



KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Office of Superintendent

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January 22, 2014

Senator Gary Stevens
State Capitol Room 429
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: Supporting Comment on Senate Bill 111

Dear Senator Stevens:

I am writing on behalf of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) to support as introduced, Senate Bill 111 that repeals the secondary student competency examination and related requirements. When the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) was first put into place, it raised the graduation bar for some of KPBSD's students. In response to this, my district increased various student accountability measures and also did more to help our struggling learners. Today, more than 95% of our seniors pass the HSGQE. In reflection, the exam did what it was designed to do - provide more accountability - but, is now just a small hurdle in the myriad of KPBSD high school requirements.

As you know, our students are tested more today than ever before. While I don't dispute the importance of assessment, I do feel that there must be sensitivity to ensure that a formal exam is providing important student learning data. I believe that we are now at this point with the HSGQE. We gather the same student learning data through the state's required Standards Based Assessment.

A further consideration that supports this bill is the cost of administering the HSGQE. Although the cost of the spring administration is a part of the annual Standards Based Assessment, the fall retake of the HSGQE costs the district more than \$4,500 in substitute teacher costs. The other unseen costs of this exam, e.g., lost instruction time and administrative oversight, must also be considered when making this consideration. We welcome any reduction in expenditures to help us respond to a looming multi-million dollar deficit.

Please let me know if I can provide more information on why KPBSD supports SB 111. Passage of this bill will provide some relief to the numerous mandates that we face.

Sincerely,

Steve Atwater, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools