

**HB**

**118**



Health, Education, and Social Services Committee  
Alaska State Legislature  
House of Representatives

MEMORANDUM

March 9, 1999

To: House HESS Committee Members

From: Wes Keller, House HESS Committee Aide

I.

RE: Fiscal Notes from the University of Alaska

Fiscal notes were requested on 3/4/99 from Wendy Redman, University liaison. None were received as of 2:00 today. She may be here to testify.

II.

RE: Nelson Page, AK Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees Appointee

Nelson Page may not call in today to testify. I contacted him on short notice and as of 2:00 this afternoon, have not been able to confirm his participation.

# FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA  
1999 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. House Bill 118

Revision Date/Time \_\_\_\_\_ Dept. Affected Education  
 Title An Act relating to payment for BRU \_\_\_\_\_  
remedial classes at the University of Alaska Component \_\_\_\_\_  
 Sponsor Representative Dyson \_\_\_\_\_  
 Requester H-HES Component Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_

**Expenditures/Revenues** (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005
Personal Services						
Travel						
Contractual						
Supplies						
Equipment						
Land & Structures						
Grants & Claims						
Miscellaneous	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

<b>CAPITAL EXPENDITURES</b>						
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<b>CHANGE IN REVENUES ( )</b>						
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**FUND SOURCE** (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts						
1003 GF Match						
1004 GF						
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
1037 GF/Mental Health						
Other (Specify Type)						
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

Estimate of any current year (FY99) cost: 0.0

**POSITIONS**

Full-time						
Part-time						
Temporary						

**ANALYSIS:** (Attach a separate page if necessary)

House Bill 118 requires a district to pay for the costs of remedial classes for a person who enrolls at the University of Alaska if the person graduated from a public high school, within two years after receiving a high school diploma.

\* This bill has no fiscal impact on the department, but does have a fiscal impact on school districts across the state.

Prepared by Barbara Thompson  
 Division Teaching and Learning Support  
 Approved by Commissioner: Shirley J. Holloway, Ph.D.  
 Agency Department of Education

Phone 465-8727  
 Date/Time 3/9/99 8:37 AM  
 Date 3/8/99

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## REPRESENTATIVE FRED DYSON

### HB 118 Sponsor Statement

#### **"An Act relating to payment for remedial classes at the University of Alaska."**

It is increasingly evident that "social promotion" is a well-intended, but a failed educational philosophy. This bill is intended to motivate individual school districts to fully educate students.

Our State universities, like the Adult Basic Education (ABE) system, and numerous post-secondary private schools expend a significant amount of resources to supply remedial education to Alaskans who, for various reasons, did not receive a quality high school education.

If this bill passes, a district that issues a high school diploma which does not equip the student with an adequate education, the district cannot pass the costs of 'fixing' the deficiency on to others. This bill closes the accountability gap and should encourage a high quality education within Alaskan schools.

If a recipient of an Alaska high school diploma must receive remedial education before participating in classes to meet the requirements for a degree or professional certification at the post-secondary level, then the cost of the remedial classes shall be reimbursed by the district from which the fraudulent diploma was issued.

SPONSOR STATEMENT

# Va. Wants Freshmen To Have a 'Warranty'

## *College Remediation a Concern*

By VICTORIA BENNING  
*Washington Post Staff Writer*

Local school systems in Virginia would issue a "warranty" on their high school graduates and promise to pay the cost of remedial classes that the students had to take as college freshmen, under a plan being developed by state higher education officials.

The proposal reflects state officials' growing frustration at the large numbers of college students who are having to learn basic skills they should have mastered in high school. One-fourth of Virginia public high school graduates at the state's public colleges take at least one remedial class in reading, writing or math during their freshman year.

The remedial courses are costing about \$40 million a year, state officials estimate—roughly \$15 million of it borne by the college students and their parents and the rest covered by state taxpayers.

Shifting those costs to local school districts would create a powerful incentive to do a better job of preparing students for college-level work, advocates of the warranty plan say.

"This is rather a rifle shot . . . to raise the profile of the issue and to communicate to the K-12 institutions that they have responsibility for the outcome of their students," said William B. Allen, executive director of the State Council of Higher Education, which is preparing the proposal.

But many local school officials are wary of the idea, saying the high enrollment in remedial courses is partly because more students are attending college. If colleges don't want to provide such classes, they need to be more selective in their admissions, local educators say.

Across the country, the issue of college remedial classes is stirring debate, with educators and politicians viewing the courses as an acute symptom of lax academic standards. College officials complain of being forced to dumb down their curriculum, and they worry that too few of their students are taking the rigorous courses they will need to be successful in their careers.

Some states, such as Colorado, Georgia and South Carolina, have eliminated remedial courses at four-year colleges. Other states are putting limits on funding of the courses or are capping enrollment.

So far, no state has adopted a plan to charge local school systems for the cost of the classes, although there have been proposals to do so in several states, including Texas, New Jersey and Montana.

In Maryland, where the statistics on remedial-course enrollment are similar to Virginia's, officials are trying to improve coordination between high school and college curriculums.

Members of Virginia's higher education council have asked their staff to present a warranty plan by January. An early draft of the proposal recommends that the warranty initially cover students who graduate from high school with an advanced studies diploma and a grade-point average of at least 2.5.

Rather than mandate the warranty program, which would require action by the state legislature, council officials say they envision persuading a few school districts to offer the guarantee voluntarily. At that point, public pressure would force more districts to join the program, state officials believe.

"Who is going to want to be the district to stand up and say, 'We don't guarantee our graduates,'" Allen said.

Local school officials agree they need to do a better job with their students, but they say it is unfair to hold them totally responsible for their graduates' problems in college—especially when standards can vary greatly from one state college to another.

"Our job is to do everything we can to ensure our students meet a certain standard when they graduate," said Pam Gauch, associate superintendent for instruction in Prince William County. "To hold us responsible afterward, based on a college's standards, well, I'm not sure that's a good idea."

The warranty plan is a simplistic answer to a complex problem, local officials say. They argue that many students who are taking college

remedial courses probably would not have been admitted to college a few years ago. They also note that some students don't decide they're interested in college until late in their high school careers, and thus graduate without having taken college preparatory courses.

But supporters of a graduate-guarantee program say the effect of holding school districts financially accountable should not be underestimated.

"A school superintendent who has to go before a school board or board of supervisors to ask for more money to pay for instruction that students should already have had is going to have to answer some tough questions," said consultant David Wheat, who conducted a study of remedial education in Virginia on behalf of the Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy.

According to the Virginia higher education council, 85 percent of the state's college freshmen taking remedial courses are enrolled in community colleges, and most of the rest attend Norfolk State University, Virginia Commonwealth University or Clinch Valley College. But Wheat said he became aware of "thinly veiled" remedial courses on other major campuses in the state while conducting his study.

The warranty proposal grew out of a meeting at which both the higher education council and the Virginia Board of Education heard officials from Hanover County describe how such a program has worked in their school system.

Hanover, which launched its program in 1994, is the only school district in the state with a warranty plan. Every Hanover student who graduates with at least a 2.0 grade-point average comes with a two-year warranty. If a Hanover graduate, during his first two years in college, needs remedial work before enrolling in a required academic class, the school district will foot the bill for the remedial course.

So far, the district has paid out 14 claims, averaging about \$400 apiece, Hanover officials say.

Hanover graduates who go to work right after high school are guaranteed, too. An employer who finds a graduate lacking in a basic skill can send him back to the school system for extra classes, at the district's expense.

"We think it says something for a school division to stick its neck out there. . . . We're putting our money where our product is," said Bill Sadler, director of alternative education for the district, about 10 miles north of Richmond.

The concept is a good one in theory, but it would be hard to implement in a diverse school system in which student learning is influenced by many factors over which teachers have no control, said Fairfax County School Superintendent Daniel A. Domenech.

"It's a great idea, but I'm not sure it would be practical in a district like Fairfax," Domenech said, pointing out that the county has large numbers of students arriving from other countries, often late in their academic careers.

Domenech noted that Fairfax is instituting several policies that have the same purpose as the warranty proposal, including adopting high school graduation standards that are higher than the state's.

State officials agree that a warranty program is only one piece of a multifaceted approach to cutting the remediation rate. And to show that they are not singling out high schools, they have proposed that the state's teacher colleges issue similar guarantees for their graduates who go on to teach in public schools.

The warranty plan fits in well with the state's overall focus on raising academic standards for public school students, said Board of Education President Kirk T. Schroder.

"There is a genuine concern that we not let kids pass through the public education system without having attained a core level of knowledge," Schroder said. "This is another way of ensuring that."

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## 4 Editorials & Opinion

Posted at 07:44 p.m. PST: Sunday, January 17, 1999

Editorial

### Diploma guarantees

THE money-back guarantee. Of all the business ideas that have crept into public education over the past decade, a warranty for high-school graduates is one of the strangest, as if students were no more complicated to manufacture than toasters.

Nonetheless, the idea has inherent logic. One upscale school district in Virginia has guaranteed its diplomas since 1994, promising to pay colleges or employers for any remedial classes needed by most of its graduates. This program may soon expand statewide and is gaining national attention.

Would warranties work in Washington? Though educators tend to oppose them, they are philosophically consistent with Washington's aggressive education reforms. Guaranteeing the new Certificates of Mastery could be a way for education reformers to put their money where their mouths are - especially if a warranty accompanied every Certificate.

Virginia's proposed warranties are eligible only to advanced-studies students who score a 2.5 GPA or higher - halfway between a "B" and a "C." If graduates need remedial classes in reading, writing or math when they get a job or go to college, school districts pay the tab.

Nationwide, supporters and critics alike call this proposal brave and controversial, which is curious: After all, the state isn't daring to promise that its below-average graduates - or even its average ones - can read, write or count.

Minnesota already has a similar plan. California's new governor made waves when he pushed a money-back guarantee during his campaign. The idea came up here two years ago, though it evaporated instantly.

Remedial education is under increasing scrutiny in Washington. Some legislators think financial aid shouldn't cover remedial classes, and the 2020 Commission wants to

get rid of most remedial classes by 2006.

This would be a big undertaking: Forty percent of freshmen at Eastern Washington University take at least one remedial class, 20 percent at Central and 3 percent at the University of Washington. Nearly 40 percent of degree-seeking students in community and technical colleges take at least one remedial class.

Remedial classes are vital for adults who need to brush up on basic skills upon returning to college; even experienced skiers can need a trip down the bunny hill after a break. But what of the students who go straight from high school to college? Those who cannot compose paragraphs or do simple calculations should not receive diplomas - and certainly not Certificates of Mastery.

There are pitfalls to warranties, to be sure: Students are mobile, and they can take breaks between high school and college. Cash-strapped school districts would be more likely to produce graduates in need of remedial ed, which could then siphon more funds from the districts. And a clever college could raise its standards for remedial education, shifting its costs to K-12 schools.

But if Washington isn't brave enough to warranty its graduates, the public should ask why not. Education reform rests upon the principle of accountability - each school's responsibility to educate its students to certain standards in the 4th, 7th and 10th grades. A good school district, like a good business, should be able to stand behind its final product.

Students aren't toasters, and it is their responsibility to learn. But it is a school district's job to ensure its diplomas are more than glorified attendance records, and vouch that after 13 years, the public got its money's worth.

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planes to abandon their planned targets.

## Virginia considers warranty on high school graduates

The Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Virginia is considering a voluntary program that would effectively offer warranties certifying the competence of its high school graduates.

State-supported colleges and universities spend approximately \$25 million annually to bring freshman up

to speed on reading, writing and arithmetic through remedial coursework.

The idea under review by the State Council of Higher Education would shift the cost of the remedial studies

to the high schools that failed to produce freshmen ready to tackle college-level work.

Advocates of the warranty plan say it would encourage public schools to do a better

job. But the leader of Virginia's largest teachers' organization said colleges shouldn't be allowed to pass off costs incurred for students they never had to accept in the first place.

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