



KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Office of Superintendent

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M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: September 7, 2010
TO: Members, School Board
FROM: Steve Atwater, Ph.D. 
Superintendent of Schools
RE: State and Federal Legislative Priorities

Background: Each year you send our state and federal legislators a list of priorities that will benefit the district. The proposed 2011 lists for both state and federal priorities are at the end of this memo. By and large, these are the similar to what you adopted for 2010 with some small edits and the removal of the funding for debt reimbursement-this passed through the state legislature during the last session- and the request for funds to build a teacher housing unit at Tyonek.

Reason for this worksession: These priorities will be brought forward for action at your October meeting. This is your chance to discuss and recommend additions or changes to those included in this memo.

Kenai Peninsula Borough School District

Proposed 2011 State Legislative Priorities

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

Fully implementing ISER Area Cost Differential. KPBSD recommends the immediate implementation of the findings of the ISER area cost differential (ACD) study. Further, the district recommends that the ISER ACD be maintained for future education funding.

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

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

Addressing huge 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 are 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.

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 in 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.

Providing support for additional workforce development courses and career and technical needs. The implementation of vocational programs inevitably results in additional expenses that are beyond the standard revenue available to a school district. An educated and skilled workforce is a key to economic vitality. Further, the District is confident that a vibrant vocational program will help to reduce the number of dropouts. Funding for career and technical education and training, especially at the middle and high school levels, would begin to address the anticipated gap in workers for Alaska jobs.

Addressing health care costs in Alaska. In Alaska, approximately 110,000 residents have no medical insurance and the cost of medical treatment is increasing. The uninsured drive costs up for everyone. The health care costs for the District are approximately 10% of the budget; all indications are that this is a growing cost of doing business. The District recommends that the legislature create a statewide insurance plan in which public entities may participate.

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 to be safe and receive an education. On occasion, the district enrolls students who have been home schooled "off the grid" and are multiple years behind in their academic standing. A registration and educational accountability system for all 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 neither exam is as useful as intended and proposes that a new exam be created to assess the two skill areas. Such an exam could blend much of the content of the current HSGQE and WorkKeys test.

Proposed 2011 Federal Legislative Priorities

Address health care costs in the United States In Alaska 18.2% of its residents, which is nearly 122,000 people, have no medical insurance and the price of treatment is increasing. In the U.S., over 47 million people have no health insurance. The uninsured drive costs up for everyone. For school districts in Alaska, these health care costs for current and retired employees are a growing problem. In many districts, including the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, these costs add up to more than 10% of the budget. This growing budget category mitigates districts' ability to directly impact student achievement through classroom focused expenditures.

Reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The KPBSD encourages the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, formerly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), to be completed during the upcoming legislative session. The district contends that the reauthorization of the act should move away from a single standard for a school and district to one that recognizes student improvement. Further, federal funding must be provided to meet the new ESEA requirements for assessment, targeted student services, teacher and paraprofessional qualifications and services that children in transition require. Restrictions on transferability of funds for districts in improvement hinder the ability of these districts to effectively address identified needs therefore need to be relaxed. Less restrictive transferability regulations would allow for increased learning opportunities for struggling learners in high poverty areas and low performing student groups.

Fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) IDEA was reauthorized in 2004. Congress originally promised to fund up to 40% of the excess costs of educating students with disabilities under IDEA. 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 in 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. Currently, the district uses Title money to fund preschools, but can only afford to serve about 20% of its preschool population. Funding for voluntary programs for four and five year olds should be provided.

Entitlement Funding. The recent move to shift Title funds from an entitlement to a competitive grant application process is troubling. While the intent of this shift is understood, the implications for districts without a grant writer are large. Students living in poverty need extra assistance to meet the district's academic standards. Federal support to help students do this should not be dependent on a well crafted grant application but rather on an application that adequately addresses the established criteria.