

## **Kenai Peninsula Borough School District 2015 State Legislative Priorities**

### **Provide sustained, reliable and adequate educational funding for Alaska's students.**

Education funding, with increases necessary to sustain educational opportunities and to provide promising new programs to improve student outcomes, should not be a year-to-year issue. KPBSD appreciates the legislature's current 3-year funding plan and the one time PERS and TRS contribution. However, continuous forward funding, with regular increases to the state foundation program to protect the integrity of the classroom, allows districts to better plan to meet its students' needs. KPBSD recommends that the legislature create funding strategies including continuous advanced funding and a robust public school trust fund.

**Slow the rate of increase in health care costs to school districts.** The cost of health care for KPBSD increases each year. Dedicating more funds for health care reduces the amount of funding that can be devoted to the classroom. KPBSD has worked hard to find efficiencies to lower these costs; it has not been able to slow the overall increases. In FY09 total cost for health care services for KPBSD employees was \$15,376,426. In FY14 the amount was \$23,141,162.19 a 50% increase in 5 years. KPBSD recommends that the legislature explore ways to help districts meet this increasing cost.

**Reform Worker's Compensation.** Alaska continues to have the highest worker's compensation premium rates and medical costs in the nation. The new fee schedule recently passed by the 28<sup>th</sup> Alaska Legislature will help to start addressing these costs. KPBSD encourages the Legislature to address the remaining major medical cost drivers by passing legislation that addresses over-utilization of services, opioid use, and physician dispensing of pharmaceuticals. KPBSD further recommends passage of legislation to improve the management of claims, addressing indemnity factors including an emphasis on Return-to-Work/Stay-At-Work, and the legal costs associated with workers' compensation claims.

**Ensure state's 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. The reduction last year of this reimbursement amount to 60% is concerning. KPBSD encourages the legislature to maintain the debt reimbursement program at the established rate of 60%. Kenai Peninsula Borough School District appreciates past support and encourages the legislature to continue to fulfill current obligations.

**Fund early learning programs in Alaska.** All children should have opportunities to learn during the formative early childhood years. The District uses a portion of its federal Title I money to offer preschool to about 1/3 of its 4-year olds. KPBSD has seen a reduction in the need for remediation and cost of this service for these students. Further, those students who attend our preschools are more likely to be reading on grade level at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. KPBSD recommends that the legislature issue a block grant for early childhood education and encourages the DEED to apply for federal funds. Further, the District advocates that enrollment in early childhood education is optional for students but accessible for all.

## **Kenai Peninsula Borough School District 2015 Federal Legislative Priorities**

**Maintain Funding for Federal Programs.** The current federal economic climate is causing a reduction in federal funds for education. The Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was designed to help students living in poverty. Over the years, our neediest students have benefitted greatly 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.

**Reauthorize Elementary Secondary Education Act.** KPBSD calls on Congress to reauthorize the ESEA with accountability provisions that are based on student growth. Further, KPBSD requests that the reauthorization consider unique state situations and not have the Act be a “one size fits all” 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 40%. To do otherwise forces local districts to continue to reduce funding for general instructional needs to meet the needs of special student populations.

**Fund 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 early childhood learning opportunities. The District uses a portion of its federal Title I money to offer preschool to about a 1/3 of its 4-year olds. KPBSD recommends that Congress offer grant opportunities directly to school districts for early childhood education. Further, the District advocates that enrollment in early childhood education is optional for students.

**Affordable Care Act:** The District is concerned that the Excise Tax (Cadillac Tax) on the value of health insurance benefits will cause a substantial cost increase. The District recommends that there is a regional cost differential that recognizes that Alaska is the most expensive state in the country for health care.

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