NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Ambler · Buckland · Deering · Kiana · Kivalina · Kobuk · Kotzebue · Noatak · Noorvik · Selawik · Shungnak
PO Box 51 · Kotzebue, Alaska 99752 · Phone (907) 442-1800

May 07, 2017

Honorable Members of the Legislature,

For the record, I am Dr. Annmarie O'Brien, Superintendent of Northwest Arctic Borough School District. We have 2017 students in 12 schools in 11 villages. None of our villages are accessible by roads. I have been employed in Northwest Arctic for 17 years, six as a Director, eight years as assistant superintendent, and now I am in my 3rd year as Superintendent.

This message is a request to all Legislators to approve, before the end of this session, HB No. 224. "An Act relating to reemployment of persons who retire under the teachers' retirement system."

Rural Alaska, especially Western Alaska, is in a crisis because of the shortage of qualified staff to teach our students. For the first time in all my years with NWABSD, school opened without full staffing.   As we recruit for the 2017-18 school year, the situation is worse. Now, after months of recruiting, we are still in need of over 30 staff to fill current needs. As parents and grandparents, I know this situation would be unacceptable to your family.

As you all know Alaska's University system graduates a fraction of the teachers needed to fill open positions throughout the state. As a result, this district goes through great expense to recruit in the lower 48.

We maintain our quality instruction through offering distance delivery and our Magnet School boarding program, but it is not enough. Qualified and experienced staff are needed and this bill would encourage them to apply.

HB No. 224 has NO fiscal impact to the State of Alaska. In fact, it will favorably impact district finances by reducing costs associated with recruitment efforts in the lower 48.

I am appealing to all members of the Legislature to assist districts struggling with maintaining qualified staff for the students in rural Alaska. Please approve HB No. 224 before the end of the FY'17 session.

If you have any questions, please call me at 907-442-1802 or email: aobrien@nwarctic.org.

Thank you.

Dr. Annmarie O'Brien