



NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Ambler · Buckland · Deering · Kiana · Kivalina · Kobuk · Kotzebue · Noatak · Noorvik · Selawik · Shungnak
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March 5, 2019

Dr. Annmarie O'Brien,
Superintendent
Re: FY-2020 Impact of Education Budget Reductions

Last year, the legislature made early funding of K-12 education a priority. School districts across the state saw a one-time increase to education for FY'19 of 20 million dollars and a one-time increase of 30 million dollars for FY'20 school year. With the withdrawal of these funds, NWABSD faces a decline of \$529,000 for FY'19 and \$810,533 for FY'20. This one-time increase, voted by the legislature, allowed for precise planning with a clear understanding that the increases would be short lived and not to be depended on for FY'21. While additional funds for FY'20 were in the budget and not yet designated, the additional funds for FY'19 are accounted for and their withdrawal with no warning is extremely frustrating.

The pending education foundation funding cut of 26 percent represents approximately \$8.6 million dollars for our region. Administration and School Board members face a challenging task to determine where the cuts will least impact the education of our students.

At first glance, the budget cuts translate to approximately 85 teachers or a mix of teachers and support staff - aides, counselors, secretaries, curriculum and technology support services.

On second glance, the reductions may take into account a combination of staff and program reductions leaving the required classroom teachers and core content (required by law for graduation) area teachers for high school in place. Exclusive of utilities and required maintenance, all other programs could be considered discretionary.

Counselors, music, art, career technical education, and academic and athletic activities are all in line for decreases unless alternative funds can be obtained to support what is considered essential to a well-rounded education for students in all our school sites.

Other potential reductions to students and staff support include:

- Instructional aides,
- bilingual education,
- non-grant supported travel including sports,
- staff support and all non-grant related professional development, and
- itinerant specialists: music, art, technology and curriculum support.

Additionally, the decline in support of VPO's is a serious issue. In our rural sites, the VPO is not the first line of defense, but the **only** line of defense for their safety. Their absence makes staff closely scrutinize whether to remain in rural Alaska without access to public safety or to leave the region.

At this time, tenured teacher contracts are distributed, and non-tenured teacher contracts are being held as a result of budget uncertainty. If there is no resolution on education before the end of the school year, many of the district's non-tenured teachers will leave the region. Without contracts and no visible means of employment, we anticipate few will remain in the area.

MISSION: To provide a learning environment that inspires and challenges students and employees to excel.
VISION: To graduate all students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for a successful future.

Many out-of-state teachers are expected to return to their home states, where in many instances, conditions for teachers has improved. Teachers are under immense pressure not knowing what to do with their careers. Do they continue to bond and work with their students or do they begin to withdraw and return to their home communities where the possibility of employment is more specific?

On average, Alaska hires 800 teachers each year. The overwhelming majority of them from out of state, necessitating the important of outside recruiting. To further complicate matters, the national shortage of educators, of which rural Alaska is primarily impacted, limits our ability to retain and hire new staff required to educate our students. For example, we are unable to attend the March 15-16, 2019 Alaska Job Fair or any job fair with any certainty as with the budget in question staff needs remain unidentified and delayed.

We understand the Governor's intent to balance the budget and for the State to live within its means. However, to do so within this short timeframe, with the staggering reductions involved, is problematic. The current process serves to exacerbate the exodus of teachers from rural Alaska and ultimately negatively impact the education of our students.

In closing, the planning necessary to organize the school year including staffing, classes offered, activities, professional development all suffer under the budget uncertainty. We respectfully look forward to working with Governor Dunleavy to ensure the region will be provided adequate funds to accomplish the educational goals we have for all our students.