

From: Cyndy Mika <Cyndy.Mika@kibsd.org>
Sent: Monday, May 08, 2023 10:56 AM
To: House Finance
Subject: HB193 Testimony from Kodiak Island Borough School District

Good morning, Chairman Edgmon, Chairman Foster, Chairman Johnson, and members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Cyndy Mika and I am the Superintendent for Kodiak Island Borough School District. I am writing today in support of HB 193 and its importance to the schools in Kodiak who would benefit from having the BAG limit raised to 100Mbps. Our rural schools need digital equity in order for our students to have an equitable education. Our students deserve and need the full transformative power of technology in order to access their core curriculum as well as electives and special education services. Since I arrived in Alaska in July, I have visited our rural schools many times and am amazed at the quality of education we are able to provide them, when the internet is working - and even then, the speeds are so low, that many of the platforms will not work! Reliable access to the internet is a critical component in modern day education.

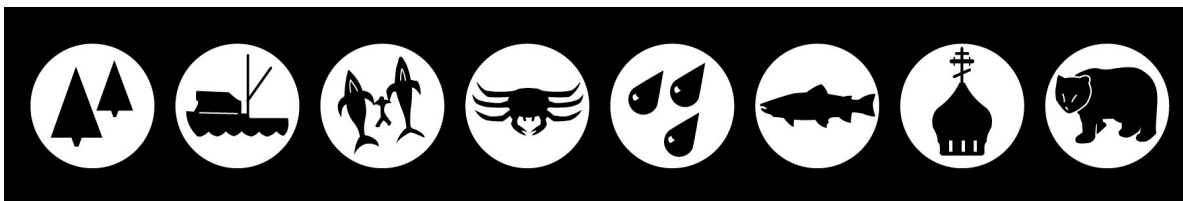
Kodiak utilizes the BAG to leverage e-rate funds and provide our students and educators fair access to the digital world. We apply for the discounted internet through the e-rate program during the annual filing window in March, which is before the end of the legislative session. Therefore, it is important that SB140 passes this year so that we can apply for the higher internet speeds up to 100mbps rather than the current max 25mpbs next spring during annual filing.

Quality equitable education requires connectivity and passing HB 193 will help KIBSD achieve our goal of ensuring each of our students regardless of living in a village or in town has access to our curriculum and educational services.

Thank you for serving our students and families and all the work you are doing for the betterment of Alaska.

Sincerely,

Cyndy A. Mika, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools Kodiak Island Borough School District



We gather on the traditional homeland of the Alutíq/Sugpiaq people. The heritage and culture of the Alutíq people continue to enrich our communities and our schools.

KIBSD

722 Mill Bay Rd
Kodiak, AK 99615
907-486-7550



May 5, 2023

Dear Representatives Edgmon, Foster, and DeLena Johnson

Quintillion's mission is to connect more Alaskans to each other and the rest of the world—which is why we are eager to support **House Bill 193**. You have written legislation critical to advancing efforts that bridge the digital divide between rural and urban Alaska. We applaud you for focusing those efforts within what is the heart of our communities, —our schools.

Over the last few years, it is evident a high-speed internet connection is not a luxury, but a necessity. Yet, too many Alaskans lag behind the rest of the world in being able to log on for work, health care services, and education.

Quintillion is the underlying broadband carrier to students and teachers in Kotzebue, Nome, Point Hope, Utqiagvik, and Wainwright. Our middle-mile fiber serves the Northwest Arctic Borough School District, Nome Public Schools, Kogoyah Kozga Library, and North Slope Borough School District.

In our partnership with Ilisagvik College in Utqiagvik (who does not qualify for E-Rate subsidies), we saw the immediate difference provided by higher download speeds, as President Justina Wilhelm explains in this [thank you video](#): *"In our rural communities, internet access and bandwidth have been a huge area of concern for us. You can't imagine the weight lifted when Ilisagvik College partnered with Quintillion, and they began donating bandwidth in 2019, continued their support in 2020, and then increased their support in 2021."*

Increasing State of Alaska Broadband Assistance Grant (BAG) speeds for schools, from 25 megabits to 100 megabits, is the difference between being able to attend tutoring sessions via Zoom or falling behind in schoolwork. Increasing BAG-eligible speeds from 25mb to 100mb is the difference between listening and watching Inupiaq words correctly pronounced to simply guessing at the sounds.

We thank you for this bill, and the important work you are doing to achieve parity and digital equity across the state. Quintillion stands ready to support you in this critical endeavor.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
A blue ink signature of Mac McHale.
86C021743C7145F...

Michael (Mac) McHale
President
Quintillion



1-800-673-4394

201 East 56th Avenue, Suite 300
Anchorage, Alaska 99518

www.QuintillionGlobal.com



GALENA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

P.O. Box 299
GALENA, ALASKA 99741
PHONE (907) 656-1205
FAX (907) 656-2238

SUPERINTENDENT
Jason R. Johnson, Ed.D.

May 5, 2023

Re: House Bill 193

Dear House Finance Committee:

On behalf of the Galena City School District (GCSD), I write today in support of SB 140.

While extremely grateful to Alaska's legislators for increasing BAG grant-eligible funding to 25 megabits per second a few years ago, the internet in Galena for our students and staff still, at 25 megabits per second, has limited video streaming, which, as we all know, is essential for education and business operations today. Our network administrator in Galena reports that he spends much of his time managing internet operations each day. For example, he might need to prioritize internet bandwidth to the central business office for an important virtual meeting which will mean limited, or possibly no, streaming for teachers and students during that timeframe.

In addition to GCSD's schools in Galena, we have six offices in urban areas that support the education of our IDEA homeschool families. I can attest to the unequal internet between urban and rural communities in Alaska as our IDEA offices can rely on video streaming the majority of the time.

Thank you for considering supporting HB 193 in order to provide digital equality for all of Alaska's students.

Respectfully submitted,

Jason R. Johnson, Ed.D.
GCSD Superintendent
Email: jason.johnson@galenanet.com

Date: 5/8/23

RE: Supporting HB 193: Increasing Broadband Assistance Grant Program to 100Mbps for Eligible KPBSD Schools

Dear Members of the House Finance Committee:

As the Superintendent of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD), I write to express our support for HB 193, which propose to increase the State of Alaska Broadband Assistance Grant (BAG) program's support level from 25Mbps to 100Mbps. This change has the potential to greatly enhance equitable access to educational opportunities and the digital world for students in even the most remote areas of KPBSD.

Since its inception in FY2015, KPBSD has leveraged the BAG program to increase connectivity up to 25Mbps at six schools, totaling \$168,076.58 in subsidy awarded through BAG¹. In the same timeframe, these schools received \$1,298,986.91 in E-Rate subsidy, with district-portion of circuit expenses totaling \$424,034.48.

KPBSD has aimed to achieve a 100Mbps Wide Area Network (WAN) connectivity baseline for all but our smallest schools, where feasible, considering the persistent infrastructure challenges in remote locations. The proposed increase in BAG support through SB 140 and HB 193 has the potential to benefit nine KPBSD schools, namely Cooper Landing School, Kachemak Selo School, Marathon School, Nanwalek School, Nikolaevsk School, Port Graham School, Razdolna School, Tebughna School, and Voznesenka School.

The advantages of increasing the BAG support level to 100Mbps for KPBSD schools include:

- Enhancing digital equity for students in remote areas of KPBSD and promoting equal access to the transformative power of technology and online resources.
- Empowering students, teachers, and school leaders in remote KPBSD schools to access modern technology, transform learning, create efficiencies, provide online health services, and compete globally.
- Leveraging federal E-Rate funds to provide KPBSD students and educators with equitable access to the digital world.
- Recognizing the critical role of reliable internet access in modern learning for KPBSD students.
- Potential to stimulate accelerated buildout of middle-mile infrastructure in support of increased broadband utilization at schools, which often serve as telecommunications anchor institutions in small communities.

While recognizing the numerous benefits of expanding broadband access, we urge careful consideration in allocating sufficient funding to accommodate the anticipated increased demand on the BAG program, resulting from a four-fold increase from 25Mbps to 100Mbps. Should demand surpass available funding,

¹ Represents actual funding for FY15 – FY23, plus anticipated funding for FY24

districts could face a pro-rata reduction in BAG funding relative to overall available funds. In the most extreme scenario, this might lead to increased expenses for districts due to reduced BAG subsidy coverage as demand outpaces appropriated funding. Although the impact of such a scenario on KPBSD is not insignificant, it pales in comparison to the potential consequences for other districts in the state facing telecommunication infrastructure limitations and extremely high costs.

Moreover, there are potential procedural challenges at the E-Rate level for at least two of KPBSD's most expensive circuits: Nanwalek and Port Graham. Each of these schools serves fewer than 100 students and has a combined pre-discount cost of \$187,500. Due to these high costs, they have repeatedly faced scrutiny under the E-Rate cost-effectiveness review program. Significantly increasing these costs to reach bandwidth levels approaching 100Mbps may risk jeopardizing E-Rate funding, as it could be deemed cost-ineffective. This necessitates a careful evaluation of multiple factors before deciding to increase broadband levels. This situation underscores one of the many challenges remote locations encounter when attempting to scale up to higher broadband levels without incurring exorbitant costs and highlights the need to modernize telecommunications infrastructure in these remote communities, allowing for increased bandwidth at more affordable prices.

There are also opportunities to further enhance the impact of the BAG program on Alaska's students. One key opportunity involves addressing the absence of a state-level E-Rate Special Construction match program, which currently results in missed opportunities for additional E-Rate funding for Alaska districts. The FCC E-Rate Program provides provisions to match state contributions for special construction costs up to 10%. When a state funds special construction charges to build high-speed broadband infrastructure, the E-Rate program increases the applicant's discount rate for these charges, matching the state funding on a one-to-one dollar basis up to an additional 10%. This approach has the potential to reduce cost burdens on local districts, modernize telecommunications infrastructure, and often decrease monthly recurring telecommunications expenses. While the current legislative session may not be the ideal time to consider significant changes to the BAG structure, examining the possibility of a future BAG structure or other mechanism that offers a state match for E-Rate Special Construction may prove beneficial. Implementing a balanced strategy that emphasizes both responsible bandwidth expansion using existing technology and investment in the development of modernized infrastructure will optimize the benefits for Alaska districts and the students they serve.

We urge the legislature to pass SB 140 and HB 193 this year and encourage future legislatures to fund this program at the necessary amount, enabling the Department of Education and Early Development to inform Alaska school districts that they can apply for 100Mbps support, rather than 25Mbps, during the next BAG application filing window next spring.

In conclusion, increasing the BAG program's support level to 100Mbps for eligible schools is essential to providing all our students, regardless of their geography, with equitable access to educational opportunities. Digital equity requires robust, reliable connectivity, and further improvements to broadband will help us achieve our goal of ensuring every KPBSD school has the access they need to provide our students with the education they deserve.

We understand that ensuring equitable access to broadband for all students in Alaska is a significant challenge, but through collaborative efforts and a strong commitment from the legislature, we believe it is achievable. By passing SB 140 and HB 193, we will be taking a significant step towards closing the digital divide and providing KPBSD students with the resources necessary to excel in the 21st century.

We appreciate your dedication to the well-being of Alaska's students and the future of our state. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or require additional information about the impact of increasing the Broadband Assistance Grant program's support level to 100Mbps for eligible KPBSD schools. Together, we can create a brighter future for our students and for Alaska as a whole.

Thank you once again for your attention to this important matter.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Clayton Holland", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Clayton Holland, Superintendent of Schools

Kenai Peninsula Borough School District