



Alaska State Legislature

Representative Les Gara

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DEMOCRATS SEEK TO IMPROVE GRADUATION RATES BY ENHANCING PRE-K PARENT INVOLVEMENT

JUNEAU - Four Democrats have filed education reform legislation aimed to improve Alaska's lagging High School graduation rates. The bill follows a growing national education reform movement to enhance parent education efforts at home for their young children. Roughly 35% of Alaska youth fail to graduate from High School.

“Parents have the ultimate responsibility for the education of their children. Not only does this bill provide the foundations for a child’s educational future, it will also equip parents to play an active role throughout all the learning years of students,” said Rep. Chris Tuck. The bill is co-sponsored by Reps. Elect Chris [Tuck](#) (D-Anchorage) and Pete [Petersen](#) (D-Anchorage), and Rep. [Kawasaki](#) (D-Fairbanks) and Rep. [Gara](#) (D-Anchorage).

Studies show that improving the learning environment for young children--at home or in pre-kindergarten classrooms--vastly improves graduation rates, employment rates after high school, earning capacity, and decreases the likelihood of adult and youth criminal activity. “A voluntary home visiting program can provide parents with information and skills they want and need to help them give their children the very best learning experiences. Parents want their children to be successful, and this is a low cost, high benefit way to do it,” said Abbe Hensley, Executive Director of the state's main early education task force, Best Beginnings.

Alaska is one of 10 states with no statewide pre-kindergarten plan, and it’s showing in Alaska’s lagging graduation rates. “Parental involvement is crucial for young children, and a small investment in a young child’s education will save money, increase graduation rates, and lead to productive workers needed to improve our economy,” said Gara.

Many states have incorporated increased parental involvement into their early education plans, and there is a growing home-based pre-kindergarten movement nationally, that incorporates the principles of this legislation. “Effective home based programs support parents in providing positive educational experiences for their children at home, where learning begins,” said Dirk Shumaker, Executive Director of one of Alaska's main pre-k providers, Kids’ Corps, Inc.

The state’s early education task force has recommended the state vastly enhance its lagging pre-kindergarten education efforts. Democrats have championed education reform to improve the state’s poor graduation rates, and have made parental involvement, and proven voluntary early education plans, a centerpiece of these efforts.

Rep.-Elect Tuck can be contacted at 223-6474, and Rep.-Elect Petersen can be contacted at 240-1049. Rep. Gara can be contacted at 250-0106 and Rep. Kawasaki at 465-3466.

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