

April 9, 2015

Representative Wes Keller

State Capitol, Room 403

Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Representative Keller and Members of the House Education Committee,

Thank you for scheduling a Public Hearing on March 20, 2015 to discuss HB 102. This very important piece of legislation will ensure that all children with a mental illness have the opportunity to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) while simultaneously receiving treatment. Furthermore, this legislation will allow the residential psychiatric treatment center the opportunity to be the educational service provider that will allow for enhanced communication with the child's resident school district, increased hours of direct academic instruction, the ability to earn the appropriate number of credits to matriculate to the next grade level and a more seamless transition back to their traditional school setting.

After listening to the public testimony provided by the Anchorage School District, we continue to have serious concerns with the District's open transparency and representation of exactly what level of services they are providing. As you may recall, Ms. Linda Carlson publicly stated that the program provided by ASD has been very effective but later testified that the District does not have any outcome measures. We find this very troubling in this day of accountability and question how a District could state that the program has been effective if there aren't any outcome measures. In fact, we were even more disheartened hearing these comments knowing that that Ms. Carlson just visited the program for the very first time this semester.

We also have serious concerns with the level of supervision and leadership the school receives from the administration based out of the Whaley Center. As you know, the eight Specialty Schools fall under the Whaley Center but North Star has not had open communication and a level of on-site leadership that this population of student's needs. Ms. Carlson stated that the District has allocated a .5 counselor position to the eight Special Schools but again, we are puzzled by the duties and time spent at each of the Special Schools. Families, students and residential staff at North Star do not interact with the principal or counselor because they are not on-site. We find this contrary to the assertions of ASD.

Ms. Carlson also spoke that the District uses an online curriculum to deliver instruction as one of their approaches. Ironically, North Star has provided over 70 computers in order to deliver this instruction. North Star has tried for years to be part of the strategic planning for the service delivery model but our requests have gone unanswered. Also unanswered are the last two Freedom of Information Act Requests and we find this very disturbing. In order to help legislators, stakeholders and disability advocates have the information to truly study this issue,

North Star requested a financial reconciliation to see if children with mental illness are in fact being served in an equitable and comparable manner to other children in the District.

In closing, we appreciate all of your efforts to move HB 102 forward and stand ready to assist you in any capacity you need. Thank you for being a champion for children who have a mental illness.

Sincerely,

Michael R. Lyons