



SOUTHEAST ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Board Report June 13, 2019

This should be my last Board meeting as Superintendent and I will participate in the meeting by phone, as we will be out of town. I have had a good run and I have enjoyed my time with our district. I will always be available, but feel it is important to get out of the way to give our new Superintendent an opportunity to lead and strive for her vision. It is harder for a new superintendent when the old one is lurking around talking about the “good old days”. I will do my best to stay off the radar. I would like to volunteer with the Thorne Bay greenhouse if it remains aquaponic.

I am trying to get my report out a little earlier than usual, so commentary on items on the Board agenda are incomplete. The ASTRIDE agreement is ready to go. I need to look more at the CIP Priority List. I do know the Thorne Bay Fire Suppression System has to be at the top of the list for replacement. Over the year, people occasionally suggest I add something to the list. If you had a suggestion on your mind, please remind me as my memory and scattered notes on scraps of paper leave much to be desired.

The Legislature is quite supportive of school funding and maintains that schools will be fully funded perhaps even including money for the new school in Hollis. The Governor maintains that forward funding was illegal and that he expects cuts in order to fund a full dividend of \$3,000. I can't tell what to do on the budget at this point and we are not likely to know for a month or two. The governor is threatening to withhold payments to schools in July if the Legislature does not comply with his wishes. As of today, that looks likely to occur.

Communities in our district voted overwhelmingly for our new Governor. At the time of his election, he refused to say how he was going to pay for the full dividend. I am curious what voters thought he would do to solve the problem. While the Governor has appeared to support efforts to close small schools in the past, at the time there was no broad support for the idea. The current effort seems designed to turn that around and essentially “starve us out” so we close those small schools ourselves. We are doing our best to hold it together and the Legislature supports us. We can survive July if the Governor does refuse to release funds. If this continues into August, operations in many school districts across Alaska will come to a screaming halt. I do not expect the impasse to continue. Even if there isn't much concern for rural Alaska, I guarantee the Governor will be listening to the big school districts. I encourage you to make your frustrations heard where it will do some good. Make your calls and send your emails to the Governor today.

We have had comments and suggestions that we could save money with adjustments to administration. After the resignation of Assistant Superintendent/District Principal

Nick Higson, we posted for a replacement in a manner to save considerable funds. We should see a savings of \$40,000. We pulled insurance from three positions, saving another \$75,000. Priscilla has withdrawn her request for compensation and will volunteer her time in July and August. There are several positions that we cannot commit to until funding is resolved. I have committed to retaining those positions through July. The budget is essentially the same as presented at the last Board meeting with modest adjustments that Lucienne will address.

We also had a request at the last board meeting for another survey regarding budget cuts. The survey for the Strategic Planning process asked essentially the same question on priorities. That survey had 131 responses including 39 parents and 46 students. The survey was up for seven weeks with many reminders. The Strategic Planning team reflected on these comments and had their own commentary. I did not ask for another survey.

I want to address some misconceptions and inaccurate statements about the budget made at the last Board meeting. In particular these involved the greenhouses. Hundreds of thousands have not been spent on the greenhouses this year out of the general fund. To date, less than \$2,000 has come from the general fund. An assortment of grants covers most of the greenhouse expenses. Approximately \$8,000 was distributed around sites that was considered to be seed money for expenses such as garden beds, chicken coops, seeds, and soil. The intent for this investment was that sites would earn enough to balance that fund. It is hard to pay off a chicken coop with chicken eggs or to return any investment if the coops are not built to keep out predators. Hanging basket sales have brought in about \$3,000 at sites that took an interest. Andy Cook in Whale Pass has some brilliant, innovative, and money-making activities in their greenhouse. There are other expenses that are hard to quantify. One example is electricity, because the greenhouses are not on separate electrical meters.

I confess it is a little hard to look around Alaska and see other districts that followed our lead doing far better with the same idea. We have curriculum and do not use it. We have had greenhouses that were working well and then struggled after we changed staff. We have an amazing educational opportunity with aquaponic systems and currently do not have anyone is taking advantage of it. Other districts have established a particular grade-level science curriculum (8th grade) that focuses on greenhouses for the year. We have staff who are interested, but they often are at the wrong sites or do not feel they can step forward. I have not seen principal support for the aquaponic greenhouses, which compounds the issue. I do not believe we should give up and I refuse to encourage decisions promoted by individuals with limited knowledge of these systems and the educational potential.

Brian Krosschell has been hired to replace Priscilla Goulding and has the additional responsibility of managing agriculture and livestock programs. I encourage supporting an AmeriCorps volunteer at any site operating an aquaponic system. If Brian and site personnel decide to go to a dirt system, there would be no need for AmeriCorps support at that site, as the system requires less management and educational opportunities.

We do not expect to cut any personnel in the end. As with every year, classroom aides are reevaluated at the start of each year based on student need. Hours have been cut from staff in the District Office and the Thorne Bay Office. Three classified staff members are losing their health insurance. I would not expect to see cut hours for these individuals returned if it includes \$25,000 for insurance.

I am very optimistic that the final legislative budget will be favorable and many of these cuts can be eliminated or reduced. I do not hold out that optimism for the following year unless oil prices rise and that is not likely. American production is simply too high to sustain high prices. We have cut where we can outside of the classroom. A classroom aide might cost \$20,000 per year and an AmeriCorps worker might cost \$15,000 per year. A second teacher at a small site might cost well over \$100,000. Want to guess where we will have to start looking for savings?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lauren Burch".

Lauren Burch
Superintendent