

Alaska State Legislature

State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska
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House Democratic Caucus

February 13, 2012

Dear Governor Parnell:

As you are undoubtedly aware, Alaska ranks at or near the bottom in too many national education categories including third-grade reading, high school graduation rates, college attendance and college completion. The state must make education a priority if we are to turn these statistics around.

It is the state's obligation to provide the necessary resources to help Alaskans become more competitive in the classroom, so Alaskans and Alaska can better compete in the national and international marketplace. If we work together to make education a priority, not only this session but for years to come, it will significantly brighten Alaska's future.

To improve Alaskans' educational opportunities, our schools need to know they have a commitment from the state that lasts for more than one year. One-time funding is not a commitment to education. Each year, inflation leads to cuts in the classroom, leaving schools uncertain of how they will make up lost resources. Worse, it undermines efforts to forward fund education and, as we are seeing again this year, it forces districts to make budget cuts or give notice of potential layoffs to teachers and other educators.

Alaska's educators need to know they have a commitment from the state so they can focus on where to improve, not where to cut.

Recent efforts to address both the inequities between rural and urban Alaska schools and the past neglect of special education students have gone a long way toward providing those students the same educational opportunities as other students in Alaska. And while helping school districts with their contributions to the Teacher Retirement System has helped districts avoid some cuts, it does not cover increasing costs in the classroom. These efforts are laudable and make up for lost ground, but they alone will not move our schools ahead without a continuing commitment from the state to provide the resources Alaska's schools need each year.

Beth Kerttula, House Minority Leader
Berta Gardner, House Minority Whip

• Sharon Cissna • Mike Doogan • Les Gara • Max Gruenberg • David Guttenberg •
• Lindsey Holmes • Scott Kawasaki • Bob Miller • Pete Petersen • Chris Tuck •

We understand your concerns about the global economy and declining production on the North Slope, but those are not reasons to withhold a commitment to Alaska's schools. In fact, those are precisely the type of challenges for which we are counting on our schools to prepare Alaskans to meet. We must work together to make education a priority now if Alaska and its economy are to remain strong in the future.

To this end, we ask that you reconsider your opposition to making an ongoing commitment to provide the much needed resources our schools require year after year. Please join us in advocating for an increase to the base student allocation that is sufficient to make sure inflation does not continue to cut into our students' educational opportunities.

Sincerely,



Representative Beth Kerttula



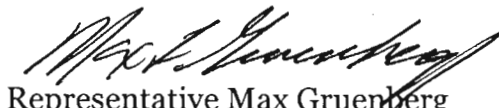
Representative Berta Gardner



Representative Sharon Cissna



Representative Les Gara



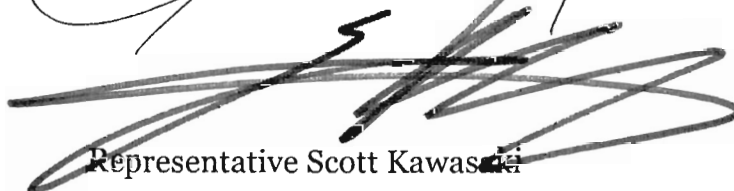
Representative Max Gruenberg



Representative David Guttenberg



Representative Lindsey Holmes



Representative Scott Kawasaki



Representative Bob Miller



Representative Pete Petersen



Representative Chris Tuck

cc. Commissioner Mike Hanley
Heather Brakes