



KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Office of Superintendent

Sean Dusek, Superintendent of Schools

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March 29, 2017

Senator Shelly Hughes
Senate Education Committee
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Senate Bill 96 Alaska Education Transformation Act

Dear Senator Hughes:

First, thank you for your thoughtful and systematic approach to support schools in moving forward to provide every student across this state with a high quality education every day. I believe this bill has several positive items, including credit opportunities for students outside of school, beginning the discussion to help address rising health care costs, and beginning the discussion on virtual education.

With that being said, we have major concerns with the section regarding the school size factor within the funding formula. We are not sure where the “80% of capacity” concept came from along with the caveat that a district will determine a school’s capacity. We believe it is important that any changes to a proven, equitable funding formula, as determined by independent firms, be developed and vetted through a transparent and empirical process. Recently, our district has made difficult decisions in regards to consolidation of schools, despite any financial losses through the existing funding formula. Through this bill, we would be forced to consolidate schools in a perceived arbitrary manner, which goes against the concept of local control. Forcing consolidation in the manner proposed in this bill also puts our student academic gains at serious risk due to a major, rapid upheaval in the instructional environment.

In regards to the important discussion on virtual education, I believe it is important to take a step back and work with the State Board of Education. They are in the process of putting together the details of the State Education Strategic Plan. A major component of this plan includes modernizing the entire system. This will include virtual education.

As you know, districts across the state have varying challenges to implement a high quality virtual education system, and are also across the continuum in implementation. While SB96 attempts to move this system forward, there are many questions, not least of which is how this bill will impact local control. In addition, any serious attempt to make virtual education a reality will require a significant investment by the State and cannot rely on a self-funded system.

Currently, the Alaska Staff Development Network is in place and could fully support professional development opportunities and requirements for teachers to successfully implement a high quality virtual and blended learning environment. Please consider the resources already in place to leverage the effort to expand educational opportunities for our students.

I applaud your efforts to bring the system together and I ask that you allow for more planning and input. Transformation is a large and potentially scary change that will take a tremendous amount of effort to be successful. Our schools are on this path and I believe that with adequate support, will accomplish the overarching concepts of virtual education and efficiency put forth in this bill.

If you have any questions or if I can provide you with further information, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Sean Dusek
Superintendent of Schools