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January 25, 2016

The Honorable Bill Walker
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

sent via regular mail & email

The Honorable Byron Mallott
Office of the Lieutenant Governor
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

Dear Governor Walker and Lieutenant Governor Mallott,

The University of Alaska System (UA) is rightfully proud of the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP). As you know, ANSEP is a UA academic program offered at all three of our universities. From its modest beginnings as a scholarship program with one student in 1995, ANSEP has evolved into a nationally-recognized, longitudinal education program with 1,500 students and alumni that encourages historically underrepresented students to pursue careers in science and engineering at an early age. UA has supported ANSEP's growth because we see value and potential in the program, especially in light of our state's poor performance challenges through more traditional programs.

ANSEP was started by University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) Vice Provost Herb Schroeder. Two weeks ago, Dr. Schroeder advised me that he wanted to ask the legislature to transfer Mt. Edgecumbe High School to UAA. This state-operated residential high school in Sitka would become the Mt. Edgecumbe ANSEP Acceleration High School, and be operated and managed as part of ANSEP. As an acceleration high school, students would be expected to graduate in three years rather than four, completing up to 46 university BS degree requirement credits in the process. Its purpose would be to prepare students to enter Bachelor of Science and Engineering degree programs. It's not clear from the proposal what opportunities would continue to be available at Mt. Edgecumbe for students not interested in pursuing a science or engineering career.

ANSEP has had great success with its Acceleration Academy, a 5-week session at UAA that is designed to develop high school students academically and socially for college, while creating enthusiasm for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) degree programs

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and careers. We believe that the idea of a full-time acceleration high school has merit and is worthy of serious study.

This proposal, however, has not yet been proposed to or been vetted by UA or approved by the Board of Regents. While it has great potential, it also raises many unanswered and important questions. Running a high school, particularly a boarding school, involves operating under a very different set of state and federal laws than those that apply to postsecondary institutions. It imposes a different set of duties and liabilities. There are questions about the relative costs associated with having university employees running the academic program, rather than state employees, and questions about the capital costs and liabilities of taking over an aging facility. We must assess this proposal in light of our academic and other priorities, given our primary mission as a postsecondary institution. These issues are particularly critical in light of the state's revenue situation and the substantial reduction in funding available for UA's existing programs, as well as potential cuts to K-12 funding.

Because of ANSEP's success and the potential we see in this idea, we are committed to working it aggressively. A team will determine what the relevant issues are and the best ways to resolve them. Among the options to be considered is to set up an acceleration high school as a non-profit corporation, and have UA provide services under a memorandum of agreement.

At the end of the day, we support the concept but believe that substantial due diligence is required in order to support a particular proposal. Our goal is to have answers and a proposal to the Board of Regents, and then to you, well ahead of the commencement of the next legislative session, in time to make sure the proposal has the support it needs to be successful.

Respectfully,



Jim Johnson
President
University of Alaska

cc: Tom Case, UAA Chancellor
Sam Gingerich, UAA Provost
Michelle Rizk, UA Vice President University Relations
Herb Schroeder, UAA Vice Provost ANSEP
Dan White, UA Vice President Academic Affairs and Research