

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA

Sponsor Statement

House Bill 339:

Public school funding is roughly \$25 million less than it was in 2015, according to Alaska's non-partisan Legislative Finance Division. If you consider the effects of inflation, the loss is even greater – more than \$90 million.

In Anchorage, 394 teachers and support staff have been cut in the last five years, largely due to funding shortages. Ninety-one additional staff could be eliminated in FY19. The Fairbanks School District faces a shortfall next year of \$8.3 million, endangering up to 50 full-time positions. In Juneau, the district has cut 92 full-time positions since 2011, and more are on the chopping block. All of these cuts impact student opportunity and achievement. A student can't do the 6th grade over again later, when school funding eventually gets fixed.

This bill would mitigate this funding crisis by increasing the Base Student Allocation (BSA) by a modest \$100. It would generate roughly \$25 million for districts statewide, roughly equal to the amount lost since 2015.

School funding cuts increase classroom sizes, reduce course offerings, undermine support for teachers and students, and demoralize the entire education community. We must not shortchange our youth and deprive them of opportunities they need to succeed.

Educators, students and parents from across the state support this modest but critical BSA increase.