


# KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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## SCHOOL BOARD COMMUNICATION

|                       |   |  |             |
|-----------------------|---|--|-------------|
| <b>Title:</b>         | 2014 Legislative Priorities                       |  |             |
| <b>Date:</b>          | September 1, 2013                                 | <b>Item Number:</b>  | Worksession |
| <b>Administrator:</b> | Steve Atwater, Ph.D.<br>Superintendent of Schools |  |             |
| <b>Attachments:</b>   | Draft of 2014 Legislative Priorities              |  |             |

Action Needed     For Discussion     Information     Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Each year you send our state and federal legislators a list of district priorities that can be met by legislative action. The items on the draft list of priorities that are attached to this document reflect administration's input. The Board's Legislative Committee will also review this list prior to this worksession. The purpose of this worksession is for you to review the lists and as necessary amend them.

At your October meeting you will be asked to adopt these priorities as amended at this worksession and during the October worksession and if necessary, the October business meeting.

## ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATION

N/A

# Kenai Peninsula Borough School District

## 2014 Legislative Priorities

### 2014 State Legislative Priorities

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District calls on the Alaska State Legislature to recognize that children are the first priority, by:

**Establishing a statewide health care plan for school district employees.** The cost of health care services in Alaska is well above the national average. Although school districts across Alaska have worked hard to find efficiencies to lower the costs of health care service, their efforts have for the most part, been unsuccessful. It is recognized that a state-wide health care pool of school district employees would be large enough to affect the cost of health care in Alaska. In FY09 total cost for health care services for KPBSD employees was \$15,376,426. In FY13 the amount was \$21,541,380 a 40% increase in 4 years. KPBSD recommends that the legislature establish a state-wide health care system for school district employees.

**Funding of the State's Unfunded Liability.** The state's plan to address the unfunded liability of its retirement system is an effective and responsible way to close the fiscal gap in its retirement funds. KPBSD applauds the state for creating this plan and recognizes that the appropriated funds are significant. KPBSD encourages the state to complete the plan so the state's school districts are not burdened with a cost that would cripple education across the state.

**Workers Compensation.** Alaska has the highest workers' compensation premium rates and medical costs in the nation. Since 2011, Alaska has been making medical payments based on "usual, customary and reasonable fees" (UCR). This has resulted in significant medical cost increases in the subsequent years. KPBSD encourages the Legislature to replace the existing UCR fee schedule with a relative value fee schedule with Alaska specific conversion factors. KPBSD further recommends the adoption of medical treatment guidelines to help control over utilization costs, as well as measures to address the rising costs of prescription drug use.

**Providing sustained, reliable and adequate educational funding for Alaska's students.** Education funding with increases necessary to sustain current programs, adequate transportation systems, and promising new programs should not be a year-to-year issue. By providing forward funding, with regular increases to the Base Student Allocation (BSA), districts can better plan to meet its students' needs. KPBSD recommends that the legislature direct its education committees to advance a new three-year funding plan.

**Ensuring bond reimbursement program is funded.** KPBSD's facilities are aging and many have significant maintenance needs. In the past the Kenai Peninsula Borough voters have approved bond funding for school maintenance projects with the understanding that the state will reimburse 70% of the bond payments. It is critical to KPBSD that the state's bond reimbursement program continues to be funded.

**Adequately funding the Department of Education and Early Development.** The level of federal involvement and requirements for public education in Alaska are increasing. KPBSD feels that while DEED does a good job of supporting Alaska education, it is being asked to do more than its capacity allows. With this in mind, it is critical that the legislature adequately fund DEED.

**Funding early learning programs in Alaska.** All children should have opportunities to learn during the formative early childhood years. Studies show that for every \$1 spent on early childhood education, \$8 is saved in later services that are not necessary. Many of Alaska's children are placed at risk for future school failure because they do not have access to rich early childhood learning opportunities. The District's use of federal Title money for preschool will continue, but will likely be reduced due to federal budget cutting. Further, this federal money only serves a portion of Kenai Peninsula Borough preschool students. As a way to offset this reduction and to expand our early learning opportunities, KPBSD recommends that the legislature issue a block grant for early childhood education. Further, the District advocates that enrollment in early childhood education is optional for students.

**Fiscally supporting improvement to athletic facilities.** Several KPBSD schools have running tracks that are in poor condition. The running tracks at Homer Middle School and Ninilchik School are in disrepair and need immediate attention. The tracks at Seward High School and Skyview need maintenance. Without maintenance or reconstruction, these tracks will be deemed unusable. Because the capital improvement process places track repair with construction and not maintenance and, hence, makes attaining the necessary priority status on the state list highly unlikely, KPBSD recommends that the legislature include funds in its capital budget for the repair of the District's tracks.

**Supporting the University of Alaska Anchorage's Kenai Peninsula College.** As the economy of Alaska changes the general population is recognizing an increased need for post secondary training. For many residents on the Kenai Peninsula this training occurs at the Kenai Peninsula College's three campuses (Soldotna, Homer and Seward). Many of our high school students attend KPC classes on one of these campuses. KPBSD recommends that the legislature support the University of Alaska Anchorage's budget that includes funds that will allow KPC to expand its offerings and ability to serve its growing enrollment.

**Creating a favorable climate for oil and gas exploration in Cook Inlet.** 30% of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District's budget comes from local taxes. Despite the increasing cost of education, the level of local contribution to the school district is not increasing. By providing incentives for responsible oil and gas exploration and development, the Kenai Peninsula Borough's tax base would likely be increased and in turn, offer the borough more revenue with which to support KPBSD.

**Addressing increasing energy costs to school districts through increased or supplemental funding.** Individuals, communities and schools are facing higher fuel prices. Increases in energy costs directly impact available revenue for school programs. Conservation programs and maintenance efforts have been put in place to help with these costs but will not address the huge

increases. Relief for high energy costs needs to be provided to school districts.

**Raising the mandatory age of attendance.** The KPBSD recommends raising the required age of school attendance to 18. The District feels that the increased age of mandatory attendance will serve to lower the district’s dropout rate and more importantly, let students know that the final two years of high school are critical to a their future well being.

**Providing accountability for all school-age children of the state.** Having a choice of an educational delivery system is important to Alaskans. However, all children have a right a comprehensive education. A registration and educational accountability system for all Alaskan school age children will help protect the rights of those least able to care for themselves.

**Create New High School Exit Exam.** The HSGQE and the Work Keys exam respectively serve to measure student readiness for graduation and preparedness for the world of work. KPBSD contends that one exam should serve both purposes. Such an exam could blend both the current HSGQE and the required WorkKeys test.

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## **2014 Federal Legislative Priorities**

**Maintaining Funding for the Entitlement Programs.** The current federal economic climate is causing a reduction in federal funds for education. The Elementary Secondary Education Act was designed to help students living in poverty. Over the years, our neediest students have benefitted from these extra funds. While KPBSD understands the need to reduce federal spending, the District feels that reduction of support for ESEA should be a last resort.

**Federal Money should not be portable with a student.** The District supports and recognizes that public school choice is a benefit for students. However, the District feels that making federal monies for IDEA or ESEA portable so that they can be used at private schools is a mistake. The limited capacity of private schools in our region would necessarily cause such portability to be difficult. Further, the legal requirements of IDEA would necessitate a collaborative approach between KPBSD and a private school which in turn could make the portable funding problematic.

**Reauthorize Elementary Secondary Education Act.** KPBSD calls on the federal legislature to reauthorize the ESEA with accountability provisions that are based on school growth. Further, KPBSD requests that the reauthorization allow states to make amendments to the Act as a way to respond to those provisions that are not suitable for Alaska.

**Fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).** IDEA was reauthorized in 2004. Under IDEA, Congress originally promised to fund up to 40% of the excess costs of educating students with disabilities. Currently congress has authorized expenditures to cover approximately 17% of the excess costs nationally. The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District believes that congress should fund the full amount they originally promised. To do otherwise requires local districts to reduce funding for general instructional needs to meet the needs of special student populations.

**Funding early learning programs in Alaska.** All children should have opportunities to learn during the formative early childhood years. Studies show that for every \$1 spent on early childhood education, \$8 is saved in later services that are not necessary. Many of Alaska's children are placed at risk for future school failure because they do not have access to rich learning opportunities. The District's use of federal Title money for preschool will continue, but will not serve the majority of Kenai Peninsula Borough preschool students.

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