



Nome Public Schools

PO Box 131-Nome, Alaska 99762
Phone: (907) 443-2231-Fax: (907) 443-5144

Date: February 19, 2017

Subject: Testimony Regarding Nome Youth Facility Education Funding

From: Shawn Arnold

To: Representative Dan Ortiz

Children in Nome Youth Facility (NYF) currently attend a full-time educational program that is operated by Nome Public Schools within a secure facility. Our educators execute a standard curriculum that includes English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies, and enables youth to earn credits toward graduation. The class is comprised of approximately ten students who share similar levels of academic need. The school day consists of different class periods, including lunch, and each period lasts for about 45 minutes. In addition to providing tutoring sessions, our teacher works with middle and high school students to help them prepare for state and local assessments.

The U.S. Department of Education has found that youth incarcerated are six (6) times more likely than our young people in public schools to have an emotional or behavioral disorder. At least 75% of the youth in the juvenile justice system have experienced traumatic victimization. These challenges should be met with quality school-based mental health services, as well as trauma-sensitive, gender responsive, culturally competent and developmentally appropriate services best delivered by regional and local institutions. Instead, due to budget reductions, the students we currently work with at NYF may be failed by the systems that are intended to create life opportunities for them.

Our state agencies often operate in silos when it comes to the education of youth who are in the juvenile justice system. Alaska Department of Education evaluates juvenile justice facilities only concerning compliance with laws and with a focus on special education, and the justice of minors focus a great deal on the criminal needs of youth, often to the exclusion of their education needs.

Youth that may now be sent away from the Bering Straits Region goes against the overwhelmingly clear research indicating that removing a child from the home/family/community causes more trauma rather than improving chances of rehabilitation: Research finds that youth who have regular visits by families have GPAs higher than students who do not have regular visits. But students from Nome being sent to other parts of our state will make it incredibly difficult for parents to participate in the special education process in the way that required by federal law.

Many states apply the philosophy of keeping youth "Closer to Home," because it works. The Federal Bureau of Prisons understands that people incarcerated are more likely to rehabilitate and less likely to reoffending if they can maintain their connections to family and the community.

School systems need to do a part in reducing suspensions, expulsions, transfers to juvenile detention facilities. Kids do not just wake up and end up in the system. It is often a series of system and policy failures throughout their lives. We cannot address recidivism without meeting the needs to send people into these systems. We need to utilize anti-racist, culturally competent restorative justice practices to ensure that we are not kicking students out of school and into the juvenile justice system. However, once youth are in the justice system, we should not send them far away from their communities.

Another reason for keeping children as close as possible to their families, schools, and other community support systems prevents the harm of educational disruptions. While youth always have the opportunity to earn credits during incarceration, these may be applied differently from facility to facility. The credits earned do not always count toward their academic progress when they come home, causing at-risk and disconnected youth to fall behind or to withdraw entirely from school.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss reasons to continue educating students at the Nome Youth Facility.

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Sincerely,

Shawn Arnold
Superintendent, Nome Public Schools