



REPRESENTATIVE CATHY MUNOZ

**SPONSOR STATEMENT
HB33**

Alaska currently faces one of the highest declining graduation rates in the country. According to recent statistics from the Alaska Commission on Post Secondary Education, thirty-eight percent of students in the ninth grade will not have a diploma in ten years. Alaska Department of Labor estimates that four-thousand Alaskans ages 16-19 are unemployed and not in school; and 57,000 Alaskans across Alaska do not have a diploma. Alaska's drop-out rate is double the national average based on statistics from the U.S. Department of Education.

HB33 changes the compulsory school attendance age so that a student is compelled to stay in school until the age of eighteen. Current law requires compulsory school attendance from the age of seven to sixteen. All exemptions from compulsory attendance currently in Alaska statute, including homeschoolers, would remain exempt from this change. This bill will not affect any current statute that allows for early graduation, and relieves the requirement of compulsory attendance to the age of eighteen if those requirements are met.

Students at risk should not have the option of leaving school at a critical age when judgment and maturation development is most critical to their personal success. It has been established through extensive research that the more education a person receives, the more earning potential one gains. As the drop out rate of Alaskan students increase, so does the direct and indirect cost to the State of Alaska. Unemployment, criminal behavior, and dependence on the State's social services are examples of this increased cost.

HB33 is designed to improve Alaska's public education system. The intent of this legislation is to be one of several important first steps toward a long term solution. The young people of Alaska deserve our very best effort. Elevating the age of compulsory attendance in our education system will become an important new commitment we can make on behalf of all of our young citizens at a crucial time in their education and lives.