

## Synopsis of Juneau Flyin 2026

Tim Daugharty

It is hard to think about the trip to Juneau without reflecting on whether the time and energy that was spent will have a positive influence on KPBSD. I think that if nothing else was accomplished the state school board association and legislators understood that the Kenai peninsula is an advocate for their district. We did glean new ideas and strengthened our relationship with local legislators that may help for bettering education in general.

For me personally, it was a great opportunity to renew old friendships and meet new contacts that have similar issues of importance for their district. The exchange of thought developed new strategies and identified similarities to navigate funding possibilities in this time of scarcity. It is always fascinating to me to watch the legislative process and the side conversations happening in many places after the legislative day is over.

Our team really worked hard to make as many contacts we could to discuss education funding and programs. In two days we met with 26 different legislators and found some similarities which were rather interesting at best. One was the idea of the seven year look back on closed schools, very few even knew about the statute including the Lieutenant governor. They were also rather surprised about the tax shifting on the larger populated boroughs. We felt satisfied to be able to bring awareness of our issues to the representatives who are bringing policy and legislation to our state. We need to not let them forget how these two points are dramatically affecting our district this year. A highlight for me was a meeting with three of our peninsula legislators and are thankful they made time for us.

The outlook from the state is rather dire at best. It is understood statewide that any more money allocated to the BSA will not be available. A possible measure to inflation proof the BSA may be discussed but not counted on. Deferred maintenance allocations are being discussed but hope for funding for our district is unrealistic. There are many issues for bush schools and Mt. Edgecomb which seems to be more pressing and a higher priority than the KPBSD.

As a general observation it appears that education may take a back seat this year to other state concerns; a long term fiscal plan, income and sales taxes, and capital projects to name a few.

House bill 261 seems to be the biggest discussion topic in the education realm. Introduced by Andi Story, this bill seeks to stabilize funding through student count averaging which diminishes uncertainty in the following years. It also allows districts the ability to modify intensive needs student counts up until February 15th of the existing school year. I suspect this is a very good thing for our district. This bill is one to keep an eye on and support.

Finally in my reflection of KPBSD needs and concerns it is obvious to me that we as a district have the toughest job to support education, probably statewide. With on road schools, and a smattering of remote schools we have two systems that are diametrically opposed in delivering education opportunities. Adequately servicing those differing schools is problematic if not nearly impossible. KPBSD is a microcosm of the State of Alaska as the variabilities of the district do mirror the state. I think we do a good job with addressing the issues of the road schools but our bush schools may suffer because of budget strains not to mention the cultural differences.

I see this gap between on road schools versus remote schools is probably why our staffing formula may be outdated or impractical for the District. I know there is a funding differential for those schools but would venture to guess that it is insufficient just like the remote schools in our state. In my travel to Juneau, the biggest take away I saw was the silent forgotten population of rural Alaska. They have no means to generate money ,to create a strong lobby in Juneau, and the skills to educate those who control the purse strings. With population centers of Anchorage and Mat-su, bush schools do not have priority voting blocks to make significant changes to their funding sources. I certainly hope we as a district can be cognisant of the discrepancy and make sure we do our best to maintain the identity of our diverse bush schools. I guess that is the real challenge of our district as this education gap widens.

In closing, the trip was worthwhile for our District to invest. Though nothing tangible could be identified, the contacts and relationships that were made will be effective as the legislative session grinds on. I personally feel confident that when we testify and lobby there will be recognition of who we are and where we are from.