



Southwest Region School District

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Aleknagik

Clark's Point

Ekwok

Koliganek

Manokotak

New Stuyahok

Portage Creek

Togiak

Twin Hills

Chairs Kelly and MacKinnon, members of the committee, for the record my name is Steve Noonkesser, Associate Superintendent of the Southwest Region School District.

I am calling to respectfully request that you to reinstate funding for the Alaska Learning Network, or AKLN as it is more commonly known.

I am a lifelong Alaskan, and have been an educator for the past twenty-seven years. I have been deeply involved in efforts over the past twenty years to provide distance-learning options to Alaskan students as a teacher, administrator and member of the boards of a number of distance learning organizations. Currently, I am the chairman of the AKLN advisory board.

In light of the state's current budget shortfalls, I hope to today to clear up some misconceptions about AKLN that have recently surfaced and provide you with some pertinent facts.

There has been talk that AKLN is a failed program or that there are other cheaper or better options of this type available to Alaskan students. This is far from the truth. AKLN is the result of over twenty years of efforts by Alaskan educators to create a program to bring varied, high quality offerings to all Alaskan students regardless of location or individual circumstance.

Pertinent facts include:

- Over 100 courses are now offered by AKLN, the majority of which address Alaska Performance Scholarship requirements.
- Enrollment in courses has risen from 169 seats in 2011-2012 to 736 this year. This is not a failed program it one growing at a dramatic rate.
- Students in 47 of the 54 Alaskan school districts now take courses. AKLN is not just a program serving rural students. Over 100 of the current year's 736 course seats are from Fairbanks alone. The courses offered meet needs across the state, both rural and urban.
- The rate of successful course completion is currently between 78% and 83%, a solid number for distance learning courses. Our success rates are roughly equivalent to those of the Florida Virtual program, one of the largest and most successful in the country.
- The proposed budget for AKLN comprises less than 1/10th of one percent of the state's education budget. Its impact is growing and potential great.

Distance learning options like those provided by AKLN are critical in establishing educational equity and opportunities for all Alaskan students. As budgets tighten over the next few years, AKLN will provide continued access to courses that will be lost at the local level in many schools as staff sizes shrink and offerings are reduced. AKLN is worthy of continued funding. We need it as one of our public education options to meet the needs of all of Alaska's students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Noonkesser", written over a horizontal line.