

Alaska State Legislature

SESSION ADDRESS:

Alaska State Capitol
Juneau Alaska 99801
907-465-3743
800-565-3743

Sen.Shelley.Hughes@akleg.gov



INTERIM ADDRESS:

600 E Railroad Avenue
Wasilla AK 99654
907-376-3725

Senator Shelley Hughes

Senate District F—Greater Palmer, Chugiak, Peters Creek, Eklutna, Fairview Loop, Gateway, Butte, Lazy Mountain

SB 79 Education Transformation Act

Virtual Education Consortium • Teacher Exam • Course Credit • Administrative Efficiencies **Sponsor Statement**

Every Alaskan student matters and deserves a high quality education. SB 79 takes steps toward the transformation of our education system in Alaska to better meet the needs of our students in the 21st century, while bearing in mind the budget challenges our districts face. Alaska has had a large achievement gap for too many years, resulting in some of the lowest graduation rates and testing scores in the nation and putting our students in a poor position on a global basis. We can do better, and it is our obligation to do better. The goal of this bill is to better our schools and increase academic outcomes for students by providing tools and incentives to districts and the department to improve classroom instruction and to reduce administrative costs.

First, this bill will create the Alaska Virtual Education Consortium to allow districts to offer virtual education courses through an online database to students in other districts for a fee. The consortium will also conduct teacher training, professional development, and can require participating districts to adopt a shared calendar and bell schedule. Students will gain access to great teachers statewide and to a wider variety of course offerings as districts choose to participate.

SB 79 consolidates administrative functions within the department and requires the State School Board to periodically adjust the minimum score needed to pass the Praxis exam so that Alaska has the highest testing standards for teacher certification among the 50 states. The bill allows districts to give students course credit in career and technical education, physical education, music, or art for activities outside of school, including cultural activities, that meet the educational or physical activity requirements of a course.

Overall spending on education does not correlate with better academic results, but direct spending in the classroom does. This bill will help districts focus money on the classroom and reduce administrative and overhead costs to help make that priority possible. SB79 increases the limit that a school district is allowed to retain in its unreserved fund balance from 10% to 25% of district expenditures and` allows for savings realized from a cooperative grant under AS 14.14.115 to not count towards the 25% limit.

The department provides a report each year to the legislature regarding academic progress of schools and districts. SB 79 requires the department to provide this report to the schools' districts as well. Each district will be required to provide its ratio of administrators to teachers to students for inclusion in the report and to make this information available to the public each year via its website or another easily accessible method. It's all about our students! For their sake, please support SB 79.