

## Freeman-Toole Receives Settlement from CRSD

Glennallen—A human rights complaint filed on behalf of Richard Freeman-Toole after the Copper River School District Board of Education voted against his retention as district music instructor in June of 2007 has resulted in a \$76,000 settlement to Freeman-Toole through the District's insurance company.

The complaint, filed with the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights by Freeman-Toole's attorney Tim Seaver, alleged that Freeman-Toole, who had been the itinerant music teacher for CRSD since the fall of 2004, had been wrongfully dismissed from his employment.

Seaver said the CRSD had failed to make accommodation for Freeman-Toole's Asperger's Syndrome—an autism-related handicap which affects verbal communications. Despite the Asperger's, Seaver said, Freeman-Toole's performance evaluations from administrators indicated that he should have been retained.

In May of 2007, the CRSD Board voted 6-1 not to retain Freeman-Toole, and in a May 24 Letter of Cause cited "significant deficiencies" in his performance as a teacher and quoted an email from Freeman-Toole in which he called himself "socially inept."

Despite substantial support from music students and parents and a rehire recommendation from school administrators, the Board sustained the non-retention decision through the June 12, 2007, appeal hearing.

Under the terms of the Settlement, mediated in a hearing sponsored by the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights in Anchorage on October 22, 2007, and certified on November 6, the District denies any admission of wrongdoing related to the non-retention decision, and Freeman-Toole has agreed to "release and fully discharge the District from all claims" arising from the CRSD Board's action.

Freeman-Toole has remained in the Glennallen community to teach private lessons and groups under his "Freemantle Music Conservatory," and says he is glad to put the school district dispute behind him. He says the settlement money, minus lawyer fees, will assuage one of his biggest concerns about losing the music teacher position—being able to help his sons with college expenses.

The Alaska State Commission for Human Rights "enforces the Alaska Human Rights statute which makes it unlawful to discriminate: in employment, places of public accommodation, housing, financing and credit, and practices by the State. The Commission impartially investigates complaints of discrimination and conciliates complaints or, when it finds substantial evidence of discrimination, proceeds to public hearings" (information from Civil Rights Directory website: <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/crd/stateloc/ak.htm>).