

2014 KPBSD's Legislative Priorities

2014 State Legislative Priorities

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District calls on the Alaska State Legislature to recognize that children are the first priority, by:

Providing sustained, reliable and adequate educational funding for Alaska's students. Education funding with increases necessary to sustain educational opportunities, to maintain adequate transportation systems, and to provide promising new programs to improve student outcomes, should not be a year-to-year issue. Forward funding, with regular increases to the state foundation program, allows districts to better plan to meet its students' needs. KPBSD recommends that the legislature direct its education committees to advance a new three-year funding plan.

Explore health care options for school districts and their employees. The cost of health care services in Alaska is well above the national average. Although school districts across Alaska have worked hard to find efficiencies to lower the costs of health care service, their efforts have, for the most part, been unsuccessful. It is recognized that a state-wide health care plan for school district employees could affect the cost of health care in Alaska. In FY09 total cost for health care services for KPBSD employees was \$15,376,426. In FY13 the amount was \$21,541,380 a 40% increase in 4 years. KPBSD recommends that the legislature explore a state-wide solution to health care costs for school districts and their employees.

Funding of the State's Unfunded Liability. The state's plan to address the unfunded liability of its retirement system is an effective and responsible way to close the fiscal gap in its retirement funds. KPBSD applauds the state for creating this plan and recognizes that the appropriated funds are significant. KPBSD encourages the state to complete the plan so the state's school districts are not burdened with a cost that would cripple education across the state.

Supporting Digital Learning. KPBSD's use of online learning is increasing and is an appropriate way to meet the diverse learning needs of its students. The district is currently offering more than 700 digitally delivered class units to its students. To adequately adjust to a learning environment that is more dependent on digital delivery will require the district to expand its support of technology and the professional development for its teachers. KPBSD encourages the legislature to create an ongoing funding plan that supports digital learning for all Alaska school districts.

Maintaining local control of charter schools. The established practice of the local school board approving a charter school before advancing a recommendation for approval to the state is sound and should be kept in place. KPBSD has four charter schools that are successful with direct KPBSD oversight. KPBSD feels it is a mistake to allow a charter school to operate independently within an attendance area. KPBSD recommends retaining the current statute and corresponding regulations that guide charter school establishment, oversight, and local control responsive to local taxpayers.

Teacher Tenure. KPBSD believes that the current practice of granting tenure after three years of employment does not, in some cases, provide an adequate period for teacher review. There are some KPBSD teachers who work at three different schools during their first three years of employment with the district. Part-time teachers, including those with Type M certificates, present challenges when receiving tenure after only three years. KPBSD recommends extending this period of non-tenure to five years to ensure that districts have enough time to make an informed decision prior to offering a contract that will ensure tenure.

Improving Workers Compensation. Alaska has the highest workers' compensation premium rates and medical costs in the nation. Since 2011, Alaska has been making medical payments based on "usual, customary and reasonable fees" (UCR). This has resulted in significant medical cost increases in the subsequent years. KPBSD encourages the Legislature to replace the existing UCR fee schedule with a relative value fee schedule with Alaska specific conversion factors. KPBSD further recommends the adoption of medical treatment guidelines to help control over utilization costs, as well as measures to address the rising costs of prescription drug use.

Ensuring bond reimbursement program is funded. KPBSD's facilities are aging and many have significant maintenance needs. In the past the Kenai Peninsula Borough voters have approved bond funding for school maintenance projects with the understanding that the state will reimburse 70% of the bond payments. It is critical to KPBSD that the state's bond reimbursement program continues to be funded.

Adequately funding the Department of Education and Early Development. The increasing level of state and federal requirements on public education in Alaska is increasing. KPBSD feels that while DEED does a good job of supporting Alaska education, it is being asked to do more than its capacity allows. With this in mind, it is critical that the legislature adequately fund DEED.

Funding early learning programs in Alaska. All children should have opportunities to learn during the critical formative early childhood years. Studies show that for every \$1 spent on early childhood education, \$8 is saved in later services that are not necessary. Many of Alaska's children are placed at risk for future school failure because they do not have access to rich early childhood learning opportunities. The District's use of federal Title money for preschool will continue, but will likely be reduced due to federal budget cutting. Further, this federal money only serves a portion of Kenai Peninsula Borough preschool students. As a way to offset this reduction and to expand our early learning opportunities, KPBSD recommends that the legislature issue a block grant for early childhood education. Further, the District advocates that early childhood education opportunities are available for all students optional for students and that enrollment is optional.

Fiscally supporting improvement to athletic facilities. Over the past couple of years, with assistance from the state, KPBSD has made improvements to three running tracks and fields that were in poor condition. There are still a number of tracks in need of repair, including the tracks at Ninilchik School and Seward High School. Without maintenance or reconstruction, these tracks will be deemed unusable. Because the capital improvement process places track repair with construction and not maintenance and hence, makes attaining the necessary priority status on the state list highly unlikely, KPBSD recommends that the legislature include funds in its capital budget for the repair of the District's tracks.

Supporting the University of Alaska Anchorage's Kenai Peninsula College. As the economy of Alaska changes the general population is recognizing an increased need for post-secondary training. For many residents on the Kenai Peninsula this training occurs at the Kenai Peninsula College's four locations. Many of our high school students attend KPC classes on one of these campuses. KPBSD recommends that the legislature support the University of Alaska Anchorage's budget that includes funds that will allow KPC to expand its offerings and ability to serve its growing enrollment.

Maintaining a favorable climate for oil and gas exploration in Cook Inlet. 30% of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District's budget comes from local taxes. By providing incentives for responsible oil and gas exploration and development, the Kenai Peninsula Borough's tax base would likely be increased and in turn, offer the borough more revenue with which to support KPBSD.

Addressing increasing energy costs to school districts through increased or supplemental funding. Individuals, communities and schools are facing higher fuel prices. Increases in energy costs directly impact available revenue for school programs. Conservation programs and maintenance efforts have been put in place to help with these costs but will not address the huge increases. Relief for high energy costs needs to be provided to school districts.

Raising the mandatory age of attendance. The KPBSD recommends raising the required age of school attendance to 18. The District feels that the increased age of mandatory attendance will serve to lower the district's dropout rate and more importantly, let students know that the final two years of high school are critical to a their future well-being.

Providing accountability for all school-age children of the state. Having a choice of an educational delivery system is important to Alaskans. However, all children have a right a comprehensive education. A registration and educational accountability system for all Alaskan school age children will help protect the rights of those least able to care for themselves.

Create New High School Exit Exam. The HSGQE and the Work Keys exam respectively serve to measure student readiness for graduation and preparedness for the world of work. KPBSD contends that one exam should serve both purposes. Such an exam could blend both the current HSGQE and the required WorkKeys test.

* * * * *

2014 Federal Legislative Priorities

Support for E-Rate Funding. The E-rate program, officially known as Universal Service Schools and Libraries Discount Mechanism, was created as a part of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. In the act, a fourth Universal Service Fund program was established to help schools and libraries connect to the Internet. Since 1996, school districts across the country have benefitted from this federal support. The proposed changes to this program would diminish KPBSD's ability to offer broadband connectivity at its schools. Further, the proposed averaging of poverty rates for a district would make it more difficult for KPBSD to meet the connectivity demands of its rural, fly-in village schools. KPBSD encourages the federal legislature to increase its current level of fiscal support for E-Rate.

Protect Federal Education Funding. The current federal economic climate is causing a reduction in federal funds for education. Over the years, our neediest students have benefitted from these extra funds. While KPBSD understands the need to reduce federal spending, the District feels that reduction of support for ESEA should be a last resort.

Federal Money should not be portable with a student. The District supports and recognizes that public school choice is a benefit for students. However, the District feels that making federal monies for IDEA or ESEA portable so that they can be used at private schools is a mistake. The limited capacity of private schools in our region would necessarily cause such portability to be difficult. Further, the legal requirements of IDEA would necessitate a collaborative approach between KPBSD and a private school which in turn could make the portable funding problematic.

Reauthorize Elementary Secondary Education Act. KPBSD calls on the federal legislature to reauthorize the ESEA with accountability provisions that are based on school growth. Further, KPBSD requests that the reauthorization allow states to make amendments to the Act as a way to respond to those provisions that are not suitable for Alaska.

Fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA was reauthorized in 2004. Under IDEA, Congress originally promised to fund up to 40% of the excess costs of educating students with disabilities. Currently congress has authorized expenditures to cover approximately 17% of the excess costs nationally. The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District believes that congress should fund the full amount they originally promised. To do otherwise requires local districts to reduce funding for general instructional needs to meet the needs of special student populations.

Funding early learning programs in Alaska. All children should have opportunities to learn during the formative early childhood years. Studies show that for every \$1 spent on early childhood education, \$8 is saved in later services that are not necessary. Many of Alaska's children are placed at risk for future school failure because they do not have access to rich learning opportunities. The District's use of federal Title money for preschool will continue, but will not serve the majority of Kenai Peninsula Borough preschool students.

* * * * *