



Anchorage School District

Education Center

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March 17, 2016

House Education Committee
State Capitol Building, Room 106
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Honorable Members of House Education:

The Anchorage School District appreciated the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 102, Residential Psychiatric Treatment Center Funding, before you yesterday. In response to questions and comments made by committee members, ASD would like to address the progress made to date on developing a productive, collaborative partnership with North Star Behavior Health System (NSBHS) in Anchorage.

In order to support students in psychiatric treatment and provide educational services at 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 the receiving school to discuss transition plans upon student discharge;
4. Scheduled weekly meeting between ASD Counselor and NSBHS clinicians;
5. Purchased and installed technology upgrades by ASD for NSBHS facility:
 - a. 92 new computers
 - b. Ten Radio controllers
 - c. Complete reinstallation of an Anchorage School District wireless network;
6. Increased staffing:
 - a. Sue Doherty was recently named as Principal of Special Schools upon the death of Jerry Koetje in December. Ms. Doherty has thirty 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;

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Superintendent Ed Graff

7. Created Special Schools Office in ASD Education Center as home base for ASD Special Schools Principal and non-teaching staff;
8. Scheduled and conducted monthly staff meetings with Special Schools personnel;
9. Conducted daily site visits to NSBHS by the principal, counselor or special education department chair;
10. Increased communications between ASD Special Schools Principal and the hospital staff;
11. Established weekly meeting between the NSBHS Education Director and ASD Special Schools Principal;
12. Affirmed all teachers are "Highly Qualified" in relevant core areas of instruction;
13. Increased instructional day for acute care students from a half-day to full day program at the request of the NSBHS Director;
14. Established regular progress meetings with NSBHS staff Mike Lyons and Evelyn Alsup, and ASD staff Mike Henry, Executive Director of Secondary Education and Sue Doherty, Special Schools Principal;
15. Scheduled quarterly progress 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;
16. 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.

In addition, ASD has responded to a list of priority areas in need provided by NSBHS in December of 2015. 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.

The Anchorage School District enjoys 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 cooperative engagement 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.

Anchorage School District is providing a supportive educational program for students with acute challenges. ASD disagrees with the premise that a treatment center is able to provide more effective educational services to a student than a school district can provide. School districts are in the best position to provide high quality public educational services.

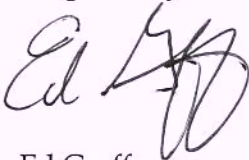
Given all that has been accomplished in providing comparable general and special educational services to students in psychiatric treatment, we believe this bill is unnecessary legislation and could negatively impact the school district's ability to support our special needs students. As noted during the meeting, the bill raises concerns about accountability under IDEA, a highly litigious area, opening the door for future conflicts.

HB 102 has been compared to the charter school laws. Charter schools are *public schools*. They are not private treatment centers. HB 102 abrogates the local control of school boards to determine the need for educational programs and circumvents school board authority and discretion for approving or denying a charter school contract. HB 102 removes all discretion from school boards because it *requires* a school district to execute a contract so long as the contract meets the requirements of the law.

HB 102 has far-reaching implications for districts across Alaska. ASD has consistently expressed concerns about HB 102. The Anchorage School District cannot support HB 102 because districts will not maintain control over the quality of education delivered, there is potential for conflict over accountability under IDEA a highly litigious area, and the bill strips local school boards of the authority to determine what educational programs are needed in their districts.

For decades, ASD has met the general education and special education needs of Alaskan students in need of residential psychiatric treatment and intends to continue doing so. We appreciate the opportunity to share these accomplishments and express our concerns relative to HB 102.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Graff', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ed Graff
Superintendent

Michael T. Graham
Chief Academic Officer

Linda Carlson
Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Support

Sue Doherty
Principal for Special Schools