

Steller Parents and friends,

Please see my letter below. Thanks so much!

Alyse Galvin 907-884-2299 (I am NOT representing ASD, I am writing as a concerned parent in our community)

## ***ACTION ASK:***

### **Please write a short letter to the legislators:**

**Suggestions for main points on letters (please say what is important to YOU)**

- 1. Eliminate the \$70M cut to education**
- 2. Don't raid the APS Scholarship fund**
- 3. Develop a comprehensive fiscal plan for AK**
  - **Our school is already losing teachers, we don't want to lose more. Or lose whole subjects.**
  - **We think Alaska Performance Scholarship encourages students go to college or Vo-Tech school, take more rigorous classes, and keeps many of our brightest in the state.**
  - **Our schools need more certainty so we don't have to go through this EVERY YEAR!!! Make a fiscal plan!**

**Please include your name, zip code, phone number at the bottom of the letter AND VERY IMPORTANT!!!!!!!!!!**

**CC [Alyse.galvin@gmail.com](mailto:Alyse.galvin@gmail.com) We will be taking a copies of ALL letters to all 60 legislators!! We are looking to capture more than 500 letters in a couple of days! You can get the emails below or simply send the email to me and I will get it to them IN PERSON!!!!**

I have been actively engaged in advocating for a strong public education for every child in Alaska, in an all-volunteer group called Great Alaska Schools. Of course, I also care about Steller, but I would be remiss if I didn't share that other schools in other districts are even in a much more dire situation right now. Our principal Reed will give you more information but I know that we will lose at least one position at Steller. And in our school that can mean one or two WHOLE subjects (sometimes more) offered to our students.

I am writing to you to explain why your engagement right NOW is critical and offer ideas as to how. I know not everyone agrees with me that protecting public education in low cash flow times in our state is important, and that is okay. Please stop reading this if that is where you stand with this issue. No worries! I still value you as a person 😊

For those who are concerned that our public education system is being threatened and would like to know a bit more, I would like to explain where things stand and suggest you spend a few minutes THIS MONTH doing a couple of things.

It is true, there are Senators in the Capitol who would like to shrink Public Education right now. They are unhappy with results (student outcomes) and think the best way to deal with it is to cut funds from it. The national trend is to encourage vouchers to private schools also, which they think will bring higher learning even though research has shown that the overall learning in states where vouchers have happened has lessened. Additionally, the private institutions are also filtering their students, not allowing EVERY student who wants to attend that school. There are a few moderates in the AK Senate Majority who are frustrated with lack of flexibility and innovations in public schools who are in earnest trying to make things better, with fewer dollars, and their plans just do not pencil out.

The easiest way to explain why there are cuts right now and deeper ones ahead is to ask you to think about your own home expenses. The state (which provides more than 80% of the dollars that goes into our kids schools) has been funding at the same amount roughly since 2011, but costs have risen (healthcare insurance, electricity, wages, etc.). Similarly, our family has had the same wage but our home costs have risen (like healthcare insurance up 39%, more kids in college, etc.) so cuts have to get made somewhere in our family budget. The flat funding is why Steller is getting cuts this next year. AND the Senate Majority is proposing another \$5.7 or \$70M on top of that. This part is important - that's about a little more than double the current cuts just for ASD. Plus, they proposed to take out the Alaska Scholarship Program (except for the top tier) which means that our Juniors and younger will not have that opportunity unless they make straight A's. And other goodies. (it's complicated to go into it all! Like they zeroed out Pre-K but I think that probably was posturing and it will come back)

I have been told that although the House has supported Public Education historically, even they are getting pressured to negotiate and maybe give in to some cuts. Let me tell you, this is devastating to so many districts. And so many children will be affected.

### **Frequently asked questions here in ANC:**

#### **It's only a nickel on the dollar, can't ASD absorb these costs, and I've heard there is so much waste in Administration?**

Administration costs in the entire district (including the head shed and secretaries, etc.) are 4.7%. So even if we cut out ALL of our secretaries, we would not cover the cuts. And the people in these jobs are supporting teachers who are teaching! One example, if we cut the 5 payroll jobs who are doing payroll for 93 schools and add one for each school, it would be very costly. Similarly, IT is spread very thinly and cannot possibly help teachers support a 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning. I thought the same thing about waste and there is perhaps a tiny bit of waste, but if I had to find it, I might think of 2 or three positions that could be combined, that is about it. Seriously.

#### **Why can't we just raise our local taxes to cover our Ed funding problems?**

Our muni is already putting in 'local contributions' to the cap. There are federal

rules about how much each local government can contribute so that there is not too much disparity among student learning in the entire state. (some districts in the state do not have any tax base- primarily have subsistence etc.) There is not much more the Anchorage community can do as far as paying more taxes to go straight to schools, unless we decide to ignore federal funding rules.

### **Can't we just pay teachers less or get rid of healthcare benefits so that we don't have any rising costs in these tough times?**

If we cut any more benefits from Alaskan teachers, we will be losing out best and brightest, without question. The rest of the US is in a teacher shortage, many states are not in a recession (like we are) and are happy to hire. Plus, don't we value teachers more than this? They deserve to have a wage that pays for their family, healthcare and transportation. They have the most important jobs in the world to the future of our community. (and they are with our most precious loved ones in the toughest and most thankless position right now)

### **Can't the Alaska just tax the oil companies more and get us out of this mess?**

This comes up a lot with some of my friends and I am sympathetic because I was not happy with the restructure of oil taxes a couple of years ago that I feel gave away too much. I am of the mind that the state of AK should get more information than we have been getting from oil companies and we should restructure oil taxes and credits and there is a bill addressing that. However, right now, with a world glut of oil, at this price per barrel and flow, we are simply not going to fix our problems this way alone. The price of oil may go up substantially (no one knows) but we cannot count on this alone. We will likely get something fixed in getting our fair share of oil revenue and more market information (see bill information), but it DOES NOT solve our problem. And even if we get rid of oil tax credits, the state has previous bills to pay.

### **I am busy and I don't have time for this right now. Every year this happens and it gets resolved, why do I need to make time for this now?**

Our state is at a crossroads. 80% of our government services have traditionally been paid for by oil. The price and flow is down so significantly and our easy to use savings is now really almost gone so NOW our leaders are FORCED to do something big to bring in more revenue, in the form of changing up permanent fund earnings, taxes, etc. And although the Legislature Finance Director has advised that the legislators cannot cut their way to a balanced budget, some in the Senate feel this is possible. And because many on the radio and in other areas WANT TO BELIEVE them, the loudest voices (although polls say not as many) are saying we can cut education and solve our problems. We need a comprehensive solution that will ensure we will not be at this point in the future. Remember next year is an election and NOTHING will be solved then, it is just not politically realistic, in my opinion.

**MORE Background about precise bills - This is from Great Alaska Schools,**

**you are welcome to email me or call me at 884-2299 if you want to receive those newsletters...**

### **What's up in the political process...**

**The House** - Passed several bills that would generate new revenues to support a sustainable fiscal future:

- SB26 restructures the Permanent Fund earnings,
- HB115 reinstates a state income tax that would be the fourth lowest in the US, and
- HB111 restructures the state oil tax.

Together, these bills can sustain a reasonable level of spending without deep cuts to services.

**The Senate** - Passed its version of SB26 – Restructure of the Permanent Fund Earnings. (They also did this last year, but it did not pass the House.)

The bottom line: There is no consensus between House and Senate on a balanced plan (restructuring of the Permanent Fund earnings, broad-based tax, targeted cuts for efficiency, restructured state oil taxes) and the 5.7 % education cut the Senate proposes would have dire consequences.

### **Action...**

We all need to speak out!

#### **1. Make phone calls and send emails and letters to the editor encouraging the Senate to pass a broad-based tax, and to eliminate the Education cuts.**

On the table for revenue are SB26, HB115, and HB111. And the operating budget is also in contention - details below. ([Click here](#) for legislators' contact information)

#### **2. Reach out to others:**

- o Explain the BIG PICTURE of the budget gap ([this video](#) has a nice overview)
- o Explain how it affects our entire economy and interests (elderly, health care, safety, etc.)
- o Ask them to write and call their legislators. Here is a [video](#) about why we need to do it all now.

#### **3. Stay informed**

- Check our Facebook page regularly...Great Alaska Schools, plus specific pages for Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Mat-Su. Would you like one for your area?

Email [greatakschoolsanc@gmail.com](mailto:greatakschoolsanc@gmail.com)

- Follow Twitter - @GreatAKSchools

- Read our email updates. Feel free to send any questions or concerns to [greatakschoolsanc@gmail.com](mailto:greatakschoolsanc@gmail.com)

**More background:** The House and Senate need to resolve the differences between their respective versions of SB26 (Permanent Fund) and the Senate needs to take action to pass acceptable versions of HB115 (Income Tax) and HB111 (Oil Tax). The House and Senate also need to agree on an Operating Budget that currently includes a nearly 6% cut to K-12 Public Education spending, 100% of Early Learning, and significant cuts to the University system, passed by the Senate.

The Senate Majority's approach of deep cuts to services without new, broad-based revenues, will lead to more job losses and to a deepening recession. Plus, our schools have seen enough cuts in recent years; what they need now is stable and predictable funding.