



Anchorage School District

Education Center

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February 23, 2022

Representative Ivy Spohnholz

Alaska State Legislature

120 Fourth Street

Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representative Spohnholz,

As superintendent of your local school district and Alaska's largest, I am writing to share ASD's strong support for HB 259 Permanent Fund Dividend, 25/75 POMV Split. This legislation will provide timely, reliable, and predictable funding for school districts across Alaska. This bill is future thinking and is a vehicle that would allow strong policy in support of education to come to fruition in our state.

Years of uncertain funding are taking a toll on Anchorage School District's (as well as other districts') ability to retain talented employees, implement programmatic changes, and focus on our students' learning and well-being needs.

Over the last six years as the superintendent, Anchorage has implemented many cost-saving initiatives. This consisted of closing two elementary schools, merging four schools and programs to create efficiency and strong outcomes, as well as staff reductions.

ASD has been fortunate to receive one-time funds from the State in fiscal years 19 & 20, and we relied heavily on federal relief funds in fiscal years 22 and 23. However, we are living on borrowed time. Inflation is real, and it is time to implement a method for education funding that will ensure the future academic success of our children.

There exist many comments about the cost of education in Alaska, leaving some to wonder why education should not receive additional funding until improvements in student achievement are seen. While it is true that education is costly, it also costs more to move to, and live in, Alaska than many of the lower 48 states. This is true in every sector in our state. Just a few simple examples of higher costs for Alaska employees include:

Educating All Students for Success in Life

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- A new employee relocating from the lower 48 would pay \$4,256 to ship their vehicle from Lubbock, Texas to Anchorage.
- Average Anchorage gas prices are approximately \$3.89 per gallon today, compared to \$3.25 in Topeka or \$3.39 in Miami.
- Grocery costs in Minneapolis are 21 percent less than Anchorage, with utilities 24 percent less.

Health care costs in Alaska are also higher than the lower 48. For example, ASD pays approximately \$20,000 per year for each employee to receive health insurance, while the Oklahoma City School District pays \$7,391 per employee and the Minneapolis School District pays \$5,650 per employee.

Alaska's school districts need three things to improve educational outcomes—high quality teachers, support for teachers in high quality professional development, and accountability at all levels. To that point, I recently testified in support of Senate Bill 111, a reading bill that will provide high quality instruction and cultural engagement that shares accountability across the State. The present bill, HB 259 will support our efforts to better attract and retain excellent educators.

There is a strong, overdue need for timely, reliable, and predictable funding for Alaska's school districts. Our children are, have always been, and will always be, Alaska's most precious resource. Their future will drive our state's future. It is time to give them every possible chance to learn, grow, and live successful lives here in Alaska.

ASD takes pride in our accountability for student success; nevertheless, we need the resources to accomplish this no-fail mission. Please feel free to reach out to me if I may be of assistance. And, thank you again for this bold, forward-thinking bill.

Respectfully,



Deena M. Bishop, Ed.D.
Superintendent