

North Slope Borough School District

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Testimony of Superintendent Kathy Ahgeak – North Slope Borough School District

Chair Ortiz and committee members, my name is Kathy Ahgeak. I am superintendent of the North Slope Borough School District located in Utqiagvik, Alaska.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning and share our district's journey to develop our career and technical education – CTE – program and build a residential dormitory for our students.

To begin, I would like to share with you that our school board, borough government, and corporate and industry partners are working closely together and are absolutely determined to meet the Department of Education and Early Learning's mission of delivering 'An Excellent Education for Every Student Every Day.' Our students deserve an outstanding education, and we are determined to provide it for them.

I'd like to start by providing the committee with a very brief history regarding the development of our residential program and its CTE and academic components.

In 2012, our regional leaders set a priority of creating a residential program in Utqiagvik to better prepare district students for high paying jobs in the North Slope oil industry and for further education.

In 2013, this group hosted an Education and Workforce Development Summit in Utqiagvik for village leaders from across our region. They invited CTE experts from other rural Alaska school districts to share insights about how they built residential dormitories and operated CTE programs in a way that served all students in their districts. At that meeting, the North Slope Borough committed to provide our school district additional financial support to supplement the costs of operating a residential program.

In 2014 and 15, North Slope leaders held public meetings in all North Slope communities to discuss plans and gain support for the establishment of a residential high school program that would serve high school students from all North Slope communities by providing short- and long-term courses that could not be feasibly delivered in small high schools.

In 2016, we identified land for construction of the dormitory and during the 2016-17 school year developed a preliminary architectural design. At that time, we also submitted our residential program plan to the Department of Education, which was approved and subsequently funded as part of the residential stipend program. Later that year, much to our dismay, the construction of the residential program dormitory was put on hold for financial reasons.

In 2017, the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation stepped forward and offered a vacant hotel for use as the residential dormitory. Since that time, we have been busy with plans to retrofit the hotel for use as a dormitory and will be sending the project out for bid in the next few weeks.

If all goes according to schedule, we will award a contract soon and begin work over the summer with an intended completion date of October or November 2020. At this time, it is our plan to begin operation of our residential dormitory at the beginning of the second semester in January 2021.

In addition to the courses it provides in Utqiagvik, the Residential Learning Center will distance deliver courses to our small high schools to provide academic foundation skills for success in our CTE program. All CTE courses have been approved as part of our application to the Department of Education and meet federal guidelines set by the Carl Perkins Act.

Our residential dormitory will also house students from our villages who are involved in advanced academics that are offered at Barrow High School.

Building our residential program and distance delivery courses will offer the most economical, efficient, and effective way to provide quality education that our students need and deserve. This program is absolutely critical to our success. The CTE and academic opportunities will provide our students with the needed skills to succeed and contribute to their families, communities, and our state.

Our CTE Director, Mr. Mark Roseberry, is also online and can answer any specific questions you may have about our CTE program, our construction schedule, or partnerships we have with business and industry.

If you desire any additional information about our residential program, please contact me.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.