

Hi Sen. Hughes:

As you are drafting or considering things to add to the education bill, how about giving some teeth to truancy laws?

Right now, absenteeism is a big problem in Alaska schools. Parents take their kids on long vacations in the middle of a month, kids are mysteriously absent for days at a time with no explanation. As a teacher, I could open my attendance book at any time and see 20-30% absenteeism.

Kids who are absent don't learn. And it isn't the schools fault. Yet we teachers have no way to enforce attending school.

In New York City, parents who want to get their kids into good, PUBLIC middle schools have to prove they have good attendance. Kids with bad attendance don't get their choice of schools. Why can't Alaska do something like that?

You want to close the achievement gap? Consider funding truancy officers.

Thanks,

Melodie Wright

Dear Senator Hughes,

On behalf of School Board Member Jerry Babcock and I, thank you taking some time out of your day to meet with he and I concerning public education in Alaska. Mr. Babcock and I are still putting some thoughts together regarding SB 96, but we will share with you as they are developed, either directly or through Dr. Lisa Parady of ASA.

Thank you again for your passion, support, concern, and willingness to innovate on behalf of the education of our students in Alaska.

Have a GREAT day and a GREAT week!

Eric Gebhart

Superintendent, Nenana City School District

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PO Box 10, Nenana, AK 99760

Awesome!

The state needs something like this.

Should the bill pass, I would love to be a part of the changes. I am:

- A doctoral candidate in the field of Educational Technology.
- A graduate of UAS's Educational Technology M. Ed program (4.0).
- One of the first Alaskan teachers to have an official e-Learning endorsement on my certificate (possibly even the very first).
- A teacher with experience teaching in bush, ferry system, and road system schools, both online and in classrooms.
- A regular presenter at the ASTE (Alaska Society for Technology in Education) conference.

I don't know to what extent there may be committees or the need for input on implementation, but I want to be a part of it! I feel like it is long overdue and, of course, I'd be only too happy to share plans and strategies that have been stewing in my head for years.

Keep up the good work, and please keep me in mind.

Thanks,

Jonathan Crocker

Shelley,

Please don't raise the fund balance allowed at all, in fact shrink it. We recently found out our School District has accumulated \$34 million dollars, just under \$10 million of that last year. Yet, they are still complaining about the State cuts and want the taxpayers to pony up more locally.

Please realize that the Borough IS THE FUND BALANCE for the School District. They do not need to have any large amount of money, because they can always go back to the borough if they need it.

Lance Roberts

Fairbanks

I like some of the bill. Thanks!

I like this part so much but wish you could have eliminated districts within 20 miles of each other. Still a terrible waste of our \$\$\$

"remove the disincentive to merge schools within a district that are not at capacity. It will allow districts to adjust over three years to the funding change. This will reduce the number of needed administrators, custodians, secretaries, bus routes and more"

Still need to boost revenues by sales tax or income tax. Sounds like you do t want either. And didn't vote for PFD. What is your plan? Looks like just cuts again. Am disappointed you are not trying to solve the budget crisis.

Thanks for your time and hard work.

Carol Boquard [carolboquard@gmail.com](mailto:carolboquard@gmail.com)

Hello Senator,

My name is Marlie Loomis and I am Kindergarten teacher in the Sitka School District. I am writing to you today to advocate for keeping the Base Student Allocation (BSA) the same for next year. Please do not cut funding for schools. I understand in more difficult financial times, belts need to be tightened but cutting education is cutting our future. We, as educators, are being asked to do more with less and our students are being adversely effected. Thank you for considering the education of our children and keeping the BSA the same for next year. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you specific questions about how cuts would adversely affect my students.

Thank you

Marlie Loomis

Kindergarten Teacher

Sitka School District

Hello Senator,

My name is Jacquie Hedrick and I am Kindergarten teacher in the Sitka School District. I am writing to you today to advocate for keeping the Base Student Allocation (BSA) the same for next year. Please do not cut funding for schools. I understand in more difficult financial times, belts need to be tightened but cutting education is cutting our future. We, as educators, are being asked to do more with less and our students are being adversely effected. Thank you for considering the education of our children and keeping the BSA the same for next year. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you specific questions about how cuts would adversely affect my students.

Thank you

Jacquie Hedrick

Kindergarten Teacher

Sitka School District

Hello Senator,

My name is Jamie Parker and I am First Grade teacher in the Sitka School District. I am writing to you today to advocate for keeping the Base Student Allocation (BSA) the same for next year. Please do not cut funding for schools. I understand in more difficult financial times, belts need to be tightened but cutting education is cutting our future. We, as educators, are being asked to do more with less and our students are being adversely effected. Thank you for considering the education of our children and keeping the BSA the same for next year. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you specific questions about how cuts would adversely affect my students.

Thank you,

Jamie Parker

First Grade Teacher

Sitka School District



Good afternoon,

My name is Jessica Christianson. I teach in the Sitka School District, working with first graders for the past 11 1/2 years. I am also the parent of 2 children who attend public school in Sitka (a 1st grader and a 4th grader). I want to advocate for keeping the funding level of the Base Student Allocation at last year's amount. The proposed funding decrease would put the quality of our children's education in jeopardy, and therefore, our community's well-being at-risk. I implore you to stand up for our kids and to continue to invest in them now, so that they will have the capability to innovate and to advocate in the future.

Thank you,

Jessica Christianson

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My name is Elizabeth McKee, from Anchorage, Alaska. I recently became aware of some concerning language in Senate Bill 96 Section 7 and Section 8. I am hoping that one or more of you might be able and willing to provide me with additional information about the intent of this language and whether I am understanding it's implications correctly.

As I read it, the addition of businesses and nonprofits, to the list of entities that a school district may choose to, or be required to, cooperate with, would allow the department to require school districts to outsource integral features like Special Education services, professional development for teachers, and instruction delivered through technology to private companies and nonprofits like private schools. This is deeply concerning on any number of levels. Can you address this?

Additionally, I am a current member of the Public Education Health Trust. The Health Trust currently has administrative costs of 3%. It is my understanding that the self-insurance of the Anchorage School District currently has administrative costs of 11% and the State of Alaska health plan has administrative costs of 19%. Of what benefit would it be for members of the Public Education Health Trust to cooperate with plans who are operating so inefficiently? Perhaps there should be an incentive for the State of Alaska health plan to lower it's administrative costs instead.

Thank you for your time and the information.

Sincerely,  
Elizabeth McKee

Dear Senators,

I am getting ready to go home for the evening, but not before sending you all an email concerning SB96. I have been blessed to teach Kindergarten for 25 years in the beautiful , rural town of Sitka, Alaska. We have a lot of pride in our historic, small-town atmosphere. Sitka is a terrific place to raise children, because we have a strong school system. Our community, however is slowly shrinking, because it is becoming, more and more expensive for young, professional families to live here. Please do not diminish our school system by the loss of this crucial funding. We depend on every dollar we receive to keep our skeletal system in place. Successful programs and class sizes will be directly impacted, and for our little ones, it will have an enormous impact. It will then impact our local economy as families choose to move away.

Thanks for all you do to serve us and hear the needs of our families and children.

Most sincerely,

Linda Fredrickson

Kindergarten Teacher & Advocate

Sitka School District

Honorable Senate Education Committee Chair Senator Hughes,

I am the superintendent of the Sitka School District, and am testifying today in strong opposition to SB 96, which is a bully bill that strips local control. Specifically, Sitka Schools and the community of Sitka have made numerous sacrifices over decades to keep our class sizes small specifically at the elementary level. SB 96 would force us to consolidate our elementary schools, which we do not have the classroom space to accommodate due to our low class sizes. Thus the bully bill would undo decades of local decisions and force us to have class sizes significantly larger. For example, an average elementary class would increase from 20 to 28 students. This is appalling and offensive, and is not in the best interest of our students nor would it be found acceptable to our community of Sitka. Additionally, the language in Section 11 of SB 96 states that, "the district in which a school is located shall determine the capacity of the school". I am confused why the Senate Education Committee requested that the Department of Education and Early Development set the capacity limits and attach a fiscal note that will cripple Sitka Schools.

Another example of SB 96's bullying tactics is the Virtual Education component. I hold a Masters and Doctorate in Educational Technology and my dissertation studied components of synchronous online learning and their value to critical thinking and education. Consequently, I am a strong proponent of virtual education in general; however, the language in SB 96 is unacceptable from an implementation point of view. To railroad districts to pay to join the consortium, change our bell schedule, district calendar, and inservice days in addition to providing professional development for all of our teachers regardless of whether or not virtual education works with their content area is heinous. Again, SB 96 is penalizing us for our local decisions to invest in bandwidth and provide a quality learning environment that prepares our students for success in today's world. Sitka Schools is seen as a leader both in Alaska and throughout the nation regarding our innovative and effective approaches to leveraging the potential afforded through the use of digital tools and bandwidth to enhance student learning. The Legislature has no right to change our local focus in the area of innovative and connected learning. And all of this when SB 96 strips almost \$5.5 million dollars from our district budget over a 4-year time period - at the same time as inflicting additional unfunded mandates, such as the professional learning for all teachers in the area of virtual education. Having the Legislature set goals for education is one thing; however, having the Legislature reach into our daily practices and dictate without any collaboration from us about how we do something is unacceptable.

For these and a number of other reasons, SB 96 is an oppressive bill. I am pleading with you to stop this overreach into our local practices and instead find ways to support our innovative and best practices in education.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Wegner, Ed.D.

Superintendent, Sitka School District

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Senator Hughes,

Thank you for taking testimony, both written and oral, on SB 96. I testified last night regarding section 5 of the bill- the reporting of administrator ratio's. I don't believe that any district will shy away from being accountable for the way they provide education to their students. My understanding is that this information will help lawmakers understand if resources are being provided in the right place to meet the needs of our children.

The challenging part for districts that run variable term residential schools, is that we serve students from around the state but don't get to count them as our students. All variable term programs also rely heavily on grants and other funds to operate. Administrators are needed for these programs but will skew the results of administrator to student ratios. More importantly, these positions are largely funded with money outside of the state funds. Variable term programs like our Voyage to Excellence, offer great resources to students and leverage state dollars into grant opportunities. As written, this section will punish those districts for operating unique programs by making it seem that they are top heavy administratively. I believe that simply adding the descriptor "state funded" to the text so that it reads, "summarizes the categories of STATE FUNDED administrative employees" will more accurately reflect what is being asked and won't punish districts who have received grants to pursue additional resources and allocate some of those funds for the administration of those grants.

Again, I have no issue with reporting our district personnel and being accountable for the funds that we receive. Simply putting numbers into a report without clarification, though, leaves our information open to the misinterpretation that our district is top heavy.

Please consider adjusting the language to accurately reflect the information that the senate is requesting and accurately reflect the work of our districts.

Thank you.

Mike Hanley

Incoming Superintendent Chugach School District Former Commissioner of Education

Madam Chairman and Committee:

My name is Patrick Mayer, Superintendent of the Wrangell Public Schools and I am speaking in opposition, specifically, to Sections 10 and 11 of SB96.

Forty Years ago, Wrangell was a thriving community with a natural resource based economy, logging, and schools were at capacity. Wrangell, and student enrollment was growing. The schools at that time were built with expansion, not contraction in mind. Yet, the school construction was all approved by the state, through all appropriate channels. If we had only known that we should have considered something that might be proposed forty plus years later

In about 1994 the logging industry disappeared, the mill closed and this resulted in families leaving and student enrollment dropping. Other communities in Southeast experienced a similar situation. Our enrollment has now leveled off. With schools comes associated exterior developments around them such as playgrounds, greenhouses, gardens and a shop attached to the middle school.

These are all parts of our community and the schools I previously mentioned were designed with infrastructure that fits the appropriate grade level. For example, lower toilets, counters in elementary schools, science labs, in the middle school and long stairs at the high school are problematic. This is not simply a matter of packing boxes in preparation for a move and is not a simple square footage issue.

We are talking about a community wide issue of MAJOR proportions and student disruptions on a grand scale. Finally, this proposal disproportionately impacts some communities over others. Based on this proposal, Wrangell Public Schools could lose 32 percent of its funding. This is not the solution and it is not fair.

In the future, please give us more reaction time to our important concerns.

Thank you for your work.

Honorable Senator Hughes,

I'm writing to express my opposition to SB96. This bill is a kitchen sink full of unrelated matters, connected only in that they affect schools across the State. It was introduced late in the session, without input from stakeholders or professional educators, just as the DEED and the State Board of Education have kicked off a year-long process to take input and develop a stakeholder-driven, sustainable, long term plan to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Alaska schools. SB96 is a slapdash effort to create efficiency in the short term, without truly considering the effects on districts' ability to function and improve education across the State.

The last thing schools need now is more unfunded mandates. It is ironic that Section 5 of this bill requires school districts to calculate and publish their administrative staffing ratios, which would just increase the administrative burden on districts without improving the quality of education that is provided. This provision is an implication that school districts are wasting funds that ought to be used on instruction on administration instead. The fact is, if we want to truly transform education in the State, we can't skimp on quality administration to lead improvement efforts. Sitka's administrative staffing is already incredibly low, and these increased legislative requirements, combined with drastic cuts to DEED over the past two years, are having a real and detrimental effect on our ability to lead change and do better.

For example, this fall, administrative staff spent significant time collecting information on the Health instructional materials in use across the District and the healthcare professionals who provide guest instruction in that area, so they could be approved by the School Board as required by HB156, in time for instruction to take place as scheduled. Because we already appropriately involve families and the community in our curriculum development processes, the instructional materials and guest speakers were approved with a substantial parental turnout in support of our work and without opposition from any member of the community. Further, tasks that were formerly centralized at DEED are now being reinvented in every school district. As an example of this, there have been changes to mandatory training requirements in recent years. Last spring, I needed a summary of the requirements in order to plan professional learning for this year, so I had to create it. DEED wasn't able to produce that summary until October, well after our opportunities for beginning-of-year training had passed us by.

More than anything, we at Sitka School District are very opposed to the State making decisions for the district that should be under local control. This happens in several sections of the bill, including Section 7, which could require schools to allow private businesses to use public facilities, Sections 10-11 which decrease funding for schools not operating "at capacity", and Section 16 which creates the Virtual Educator Consortium.

Over the years, Sitka has worked very hard to keep class sizes low at the elementary level and a rich and diverse program at the secondary level, despite a reduction in enrollment of about 500 students over the past 15 years. Our schools were built at a time when we had more students, and the cost to operate them does not magically go down because there are fewer students in them. The School Size Adjustment, currently in place in the foundation formula, accounts for that, but SB96 would take that away. By 2021, our annual State funding would decrease by \$2.5 million.

The State is making assumptions about school size and capacity without consulting district personnel, and as a result are making inaccurate estimates of potential cost savings. According to the State's capacity calculations, we could consolidate elementary schools in order to operate closer to their definition of full capacity. If we did this, we would need to move the District Office to Baranof School, because Keet Gooshi Heen doesn't have enough space to accommodate the DO and all of our elementary students. We wouldn't be able to close the Baranof building, so savings would be minimal, but funding would decrease dramatically. Additionally, in order to actually fit all the children into available classrooms, we would be forced to have much larger class sizes and to eliminate programming that is valued by our community, such as enrichment, music, and science classes. These decisions are more appropriately made at the local level.

Section 16, creating a Virtual Education Consortium, sounds like a great idea on its surface- in fact, we used to have something similar in the Alaska Learning Network or AKLN, which was discontinued due to lack of legislative support and funding. DEED also used to support districts with dedicated statewide educational technology staffing- this was lost in the last two years of DEED cuts. Currently, educational technology staff from various districts have formed a grassroots Virtual Educators Network, to collaborate and support each other, without significant State support. These educators would love some State support, if they were consulted and asked to help design what that could look like. In its current form, this section removes local control of teacher professional learning, school year calendaring and scheduling, and reduces our State funding regardless of whether or not the newly formed consortium meets a district's virtual learning needs. For Sitka, that loss of control would mean a dramatic shift away from our current innovations in the area of arts and culture embedded instruction, culturally responsive teaching practices, and culturally responsive social emotional learning. We have been awarded a number of private and highly competitive public innovation grants to support this work, that we would risk losing if we no longer controlled our own school calendar and professional learning.

In the big picture, this bill is bad for schools across the state, and it would hit Sitka particularly hard. Sitka has under 1% of the State's students, yet would bear almost 4% of the financial cuts made in this bill. We understand the need to be both more efficient and effective in these times of diminishing revenues, and we are working towards both of those goals on the local level. Systemic change takes time, stakeholder input, and educational expertise, and SB96 reflects none of those. I urge you to oppose this bill in its current form. Please feel free to contact us at SSD if you have any questions about impacts this bill would have on Sitka. Thank you for your service.

Sarah Ferrency

Co-Assistant Superintendent

Sitka School District

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Hello Senator,

My name is Jeffrey Hole and I am First Grade teacher in the Sitka School District. I am writing to you today to advocate for keeping the Base Student Allocation (BSA) the same for next year. Please do not cut funding for schools.

Cutting school funding will create a rippling effect of catastrophic proportions, causing kids to suffer. Already, teachers are asked to teach to higher standards even though the number of students with social emotional needs, behavioral needs, and disability needs are increasing. A cut to the BSA will create a cut to the number of teachers. This will lead to an increase in classroom size, which will lead to a decrease in student learning, a decrease in authentic learning opportunities, a decrease in love for school for students, and a decrease in the love for teaching.

Decreasing the BSA... why? Why cut our future? Why harm the present? Why continue the cycle of asking for more with less? Thank you for considering the education of our children. Thank you for considering keeping the BSA the same for next school year. If you want to know more, or if you have specific questions about how cuts would adversely affect my students, please feel free to e-mail me.

Thank you

Jeffrey Hole

First Grade Teacher

Sitka School District

Hello Senators,

My name is Gretchen Matiatos. Presently, I am First Grade/Kindergarten combination teacher in the Sitka School District. I am PROUD to say that I have taught almost 20 years in Alaska.

Subjectively I say that the education of future Alaskans is vital to the future of our state.

The reason I am writing to you today is to be a voice for keeping the Base Student Allocation (BSA) the same for next year.

Please, consider a bright future and do not cut funding for schools.

I understand your overlooking perspective, the necessity of balance, finding out what the priorities in times of financial crisis... but I truly believe that a cut to education is a cut our future. I feel it is the difference in what kind of future YOU want to create. As an educator, I understand what is being asked, I understand how making difficult decisions have consequences 'down the line'. I am asking you to put yourself behind and support keeping the BSA the same as last year.

Thank you for considering the education of our children. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you specific questions about how cuts would adversely affect my students.

Thank you

Gretchen Matiatos

1<sup>st</sup>/K Teacher

Sitka School District