

Senator Cathy Giessel  
Representative Wes Keller  
House Education Committee Members  
Senator Lesil McGuire  
Senate Judiciary Committee Members  
State Capitol  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Date: March 21, 2016

Dear Legislators:

This is in response to the Anchorage School District (ASD) letter dated March 17, 2016 to the House Education Committee. That letter contains important mischaracterizations of the current educational situation at North Star Behavioral Health.

We are grateful for the limited progress that the ASD has made in relation to instructing this unique population of students during the 2015-2016 school year. It was not until after the last session, that ASD made a concentrated effort to remedy the educational deficiencies they themselves identified.

In the letter ASD listed 16 areas of improvement. Of those, 11 are improvement areas that deal with administration responsibilities and not direct student instruction. We are looking for more than a supportive educational system for this population of kids as described in their letter. We are seeking educational accountability and equity for children in treatment facilities.

There are still many important areas needing assistance which ASD has not remedied. These areas include:

- Establishing the level of onsite services provided by principal to ensure access for stakeholders, parents, teachers, and students. *ASD stated there was enhanced communication with parents/guardians and resident school. However, to date we do not know how or when those calls are happening as we have schools and families that continue to struggle daily with identifying who to speak to or when they are available for communication.*
- Lack of student course schedules listing actual courses students are registered in for each semester
- Lack of clear transcript alignment with neighborhood school
- Lack of full student registration to the APEX course system
- Lack of completion of each students ILP
- Lack of further technology assessment and plan

- Lack of identification of Outcome Measures
- Lack of curriculum assessment and plan
- Slow and cumbersome enrollment process
- Lack of Admission, course registration and Transition Policies and Procedures  
*ASD stated they have a new streamlined process for registration however, there has not been a change in process only updated forms for the current school year.*
- Lack of AIMS web testing

The Anchorage School District voiced concerns over the quality of education delivered to students in treatment facilities if HB102 was passed. This is ironic and disingenuous since North Star has pleaded with ASD for 6 years to step up and fulfill its obligations to this class of students. ASD has failed to do so. Only this year, after HB 102 was moving, has this district taken any interest in correcting the lack of education for these students.

The bill addresses how quality education will be addressed by North Star on page 3, starting on line 16, “the following provisions will be included in the contract:

- Teacher to student ratio;
- A description of the educational program and how it aligns with state content standards;
- A description of student assessments provided in the educational program and an agreement that the center will administer those assessments required by the state;
- Written objectives for student achievement;
- The center’s plan for providing special education, vocational education, gifted education and bilingual education; an educational program and calendar;
- A description of staff development activities;
- Documentation that a teacher possesses a valid teacher certificate issued by the department and meets training requirements as outlined in AS 14.30.250”.

ASD also expresses concern over IDEA laws and Special Education. The bill openly discusses this on page 3, line 30: the RPTC must include “(10) documentation that a person who possesses a valid administrative certificate issued by the department under AS 14.30.255 will administer special education services;” and again on page 4, line 6, (12) “the center will follow procedures established by the department to comply with federal law, including 20 U.S.C. 1400-1482 IDEA.”

This is a three year pilot project with a sunset date in 2020. The option for a pilot project was taken so treatment facilities could collect data and show outcomes of their educational program to all stakeholders involved. The goal is to have clear, concrete, best practice decisions made as we move forward with educating this unique population.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the continued educational issues students face while receiving mental health treatment. If you have questions I am always available by phone 907-903-5081 or call Ray Gillespie at 907-230-8843.

Respectfully,

Evelyn Alsup

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Director of Education

North Star Behavioral Health