

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



SENATOR JOE THOMAS

## Senate Bill 170

### **"An Act requiring vocational education counseling in public schools."**

One of the major functions of public education is to prepare our future workforce. During their school years young people make critical decisions which will ultimately affect their choice of a career later in life. Some young people have a clear idea of what they want to be doing after graduation, but many do not.

The adolescent years in particular are filled with many changes, making it a one of the critical phases of a person's life. If childhood is like traveling down a busy street, seventh grade is the junction. Recent research has specifically targeted the early adolescent years as a crucial point in development. It is a perfect time to introduce realistic career options.

Senate Bill 170 recognizes this junction in a young person's life, and provides for career counseling for every student in seventh, ninth and eleventh grades. Many schools are already offering this for all secondary students, but it should be available to every student in our state. The Department of Education and Early Development already has resources that can be directed toward this important task.

This bill would not prevent schools or districts from providing a more comprehensive program. It sets the minimum standards for career counseling, starting at seventh grade and continuing in ninth and eleventh grades. Seventh grade is when students start making important life choices. Studies show this is when students either start taking school more seriously or start their academic decline. If they want to pursue a specific career, this is the time they need to start thinking about what they need to do to be successful in that occupation.

Ninth grade is the beginning of high school, when they are choosing courses which will affect their readiness for the workforce. The coursework they choose at this time will probably determine whether they are college bound or whether they would need to take in-depth career tech courses.

In eleventh grade they are starting to look ahead to high school graduation, and what will come after commencement. They are putting the finishing touches on their secondary education, and need to know which courses to take to make sure they are prepared for life after high school.

It is vital that we give our children the tools they need to prepare for their future, and to become a productive part of our workforce. SB 170 provides this for our students.