

Alaska State Legislature

Senator Cathy Giessel
Senate Majority Leader
Senate District E
907-269-0181



1500 W Benson Blvd.,
Anchorage LIO,
Room 416
Anchorage, AK, 99517

November 18, 2024

Dr. Jharrett Bryantt, Superintendent

Anchorage School District

5530 E. Northern Lights Blvd

Anchorage, Alaska 99504

Anchorage School District School Board members

Andy Holleman

Margo Bellamy

Kelly Lessons

Dave Donley

Pat Higgins

Dora Wilson

Carl Jacobs

Dear Superintendent Dr. Jharrett Bryantt and Anchorage School Board,

Bear Valley Elementary School should not be closed.

Sen.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov

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Academic performance was cited as the third most important factor in the decision of which schools in ASD to be closed. Bear Valley Elementary is ranked #2 on Best Alaska Elementary Schools list and is the only Anchorage elementary school to be a National Blue Ribbon Award winner twice in the last 10 years. Bear Valley students scored 10-15% higher on the AK Star test among schools in the district with similar demographics. Bear Valley's consistent high academic performance should be the over-riding reason to keep the school open for many more years to come.

Utilization of the school was ranked sixth on the ranking of priorities for school closure, but Bear Valley's 69% utilization rate does not account for both the preschool program, nor the waitlist to attend the school. In 2024 there was a waitlist of 43 children who could not attend the elementary school because of a lack of staff allotted to the school.

The Bear Valley Community Association (BVCA) is a non-profit organization that operates out of Bear Valley Elementary School. BVCA began a **preschool pilot program** with 8 students in 2024-2025. They are expected to increase to 20 students in 2025-2026 but have the capacity for up to 40 students. The 8 students enrolled in the preschool program bring the utilization rate of Bear Valley Elementary up to 70.3%, which is higher than 26 schools across the district.

BVCA also runs a **summer camp** at Bear Valley Elementary that serves over 100 students, and has a **before and after school childcare** program that serves 118 students with a waitlist for more families. As we know, childcare is a major issue in our community, and closing a school that helps fill this need for working families is a step in the wrong direction.

I completely understand the cost of buildings that are not being fully utilized and are costly to maintain. However, closing a high academic performing school, that is utilized by the surrounding community in many other ways, doesn't make sense. This facility is being fully utilized.

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I suggest that instead of closing Bear Valley Elementary, the Anchorage School Board needs to examine this school and find out what has made it among the highest achieving elementary schools in the Anchorage School District. Rather than close it, ASD should be attempting to replicate the successes of Bear Valley Elementary throughout the district.

I join the parents of my district in opposing the closure of one of the most successful elementary schools in ASD, Bear Valley Elementary.

Bear Valley Elementary School should not be closed.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cathy Giessel".

Senator Cathy Giessel

District E

Alaska State Senate, Majority Leader