



Anchorage School District

Education Center

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April 1, 2016

House Finance Committee
State Capitol, Room 519
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Honorable Members of House Finance:

The Anchorage School District does not support HB 102, Residential Psychiatric Treatment Center Funding, over which we have consistently expressed concern. We understand this legislation will have far-reaching impacts on districts across Alaska, many of whom may be unaware of the requirements it imposes on local school boards. District feedback on such impactful legislation and its associated implications on schools should be weighted heavily.

ASD has provided testimony and written comments about both HB 102 and the Senate version of the bill, SB 103, on a number of occasions. We maintain our major concerns with the legislation:

- HB 102 allows for the expenditure of public funds for the direct benefit of a private educational institution, prohibited under the Alaska Constitution;
- HB 102 would not allow districts to maintain control over the quality of education delivered at RPTCs;
- HB 102 opens the door to potential conflict and legal liability over accountability under IDEA – a highly litigious area;
- HB 102 strips local school boards of the authority to determine the need for educational programs and circumvents school board authority and discretion in approving contracts.

ASD respectfully requests your consideration of the written comments and public testimony submitted by our district, other Alaska districts, and the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education.

HB 102 is unnecessary legislation. The issues referenced by North Star Behavioral Health System can and should be handled outside of the legislative process. ASD has enclosed a 16-point list of specific improvements as part of our collaboration with

Educating All Students for Success in Life

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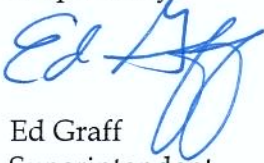
North Star Behavior Health Systems. The list encompasses significant, measurable, and meaningful accomplishments. We recognize that more work needs to be done in the spirit of mutual cooperation and partnership on our part and on the part of North Star.

ASD believes that a strong working relationship with treatment centers is critical so that the corresponding needs of students for education and treatment can be accomplished. A strong working relationship is predicated upon the willingness of both parties to move forward cooperatively, to strive for open communication and sharing of timely information, and to be committed to the mutual goal of meeting the needs of students.

Our district enjoys strong partnerships with Providence Hospital, Alaska Psychiatric Institute, Alaska Child and Family, Volunteers of America, and the Office of Children's Services, to name a few. Through cooperative engagement with clinical care providers, we have continued to increase our educational services and supports for our children with the most complex mental health and behavioral needs.

In conclusion, Anchorage School District does not support HB 102, which impacts all districts in the State of Alaska and makes fundamental changes that will not be in the best interest of our students or our state. ASD is very concerned about the implications passage of this bill will have on Special Education students and our associated responsibilities to them under IDEA, responsibilities that cannot be delegated to another entity. Mandatory contracting requirements imposed on school boards do not represent a good investment of Alaska's education dollars. ASD appreciates your consideration of the aforementioned concerns and consideration of withdrawing the legislation in favor of handling remaining issues outside of the legislative process.

Respectfully,



Ed Graff
Superintendent

Enclosure

In order to support students in psychiatric treatment and provide educational services at North Star Behavioral Health System (NSBHS) in Anchorage, ongoing conversations with the local Educational Director and the Vice President of Specialty Education of United Health Services of Delaware, Inc. have occurred and resulted in the following improvements:

1. Updated registration process with current ASD enrollment packet;
2. Enhanced communication with parents of students in psychiatric treatment at enrollment, including personal calls by the transitional counselor to ensure appropriate course placement, IEP goals are addressed, and accurate contact information is shared;
3. Facilitated communication with parent or guardian and the receiving school to discuss transition plans upon student discharge;
4. Scheduled weekly meeting between ASD Counselor and NSBHS clinicians;
5. Purchased and installed technology upgrades by ASD for NSBHS facility:
 - a. 92 new computers;
 - b. 10 Radio controllers;
 - c. Complete reinstallation of an Anchorage School District wireless network;
6. Increased staffing:
 - a. Sue Doherty was recently named as Principal of Special Schools upon the death of Jerry Koetje in December. Ms. Doherty has 30 years of special education experience as a resource teacher, transition specialist, department chair, supervisor of special education, and school administrator. Most recently, she served as an assistant principal at a comprehensive high school transitioning students from residential treatment facilities back to their neighborhood school programs.
 - b. Transition Counselor position increased from .5 FTE (half time) to 1.0 FTE (full time)
 - c. Teacher positions increased from 6 FTE to 10 FTE;
7. Created Special Schools Office in ASD Education Center as home base for ASD Special Schools Principal and non-teaching staff;
8. Scheduled and conducted monthly staff meetings with Special Schools personnel;
9. Conducted daily site visits to NSBHS by the principal, counselor or special education department chair;
10. Increased communications between ASD Special Schools principal and the hospital staff;
11. Established weekly meeting between the NSBHS Education Director and ASD Special Schools principal;
12. Affirmed all teachers are "Highly Qualified" in relevant core areas of instruction;

13. Increased instructional day for acute care students from a half-day to full-day program at the request of the NSBHS Director;
14. Established regular progress meetings with NSBHS staff Mike Lyons and Evelyn Alsup, and ASD staff Mike Henry, Executive Director of Secondary Education, and Sue Doherty, Special Schools Principal;
15. Scheduled quarterly progress meetings with NSBHS staff Mike Lyons and Evelyn Alsup, and ASD staff Mike Graham, Chief Academic Officer, Linda Carlson, Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Support, Mike Henry, Executive Director, Secondary Education, and Sue Doherty, Special Schools Principal;
16. Addressed reported staff shortages experienced by North Star Behavioral Health System that result in relocation of classrooms and increased class sizes, without prior notice and on any given day, by remaining flexible and committed to serving our students.