

Senate Education Committee – SB 96
March 30, 2017

Thank you Chair Hughes and members of the Senate Education Committee.

I am Norm Wooten, Executive Director of the Association of Alaska School Boards.

In the interest of time I will not go through each section of the bill but rather touch on the sections having the most impact on school districts.

Section 4 – This session expands the content areas that students may challenge out of to physical education, art and music. We support this as seat time is never an appropriate gauge but rather mastery of content. I might suggest that you add CTE courses as well to the list of content areas to give students more options.

Section 5 – I suspect you are looking for accountability from school districts. However, this seems redundant as districts already report this data in other places. Additionally, this is yet one more requirement for one more report. Although it might seem to be a small requirement districts are already struggling to comply with state and federal reporting requirements.

Section 6 – We appreciate the easing of requirements in any way possible and one school buss inspection per year seems reasonable.

Section 7 – We support the idea of districts being free to share space in school facilities. However, it should always be voluntary and allow districts to make the choice for what is appropriate in their community. Sharing space with businesses might take a little more thought but as long as it was a local decision it could be good option.

Section 8 – The opportunity to obtain a one time grant would allow districts to make necessary modifications in their facilities to create separations necessary for student safety.

Section 9 – Among the items in this section it refers to districts join the state of Alaska health plans. The number one cost driver in districts is health insurance. Anything that would contain or lower these costs would be of help. There are many questions to be answered on how this could occur with those health benefits currently being contained in collective bargaining agreements. The first step is changing statute to allow it to happen. All the ensuing details would then need to be ironed out.

Section 10 – This section is the most troubling in this bill. This in effect opens up the foundation formula by adding a building capacity element to the formula. Student populations fluctuate from year to year. This provision will be devastating

to many districts in Alaska. Changes to the foundation formula deserve to be carefully considered and vetted for any unintended consequences.

Section 15 & Section 23 – the provisions concerning the PTPC are in alignment with the Legislative Audit recommendations and we are in support of those.

Article 15 – AASB supports the use of and expansion of distance delivery of course material. Many districts are providing or purchasing these services for delivery in both inter and intra district. Costs for courses should always be driven by the market. Membership in the consortium should be voluntary allowing districts to determine the benefit for their students. This is not the solution to virtual education but it is a first step. We need to continue to pursue greater access to broadband for all districts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.