

## McDonald Weighs in on Education Legislation

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

There's a lot of moving and shaking in the Alaska legislature this year, especially when it comes to education. Last month Governor Sean Parnell introduced his omnibus education bill, which proposed a handful of changes to different aspects of the state's education system.

One of the biggest changes Parnell proposed was repealing the high school exit exam. In order for any student in Alaska to get their high school diploma, they must pass this test. The legislature has heard testimony over the past few weeks from parents and educators in support of repealing the exam, and many referred to it as an unnecessary obstacle to graduation.

Kodiak's Superintendent Stewart McDonald spoke on KMXT's Talk of the Rock last week and touched briefly on the subject.

"If removing the exit exam means our students can receive a diploma for completing a program without that exit exam, I'm all for that. If we really want to educate all children we need to find a way to make sure all of our children who complete programs get a diploma whether they're in special education or otherwise."

McDonald said he wasn't too keen on the state taking that exam away and replacing it with a different test, but said there are alternative options out there.

"I haven't quite seen that yet. If it's a WorkKeys test and we just simply give a student a diploma and maybe a rating of a bronze, silver, gold, platinum on their test results, that might be reasonable, but I need to see the rest of the details."

Parnell has proposed replacing the exit exam with a college entry exam, like the ACT, SAT or job skills assessment as McDonald mentioned. In Parnell's education bill he suggested the state would pay for the first of those tests a student might take, and graduation wouldn't require any minimum score.

Another proposal making its way through the legislature this year deals with allocating public funding to private and religious schools. Doing so would require amending the state's constitution, and legislators are trying to put that issue on a ballot.

McDonald offered up his take on the matter.

&ldquo;My particular point of view just comes solely down to public school is all inclusive, private school is, by nature, exclusive. I think public dollars need to be where we have all the rules, all the regulations and the all inclusive program. And people can always choose to be exclusive, but they should do so on their own dollar.&rdquo;

Any proposed constitutional amendment would require a two-thirds majority vote in both the House and Senate in order to qualify for an upcoming ballot.