

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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REPRESENTATIVE DAN SADDLER

SPONSOR STATEMENT

House Bill 318

“An Act relating to public school reports of students whose parents are members of the active duty military service.”

Military families in Alaska face special challenges. Many must move every three or four years. One or more parents may deploy for up to a year or more on overseas duty. Students must transfer into and out of school districts from different states – maybe even different nations. Students must adjust to different graduation criteria. And they face the social dislocations and the necessity of making new friends. All this can make it a challenge for students to make normal progress toward graduation.

While the impacts of these stresses on a child’s educational progress may be clear to the parents of these students, they are hidden from our local school districts, the state, and the federal government.

HB 318 seeks to capture information on the academic performance statistics of students of active-duty military families. HB 318 requires local school districts to gather information on the number, attendance and performance of students enrolled in the school whose parents or guardians are on active duty in the armed forces of the United States, the United States Coast Guard, the Alaska National Guard, the Alaska Naval Militia, or the Alaska State Defense Force.

The reports of this information will provide both the local school districts, and the state Department of Education and Early Development, with information on which schools are best meeting the challenges of working with military students. Further, the reports required under HB 318 will also provide the Department of Defense with information it needs to develop policies and procedures – and to identify and provide necessary resources -- to help military families achieve better educational outcomes.

Currently the U.S. Department of Education Impact Aid Program collects data on military-connected students by school district. However, this data does not include the academic performance of the students or the specific schools they attend. By providing the Department of Defense with this specific performance and attendance data, the Department will be better able to develop policy and procedures to better prioritize funding needs and ensure our military members’ families receive the utmost support.

Alaska is home to over 23,400 active duty military members and 35,200 active duty dependents; over 3,924 National Guard and Reserve; and 1,850 active duty Coast Guard and 2,564 dependents – making up a large percentage of the student population in Alaska.

There is no reliable data on military children and the impacts of the challenges of military life. By collecting and tracking data, educators and school districts could more effectively prepare transitioning students. Parents will have more information about the educational choices for their child. Federal, state and local entities will have the information they need to provide or adjust resources where it is most needed.

Many organizations connected with military students support and endorse identifying and tracking the performance of these students, and are working to identify successful practices that can be replicated. The data will help achieve educational continuity and minimize disruptions for those children that experience frequent school moves and deployments.