



Alaska Council of School Administrators

Leadership, Unity and Advocacy for Public Education

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April 8, 2026

Dear Co-Chairs Foster, Josephson, Schrage, and Members of the House Finance Committee:

On behalf of the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), we are submitting this written testimony in support of HB 246, which increases the statutory allocation for the Special Education Service Agency (SESA).

ACSA's 2026 [Joint Position Statements \(JPS\)](#) affirm that student achievement is our number one priority and sustainable funding remains our most critical need. HB 246 directly aligns with this priority by strengthening support systems for Alaska's most vulnerable children. As noted in the JPS, improving outcomes requires efforts to "increase student achievement and eliminate academic disparity for all of Alaska's children - especially those with special needs." (JPS pp. 4)

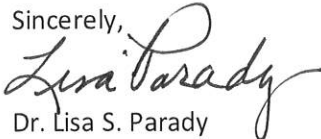
HB 246 updates the state's funding formula to raise the per-student allocation from \$23.13 to \$26.89. This adjustment is crucial to ensure SESA can continue to deliver critical services to children with low-incidence disabilities that are not available in their school district.

SESA provides highly specialized expertise, technical assistance, evaluation support, and professional training to school districts across Alaska, services districts often cannot independently provide. In a state as geographically vast as Alaska, SESA allows for children with complex needs to receive equitable access and support regardless of their location.

The proposed increase reflects rising costs and the growing demand for specialized support. Strengthening SESA's funding helps districts to meet federal and state special education requirements, while simultaneously supporting Alaska's most vulnerable children.

ACSA respectfully urges the Committee to advance HB 246.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lisa S. Parady
Executive Director
Alaska Council of School Administrators



Kuspuk School District

Calillgutekluta Ciutmurnnurtukut | Let's go forward, working together

Upper Kalskag | Lower Kalskag | Aniak | Crooked Creek | Chuathbaluk | Stony River | Sleetmute

March 12, 2026

RE: HB 246 - Increase the Special Education Services Agency's (SESA) funding

Members of the House Finance Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 246, legislation to increase the Special Education Service Agency (SESA) funding formula from $ADM \times \$23.13$ to $ADM \times \$26.89$ so the agency can hire additional staff and reduce service waitlists for Alaska's children who depend on specialized supports to access their education.

I offer this testimony in two capacities. First, as the Superintendent of the Kuspuk School District, a rural district serving remote villages in Western Alaska. Second, as a member of the SESA Board, representing superintendents statewide through my elected position with the Alaska Superintendents Association.

Before becoming superintendent, I served as the Director of Special Education for Kuspuk, and I have continued to maintain direct involvement in special education oversight during my tenure. Earlier in my career I worked as a special education teacher, serving students across multiple grade levels and instructional settings. Because of that background, I can speak firsthand to the critical role SESA plays for school districts across Alaska, particularly those in rural and remote communities.

The Role of SESA in Rural Alaska

SESA exists because many Alaska school districts, especially smaller and rural districts, cannot independently hire the full range of specialized expertise needed to meet student needs under federal special education law. For districts like Kuspuk, where communities are only accessible by small plane or river, recruiting even general education teachers is difficult. Recruiting highly specialized expertise in low-incidence disabilities is even more challenging. SESA helps address this gap by providing districts access to consultation, training, and program support from specialists in low-incidence disabilities, including:

- Autism
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Deaf-Blindness
- Vision Impairment
- Emotional and behavioral disabilities
- Multiple disabilities

SESA specialists work directly with school teams by providing consultation to IEP teams, professional development for educators, and technical assistance that supports effective instructional strategies for students with complex needs. This work strengthens local capacity so teachers and staff can better support students with disabilities within their own communities.

Supporting Students and Building Local Capacity

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), school districts are required to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to students with disabilities. Services are guided by an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which is a legally binding educational plan developed by a team that includes educators, specialists, and families. For rural districts, IEP teams often face extremely complex needs. When our educators encounter situations that require deeper expertise, my first question is usually simple:

“Have we reached out to SESA?”

SESA provides consultation that helps teams develop appropriate services, refine behavioral supports, evaluate students properly, and ensure we remain compliant with federal requirements.

Growing Need and Increasing Waitlists

Student needs across Alaska continue to require highly specialized supports. At the same time, school districts are facing significant fiscal pressure and declining statewide enrollment. With limited resources, districts can afford fewer certified educators, let alone maintain specialists in low-incidence disabilities. Because SESA's funding formula is tied directly to Average Daily Membership (ADM), declining enrollment has reduced the agency's funding even as districts continue to rely on its services. This dynamic has created a growing gap between the support districts need and the resources available to SESA. As demand increases, SESA's caseloads and waitlists continue to grow. When districts cannot access timely consultation or evaluation support, the consequences are significant:

- Students may wait longer for evaluations
- IEP teams may lack necessary expertise to design services
- Districts risk falling out of federal IDEA compliance
- Families experience delays in receiving support

SESA is one of the most efficient shared service models in Alaska education. Instead of every district attempting to hire highly specialized staff independently, SESA provides statewide expertise where it is needed most. Increasing the funding formula would allow SESA to hire additional specialists, reduce waitlists, and help districts maintain compliance with federal special education requirements.

For rural districts serving small and remote communities, SESA is essential. I respectfully urge your support for HB 246 so children across Alaska, including those in the most remote communities, receive the specialized support they need.



Dr. Madeline Aguillard
Superintendent
Kuspuk School District

From: Karen Page [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, April 15, 2026 9:34 AM
To: House Finance
Subject: Hb246 my testimony

I gave my testimony over the phone but I was a nervous wreck and had a hard time keeping on track and stay within 2 minutes. Here is a copy of what I wanted to say:

My name is Karen Page, i represent myself as a parent of 2 disabled kids who has received help from SESA. I live within the Alaska Gateway School District. I'm here today to give my testimony on HB246.

Accessing services in a very rural area like ours has been one of our biggest challenges. I have three children, two of whom are highly disabled with Cohen Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder.

Both of my children are nonverbal, have poor vision, low muscle tone affecting both fine and gross motor skills, and immune system challenges to name a few.

My youngest walks with leg braces since she was 15 months old. She required a walker from a young age up until a year ago and has tossed it aside for regular walking. She struggles with sign language and primarily communicates using a speech device or taking you by hand to what she wants.

My eldest son is more functional and understands sign language, but has limited finger control so he also relies on a speech device and shows you what he wants. He has much higher medical needs due to Crohn's disease and requires a bit more love and care. Both have very happy dispositions.

SESA has been essential in making my kids' experience at our rural school more supportive and more effective.

They evaluated my children in the school environment and provided practical, individualized recommendations that our school can implement.

Because of SESA:

Our local school district is more inclusive in their views, practices and ideas that harbor growth in our Sped dept.

With their support My children received iPads, specialized grid cases, and speech programs like LAMP to communicate at school.

They recommended high-contrast materials, larger print, and visual supports and made adjustments to their laptops when they use them.

They helped collaborate to create visual schedules so my children can move tasks from "to do" to "completed" and understand their day.

They made adjustments and recommendations on self help skills/ life skills that's part of their IEP.

They suggested classroom seating, larger books so my children can see and participate in stories being read and other work material being read to groups or individual work and a light board to help with seeing her work on a table.

They suggested bright floor markings to help with safe navigation in the classroom to places like the sink and the circle time area within the participating Rural cap headstart at the time years ago.

They improved cafeteria seating by suggesting special chairs that helped with reaching the table and foot placement so my children can sit and eat with peers with less struggle.

SESA helped train the paras/aids in how to help my kids use the speech devices or help with their routines so they could be more independent in navigating meal times or conversations spent around peers and expressing wants.

They helped navigate and secure grants. One grant was for the blind so we could afford essential speech equipment for kids at home, so I didn't have to spend thousands on buying my own learning programs, speech apps and devices to run them.

They recommended and supported the school in getting an adaptive playground swing with back support for my daughter. She can now safely use a swing and be included with other children on the playground and that makes me extremely happy.

SESA has helped my children in more ways than I can fully list. Meriah Cory and Angel Black have been a blessing to me and our school. SESA has dispatched them to our school for many years. And words cannot express how grateful I am for their expertise.

In a rural district like ours, SESA is not just a resource—it is the foundation that our special education program needs to be more successful. They provide the knowledge, advocacy, and support needed to make inclusion possible for all students.

I strongly urge you to continue—and increase—funding for SESA.

For families like mine, SESA isn't just an extra perk—it's what makes education possible. It's necessary for growth in all areas of every Sped dept in our rural areas with minimal resources. It's a need, not a want in my opinion.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Karen J Page

From: Jessica Leorna [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, April 13, 2026 10:29 AM
To: House Finance
Subject: Support for HB 246: LONG OVERDUE!! Special Education Service Agency Funding

Dear House Finance Committee:

I am writing as a parent to express my support for HB 246, which strengthens funding for the Special Education Service Agency (SESA).

In communities across Alaska, including my own, families rely on schools to support children with disabilities who need highly specialized services. In many cases—especially in smaller or rural districts—SESA is the only way those services are available.

What is often not visible is how fragile this system already is. When funding falls short, services are delayed or reduced rather than denied. Parents step in to fill the gaps—traveling, paying out of pocket, or going without. This creates an inequity where some families can compensate and others cannot. That is why it is the state’s responsibility to ensure these necessary programs are fully funded and able to function as intended.

When students do not receive appropriate support, it impacts not only them, but entire classrooms and educators as well. Strong services benefit the whole school environment.

More broadly, Alaska’s education system is falling behind, and our students are paying the price. We cannot afford to lose focus on core investments like education—especially for students with the most significant needs.

HB 246 is a practical, targeted investment that helps ensure all students—regardless of ability or location—have access to the support they need. I encourage your support.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Leorna
Juneau, Alaska

From: ACSA Fellow <acsafellow@alaskaacsa.org>
Sent: Wednesday, April 08, 2026 10:21 AM
To: House Finance
Cc: Ken Alper
Subject: ACSA HB 246 Written Testimony
Attachments: HB_246_ACSA_Written_Testimony.pdf

Please find attached ACSA's written testimony on HB 246.

All the best,

John Putnam, Alaska Fellows Program
Alaska Council of School Administrators
www.alaskaacsa.org
(907) 364-3889

Leadership, Unity, and Advocacy for Public Education

From: Alicia Miner [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, March 12, 2026 8:07 AM
To: House Finance
Subject: Support for HB 246

Good afternoon,

My name is Alicia Miner, and I am a special education director in Bethel, Alaska for the Lower Kuskokwim School District. I am writing today to express my strong support for **HB 246 Increase the Special Education Services Agency's (SESA) funding**.

We have over 40 students in my district currently being served by SESA. This service provides critical support to my students who would not otherwise get this support. Students with disabilities deserve access to the specialized services and expertise they need in order to succeed in school and in life. The Special Education Services Agency plays a critical role in supporting districts, educators, and families by providing highly specialized services that many districts cannot provide on their own. These services include consultation, training, and direct support for students with complex needs.

Across our state, districts are facing increasing demands in special education. Educators are doing their best to meet these needs, but without adequate support systems, students may not receive the level of service they deserve. SESA helps bridge that gap by bringing expertise and resources to districts that would otherwise not be able to access them. This year they've provided PD for both my teachers and paraprofessionals. We've also been able to pilot a program this year that will increase access for my students with disabilities.

Increasing funding for SESA is an investment in students with disabilities, in the educators who serve them, and in the families who rely on our schools to provide appropriate and meaningful support. When districts have access to SESA specialists, students benefit from stronger programming, teachers gain valuable guidance and training, and schools are better equipped to meet legal and educational obligations.

HB 246 ensures that SESA can continue to expand its reach and meet the growing needs of students across the state. Right now they have a waitlist and increasing the funding could help them serve more students. Supporting this bill helps ensure that students with disabilities—especially those with the most complex needs—receive equitable opportunities to learn and succeed.

I respectfully urge you to support HB 246 and strengthen and increase the services available to students with disabilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Alicia Miner
Director of Special Education
Lower Kuskokwim School District
[REDACTED]

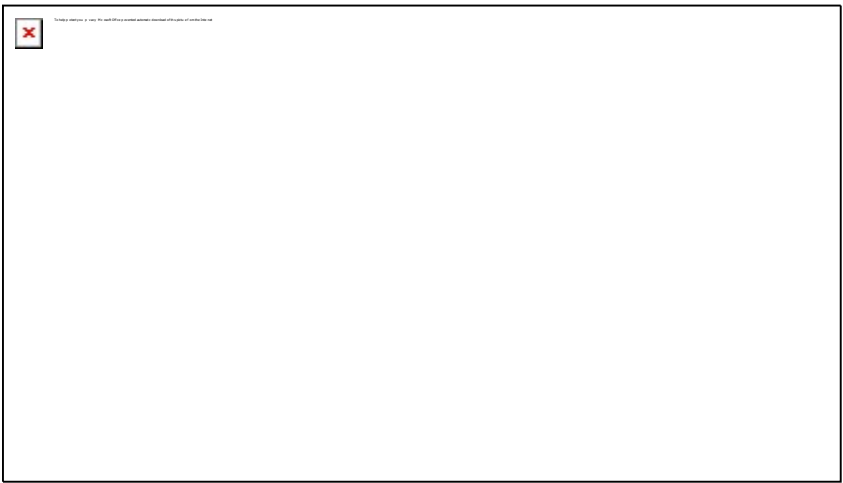
From: Madeline Aguillard [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, March 12, 2026 5:00 AM
To: House Finance
Subject: HB 246 Testimony: Kuspuk School District
Attachments: HB246 Testimony_Kuspuk.pdf

Committee Members,

Please see attached for written testimony on behalf of Kuspuk School District in support of HB 246.

Thank you

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From: Kelly McBride [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 11, 2026 4:26 PM
To: House Finance
Subject: Please support HB 246 (SESA funding), SB 178 (Infant Learning expansion), and InterRAI implementation

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kelly McBride, and I am a special education administrator for a rural district that serves remote students and statewide correspondence. Additionally, I am a parent of a neurodivergent school-age child in the Mat-Su. I am writing in strong support of HB 246 and SB 178 and to encourage continued funding for the implementation of InterRAI (an assessment tool) within the Department of Health. Together, these actions strengthen Alaska's capacity to deliver timely, appropriate services under IDEA and Section 504 (federal laws that provide educational services for students with disabilities) to some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Why HB 246 matters to students in Galena and across Alaska

HB 246 updates the funding formula for the Special Education Service Agency (SESA) so it can keep providing expertise for low-incidence disabilities across Alaska. These less common disabilities include autism, multiple disabilities, deaf-blindness, vision impairment, and deaf or hard of hearing. SESA helps school teams that cannot staff every specialization by offering consultative services, on-site visits, remote consultations, and access to a statewide lending library.

SESA's formula is currently tied to statewide ADM (average daily membership, or the average number of enrolled students) at \$23.13 per student; advocates have asked to modernize that amount (e.g., to \$26.89) to keep pace with caseload growth and workforce realities. A Governor's Council analysis shows rising SESA caseloads while ADM declines—putting specialists and rural districts under strain and at risk of waitlists without an adjustment. HB 246 addresses this gap.

Local impact (GCSD/IDEA):

- Autism (Galena): SESA Specialist John Barrowman provided training to school staff for a student transitioning from the Infant Learning Program to preschool, and will be on-site next week to provide consultation for the preschool student and a high school student.
- Multiple Disabilities (Galena): SESA Specialist Samantha Weiland provided training to school staff for several young students who experience communication delays and challenging behaviors.
- Vision/Hearing (IDEA homeschool): Multiple students receiving services benefited from SESA's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Specialist, Abigail Steer, on communication strategies, and from an Alaska Deaf-Blind Project consult from SESA Specialist Angel Black, including tactile communication strategies and orientation/mobility techniques. Additionally, Angel helped us navigate the Visually Impaired registry.

Beyond student consults, SESA has trained GCSD staff and parents—including IDEA families—on topics such as emotional regulation and home learning routines, thereby multiplying the impact statewide.

Request: Advance and fund HB 246 to allow SESA to maintain and expand low-incidence outreach, especially in rural and remote communities.

Why SB 178 matters (Infant Learning/early intervention)

SB 178 would expand eligibility and add Medicaid options for Alaska’s Infant Learning Program (ILP), which provides early intervention and support services to infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities. Earlier intervention reduces the intensity of services many children need later in preschool and K-12 special education. The Department of Health’s materials note that lowering the developmental delay threshold (e.g., to 25%, meaning children qualify if they are 25% behind typical development for their age) and aligning financing can expand reach and produce long-term educational savings when paired with adequate funding. SB 178 is currently before the Senate Finance Committee.

Local impact (Galena):

- A toddler in Galena flagged through Child Find and referred to ILP received in-home coaching and early speech-language therapy, occupational, and physical therapy. Other students in the community have identified needs but do not meet the 50% delay threshold and must wait until they are delayed enough or until they turn three and can be evaluated under Part B services (25% delay for early childhood developmental delay). An alternate route is a diagnosis; children are often on waitlists for 6-12 months and have to travel to Fairbanks or Anchorage for a developmental assessment before they can receive services, missing out on early intervention services.

Request: Support SB 178 and appropriate funding and Medicaid coverage for developmental therapies to ensure expansion benefits more infants and toddlers.

Support InterRAI implementation (objective, needs-based assessments)

We know that many of our community members experience lifelong intellectual and developmental disabilities and require home and community-based supports as wrap-around services, and more support once they age out of special education. Alaska’s Governor’s Council on Disabilities & Special Education has identified InterRAI implementation as a critical reform to streamline assessments for Home and Community-Based Services, objectively match supports to need, and help end the IDD waitlist. The Council’s FY27 ask includes \$1 million in state funds to secure the federal match and complete implementation, so the tool can launch on schedule. This will improve continuity for students as they age into adult services and reduce duplicative evaluations that families often face.

Request: Fund InterRAI in the Department of Health (Senior & Disability Services) budget to achieve consistent, data-driven eligibility and service planning statewide.

By aligning these initiatives—early intervention through ILP, specialized support from SESA, and objective assessment through InterRAI—GCSD and IDEA have seen firsthand what works.

Thank you for your leadership and for considering this testimony from a rural district that serves families statewide. I’m happy to provide additional data or connect you with GCSD/IDEA parents and staff who can speak to these impacts.

With appreciation,

Kelly McBride

From: Melissa Matthews <melissa.matthews@bssd.org>
Sent: Tuesday, March 10, 2026 5:18 PM
To: House Finance
Cc: Olivia Yancey
Subject: SUPPORT HB 246: Increase Funding for the Special Education Service Agency (SESA)

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Melissa Matthews, Director Student Support in the Bering Strait School District and I am a resident of Unalakleet, Alaska. I am writing today to urge your full support for HB 246, which seeks to increase the funding formula for the Special Education Service Agency (SESA).

As a stakeholder in rural Alaska, I can attest that SESA is an indispensable resource for our students. They provide highly specialized consultation and support to our schools, teachers, and families—expertise that is often unavailable locally in our remote regions.

The current funding model for SESA is at a breaking point due to the following factors:

- Funding Gap: SESA's funding is tied to the State's Average Daily Membership (ADM), which has been dropping steadily for five years.
- Increased Demand: While enrollment numbers have dropped, the actual demand for SESA's specialized services has steadily increased.
- Critical Adjustment: HB 246 would update the formula from $ADM \times \$23.13$ to $ADM \times \$26.89$.

Without this adjustment, SESA will be unable to hire necessary staff and will be forced to waitlist students who require these vital services. For our rural students, being on a waitlist means falling behind without the specialized tools they need to succeed.

Please support the passage of HB 246 to ensure that every student in Alaska, regardless of their zip code, has access to the specialized educational support they deserve.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Alaska's students.

Sincerely,

Melissa Matthews
Director of Student Services and Special Education
Bering Strait School District
Unalakleet, Alaska
(907) 624-4278 Office
(907) 624-4288 Fax
email: melissa.matthews@bssd.org

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