



# Anchorage School District

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## Education Center

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January 19, 2024

Representative Craig Johnson, House Rules Committee Chair  
State Capitol Room 216  
Juneau AK, 99801

Anchorage School District  
Dr. Jharrett Bryantt and School Board President Margo Bellamy  
5530 E. Northern Lights Blvd.  
Anchorage, AK 99504

Dear Representative Johnson and House Rules Committee Members,

We write this letter with urgency and for your thoughtful consideration concerning the House Rules Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 140. As leaders of the Anchorage School District (ASD), the largest and most diverse school district in Alaska, we have undertaken a review of the latest proposal from the Committee. We appreciate the Committee bringing forward the issue of education funding so early in the session. Any efforts made to finalize the education budget early in the legislative session are tremendously appreciated and will help the District avoid sending layoff notices to educators and staff by the statutory deadlines in May.

While the original intent of the bill focused on increasing internet speed in schools, a concept ASD fully supports, our comments will focus largely on the following: **the BSA increase, charter school provisions, transportation funding, teacher bonuses, and changing the funding formula for correspondence schools.**

Certain provisions of the bill have merit, while others are concerning. Our detailed thoughts on the Committee substitute, version 33-LS0687U, are as follows.

ASD faces a \$98 million structural deficit for FY25. A combination of inflationary pressures without a corresponding permanent increase in funding has resulted in this daunting situation. To close this deficit, ASD is faced with draining its emergency reserves and implementing significant cuts to programs, services, and staff – choices that will all impact student outcomes and undercut our current efforts to transform the District through initiatives such as the Academies of Anchorage and implementation of the Alaska Reads Act.

ASD appreciates the House Majority recognizing the need for a permanent BSA increase. However, the \$300 permanent BSA increase contained in this version of the bill will actually provide the District fewer funds than received in FY24 following Governor Dunleavy's budget veto of one-time education funding. Since 2016, inflation in Anchorage has risen nearly 27%, while the BSA has risen just 0.5%. This imbalance is eroding public education across our state. ASD is advocating for a permanent BSA increase of \$1,413, for a total of \$7,373, and to inflation-proof the BSA going forward.

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*Educating All Students for Success in Life*

**Anchorage School Board** Margo Bellamy, President

Carl Jacobs, Vice President

Dora Wilson, Clerk

Kelly Lessens, Treasurer

Dave Donley

Pat Higgins

Andy Holleman

**Superintendent** Dr. Jharrett Bryantt

Considering the increase to pupil transportation, ASD supports this. However, the \$50 increase in transportation funding only covers approximately 25% of our \$8.5 million transportation deficit. ASD took significant steps to address a bus driver shortage at the beginning of last school year by increasing wages and offering year-round work to employees. Addressing this problem came at a cost, and as such, ASD supports a transportation funding increase of at least \$209 per pupil to \$690 per pupil for FY25.

One of the most concerning and problematic portions of the bill deals with charter schools. To be clear, ASD supports and welcomes charter schools. Our district has a thriving community of charter, alternative, and optional schools offering a wide array of educational choices to the community. ASD has a clearly defined vetting process for charter schools that ensures they are successful from the start. We adamantly oppose the new section giving the State Board of Education the ability to authorize charter schools within a district. This state overreach would undermine local control of school districts, a principle backed by state statute.

Looking at the proposed change to correspondence funding, it's important to reiterate ASD's core mission, which is to educate all students for success in life. Singling out funding for a small portion of students diminishes our ability to provide adequate education for all students. While an important choice, correspondence schools serve a specific population within our district. Correspondence schools don't have the additional costs of maintaining buildings or providing transportation like traditional neighborhood schools. Under this proposed bill, correspondence schools would receive almost as much funding per pupil as ASD receives for our largest comprehensive high schools. Therefore, ASD supports a permanent BSA increase that supports all students.

Lastly, we have reflected on the incorporation of the teacher retention bonus proposal. While ASD greatly supports our teachers, and just approved the largest one-year wage and benefits increase for educators in over a decade, we have concerns with the underlying intent of this idea. ASD strongly supports recruiting and retaining educators. However, with a price tag of nearly \$60 million a year, this proposal leaves out all other staff - including paraprofessionals - who are vital to the success of our students. ASD believes these funds should be applied to a larger, permanent BSA increase to enable districts to make targeted investments tailored to their specific needs.

ASD will continue to analyze the remaining portions of the bill as the session progresses. At this time we wanted to share our foremost concerns regarding the BSA increase, charter schools, transportation funding, teacher bonuses, and changing the funding formula for correspondence schools.

We recognize the state's fiscal situation and know how difficult it is to balance competing interests when resources are strained. Without your support we cannot deliver the world class education we all want for our students. Our students are Alaska's most valuable resource. They are our future leaders, business owners, and public servants and deserve a commitment from us to safeguard their education to ensure Alaska thrives for decades to come.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jharrett Bryantt  
Superintendent, Anchorage School District  
Board



Margo Bellamy  
President, Anchorage School