematurely forcing an exit exam in 2002 will not produce successful children. The exit exam must be delayed at least until 2006 to allow school districts and the state to continue testing while exploring ways to improve our educational system. New curricula and strategies are necessary to ensure passing opportunities for all Alaskan students.

Preliminary results of the exit exam show that we are heading for a train wreck with all of our children aboard. To avoid a catastrophe, while providing a quality education for all of our children, the Legislature must delay implementation of the exit exam. I was always taught, "Our children are our most important resources." Let's show our children by giving them a fighting chance.

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