

29 March 2026

LPSD Board  
Box 498  
King Salmon, AK 99613

Dear Board Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to share some of my observations concerning the relationship between LPSD, NIYAC, and the Newhalen-Iliamna communities. I am not an official of any of these entities but have had close working relationships with all of these since 1993, except for NIYAC which is a more recent organization. Most importantly, I write as someone who deeply cares about the children and families of Newhalen, Iliamna, and all the communities in our Lake and Peninsula School District.

Two years ago, when the LPSD school meal program was eliminated, it created an immediate hardship for families. NIYAC, without hesitation, assumed responsibility for providing Newhalen School students with daily meals. Like many others, I significantly increased my involvement with NIYAC, specifically with any activity that would support the school meal program because our children needed it. I can imagine that all LPSD schools and communities reacted in similar ways.

So, this is what I have observed these past 2 years about the relationship between LPSD and NIYAC.

There have been countless meetings, emails, and other correspondence between LPSD and NIYAC. I believe that most of these communications were about how NIYAC raised and spent money in support of both the meal program and co-curricular activities. Each communication required dedicated LPSD staff to use significant time and resources to prepare, monitor, and execute meetings, emails, and other correspondence. At times LPSD used an attorney for these communications. If you consider the cost of LPSD staff time involved, travel to attend meetings, attorney costs, and any other miscellaneous costs, I feel fairly confident that LPSD has spent about \$25,000 for this back and forth, with no positive result.

In contrast, each time in response, NIYAC volunteers had to spend precious time away from their NIYAC efforts and their own families in order to respond.

That is what makes this so difficult. So much has been given on both sides, yet there is so little clarity, agreement, or resolution on a partnership between LPSD and NIYAC. It is disheartening to see this level of effort lead to frustration rather than progress.

When considering the financial cost to the District alongside the countless unpaid hours from volunteers, it is hard not to feel a sense of loss. These are resources that could have gone directly toward supporting students and strengthening our community.

I continue to hear the word 'transparency', yet these past 2 years have not felt clear or collaborative. At the heart of this, we all share the same goal: to support our students. They deserve our best.

I respectfully ask you to reflect on where we are, where we could be, and what we could accomplish if we truly worked together.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your consideration.

Joann Lester

CC:

LPSD Superintendent

Newhalen LSAC

NIYAC

Newhalen School Principal