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NEA-Alaska President Responds to Gov. Dunleavy's Press Conference

Anchorage: NEA-Alaska President, Tom Klaameyer issued the following statement after the conclusion of Governor Mike Dunleavy's February 7th Press Conference and subsequent Press Release.

"The clear frustration and emotion Governor Dunleavy expressed during his press conference related to the opposition his education priorities are facing in the Alaska State Legislature is understandable. I too am frustrated, as are thousands of educators, families, and students whose voices continue to be ignored by this administration and some members of the Alaska State House. We all care about public education, and I would again extend an invitation to Governor Dunleavy to have a genuine conversation with me and public school educators who are experiencing crisis in schools every day."

"I want to address several assertions made by the Governor yesterday which mischaracterized the positions of NEA-Alaska and other education stakeholder groups, the motives behind our advocacy, and the solutions we have presented to improve educational outcomes for Alaska's students."

"First and foremost, every educator I have ever spoken with in this state cares deeply about student learning. Our members are in classrooms every day, teaching students reading, writing, math, and other critical skills necessary to advance academically. To imply that Alaska educators have somehow strayed from their core mission is misguided and belittles the contributions and sacrifices our educators make in schools throughout the entire state every single day."

"Governor Dunleavy used his press release to sing the praises of a single study and to promote his plans for a charter school takeover in Alaska. I share Governor Dunleavy's excitement about Alaska's charter school students receiving top ranking among all states for their performance; however, I believe that if something is working well, don't alter the very mechanisms that allow it to perform. Under Governor Dunleavy's proposal, the strong local controls that school districts currently utilize to approve charter schools could easily be sidestepped, allowing the



Governor's appointed State Board of Education to rubber stamp additional charters while passing the cost on to local school districts to fund. NEA-Alaska is a strong supporter of our current public charter school system. Why not simply bolster the existing process rather than create a new system that could usurp local school boards' authority to evaluate each new charter school based on its merits?"

"Governor Dunleavy's approach to solving Alaska's recruitment and retention crisis is puzzling. When talking about the Base Student Allocation, the Governor suggests that we can't simply throw more money at our problems and expect something to change. However, his cash bonus scheme alone is exactly that, a limited, short-term proposal only for classroom teachers. If the Governor's "experiment" was in addition to adequately funding the BSA and recognized the work of all educators in schools, I think he would find more support for this idea. Meanwhile, a return to a modest pension system (like proposed in Senate Bill 88), is a genuine long-term solution because it creates a real incentive for our educators to stay in Alaska. Despite mentioning his own secure state retirement, the Governor gave this bill only a passing mention and dismissed pensions as something young people simply aren't interested in. In fact, the Governor's own Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force survey data shows that educators prefer a pension. It is documented and widely agreed that Alaska now has the worst teacher retirement system in the country. The Alaska Department of Labor data, which was initially blocked from publication by the Dunleavy administration, demonstrates that Alaska has lost its competitive edge in teacher compensation relative to other states."

"Governor Dunleavy relies on his experience as a former educator to argue for his policy positions. I commend his passion, but am forced to question who he's talking to because the solutions he presents are not in alignment with the solutions I hear from classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, classroom aides, related service providers, administrators, and parents with whom I've had the opportunity to speak frequently or have testified on the record. I agree that we cannot keep doing the same thing over and over and expect different results. We absolutely cannot keep flat-funding public education yet again. We can't continue to rely on one-time money that is subject to a veto pen. And we can't keep eliminating positions which cause overcrowded classrooms and expect children to learn hard skills. It's time to do something new – provide the resources that public schools need, and our students deserve."

"I stand ready and willing to sit down and talk about common sense solutions to improve educational outcomes for all students, but I will not be silent when our motives are questioned, our positions misstated, our commitment to excellence challenged, and educators' and parents' concerns patently dismissed.



“Let’s prioritize durable policy solutions over short term political victories. Public education should not be a divisive issue. I can say with certainty that no one is more tired of fighting for adequate funding than the members of NEA-Alaska. Our educators want to put this issue to bed and focus on their jobs of preparing the next generation of Alaskans for a bright future.”

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