

Michael Mason

From: Landa Baily <landabaily@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 11:44 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: SUPPORT FOR SB 266 Public funds and education

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for your commitment to public education in Alaska. I attended public schools in Alaska, K - 12, plus two years at University of Alaska, Southeast before transferring to the U of Oregon to finish undergraduate studies and attend law school. My brother benefitted from correspondence home school in the 1960's and my son also, during the 1980's, both times administered by the State of Alaska. In neither case did my family receive state funds for private and/or religious purposes. Extracurricular activities were, appropriately, paid for out of our family budgets.

I fully support correspondence school programs; I fully support private and religious school programs. **I support SB 266 in its present form.**

I do not support public funds for private and/or religious school programs. I especially do not support a constitutional amendment to allow public funds to pay for private and/or religious schools. I am even more opposed to the continuation of the unconstitutional practice urged by the recent "Sense of the House."

Please continue your efforts to ensure that by the end of this regular legislative session, the correspondence school program is restored to the procedures in place prior to the unconstitutional 2016 change.

Thank you and best regards,
Landa Baily
Homer, Alaska

Subject: Senate Bill 266

Dear Senate Education Committee:

As a long time Alaskan (1991), mother of three homeschooled children in rural Wrangell, Alaska and commercial fisherman, I have heightened concerns relating to Senate Bill 266.

Section 1. AS 14.03.016(a)

To redact (1) that currently recognizes the authority of a parent to object or withdraw a child from assessment or testing is a **GROSS** government overreach into a parents rights to help, guide, and/or protect their child in their educational journey. The current proposed change contradicts the statement prior “to adopt policies to promote the involvement of parents...” A governing body that intentionally removes authority of a parent as it relates to their child is not promoting parental involvement.

Section 3. AS 14.03.310 (d)

- (1) “To annually return the unexpended balance of a student fund account to the department or district;...”

By making this change, the senate education committee, is penalizing students who have chosen to spend funds responsibly, save for future more expensive classes, and immediately eliminates the ability of Alaska’s rural students to pursue education in vocational/life skill interests.

In looking at the Interior Distance Education of Alaska’s statistics, 45.09% of their student population are considered **economically disadvantaged**. By requiring that a students unexpended balance be returned, only furthers the economic disadvantage of the student. If the mission of our State Department of Education is “An Excellent Education for Every Student Everyday,” eliminating the roll-over funding for economically disadvantaged students does not align with the mission statement of our Department of Education.

Sec 3 14.03.310 (e)

- (2) (A student fund may not be used to pay for) Services or materials provided by a private or religious educational institution.
- (13) (May use...) Student fund account to contract with a private individual to provide...

The above restriction even furthers the disparity for rural Alaska children as some private institutions have the ability to provide needed services that our rural/bush students do not have access to. For example in requesting class listings from our local High School, AP classes are not offered and Spanish is the only language offered. By eliminating access to private institutions, required classes for further opportunity will no longer be accessible. Rural Alaska children will not have the option to apply for certain scholarships, (such as the Alaska Performance Scholarship) or Universities that require AP classes and/or several years of a foreign language.

The opportunity to contract with an individual, in reference to item 13(f) is wonderful if an individual can be available or found in such small rural communities. As we and many others living in small towns and villages have learned, finding “individuals” who can tutor students is

rare if not impossible to find. This is just one example of what important opportunities will be eliminated for Alaska's' youth.

As a very involved parent of three homeschooled students, living on an amazing island in southeast Alaska, I have committed to a rich education for our children. By changing the allotment spending opportunities and removing our authority as parents, decreases the rich education we have currently been able to provide.

Thank you,

Amy Smith

Michael Mason

From: Andrea Lang <andrealang827@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 30, 2024 7:44 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Yes on SB 266 and No on Reconfirmation of Bob Griffin

Members of the Senate Education Committee:

I am writing to urge you to **pass SB 266** and **vote AGAINST the reconfirmation of Bob Griffin to the State Board of Education.**

I believe there needs to be oversight and specific stipulation on how state funds can be used by those choosing to homeschool children using public money.

Additionally, I feel that Bob Griffin is an advocate for policies that are contrary to the support of public schools. While Griffin touts the importance of educational reform, his ideas are not in line with the advancement of ALL children. While I believe more needs to be done to cultivate our higher achievers in the public school realm, I realize that all students will benefit from policies that nurture the entire student population.

This being said, I also urge the Senate Education Committee to consider legislation that includes factors involved in educating each child in Alaska: **The Parent, the teacher, the school and the community.** We are attempting to educate students that are NOT LEARNING READY. All the responsibility is being placed on the school and the teacher. Perhaps you can start with an attendance policy attached to the PFD.

There are ways to improve education. Start by asking the teachers.

Thank you,

Andrea Lang

Michael Mason

From: Ariana Anderson <islavet@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 9:06 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Oppose SB 266

Dear Senate Education Committee,

I am unable to testify today in person because I am providing veterinary relief services in Ketchikan this week. When I am home in Juneau, I take half the weekend emergency call and organize the veterinary emergency group, as well as doing regular relief for half the clinics in town. I am able to contribute to the community this way because I can outsource parts of my children's education. As a homeschooler for 40 years, I am not willing to compromise on my right and responsibility to homeschool my children.

I urge you to oppose SB 266. There are many alarming changes, but the most concerning to me is the statement that no "services or materials provided by a private or religious educational institution" will be allowed to be paid for with allotment. This is ludicrously discriminatory, since public schools are allowed to buy materials and services from private vendors. This would eliminate all activities such as PE and music classes. My children currently take online classes from a variety of sources, including Spanish from native speakers. We can choose what fits us academically, and according to our family schedule. All of this would be prohibited because they are private institutions. This would also be devastating to the small businesses that provide services in our community, including to many homeschoolers. It would be very simple to specify that services and materials that are specifically religious cannot be paid for with allotment, as has been the process. As a homeschooler with IDEA for 11 years (minus a three-year tour elsewhere), the system has seemed perfectly appropriate and erring on the side of caution if a resource even mentions religion.

The requirement forcing all parents to allow their children to be tested is also appalling, and would be challenged in court.

A number of things would be prohibited by this bill, such as travel for field trips, that public schools are allowed to use public funds for. This is also highly discriminatory.

There are more concerns than I can go into and keep this succinct, so I simply urge you to vote no and find another solution to allow the vast majority of homeschoolers to continue educating their children as they see fit through correspondence programs.

Sincerely,
Ariana Anderson, DVM

"The cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run."

- Henry David Thoreau

Michael Mason

From: Ariena Jensen <ariena.jensen@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 30, 2024 1:41 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: SB 266

Please consider amending the following sections:

Annual return of unexpended balance: this Bill seems to strip the privilege of "rollover" funds being used by re-enrolled students in subsequent years. It would be a blow to my family to lose this freedom. In planning out my students' educations, I have the opportunity to take a long-term view of their education, not simply a year-by-year approach that so many brick-and-mortar institutions are limited by. We have often practiced fiscal responsibility in conserving funds one year, so to provide a more expensive course (and thus often otherwise prohibitive educational experience) in a following year or semester. I have never witnessed the "use it or lose it" budgeting mentality to ever (in private or public spending) result in better planning or expenditures of funds. I urge you to reconsider this section.

Memberships or passes to sports or recreational facilities: this bill will restrict access for correspondence students to physical activity and education. With no access to the type of facilities that a brick-and-mortar institution provides (like a gymnasium, tracks, pools, weight rooms, equipment, etc.) this bill seems to strip access to any of the like (whether public or private) unless there is a "lesson" being taught. What a loss to the health (physical and mental) for students who have such restricted access to the outdoors for so much of the year... especially the school year! Please reconsider this language to allow Alaskan students to attend to not only their academic growth, but their physical ones as well.

Private Individual Tutoring: I cannot understand the need for restrictions that narrow tutoring options so dramatically. Limiting tutoring to fine art, music, or PE robs many students of the ability to seek tutoring in core classes. Requiring certifications, and/or oversight and assessment by a certified teacher will be such a blow to the students who currently have access to excellent tutors in so many subjects, all of whom generate reports and assessments of their student's progress. This places undue burden on Correspondence Program staff AND Tutors both, not to mention the students themselves. Please reconsider how this language might practically impact our students, particularly those most in need of support.

Ariena Jensen
District R

Michael Mason

From: Avonlea Guthrie <coeguthrie@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 12:20 PM
To: House Education
Subject: Oppose HB 400 / Oppose SB 266

Dear Committee Members,

I urge you to oppose the hastily made bills, HB400 and SB 266.

As a second generation homeschooler, I am very passionate about this issue. My wife and I both had the privilege of reaping the tremendous benefits of being homeschooled, and are getting to experience it in a new light by providing our children with home education.

Our family came to a crossroads 5 years ago and made the decision to move our family to Alaska. Alaska's homeschool laws that supported a parent's right to choose the best form of education for their children played a great role in our choice of Alaska over other states.

The Allotment for homeschooling families has been a tremendous blessing to our family, but an even greater blessing has been the ability to make the correct education choices for our family.

As a part of the 20% Alaskan families who have chosen correspondence education for our children, we are deeply concerned about our educational rights and choices being threatened. Our successful programs stand on the brink of destruction due to judiciary, legislative, and bureaucratic regulations. House Bill 400 and Senate Bill 266 pose a direct attack on parental rights and authority to direct their child's education. These bills propose significantly inequitable changes that aim to strip correspondence students of funding, only to redistribute their allotment to fully funded public school students.

Alaska has always been a state that values freedom and choice when it comes to education. We believe in providing an environment where every child can thrive - whether that's in a traditional classroom or through correspondence schooling. However, these proposed bills undermine this belief by threatening the very essence of school choice.

We urge lawmakers not just consider these facts but also remember that each statistic represents real children whose futures are at stake here. Oppose HB 400 and SB 266.

Sincerely,
Coe Guthrie

Michael Mason

From: Betty J Johnson <jmbak49@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 9:08 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: SB 266

Good morning.

This email is in response to SB 266 which is scheduled to be heard today.

I have two objections to some language in the bill. Specifically,

1. Section 1. AS 14.03.016(a)(3) - recognizing the authority of a parent and allowing a parent to withdraw the child from an activity, class, program, or standards-based assessment or test required by the state for a religious holiday, **as defined by the parent.**

This allows a parent to declare any and all dates for standards-based assessment or tests required by the state as a religious holiday and they can make up their own definition of a "religious holiday." Perhaps the best way to mitigate that potential is to state that the student is required to complete the testing immediately after the parent defined religious holiday.

2. Section 3. AS 14.03.310 Student fund accounts. (a) Except as provided in (e) of this section, the department or a district that provides a correspondence study program may provide a student fund account to a parent or guardian of a student enrolled in the program for the purpose of meeting **instructional** expenses for the student enrolled in the program as provided in this section. I believe "instructional" expenses such as "horse riding instructions" and "private music lessons" should also be addressed more specifically in the regulations.

Thank you for considering my objections.

Sincerely,

Betty Johnson
907-209-2817

On Apr 29, 2024, at 3:46 PM, Candice B <cmbrownak@gmail.com> wrote:

Senator,

I am baffled. Truly not even sure where to begin here. SB 266 is such a hastily and poorly written bill I can't even. Speechless.

As written, it is VERY clear to me that you have very little to NO understanding of how PUBLIC Charter Correspondence schools actually operate. Please educate yourself on how these programs actually work and revise this bill immediately. As is, it violates parents RIGHTS again and again. I will do my best to organize my thoughts on this through my absolute outrage and utter disappointment in this legislation on this matter.

This appears to be an outright attack on homeschooling in general. NOT simply fixing the issue of a few bad apples using the program to pay for full-time private school tuition. I say full time tuition because that is another area where this bill completely misses the mark and imposes strict restrictions on families who have followed the rules to the letter for years. I agree, using the allotment and sending your kid to a private school full time, doing zero education at home is wrong. But we're talking about a few bad apples here. Why is the aim to punish every homeschooling student for the actions of a few? Why were those few bad apples not addressed and made to stop? Why are we attacking the entire system because essentially a few people broke the law/disobeyed the statute. We don't through out laws and draft completely new ones anytime a drunk driver kills someone.....nor do we go after every other driver on the roads who had nothing to do with it. That's what your doing here....coming after every homeschooling family because a few disobeyed. This is beyond unfair.

Homeschoolers continue to statistically receive a far better education than the public school system. Tons of research shows that, please do your due diligence

here and do your research. I keep hearing those in favor say "We're not trying to limit homeschooling just inappropriate funding of private schools ".... but by attempting to pass SB 266 that's exactly what you are doing. Massively limiting my ability as an involved parent to provide the very best education for my children. We only receive \$2700 a YEAR from the districts. We don't even come close to receiving the full BSA for our kids when we're doing all the work. It truly doesn't cover very much anyway. Our family has primarily used it for curriculum, that already has to be approved by our contact teachers and deemed secular in origin. And we use it for things like the Kellogg Outdoor Field schools environmental science program. Which is a truly wonderful Outdoor science class. Or the actual legit art class my daughter attends with moosewood art studio in palmer. Or drum lessons with Dr. Aube of Percussion of the Valley. Because those classes ARE harder to give quality education at home. But by no means would that or should that be considered "private school funding" it's 1 class here and there, and mainly because Idea doesn't offer those options at either valley location. The way SB 266 is currently worded, the allotment would no longer pay for any of that except maybe text books. How is that fair? How is that equal? The brick & mortars use their funds regularly for classroom supplies, Field trips, transportation for Field trips, supplies etc. Heck every student gets a stupid chrome book?! And you want to regulate how I use funds?! If that's the case then every school district must then go through a strict audit to ensure funds are not being spent in any way that is against SB 266....and every school district will fail that audit miserably. Coming after the homeschoolers because the public schools are in disrepair and the system is horribly broken, and ASD has a 70% absentee rate...is like going after all drivers or even car manufacturers when a drunk driver breaks the law. It's insane. We are not the problem. Taking our funds is not going to help the brick and mortars. Actually it will hurt them. The ONLY reason most of us tolerate going through a public charter correspondence program IS the allotment. When it becomes so heavily regulated that it's difficult to even get basic items covered. I will go independent. The state shall not receive a dime for my child's enrollment. And every single homeschool parent I've spoken with in my community has the same stance. The correspondence programs allotment WAS the middle ground. The wording of SB 266 is terrible and will absolutely infringe on parental rights. It doesn't even fully articulate what private tuition is defined as. It should read as full time enrollment in a private brick and mortar actual credentialed school. Everything else we utilize is not that. It's education enrichment of 1 class here and there.

My oldest has ADHD and is thriving at being homeschooled. If I placed her in public school she'd need an IEP and be placed in the sped classes and struggle like every other sped program child already is because those programs in the schools are TERRIBLE. Where as her test scores are always great....when we choose to test. That is a parental right.

If SB 266 was truly only about funding private school tuition then all that other junk needs to be removed immediately. There shouldn't be anything in it about forcing standardized testing....which is already proven is a terrible metric.

We do not need new laws that massively overstep. We just need the current statute to be enforced as written. We already cannot be reimbursed for any Christian material or pay for private school tuition. That's already how it always was for Pete's sake! Never once was I able to get reimbursed for anything biblical. How on earth some folks did I have no clue. I've been with Twindly Bridge and Idea and those rules were strictly enforced already!

A Modest Proposal of SB266 by rewording it. Written by a dear friend Maria Michaloski:

"SB666, A Modest Proposal

The department or a district that provides a student fund account shall
-annually return the unexpended balance of a student fund account
to the budget of the department or district as the idea of saving money for future
expected expenses is abhorrent to all governments.

A student fund account may not be able to be used for:

- services or materials provided by a private or religious educational

institution. Students may only use curriculum developed and sold by the government. It is not that we want to control you, we just don't like that you try to make your own choices and think your own thoughts. Please forget that your neighborhood school uses curriculum from private educational institutions.

-family travel, as traveling is wanton entertainment. Traveling has never been shown to be educational or beneficial for the development of a person nor their ideas. Only sterile classroom environments are proper for children.

-annual passes or family memberships to a sports or recreational facility; Students shall not be able to run freely, play with a ball, or engage in any physical activity without the direct instruction of a certified teacher.

-fees that allow entrance to a facility in which learning happens naturally. These include museums, the Sealife center, science centers, the Alaska Native museum. If a child has a certified teacher guiding every thought and movement of child, there is an exception.

-clothing, uniforms, physical education equipment, or personal, unless of course they join a brick and mortar school and then they will be given uniforms to use. - parking fees. No learning has ever or will ever occur while hiking Lazy Mountain, the Butte, or by using a state park. Exercise of one's body may only occur under the direct supervision of a certified teacher in a school building. Do not look at anything outside of the classroom, there is nothing to learn there it is an empty wasteland.

- entertainment. Funds may be used for a drama production but no school funds may be used to watch said drama production. That is entertainment. There must be no audience."

Her satire truly highlights exact what SB 266 is REALLY going to do if passed. This is NOT ok.

Sincerely,

Candice Brown

907-521-1624

Palmer Resident & Homeschool educator

Michael Mason

From: Carmen DeVilbiss <windyriverfarm@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 10:56 AM
To: Senate Education; House Education
Subject: Fwd: SB266

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Carmen DeVilbiss** <windyriverfarm@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Apr 29, 2024 at 10:50 AM
Subject: SB266 and HB400
To: <House.education@akleg.gov>

To the Alaska Senate and House Members,

I am writing about the concerns I have for the upcoming Senate Bill 266 and HB400. My first concern is about why these bills need to include standardized tests. This whole Correspondence School issue that arrived with Judge Zemans ruling absolutely had nothing to do with parents' ability to opt out of testing. There have been many studies proving that standardized tests are not useful in gauging children's learning. From the NEAtoday website "Standardized testing is still failing students. Educators have long known that standardized tests are an inaccurate and unfair measure of student progress." Also from the NEAtoday website "Standardized tests don't accurately measure student learning and growth." As well as this gem from the same article: "We want to capture all of the things that show student learning and achievement, not just this tortuously narrow vision that is embedded in the current system." Jack Schneider. If the very people who brought forth a lawsuit against Public Correspondence Schools believe this about standardized testing, why in the world would you think it a good idea to force this on students in your state?

As for the allotment issue changing the wording to "student fund" does not change the issue at hand or all the "extra can not use" wording that you added to the bill. If these are not allowable to public homeschooled students they can not be allowed to brick and mortar public school students either. It is neither "fair nor equitable."

The system that has been in place for the last ten years has served CS students very well. As a mom using a Correspondence Homeschool program I can attest to the usefulness and breath of fresh air that the CS model has brought to our family. It has helped lay out a good model of education for each of my children, who all have very different learning styles, and our Contact Teacher has helped us navigate the High School graduation pathway. She has given us great ideas on programs and curriculum that would work great for each individual child. We have not, and have been specifically forbidden to use our allotments, for any type of religious material. All of these are paid out of pocket and not reimbursable. Why a math workbook from one publisher over a math workbook from another publisher is non-reimbursable is beyond me, but I stay within the guidelines. I think you will find that to be the case 99% of the time. Re-writing statutes that remove the current models drastically are not in the public interest and certainly not in the interest of roughly 18% of your students population. Throw the bill out. It does not solve the issues brought up by the court's ruling.

Thank you,
Carmen DeVilbiss

Michael Mason

From: Carol Dunfee <bcdunfee@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 11:41 AM
Subject: SB 266 and HB 400

As a homeschool-serving vendor and as a homeschool parent, I oppose both SB 266 and HB 400 as they stand.

I oppose mandatory standardized testing. Standardized testing is not an accurate measurement of learning progress. It causes undue stress on both the student and instructor. It interrupts real education while only testing a limited cross-section of learning.

Student allotments should go to whomever the parents choose for instruction. Parents know their children better than a school district. They know which instructor, curriculum, and setting will be most conducive to learning. No college degree or certifications can replace a parent's understanding of their child's needs.

The term "private or religious educational institution" is too broad and is subject to whims of interpretation. Both HeadStart and Sylvan Learning Center could be deemed as private educational institutions, yet both are used by the Anchorage School District. ASD also purchases curriculum from private education institutions known as curriculum companies. To cut off correspondence school allotments, while leaving these arrangements untouched, is discrimination and inequity. It also could lead to the destruction of local small businesses who serve the correspondence/charter/homeschool school community.

As a vendor for several correspondence/charter schools, my small business is in danger of losing 90% of its revenue. Even now, my income has been interrupted by ASD's refusal to pay me for services I have already rendered and that I billed long before the April ruling. Many other vendors such as coaches, gyms, art/music studios, tutoring services, and co-ops are at risk of losing their businesses entirely with this discriminatory legislation. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, there is no verbiage distinguishing my small business from a private brick-and-mortar school.

Student allotments should be allowed to accumulate and roll over to future years. Some years of education are relatively inexpensive while others cost far more than a standard allotment. By allowing money to roll over from year to year, lower-income and middle-income working families can save for dual enrollment college classes, quality instruction for math and science, and other opportunities unique to the upper grades.

I support legislation that guarantees parents' freedom to educate their children without government or school district over-regulation. The charter/correspondence schools under attack have been proven by independent research to be the most effective in the state. Instead of hindering them with restrictions and required testing, let's grant them freedom to continue to operate successfully.

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Carol Dunfee

Michael Mason

From: Carolyn Morrison <tenderheartcarebear@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 3:39 PM
To: Sen. David Wilson; Senate Education
Subject: oppose sb 266



Carolyn Morrison <tenderheartcarebear@gmail.com>

to Senator.David.Wilson, Senate.education

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Carolyn Morrison. I am a Mat-Su resident who taught in the Mat-Su School District for three years, have been homeschooling for the past 13 years, and helped my niece in another state learn how to read when her public school failed her. I have kept up on my teaching license.

Please vote no on legislation SB 266. Mandating state testing has nothing whatsoever to do with the judges ruling on private education and/or religious education institutions and allotment.

For mandatory testing, an opt-out possibility is an absolute must. I have friends in correspondence schools who feel strongly about wanting their students to do the state mandated testing. I have a student who at one point did not test well, and a state mandated test would have shaken his confidence in learning, no matter how well or poor he performed. I have another child who did the STAR early literacy test in third grade. He was reading *The Lord of the Rings* for the second or third time in THIRD GRADE, yet the test results came back as "probable emergent reader." I know adults who have not been able to finish *The Lord of the Rings* series. Years ago, I worked with a public school student who scored well on state mandated testing, putting this particular student up among the most on grade level students academically, yet the students' academic abilities were not up to par remotely.

Testing given by the parent (or teacher) is beneficial, as the parent (or teacher) have the results immediately, and know if their student can move on with new material or needs more help with current material. On the other hand, state mandated testing takes months to get the results back. The point of testing is to know HOW the students are doing, and getting the results back six to nine months later does not allow teachers in correspondence or public schools know how the students are doing so they can either review material or forge ahead.

Having taught in the public schools and as a correspondence homeschool parent, mandating state testing is extremely disruptive to the education of students. When I was a teacher in the Mat-Su school district, I would have to proctor students for an entire week of normally scheduled testing, then spend another week doing make-up testing for students school-wide who had been absent. The students I needed to be helping get up to grade level—the English Language Learners who were struggling (not all were)—were not getting the services needed during the week of make-up testing. On state mandated testing days, correspondence homeschooling parents have to disrupt the learning of ALL their students if ANY of their students are in the grades doing testing. They have to drop and pick up students at the proctoring places, then they have to stay within 20-30 minutes of the testing site until testing is done to be able to pick up their students, a very large portion of the day. Students logically can only be released at certain times, so if the test is 3 hours long, but they finish in one hour, that is two wasted hours. There was the year that testing was being computerized—which many students do not do well on—and there was major technical difficulties across the state. Testing across the state was not finished.

Sincerely, and thanks for your support,

Carolyn Morrison

Michael Mason

From: Charles arndt <punchin83@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 12:30 PM
To: House Education; Senate Education
Subject: Oppose HB 400 / Oppose SB 266

Dear committee members,

I urge you to oppose the hastily made bills, HB400 and SB 266.

As a part of the 20% Alaskan families who have chosen correspondence education for our children, we are deeply concerned about our educational rights and choices being threatened. Our successful programs stand on the brink of destruction due to judiciary, legislative, and bureaucratic regulations. House Bill 400 and Senate Bill 266 pose a direct attack on parental rights and authority to direct their child's education. These bills propose significantly inequitable changes that aim to strip correspondence students of funding, only to redistribute their allotment to fully funded public school students.

Alaska has always been a state that values freedom and choice when it comes to education. We believe in providing an environment where every child can thrive - whether that's in a traditional classroom or through correspondence schooling. However, these proposed bills undermine this belief by threatening the very essence of school choice.

We urge lawmakers not just consider these facts but also remember that each statistic represents real children whose futures are at stake here. Oppose HB 400 and SB 266.

To Whom It May Concern,

PLEASE OPPOSE SB 266.

My name is Christy and I homeschool my two children, grades 6 and K, through a local correspondence program. My daughter, now grade 6, was public schooled until second grade. When Covid happened, we decided to homeschool. My daughter used to come home crying daily about math. I did not realize why until we started homeschooling. In second grade, she was already two grades behind in math! The public school system failed her. I have been able to catch her up to her grade level and spend the one-on-one time with her that she needs to succeed.

Senate Bill 266 is an over reactive grab for control. Our correspondence school already does a fantastic job of controlling allotments. Everything purchased is gone over and no blank checks are given. If a curriculum even mentions God once, it is not funded with allotment. Our correspondence school has been very careful to look over every expenditure. Also, this problem was allotment related, why add extra burdens to a bill that should be dealing solely with allotment?

A parent's right to opt out of standardized testing should not be taken away. Parents know their children best. Parents know where their children are at compared to the level they are supposed to be at. Parents work HARD every day to ensure that their children have a good education. Taking away a parent's right to chose to opt out of standardized testing is wrong. Is this something that will also happen to all public school children in the state? Only a parent knows whether their child can preform well on tests. A test is not an accurate view of what a child knows. One example of this is that my daughter has learned SO MUCH math in the last few years. However, she has ADHD and struggles to follow directions without help. She knows the math but would likely stress out and get it wrong on a standardized test. Retain the right for parents to opt out of state testing.

Parents should also be allowed to use a portion of their allotment for memberships to sports or recreational activities. Public schools pay for many of these things for their enrolled kids. Homeschooled kids who homeschool through a charter school are also public school children. They should not be targeted and treated unfairly. Sports and/or recreational activities can be costly. We live in a state that is covered by snow for about half the year. Children need to have a place they can go in to get regular exercise. Retain the right for parents to use allotment for memberships to sports or recreational activities.

It also seems like this bill may indicate that tutoring in fine arts, music, and PE must be provided by a certified teacher employed by the correspondence program. I am not sure if I am reading this correctly. My daughter takes piano lessons locally and has learned so much about music and how to play the piano in the last couple years. She has also discovered a new passion for music. Do not take this away. It would be bad for the businesses who do an excellent job at teaching certain subjects, and it would overwhelm the teachers who are allowed to tutor. Suddenly there would be too many kids needing music, fine arts, and PE lessons. Some would be turned away. Retain the right for parents to use the teacher that they choose for fine arts, music, and physical education.

Please do not call for immediate return of unused funds that have been previously carried over. My family and I only have a couple hundred dollars of unused funds; however some families have been extra careful about what they spend their money on to save up for special courses for their kids when

they are in high school. Their care and consideration for their child's future should not be thrown out without warning. Allow for those parents to use the funds that they have saved.

Senate bill 266 should be opposed. It unfairly targets a small portion of public school children who school at home. The correspondence school that we are a part of has already been doing a fantastic job monitoring the allotment. We are not given any funds until they approve the expenditure (and they receive receipts that prove the expenditure). The only things they have ever approved have been constitutional. Do not disadvantage everyone because of a very small portion of parents that may or may not have misused the allotment. Maintain parent's rights to know what is best for their child, to opt out of standardized testing, to use a portion of their allotments for memberships to sports and recreational activities, to find a tutor that teaches their children well, and to use allotment that parents worked hard to save.

Sincerely,

Christy Elmaleh

Michael Mason

From: christy montero <mavacat@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 3:00 PM
To: Senate Education; House Education
Subject: HOMESCHOOL , with many under IDEA<RAVEN<HOMEBRIDGE ETC>>>>
FUNDING<<<

Dear all Senate and everyone else ...

I've been a educator to many of my students as well ,my own for many years ..On behalf of many others who haven't had the chance to speak up, or conflicts in current lives. We all are fighting for our rights.. Now, Why are you dipping in the homeschool public system????!!! Which had followed states rules and such of your funding to the system of under idea, raven and more. When many people meaning (we) Do not ORDER any *regligious or any pravite....So that one, secondly Sat is worthless.. We do test when we need to see where they are at, we do not need to inflate thier education of fail to engcourage they need to just keep going.. We have A RIGHT to opt of whatever we choose to OUR kids we choose what suits what fits for Them.. on the Student Allotment We use it all the time TIL they graduate. Rollovers actully save MONEY for both sides teachers , and schools. Why take that out??*

Students actully do well at homeschool under public, when many struggle with peers, or number many reasons such small towns that why we are responblity of OUR kids WE choose what to fit for the kids.

NOW since school account of system of schools of locals leaders mess up on those high schools ,middle schools, and Elementary school's Funding .. Guts to take it out that is very very uncalled for the systems to make the mistake of mishandling money and touch the public homeschool sysystem can save money or use money ?? !! No that doesn't work that way, Can't just keep taking Maybe the gov, and rest of you sentors NEED TO LISTEN to the people!... LISTEN and HELP Them...

well conquesces is to close some schools, save cbj is use one of those a buildings SAVE some funding sell a building to some others business to maybe to help business of some stora.. Therefore fix it and own up the mistake.. LETS SAVE JUNEAU>>>>!!!

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING AND SAVE YOUR PEOPLE OF JUNEAU!

Juneau citizen,

Christy Montero
mavacat@gmail.com
mavacat@hotmail.com

Michael Mason

From: Dani W <akwitzaks@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 8:20 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Oppose SB 266

Senators,

You might wonder why a homeschooling parent who has been involved with correspondence programs in Alaska for 12 years would oppose this legislation. After all, it purports to "save" our allotment programs! What it actually does is hobble correspondence students with unfair and unequal regulations. It would be better to wait on the final verdict from the AK Supreme Court and take time to craft quality regulations if necessary based on that verdict rather than rush through a quick fix that is rather unacceptable in many ways.

What are some of those inequalities as provided for in this bill? Let's start with one of the most glaringly obvious: access to physical education. In its current form, families are allowed to access facilities--gyms, ski areas, etc--to provide access to equipment and spaces they don't have at home. For instance, what home has a basketball court or track? Kids in brick and mortar schools have access to these spaces and various equipment, including weights, balls, jump ropes and the like. Under SB 266's rewrite, correspondence students who currently enjoy access to these same benefits via family memberships to facilities would lose that access. A student's membership may be prorated based on direct instructional time only, however. This means that a parent cannot take a child to the gym to teach that child how to shoot a basketball--the child may only be taught these skills by someone else paid to provide that service. This goes against the entire essence of homeschooling where the parent provides the bulk of instruction. Apparently a parent is allowed to teach a child math, but not physical education? Of course, if we chose to stay home and teach our children those skills without the use of a facility, we are banned from purchasing the same equipment schools provide to their students. This is unequal access. I could understand if correspondence schools provided gym facilities for their students to use, but our new school building--Mat Su Central--was just denied funding for the gym.

Likewise, access to Alaskan outdoor areas for physical education would be cut under this bill as well with the prohibition against reimbursing parking fees. When public schools contract a school bus to take children to Alyeska (I am there midweek all season with my children and there are constantly public schools utilizing the ski area), public funds are being used to pay for transportation as well as ski lifts and rentals. With this new language, my children would not be entitled to ski lift tickets as that isn't direct instruction, even though those public school kids are also just using those lifts without instruction. This is unequal treatment.

Further, the language in the bill does not recognize how homeschool families operate. Many of us combine our children for family learning, which means that our kids are not on the same timeline as public schooled children. They may learn US History sooner or later than their school peers depending on the cycle their family is following. I do not teach 4 different subjects in history or science. It's more of a 1-room schoolhouse approach where we all learn certain subjects together. This means that my 3rd grader may be studying what 5th graders are studying in the school down the street so his curriculum won't be "aligned" with state standards for his grade, but when he's in 5th grade he will be covering the history the schools did in, say, 4th grade. Homeschools do not function the same as grade-segregated

public school classrooms and we cannot be expected to prove that we are doing everything at the same pace and rate and timing of these schools. In fact, our approach is likely what leads to stronger test scores and better educational outcomes when compared to those grade-segregated classrooms that teach largely to standardized tests. It is more reflective of real life. I am not willing to give up the beauty of the family learning together to satisfy the state's timelines for history and science subjects. We will cover them all, but not in the exact order the state standards lay out. I would leave a correspondence and homeschool independently if this is strictly imposed.

I oppose SB 266 because it does not provide for adequate support of homeschooled children's access to services and curriculum based on their individualized learning plans. It is too limiting and inflexible and does not provide an acceptable fix. I urge you to table any regulatory changes to the correspondence programs until this issue is settled by the courts.

Thank you,
Danielle Witczak, Palmer AK

Senator Loki Tobin, Chair
Senate Education Committee

In support of SB266 and the Alaska State Constitution

Dawn Fitzpatrick, parent of school-aged children
April 29, 2024

Dear members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Dawn Fitzpatrick, and I am the parent of two elementary-aged students in Fairbanks, Alaska. I am writing to you today in support of SB266 and the Alaska Constitution.

While correspondence schools work well for Alaskans, and I encourage us to continue their use, I support making our homeschool and correspondence school laws follow the Alaska State Constitution, which clearly outlines that public money cannot be used for private or religious schools. Families are welcome to use private and religious schools, but per the constitution, public money should not fund such schools. Please do not call yourself a “constitutionalist” if you can easily just ignore this part of our constitution. Instead of finding a way to divert the little bit of public school money that exists, please find ways to fund our public schools. I just read today about how the school closure at Eielson is forcing families not to make roots in Alaska. Soon, more of us will be unable to stay at home and get a good education for our children.

I strongly support SB266 and the Alaska State Constitution. Please support Alaskan children by supporting strong public schools and our constitution. Thank you for your time and effort in support of Alaska's students.

Dawn Fitzpatrick
Dawnell1@yahoo.com
907-328-9513
Fairbanks, AK 99709

On Apr 29, 2024, at 1:08 PM, Diane Heaney-Mead <architecturematters@gmail.com> wrote:

Senator Tobin,

I am opposed to the removal of exemptions to mandatory testing. My children attend Winterberry Charter School which follows the Waldorf method that while different, has a proven track record of results with a high number of students continuing to high school and graduating.

Many parents including myself have opted to exclude our children from mandatory testing because it is not a useful tool for our children. Reading is taught at a different pace with emphasis on building the tools to learn to read instead of focusing on early literacy. The school discourages the use of screens (computers, TVs, etc) so testing on a computer would be problematic at best.

Generally speaking I've found standardized testing to be problematic. Being dyslexic I've often struggled with tests despite completing a graduating degree and have a successfully career. I have found that many people who are great at tests have been real turds when it comes to applying the knowledge.

I also know many people in my life with autism and anxiety who testing can be a real source of trauma. While I understand your intent, not giving families the choice to opt out is wrong.

I do agree that the State should not be funding programs that are not open to the public, particularly since many actively exclude LGBT families . I do agree that programs need to be accountable, but I disagree that testing is the one and only solution.

Thank you,

Diane Heaney-Mead
2915 Glacier St
Anchorage, AK 99508

Michael Mason

From: Douglas McKinnis <dwmckinnisak@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 11:02 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Reject SB 266.

Senate Education Committee Members:

Please vote “NO” on SB266.

This bill dramatically erodes parental authority over the education of their children and restricts parental oversight & decision-making.

Parents will be prohibited from withdrawing from or objecting to student tests required by the state.

As always, and here clearly illustrates that teacher’s unions & authoritarian lawmakers make targeted efforts to erode parents’ authority and seek to undermine and replace it.

The state does not own the children.

Parents determine the course & direction their children take, not the state. You must preserve this fundamental principle.

Many other serious problems exist within the provisions of this bill.

Reject SB266!

Sincerely,

Doug McKinnis
(907) 529-2627

This is a dangerous bill.

Michael Mason

From: Elizabeth Boxler <boxlereлизbeth@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 30, 2024 9:57 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Senate Bill 266

Hello,

I am a homeschooling mom educating my two elementary age students at home. I am writing to express my concern with mandating testing for all students as I am unconvinced that standardized testing provides for a better educational outcome. In my personal experience mandating testing only leads to time spent away from the best education for children. In addition please insure that the wording for the bill specifically allows for the payment of private extra curricular activities such as private music lessons and physical activities (karate or other sports). These are opportunities other public students receive in their schools and the money for these activities directly improves the rest of the local community.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Boxler

Michael Mason

From: Elizabeth Nudelman <emsnudelman@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 9:12 PM
To: Senate Education
Cc: Sen. Jesse Kiehl
Subject: Support SB266

Dear Senate Education,

I am writing as an individual in support of SB266, a bill that preserves Alaska's statewide correspondence program by removing the unconstitutional language inserted into statute in 2014.

Prior to my retirement I had the opportunity to practice as a CPA in a public accounting practice and then serve as a state employee for 23 years including approximately 20 years at the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) ending in 2016. I worked as DEED's Internal Auditor, School Finance Manager, and Director of School Finance.

During my time at DEED I performed audits of the correspondence study program and worked closely with statutes and regulations. I find SB266 provides our public school correspondence students using the home school approach with a wide array of services from individual learning plans, textbooks, computers, classroom supplements, physical education and music and arts opportunities. I believe parents will find this bill to provide autonomy and flexibility concurrent with the long established practices of public correspondence home school programs in Alaska while correcting the unconstitutional language permitting private school tuition.

I urge the House and Senate to pass this bill in support of home school students.

Thank you,

Elizabeth Sweeney Nudelman

Michael Mason

From: Faelyn Simpson <faelyn.mcdaniel@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 12:46 PM
To: House Education; House Judiciary; Rep. Jamie Allard; Rep. Justin Ruffridge; Sen. Löki Tobin; Senate Education
Subject: SB 266 HB 400

My name is Faelyn Simpson am writing today in opposition to SB 266 and HB 400, I am a military spouse, my husband has been in the Air Force for 18 years. We have 3 beautiful children, whom I homeschooled at our residence in Eagle River. I am a 3rd generation Alaskan. My grand parents homesteaded in Peters Creek in 1950, so despite our many moves, Alaska is my home.

These last few weeks, have been incredibly stressful, and it's literally felt hard to breathe. ASD currently owes me almost \$6,000 in money I was promised at the start of the year that I spent and now I am not receiving reimbursement. We are a one income military family (very low income). We use these funds for curriculum (non religious only), books, art classes, physical education, internet, and recently a computer we bought for my eldest because his stopped working and he does all of his schoolwork online. We do not have the extra money or income to cover these expenses without the help of the allotment and they are invaluable to the growth of my children. If these bills pass they will not allow us to continue these activities and it is completely unfair. I pay property taxes just like everyone else and I should be entitled to spend money on my children's education how I see fit. I'm not asking for anything out of line or crazy. Basic needs of a developing child.

We have been homeschooling for 6 years going on 7 next year. We started our homeschooling journey because my eldest was getting bullied so bad we ended up having to file police reports. We lived in North Carolina at the time. The school he attended wasn't a terrible one but the principal wasn't the best. She favored a group of kids more than another and ended up putting all the lower income students and challenging students all in one classroom. This led to 4, twelve year olds in a fourth grade class. You should be 9-10 in that grade. My son was targeted over and over, his life threatened, sexually harassed and threatened, people would stand up in class and throw things at him corner him, attack him on a bus no matter what they tried to do to fix it, it kept happening. We pulled him out of the school because the principal wouldn't move him or the other students. I homeschooled until we could get him into another school, a Charter school down the road. Things seemed ok at first but after a few weeks he started getting bullied there too. Not as extreme but to the point he was the outsider in all things, even the teacher treated him as the outsider and bullied him.

My child has an extreme case of ADHD and possible Autism or Tourette's but has never been diagnosed with either. He's different, he's awesome, he's highly intelligent, he's hilarious, he's self motivated, he's curious and so many more things. But he was bullied very badly because he wasn't like everyone else growing up. He's now 15 and has 2 jobs, plays hockey on 2-3 teams throughout the year, and will have 18 credits I believe at the end of this school year. He has an A/B average. I believe this is a testament to the homeschool program and school choice. Kids absolutely need to feel safe in order to flourish.

I have two younger children as well, Irish Twins what some would call them. A boy with a summer birthday who needed more time to develop and a girl that was ready far before her 5th birthday. According to the school district and their rules they should've been two grades apart. But they are currently enrolled as a 4th and 3rd grader doing the same work together daily at home and it works

beautifully. My middle boy struggled for many years and needed lots of one on one but having him home with me consistently has given him the advantage he needed to catch up and thrive. My daughter like my eldest struggles with extreme ADHD. Having her home she is able to get her movements out when needed we take jump breaks in the garage on a trampoline I bought for the winter months. We also have a yoga swing. They are both in sports year round to help stay active and it helps a lot with their attention spans. The allotments allow this.

To summarize why I believe School Choice is so important and parents should have flexibility and funding to provide that for their children; all children are not equal, they learn different, have different interests, different challenges, come from different backgrounds and perspectives. Not all children can sit in a traditional classroom, some struggle to focus while others have no problem at all with it. We are not raising robots. We are raising small humans that are going to be making grown up decisions one day and need to know how to think independently. School is not made for the indoctrination of a society. Instead, we should educate each individual student according to their needs and interests. And homeschooling can provide that by means of a parent at a cost much lower to the state than public school education. If a parent is going to sacrifice their own career to stay at home to help their special needs children and save the state potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars a year the least the state could do is give them an allotment without a million strings attached. A child's needs should trump any political interests. I really hope you all understand how deeply our homeschool community has been affected by this.

Thank you for your consideration,

Faelyn Simpson

Michael Mason

From: Geraldine Langan <gmlangan@icloud.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 30, 2024 8:25 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Oppose SB 266

Dear committee members,

My name is Geraldine Langan and I am the mother of a child currently enrolled in Raven Homeschool, one of the state's public school correspondence programs. Our family has been enrolled with Raven for 4 years.

During this time, we have made use of the state's allotment program to purchase approved curricula, books, and supplies. We have also used our allotment funds to pay for art classes through local businesses as well as visiting the state museum to enhance our studies. The allotment funds have allowed us to nurture our child's interest in various subjects (e.g. learning to code) by taking approved online courses when local options have not been available. We have never used our allotment funds to pay for religious educational materials. Nor have we used the funds for classes at religious and/or private institutions.

While I understand the concern regarding the use of allotment funds at religious institutions and private schools, the proposed legislation goes beyond this issue, even going so far as to disallow the purchase of furniture such as desks and bookshelves for students. In addition, we would not be able to utilize the classes that have allowed our child to thrive in his education. This puts our public school correspondence students at a disadvantage when compared to their public "brick-and-mortar" school peers. (Public brick-and-mortar schools are allowed to purchase furniture, curricula, supplies, and pay for field trips with public funds.)

SB 266 also removes the right to opt out of standardized testing for all public school students. As a parent, I cannot support this change. Standardized testing does not adequately reflect a child's abilities and often causes increased anxiety in children. Parents know their children best. Children should not be compelled to sit for these tests if we, as parents, have determined it is not appropriate for our child.

SB 266 poses a direct threat to our parental rights and to our ability to direct our child's education. I urge you to oppose this legislation. The important issue of correspondence program allotments has not been given the time or careful consideration that it deserves and the resulting legislation is over-reaching and inequitable. Please remember that behind the numbers are actual children whose education will be greatly impacted by the decisions you make today.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Geraldine Langan
Douglas, Alaska

Michael Mason

From: Skeetter kurka <skeetter_akruk@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 10:22 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: SB266 testimony

To whom it may concern:

I strongly oppose SB266, plain and simple. It clearly was written as an attempt to take out parents choice in education and to hurt the children that benefit from these correspondence schools. Brick and mortar school failed me as a teen going to high school and fail my daughter when she went to kindergarten. Homeschooling gave my kids more of a chance to excel, then they were going to get in person school.

In response to someone in favor saying they would have to pay for skiing, my family didn't when I was in elementary, we borrowed equipment the school HAD. It was amazing experience and one of few memories I have of that time. Do not limit these experiences. We have 2 children taking Japanese, from what I heard today, she would not be allowed to teach because she doesn't have a teaching degree. Did I hear you right?? That would make most world language private instructors not able to teach unless they got a teaching degree. Thank you for your time. Please send some sort of response so I know it was received.

Heather Hepler
Chugiak

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

Michael Mason

From: Jon and Ruth Ewig <ewig4him_7@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 10:20 PM
To: Senate Education; Jon and Ruth Ewig; Sen. Shelley Hughes; Sen. Robert Myers; Sen. Mike Shower
Subject: We oppose SB 266 with its draconian regulations

WE OPPOSE SB 266. You are attempting to impose draconian regulations on the Correspondence Schools in Alaska.

If you believe that increased regulations are necessary, aim them at your government schools which are performing academically as number 49 out of 50 states.

These government-run schools could use some of "your wisdom" and guidance to help them improve.

We pray for all of you in government power positions that you will use your power for the good of Alaska's citizens and children rather than your own self-centered whims.

Respectfully,
Jon Ewig 2325-30th Avenue
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

copy to Governor Dunleavy

Michael Mason

From: Joe Kurber <joe@visionunited.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 10:41 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: SB266 / HB400 Testimony

To whom it may concern,

Our names are Joe and Rebecca Kurber and we live in Fairbanks. We currently have 5 children enrolled in Cyberlynx, and we love the program. We want to express our dismay at the ruling that these homeschool programs are unconstitutional, especially since they have been going on for so many years and have been so successful. We have based many of our childrens' educational decisions on the expectation that these programs would continue, as have many other families.

It is hard to understand the reasoning behind this decision, since public money has been spent with "private and religious" third parties for some time now, and it is not clear to us how the homeschool programs' use of third party vendors is any different from the brick and mortar schools' use of third party vendors. How are any schools supposed to function without using "private or religious" vendors? For instance, purchasing books and computers involve third parties. Maintenance contracts for school buildings involve third parties. Music lessons, sports teams, and other extracurricular activities involve third parties. Should youth sports be put on hold because Monroe Catholic school is involved? Which "private or religious" third parties are acceptable and which are not, and how do you draw a distinction without being arbitrary? This reasoning is totally unworkable.

During Covid, the NEA supported homeschooling as a solution to the pandemic. It told parents that it would be fine, that there were support networks out there, and that parents were capable of meeting the challenge. Unfortunately for the NEA, parents discovered that those reassurances were true. Parents enrolled in droves in IDEA, Cyberlynx, and other programs, and found a warm and welcoming network of teachers, third party vendors, and other parents and children. In fact, around 20% of Alaskan kids now use these homeschool programs. In a shocking about face, the NEA filed a lawsuit opposing the very solution they advised parents to seek. There's no question in our mind that this lawsuit is only motivated by the NEA's concern for their funding, now that parents have been overwhelmingly choosing homeschool for their children.

When the judge's ruling came out, parents were shocked. How could something that has been a vital part of Alaska's educational system suddenly be unconstitutional? The NEA, overwhelmed by the backlash, petitioned for a stay of the very ruling they sought. Now legislation is under way to "remedy" the problem they created, but of course the programs cannot be simply left alone. No, according to opponents of homeschooling, changes must be made. For instance, these bills both call for:

- Removal of the right for Alaska's parents to opt out of having their child(ren) take "a standards-based assessment or test required by the state." Note: This would apply to all public school students in Alaska.
- Restriction of student allotment funds so that they "may not be used to pay for services or materials provided by a private or religious educational Institution."

- Removal of the carryover provision allowing unused allotment to roll over from one year to the next.

As parents, we can see that these provisions reduce our say over our kids' educations, restrict how and where we educate our children, attack private and religious institutions, and remove the carryover provision that helps us budget responsibly. Again, why can't the programs simply be left alone? They are working great for our family and for the 20% of Alaskan children who are fleeing a disastrous experience at brick and mortar schools.

The truth is, homeschool programs empower parents to give their children a great education. They allow families to stay together and learn together, strengthening the bonds that form the base layer of our society. They also reduce the cost of education for local governments - in fact, they actually make money for local school districts instead of losing money.

Please, just leave these programs alone!

Thanks,
Joe and Rebecca

--
Joseph and Rebecca Kurber
Fairbanks, AK
907-978-9486

Michael Mason

From: Joy Gillespie <gillespie.joy27@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 1:54 PM
To: Senate Education; House Education
Subject: Oppose SB 266, oppose HB 400

Dear committee members,

I urge you to oppose the hastily made bills, HB400 and SB 266.

I have been a home educator with Cyberlynx correspondence school in Alaska for 10 years. In recent years we have been given access to the most allotment we've ever been able to access per student at \$2,700 Per school year. The rest of the student funding goes towards our amazing contact teachers and staff, a very little towards the usually small offices and staff of our cyberlynx correspondence schools and I understand a substantial share is returned to the Nenana district that cyberlynx operates out of. Those funds go towards transportation and the brick and mortar of public neighborhood schools — things my children never get to benefit, but I get a “whopping” 2,700 to spend on a years’ worth of math, science, social studies, language arts, PE, computers, some internet and extracurriculars. Needless to say, it doesn’t go far. Not to mention the amount we spend out of our own pocket in transportation to/from field trips, school materials, enrichment, home storage and space for learning and supplies, and wherever allotment doesn’t stretch. We have mostly used these funds toward activities that broaden the children’s socialization with other kids and teachers, and physical education in sports, dance and music — all approved as non religious, all things we would be unable to do without allotment. We mostly pay up-front, out-of-pocket for materials and seek reimbursement which then the school program decides what they reimburse for based on a student’s ILP, or a parent can order through approved vendors and the correspondence school pays the vendor directly. We have always submitted our purchases for reimbursement and approval per the school requirements. We have never been “given a blank check.” It is always per approval of the school and regulations.

Now I ask you to consider the economic impact a removal of 22,000+ homeschool students’ allotments will have when suddenly removed from the local communities. For our own little family a number of local vendors would be impacted: Sonja’s Studio, Lego robotics and Learning Essentials, Wood and Wire, to name a few.

But beyond that, what is the definition of public verses private? Are not these funds available to any child enrolled in any of the states’ correspondence schools? They are. In no way do correspondence schools take away funding for neighborhood schools... they ADD to it! In one fell swoop- the choice of public correspondence programs- you have employed thousands of teachers willing to work FOR FREE. You have gained the use of thousands of homes as your school rooms FOR FREE, employed thousands of transport drivers, enabled thousands of vehicles FOR FREE. And those leftover funds after a meager allotment and menial office management costs? Those leftover funds are for the districts to use at their discretion. Homeschool through correspondence is a public educational system and benefit.

It seems the problem here is the interpretation of one judge, in which he decided to interpret the constitution’s wording of “public funds” as “government funds” should be used only for public entities, I. E., “government-run” entities— in which case every school in the nation would be breaking the constitution. What public school doesn’t hire “private” subcontractors? What public school doesn’t order curricula or sports equipment or musical instruments, computers, programs, from privately owned businesses?

To take away homeschool enrolled students' allotment would be then to grossly discriminate against those parents and students who have chosen one system over another, discrimination by withholding funds only to redistribute their allotment to fully funded neighborhood school student. Especially those parents that have frugally saved up rollover allotment in order that their children may benefit from higher level education like college classes, apprenticeships, flying courses and more. This would be a great oversight and breach of contract toward these parents. Parents who have sacrificed years of wages to ensure their children get the best education available— One tailored to an individual's needs and abilities. One that has personal responsibility built in to its operation, one that produces the most well rounded, well educated and most productive people in our current educational system. We should be throwing money at parents and teachers and schools dedicated to the homeschool model. This is “public funds in public education” at its finest!

We do NOT need more legislation or more restrictions of how parents spend the limited allotment of their students. That is already in place. We do not need required, standardized testing, based on only one model of schooling, that doesn't take into account the vast array of curriculum and formats and paces of learning, and violates the sanctity of parental choice. We do not need a rewriting of the constitution. Vote for Public schools using public funds to educate our children the best way possible. Some choose neighborhood schools, some choose homeschool, some choose charters. Vote for Freedom for parents to choose what is best for their child. Vote for a limited government astute enough to know the difference between public and government-run, between democracy and socialism.

That Vote is No on SB 266 and HB 400 and continue with a stay on the recent rulings until a more thoughtful, intentional, free and equitable decision can be reached.

C Joy Gillespie
Sent from my iPhone

Michael Mason

From: Kasie Krage <kasiekrage@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 2:48 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Concerns Regarding Senate Bill 266 (SB-266) - I am opposed to SB 266

Dear Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 266 (SB-266), particularly concerning the provisions related to student fund accounts, the regulations applied to how those funds are spent, and the limitations on private tutoring, as outlined in Section 3. I strongly oppose the requirement "that textbooks, services, and other curriculum materials must (A) be approved by the department or school district providing the correspondence study program; (B) be deemed appropriate for the student; (C) comply with state standards; and (D) comply with AS 14.03.090 and AS 14.18.060 and (e) - (g) of this section" (lines 8 - 14 of page 3). These requirements impose excessive bureaucratic hurdles and may limit access to diverse educational resources that cater to individual student needs and preferences and also impede the free will of parents and guardians in supporting their children's education.

Of particular concern is the provision that prohibits the use of student fund accounts for religious, partisan, sectarian, or denominational textbooks or other curriculum materials (lines 13 and 14 of page 4). This restriction unjustly infringes upon the rights of families to choose educational materials that align with their religious or philosophical beliefs. Parents should have the freedom to select curriculum materials that reflect their values and cultural backgrounds without government interference.

Furthermore, subsection (f) of Sec 3. places limitations on the type of private tutoring allowed, including a prohibition on tutoring provided by private or religious educational institutions. I seek clarification on the definition of "private" to ensure that the provision does not inadvertently hinder access to quality tutoring services. I believe that the amendment to the Alaska Constitution, as addressed in HJR028A, would be more appropriate in solving the issues surrounding correspondence allotment spending, and provide long-term educational choice freedom.

In conclusion, I urge you to reconsider the provisions and regulations related to student fund accounts in SB-266 and to prioritize the needs and interests of families and students enrolled in correspondence study programs. Any changes to existing policies should be made in consultation with stakeholders and with careful consideration of their potential impacts on educational equity, accessibility, and parental choice.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my reasons for opposing this bill. I appreciate your attention to these concerns and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,
Kasie Krage

Michael Mason

From: Kathryn Arndt <kathryn_arndt@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 10:42 AM
To: House Education; Senate Education
Cc: Rep. Justin Ruffridge; Sen. Löki Tobin; House Judiciary
Subject: Testimony From a Homeschool Parent

Hello,

My name is Kathryn Arndt. My 3 boys are some of the thousands of children affected in the State of Alaska by the recent homeschooling legislation. I am deeply concerned by the recent bills HB 400 and SB 266. They seem to be a poorly constructed Band-Aid to try and fix a situation that's currently hemorrhaging.

I believe the original lawsuit was addressing the use of public funds for private institutions. These bills, while seeming to 'take care' of the problem of public fund usage, also introduce things that were never a question until now. Required testing, no allotment rollover, and requiring us to follow district guidelines are just some of the issues with both of these bills.

Why are we putting harsher guidelines in for homeschool families than we do for our public school children?

I choose to homeschool because I have a child with severe adhd and autism. In a brick and mortar school he would not thrive, he would founder and eventually sink. As a parent, I want to give my children the best support they can get for the foundation of their whole lives. They are our future. Our Alaska school systems are not designed to be able to help children like my son who need one-on-one support. Taking away the little freedom we have to accommodate him in a charter school isn't in anyone's best interest. If these bills are passed and we are required state testing and aren't allowed allotment rollover we are prepared to withdraw him from all schools and homeschool independently.

Please show your support for families like mine all around Alaska and oppose HB 400 and SB 266. I still have some faith in our government system and I believe we can come up with a more fitting solution. Proposed Alaska Constitutional amendment HJR 28 seems much more reasonable. It addresses the allotment and public funds usage without trying to insert any extra agenda that homeschool families would be burdened with. Please support HJR 28 and help Alaska's children thrive!

-Kathryn

Dear committee members,

I urge you to oppose the hastily made bills, HB400 and SB 266.

As a part of the 20% Alaskan families who have chosen correspondence education for our children, we are deeply concerned about our educational rights and choices being threatened. Our successful programs stand on the brink of destruction due to judiciary, legislative, and bureaucratic regulations. House Bill 400 and Senate Bill 266 pose a direct attack on parental rights and authority to direct their child's education. These bills propose significantly inequitable changes that aim to strip correspondence students of funding, only to redistribute their allotment to fully funded public school students.

Alaska has always been a state that values freedom and choice when it comes to education. We believe in providing an environment where every child can thrive - whether that's in a traditional classroom or through correspondence schooling. However, these proposed bills undermine this belief by threatening the very essence of school choice.

We urge lawmakers not just consider these facts but also remember that each statistic represents real children whose futures are at stake here. Oppose HB 400 and SB 266.

Michael Mason

From: Lessens_Kelly <Lessens_Kelly@asdk12.org>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 3:16 PM
To: Senate Education
Cc: Bellamy_Margo; Office Of The Superintendent
Subject: SB 266 support

Dear members of the Senate Education Committee,

As an individual member of the Anchorage School Board, I am writing in general support of SB 266, albeit with tentative support for one or more amendment(s) which might improve options for providing students with access to coursework which might only exist online.

One part of SB 266 which I think is absolutely critical is your amendment to AS 14.03.016(a). This section addresses concerns I have had for some time. As I shared in a conversation with the rest of the Anchorage School Board approximately one year ago (in April of the 2022-2023 school year), I had come to the understanding that a rampant anti-testing culture among many correspondence families was resulting in exceedingly low levels of student participation in both formative and summative assessments. These assessments, I had come to understand, help educators diagnose "deficiencies" in certain skill areas and flag areas of strength. When students do not participate in them, this means that their educators (in this case, their parents) may not receive a granular understanding of the particular skills that may need to be strengthened vs what is going well.

As I prepared for that discussion, I learned that the Alaska School Performance Index notes that participation rates factor in to DEED's "achievement score" for its ASPI rating: "If the school does not meet 95% participation, any students who were not assessed but were enrolled will be counted as not proficient..."

As an example of how under-assessed ASD's correspondence students were (and according to ASPI standards, how "not proficient" they should be deemed), I shared the following during our 4/3/23 Board meeting:

- In the spring of 2022, only 11.6% of Family Partnership Charter students who were enrolled in grades 3-9 (79/681 eligible students) had participated in AK STAR testing for Math;
- Among 102 FPCS enrolled 3rd graders in the spring of 2022, only 5.8% of FPCS students (6/102) participated in AK STAR testing for reading;
- During the 2022-23 school year, FPCS participation of K-2 students in Fastbridge assessments (*this was the precursor to the state's new mClass screener) was only 10.2% in the fall and 9.6% in the winter. Only 45 FPCS K-2 students, and then only 41, out of 427 enrolled K-2 FPCS students participated in the screenings. Of the students assessed, Fastbridge flagged 35% as "at risk or at some risk" in the fall. 51% of assessed students were assessed as "at risk or at some risk" in the winter. As a result of the opt-out rates, however, ~90% of FPCS K-2 students did not receive data on their early reading skills last year.
- Similarly, during the 22-23 school year, only 21% and 20% of FPCS students in grades 3-9 participated in fall and winter Math MAP testing, respectively. Because more than 700 students enrolled in grades 3-9 at Family Partnership did not participate in math MAP growth assessments

that year, neither their parents nor their sponsor teachers would have been able to make data-informed decisions on those students' behalf.

While I do not personally love assessments, I have come to the conclusion that they have a place in our education system. But as an example of what can happen under a model where the State does not require any accountability for correspondence students (and as a shout out to ASD educators at one of our Big 8 high schools who worked exceedingly hard to help one particular student who fell 'between the cracks' because of the lack of oversight within his homeschooled program), I wanted to share part of an extraordinary email the Board received earlier this year. I've put the core of the problem in bold text:

"In December [2023] a mom from a school where I was an elementary principal passed away suddenly. Her name was -----. She was a strong advocate for her children and for special education. When I met her years ago her children were being home schooled but she brought them in for specials and some other services to the school where I was the building principal. I convinced her to let me take her boys full time in school. Not an easy task but she learned to trust me and although we did not always agree on things we maintained a professional relationship. The boys thrived in school. We stayed in contact over the years. I worried about the boy's future as they moved through the district.

When COVID hit the mom barely left the home and was not homeschooling the children as she let many of us to believe. For three plus years her children did not go to school and had very limited things they were allowed to do. They couldn't hang out with friends, go to dinner together etc because she was afraid of COVID.

Her oldest is 17 with zero high school credits and hasn't attended a school since

middle school. Once I was added to the contact list I showed up with him at ----- High School Monday morning after break. I know this is the worst day to pop into any school but I did not want to waste one minute. This student wanted to go to school. 9am we were there waiting in the front office. A team was pulled together and we met shortly after. The team addressed outdated paperwork and how they could get those items completed quickly for us but when they asked the student if he wanted to attend full or half days and when he wanted to start his response was, "full days and I want to start tomorrow." The team was so kind and caring. They created him a supportive schedule including electives he wanted. Yesterday was his first day and although he was nervous and I stayed on campus with him most of the day he had the most amazing day. He even got on the bus to go home. Today is his second day and he was up and ready to go on time. **This is a student who did not have a schedule for three years and spent most days sleeping.** Just the stamina alone to make it through a full day is hard. He said he got home from school and went to bed at 4:00.

-----High School went above and beyond to make him feel like he is cared for, has a future and belongs to a caring community. The loss of his mother will take time but the school piece has been the most amazing experience and I want to thank the principal, assistant principal, department chair for special education and his counselor.

The school has embraced this student and he will be successful!!

Thank you for taking the time to hear about an amazing experience for an at risk student who needed his school community. "

Although many homeschool students are deeply engaged in their work, and it has been a privilege to meet with many of them and hear about their successes, I am sharing this story with you because it has stayed with me for the past 4.5 months and I think it offers a cautionary tale of what can happen when oversight is nonexistent.

Finally, I wanted to say that I have reviewed many of the comments that other members of the public have submitted regarding SB 266, and it did catch my attention that the state may need to ensure that correspondence students—especially those in rural areas—are able to use allotments to access appropriate academic coursework that might only be available through private online vendors (ie for multivariable calculus, as one person noted). I am thinking in particular that Sec. 14.03.310 (e) (2) might need an amendment akin to the carve out later in SB 266 for music/fine arts instruction, so as to facilitate something to that effect.

Thank you for your work on this bill, and for your support of education across the state.

Sincerely,
Kelly Lessens
Anchorage School Board

Michael Mason

From: V Mail <vmail9470@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 1:17 PM
To: House Education; Senate Education
Subject: Oppose Bills HB400 and SB266

Dear committee members and legislators,

I strongly urge you to oppose bills HB400 and SB266. Both bills were quickly constructed and poorly reflect a knowledge of homeschooling or the needs of homeschool families.

Our family lives in a subdivision across the road from a high school and a middle school. The neighborhood elementary school is five minutes away. I've chosen to put my career on hold and spend my time educating our children. Obviously, our schooling choices have nothing to do with location, finances, or time. We are invested in our children and their future as educated, responsible, and wise adults.

I am deeply concerned that the wording within these bills threatens the educational rights and choices of Alaskan parents. I urge you not to attempt a quick bandaid allowing for infringements and concessions that will hurt Alaskan education for years to come.

Please pause, wait for a final court ruling, and use the time to explore the real issues in more detail. Logically look at where educational funding is actually being spent. Follow the monies going to brick and mortar schools, correspondence schools, and the trickle that actually makes it to homeschooling parents after reimbursements have passed the approval processes. Question homeschool families and discover the real costs of their educational choices. Research Alaska's testing numbers, attendance numbers, retention numbers and the actual return on investment. Consider the consequences of job losses and business closures for correspondence teachers and small businesses who serve the homeschool community. Evaluate the inequality in budgets and allowable expenditures between brick and mortar schools and parents in correspondence schools. Search out fiscal irresponsibility, be it in the brick and mortar schools or correspondence schools, and deal with it appropriately. Give thought to who might be trying to control the education of Alaska's children and whether they have proven themselves adequate or vastly incompetent. Lastly, calculate the effect of homeschooling families choose not to deal with mandatory testing and freedom-infringing oversight and instead choose to educate completely independently.

The homeschool community is inherently involved, active, educated, invested, and independent. It is these traits that won't allow us to sit by and observe our kids being used as pawns in a battle that appears to have little to do with actual education.

We all have different priorities and reasons for the educational choices we have made. Please help to ensure that choice and freedom remain Alaskan values.

Kim Vruggink

Michael Mason

From: Larri Spengler <larri.irene.spengler@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 7:22 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: YES on SB 266

Greetings:

I urge you to support SB 266, that would make sure that Alaska's correspondence school programs are consistent with the state's constitution.

This bill would return Alaska's homeschool program to its status before 2014, which was working perfectly well and which did not raise any constitutional issues.

Homeschooling and correspondence schooling are important educational underpinnings for the children of 20,000 Alaskan families who rely on these programs. Protect this important Alaskan educational tool, those families and children, and the Alaska constitution by approving SB 266.

Thank you.

Larri Spengler

--
Larri Irene Spengler
4545 Thane Road
Juneau, Alaska 99801
907-586-9768 (phone/fax)
Larri.Irene.Spengler@gmail.com

Michael Mason

From: Leona Shell <ak_lulu@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 3:10 PM
To: Senate Education; House Education
Subject: SB 266

Something to consider how you're showing up if this bill is passed & if this is the case, what are you even doing in your position ?

“Motivated by Jonathan Swift, I crafted A Modest Proposal of SB266 by rewording it.

SB666, A Modest Proposal

The department or a district that provides a student fund account shall
-annually return the unexpended balance of a student fund account
to the budget of the department or district as the idea of saving money for future expected expenses is
abhorrent to all governments.

A student fund account may not be able to be used for:

- services or materials provided by a private or religious educational institution. Students may only use curriculum developed and sold by the government. It is not that we want to control you, we just don't like that you try to make your own choices and think your own thoughts. Please forget that your neighborhood school uses curriculum from private educational institutions.
- family travel, as traveling is wanton entertainment. Traveling has never been shown to be educational or beneficial for the development of a person nor their ideas. Only sterile classroom environments are proper for children.
- annual passes or family memberships to a sports or recreational facility; Students shall not be able to run freely, play with a ball, or engage in any physical activity without the direct instruction of a certified teacher.
- fees that allow entrance to a facility in which learning happens naturally. These include museums, the Sealife center, science centers, the Alaska Native museum. If a child has a certified teacher guiding every thought and movement of child, there is an exception.
- clothing, uniforms, physical education equipment, or personal, unless of course they join a brick and mortar school and then they will be given uniforms to use. -parking fees. No learning has ever or will ever occur while hiking Lazy Mountain, the Butte, or by using a state park. Exercise of one's body may only occur under the direct supervision of a certified teacher in a school building. Do not look at anything outside of the classroom, there is nothing to learn there it is an empty wasteland.
- entertainment. Funds may be used for a drama production but no school funds may be used to watch said drama production. That is entertainment. There must be no audience.“

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

Michael Mason

From: Liisia Putnam <liisia08@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 10:56 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Opposition to HB400A and SB266A

Hello Committee Members,

Though the effort put forth in forming the two recent bill proposals, HB400a and SB266A, is much appreciated, there is room for improvement before either would be deemed desirable by the community in which they propose to support. As you are learning, or may already know, the correspondence and homeschooling community is vast in Alaska and continues to grow rapidly. ASD has a supposed three-year plan to close many brick-and-mortar schools across the district due to their ever declining enrollment rate. However, failure to come to an adequate agreement won't result in a remedy to ASD's enrollment woes. Sure, some students might enroll but the vast majority of the parents of over 20,000 correspondence/homeschooled children have seen the green grass on the other side. These parents have seen that when their children are not put into a classroom with 25-30 students taught by a singular teacher and maybe sometimes a support staff, that their children flourish in ways that the alternative could not provide. These parents know what their children need to succeed and have learned how to create an individualized learning plan (ILP) that their children thrive on. Many parents will not compromise their childrens' social, emotional, and intellectual well-being by abandoning those ILPs but will instead adapt to independent homeschooling (homeschooling without an allotment and without state restrictions). I would like to think that our tax dollars and the Base Student Allocation (BSA) per student, would allow for the financial support each student needs regardless of where they are enrolled. That is why the correspondence allotment funds have been so appreciated. My children, with help from their allotment funds, have been able to: attend enrichment classes hosted by their correspondence school with a student-to-teacher ratio that has allowed for my childrens' academic progress, physical education classes, book clubs, educational field trips, life-safety skills courses, educational memberships, foreign language development, etc. These are resources that many families would not be able to afford without an allotment. But these families will go independent before they subject their children to mandatory testing, state approved only curriculum, and so forth. Many suspect that the grounds the NEA had to initiate litigation against the correspondence/homeschooling programs were due to a fringe/minority group who were not adhering to the implied rules/statutes (supposedly using allotment funds to aid in private school tuition fees). That fringe/minority group does not represent Alaska's correspondence/homeschooling community. That misuse of allotment funds is quite isolated, yet this ruling is affecting thousands of statute/constitution abiding families. It would make more sense to target those entities/individuals personally through disciplinary or legislative action then the community as a whole. The allotment system put in place since 2014 has been working phenomenally for Alaskan students to help them achieve academic success. Please talk to your friends (with 1 in 5 students being homeschooled, you most likely know a parent or two who is in my same situation) who are passionate about providing their children with enriching learning opportunities through correspondence/homeschooling formats so you may learn what is necessary to advocate for this large group of Alaskan children. These bills need more attention before they can be considered by the correspondence/homeschooling community as favorable. Thank you for your time and efforts.

Respectfully,
Liisia Putnam

Michael Mason

From: Lisa Dennis <lisardennis03@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2024 10:46 PM
To: Senate Education; House Education
Subject: Oppose HB 400/Oppose SB 266

Dear committee members,

I urge you to oppose the hastily made bills, HB400 and SB266.

As a part of the 20% of Alaskan families who have chosen correspondence education for my children, I am deeply concerned about our educational rights and choices being threatened. Our successful programs stand on the brink of destruction due to judiciary, legislative, and bureaucratic regulations. House Bill 400 and Senate Bill 266 pose a direct attack on parental rights and authority to direct their child's education. These bills propose significantly inequitable changes that aim to strip correspondence students of funding, only to redistribute their allotment to fully funded public school students.

Alaska has always been a state that values freedom and choice when it comes to education. As a credentialed teacher and homeschool parent, I believe in providing an environment where every child can thrive - whether that's in a traditional classroom or through correspondence schooling. However, these proposed bills undermine this belief by threatening the very essence of school choice.

I urge lawmakers to not just consider these facts but also remember that each statistic represents real children whose futures are at stake here. Please oppose HB 400 and SB 266.

Thank you for making our voice heard.

Sincerely,

Lisa Dennis