

Deena Mitchell's Testimony to the Senate Finance Committee, April 10, 2014

- Mr. Chair, members of the Finance Committee, my name is Deena Mitchell and I am one of the co-founders of Great Alaska Schools Anchorage. I am here today with a few other Great Alaska Schools leaders to speak to you on behalf of our coalition of over 2,000 Alaskans.
- We appreciate you taking the time to hear from the public.
- In roughly two months, Great Alaska Schools Anchorage has gone from an idea to a movement. Our meteoric growth is just one indication of how passionately Alaskans feel about education funding.
- We know that the Session is reaching its critical last few days, and your time is valuable, so we did not mobilize our general membership to testify this morning.
- Instead, we are delivering to you petitions signed by over two thousand Alaskans, from 30 communities across the state, expressing their support for Great Alaska Schools' message of increasing the base student allocation.
- So please recognize that the comments from me and the other Great Alaska School leaders represent those of thousands of Alaskans on whose behalf we address you this morning.
- The bottom line is that Alaskans support our public schools, want to see them fully staffed, and can be quickly mobilized if there is a threat to their children's education.
- We know that you face a tough decision having to balance a deficit budget and a loud and growing call for more education spending.
- We are Alaskans who are asking you to prioritize education spending over other funding demands. Despite the fiscal climate, Alaska is a rich state. We have boosted education funding during past times of deficit spending, with great results, and we are asking you to carry forward that same bold vision today.
- The foundation formula likely needs to be updated. Let's take the time to do that thoroughly and carefully, to strengthen the formula and provide equitable allocation of funding to our schools statewide.

- For those legislators who want to see real education improvement, we ask you to take advantage of this movement of parents and enlist our help in identifying and implementing improvement.
- However, such a conversation can only happen if our schools are fully funded and fully staffed. If not, then any shortcomings in the system will be blamed entirely on the lack of funding. You will not see any improvement, and in fact we will likely backslide.
- So we come to you with an offer, as parents and as consumers of the education system. Increase the BSA \$400 this year, \$125 in each of the two following years, and we will work with you during those three years of stable funding to identify ways to improve the system.
- Without this three-year commitment of reliable funds, we will continue to expend most of our energies on securing the necessary funding.
- We Alaska parents are looking for a true partner in support of our great Alaska schools, and we need our state to be that partner.
- Thank you.