



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

**Department of Education  
& Early Development**

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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July 25, 2016

The Honorable Bill Walker  
Governor  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, State Capitol  
P.O. Box 110001  
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Governor Walker,

HB156 is an unfocused piece of legislation. It has multiple unrelated components that require evaluation both separately and collectively as you consider whether to sign or veto the bill.

The bill corrects a number of problems created by previous legislation, for example, an excessive mandatory training. It also eliminates a 70/30 requirement for school budgets that districts have wanted repealed for some time. Given the current fiscal crisis, this flexibility would be particularly welcomed by school officials as they implement cost saving efficiencies.

The provision to ease procurement requirements for statewide testing would be especially helpful in the coming months as we work with stakeholders to implement a meaningful assessment program to replace the Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP). The easing of procurement rules could also help DEED cultivate consensus for a statewide assessment that would make the testing prohibition portion of the bill a non-issue. Most districts already give a standardized assessment apart from state requirements. This clearly demonstrates that Alaska's school districts value testing as a tool for improving student achievement. The best response to that portion of the bill will be when districts choose to test.

From the perspective of a parent and educator, I don't think the sex-ed requirements are beyond what already happens in many districts, and more importantly, beyond what most parents would expect as a common courtesy when sensitive topics are discussed as part of the planned curriculum. This portion of the bill with its notoriety could actually serve to encourage greater parent involvement in curriculum decisions for all subjects. Additionally, as amended, the portion of the bill making school board's responsible for curriculum decisions regarding human sexuality and reproduction is consistent with the administration's position regarding transgender policies as outlined in Attorney General Richards' memo dated June 21, 2016. It is an issue that can be decided locally.

Though, in my opinion, the bill inconsistently restricts and makes less restrictive various components of the public education process, I recommend you sign the bill. Your signature will

return much needed flexibility that the legislature removed in previous bills. Conversely, a veto would keep in place restrictions that will make adapting to declining revenue more difficult for DEED, school districts, and individual schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input during your deliberations regarding HB156.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Johnson", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Michael Johnson  
Commissioner