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ALASKA STATE SENATE

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SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE Senators Kevin Meyer & Joe Thomas, Co-Chairs

Senate Bill 171

The legislature shall by general law establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the State, and may provide for other public educational institutions.—Article VIII, Section 1 Alaska Constitution

Every Spring school districts around the state have the unenviable task of developing their budgets—sometimes without complete knowledge of the amount of funding they will receive for the next academic year.

SB 171 gives districts the ability to craft responsible and conservative budgets. It establishes a three-year plan of modest increases—lower than the inflation rate—so districts know the financial parameters they must work within as they plan for sustainability. Forcing districts to rely on unpredictable one year bumps in funding undercuts their ability to do long range, responsible financial and programmatic planning.

This provides districts with a three-year financial plan. Districts will know well in advance how to plan for the education of our children, how to staff the schools, and how to maintain fiscal security over time. Instead of working out whom to layoff each spring, they can budget over a longer period of time, knowing how much money they have to work with.

This additional annual amount added to the BSA allows schools to keep up with the rising cost of educating our children. When a student enters a school, we expect they will receive a quality education. They need an environment conducive to learning—curriculum that meets high standards, a safe, warm building, reliable transportation to and from the facility, and the best teachers possible. Some students have special needs that must be met. If we are going to increase our graduation rates, we must reach out to at risk students.

Failure to increase the Base Student Allocation will lead to lay-offs at school district around the state, program and curriculum reductions, or result in more education costs being borne by local taxpayers.

Because of our unique conditions, delivery of a quality education is more expensive in Alaska than in other states. However, in comparison to other states we are spending less and less to educate our students. In 2009-2010 we ranked 22nd in the nation in per pupil spending. This additional annual amount added to the BSA allows schools to keep up with the rising cost of educating our children. The incremental increases represent less than two percent a year, which is below the current inflation rate.

Alaska must invest in its resources, and the education of our residents is one of the most important investments we can make.

We urge you to support SB 171, and vote for its passage.