

Members of the House Education Committee,

Alaska has long needed a stable, consistent, predictable, and adequate funding source for public education. Great Alaska Schools supports legislative bills that move the state closer to a stable, consistent, predictable, and adequate funding for education. Bill HB 259 does just that.

Throughout our advocacy efforts we've learned that Alaskan families really want our children to be prepared for the workforce or for further learning when they leave Alaska's public schools as young adults. A strong education system is really the only viable means for the majority of students to succeed. Research clearly shows that high-quality teachers lead to the greatest education outcomes. Yet, there is a national shortage of quality educators, and Alaska is losing those educators to other states. Alaska must prioritize creating an attractive work environment to retain the educators we have and attract future impassioned educators.

When we ask our education leaders why there are so many vacant positions, we hear time and again that recruitment and retention are the greatest challenges. Other states have shown that by prioritizing education with consistent funding they can draw quality teachers through solid retirement benefits, attractive healthcare options, and by incentivizing or compensating for higher learning in the profession.

The teacher turnover rate in Alaska is high and getting higher. This is incredibly costly to all districts, both financially and emotionally for students. Per Jim Anderson, CFO of ASD, it costs ASD approx. \$108,000 to onboard a single teacher. That's money that does not make it to the classroom. Further, the connection that students have with teachers through their K-12 years and those teachers remaining connected to their communities has an incalculable benefit for students. This has been underscored by the pandemic. During a time of dramatic uncertainty for children, the relationships students have with their educator can all too often be the only solid relationship that they have with an adult outside their home. When that adult is forced to relocate, it can be very destabilizing for a student.

Furthermore, since the BSA has been flat and the cost of operations have compounded over the last 8 years, ASD has worked carefully to equally allocate teachers in their schools, so when budgets are continually squeezed, it has led to teachers being moved to other schools, the result of those moves are losses of continuity and colleague relationships for educators, and significant disruption for students.

This pandemic has certainly shown just how critical it is to have a safe and nurturing place for our children to learn so parents are able to continue to work.

We believe that there is a greater appreciation for our educators now, so this is the perfect opportunity to show them that they are valued by enacting legislation to support them.

Great Alaska Schools sees HB 259 as a sincere effort by legislators to set up stable, consistent, predictable, and adequate funding for public education, per the state's constitution. We fully support this Bill and the % of the POMV being specifically allocated for public education.

Sincerely,
Great Alaska Schools
Anchorage Leadership Team

