



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

February 17, 2022

RE: 2022 02 08 HB 273 Testimony

Madam Chair, Rep. Harriot Drummond Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Unuqsraalautaq, UvaNa Atiga Avinnaq. Good Afternoon, My name is Terri Walker

I was raised in Buckland Alaska one of the villages in Northwest Arctic Borough. I am a part of the Hadley/Gavin family. I have worked for the district for 32 years serving the people of the region. I am currently the Superintendent of the School District. I appreciate your time in holding this hearing today on HB 273, a bill our board and district strongly support.

At its core, HB273 inflation proofs the base student allocation. Although the bill is simple, its effects are profound and long overdue.

Inflation is defined in economic terms as “a persistent, substantial rise in the general level of prices resulting in the loss of value of currency”. That is what our schools persistently face – a loss of value of their budgets and their resources.

Inflation is insidious, slowly hollowing out public education and opportunities for our students. Inflation has many synonyms and associations – to impair, undercut, whittle away, erode, sap, enfeeble, eat away, debilitate – it is damaging to our public education and student opportunities across our great state.

Inflation is roaring in Alaska and the USA, increasing prices for food, utilities, staff, virtually every input into a school district. re: governor - In his address at the beginning of session said inflation is at a 40-year high. The needed response is to inflation proof the BSA.

The current budget process does not account for inflation. The result is a budget cut.

Here are some examples of the fixed cost increases we have seen in our district:

Our district serves 13 schools in 11 communities. From FY2019 to 2021 we have seen the cost of freight to villages increase by \$.10 for freight over 10 pounds, which equals about a 10 percent increase. Freight minimums have also increased by \$5, about at 20% increase.

In the last year, FY 21 to FY 22 year-to-date there has been a 16% overall increase to our heating fuel expenses. This increase is after going out to bid to buy our fuel in bulk.

Our Eleven villages do not have roads, so everything must be flown in during the winter months. During the summer, we make every effort to barge our fuel for heating the buildings. For some

villages, the river water may never get high enough for a barge to make it, so fuel then has to be flown which increases our costs tremendously.

The cost of our food program has gone up 12.27 percent from FY18 to FY21. As a title one school district, we qualify for 100% free meals for all students. However, USDA reimburses only 40% of what it costs to feed our children. Because of the continuous, increased cost in food and shipping, our district supplements over 1 million dollars each year. We are thankful for the cares act and ARPA funds that we've been able to cover these costs thru 2024. But these are one-time funds that are going away.

Before I reach my closure, I would like to tell you of cuts we've had to make because of flat funding.

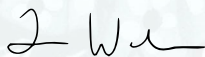
- we've cut prek
- we've cut career & tech ed. and reduced our counselors by half
- we've cut all elementary and middle school student activities and greatly reduced funding for high school activities.
- We've cut administration teaching and support staff positions.

It's hard sitting in a meeting trying to balance the budget deciding whether we are going to feed or educate our children.

We have experienced the continual rise of inflation while funding for education remains flat, with a decreasing value. We are diminishing public education, giving our students less opportunity.

It is time to address education funding and inflation proofing the BSA. If we don't, we are hurting Alaska's students and our states' future leaders by not fully funding public education or accounting for inflation in the state's education budget.

Thank you for your consideration of HB 273. I am happy to answer any questions.



Terri Walker
Superintendent, NWABSD
(907) 442-1802
twalker@nwarctic.org

Sent to:
House.education@akleg.gov
Rep Drummond

From: [Todd, Kathleen](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: HB 273
Date: Friday, February 11, 2022 8:31:48 PM

I am writing in support of this bill tying the BSA to inflation. During my 15 years on the Valdez School Board I have experienced unchanging BSA's (really cuts to district buying power). I have also seen one year with special grants that were appreciated but came so late as to not be useable to support program enhancements or hire needed personnel (we could have hired for that elementary teacher position that we had given up to buy fuel oil, but it was too late to find one when the money for the high price of fuel arrived). Having increases tied to inflation will allow better planning in the medium term and will save the legislature a lot of time haggling over school funding every year. Even though I do not think current school funding is optimum, the predictability of increases tied to inflation would be worth more than the chance to have a higher increase in some years.

I don't quite understand the wording of this bill (is it meant to be 3 years worth of inflation every single year or is it intended to be an average of the previous 3 year's inflation that is used?), but I support wholeheartedly the idea of tying increases in school funding to inflation in the basket of goods and services that school districts use. (Remember that a vast majority of their costs are for personnel, so that the consumer price index may be a good enough measure.) Please pass this bill.

Kathleen Todd
Member, Valdez City School Board.

From: [Katie Botz](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Cc: [Rep. Andi Story](#)
Subject: Continuation Testimony to HB 272/273
Date: Friday, February 11, 2022 6:53:14 PM

Greeting Madam Co-chair Drummond, Co-chair Story and other members of the House Education Committee,

So sorry for stating my testimony over the phone shorter than normal but was still working and had to return to bus barn before coworkers asking where I was. I'd like to take the time to expand on my testimony.

My name is Katie Botz, and I am a proud constituent of district 34 speaking on behalf of myself. I respectfully ask that you pass both HB 272 and 273, and get rid of the flat funding when it comes to our K-12 education!! Our future generation depends on these two bills being placed into law. I am both a school bus driver as well as an aunty to 11 nieces and nephews throughout Alaska (Kodiak and Cordova). As you well know we were just hit by COVID, and all students were forced to online schooling. What I wasn't able to say, was many of my nieces and nephews suffered being forced to stay at home instead of having in-class learning. My sister-in-law had to get a deal made to where my nieces and nephews could go to school in-person for a couple of hours just to get caught up! How many other students throughout Alaska were behind in their studies during COVID season?

I also am concerned regarding to ALL student's Mental, Emotional and Social health. As a bus driver, I can tell when students are struggling socially and emotionally considering I ask them to bring problems to my attention on the bus daily. When students were finally able to come back to school after COVID, it was evidence that not only did I transport them home, but I had to take more time of my day to help remind the students how to properly socialize with each other, once again. It was also evidence by the comments which they students would make to me, that being at home for such long period of time with their family, became a safety issue. My route takes low-income students to and from elementary school, and there are times where I will hear students having to climb onto the counter and feed themselves due to parent/guardian passed out on the couch. I'm truly thankful Gastineau Elementary are providing breakfast in the morning so my students can least eat before they head to class (oh and I make sure they get to school early enough to eat as well). It is my understanding that the school district pays for the food which the students eat. If we are flat funded, where are the funding going to be to provide for the food?

If we are still flat funded, where are our students going to be when they graduate from High School? I often question whether these kids will be college ready, or career oriented by the time they are 18.

There's one last point that I'd like for you to consider. Teachers should be able to take students out on field trips, not only to give the students different scenery, but for their mental, and emotional health. I've been actually driving for about four and a half years now, and I have noticed a decreased in field trips throughout the district due to lack of funding. Most of the field trips which other drives fight over are from teams coming in from various districts now with field trips for classes are limited.

Please pass and fully fund both HB 272 and 273 for ALL Alaskan students.

Katie Botz
District 34



LOWER YUKON SCHOOL DISTRICT

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George Smith

Chairman

Gene Stone

Superintendent

February 23, 2022

Representative Andi Story
Alaska State Legislature
Capitol Building, Room 403
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: House Bill 272 increase Base Student Allocation and House Bill 273 Increase Base Student Allocation Inflation

Dear Representative Story,

My name is Gene Stone and I am the Chief School Administrator for the Lower Yukon School District. Recently I met with you in your office and spoke with you about school funding.

On behalf of the Lower Yukon School District Regional School Board, District Administration and the nearly 2000 students in our district, we thank you for introducing HB 272 and HB 273.

This legislation is greatly needed to offset the eroding effects of inflation and the flat funding of education that has occurred since 2017. Alaska's fiscal position has strengthened and the educational demands require a very reasonable increase in the Base Student Allocation.

Additionally, LYSD supports HB 273 to help inflation proof the Base Student Allocation and reasonably does so by using inflation comparisons using the CPI.

Our costs for teacher housing, building and maintenance repairs, basic school supplies, transportation and nutrition services have all increased dramatically. We also incur significant costs to demo old buildings and tank farms that are hold overs from BIA buildings.

Thank you for supporting Alaska education and the students of the Lower Yukon School District.

Sincerely,

Gene Stone

CHILDREN FIRST

Alakanuk Emmonak Hooper Bay Kotlik Marshall Mt. Village Pilot Station Russian Mission Scammon Bay Nunam Iqua

From: [Michael Wald](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: HB 272 and 273
Date: Monday, February 7, 2022 8:53:58 AM

Alaskans have a tremendous need for quality education and current funding levels are not meeting these needs. Please support HB 272 and 273 as initial steps to provide Alaska's youth with the education they deserve.

Thank you.

Michael

Michael Wald
Owner Arctic Wild
Michael@arcticwild.com
907-479-8203
www.arcticwild.com

From: [AMY EKELMANN](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: support BSA
Date: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 8:54:46 AM

My school prides itself in maximizing every penny of the annual budget to create the best learning opportunities for our students! We are proud of the fact that close to 92% of our budget is dedicated to instructional staff and safety. The remainder goes for custodians, utilities, and teaching supplies.

The school I work at has struggled to balance the budget while maintaining quality instruction. This is the result of no increase to the BSA for 7 years! Our budgets have become compressed, and we are hitting up against the glass ceiling. Stagnant funding does not provide for the important salary and benefit increases that keep our teachers and staff in our schools and in our state. The stagnant funding causes ALL schools to struggle to maintain status quo, but now, even the status quo can't be maintained! Your public schools cannot do the important job of educating Alaska's future leaders without an increase to the BSA! Please help! Advocate for Alaska's future!

Please, work together, and agree to an increase for the BSA. It is time. The need is critical. The time is NOW!

Thank you for your time and consideration!

With Warm Regards,

Amy Ekelmann
Parent of 2 students in public school
Special Education Teacher
Palmer, Alaska 99645

From: [Nicole Stellon O'Donnell](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: support for raising the BSA
Date: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 11:57:32 AM

Dear House Education Committee:

As a parent and constituent in Fairbanks I am writing to support the passage of HB 272 and HB 273.

I strongly believe we need to increase financial support for Alaskan schools. The years of underfunding have damaged the quality of education and deepened the teacher shortage in our state. Please honor the commitment to education in Alaska's constitution and increase funding.

Thank you,

Nicole

Nicole Stellon O'Donnell
697 Fordham Drive
Fairbanks, AK 99709
907-799-7196

From: [Barb \(QasuGlana\) Amarak](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: Testimony
Date: Monday, February 7, 2022 7:51:47 AM

Having been a school board member for twelve years and worked for a school district for twenty years, I understand issues and needs related to ensuring success and achievement for and by our students.

I support HB 273 and HB 272 and their purpose to increase the base student allocation, and I request your support.

Barb (QasuGlana) Amarak

Director, UAF Northwest Campus
907-434-1650

We acknowledge the Indigenous peoples upon whose customary lands our campuses reside. In the Bering Strait region, the Northwest Campus is located on the customary lands of the Inupiaq, Siberian Yupik, and Yup'ik peoples.