

April 2, 2026

Dear LPSD School Board & Superintendent Luke–

For the last six years I have had the privilege of being a part of the Lake & Peninsula School District Team. For the last eleven years I have considered this region my home. It was in Port Alsworth in 2015 that I developed a passion for school counseling and decided to pursue my Masters of Education in Student Services in hope of one day counseling for LPSD. In 2022, after being a Tutor and Principal Practicum Student in our district, my dream came true. I flew home from my first SNAP Meet four years ago, shortly after being hired as a school counselor for the following school year, crying happy tears because I couldn't believe that I had received my dream job.

In my time in the district, I have seen some of our villages swell and others begin to shrink. After walking alongside students and families in Pilot Point and Chignik Bay when their schools closed several years ago, I felt called to do what I could to become a part of a solution to the complicated issues surrounding economic instability in our region. At that point, I began my doctoral journey at University of Alaska - Fairbanks. I have since narrowed down my Ph.D. research to focus on increasing long-term economic sustainability in Dena'ina Elnena and Yup'ik Ancestral Land through culturally relevant education and mental health care. I say this because as someone studying the complex economic systems of our region, I understand the desire to keep LPSD positions in the region in order to bolster our local economy, and honestly, I could not agree more. I purchased land in Newhalen in June 2025 with the intent of keeping our family in-region for the foreseeable future because I deeply believe this region and its youth are worth investing in.

Knowing that the Lake Clark and Lake Iliamna areas are home to my children and I, my future husband chose to change career fields from civil engineering to medicine last fall. This shift was in an effort for our family to stay within the LPSD boundaries long-term– and specifically in support of my career as LPSD's Student Services Coordinator. As he has developed a vision for what his role could be in our communities, he has seen the need for dedicated, qualified medical staff who are willing to *live in our communities* and provide quality health care to our people. With this vision in mind, he has chosen to apply to medical school at University of Alaska's WWAMI Program in hopes of becoming an itinerant doctor to LPSD communities in the future. It is for this reason that we are temporarily relocating to the road system; affording him the training to become a doctor is a necessity for our family to be able to serve our communities in the ways we feel individually called. I cannot over emphasize that we do not intend to leave as others have, but rather aspire to continue to invest in new ways in LPSD over the decades to come.

Given the largely remote nature of my job, I feel confident that I would be able to continue to deepen connections with our students, as I always have, while executing programmatic development work for the Student Services Team over Zoom. Over the last four years, the vast majority of my work has been done via Zoom as I have supported students from Perryville to Port Alsworth. I have rarely been at my own home site these last two years due to

work travel, but have consistently maintained these weekly connections with students all across the region online. If I were allowed to continue my position remotely next year, my commitment to traveling into the region as needed would continue as it always has, as I believe that it is crucial for our students to have face-to-face interactions with the Student Services Team on a regular basis.

I listened to and have heard the concerns expressed in the Special Session Board Meeting on March 23rd regarding the physical presence of school counselors at our sites. Also, knowing what I do about the nature of our current five year Mental Health Consortium Grant (of which we are in the third year, and of which I am the co-administrator, alongside Superintendent Luke), I have significant concern about the potential of this (and similar) grants not being re-issued by the federal government in the future due to the possible programmatic disruptions that would occur in our Student Services programming if my contract were not renewed on such short notice. As my work calendar currently stands, I will be out of contract days on May 12th. Frankly, one month is not enough time for me to hand off the program that I have spent the last three years co-creating with my team from the ground up. Should the program falter without the consistency of a coordinator who has tailored the creation of our program to our current grant and team, this could potentially leave LPSD without a Student Services Team in general in future years due to the tenuous nature of federal funding, thus potentially completely removing school counselors and social workers from our district.

Additionally, I have a great amount of unease thinking about what an abrupt shift in staffing could do in the lives of our students across the region with whom I meet regularly. I think consistency of care and the impact of them losing one of their trusted adults should be taken into consideration as this potential shift in staffing is discussed. I understand that in economic terms my position is replaceable. But I am asking you to consider the guidance of some of your most trusted adults when you were a child, teen, or young adult, and consider whether those people would have truly been “replaceable” in your life.

I do not intend to catastrophize, but rather hope to bring to light the complex realities of what a last minute change to the overall structure of the Student Services program could do, both in the short and long-term. Our students in LPSD are my heartbeat. I would never want anything I do, or am a part of, to have a negative impact on them.

With all of these things in mind, I am humbly asking you to reconsider the possibility of allowing me to work in my current capacity for the district remotely from Soldotna for the 2026-2027 school year. I am open to discussing what this could look like in future years, but am simply begging you to not force this shift on our students today. I intend to be with LPSD for years to come, but if this is not a position you believe can continue to be remote in the short-term future while my family pursues my fiance’s medical schooling, I am simply asking for the opportunity to properly pass the torch for the good of our students and communities.

For the kids, relentlessly—
Kacy Lou Leyba