

HB 339 Support

Alaska kids and schools are suffering from four years of flat funding. funding education in HB 339 will help districts catch up and stay afloat during these challenging fiscal times.

Tara Kulbeth

My name is Matthew Conlon and I am a School Counselor in Galena. I am hoping you will do what ever you can to support appropriate funding for our schools. Thank you!

Matthew Conlon

Distinguished elected officials,

My name is Kayla Harmon. I am a fourth generation Alaskan and an elementary school teacher in Juneau. I am writing in support of HB 339 approving an education budget early. I want to let you know how delayed educational funding has impacted myself and my career.

I am a product of a great, well-funded Alaskan education. I am who you want: a committed Alaskan that chose to return to my hometown to educate the next generation of Alaskans. Do know that you get a return on your investment!

In the first 5 years of my career in education, however, I signed five long-term contracts and three 1-year contracts. I was fired every spring only to be rehired days before students were to arrive, scrambling to set up a classroom while juggling lesson planning and scoping out the school year. One year I was hired the day before school started, and the lapse in teacher contract days restarted my tenure clock. This uncertainty was stressful for many reasons. I didn't know if I would have a job with a steady income to pay my student loans, and I would fret all summer about something I had no control over. I even contemplated moving south to more predictable school districts.

I finally have job security, a multi-year contract, and a supportive administrator. I'm extremely fortunate, but I feel that I need to advocate for the new teachers facing these same issues, many whom are currently looking for employment in other states, as these issues are not resolved, and our state continues to slide further into debt while districts trim budgets more and more.

I believe that if districts knew earlier in the year what the budget would be, they could be better informed in retaining and hiring new teachers for the following school year. As you (should) know, teacher turnover costs districts money, exhausts human resource departments desperately hiring at the last minute, and wastes investment on training and professional development. (There is a great ADN report on how much this costs!) This is especially true in Bush communities. (I encourage you read the book Alaska Native Education by the late and great Oscar Kwaggaely.)

I understand that you are forced to make some hard decisions during this legislative session, but please keep in mind the investment you are making in future leaders of this great state. Alaskan children need your support more than ever. Education funding should be a non-negotiable.

A final note: I currently have 29 students in my 5th grade class. Seven of those students are in foster care. Children are really struggling right now. The opioid epidemic impacts the children that are being raised by addicts. I'm reporting neglect, parent drug use, domestic violence and even sexual abuse. Teacher prep times are being threatened. We are told our class sizes will go up every year, required curriculum is being thrown at us without any professional development and teachers aren't even given any work time to set up our classrooms or prepare for parent teacher conferences. It's not an easy time to be in education. Please do your part, and pass this bill.

If there is an opportunity to meet, or testify in front of any committees, I would love the opportunity to express myself in person. Please let me know what committees will be considering and when I might have an opportunity to testify.

Thank you for your time,

Kayla Harmon
Juneau Educator

I am writing in support of forward funding for education and an increase in the base student allocation. Anyone who pays their own bills knows that prices keep rising and we budget ahead of expenses or we are at risk. When the base student allocation remains the same, it really means the allocation value in real dollars is going down. Please provide stable (forward funding) and adequate (increase base student allocation) for the education of our young people.

Thank you for your service to Alaska.

Carole Bookless
Douglas, Alaska