

Joint Legislative Education Task Force

Dissenting Member Opinion – Rep. Mike Kelly – 8/14/07

Unfortunately I cannot support the recommendations of the task force relating to our primary assignments: **District Cost Factors & Intensive Needs Funding**.

District Cost Factors

In my opinion, testimony from the Education Department and some of the School Districts, combined with a presentation concerning the Moore vs. State lawsuit, sheds more favorable light on the State's ongoing attempts to ensure reasonable adequacy and equity in education funding that some non-urban legislators would have us believe. Add ISER's inconsistent conclusions that surfaced during questioning by task force members and it is clear to me that implementation of more than 50% of the flawed ISER study is not supportable. Especially since the price tag is \$100 million compounding annually and Alaska is entering a decade of deficits with oil production declining. Keep in mind we are already paying over 3 times the average cost per student in Anchorage for a student in some of the smaller schools. The ISER increase would be added to a K-12 budget that has ballooned over 35% in the past 5 years, without even considering the multi-billion dollar PERS/TRS unfunded liability mortgage payments.

I could reluctantly support statutory implementation of 50% of the ISER study for District Cost Factors with the understanding that 50% would be the final percentage implemented by the Legislature. Some rural lawmakers have said they have some of the same concerns over the ISER study that I have and would be satisfied with 50%. I was hopeful when the task force tentatively landed on implementing 50% of ISER (with a blue ribbon committee appointed to study the matter further), but the deal changed overnight to a phased-in implementation of 100% of ISER. The blue ribbon committee proposal was retained to study the issue even though the task force had decided to recommend 100% implementation. Might make sense if you're from Bethel. None if Anchorage is home. I was told I should be satisfied because urban districts retained the current "local contribution formula." I'm not. Districts that make a local contribution to education are funding over 95% of the cost increases in education, while many of the others pay nothing. In a time of scarcer resources, implementing 100% of ISER will simply amount to another transfer payment away from local districts that tax their residents to support education at a time when they can demonstrate significant needs and are underperforming in important accountability areas. If we are going to create a blue ribbon committee we should look at a lot more than District Cost Factors.

Intensive Needs Funding

Funding for intensive needs students is currently 500% of average student funding. The task force recommended a phased-in increase to 1300%. I can't support more than a 200% increase to 700%. There are significant problems with the way intensive needs students are being assimilated into our schools (including reports of classroom disruption, less learning-time-on-task for other students, lower teacher morale, questions about the

appropriateness of the classroom venue for some levels of need, questions about the appropriateness of our schools assuming parental and family roles/responsibilities/costs, etc.). Throwing money at these problems must be accompanied by creative solutions. Some folks would add even more responsibility for intensive needs students onto the teachers in our schools. As much as our hearts go out to the parents and families involved, we cannot sustain the cost growth. The wisdom of some elements of the current system (much of which is unfortunately federally mandated) is questionable.