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Referred: Health, Education and Social Services and Finance

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IN THE SENATE

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 81

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

SIXTEENTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

A BILL

For an Act entitled: "An Act relating to educational programs for school children who are at risk of withdrawing from school before high school graduation; and providing for an effective date."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

* Section 1. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE. (a) The legislature finds that

(1) under AS 14.30.010(a) a student may withdraw from school at the age of 16;

(2) students withdraw from high school before graduation for various reasons, including unsatisfactory educational experiences, discipline problems, truancy, and a variety of family, health, and social problems;

(3) in the changing economy that will characterize the nation and the state through the next decades, most jobs will demand a level of basic skill that is seldom attained by students who have failed to finish high school; opportunities in many jobs, the military, the post-secondary education system, and many industry training programs are reduced or closed to those without a high school diploma, and the failure to obtain a high school diploma or its equivalent may consign students to a greater risk of unemployment or to a lifetime of low-level jobs;

(4) those responsible for public education should act to reduce the numbers of students withdrawing from school before high school graduation.

(b) It is the purpose of this Act to

1 (1) require the commissioner of education to collect and report
2 information about the number of students withdrawing from enrollment before
3 high school graduation, and the reasons for their withdrawals; and
4 (2) authorize the Department of Education to award state grant
5 funds to districts that develop a plan and maintain a program of basic
6 skills for students who are at risk of withdrawing from school before high
7 school graduation.
8 * Sec. 2. AS 14.07.020(a) is amended by adding new paragraphs to read:
9 (15) develop and implement a program to obtain from each
10 district on an annual basis information about school students who
11 withdraw from enrollment in the district before high school grad-
12 uation, and the reasons for the students' withdrawals; from the infor-
13 mation obtained, the department
14 (A) shall calculate and report information about
15 withdrawals from schools under AS 14.30.055;
16 (B) may make recommendations to the board and the
17 legislature for changes to the standards adopted under AS 14.-
18 30.450 - 14.30.499 defining qualifying students and eligible dis-
19 trict programs;
20 (16) administer the child at risk grant program under AS 14.-
21 30.480.
22 * Sec. 3. AS 14.30 is amended by adding a new section to article 1 to
23 read:
24 Sec. 14.30.055. REPORTING SCHOOL DROPOUTS. (a) Each district
25 shall report to the commissioner the number of students who dropout in
26 the district before high school graduation and the reasons for the
27 students' dropping out. The chief school administrator shall provide
28 the information in the manner that the department may require by
29 regulation.

1 (b) For each school year, the commissioner shall, based on
2 enrollment in each district, calculate and report the percentage of
3 students who dropout in each district for kindergarten through grade
4 12 and the percentage of dropout in all districts for kindergarten
5 through grade 12. The percentages shall be expressed as a percentage
6 of enrollment within each respective grade.
7 * Sec. 4. AS 14.30 is amended by adding new sections to read:
8 ARTICLE 5A. PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN AT RISK OF LEAVING SCHOOL.
9 Sec. 14.30.450. IDENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN AT RISK. Each school
10 board shall annually identify children at risk who are enrolled in the
11 district.
12 Sec. 14.30.460. PLAN. (a) Except as provided in (b) of this
13 section, a school board may develop a plan to meet the needs of chil-
14 dren at risk. The plan must describe how the school board intends to
15 retain children at risk in district enrollment until graduation. The
16 plan may consider curriculum modifications and alternative programs
17 that meet the minimum course of study for graduation from public
18 schools as prescribed by the department, and may include
19 (1) individual tutoring, individual and group remediation,
20 and other instructional strategies, with sufficient support services,
21 to permit a student to benefit educationally from the instruction;
22 (2) model alternative educational programs, including
23 programs combining academic learning with a substantial employment or
24 experience component;
25 (3) collaborative efforts with other state and local agen-
26 cies directed at helping a student to overcome problems that interfere
27 with learning;
28 (4) expanded use of guidance and career planning services;
29 and

1 (5) expanded use of counseling services, including peer
2 discussion groups and intervention efforts.
3 (b) If, in the previous school year, a school district had a
4 dropout rate exceeding five percent of the district's total secondary
5 school enrollment or had 50 or more secondary school dropouts, the
6 school board shall develop and submit a plan under (a) of this section
7 to the commissioner for review and approval.
8 (c) A plan developed under this section must also describe how
9 basic skills instruction, parental involvement, and community support
10 services will be used to meet the needs of children at risk.
11 Sec. 14.30.470. EDUCATION PROGRAM. A school board may establish
12 an education program for children at risk who are enrolled in the
13 district. The program must be based on the plan developed by the
14 school board under AS 14.30.460.
15 Sec. 14.30.480. CHILDREN AT RISK GRANT FUND. (a) The children
16 at risk grant fund is created as an account in the general fund. The
17 department may make grants from the fund to eligible districts for a
18 children at risk education program established under AS 14.30.470.
19 The fund consists of money appropriated by the legislature.
20 (b) A school board may apply for a child at risk grant by sub-
21 mitting an application to the department. An application must include
22 (1) a copy of a plan developed under AS 14.30.460;
23 (2) a proposed budget detailing the expenditure of all
24 grant funds; and
25 (3) an evaluation of the anticipated results of the child
26 at risk program.
27 (c) The department may not award a grant under this section
28 unless the department determines that during the previous school year
29 the school board's program for children at risk has met at least three

1 of the following criteria:

2 (1) a retention rate of at least 70 percent of the pupils

3 enrolled in the program;

4 (2) an attendance rate of at least 70 percent of the pupils

5 enrolled in the program;

6 (3) graduation of 70 percent of the seniors enrolled in the

7 program;

8 (4) at least 70 percent of the pupils enrolled in the

9 program received academic credit; or

10 (5) the program maintained an average of at least one month

11 of improvement in reading and mathematics performance for each month

12 of instruction.

13 (d) Among those districts otherwise eligible to receive a grant

14 under this section, the department shall first award grants to those

15 districts required to develop and submit a plan under AS 14.30.460(b).

16 Sec. 14.30.490. EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS. In addition to applying

17 the requirements of AS 14.30.480(c) and (d), the department may with-

18 hold approval of a grant application if, as a result of an evaluation

19 of the school board's existing child at risk program, the commissioner

20 determines that

21 (1) the program has not reduced the dropout rate for the

22 district; or

23 (2) the program does not provide substantial improvement in

24 basic skills.

25 Sec. 14.30.499. DEFINITIONS. In AS 14.30.450 - 14.30.499

26 (1) "child at risk" means a secondary school student en-

27 rolled in a public school that a school board determines, under regu-

28 lations of the department, is a student who

29 (A) has withdrawn from enrollment in the district

1 before high school graduation and has returned to school in the
2 district to complete graduation requirements; or
3 (B) may withdraw from enrollment in the district
4 before high school graduation because of
5 (i) family or social difficulties, personal
6 health, or pregnancy;
7 (ii) poor attendance;
8 (iii) low achievement, as evidenced by the student
9 being one or more years behind the student's age group or
10 grade in the number of credits attained or in basic skill
11 levels, including reading and mathematics;
12 (iv) low academic test scores;
13 (v) retention at a certain grade level;
14 (vi) diminished self-esteem and motivation;
15 (2) "district" has the meaning given in AS 14.12.010;
16 (3) "dropout" means a person under 18 years of age who is
17 not attending school or enrolled in a correspondence program, contin-
18 ues to reside in the district, does not attend a vocational, techni-
19 cal, or adult education program, and has not received a high school
20 diploma;
21 (4) "dropout rate" means the percentage calculated and
22 reported under AS 14.30.055(b);
23 (5) "secondary school" includes grades seven through 12.
24 * Sec. 5. REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS. The Department of Education
25 shall report on withdrawals from school by elementary students in kinder-
26 garten through sixth grade and make recommendations for criteria to identi-
27 fy and for programs to assist elementary students who are at risk of with-
28 drawing from school before graduation from high school. The department
29 shall submit the report to the Board of Education and the legislature

1 before January 1, 1991.

2 * Sec. 6. TRANSITION. The commissioner of education shall begin to

3 collect program data required by AS 14.07.020(a)(15), added by sec. 2 of

4 this Act, by October 1, 1989.

5 * Sec. 7. This Act takes effect July 1, 1989.