

Honorable Members of the Legislature

For the record, I am Dr. Annmarie O'Brien, superintendent of Northwest Arctic Borough School District. We have 2,136 students in 12 schools in our 11 villages. None of our village sites are accessible by roads, and all supplies delivered via an air carrier. I have been employed in Northwest Arctic for 18 years, six as a director of curriculum and instruction, eight years as assistant superintendent, and now in my 4th year as superintendent.

This message is a request to all Legislators to approve, before the end of this session, SB 185. "An Act relating to reemployment of persons who retire under the teachers' retirement system."

Rural Alaska, especially Western Alaska, is in a crisis because of the shortage of qualified staff to teach our students. For the first time in all my years with NWABSD, school opened without full staffing. This year alone 5 positions are filled by temporary staff. As we recruit for the 2018-19 school year, the situation is projected to be worse. As parents and grandparents, I know this situation would be unacceptable to your family.

As you all know, Alaska's University system graduates a fraction of the teachers needed to fill open positions throughout the state. The in-state candidates are in high demand, and mainly seek positions on the road system. This further decreases the number of candidates for rural Alaska. As a result, this district goes through great expense to recruit in the lower 48.

With the entire country facing a teacher shortage, the district must continually seek out new areas to from which to recruit. Utah, for example, no longer allows out-of-state recruiters to attend their major education career fairs. Others, such as the state of Montana, allow in-state recruiters to speak with their candidates first, and try to gently discourage out-of-state recruiting. In an environment of ever-shrinking resources; we are asking for assistance.

Using the Video Teleconference system (VTC), the district has been able to offer electives to remote sites that do not have the staff to support additional courses. There are eight sites and 61 students within the NWABSD that are taking these courses.

In addition to that, there are three students from two villages outside our school district who are enrolled in Introduction to Education I along with the NWABSD students. This education focus has resulted in an active Educators Rising program. Currently, there are 14 students enrolled in internships in 4 of our schools, this Introduction to Education II course is taught via VTC and uses CANVAS as the lesson management platform. Thirty-five students enrolled in Introduction to Education I course this year, this course was also only offered via VTC and is available to all sites.

As a district, we are taking advantage of the technology available to grow and expand our programs, by using technology. We are trying to use our staffing as effectively as possible during this time of teacher shortage.

We also run a 40-bed high school dormitory that is available to 11th and 12th-grade students locally and statewide. We house both full-time students in the dorm as well as students who travel to Kotzebue for our variable-length programs.

These programs, offered through our Magnet School, are designed to introduce students to careers in health care, education, process technology, and culinary arts. This efficiently allows us to fill the

need for classes in these areas to students in schools outside of Kotzebue that do not have the staffing or students to make a course viable.

We maintain our quality instruction through offering distance delivery and our Magnet School boarding program, but it is not enough.

HB No. 224 has NO fiscal impact to the State of Alaska. In fact, it will favorably impact district finances by reducing costs associated with recruitment efforts in the lower 48, and our students by having full-time, not temporary teachers for their classes.

I am appealing to all members of the Legislature to assist districts struggling with maintaining qualified staff for the students in rural Alaska. Please approve HB No. 224 before the end of the FY'18 session.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Annmarie O'Brien".

Dr. Annmarie O'Brien
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