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16 April 2017

RE: A letter in support of HB224

This letter is written in strong support of HB224 a bill that is long overdue. Alaska's ability to educate its youth, in fiscally tough times, depends on encouraging and keeping the support of master teachers, principals, and superintendents who understand educational needs in Alaska. Not everyone wishes to do this however those that do should be held in high regard.

My name is Dr. PJ Ford Slack and I have been a principal, Alaska State Special Education Director, Activities Director, a special education teacher, the Director of Teaching and Learning Support, and a Superintendent. I have worked in Alaska 20 years and am a Tier II educator. Currently, I am an emergency superintendent in a small district in SE Alaska. This district has had over 12 superintendents in the past 20 years. It's budget and education program speak to that lack of consistent leadership. Bringing in outside superintendents to this district has added to the lack of academic growth for students who attend this culturally centered school. This school district has amazing potential however it needs experienced leadership and experienced Alaska teachers to work with new teachers to achieve a comprehensive learning program.

When I was an educational professor in the State College System of Minnesota many of my teacher education students and administrative students headed to the Alaska job fair. This year at the job fair there were more hiring personnel than applicants. Alaska is no longer the state to come and establish an educational life. Our retirement system and wages for the cost of living here does not draw from the lower 48 as it once did.

Further, Alaska's regulations punish experienced Alaska educators if they would like to help a district post-retirement. That is a dilemma for me and others. I don't want to take my Alaska educational knowledge outside the state however if I retire that is what it looks like I may need to do. That is problematic to this state as we all look to educate our most valuable resource, our children, with less. For example, the state of Oregon, who has undergone continuous fiscal upheaval maintains a list of administrators who are willing to go into districts that need emergency support. Why can't Alaska's AASB or ASA maintain such a list? The reason is simple, retired educators must follow an increasingly tough set of restrictions to be able to help a district.

I applaud you all for supporting this bill and moving it forward. It is part of the equation in these lean times in our state.

Don't overlook your retired educators as a resource!!!

Thank you for all you do for schools and our students.

Dr. PJ Ford Slack, Superintendent Hoonah

