

Alaska State Legislature

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Senator Bettye Davis

SB 102 "An Act relating to compulsory school attendance; relating to the crime of contributing to the delinquency of a minor; and relating to school disciplinary action and truancy."

Sponsor Statement

SB 102 increases the Alaska compulsory school attendance age from 7-16 to 7-18. At the same time it necessarily amends the crime of contributing to the delinquency of a minor from the maximum age 16 to 18. This bill will not preclude parents from homeschooling children, or using charter or alternative schools, or any other of the twelve enumerated exceptions to compulsory education under AS14.30.010(b), including completion of grade 12 or graduation from a secondary school before age 18.

3283 Alaska students dropped out and 62.4% graduated in the 2007-2008 school year per the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). Nationally, the graduation rate is 70% or higher. The highest dropout rates in Alaska are among minorities with Alaska Natives at double the rate of others. These numbers have not changed much in many years and Alaska's compulsory school attendance age has not changed in decades.

17 states have increased the compulsory school attendance age to 18. 9 states maintain age 17, and 23 states maintain age 16, per the US Department of Labor February 10, 2009. The legislative intent by states which have increased compulsory school attendance age to 18 is to encourage more students to stay in school long enough to graduate, attend institutions of higher education, and decrease dropout rates, juvenile crime, and teen pregnancy. Studies have shown that students without a diploma earn less than 75% of those with a diploma; they are more likely to live in poverty, go to jail, and have health problems.

National Education Association's "12-Point Action Plan for Reducing the School Dropout Rate" lists as a first priority to *"mandate high school graduation or equivalency as compulsory for everyone below the age of 21."* It reports:

"Just as we established compulsory attendance to the age of 16 or 17 in the beginning of the 20th century, it is appropriate and critical to eradicate the idea of 'dropping out' before achieving a diploma. To compete in the 21st century, all of our citizens, at minimum, need a high school education."

Increasing compulsory school attendance age is the first step in reducing dropouts and increasing graduation rates. The NEA also recommended high school graduation centers for students 19-21; individual attention in smaller learning communities; expanding graduation options in partnership with community colleges in career and technical fields and with alternative schools to provide other ways to earn a high school diploma; increasing workforce readiness programs; acting early to provide high-quality universal preschool and full-day kindergarten; involving families in students' learning at school and home; monitoring academic progress during the school year to prevent falling behind; involving the entire community in dropout prevention; providing educators with the training and resources to prevent dropouts; and asking Congress to invest \$10 billion over 10 years to support dropout prevention programs and states which make high school graduation compulsory.

Remedial programs, work-study programs, alternative schools, and parental support to age 18 have proven effective in other states. Opponents to increasing compulsory school age who are concerned about forcing students to be in the classroom against their will argue that these students may become disruptive and require more time and expense on behavior and truancy problems. For those students who want to work or are not as academically inclined, school districts are encouraged to continue accredited alternative schools and work-study programs to help students earn credits toward a diploma while they often work at the same time. Students will want to come to school, stay in school, and graduate, if academic problems are identified early and they helped long before they dropout. Coupled with early efforts to retain, train, and graduate, SB 102 can bring hope and success to thousands of Alaskan students who otherwise might not stay in school and graduate