



Chairman Harriet Drummond
Alaska State House of Representatives
Education Committee
Juneau, Alaska
Via email: House.Education@akleg.gov
Via email: Rep.Harriet.Drummond@akleg.gov

Re: Senate Bill 34 Education Compacting Demonstration Project, Senator Gary Stevens sponsor

Dear Chair Drummond:

On behalf of the many member organizations of the Alaska Federation of Natives, I write to express our strong support for SB 34, an Act to establish a demonstration project to explore the establishment and implementation of one to five state-tribal education compacts.

Passage of this legislation would fulfill requests made by the Department of Education and Early Development for exploring the compact school model to provide for more appropriate and effective educational programs, programs which are focused on teaching through indigenous peoples' cultures rather than merely about those cultures. AFN is excited about this bill for many reasons. It is critically important to address the low scores, absenteeism, and dropout rates of Native students, but our goals go beyond just improving educational outcomes. We want students to excel – in school, in their communities and in life. Every parent, teacher, and administrator – really every Alaskan – wants our children to love their time in school and be successful learners. AFN wants educators and administrators to experience the joy that teaching should bring when students are engaged and progressing. We want our teachers to stay in and feel a part of our communities.

AFN views this post pandemic period as an opportunity to transform the educational experience. This is the time to look past getting back to previous norms that were not working well. This is the time to embrace innovation, meld incredible emerging technologies with traditional Native ways of knowing and learning and expand resources. The State's interest in exploring options exemplifies its commitment to providing the very best education to all Alaska's children. AFN anticipates that the State's collaboration with tribes will be a learning experience for everyone. Partnerships take work but we share a desire to do what is best for our kids.

The purpose of a demonstration project is to learn, determine best practices and ensure future efforts are successful. This initiative will benefit all Alaska schools. Nothing final will come out of the project. This bill outlines a two-step process. The final review and approval will come back to this Committee and the legislature. So, this is a first small step.

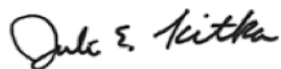
AFN has worked thoroughly with the Department, Commissioner Johnson, and other House and Senate Committees to thoroughly review the best path to exploring this education model---as promptly and thoroughly as possible---in a few schools in Alaska, on a voluntary basis. As SB 34 has moved through the process, questions have been answered to the point that all committees to date have acted favorably, and the legislation is now focused on a negotiated model agreement which would then come before a future Legislature to validate.

Although we believe strongly that the compact model can work extremely well in education, our goal with this legislation is to allow the opportunity for the ideas to be tested and negotiated, and then to see how well the compact model can work in education. The model has worked extremely well in the health care arena for many years, and now more in the child welfare arena as well.

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee, we urge the committee to pass this important legislation. We must find more innovative ways in Alaska to provide for the highest quality of education for Alaska students, close to home, through culturally linked means. SB 34 represents a critically important step in that direction.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Julie E. Kitka".

Julie Kitka, President