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Contact: David Brighton, President, Kenai Peninsula Education Association

907.690.5732, Mr.Brighton@gmail.com

Anne McCabe, President, Kenai Peninsula Education Support Association

907.260.2023, kpesaoffice@gmail.com

Kenai Educators Will Strike on Tuesday, September 17

District intransigence over rising healthcare premium costs lead to district-wide strike.

KENAI: On Friday, September 13, the Executive Committees for the Kenai Peninsula Education Association (KPEA) and the Kenai Peninsula Education Support Association (KPESA) voted to notify the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) of their intent to strike starting at 7:00 a.m., on Tuesday, September 17 2019 as required under AS 23.40.200 (g) (2).

The failure of the KPBSD to adequately address the Association's primary concern of affordable healthcare premiums for public school employees continues to hinder an acceptable agreement. In May, 75% of teachers and education support staff voted to strike if the District could not come to the table with an offer that would lower healthcare premium costs to a level commensurate to comparable districts in Alaska. The District has not met that demand.

On Thursday, September 12, the Association's bargaining team presented the District with an offer that would have given up a previously agreed to raise of 2% for all employees in FY21, pending the outcome of *Alaska Legislative Council v. Dunleavy*, if the District would agree to the most recent healthcare proposal offered by the Associations. This proposal was designed to acknowledge the District's concerns regarding the uncertainty around one-time state funding while respecting the Association's desire to prioritize affordable healthcare.

"We have said since May that we don't want to strike, but we will," said David Brighton, KPEA President. "We have been bargaining for 575 days, and the District still doesn't seem to understand how incredibly important healthcare is to our members. If they won't listen to us at the table, we'll take our message to the community. Until the District is willing to accept our reasonable proposal, we will exercise our legal right to strike."

"Our educators work hard for every single dollar and benefit they receive in compensation," said Anne McCabe, KPESA President. "Our latest proposal asks our members to sacrifice well deserved raises in order to

achieve our ultimate goal of affordable healthcare. We simply cannot afford to give any more and apparently that's still not enough for District leadership."

KPBSD's most recent offer would mean public school employees on the Kenai would pay double what any other public school employee in a comparable district pays for healthcare premiums. "The high cost of healthcare is causing educators and their families to leave the district and is becoming a barrier to recruiting and retaining high quality education professionals for our students," said Brighton. "This is a crisis and the District has the power to fix it."

"We understand the short-term impact a strike will have on students and families, but the long-term impacts of growing class sizes and shrinking communities because no one can afford to work here are far more serious," said McCabe. "The District can end this strike before it even begins if they decide to value our public school employees and offer them a fair contract."

KPEA and KPESA members will begin their district-wide strike at 7:00 AM on Tuesday.

All questions can be directed to David Brighton and Anne McCabe.

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