

**SB**

**133**

HFIN

FILE



# FISCAL NOTE

**STATE OF ALASKA**  
**2001 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

Fiscal Note Number: 1  
 Bill Version: CSSB 133(HES)  
 (S) Publish Date: 3/20/01

Revision Date/Time (Note if correction): \_\_\_\_\_ Dept. Affected: Education & Early Development  
 Title: An Act relating to a two-year transition for imple- BRU: Teaching & Learning Support  
mentation of the public high school competency examination Component: Quality Schools  
 Sponsor: Senate HESS  
 Requester: Senate HESS Component Number: 2147

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

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

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007
Personal Services						
Travel	48.0					
Contractual	17.9					
Supplies						
Equipment						
Land & Structures						
Grants & Claims						
Miscellaneous						
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>	<b>65.9</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	65.9					
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
1037 GF/Mental Health						
Other (Specify Type)						
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65.9</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 (FY2001) cost: 0.0

Check this box (X) if funding for this bill is included in the Governor's FY 2002 budget proposal:

**POSITIONS**

Full-time						
Part-time						
Temporary						

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

The legislation amends AS 14.03.075 to allow a governing body to grant a waiver of the competency exam requirement based on criteria established by the State Board of Education & Early Development (SBOEED) to develop the waiver, the SBOEED will engage the Alaskan public through a series of face-to-face regional meetings and teleconferences. Meetings and teleconferences will be advertised statewide. During FY03, the SBOEED will draft the waiver parameters to fulfill the reporting requirements for the January 2003 report to the legislature. The SBOEED will then promulgate regulations delineating the waiver process requirements.

Prepared by: Barbara Thompson, Deputy Director Phone 465-8727  
 Division: Teaching & Learning Support Date/Time 3 16 01 12:00 AM  
 Approved by: Bruce Johnson, Deputy Commissioner of Education Date 03 16 2001  
 Agency: Department of Education & Early Development

For distribution information, call the Governor's Legislative Office

w/d

#1

AMENDMENT

OFFERED IN THE HOUSE

BY REPRESENTATIVE BUNDE

TO: HCS CSSB 133(HES)

1 Page 1, line 3:

2 Delete "certain reports"

3 Insert "a report"

4

5 Page 2, line 5:

6 Delete "sec. 7"

7 Insert "sec. 6"

8

9 Page 5, line 31, through page 6, line 16:

10 Delete all material.

11

12 Renumber the following bill sections accordingly.

13

14 Page 7, line 13, following "(1)":

15 Insert "a competency examination waiver process for students who enter the school  
16 system late and for other students with rare or unusual circumstances that merit a waiver;

17 (2)"

18

19 Page 7, line 14:

20 Delete "(2)"

21 Insert "(3)"

22

23 Page 7, line 17:

24 Delete "(3) evaluating the process described under (2)"

*circumstances...*

- 1           Insert "(4) evaluating the process described under (3)"
- 2
- 3   Page 7, lines 18 - 25:
- 4           Delete all material.
- 5
- 6   Renumber the following bill sections accordingly.
- 7
- 8   Page 7, line 28:
- 9           Delete "sec. 11"
- 10          Insert "sec. 9"

SB 133

AMENDMENT

OFFERED IN THE HOUSE

TO: HCS CSSB 133(HES)

By: *Lanier*

#2 / Moved  
waiting  
Held vote  
Adopted

Page 2, following line 13:

Insert a new subsection to read:

“(d) It is the intent of the legislature that the Department of Education and Early Development, through its existing federally required monitoring program of district special education programs, review the potential for an IEP team’s inappropriate lowering of IEP goals and objectives for the purpose of providing a diploma to a student who has not achieved the State performance standards to the maximum extent practicable and take appropriate corrective action.

Page 3, lines 11-20:

Delete all material and insert:

“(1) a student who is a child with a disability and who does not achieve a passing score on the examination required under (a) of this section is eligible to receive a diploma if the student successfully completes an alternative assessment program required by the student’s individualized education program or required in the education plan developed for the student under 29 U.S.C. 794; an alternative assessment program must, to the maximum extent possible, conform to state performance standards established for the competency examination required under (a) of this section;”

Page 4, following line 8:

Insert new subsections to read:

(f) A student shall receive an endorsement on the student’s diploma and transcript identifying the areas of the examination successfully passed.

(g) The department shall by regulation establish uniform standards for an alternative assessment program required under (c)(1) of this section. The alternative assessment program required under (c)(1) of this section applicable to an individual student may not be changed after February 1 of the student's junior year of study."

Reletter the following subsection accordingly.

Page 7, line 13, following "diploma":

Delete ";

Insert ".

Page 7, lines 14-17:

Delete all material.

W/P

3

## AMENDMENT

OFFERED IN THE HOUSE

TO: H CS CSSB 133 (HESS)

BY: Representative Croft

1) Page 1, Line 4 after "schools" INSERT

**"; relating to the base student allocation used in the formula for state funding of public education"**

2) Insert 2 new Sections to read:

"Sect \_\_\_ AS 14.17.470 is amended to read:

**Sec. 1417.470. Base student allocation.** The base student allocation is \$4,085[\$3940]"

"Sect \_\_\_ This section takes effect July 1, 2001."



# Alaska State Legislature

House Special Committee on Education  
Representative Con Bunde, Chair

State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182  
(800) 892-4843 (907) 465-4843 (phone)  
(907) 465-3871 (fax)  
Representative\_Con\_Bunde@legis.state.ak.us

Brian Potts  
Joe Green  
Peggy Wilson  
Gary Stevens  
Reggie Lantz  
Gretchen Guess

## STATEMENT OF EXPLANATION HCS for CSSB 133 (HES) Version "T"

HCS for CSSB 133 (HES) Version "T" is a combination of the Senate-passed version of SB 133 and the Education Committee's HB 94. It maintains accountability for the State Performance Standards. It also addresses the public's concerns about opportunity to learn, children with disabilities, and students who transfer into an Alaskan high school from another state. The work that has gone into this effort, by both the Senate and the House to date, is intended to make the High School Competency Test fair to all students and legally defensible.

This bill includes the following provisions:

- delays the effective date of the High School Competency Test until February 1, 2004;
- the Legislature's commitment to improving education through the State Performance Standards and intent that the High School Competency Test is part of an evolving process;
- the student must demonstrate mastery of the State Performance Standards in reading, English and math in order to receive a diploma, or have passed a competency test in another state;
- a waiver could be granted to students who transfer to an Alaskan high school or who has rare or unusual circumstances and who has satisfied the state performance standards to the maximum extent possible;
- if a student cannot demonstrate mastery of the standards, he/she would receive a Certificate of Achievement, which would note which portions of the test the student had passed, his/her attendance record, and any other qualifications the district felt were appropriate;
- special education students may demonstrate mastery by a combination of passing the test without accommodations, with accommodations, or through a portfolio of work;
- a requirement that the Department of Education will provide the Legislature with an annual report showing indicators of the progress that schools are making toward high student achievement;
- rewards students, between 2002 and 2004, for passing the High School Competency Test; and
- asks the department to make recommendations to the Legislature regarding an appeals process and portfolios.
- asks the department to report to the Legislature on the proposed criteria and procedures for waivers.

### **Added Justification for an Extended Delay in the High School Qualifying Exam**

Submitted by Mary Miller P.O. Box 598 Nome, AK 99762 4/22/01  
Ph: 907 443 2372 e-mail: [mary\\_m@nome.net](mailto:mary_m@nome.net)

An excerpt of an article entitled "Teaching/Learning Across Cultures: Strategies for Success" by Ray Barnhardt, published in Sharing Our Pathways Vol. 2 Issue 3 Summer 1997 (A Newsletter of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative)

"How Do You Determine What Has Been Learned? The question of what constitutes success is difficult to answer under any educational circumstance, but it is especially complex in cross-cultural situations. Different people can exhibit competence in different ways, and when cultural differences are added to the mix, the ways can multiply dramatically. In addition to determining what it is we want students to learn, there is the task of determining how it will be measured. Not everything we want students to learn lends itself to easy and reliable measurements within the timeframe that schools expect to see results. On top of all this, we have the issue of cultural bias in everything from the instruments we use to the way we use them.

One of the most important considerations in this arena is to recognize that there are multiple forms and ways of displaying intelligence, and therefore, we need to provide multiple avenues through which students can demonstrate their competence. Recent studies indicate that there are at least seven prominent forms of intelligence, with each individual, as well as clusters of people, having strengths in some forms and weaknesses in others. These include potential aptitudes in linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence (see *The Unschooled Mind*, by Howard Gardner, 1991). The problem is that schools tend to rely almost exclusively on the first two (linguistic and logical-mathematical) as the basis for measuring academic success, leaving other forms of intelligence largely on the sidelines. While you as a teacher are not in a position to unilaterally revamp the schooling enterprise to more fully incorporate the full range of intelligences, you are in a position to recognize them in your students and to provide a variety of avenues for them to access what you are teaching. At the same time, you can incorporate some of the more culturally adaptive modes of assessing student performance, such as portfolios, exhibitions, demonstrations and productions. Through these more flexible and responsive approaches to assessment, it is possible to officially recognize the various forms of intelligence and accommodate cultural differences at the same time."

Members of the Finance Committee,

4-18-01

I would like this letter to be entered into the written record on HCS CSSB 133.

My name is Dr William Pfeifer and I currently sit as a school board member in Ketchikan. The following comments are my own and do not represent any other entity. I would ask that you also review my earlier comments on this issue.

I have a daughter who was recently identified as having a reading disability and now has to have all her textbooks available on tape. This wasn't addressed until this year, while she was in college. WAY TO LATE!!! Along with all the kids not functioning at grade level, I want to remind you that there are still many above grade level that are not being appropriately addressed. We cannot afford to lower our standards further. I would ask that you defeat any offered amendments to HCS CSSB 133/ that lower standards and diminish our competency exam. Please defeat amendments that create any sort of special alternative assessments for our disabled kids. Those kids cannot be left out of BASIC competency expectations. Schools and the state should RAISE THE EXPECTATIONS for our kids, not lower them! The system must then CHANGE to meet those expectations! The schools need to give all kids what they need to succeed!

There are many I have talked to that suggest that the Legislature and the DEED want to give an easy "out" to districts by allowing a SPED Diploma, waiver, or alternative assessment. It has been suggested to me that this is so you do not have to fund and provide the training, programs and methodology changes that may be needed for appropriate intervention and the "opportunity to learn" to get all kids to succeed. I don't believe this is the case, but it may be the lasting impression depending on your actions.

Since I am of Alaska Native decent (Tlingit), I read with special interest a report from OSEP that talks about the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. In fact the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the U.S. Office for Civil Rights (OCR) have three concerns about disproportionate representation: (a) Students may be unserved or receive services that do not meet their needs. (b) Students may be misclassified or inappropriately labeled. (c) Placement in special education classes may be a form of discrimination.

Reducing disproportionate representation is a high priority for both offices and for many groups and associations that represent ethnic minorities and/or special education. While I don't necessarily agree with everything in the report I do agree with their statement that for most children referred for evaluation, academic failure is related to problems in learning to read. They suggest that the student's general education program use instructional strategies appropriate for the individual, and that they be adjusted to address the student's area of difficulty.

We know that a large segment of our Native population are not succeeding in our schools and are dropping out. We need to address this head on and not give reason to have more of our students classified as under SPED so they can get an easier diploma. All parents, including Natives, of the State of Alaska want their children to acquire the skills they need to succeed in a technological and competitive world.

Dr Bill Mel at the UAA apparently agrees with me that our reading cut score is at the 1<sup>st</sup> quartile as compared to standardized tests. He even classifies it at the 7<sup>th</sup> grade level. This level needs to be raised. But we also need to give parents the hammer ("opportunity to learn" ) to force districts to give their child appropriate diagnostic assessments, instruction, and intervention. How else can this system be held accountable. How do I hold the system accountable for failing to diagnose and intervene with my daughters reading problem in a timely manner. She will have to live with the results throughout her life. Every year you delay, every standard you choose not to appropriately measure, will add to the number of kids you continue to let out in the world unprepared. We have iatrogenic disabilities in our current educational system. It is time to leave no child behind. Give them the opportunity!

Dr Bill

Dr William Pfeifer  
2901 Baranof Ave  
Ketchikan, Alaska 99901  
907-225-9090  
family@ptialaska.net

URGENT! Please, don't cheat our children!

**Subject: URGENT! Please, don't cheat our children!**

**Date:** Thu, 15 Mar 2001 21:01:35 -0900

**From:** Barbara Lefler <lefler@alaska.net>

**To:** Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us, Senator\_Loren\_Leman@legis.state.ak.us,  
Senator\_Jerry\_Ward@legis.state.ak.us, Senator\_Bettye\_Davis@legis.state.ak.us,  
Senator\_Gary\_Wilken@legis.state.ak.us, Representative\_Con\_Bunde@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Gretchen\_Guess@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Joe\_Green@legis.state.ak.us, Representative\_Brian\_Porter@legis.state.ak.us,  
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Representative\_Peggy\_Wilson@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Gary\_Stevens@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Fred\_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Peggy\_Wilson@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_John\_Coghill@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Gary\_Stevens@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Vic\_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Sharon\_Cissna@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Reggie\_Joule@legis.state.ak.us

Dear Honorable Legislators,

We are parents of a student in the graduating class of 2002! Neal has an IEP. We are emphatically opposed to the language of SB 133.

If the 2% of the students who are developmentally disabled and have to take the alternative assessment want IEP diplomas, let them have it.

However, the other 98% of the students (including our son) with cognitive abilities want to be held to the same standard as their peers! Our children are capable of achieving if they are provided with an appropriate education. We parents already have to fight for our children's education. By taking away their high expectations and by stripping them of their rights to use state standards and benchmarks, there is no motivation for the schools to provide an appropriate education. We are tired of fighting. Please, don't cheat our children out of their right to achieve and graduate with their peers.

Sincerely,

Barb and Doug Lefler

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



*Interim:*

600 East Railroad Avenue  
Wasilla, Alaska 99654  
(907) 376-3370  
(907) 376-3157 Fax

*Session:*

State Capitol  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182  
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## SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE SENATOR LYDA GREEN, CHAIR

### SPONSOR STATEMENT CS SENATE BILL 133(HES)

CSSB 133 (HES) focuses on three main goals:

1. Continue giving the exam, thus requiring responsibility and accountability;
2. Ensure the exams test knowledge of essential skills and that students taking the exam as seniors have been taught the appropriate material; and
3. Address provisions for special education/disabled students and extraordinary situations.

Although the existing exit exam law has effected positive change to Alaska's education efforts, several problems with the exam have been identified over the last several years. CSSB 133(HES) addresses these problems by delaying the implementation of denying diplomas for failing the exam until 2004, by creating a carefully administered waiver program for extraordinary situations and by adding language that would allow students participating in an "individual education plan" the ability to earn a diploma.

Currently, some students are being tested on skill sets they are not required to know by state statute and/or by local school districts, on information they have never been taught, and they will be denied a diploma if they fail the exam. Additionally, content review committees, especially in mathematics, did not develop tests for those essential skills we expect students to have when they graduate. CSSB 133 (HES) provides the department with two additional years to resolve this serious matter. During this two year period, CSSB 133(HES) requires that students take the exam and that areas of the exam they successfully pass be shown on their diplomas and transcripts.

Also, current law makes no provision for students with an IEP. Consequently, students with an IEP would be denied the opportunity to earn a diploma. CSSB 133(HES) addresses this inequity by ensuring students with an IEP have the same opportunities as students without special education needs.

Additionally, the current law provides no flexibility for the department to consider extraordinary situations such as illness or military transfer students. CSSB 133(HES) addresses this issue by creating a waiver system. The legislation requires the department and the board of education to develop the criteria and procedures for such a waiver and then return to the legislature to report on their proposed regulations by January 31, 2003.

In short, though CS for Senate Bill 133 (HES) is relatively short and simple, it is also the only legislation introduced this year that comprehensively addresses the problems expressed to the Senate HESS Committee. CSSB 133(HES) is reasonable legislation designed to enhance current competency exam laws so that Alaska's children can fully benefit from their educational efforts.

SENATOR LOREN LEMAN, VICE-CHAIR  
SENATOR JERRY WARD, SENATOR GARY WILKEN, SENATOR BETTYE DAVIS



# PARENTS

Families Assisting Families of Children With Disabilities

To: Representative Fred Dyson  
 Fax: 465-4587

As a whole PARENTS, Inc. supports SB 133 and its purpose.

We support the addition of the waiver process to allow for an additional means of obtaining a diploma. We also applaud the removal of the words "Certificate of Attendance" for those who do not meet the criteria for a diploma.

This bill provides for several things that are necessary for students with disabilities including:

- Recognizing that after taking the test, the IEP team may determine that re-testing is inappropriate.
- Explicitly outlining the methods by which students with disabilities can receive a diploma (passing the examination, passing with accommodations, or demonstrating through a portfolio).

I worry, however, this appears to mean that an IEP team cannot ask for a waiver in certain unusual circumstances. Alaska Department of Education and Early Development has currently determined that their "alternate examination" through portfolio work can only be for the lowest functioning 2% of students with disabilities. This ignores those students who may not qualify for the portfolio assessment, but also may not be able to pass the examination, even with accommodations. I also do not believe that the requirement of students examined through a portfolio needing to have mastery of state performance standards is what is sought by parents of children with disabilities. Parents around the state have made it clear that they would like such a method to be able to show general competency within the student's abilities, recognizing that they will not be able to meet the same performance standards as regular education students but have still shown that they have performed to their maximum level of potential. Parents believe strongly that these students should still be entitled to a diploma through alternate examination means based on individualized criteria, even if they cannot master the state performance standards.

Examples given by parents include psychological disorders such as extreme test anxiety, and profound deafness where the student's native language is ASL and English is only learned through English-as-a-second-language methods (the majority of

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 E-mail: [parents@parentsinc.org](mailto:parents@parentsinc.org) ♦ Web: [www.parentsinc.org](http://www.parentsinc.org)

**A Non-Profit Corporation**

language is learned through casual listening and through phonetics, neither of which is available to deaf students). Deaf individuals usually do not obtain a high-school level English level until well after high school, but are completely functional citizens in our society through sign language.

The bill allows for waivers that might be able to remedy this situation, however it states that it is only for rare or unusual circumstances. I would prefer that the words "rare and unusual" be removed (or at least the word "rare"). I also worry that the "governing body" might not be appropriate to all types of requests, especially if they relate to students with disabilities. This point, however, may have to wait for the department's proposed regulations. I like the provision that requires the department's regulations for this bill to be reported to the Legislature.

If anything, I would wish that this bill contained some process or assurances that students with disabilities would be able to receive the maximum effort possible to ensure that they at least have a chance to try and pass the examination and get a diploma. PARENTS, Inc. has listened to and helped countless parents of children with disabilities who struggle with school districts to get even the minimum services required under federal special education law. Many more do not know their rights and their children are not receiving an adequate education and have even less of a chance of passing the examination.

By moving the date back and making several other changes you have greatly improved the prospects of regular education students and the ability of school districts to change their curricula to ensure the success of those in regular education classes, but little is in the bill to ensure that students with disabilities will be able to achieve higher standards.

Sincerely,



Tim Weiss  
Program Director

**Subject: SB133**

**Date:** Wed, 18 Apr 2001 11:18:08 -0800

**From:** "Eric & Kristi Holta" <kholta@gci.net>

**To:** <Representative\_Bill\_Williams@legis.state.ak.us>

Eric J. Holta

22724 Knik Vista Street

Chugiak, AK 99567

Dear Representative Williams:

I'm a lifelong Alaskan and have been teaching students with special needs within the Anchorage School District for 8 1/2 years. I'm writing to you to express my deep concern regarding the horrific changes proposed to SB 133.

I have no problem with setting high standards and goals for students or with holding us educators accountable in educating children. I welcome the idea and believe it is long overdue. I am, however, struggling with the changes made to SB 133. After reading the new version of SB 133 it appears to me that it is closer to what we currently have than it is to the original proposal. What is the difference between students passing a test based on state standards and putting together a portfolio that meet state standards? That is not an accommodation/modification, nor does it take into account the real differences in learning styles and effort put into learning. I believe this bill, as changed, does more harm than good. As a professional I'm extremely disappointed in this huge step backward. It appears to me that it falls short of meeting the intent and letter of the law concerning students with learning disabilities.

We must recognize that for many children, it is **not** a lack of effort, poor teachers, bad parenting or even over-sized classes. While these problems do exist, for many, learning is a matter of an individual's ability to master algebra or geometry, or their ability to read and write at the high school level. Some people do not, and never will, have the ability to master all the academics taught in school--they are cognitively different from "the norm." **This is neither their fault nor the fault of anyone else.** Many of these people are smart, hard working, enthusiastic, outgoing, energetic and they want to learn. We should be encouraging them and giving them options, not penalizing them for being different.

All of us know someone who fits into the category described above. Someone who, no matter what is done, will only go so far towards mastering the entire curriculum as outlined in the exit exam. These people are everywhere. Some are business owners or managers, legislators and other prominent members of our communities. What would have become of them had they been denied their diplomas? Some may have dropped out and succumbed to drugs, crime, and a life totally different than what it is today.

SB 133 as proposed by Senator Green recognizes that students learn and think with different styles and in different ways, it is a great compromise. The plan is impressive because it allows for setting high standards and at the same time recognizes that students operate on different levels of ability. It does not let kids off the hook just because they have a disability but allows

for the development of individualized programs and goals. In addition it holds everyone (pupils, teachers, and parents) accountable for setting and reaching goals, no more excuses. I've reviewed quite a few plans from different states and this is by far the best. This plan proves that you can have your cake and eat it.

If the aim is truly to better prepare our students for the future we should be giving them more options in stead of less. SB 133 as introduced by Senator Green does this and it holds everyone accountable. I am not advocating that we enable students by passing them on. I truly believe in accountability. However, we need to encourage students to stay in school and give them options when appropriate, we should not be discriminating against them because they are different. To put all students into the same category by having them pass "a" test is simply wrong. Hundreds of students will be left behind each year as a result of changes made to SB 133. Most work hard at school, are involved in their community and have bright futures. To deny them a diploma based on a test is not only cheating them but our communities as well.

The changes being proposed by Bunde and company is an atrocious miscarriage of justice. For the sake of Alaska's future I hope you will not let this happen and restore SB 133 to it's original version. If possible please include this letter as matter of record when considering SB 133.

I would be more than happy to discuss with you in-depth this extremely important issue. I look forward to hearing from you at the address above, via e-mail at [eholta@yahoo.com](mailto:eholta@yahoo.com), or via telephone at (907) 688-1008. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely Yours,

Eric J. Holta

**Subject: exit exams**

**Date:** Wed, 4 Apr 2001 13:18:38 -0800

**From:** Leilani Knight <lknight@ccthita.org>

**To:** "Representative\_Fred\_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us" <Representative\_Fred\_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us>

Children with disabilities have the right to take exams that are structured to meet their needs for the way that they learn. They learn differently therefore exams need to be made in a way they can understand and succeed. Please understand this when you vote on the exit exam bill for our children.

**Subject: High School Graduation Qualifying Exam**

**Date: Wed, 04 Apr 2001 14:03:00 -0800**

**From: Richard Rainery <rainery@pobox.alaska.net>**


**To: Representative\_Brian\_Porter@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Gary\_Stevens@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Peggy\_Wilson@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Fred\_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Gretchen\_Guess@legis.state.ak.us**

Dear Representatives Porter, Dyson, Wilson, Stevens, and Guess:  
Attached you will find a copy of a resolution concerning the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam adopted by the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) earlier this year.

The AMHB strongly believes that all students with disabilities should have the opportunity to earn a diploma based on fair assessment and recognition of their achievements. We support an exit exam. We urge the Legislature to allow students with disabilities the accommodations necessary to tackle such an exam and to succeed on it to the best of their abilities. Success, as for other students, should take the form of a diploma. Thank you.

Richard Rainery  
Acting Executive Director  
Alaska Mental Health Board  
431 North Franklin, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
rainery@pobox.alaska.net  
907.465.4765  
907.465.3079 (fax)

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	<a href="#">HSExitExamfinal.doc</a>	<b>Name:</b> HSExitExamfinal.doc <b>Type:</b> Microsoft Word Document (application/msword) <b>Encoding:</b> base64 <b>Download Status:</b> Not downloaded with message
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**Subject: IEP Diplomas**

**Date:** Sat, 17 Mar 2001 23:12:31 -0900

**From:** "Cheryl" <scekstro@gci.net>

**To:** <Representative\_Fred\_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us>

Good Morning,

I am writing to you this morning because I just got some disturbing news. I heard that there are two bills being considered by the Legislature right now which impact all students with IEP's. These bills are SB 133 and HB 94.

It is my understanding that these Bills propose that all students with IEP's receive an IEP diploma even if they are not severely disabled and are able to earn a regular diploma. All children with IEP's are not severely cognitively disabled. Many have learning disabilities that do not block them from learning, but cause them to have special needs.

I do not support a blanket IEP diploma, nor do I support implementation of a program that will label all students with learning disabilities of any kind as less than able. These Bills before you do just that and should not be allowed to pass.

I would like to ask you to consider these Bills and their long term impact carefully and to use your influence to see that the students of this State receive a fair and appropriate education and foundation for the rest of thier lives.

I thank you for your time and for your efforts on behalf of my family and our beautiful state!

Sincerely,

Cheryl Ekstrom

Mother of 7 (2 graduates of Anchorage School Dist. and 5 currently attending school therein)  
Anchorage Alaska

**Subject:** All the kids have worked hard

**Date:** Tue, 3 Apr 2001 15:33:51 -0800

**From:** "Robert P. Conte" <rpconte@gci.net>

**To:** "Representative Con Bunde" <Representative\_Con\_Bunde@legis.state.ak.us>,  
<Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Brian\_Porter@legis.state.ak.us>,  
<Representative\_Peggy\_Wilson@legis.state.ak.us>,  
<Representative\_Fred\_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us>,  
<Representative\_Gretchen\_Guess@legis.state.ak.us>,  
<Representative\_Gary\_Stevens@legis.state.ak.us>

My name is Bob Conte. I live at 517 Sixth Street in Juneau. I am the father of a son who experiences mental retardation. I appose the idea that students with severe disabilities who take any sort of alternative exam should only get a Certificate of Attendance, thereby denying them proper recognition of all the hard work they have done. It is not correct to think that one test will suit all students and will be fair in all situations.

As the treasurer of PARENTS, Inc., the Parent Training and Information Center for the State of Alaska, I have been told by staff, that they hear from hundreds of parents and teachers from numerous communities around Alaska who all believe that all students with disabilities have a right to receive a diploma if they can pass a test geared toward their special needs and fulfill their Individual Education Program goals.

I ask you to please consider the importance of receiving an educational diploma that recognizes the hard work that all students give to learning and achieving educational goals.

Thank you,

Bob Conte

Representative Fred Dyson  
Fax 907-465-4587

RE: Exit Exam

Dear Representative,

I had the wonderful opportunity to be in DC during the inaguration for the Bush Administration.

I was very proud when George W. Bush announced that the cornerstone of his Administration would be Bipartisan education reform. President Bush explained that he was looking forward to working with Congress to ensure that no child is left behind

I have received the legislature alert and find that the Last Frontier wants to leave behind children with disabilities if they waiver from the exit exam. You want to deny them proper recognition of all the hard work they have done. This move invalidates the proven fact that one test does not suit all students.

We (families with children with disabilities) believe that all students with disabilities have a right to a diploma if they can pass a test geared toward their special needs and fulfil their IEP.

I ask that you leave in the language so those children with disabilities have an opportunity to receive the diploma they have earned. It is not sad enough that the child has a life long challenge from the beginning now they are being handed the ultimate challenge, the challenge to compete with children without disabilities. IDEA says that all children have a right to a free and appropriate education. IDEA is mandated through the Federal Government shouldn't we also follow mandates in the Last Frontier?

Please consider the children of Alaska, they need your support.  
Thank you,

Cecilia White

**Subject: School Exit Exams**

**Date:** Tue, 3 Apr 2001 17:02:11 -0800

**From:** "Hollie Swanson" <hollie@parentsinc.org>

**To:** <Representative\_Brian\_Porter@legis.state.ak.us>,  
<Representative\_Peggy\_Wilson@legis.state.ak.us>,  
<Representative\_Fred\_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us>

**CC:** <Representative\_Gretchen\_Guess@legis.state.ak.us>,  
<Representative\_Gary\_Stevens@legis.state.ak.us>

Dear Representatives:

I am writing in response to an alert I received today RE: Exit Exams and children who have disabilities. As the parent of a child who has severe learning disabilities, I strongly believe that children who have special learning needs have the opportunity to receive a diploma and should not be denied a diploma because of their disability. I also believe that Exit Exams for students with disabilities should be geared toward their specific disability.

Thank you.

Hollie Swanson

**Subject: students with disabilities**

**Date:** Tue, 03 Apr 2001 17:20:14 -0800

**From:** Daniel Lee Hasenfang <dannylee@alaska.net>

**To:** Representative\_Con\_Bunde@legis.state.ak.us, Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Brian\_Porter@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Peggy\_Wilson@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Fred\_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Gretchen\_Guess@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Gary\_Stevens@legis.state.ak.us

My name is Marianne Sharp and my address is 10209 Heron Way, Juneau, AK 99559.

I understand you are meeting tomorrow about granting students with disabilities a Certificate of Attendance instead of a high school diploma.

I wanted to write to state my opinion that I believe that all students with disabilities have a right to receive a diploma if they can pass a test geared toward their special needs and fulfill their Individual Education Program goals.

Sincerely,

Marianne Sharp

**Subject: concern over House changes to HSGQE bill**

**Date:** Tue, 3 Apr 2001 20:26:52 -0800

**From:** "Dave and Valorie Ringle" <dvringle@ptialaska.net>

**To:** <Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Brian\_Porter@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Peggy\_Wilson@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Fred\_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Gretchen\_Guess@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Gary\_Stevens@legis.state.ak.us>

Dear Representative Bunde:

As I read statements about representatives' opinions regarding students with disabilities and the state competency tests for graduation, I am disturbed by the failure to provide for students with disabilities who cannot pass the competency tests.

As a teacher, I feel that the tests, especially when accompanied with benchmark exams in the 6th and 3th grades, are a welcome challenge for most students. They have not changed the way I teach, but they have helped me modify and clarify objectives students must meet. For most students, these tests are a welcome motivation to remind them that social promotion is not going to result in a diploma.

There are, however, a few exceptions to every rule. I have students with disabilities who will be challenged by the test, yet I have no questions about their ability to function or their deserving of a high school diploma, assuming they continue their present level of work.

Two students come to mind. One is a boy with severe dyslexia. This student tests as the lowest reader in my class, yet he is one of the best students I have taught. He is artistically and mathematically gifted, sets high standards for himself, and compensates for his lack of reading in amazing ways. Currently he is willing to get tapes of books, listen orally, and complete all written work I require. He gives oral reports that surpass most students. His writing structure and organization is above grade level, and he understands the need for spell-checking and human proofreading to compensate for his poor spelling abilities. He at times avoids working in groups because he does not want to work with peers who do not share his high standards. This student has success written all over his school performance, yet is almost certain not to pass the high school reading exam.

Another student I have comes from a severely abusive environment. Currently we are seeing improvement of two to three grade levels in her performance as she receives a supportive educational environment and a very supportive mother. As this improvement continues, I am seeing a marked difference in her oral skills and her written skills, as diagnosed by her learning disability. While orally she can complete many skills on grade level, her written work lags significantly behind. Given the tenacity with which she has overcome a potentially tragic situation and her current skills, despite her learning disability, this person has the skills it will take to function in society--something specialists did not think possible three years ago. However hard she works to overcome the stigma of abuse, because of her learning disability I fear she will leave high school with another stigma because no accommodations are made with the competency tests for unique situations that I as an educator have seen too many times.

I urge you to reconsider your stance on the house revisions to this test and include provisions for those students who work so hard, yet because of diagnosed learning disabilities show their success in ways your test does not measure.

Dave Ringle  
3786 McGinnis  
Juneau, AK 99801  
home: 907-790-7249  
work: 907-463-1899



# PARENTS

Families Assisting Families of Children With Disabilities

April 3, 2001

Dear Rep. Fred Dyson,

First of all my name is Catherine Burgess and I'm a parent of a child that has multiple disabilities and will be taking the Alternative Assessment test based on his IEP goals. I'm also a parent advocate of a non-profit agency: PARENTS, Inc. located in Anchorage, AK.

All Special Education students do deserve the opportunity to receive a diploma. Because each child that has a certain disability learn in their own unique style that is based around their IEP goals and that one test is not adequate to serve all children that have different disabilities when they learn in their own unique way.

I would encourage that you support all children that have disabilities deserve a high school diploma in which they have work so hard in getting.

Thank you for your time,

Catherine Burgess

**Subject:**

**Date:** Wed, 4 Apr 2001 08:15:43 -0800

**From:** "Lee Ray and Lynne" <flower24@gci.net>

**To:** <Representative\_Con\_Bunde@legis.state.ak.us>, <Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Brian\_Porter@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Peggy\_Wilson@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Fred\_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Gretchen\_Guess@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Gary\_Stevens@legis.state.ak.us>

I believe that all students with disabilities have a right to receive a diploma if they can pass a test geared toward their special needs and fulfill their Individual Education Program goals.

Thanks for listening to concerned parents.  
Lynne Clements  
Juneau, Alaska

**Subject: Who is fit for a Diploma**

**Date:** Tue, 03 Apr 2001 21:33:16 -0800

**From:** pkmonagle <pkmonagle@gci.net>

**To:** Conley R Bunde <Representative\_Con\_Bunde@legis.state.ak.us>,  
Lyda N Green <Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us>,  
Brian S Porter <Representative\_Brian\_Porter@legis.state.ak.us>,  
Peggy A Wilson <Representative\_Peggy\_Wilson@legis.state.ak.us>,  
Frederick J Dyson <Representative\_Fred\_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us>,  
Gretchen G Guess <Representative\_Gretchen\_Guess@legis.state.ak.us>,  
Gary L Stevens <Representative\_Gary\_Stevens@legis.state.ak.us>

It is my understanding the H.E.S.S. committee will be deciding on whether high school students should receive a valid High School diploma, if they have a mental illness.

Need we go there ladies and gentleman? Will a 'certificate of attendance' achieve anything other than create more rules and regulations against those who already suffer? Why would you even consider a bill that would belittle the efforts of these people? Are you afraid these people will steal their way into college? Are you fearful that they will be taking away skilled positions in the workplace?

I don't think our society will suffer if we give a few individuals the dignity of receiving a valid diploma if they meet all the requirements set forth by the State Department of Education! Show a little compassion and humility. May those who work hard continue to have the right of receiving a valid High School diploma!

Pat Monagle

**Subject: concern over House changes to HSGQE bill**

**Date:** Tue, 3 Apr 2001 20:26:52 -0800

**From:** "Dave and Valorie Ringle" <dvringle@ptialaska.net>

**To:** <Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Brian\_Porter@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Peggy\_Wilson@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Fred\_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Gretchen\_Guess@legis.state.ak.us>, <Representative\_Gary\_Stevens@legis.state.ak.us>

Dear Representative Bunde:

As I read statements about representatives' opinions regarding students with disabilities and the state competency tests for graduation, I am disturbed by the failure to provide for students with disabilities who cannot pass the competency tests.

As a teacher, I feel that the tests, especially when accompanied with benchmark exams in the 6th and 8th grades, are a welcome challenge for most students. They have not changed the way I teach, but they have helped me modify and clarify objectives students must meet. For most students, these tests are a welcome motivation to remind them that social promotion is not going to result in a diploma.

There are, however, a few exceptions to every rule. I have students with disabilities who will be challenged by the test, yet I have no questions about their ability to function or their deserving of a high school diploma, assuming they continue their present level of work.

Two students come to mind. One is a boy with severe dyslexia. This student tests as the lowest reader in my class, yet he is one of the best students I have taught. He is artistically and mathematically gifted, sets high standards for himself, and compensates for his lack of reading in amazing ways. Currently he is willing to get tapes of books, listen orally, and complete all written work I require. He gives oral reports that surpass most students. His writing structure and organization is above grade level, and he understands the need for spell-checking and human proofreading to compensate for his poor spelling abilities. He at times avoids working in groups because he does not want to work with people who do not share his high standards. This student has successfully written all over his school performance, yet is almost certain not to pass the high school reading exam.

Another student I have comes from a severely abusive environment. Currently we are seeing improvement of two to three grade levels in her performance as she receives a supportive educational environment and a very supportive mother. As this improvement continues, I am seeing a marked difference in her oral skills and her written skills, as diagnosed by her learning disability. While orally she can complete many skills on grade level, her written work lags significantly behind. Given the tenacity with which she has overcome a potentially tragic situation and her current skills, despite her learning disability, this person has the skills it will take to function in society--something specialists did not think possible three years ago. However hard she works to overcome the stigma of abuse, because of her learning disability I fear she will leave high school with another stigma because no accommodations are made with the competency tests for unique situations that I as an educator have seen too many times.

I urge you to reconsider your stance on the house revisions to this test and include provisions for those students who work so hard, yet because of diagnosed learning disabilities show their success in ways your test does not measure.

Dave Ringle  
3786 McGinnis  
Juneau, AK 99801  
home: 907-790-7249  
work: 907-463-1899

1/15, 04-463/11

By: Assemblymember Colver  
Adopted: 03/27/01

**MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH  
RESOLUTION SERIAL NO. 01-022**

A RESOLUTION OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH ASSEMBLY SUPPORTING  
SB 133 RELATING TO SCHOOL COMPETENCY EXAMINATIONS.

WHEREAS, SB 133 delays the exit exam until 2004, which allows for the two-year period the Department of Education has testified it will need to make sure the exams are testing the appropriate skill sets; and

WHEREAS, existing statute does not address the needs of students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP); and

WHEREAS, SB 133 allows IEP students to earn their diplomas when they pass the exam and provides flexibility in allowing modifications or accommodations; and

WHEREAS, the existing statute does not allow the Department of Education, the State Board of Education, or local school districts to address extraordinary situations by creating a waiver system; and

WHEREAS, SB 133 provides for development of a waiver process by the board defining procedure and requirements; and

WHEREAS, nothing in the current law directs the department to test for essential and foundational skills; and

WHEREAS, the extension of time ensures that students have a fair opportunity to take the courses necessary to build the skills they need.

# STATE OF ALASKA

Department of Education & Early Development

*State Board of Education & Early Development*

*file AB133*  
TONY KNOWLES, GOVERNOR

Goldbelt Place  
801 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894  
(907) 465-2800  
(907) 465-4156 Fax

RECEIVED

APR 05 2001

April 3, 2001

The Honorable Lyda Green  
Alaska State Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 125  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Senator Green:

On behalf of the State Board of Education & Early Development, I want to express our deep appreciation for your time, effort, commitment, and leadership in crafting Senate Bill 133.

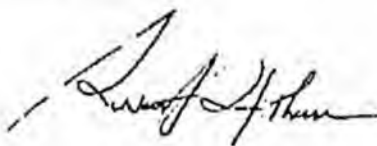
We believe the high priority you placed on SB 133 shows your insight and leadership abilities. We are grateful for the diligence and patience with which you pursued these amendments. Your achievement is a clear message to every Alaskan that you care deeply for school students, the schools they attend, and whether or not young people face a bright future.

The State Board is aware that SB 133 addresses virtually all the concerns we have had with the exit exam law, and we are deeply appreciative of the results you were able to achieve. Your bill is aimed at what we too are seeking - a disciplined, results-oriented, and accountable system of public schools where students get the help they need to meet our state's academic standards. Working together, we will get there!

Thank you for calling on the leadership and staff of the Department of Education & Early Development as you sought solutions to the challenges the exit exam law poses.

We look forward to working with you on other issues in the future.

Sincerely,



Susan Stitham  
Chair



**MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**125 WEST EVERGREEN**  
**PALMER, ALASKA 99645**  
**Office of the Superintendent**

Ph (907) 746-9255 fax (907) 745-0194 email: [pchesbro@msb.mat-su.k12.ak.us](mailto:pchesbro@msb.mat-su.k12.ak.us)

*SB 133 file*

RECEIVED

APR 04 2001

March 29, 2001

Senator Lyda Green  
Alaska State Legislature  
State Capitol (MS 3100)  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Senator Green:

Thank you for addressing the Alaska Association of School Administrators on Monday, March 26, 2001. I appreciated hearing your thoughts and concerns about accountability and the exit exam. It is encouraging to note that legislators, educators, and the general public are all speaking about the importance of essential learning for our students. We seem to disagree only in the implementation details. I think the committee substitute for SB 133 goes a long way in addressing important issues for students and testing. We recognize your leadership in this effort. I was glad to hear of the Senate's unanimous support.

Thank you, also, for my lunch meeting. Clearly, you have a good handle on the special situation Mat-Su School District finds itself in relation to the funding formula. I understand the difficulty of finding a way to be fair to all in such a diverse state. However, I am thankful for your advocacy for our local area and welcome any work you do to provide relief to our fiscal conundrum.

My 26 years of service in public education in Alaska convinces me that we have a strong school system. I am confident that the joint efforts of legislators, educators, and the public will strengthen our work with our children as we ensure that all have essential skills while nurturing their individuality.

Sincerely,

Patricia R. Chesbro  
Superintendent

*PO Box 1093  
Palmer AK 99645  
12.26.00/15*



# Alaska State Legislature

## House Special Committee on Education Representative Con Bunde, Chair

State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182  
(800) 892-4843 (907) 465-4843 (phone)  
(907) 465-3871 (fax)  
Representative\_Con\_Bunde@legis.state.ak.us

Brian Pate  
Joe Green  
Peggy Wilson  
Gary Stevens  
Reggie Smith  
Gretchen Gies

## STATEMENT OF EXPLANATION HCS for CSSB 133 (HES) Version "T"

HCS for CSSB 133 (HES) Version "T" is a combination of the Senate-passed version of SB 133 and the Education Committee's HB 94. It maintains accountability for the State Performance Standards. It also addresses the public's concerns about opportunity to learn, children with disabilities, and students who transfer into an Alaskan high school from another state. The work that has gone into this effort, by both the Senate and the House to date, is intended to make the High School Competency Test fair to all students and legally defensible.

This bill includes the following provisions:

- delays the effective date of the High School Competency Test until February 1, 2004;
- the Legislature's commitment to improving education through the State Performance Standards and intent that the High School Competency Test is part of an evolving process;
- the student must demonstrate mastery of the State Performance Standards in reading, English and math in order to receive a diploma, or have passed a competency test in another state;
- a waiver could be granted to students who transfer to an Alaskan high school or who has rare or unusual circumstances and who has satisfied the state performance standards to the maximum extent possible;
- if a student cannot demonstrate mastery of the standards, he/she would receive a Certificate of Achievement, which would note which portions of the test the student had passed, his/her attendance record, and any other qualifications the district felt were appropriate;
- special education students may demonstrate mastery by a combination of passing the test without accommodations, with accommodations, or through a portfolio of work;
- a requirement that the Department of Education will provide the Legislature with an annual report showing indicators of the progress that schools are making toward high student achievement;
- rewards students, between 2002 and 2004, for passing the High School Competency Test; and
- asks the department to make recommendations to the Legislature regarding an appeals process and portfolios.
- asks the department to report to the Legislature on the proposed criteria and procedures for waivers.

**Subject: SB 133**

**Date:** Wed, 18 Apr 2001 11:22:22 -0800

**From:** "Eric & Kristi Holta" <kholta@gci.net>

**To:** <Representative\_John\_Davies@legis.state.ak.us>

Eric J. Holta

22724 Knik Vista Street

Chugiak, AK 99567

Dear Representative Davies:

I'm a lifelong Alaskan and have been teaching students with special needs within the Anchorage School District for 8 1/2 years. I'm writing to you to express my deep concern regarding the horrific changes proposed to SB 133.

I have no problem with setting high standards and goals for students or with holding us educators accountable in educating children. I welcome the idea and believe it is long overdue. I am, however, struggling with the changes made to SB 133. After reading the new version of SB 133 it appears to me that it is closer to what we currently have than it is to the original proposal. What is the difference between students passing a test based on state standards and putting together a portfolio that meet state standards? That is not an accommodation/modification, nor does it take into account the real differences in learning styles and effort put into learning. I believe this bill, as changed, does more harm than good. As a professional I'm extremely disappointed in this huge step backward. It appears to me that it falls short of meeting the intent and letter of the law concerning students with learning disabilities.

We must recognize that for many children, it is **not** a lack of effort, poor teachers, bad parenting or even over-sized classes. While these problems do exist, for many, learning is a matter of an individual's ability to master algebra or geometry, or their ability to read and write at the high school level. Some people do not, and never will, have the ability to master all the academics taught in school--they are cognitively different from "the norm." **This is neither their fault nor the fault of anyone else.** Many of these people are smart, hard working, enthusiastic, outgoing, energetic and they want to learn. We should be encouraging them and giving them options, not penalizing them for being different.

All of us know someone who fits into the category described above. Someone who, no matter what is done, will only go so far towards mastering the entire curriculum as outlined in the exit exam. These people are everywhere. Some are business owners or managers, legislators and other prominent members of our communities. What would have become of them had they been denied their diplomas? Some may have dropped out and succumbed to drugs, crime, and a life totally different than what it is today.

SB 133 as proposed by Senator Green recognizes that students learn and think with different styles and in different ways, it is a great compromise. The plan is impressive because it allows for setting high standards and at the same time recognizes that students operate on different levels of ability. It does not let kids off the hook just because they have a disability but allows for the development of individualized programs and goals. In addition it holds everyone (pupils, teachers, and parents) accountable for setting and reaching goals, no more excuses. I've

reviewed quite a few plans from different states and this is by far the best. This plan proves that you can have your cake and eat it.

If the aim is truly to better prepare our students for the future we should be giving them more options in stead of less. SB 133 as introduced by Senator Green does this and it holds everyone accountable. I am not advocating that we enable students by passing them on. I truly believe in accountability. However, we need to encourage students to stay in school and give them options when appropriate, we should not be discriminating against them because they are different. To put all students into the same category by having them pass "a" test is simply wrong. Hundreds of students will be left behind each year as a result of changes made to SB 133. Most work hard at school, are involved in their community and have bright futures. To deny them a diploma based on a test is not only cheating them but our communities as well.

The changes being proposed by Bunde and company is an atrocious miscarriage of justice. For the sake of Alaska's future I hope you will not let this happen and restore SB 133 to it's original version. If possible please include this letter as matter of record when considering SB 133.

I would be more than happy to discuss with you in-depth this extremely important issue. I look forward to hearing from you at the address above, via e-mail at [eholta@yahoo.com](mailto:eholta@yahoo.com), or via telephone at (907) 688-1008. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely Yours,

Eric J. Holta

**Subject: from Louise**

**Date: Sat, 21 Apr 2001 08:47:49 -0700**

**From: Louise Parish <bells@alaska.net>**

**To: Representative\_Con\_Bunde@legis.state.ak.us**

Dear Rep. Bunde,

Thanks so much for your interest and support! I thought you might enter this into written testimony for me on 133.

I am concerned that some legislators may not have a lot of experience with disabled kids. I thought I'd try to tell them some stuff that could help them in their decision-making processes. This is a very important issue.

Sometimes people have misperceptions about the term "disabled." "Disabled" does not mean "can't learn." The majority of special ed kids in Alaska fall under the category of specific learning disability. I'd guess most have reading difficulties. It's fairly common. My daughter has dyslexia. Dyslexia is a language-based specific learning disability. Kids with specific learning disabilities like dyslexia CAN learn to read.

Dyslexics are probably the low end of a wide spectrum of kids that have difficulty processing and blending sounds and symbols (reading.) Are these dyslexic kids permanently disabled? Yes. They'll probably always process a little differently and struggle more than others. Does that mean they can't learn to read? NO. Dyslexics and struggling readers learn how when they take their kids to private clinics all the time. Can these programs be implemented in the schools at the K-2 level to provide a road map for kids who don't "pick up" on reading rules innately? Yes. This is what should be occurring for ALL potential struggling readers, not just kids who have qualified for eligibility as a child with a specific learning disability.

SLD sped kids are of at least average intelligence. To qualify as a child with a specific learning disability, a child must be determined to be of at least average intelligence, and display a significant discrepancy between their ability and achievement. An easy way to describe it is to think of a kid with a normal or above normal IQ (ability) and a surprisingly lousy reading ability (achievement). ... (This eligibility criteria issue is a whole other bag of beans and one I won't touch right now....)

How do the kids get this discrepancy? Take your struggling first grader and wait a couple of years. Seriously. This is my perception. The kid usually has to wait until about third grade to accrue a discrepancy great enough to qualify them for sped. Up until third grade, they spend time getting comparatively worse. They're pretty much staying the same while the other kids are "getting it." Special ed is supposed to help kids "close the gap" between ability and achievement. I believe it often widens. It would be best if we didn't wait for the gap to open beyond a peek.

Kids like mine have difficulty reading because they process information differently than other kids. It's not that their hearing is bad, or that their eyesight is bad. They have a processing glitch that makes it hard for them to associate sounds to symbols. Dyslexics don't automatically perceive (not hear, but perceive, it's a processing thing) that words rhyme. They don't automatically perceive the beat of a syllable chunk. They don't "get it" like other kids do. The code of language that comes easily to others doesn't come to them without explicit instruction. It's frustrating for them because they are smart, but feel dumb.

Here are a few examples. Think of the word CAT. You and I automatically perceive that there are three sounds in it. Kuh-A-Tuh. A dyslexic perceives one sound. CAT. They can't pull sounds and words apart into their component parts. This immediately limits their ability to manipulate and understand words. They usually instead identify the first consonant and guess by word configuration memorization (length and shape of letters.) This doesn't work for very long. Anyway....

Think of the TH sound. You and I look at the written letters TH and automatically know we stick our tongues between our teeth and blow to get either a vibratory th as in the word "these" or a light th as in the word "thick." Dyslexics and other struggling readers have to be taught to associate the written letters with these two sounds and to try both ways when they see TH together. They remember because they think of what their body was doing when they saw the letters together. It's called "multi-sensory." It's really not that hard. It can really be implemented into our programs fairly easily.

Here's another. Think of the word "water". Most kids at the end of kindergarten could probably tell you it had two syllables and pound it out for you. Not dyslexic kids. They might tap it out with one tap. All they perceived was one big sound that said water. Can they be taught to understand and perceive what other kids do? Absolutely. Dyslexic and struggling readers can be taught to perceive the sound symbol relationship if it's presented in a way they can relate to. That "way," however, is usually NOT the way classroom teachers are teaching.

Here's a couple of others you might relate to. Dyslexics and struggling readers need to be taught to think of rules and expectancies as a reading strategy. The expectancies become embedded with practice. Struggling and dyslexic readers should be explicitly shown the initial "process." For instance, they are taught the "X" expectancy. If an X is at the beginning of a word, it usually sounds like zz. If it's in the middle, it usually sounds like gz. If it's at the end of a word, it usually sounds like a ks. We non-dyslexics don't even think about this. We just know it. Dyslexics have to be shown and taught it. Again, not that hard.

If the teachers don't know how to do it, can they be taught how? Absolutely. Do I have the phone numbers to trainers? Yep. Is this bogus? Nope, research-based methods of reading instruction are making their way into classrooms across the nation because they have been PROVEN to be successful.

Do we have to wait for kids to display a significant discrepancy between ability and achievement in third grade or so before we can start using these methods of instruction?

No. We can identify 95% of potential struggling readers with a number of professional and simple end-of-kindergarten tests. I have numbers for those too and many are free. Texas has ten approved end of K screening tools. Many are called phonemic awareness tests (LAC, Yopp-Singer, many more)...

Can all struggling kids benefit from a system of K-2 screening, diversion and intervention using proven methods of reading instruction. YES. We can set up systems of diversion for kids who are going to struggle. Other states already do. At the end of kindergarten we give the screen. Those who fail get diverted to small group instruction using proven methods of instruction during first grade. Maybe 30 minutes a day. Some kids "get it" and exit. Some kids need more help. Ditto in second grade. By third grade, if you have done it systematically and correctly and not just in a hodgepodge of what you could pull together and fit in, you should have tons less kids going into special ed. Even

from Louise

the ones that do go in will be tons better than they would have been without intervention. You should be able to get 95 percent of all kids to basic competency by graduation.

I just wanted you to understand that LD kids CAN learn if schools decide to make reform a priority. I don't think schools will get this K-2 thing going without an impetus. They haven't so far. Maybe they would if there was a new consequence, such as "NO IEP DIPLOMAS."

Thanks much.

Louise