



## THE LAKE AND PENINSULA SCHOOL DISTRICT

101 Jensen Drive  
King Salmon, AK 99613  
907-313-3841

1617 S Industrial Way #1  
Palmer, AK 99645  
907-745-7090



Dear Madam President and Members of the Board,

I am writing to you today to ask for your reconsideration of your previous choice to not approve Kacy Lou Leyba's contract for the 2026-2027 school year.

There are currently 315 students enrolled in our district, PreK-12. Kacy Lou resides in Port Alsworth, where there are 43 students enrolled, making up 13.6% of our total enrollment. When she is not traveling, which she does regularly, she is able to work in person with this portion of our students. However, for the remaining 86.4% of our district, counseling services are delivered via Zoom. I want to highlight this data to show that the majority of what Kacy Lou, and our team, does exists in Zoom. This is not a limitation, but rather a gift in allowing us to provide equitable services across our geographically dispersed district. It is a reality reflected across our student services, distance learning, and special education programs. What makes our Student Services Team's distance offerings successful is not proximity, as we cannot be in all of our sites at once, but presence, and Kacy Lou has proven time and time again that she shows up.

I share this data to emphasize that the effectiveness of our Student Services program does not depend on a single physical location. Instead, it depends on consistency, trust, and relationships that have been cultivated over time. Earlier this year, I sat through a presentation from two of our current students as part of Alaska's School Health ECHO where they shared that having trusted, committed adults that come back year after year are a huge factor in engaging in healthy habits and being able to talk to someone when peer concerns come up or stressors arise. I think this note from two of our students is a testament to how important consistent adults in our school district are. Kacy Lou has demonstrated exceptional commitment and has made numerous sacrifices to ensure that consistently, trust, and positive relationships are maintained for all students in our district, from Port Alsworth all the way to Perryville. She is present for districtwide events such as jamborees and SNAP Meet, where in person connections are strengthened. She shows up reliably and without hesitation when students and communities need her most.

Kacy Lou consistently goes above and beyond what is expected of an employee. Just last weekend, when a transformer failure in Port Alsworth caused ongoing power outages, Kacy Lou hopped on a plane with twenty minutes notice to travel to Iliamna to ensure she could co lead our



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districtwide Sources of Strength Adult Advisor training, an initiative that she has worked tirelessly to implement. Similarly, when communities experience loss, she does not hesitate to get on the first plane to provide in person support. Her responsiveness and dedication extend beyond her scheduled hours, as she often makes herself available whenever needed for our team, even on her days off. Every year on Valentine's Day she handwrites a card to every student in our district. Little moments like these make a huge difference in our student's lives. Additionally, Kacy is aware of death anniversaries and anniversaries of other hard moments due to the length of time she has been working in our district and checks in with sites and families and students around those dates. These are not the actions of someone whose commitment is dependent on location, but of someone who is deeply dedicated to our students and communities and this district's mission and vision at the core of their personhood.

Her move to Soldotna does not diminish her commitment to our district, it reinforces it. As she enters a new chapter of her life with her spouse, she will have access to consistent, reliable family support that will allow her to sustain the level of responsiveness and care that she has already cultivated with our communities. Despite this change in geographic location, she remains fully committed to the district. She intends to continue traveling for districtwide events and will remain ready to mobilize quickly in cases of emergency or when in person support is needed. This added stability in her personal life will ultimately strengthen her ability to continue showing up for our students and communities in the consistent, reliable ways they have come to care for.

Kacy Lou is one of the most giving individuals I know. She is incredibly attuned to the needs of our students, schools, and communities, and she pours her energy into supporting students regardless of their circumstances or lived experiences. She thinks outside of the box consistently and due to her knowledge of the region, she is oftentimes able to figure out creative solutions to support our youth. On a personal note, she is also an incredible mentor to me and many other staff in the region. She has helped me grow into the professional and person I am today and I am very lucky to know her and have her in my corner. Kacy Lou fights for what she believes in and for equity of services across our district. This is demonstrated by her tireless advocacy to implement sustainable, tiered, and systemic approaches to student support. This includes mental health partnerships through Volunteers of America, evidence based screeners such as the Columbia Suicide Severity Scale and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, the implementation of Sources of Strength, an evidence based suicide prevention program, and the



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development of strong partnerships to host meaningful opportunities like our career fair at SNAP meet. These systems give students tools to build connection, resilience, hope, agency, and resources. They are not short term fixes, but long term investments in the well being of our youth and communities. In fact, a testament to her unwavering commitment to advocating for and supporting our youth is the distinction that Kacy Lou received as the Alaska School Counseling Association's Advocate of the Year in 2025.

Beyond her work with students, over the past three years, Kacy Lou has also played a critical role in strengthening the overall stability of our schools through her involvement in new teacher induction. In a district that experiences high staff turnover, this work is essential. She helps support teachers and administrators in learning more about our schools and communities, accessing resources, and having a go to person to lean on for support. Losing her would mean losing not only strong student relationships, but also a key pillar of support for incoming and continuing staff, something that impacts retention and the overall climate of our schools. Over the last four years in her position, Kacy Lou's unwavering support and kindness has helped create a culture of trust in which staff feel comfortable and empowered to reach out with student concerns on a weekly basis, no matter how small or large. The positive relationships our team has cultivated over the years I have been in this position are a testament to the leadership of our team and how deeply Kacy Lou believes in supporting our students through a holistic, collaborative approach.

In rural Alaska, we know that our future depends on the young people we are raising today. A strong, stable, and uplifting Student Services program is essential to the longevity and vitality of our region. When we support students socially and emotionally, connect them with trusted adults, and equip them with tools to navigate challenges and promote self advocacy, we are shaping the next generation of leaders and building communities that are healthy and thriving.

I ask the Board to please consider the broader implications of this decision. Currently, all three members of the Student Services Team are grant funded under the Mental Health Consortium Grant in partnership with Dillingham City School District. With this grant funding nearing its end in December of 2028 and no guarantee of renewal, program stability is crucial. Kacy Lou serves as co grant administrator and possesses specialized knowledge of the grant's requirements, reporting structures, and ensuring strides towards meeting grant goals. Disrupting the established relationships and services that Kacy Lou provides would not only directly impact



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student well being, but could also impact our grant commitments. This has broader implications for the longevity of our Student Services program and could affect future funding that is desperately needed for counseling and youth support services in our district.

Lastly, I urge you to consider the current reality of hiring in our state. According to the Alaska Educator Retention and Recruitment Center, there are currently 25 open school counseling positions across Alaska, with 21 of those in rural districts. This reflects how difficult it is to find qualified counselors, especially in regions like ours. If we choose not to retain a proven and effective counselor like Kacy Lou, there is no guarantee we will find a replacement with her level of experience, commitment, and established relationships. Her loss would not just create a vacancy, it would leave a gap in support that will be felt immediately and deeply by our students and schools, especially at a time when student mental health needs are increasing.

While I understand that economic vitality is an important consideration, I respectfully ask that you weigh that against the cost of losing a trusted, loving, deeply knowledgeable and highly effective counselor. Kacy Lou has shown us over and over again that she is committed to this district, not because of where she lives, but because of who she is and how she serves. Kacy Lou is truly one of a kind, and the distance from which she works does not change that. Investing in people like Kacy Lou is an investment in our students, our staff, and the future of our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Patty McCasland  
LPSD School Counseling Intern & BBRCTE Career Guide