



April 29, 2025

The Honorable Rebecca Himschoot
Co-Chair, House Education Committee
Alaska State Capitol, Room 411
Juneau, AK 99801

The Honorable Andi Story
Co-Chair, House Education Committee
Alaska State Capitol, Room 403
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representatives Himschoot and Story,

This letter serves as a response to questions addressed to the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) at the Wednesday, April 23, 2025, House Education Committee meeting. All dollar figures presented in this document are in whole numbers.

1. How many teacher housing units are there?

The DEED surveyed school districts and received data from 11. Among those, there are more than 430 district-owned housing units, and 42 currently leased units used for employee housing. While municipal school districts were not specifically surveyed, one business manager who supports both a Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) and a municipal district reported that their municipal district also owns and operates teacher housing units. This suggests that teacher housing exists beyond REAAs and may be more broadly relevant than initially contemplated in the proposed legislation.

2. What is the difference in maintenance and operations of buildings versus capital?

Maintenance and operations of buildings refers to routine and preventative maintenance activities necessary for the day-to-day upkeep and safe functioning of school facilities. This includes smaller-scale items such as replacing air filters, servicing heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, repairing faucets, or addressing minor wear and tear—typically costs that are below \$50,000 and do not substantially extend the life of the facility.

Capital improvements generally refer to larger-scale projects that involve construction, major repairs, or upgrades that significantly enhance or extend the useful life of a building. These

projects typically exceed \$50,000 and may include things like roof replacements, major structural repairs, or facility expansions.

3. If Mount Edgecumbe High School (MEHS) is a state-managed and owned facility, why are we now asking for permission to manage the facility? Could you provide some history of management of the school?

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) closed MEHS in the early 1980's. MEHS reopened in 1984 under state ownership. Many former BIA faculty and facilities maintenance personnel stayed as state employees. From 1984 - 2018 the school maintenance was under control of MEHS. The maintenance superintendent worked with the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) to maintain the deferred maintenance priority list and capital projects. From July 2018 - October 2022 the MEHS facilities maintenance team was temporarily assigned to the DOT&PF. During this time, they maintained MEHS and other local state-owned facilities. From October 2022 to present, the facilities maintenance team is back exclusively on the MEHS campus under the control of the DEED. The current maintenance superintendent (in his position under DEED/DOT&PF since 2009) works closely with the DOT&PF on the deferred maintenance priority list. The maintenance superintendent holds a DOT&PF construction warrant that may be used to solicit for and manage projects on the MEHS campus.

4. Provide a legislative history of the \$70 million cap referenced in section three of House Bill 174.

The \$70 million cap originated as part of a legislative compromise related to resolving the *Kasayulie* case, which addressed the need for equitable school construction funding in rural Alaska. Initially, the proposal included a \$100 million fund to support construction of one school per year, but the amount was reduced to \$70 million to provide flexibility, especially after one project alone was projected to cost \$38 million. Co-Chair Hawker at the time referred to this as a "mini capital budget" intended to fulfill the state's commitment to rural school construction. The sunset date was removed as part of that compromise, in exchange for lowering the annual funding level, allowing the program to continue indefinitely at a more manageable pace without needing periodic reauthorization.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with additional questions.

Sincerely,



Deena Bishop, Ed.D.
Commissioner

cc: Jordan Shilling, Director, Governor's Legislative Office