

Alaska State Legislature

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Senator Shelley Hughes

Senate Majority Leader

Senate District F—Greater Palmer, Chugiak, Peters Creek, Eklutna, Fairview Loop, Gateway, Butte, Lazy Mountain

Senate Bill 42— Reading, Virtual and Early Education
Reading by Nine • Virtual Education Consortium • Teacher Exam • Early Education
Sponsor Statement

Guided by the principle that every Alaskan student matters, SB 42 takes steps toward positive transformation of our education system in Alaska to better meet the needs of our students in the 21st century. Alaska has had a large achievement gap for too many years, resulting in some of the lowest reading scores, graduation rates, and testing results in the nation, putting our students in a poor position on a global basis. We can do better; it is our obligation to do better and for the sake of our youth, we must do better. The goal of this bill is to improve our schools and increase academic outcomes for students by providing tools and incentives to districts and the department to improve classroom instruction and reduce administrative costs.

First, this legislation will require district focus and accountability on K-3 reading instruction to ensure children are fluent readers by 4th grade in order to increase their success and achievement in all subject areas in the remaining grades and beyond. The bill requires districts to employ proven and effective literacy teaching methods and provide intensive reading intervention in partnership with parents. The goal is that students will master the objectives at each grade level prior to promotion to the next grade.

SB 42 will also create the Alaska Virtual Education Consortium to allow districts to offer high quality virtual education courses through an online database to students in other districts for a fee. The consortium will also conduct teacher training, including specific instruction for conducting creative and engaging online delivery. Students will gain access to great teachers statewide and to a wider variety of course offerings as districts choose to participate.

SB 42 will require the State School Board to periodically adjust the minimum score needed to pass the Praxis exam so that Alaska has the highest testing standards for teacher certification among the 50 states. SB 42 will also work to provide recognition to the best of our teachers through greater acknowledgement of National Board-Certified teachers and staff.

This bill provides districts an opportunity to increase the carry-forward limit of their unreserved fund balance from 10% to 25%, not including savings resulting from a cooperative arrangement grant.

The department will provide a report each year to the legislature regarding academic progress of schools and districts. SB 42 requires the department to provide this report to the school districts and to the public.

It is all about our students! For the sake of the youth of Alaska and the future of our great state, please support SB 42.

Please contact my Committee Staff, Dawson Mann, at 465-1173 with any questions or concerns.