



Anchorage School District

Education Center

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March 2, 2016

Senator Mike Dunleavy, Chair
Members of the Senate Education Committee
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Dunleavy and members of the committee,

The Anchorage School District appreciates the opportunity to provide written testimony on SB103 "An Act relating to school boards; providing for approval of educational programs at residential psychiatric treatment centers; and providing for funding of educational services for students in residential psychiatric treatment centers."

The Anchorage School District is committed to working collaboratively with other organizations for the benefit of our students. We have enjoyed strong partnerships with Providence Hospital, Alaska Psychiatric Institute, Alaska Child and Family, Volunteers of America and Office of Children Services to name a few. Through collaboration with clinical care providers, we have continued to increase our educational services and supports for our children with the most complex mental health and behavioral needs.

In an effort to provide educational services and support students in psychiatric treatment at North Star Behavior Health System (NSBHS) in Anchorage, ongoing conversations with the local Educational Director and the Vice President of Specialty Education of United Health Services of Delaware, Inc. have occurred and resulted in the following improvements:

1. Updated registration process with current ASD enrollment packet;
2. Enhanced communication with parents of students in psychiatric treatment at enrollment including personal calls by the transitional counselor to ensure appropriate course placement, IEP goals are addressed, and accurate contact information is shared;
3. Facilitated communication with parent or guardian and receiving school to discuss transition plans upon student discharge;
Scheduled weekly meeting between ASD Counselor and North Star Behavioral Health (NSBHS) clinicians;
4. Purchased and installed technology upgrades by ASD for NSBHS facility:
 - a. 92 new computers
 - b. 10 Radio controllers
 - c. Complete reinstallation of an Anchorage School District wireless network;

Educating All Students for Success in Life

Anchorage School Board Kameron Perez-Verdia, President

Kathleen Plunkett, Vice President

Tam Agosti-Gisler, Clerk

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Elisa Snelling

Superintendent Ed Graff

5. Increased staffing:
 - a. Sue Doherty recently named as Special Schools Principal upon the passing of Jerry Koetje in December. Ms. Doherty has 30 years of special education experience as a resource teacher, transition specialist, department chair, supervisor of special education, and an administrator. Most recently, she served as an assistant principal at a comprehensive high school transitioning students from residential treatment facilities back to their neighborhood school programs.
 - b. Transition Counselor position increased from .5 FTE (half time) to 1.0 FTE (full time)
 - c. Teacher positions increased from 6 FTE to 10 FTE;
6. Created Special Schools Office in ASD Ed Center as home base for ASD Special Schools Principal and non-teaching staff;
7. Scheduled and conducted monthly staff meetings with Special Schools personnel;
8. Conducted daily site visits to NSBHS by the principal, counselor or special education department chair;
9. Increased communications between ASD Special Schools principal and the hospital staff;
10. Established weekly meeting between the NSBHS education director and ASD Special Schools Principal;
11. Ensured all teachers are "Highly Qualified" in relevant core areas of instruction;
12. Increased instructional day for acute care students from a half-day to full day program at the request of the NSBHS director;
13. Established regular progress meetings with NSBHS staff Mike Lyons and Evelyn Alsup, and ASD staff Mike Henry, Executive Director, Secondary Education and Sue Doherty, Special Schools Principal;
14. Scheduled quarterly progress meetings with meetings with NSBHS staff Mike Lyons and Evelyn Alsup, and ASD staff Mike Graham, Chief Academic Officer, Linda Carlson, Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Support, Mike Henry, Executive Director, Secondary Education and Sue Doherty, Special Schools Principal;
15. Addressed reported staff shortages experienced by North Star Behavioral Health System that result in relocation of classrooms and increased class sizes, without prior notice and on any given day, by remaining flexible and committed to serving our students.

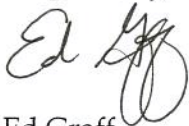
Given all that has been accomplished in providing comparable general and special educational services to students in psychiatric treatment, we believe this bill, which in essence diverts public school funding to the residential treatment facilities operated by an outside for profit corporation, is unnecessary legislation and could negatively impact the school district's ability to support our special needs students.

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We believe we are providing a supportive educational program for these students with acute challenges. Because we are committed to serving all students and enhancing our services through communication and collaboration with community providers, we have accommodated every request made by North Star Behavioral Health System through United Health Services of Delaware, Inc. Finally, while there still exist concerns regarding best practices for psychiatric treatment and educational services for this unique population of students, we believe that school districts are in the best position to provide high quality public educational services.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to share these accomplishments and express our concern relative to SB 103.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ed Graff". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Ed Graff
Superintendent

Michael T. Graham
Chief Academic Officer

Linda Carlson
Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Support

Sue Doherty
Principal for Special Schools