ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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SENATOR BERTA GARDNER
SENATE DISTRICT H

Sponsor Statement SB 147

An Act increasing and providing an inflation adjustment to the base student allocation used in the formula for state funding of public education; and providing for an effective date

Funding to schools for staff, course enhancement, and increased achievement has been flat for the past four years. Governor Parnell proposes funding that lags behind inflation in the fiscal year 2015 operating budget. As a result, education funding has fallen roughly 7% behind inflation since fiscal year 2011. Flat funding is the reason Anchorage has lost classroom support positions in past years, and will lay off 200 counselors, support staff and teachers next year. It's the reason class sizes will increase again in Juneau, and why staff and teachers have been cut in the Kenai, the Northwest Arctic Borough School District, and other areas.

The legislature passed legislation roughly five years ago that helps fund the shortfall in the teacher's retirement fund. However, none of that money can be used to hire teachers, staff, or improve curriculum. So, while "spending" has gone up, the funds schools are allowed to use for children in the classroom, and for staff, has fallen in real dollars by roughly 7% over the last three years and under the Governor's proposal for next year.

This legislation, Senate Bill 147, keeps school funding at the same pace as inflation, and makes up the last three years of losses in buying power. This bill will allow districts to avoid the cuts schools are discussing. The provision to inflation proof in statute allows them to rehire lost staff and the predictability in funding allows schools to plan for the future.

Together, these measures will allow districts to continue to improve outcomes and graduation rates. I ask for your support of Senate Bill 147.