

SB

152

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3/17/08

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 152()
IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA
TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY

Offered:
Referred:

Sponsor(s): SENATOR THOMAS

A BILL
FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

1 "An Act relating to charter school funding."

2 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

3 * Section 1. AS 14.17.450 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

4 (c) If the ADM in a charter school is less than 150, the adjusted student count
5 under (a) of this section for the school shall be calculated by multiplying the ADM by
6 1.08.

7 * Sec. 2. AS 14.17.905(b) is amended to read:

8 (b) Notwithstanding (a)(3) of this section and for purposes other than
9 calculations under AS 14.17.450, a charter school shall be counted as a separate
10 school if the charter school has an ADM of at least 150 students.

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



SENATOR JOE THOMAS

Sponsor Statement SB 152

SB 152 will correct a flaw in the school funding law as it applies to charter schools with fewer than 150 students.

Currently, charter schools with fewer than 150 students are not funded as separate schools under the foundation formula. Instead, they are funded at a much lower per-child rate, as if their students attended the largest schools in their districts. The largest schools in urban districts are high schools with 500 - 1,000 students, whose multipliers for additional students under the foundation formula are .84 or .92. In contrast, the per child funding rate for a school with 150 students is 1.45 when the ADM base and multiplier are considered.

SB 152 gives charter schools with fewer than 150 students an Adjusted Student Count equal to their ADM times 1.27. This rate is the same as the per-student rate for a standard school of 275 under the current school size factor.

The current law triggers financial emergencies for schools and their districts when enrollment at a charter school drops unexpectedly from above 150 to just under that threshold.

For example, Winterberry Charter School in Anchorage opened in FY06 with 143 students instead of 150, which resulted in a \$400,000 cut in funding to the Anchorage School District and financial crisis for Winterberry. Positions had to be eliminated and the program was reduced in the middle of the school year. Fortunately, Winterberry survived and now has 160 students.

Last year, Fairbanks' Effie Korkine School dropped from a school-size factor of 1.45 down to .84, when its enrollment fell below 150, and Bethel's Yup'ik Immersion Charter School suffered a similar fate. Both these schools offer programs focused on success for Native students, but their survival is endangered by the flaw in the funding system.

The system makes it extremely difficult for charter schools to operate if their community size or the curriculum is not appropriate for a school of 150 students. That is the case today in Juneau, Homer and Nome. In Juneau's case, the state funds students at a rate of 1.17 - 1.30 if they attend a neighborhood elementary school, but cuts funding to .84 if those same students attend the local charter school.

SB 152 maintains an incentive for charter schools to grow above 150 students, at which point they are funded at the higher, separate school rate under existing law. However, it allows smaller charter schools to survive and offer valuable education options to Alaska families.

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE ROLL CALL

DATE: 3-25-08
 Amendment: adopt new CS HB 158 (FIN)

MEMBER	Favor	Oppose
SEN. ELTON		✓
SEN. HUGGINS		—
SEN. OLSON		✓
SEN. THOMAS		✓
SEN. DYSON		✓
SEN. STEDMAN	✓	
SEN. HOFFMAN	✓	

absent

YEA 3
 NAY 4

Hi Senator Elton:

I have written to you for several years now, both to ask for your help in supporting small charter schools, and to thank you when you have provided that support. Tonight I write you feeling hopeful that the long-term solution to the small charter school funding problem may finally be at hand.

On Tuesday the Senate Finance Committee is scheduled to hear SB 152, Sen. Joe Thomas's bill on charter school funding. This bill would represent the long-term funding solution that we have needed to keep the charter school healthy and able to count on staying alive for more than just one year at a time--which, as important as it's been, is nonetheless all we can count on from the small charter school appropriation that you have helped champion in previous years. Passage of this bill would mean that the small charter schools of Alaska would no longer need to come back to you and the other members of the Legislature year after year and beg for just one more round of appropriations. It would mean we could deliver basic services--transportation, special ed services, school counseling--that we simply can't deliver to our kids--even though they're public school students. It would mean that the small charter schools around Alaska could be assured of survival for years to come.

I know time is short, but I hope you will work as hard as you ever have to see that this bill passes out of Senate Finance and gets a vote on the Senate floor. We will be with you all the way.

Thanks, Tony and Linda Newman

Senate Special Committee on Education

Thank you for holding an overview session on Charter Schools with the Senate Special Committee on Education. I am writing to express my support for Charter Schools in Alaska and to request your support for more equitable funding for charter schools of all sizes.

I currently have two children attending the Juneau Community Charter School. My ten year old son has attended the charter school for all 6 years of his education and my youngest son has started kindergarten this year.

I believe Charter Schools are an important way to provide for school choice in Alaska and support parent involvement in education. We are very happy that the Juneau Community Charter School exists to provide a small school environment (a total of 66 children) and involve parents in the school in meaningful ways. I want my children to be educated in a small environment and want to be involved in their education. We like the multi-age classrooms, the daily interaction between children of different ages, and the whole child view of education.

Since home schooling is not an option for our family due to employment obligation we are happy to have a charter school available to address many of our needs. My older son was born with a serious congenital heart defect that has required many open heart surgeries and has had special physical needs. We have greatly appreciated him being able to attend a small school where his needs are known and met within the regular classroom.

We would love to have you visit the school since it is just two blocks from the capital. Please call the school office at 586-2526 anytime you would like to arrange a visit.

I believe Charter Schools have an important place in Alaska's education system. I hope that through your efforts, solutions to the challenges faced especially by small charter schools can be addressed. The current funding situation means it is very difficult for charter school with under 150 students to operate.

Alaska is a state of small numbers and we need charter school legislation that will allow charter schools of all sizes to thrive.

Please support more equitable funding of charter schools to allow educational options around the state.

Thanks very much for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Jeannie Monk
Juneau Community Charter school parent

Dear Senator Elton,

I have never taken the opportunity to thank you for the hard work you do in the name of Juneau families and children, and do so at the outset of this letter. I appreciate what I consider to be very intelligent representation that you give to Juneau.

I am writing to you today as the parent of two children that attend the Juneau Community Charter School, in support of SB 152, which would help to create more equitable funding for small charter schools, like ours. I am also a teacher at the school, now in my sixth year, and have known the yearly struggle of trying to raise enough funds to keep the wolves at bay. It wears on us all.

As difficult as it can be to worry about our finances, I would not teach anywhere else. I feel privileged to work in what I consider to be a model school, not as measured by test scores, but the joy our students find in learning, and in the many close friendships they develop as they journey through their elementary years.

We often remark that what makes the Charter School unique is its arts-integrated curriculum, but we fail to mention how the small size meets the needs of children. Children learn best in an environment where they feel safe, comfortable and close to the adults and peers they see everyday. With the level of parental involvement and long-term relationships between peers, our school provides the kind of caring community in which children thrive.

Research says that children whose parents are more involved in their education tend to do better in school. After my Charter School experience, I would add that parents who are involved in the lives of children, generally, at school, make a tremendous contribution to creating a kinder world- the kind we would all like to pass on to our children.

Thank you again for the hard work you do in the name of Juneau. I appreciate your efforts on behalf of education and all children, especially.

Sincerely,
Sheila Keller

Catherine Reardon

From: jgeselle@gci.net on behalf of Jon Geselle [jgeselle@gci.net]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2008 8:48 PM
To: Catherine Reardon
Subject: SB 152

To Senate Finance.

We are writing to thank you for taking time during this busy legislative session to consider SB 152, which will help address the funding formula for small (under 150 students) charter schools. This is an especially important change as reaching the critical size (150+) is very difficult in many areas of Alaska. Charter schools provide educational choice in our state and we request your support.

Our son has attended the Juneau Community Charter School for all three years of his elementary education and we could not be more pleased with the experience. We value the small size of the school because of the ways it enables children to establish long-term relationships with children of multiple ages. (Our son recently invited friends in grades ranging from 1st through 5th to his birthday party.) The school's size and structure (with parent involvement) also allows children to build relationships with numerous adults in their lives. It is hard to estimate the value, for our children, of seeing so many adults invested in their lives. It is equally hard to estimate the value of taking part on the lives of so many young people. Truly it is a blessing.

Due to the current funding formula we face an uncertain future on a yearly basis. This uncertainty is a difficult and unnecessary strain on the teachers and parents. With your support, we may find a long term solution to the financial situation of small charter schools, thus ensuring that others will have the same opportunity we have had to experience the benefits of a small school.

Thank you,
Annie & Jon Geselle

Catherine Reardon

From: sarah@gci.net on behalf of Sarah Olsen [sarah@gci.net]
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2008 12:06 AM
To: Catherine Reardon
Subject: letter

Senate Special Committee on Education,

The Juneau Community Charter School has been a great option for my family for the past 4 years, and I would truly appreciate it if the children in our public school were afforded the same funding as other public school students in Juneau.

The Juneau Community Charter School is a place where the family is encouraged to actively participate in their child's education. I think the children really thrive in the multi-grade classrooms, as well as in the many all-school activities in which they participate. My children have particularly enjoyed the Spanish and art programs, as well as the "field trips" into the Juneau community.

Though our student-to-teacher ratio is comparable to other Juneau School District classrooms, the small school size (66 students) is unique and offers a wonderful option for students in Juneau.

Thank you again for helping us to obtain equitable funding for our children. Your efforts are very much appreciated.

Sarah Olsen
Parent of 2 Charter School Children

Catherine Reardon

From: campalaska@gci.net on behalf of peter otsea [campalaska@gci.net]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2008 10:59 PM
To: Sen. Charlie Huggins; Sen. Donny Olson; Sen. Fred Dyson; Sen. Lyman Hoffman; Sen. Bert Stedman; Sen. Joe Thomas; Sen. Kim Elton
Cc: Catherine Reardon; Brenda & Joe Taylor/Roth
Subject: support for SB 152

Dear Senators,

I am writing to thank you so very much for giving your attention to the funding situation of small charter schools (under 150 students) in Alaska. My hopes are high that Senate Bill 152, which is being considered by your committee, might mean that small schools such as the Juneau Community Charter School will finally find some financial security and will allow the school to realize some important goals for education in our district that currently remain out of reach due to the hard-scrabble sort of budget under which we operate.

There are so many positive things I could say about the Juneau Community Charter School (JCCS) where my children have been being educated over the past 9 years. I could go on at length to describe how the school has benefited not only my 3 kids but my family as a whole. However in the interest of brevity, I want to make some points about the value of the school's small overall size since this is at the crux of our funding inequity. What follows are some valuable things that are possible in a school comprised of only 66 Kindergarten-through-sixth-grade kids:

* At a school like JCCS there is an intimacy that includes all children as well as staff and parents. The environment is one where everyone belongs. Sometimes like in a family, which is often how our school feels, this makes for tension or discomfort. Yet, because these are the kids who will be in class together year after year, this is the teacher who will be teaching the same kids for 2 or 3 years running, and these are the parents who will be interacting with one another for many years to come, it is mandatory that conflicts are resolved, differences are respected and that we find ways to co-exist to the benefit of all. I believe that having kids learn in an environment where the development of the social skills necessary to work together shares importance with the acquisition of academic skills is of great importance to all, and even crucial to some who may not otherwise have the opportunity outside of school to develop successfully in these ways.

* At a small school like JCCS the teachers and staff really come to know each and every student and are able to be better teachers to each individual child because of that relationship. Also, over time, relationships are built up between teachers and parents to the point where I feel in real partnership with my children's teachers. I, too, am supported by them in my efforts to parent my own kids and minister to the children of others.

* I adore the opportunities afforded by multi-age classrooms as well as the multi-grade interactions that are sprinkled throughout the day and week at JCCS. I invite you all to come and watch the older students working alongside the younger ones - playing, mentoring, inspiring, sharing . . . Life at our school is socially, emotionally and academically enriched by this mingling in the classroom, on the playground and out in the community.

Unfortunately, there may be other students, other families in our district who would greatly benefit from these and many other things that are made possible by the small size of JCCS but find there are barriers to their ability to make this school choice. One very large deterrent, for example, is the lack of busing. At our present level of funding, there is absolutely no way we can afford to pay for bus service; parents must make their own arrangements to get their kids back and forth to school each day. This is made even harder for parents who need to avail themselves of before or after-school care for their children!

As you can imagine, our "wish list" for what we might do with a larger, sustainable budget goes on from there. By way of a final note from my corner - wouldn't it be great if the time and energy of those parents like myself who can afford to give a little bit more could be

used exclusively to directly benefit children and support teachers?
Just think of what else I and others could be doing instead of endlessly fundraising and lobbying for little pockets of money just to pay for what seem to be basic necessities! How about hosting after-school clubs? Or tutoring students whose own families, for a variety of reasons, may not be able to support their learning in the way I can with my kids?

It is my fervent hope that this will be the year that legislation will be passed to make the funding of small charter schools more in keeping with larger schools in our district so that we can be secure in continuing to provide a quality education for children and so that we can strive towards the goal of making JCCS accessible to all students who would be well served in this environment. I commend your efforts on the behalf of our school and others like it in the state.

Sincerely,
Marjorie Hamburger
Juneau Community Charter School parent

Catherine Reardon

From: Alison-Michael Cooney [amcooney@gci.net]
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2008 6:56 AM
To: Sen. Kim Elton
Cc: Catherine Reardon
Subject: Please support SB 152

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

We are writing to ask for your support of SB 152 to increase charter school funding. The Juneau Community Charter School has provided a positive educational experience for our 1st grade daughter, Sklyar Cooney. We look forward to sending our four year old son to the charter school as well in a couple of years so that he can benefit from the same unique public school experience. Thank-you for your support.

Sincerely,

Mike & Alison Cooney

Charter School Funding Relevant Statutes

Sec. 14.03.260. Funding for charter school.

(a) A local school board shall provide an approved charter school with an annual program budget. The budget shall be not less than the amount generated by the students enrolled in the charter school less administrative costs retained by the local school district, determined by applying the indirect cost rate approved by the Department of Education and Early Development. The "amount generated by students enrolled in the charter school" is to be determined in the same manner as it would be for a student enrolled in another public school in that school district.

Sec. 14.17.905. Facilities constituting a school.

(a) For purposes of this chapter, the determination of the number of schools in a district is subject to the following:

(1) a community with an ADM of at least 10, but not more than 100, shall be counted as one school;

(2) a community with an ADM of at least 101, but not more than 425, shall be counted as

(A) one elementary school, which includes those students in grades kindergarten through six; and

(B) one secondary school, which includes students in grades seven through 12;

(3) in a community with an ADM of greater than 425, each facility that is administered as a separate school shall be counted as one school, except that each alternative school with an ADM of less than 200 shall be counted as a part of the school in the district with the highest ADM.

(b) Notwithstanding (a)(3) of this section, a charter school shall be counted as a separate school if the charter school has an ADM of at least 150 student .

Sec. 14.17.450. School size factor.

(a) For purposes of calculating a school's ADM to determine state aid, the ADM of each school in a district shall be computed by applying the following formula:

If the student count		The adjusted student count is			
In a school is					
At least	But less than	Base	Multiplier	The number of Students in excess of	
10	- 20	39.6			
20	- 30	39.6	+ (1.62	x	20)
30	- 75	55.8	+ (1.49	x	30)
75	- 150	122.85	+ (1.27	x	75)
150	- 250	218.1	+ (1.08	x	150)
250	- 400	326.1	+ (0.97	x	250)
400	- 750	471.6	+ (0.92	x	400)
750 or over		793.6	+ (0.84	x	750).

(b) If the ADM in a school is less than 10, those students shall be included in the ADM of the school in that district with the lowest ADM as determined by the most recent student count data for that district.

****Note:**

The adjusted student count for charter schools with fewer than 150 students is based on the same formula as the largest school in the district (AS 14.17.905). Since urban districts generally have a high school with more than 750 students, their smaller charter schools receive .84 (84%) of the base student allocation for each of their students. This is the lowest rate for any non-correspondence school in the state.

Sec. 14.17.450. School size factor.

(a) For purposes of calculating a school's ADM to determine state aid, the ADM of each school in a district shall be computed by applying the following formula:

If the student count

The adjusted student count is

In a school is

At least	But less than	Base	Multiplier	The number of Students in excess of	*The italicized calculations of per student funding in the columns below combine the base and multiplier, and are supplementary information not written in the statute
10	- 20	39.6			<i>10 students = 3.96/student</i> <i>19 = 2.08/student</i>
20	- 30	39.6	+ (1.62 x	20)	<i>20 students = 1.98/student</i> <i>29 = 1.86/student</i>
30	- 75	55.8	+ (1.49 x	30)	<i>30 students = 1.86/student</i> <i>74 = 1.64/student</i>
75	- 150	122.85	+ (1.27 x	75)	<i>75 students = 1.64/student</i> <i>149 = 1.45/student</i>
150	- 250	218.1	+ (1.08 x	150)	<i>150 students = 1.45/student</i> <i>249 = 1.30/student</i>
250	- 400	326.1	+ (0.97 x	250)	<i>250 students = 1.30/student</i> <i>399 = 1.17/student</i>
400	- 750	471.6	+ (0.92 x	400)	<i>400 students = 1.17/student</i> <i>749 = 1.06/student</i>
750 or over		793.6	+ (0.84 x	750).	<i>750 students = 1.06/student, 1000 = 1.00/student, 1500 = .94/student</i>

***The adjusted student count for charter schools with fewer than 150 students is based on the same formula as the largest school in the district (AS 14.17.905). This means they are funded at the rate of excess students in the district's largest school. Since urban districts such as Juneau, Anchorage and Fairbanks have high schools with more than 750 students, their smaller charter schools receive .84 (84%) of the base student allocation for each of their students. This is the lowest rate for any non-correspondence school in the state.*

FY2008	
DISTRICT; Charter School	FY2008 ADM
ANCHORAGE	
Frontier Charter (Correspond)	337.30
Aquarian Charter	355.30
Family Partnership Charter School (correspond)	530.33
Winterberry Charter	169.45
Eagle Academy Charter	165.50
Highland Tech Charter	251.05
Rilke Schule Charter School	183.20
FAIRBANKS	
Chinook Montessori Charter School	155.20
Star of the North Secondary School (charter)	184.50
Effie Kokrin Charter	155.05
JUNEAU	
Juneau Community Charter School	65.00
KENAI	
Aurora Borealis Charter (soldotna)	180.00
Kaleidoscope Charter School	196.00
Fireweed Academy Charter (Homer)	75.70
Soldotna Montessori Charter	160.68
KETCHIKAN	
Tongass School of Arts & Sciences Charter	153.35
Ketchikan Charter School	174.15
LOWER KUSKOKWIM	
Ayaprun Eliitnaurvik Yup'ik Immersion (bethel)	162.30
MAT-SU	
Academy Charter School	226.80
Midnight Sun Charter School	164.00
Twindley Bridge Charter School (correspond.)	280.80
NOME	
Anvil City Science Academy	44.00

FY2009 Projection	
DISTRICT; Charter School	Projection FY09 ADM
ANCHORAGE	
Frontier Charter (Correspond)	329.00
Aquarian Charter	358.00
Family Partnership Charter School (correspond.)	482.00
Winterberry Charter	185.00
Eagle Academy Charter	170.00
Highland Tech Charter	242.00
Rilke Schule Charter School	247.00
FAIRBANKS	
Chinook Montessori Charter School	155.00
Star of the North Secondary School (charter)	187.00
Effie Kokrin Charter	152.00
JUNEAU	
Juneau Community Charter School	65.00
KENAI	
Aurora Borealis Charter (soldotna)	180.00
Kaleidoscope Charter School	239.00
Fireweed Academy Charter (Homer)	128.00
Soldotna Montessori Charter	185.00
KETCHIKAN	
Tongass School of Arts & Sciences Charter	158.00
Ketchikan Charter School	182.00
LOWER KUSKOKWIM	
Ayaprun Eliitnaurvik Yup'ik Immersion (bethel)	170.00
MAT-SU	
Academy Charter School	228.00
Midnight Sun Charter School	163.00
Twindley Bridge Charter School (correspond.)	285.00
Valley High Tech Charter School [FY09]	200.00
NOME	
Anvil City Science Academy	44.00



JUNEAU SCHOOL DISTRICT
CITY AND BOROUGH OF JUNEAU
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

10014 CRAZY HORSE DRIVE • JUNEAU, ALASKA 99801-8529 • (907) 523-1702 • FACSIMILE (907) 523-1708

March 11, 2008

Senator Gary Stevens
Chairman, Special Committee on Education
State Capitol, Room 103
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Dear Senator Stevens:


The Juneau School District values small charter schools with under 150 students, therefore requests greater, more equitable funding for them.

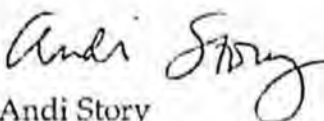
We recognize that small charter schools offer a unique learning environment because of their size and we find that small charter schools fill an important niche in the array of educational options that the District offers.

We also recognize that neighborhood schools in districts, such as Juneau, have the potential to be adversely affected when too many district children are enrolled in a large charter school(s).

Please share our recognition and concern with your committee during the upcoming work session on charter schools.

Thank you,


Peggy Cowan
Superintendent


Andi Story
School Board President

copy: Brenda Taylor, Juneau Community Charter School

Catherine Reardon

From: Joe Roth and Brenda Taylor [joebrend@alaska.net]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2008 1:00 PM
To: Catherine Reardon
Subject: harriet's letter to Senator Stevens

Dear Senator:

I write in anticipation of the workshop on charter schools which has been scheduled for this coming Saturday, March 15th.

First, I would like to thank you for taking the initiative to look closely at this important issue. You've got a short session and many issues competing for your time and attention. The issue of how we support diversity in educational settings is critically important for all Alaskans, I believe, and my family notes and greatly appreciates your interest in it. Thank you.

Second, I would like to offer some thoughts on what the Juneau Community Charter School has meant to our two children and to our family.

The school's small overall size (65 students in three classes, covering K-5th grades) has allowed our children to have regular and meaningful interaction with other learners of a wide range of ages and experience. Our son (eleven years old and a fifth grader) participates in a writer's workshop with third and fourth graders; he is a "reading buddy" to a first grader, and every Thursday morning, he spends an hour visiting from room to room in what the school calls "all school's centers" -- a free form exploratory period during which the children share the projects they have been working on. It has been our family's experience that this regular interaction with children of all ages has fostered a sense of community among the children, and it has given our son a warm and inviting setting in which to mentor younger students. Through these interactions, our son has developed quite a sense of pride in his own accomplishments while at the same time, he has learned much about how to manage himself in a world of others who may be at very different stages in their lives. These experiences would not be nearly so available in a traditional or much larger school, where by necessity the children spend virtually all of their non-recess time with children of the same age.

The Juneau Community Charter School proved to be a lifesaver for our older child (now an eighth grader and no longer a student at JCCS). She has a learning difference that responded amazingly well to the school's small community environment. No amount of special education funding or attention could make up for what she needed in order to realize her potential: a sense of belonging - and being truly important to -- a small learning community. At JCCS, she knew and was known by every other child and teacher in the school. This helped her to feel responsible for her learning in a way that she could not feel, as one child of hundreds in the halls of a more traditional school. There are many, many children like our daughter, who are bright and have tremendous potential, but for whom a large school becomes a hiding place rather than a place to set down roots and grow up strong and self-confident. For these children, who will become the writers and the artists who so enrich all our lives, we have an obligation to provide the option of a small learning community setting, such as is provided by the Juneau Community Charter School.

There is another feature of our small charter school that I would like to highlight: family involvement. At our small charter school, family members are a regular part of the learning environment. In nearly every class of every day - including the lunch period and recess -- our students see at least one person who is not the classroom teacher. Usually, there are two family members in every class. These may be parents but they are often grandparents, aunts, uncles, step-parents, or other extended family members. The presence of these adults in the children's day does two things: it reinforces the importance of family and support persons in all our lives, and it shows the children that what *they* are doing all day is just as important as what the adults in their lives may be doing. This is important for every child, but for some it is truly critical. Those may be children whose families are struggling to cope with difficult circumstances, or those children who are at risk of falling through the cracks of our education system. For a child at risk, seeing an adult volunteer in her classroom every day, may be the support she needs to grow into a happy, centered person. Every responsible elementary school will tell you that it welcomes parent involvement, but it is obviously much easier to integrate family members into the day-to-day operation of a small school than a large one. We are fortunate to have a small school in Juneau where family members are integrated in the program.

In closing, allow me to voice what each of us has probably observed in our own families: when it comes to children, there is no "one size fits all". It is precisely for this reason that this family believes we have an obligation to support charter schools, including small ones, as equal partners in our state-wide education system. Charter schools have a reputation, generally, of turning out well-educated and productive kids, but charter schools aren't "better" than traditional public schools, any more that their students are "better" than any other students. They're different, and they bring the best that Alaska can offer to children who may do better in a different setting. We need to ensure that every child has the option of attending an accountable public school that as nearly as possible allows the child to learn and thrive. Thirteen years ago your predecessors agreed that this goal means offering the option of charter schools to districts around the State. We thank you for your support, and ask that you work to ensure that charter schools - including small ones -- are treated and funded as equal partners in our great public education system.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Harriet Dinegar Milks
William E. Milks
Sarah E. Milks
Reece C. Milks

From: maureen wilkinson [mailto:mokibay@yahoo.com]
Sent: Monday, January 28, 2008 1:48 PM
To: Sen. Gary Stevens
Subject: School Choice and Equal Funding

Dear Senator Stevens,

Hello. I am writing this letter with the help of my twin boys who are ten years old. One attends West Homer Elementary and one attends Fireweed Academy, both in the fourth grade. First, I will let them express their ideas and then I will add my own.

I go to Fireweed and love it! My mom took me to visit when I was in 2nd grade for a day to see if it was where I wanted to go to school. I knew a lot of the kids already because my mom worked there before. I liked that I knew Kiki and Kris. I really liked the math and Kiki has a lot of cool books. Now that I have been going there for almost two years, I can't imagine going anywhere else. We do really cool projects and learn a lot. I enjoy that we move around and study themes. I think I learn a lot more this way. This school has given me lots of good buddies, but I also still play with friends that don't go to Fireweed on the playground and sports. I am happy that I had a choice of where to go, because I love it here at this school. We work hard, have cool field trips and get to go camping in the beginning of the year. I am glad I go to Fireweed. - Zane

I go to West Homer and I am happy that I do. When my mom took me to visit Fireweed in second grade, I was excited because I really liked Kiki. My mom said she thought I would really like going to Fireweed. After being there for a few hours, I called my mom and asked her to bring me home. I think there was too much action and I didn't like not having a desk. I have been jealous that Zane gets to go on so many field trips, but sometimes I get to play with everyone at Fireweed too. I got to visit them on their camping trip in the fall. I like that we are different and have some different friends. My teachers have been great at West Homer and I like my school. Now, I am glad that we go to different schools. - Hale

When we were deciding where to go in third grade, I wanted my boys to visit both schools and have them help make the choice. I emphasize here

that there was a CHOICE. I thought that it would end up being the other way around and that my son Hale would love the learning environment in Fireweed. I was wrong. He was the one who let me know that it wasn't a good fit for him. He needed more structure and has done well going to West Homer.

I believe that kids, as well as adults are not cookie cutters. We don't all learn the same, we don't all react and play the same. It is essential that there are choices for us to learn and grow as we become adults and our potential is achieved. If all teachers taught in exactly the same way, using the same methods, we would lose a lot of good students who just don't get it. I feel that you must realize this and would agree that kids or adults don't learn the same way.

My reason for writing to you now is that I know you are trying to make a decision for Fireweed as to whether or not charter schools we will be allowed equal funding as opposed to public school children. I support all the work you have previously done to help put schools around the state on an equitable playing field. As much good progress that has been made, however, there is still much that needs to be done. I do not feel that it is equitable among schools here on the Kenai Peninsula. You know as well as I do that communities where wealthy people live, support the schools through taxes and their children and therefore have more opportunities for learning. They may have more field trips, more books in their library, better facilities, but it doesn't always ensure that the quality of teaching is the same.

I was naive to think that West Homer and Fireweed students and teachers could work together collaboratively and learn from each other. I thought that all the kids, being the same ages could work in groups and that teachers who are all there because they value education could see that each approach had merit. These kids play hockey together, soccer, Little League and go to church at the same places. They are all kids, but all very different with different backgrounds and needs. We, as adults must provide for these differences by providing quality options that fit the needs of the students.

I encourage you to take a fair look at the way charter schools around the state are funded during this legislative session. Please support the growth of Fireweed and what they are trying to achieve with their students. I appreciate you taking the time and energy to ensure the bright future of all our students in the school district. And I am thankful that I had a choice that would meet the needs of both my children.

Mo Wilkinson

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From: Mo Sanders [mailto:MSanders@KPBSD.k12.ak.us]
Sent: Tuesday, January 15, 2008 2:58 PM
To: Sen. Gary Stevens
Subject: Charter School Funding

Dear Senator Stevens,

I am writing you regarding a change in funding for charter schools in Alaska that have less than 150 students enrolled.

As the administrator of a successful charter school in Soldotna I can recall how difficult it was to sustain our program while we developed our student enrollment. Now that we have 161 students enrolled and receive full funding we are able to provide a full program to our students and employ experienced, highly qualified staff.

I believe the proposal that has been put forth by Fireweed Academy in Homer to increase funding for small charter schools that have a 10 year track record of success is a reasonable one. There are only four schools in our state that are impacted so the cost to the state is minimal. At the same time, the impact for these four schools is monumental.

In addition, these charter schools have proven that they are accountable both fiscally and academically. Fireweed Academy, one of the charter schools that would be impacted by a change in funding legislation, was one of the recipients of the state incentive pay for outstanding school performance on the State Standards Assessment last spring.

I would like to ask you to consider moving forward with a change in funding level for small charter schools with a successful track record. Thanks for considering this important issue.

Mo Sanders
Principal
Soldotna Montessori Charter School

From: Jocelyn Shiro-Westphal [mailto:jazzline@gci.net]
Sent: Friday, February 01, 2008 7:03 AM
To: Sen. Gary Stevens
Cc: Kiki Abrahamson
Subject: Fundng for small public charter schools

Dear Senator Stevens,

We are writing as concerned parents of students attending Fireweed Academy, a small charter school in Homer. Our daughter attended Fireweed for four years and is now in 7th grade at Homer Middle School and doing extremely well. She is in the higher level language arts and math classes, two subjects in which she was completely inspired at Fireweed Academy. Our son is in his third year at Fireweed, and loves it.

This school has fostered the love for learning in both of our children; words cannot express our overwhelming support and appreciation for this school and its teachers. The level of education they received and continue to receive is in every sense of the word "excellent." We have seen and been a part of this school since it inhabited two small portable buildings and had twenty students. It has expanded into four classrooms in a building shared with another public elementary school, and the student enrollment is now up to seventy plus students. The number of families in this community who support this school and wish to have their children attend Fireweed continues to grow. The school, unfortunately, is faced with space restrictions from the building site, hindering further growth and is at risk of being closed due to lack of funding because it is a small charter school with fewer than 150 students. It is imperative that Fireweed continue to offer families and children in this community with an alternative to the regular public school system. Parents in this community want and appreciate having this alternative. WE have appreciated having this althernative. We only ask that you support funding public charter school students in both rural and urban communities as you would any other public school child. We understand and appreciate all of the work you have done addressing our concerns in the past. Please allow us and other communities with smaller sized charter schools, to keep our children in these wonderful alternative schools.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Jocelyn and Douglas Westphal

Homer, AK