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June 24, 2021

Community Leader, President/Executive Director,

Local Native Community

Nome, AK 99762

Re: Funding request for long-term budget/teacher position

Dear Tribal leaders,

We are writing this letter to request financial assistance from your organization to provide sustainable funding for a second teacher position in the Nome Beltz Middle High School Art & Culture Department. For the last six years, Nome Public Schools has had one teacher at Nome-Beltz Middle/High School; Ms. Phyllis Walluk, who has retired this year.

For decades prior to Phyllis Walluk, NPS has always had two full-time teaching positions located at Nome Beltz Middle/High School that brought unique skills and abilities that attest to our Indigenous way of life, our language, our art, and our cultural practices. The past duo culture teachers have included Joe Kunnuk with Marie Saclamana and Harry Koozata with Dina Iknokinok. These positions have historically been funded through community donations from local agencies, or by the Indian Education Grant. This grant currently also covers culture studies programs at the elementary school. Until recently, the grant funded two elementary school Culture Teacher positions as well as Ms. Walluk's position.. Past Culture Teachers at the elementary school have included Josie Bourdon and Annie Conger, both certified teachers. When Josie retired two years ago, she was replaced with Sandi Keller, but when Annie retired, the funding for her position shifted to support the immersion language kindergarten program through an Inupiaq-speaking classroom aide for that classroom. The School District has shown its support for this fledgling program by funding the classroom teachers out of general funds as opposed to insisting on outside funding. This is a shift in funding Alaska Native Language through integration in the classroom.

The Nome Public Schools budget has been flat funded from the State for the last five years, and the amount of funding received through the Indian Education Grant has slowly declined, making it a challenge for NPS to sustainably fund a full slate of Culture Studies positions.

It is essential that we find a way for these positions to be sustainably funded to ensure rich and authentic Culture Studies opportunities are available for our older children as well as our younger.

Cynthia Gray and I sat on the Hiring Committee for this position where two highly qualified candidates were interviewed. Since the FY22 NPS budget was already set for next school year to support only one teacher, Cynthia and I were moved as mothers, community members, and Native leaders to approach our Native entities to come together and support our youth by reinstalling a full-time paid Cultural Arts teacher at NBMHS. Now is the time to support Native educators and to sustain our Native culture through our youth.

Having a one-size-fits-all approach that NPS currently has in the Native Arts and Culture department is not sufficient to uphold the NPS mission; “*We inspire and empower students to be culturally grounded responsible citizens who are deeply connected to our community and world*”.

NPS needs a minimum of \$100,000 to fund a second full-time teacher position at Nome-Beltz for the FY22 school year. We are also approaching the other tribes and corporations in the region to see where we can come together and support the NBMHS students.

Please feel free to set up a meeting with us and Superintendent Jamie Burgess to discuss further details if needed. Quyanna for your consideration and support. We look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Amber Otton

Amber Otton
NACTEC CTE Teacher

Cynthia Gray

Cynthia Gray
NPS Human Resources Manager