

KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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SCHOOL BOARD COMMUNICATION

Title: 2013 State and Federal Legislative Priorities

Date: October 7, 2012

Item Number:

Worksession

Administrator: Steve Atwater, Ph.D. 
Superintendent of Schools

Attachments: 2013 State and Federal Legislative Priorities

Action Needed For Discussion Information Other: _____

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Each year the board sets legislative priorities for our state and federal legislatures. These priorities detail our areas of greatest need where we feel that the federal and state legislatures can offer assistance. In August you began a review of these priorities and recommended that a Base Student Allocation be the district's top priority. This worksession is your opportunity to review the administration's list of priorities and to then add or subtract items. You will be asked to approve the revised list during the October business meeting.

ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATION

N/A

2013 KPBSD's Legislative Priorities

2013 State Legislative Priorities

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

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.

Replacing Homer Area School Boilers. The Homer area schools will soon have access to natural gas. To take advantage of the cheaper cost of providing heat that gas affords, the schools will have to either convert or replace their boilers. Given that the boilers are older, it makes sense to replace the boilers to gain maximum efficiency of energy use. KPBSD requests that the legislature provide funding for the replacement of boilers at West Homer Elementary, Homer Middle School, Homer High School, Homer Flex School and Paul Banks Elementary.

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 and playing fields 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. The playing fields at Homer High School, Seward High School, Skyview High School, and Soldotna High School are sub-standard. Because the capital improvement process places track and field 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 and playing fields.

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 decreasing. 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 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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2013 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. The current scramble by states to seek waivers to the No Child Left Behind Act requirements is an inappropriate way to respond to the unattainable facets of this 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 only serve a small percentage of Kenai Peninsula Borough preschool students.

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