

1006 Beaver Pond Rd
Port Alsworth, AK 99653
17 September 2020

Lake and Peninsula School District
PO Box 498
King Salmon, AK 99613

Dear Lake and Peninsula School Board members, Superintendent, and Principals:

Thank you for all of the opportunities you have provided for us students in the past to travel for sports and other scholastic opportunities. I can personally attest that playing high school sports has changed my life. I have created long lasting relationships with my teammates and opponents that I will have for the rest of my life. My fellow athletes are my family, brought together by the bond of sports. Through sports I have learned accountability, punctuality, selflessness, courage, confidence, attention to detail, and they have taught me to never give up. Being a student from LPSD I have been taught that I can accomplish anything, that no obstacle is too large. I am resilient.

The most important life-ready characteristic in LPSD's mission is resilience. Sadly, our resilience seems to be in short supply during this time in our lives. Fear should never be our motivator as life-ready adults. I keep hearing people say that the actions that don't allow us to play sports are for our safety. However, Covid-19 is not the biggest threat to high school students. According to the CDC, school age children have the lowest hospitalization and death rate among all age groups. The death rate is 16x lower than the age group of 18-29. For all childhood cases in America only .2% of those resulted in death.

The biggest threat to our safety is suicide. Alaska is the unhealthiest state when it comes to teens committing suicide. Alaska has a suicide rate of over twice that of the national average. And for Alaska natives it was almost three times as high. According to the YRBS survey that every high schooler took last year 25% of teens seriously considered attempting suicide 21.6% actually made a plan to kill themselves, and 19.7% attempted to take their own life.

That was before they were forced to isolate themselves from their peers due to Covid-19 mandates. The numbers for this year will be devastating, larger than any death toll due to Covid-19. I can see the teenager who wakes up and contemplates taking his/her own life, but doesn't because they have the opportunity to play sports and travel with their friends. If sports are taken away, they won't have that reason to say no. These kids taking their own lives are my

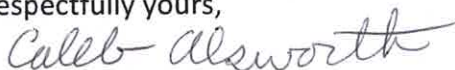
peers, my friends, my classmates, your children. My heart hurts for them. They need to be protected! They need a reason to get out of bed and live each day. Sports is that reason. When we are isolated apart from our friends, teammates, and coaches that care for us we turn to social media for a false sense of belonging. That is where the real danger lies. The leading causes for teen suicide are time spent in isolation and on social media platforms.

Sports holds teens to a high standard. It forces us to stay away from alcohol and drugs. If sports are taken away then kids are more likely to turn to alcohol and drugs to satisfy themselves. That is a real danger. According to the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services 9 out of the 10 leading causes of death are related to substance abuse.

I know that sports are not the most important thing in the world. But keeping teenagers from taking their own life is a priority. My heart beaks knowing that my peers have lost hope, knowing that suicidal thoughts and the threat of alcohol and drugs are stronger than ever before. Sports is not the cure for these tragedies happening to Alaskan teenagers. There is only one cure Who gives hope to the hopeless, but sports is the vaccine, and it is the one that most teens will accept.

As you can see Covid-19 is not the biggest threat to student safety. When you compare the number of Alaskan school age children dying from Covid-19 to the number of teens dying from drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, and reckless activities it is like a glass of water compared to Lake Iliamna. Any virus is dangerous to elders and we must take special precautions to ensure their safety, but our biggest danger is suicide, as well as drug and alcohol abuse caused by the cancellation of our activities. I understand that no one wants to be responsible if there is a death in our region due to Covid-19, but suicide and the dangers of drugs and alcohol are far more dangerous to teenagers. We need to find way to combat these threats. Threats that take countless numbers of teen lives. The ADHSS confirmed that teens who live in rural villages are more susceptible the risk of suicide. And the regions under the greatest risk are Northern and Southwest Alaska. Those are the kids in your schools that face the greatest danger. We need to focus our efforts to stop the spread of teens killing themselves. I understand that we are faced with some very difficult decisions ahead as how to deal with this situation. Please keep in mind that teenagers need hope, whether that is sports, interaction with peers, or other activities. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully yours,



Caleb Alsworth

High school senior, student athlete, Former District Student Government President, Concerned student

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