



KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Office of Superintendent

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[Sent to: Kenai Peninsula Senators Stevens, Micciche, and Giessel]

Dear Senator:

I am writing on behalf of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) to express reservation about Senate Joint Resolution 9 that, if passed, would let the public vote to change Alaska's Constitution to allow public monies to be spent on private and religious education. After considering the implications of such a change, KPBSD does not support this resolution.

Although I appreciate how some could view providing parents with funds to use for the education of their children as positive, it is difficult to know how this proposed amendment to the Alaska Constitution will play out. It is for this reason that it is imperative that this resolution has accompanying legislation to guide the pending changes. KPBSD strongly feels that a public vote without accompanying legislation is a mistake. Briefly, such legislation should address the following three areas.

Equal Access- Will private schools receiving public monies be required to accept all students? Or, will such schools be able to maintain a practice of selective enrollment? Specifically, can a private school receiving a student who will use public dollars turn this student away for reasons other than building capacity?

Accountability- Will private schools receiving public monies be held to the same accountability standards as the state's public schools? Specifically, will private schools be required to comply with all of the state's education statutes and regulations?

Funding- Will allowing students to use public funds for private school tuition increase the amount of state money dedicated to K-12 education and if so, is the state prepared to make a corresponding increase to these funds? Specifically, will the expansion of the number of students receiving public funds for education lead to more money being dedicated to K-12 education?

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District has long supported school choice. Although not a large district, KPBSD offers our families five different types of schools to meet the learning needs of our students. One can view this as a success with students of the Kenai Peninsula having graduation rates and test scores well above the state averages. In sum, the need for more school choice on the Kenai is not a pressing issue.

In closing, KPBSD will not consider supporting SJR9 until accompanying legislation addresses each of the mentioned areas of concern. Thank you for considering this testimony and thank you for your commitment to the political process.

Sincerely,

Steve Atwater, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools