



Alaska State Legislature Senate Majority News

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Senate Takes Up K-12 Education Funding *Discussion will also include PERS/TRS*

(Juneau)—The Senate turns attention to K-12 education funding this week with bills that would increase the per-student allocation.

“The Senate Majority is looking forward to beginning the discussion on education funding and what changes need to be made to respond to all the information we have received so far,” said Sen. Lyda Green (R-Wasilla), who is co-chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and vice-chair of the Health, Education and Social Services Committee.

The Senate HESS Committee is scheduled to hear [Senate Bill 1](#), [Senate Bill 14](#) and [Senate Bill 91](#) on Monday. The bills would increase the per-student dollar over the current \$4,169. The Senate Finance Committee plans to take up discussion of the issue Wednesday.

“We will hear the bills in Senate HESS Monday afternoon and hopefully they will move on to the next committee of referral, which is Finance, where we will have the ability to look into the full implications of all the changes to the financing package and see if anything else needs to be added or if there are any other provisions we can add to it to make it a better year for schools across the state,” Green said.

“I expect the discussion to also include a discussion of the impact of the need for additional funding for the PERS (Public Employees Retirement System) and TRS (Teacher Retirement System) packages for the school districts and what impact that’s had,” Green said. “We’re hearing from the districts that the increased retirement contributions are a substantial factor this year, and that does impact what happens in the classroom.”

“We want to be sure that we get funds to the classroom so that schools are in good shape for the coming year,” Green said. “We have to be responsive, but we have to be responsible.”

The other Senate Finance co-chair Sen. Gary Wilken (R-Fairbanks) said districts are struggling with unforeseen high expenditures in health care costs as well. He said an increase in the student dollar will help address the financial dilemma facing all 53 school districts.

“SB 1 gives us a starting place for the discussion,” Wilken said. “I’m looking forward to hearing from all members on this issue.”

“The determination of how much to increase state spending in education is one of the toughest challenges of the session,” said Senate HESS Chairman Fred Dyson (R-Eagle River). He said that increased teacher health and welfare costs, combined with decreased student count in some districts, have led districts to seek more revenue.

Senate Bill 1, introduced by Sen. Gary Wilken (R-Fairbanks), would increase the per student allocation to \$4,263; Senate Bill 14, introduced by Sen. Tom Wagoner (R-Kenai) would increase the allocation to \$4,500; and Senate Bill 91, introduced by Sen. Bettye Davis (D-Anchorage) would increase the allocation to \$4,225.

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