



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
STATE LEGISLATURE

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Sustainable Education Task Force Co-Chairs

Report for the Governor, Commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development and the Alaska State Legislature by the State House Sustainable Education Task Force

January 1, 2014

State House Sustainable Education Task Force Initial Report

The State House Sustainable Education Task Force was established during the legislative session to investigate and formulate recommendations on public education funding. Members of the task force include Co-Chairs, Representative Lynn Gattis (R. Wasilla), and Representative Tammie Wilson (R. Fairbanks), and members Representative Charisse Millett (R. Anchorage), Mr. Andy Baker, Mr. Jerry Covey, Mr. Andrew Halcro, Mr. Brad Keithley and Mr. David Nees.

Throughout the interim, Representative Wilson and Representative Gattis visited communities on and off Alaska's road system, attending town hall meetings, Alaska Federation of Natives and other education conferences, soliciting feedback from parents, teachers, students, community leaders and Native Alaskan leaders and elders. The full task force held meetings in many parts of the state.

The findings discussed by the task force included the recognition that Alaska has many dedicated teachers throughout the state, but there are many challenges when teacher turnover and school curriculums often change. Many parents spoke of these issues and a lack of incentivizing school districts to recognize vocational and technical education as a true alternative to college preparation and success.

As made clear in the Alaska Constitution, education is a core mission of state government. Alaska believes in local control of education where appropriate, through involvement and direction by local school boards. Alaska is facing a challenging fiscal future, which will require new ways of thinking in order to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of education.

Education is a key to the long-term sustainability of Alaska; the purpose of education is to help ensure that all students will have the opportunity to succeed in their education and work. A critical component of achieving sustainability in education is to ensure a sustainable funding stream.

During their last meeting, task force members agreed that it is imperative for the Alaska Legislature to understand the need of a strategic statewide education plan with hearings involving Alaskans. The development of an inter-organizational data collection, management and usage system for K-20 education is needed. The task force will analyze the potential benefit of establishing a state curriculum in reading, writing and mathematics to ensure literacy and numeracy.

In order to provide for an overall sustainable future for Alaska, current state spending levels must be reduced with a portion of the current revenue stream to be set aside to provide for future generations. Further, it was recognized that education is one of the core constitutional missions of state government and therefore, funding to education should be given a priority. However, Alaskans should be made aware that current education spending is not sustainable. It is a recommendation of the task force that a cost



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analysis of the new Alaska State Standards, curriculum, assessments, teacher development and the financial impact that these will have on local districts be performed before implementation.

Within education, spending should be focused first on providing the operating funds necessary to provide education opportunities for all students. In addition, a review and revision of Capital expenditures is needed.

Achieving a sustainable future will require new ways of thinking:

- Invest in technology that is compatible with local infrastructure;
- Establish regional residential education centers to enhance secondary education;
- Expand public choice in education opportunities to include: boarding, charter, virtual, homeschool and neighborhood schools;
- Evaluate the current level of facility cost sharing between the state and localities. Consistent with local control, increased local contribution may not only be necessary but a better way to ensure that facilities are built and maintained efficiently;
- Standardize school facilities, with the goal of reducing overall construction and maintenance costs using "recognized best practices";
- Analyze the potential benefit of school district consolidation and shared services between school districts and other entities; and
- Review and eliminate unnecessary regulations.

The task force is set to expire in 2015 and more hearings are expected during the legislative session through the Finance Sub-Committee of Education & Early Development and the Education Committee.

Sincerely,

Sustainable Education Task Force Co-Chairs,


Representative Lynn Gattis


Representative Tammie Wilson

