

----- **KAY** -----

Good morning chair Drummond, chair Hughes, and members of the House and Senate Education Committees. For the record, my name is Kay Andrews and I serve as the President of the Southwest Region School District School Board.

Southwest Region Schools is meeting Alaska's Education Challenge for children through its innovative and collaborative efforts sustained by stable education funding.

----- **DAVE** -----

Good morning, thank you for inviting us to provide testimony this morning. For the record, my name is David Piazza, Superintendent of the Southwest Region School District.

Over the years, Southwest Region School District has, along with other school districts across the state and nation, focused its limited resources on core reading, writing, and mathematics basic skills due to the emphasis placed on measurement by standardized tests. Staff size has been reduced in this period as well due to increasing costs and shrinking budgets. As a result, the variety of courses and opportunities and experiences for students in areas like music, art, home economics, business, and many of the other career and technical pathways have dwindled dramatically. This state of affairs was not acceptable. To provide more options and variety of classes to students, the District has implemented several collaborative and innovative programs. Today we will be speaking to you about three important initiatives:

- Collaborative Exploration Weeks designed to increase course offerings.
- Refocused instruction in the local Yup'ik language and culture to promote student well-being and a sense of place and self.
- Increased use of technology to access new curricula and share resources between our schools.

----- **KAY** -----

This is Kay Andrews again.

To address the issue of limited course offerings the district established a series of mini-term courses that we call “Exploration Weeks.” These courses are offered four times per year and are one week in length. We created them by extending our school days during normal school weeks to allow for this instructional time without cutting time in our other more standard courses. These week-long learning opportunities provide a variety of hands-on career and life skills experiences for students that promote engagement and spark student interest while also providing additional high school or dual credit options. Through a partnership of all four Bristol Bay region school districts, the collaborative establishment of a concurrent calendar with Bristol Bay Borough and Lake and Peninsula School districts for the four Exploration Week sessions has allowed situation where students can travel to take courses where the instructional expertise or equipment may be located. This past spring, students in three of the four district were surveyed to determine interest in career and vocational education course areas. From this data, a range of courses were planned and hosted in Naknek, King Salmon and Dillingham. Among the options provided was a Private Pilot Ground School course taught in King Salmon, an Emergency Trauma Technician (ETT) certification class in Dillingham taught by hospital and volunteer fire department staff, and many other courses. Students from across the four districts applied and were selected for attendance. The success rate was high. A number of students returned home with recognized industry and state certifications.

All students not traveling to the CTE region-wide courses were also given new options in their local schools, based on the student interest survey data. Students in each of Southwest Region’s schools were allowed to select courses that they had interest in. On site, at home, a wide range of courses were offered.

- Career and Technical Education courses including:
 - Driver’s Education
 - A range of cooking classes
 - Furniture Making
 - Journalism
 - Digital Moviemaking

- Computer Aided Design
- Computer Aided Fabrication
- Introduction to Computer Programming
- Introduction to Robotics
- Art courses including
 - Wood Burning
 - Introduction to Painting
 - Introduction to Photography
 - Creative Writing
- Commercial Fishing related courses like Net Bench Making
- Personal Safety related courses including:
 - Hunter Education
 - Firearms Safety
 - Outdoor Survival Skills

None of this would have been possible without collaboration with area organizations and other districts in the region.

----- MARIE -----

Good morning members of the House and Senate Education committees. For the record, my name is () Marie Paul and I serve as the Vice President of the Southwest Region School District School Board.

The parents and communities of our region see a need to ensure that the young people remain grounded in local language and culture. Students who are well grounded in their language, traditions, customs, and values will become contributing members of their communities in whatever role they choose to undertake, whether that requires additional training outside of the community or whether it can be accomplished with survival and life skills that have been passed on for generations. The District's Yup'ik Studies program integrates Yup'ik language, art, science, and local knowledge to ensure that students know who they are and build their sense of belonging in the world.

Providing instruction in the Yup'ik language is a vital part of our programs. This required both the use of distance learning technologies and a collaborative effort in scheduling. In some smaller sites, where the number of staff are limited or where the language

has not been spoken at concentrated levels for many years, this was a challenge. An example of how we are meeting this challenge is the course taught by experienced Yup'ik language teacher, Larry Bartman. He teaches Yup'ik Eskimo Orthography daily to students in another small site by video-conference. To make this and other courses possible, the District established a common bell schedule across all of its schools so that students could have access to additional course offerings taught by highly effective instructors.

In addition to culture courses like this one, during the Exploration Weeks Kay just spoke about, we also were able to bring courses back into our schools that promote our students sense of culture and self.

- Yup'ik culture related courses were offered including:
 - Storytelling
 - Yup'ik Dance
 - Qaspeq Making
 - Trapping
 - Steam Building
 - Native food preparation
 - Skin Sewing
 - Uluaq and harpoon making
 - Parka Making
 - Subsistence Meat Processing

None of this would have been possible without technological innovation and collaboration with instructors across the district.

----- DAVE -----

For the record, this is David Piazza again.

In addition to collaborative efforts to make CTE and other course offerings possible, and a renewed focus on culture, the District has also expanded the use of online curricular content and resources. These online courses and materials do not replace instructors, rather they provide additional tools that allow for blended instruction and the offering of courses not possible before. The face-to-face support of locally-based teachers with the effective technology skills, an understanding of necessary pacing, and access to resources found in online course management and delivery systems are all critical for

the success of this initiative. The use of online platforms allows for a variety of course offerings enabling student interest levels to be pursued. In addition, it ensures that the quality of instruction remains consistent across all of our schools. For example, this semester students in Koliganek, which is a high school with two teachers, are able to study forensics, a field which a number have expressed interests in during the year. Students will receive instruction from a local instructor, and an online curriculum utilizing a blended model.

None of this would have been possible without exploring new models of instruction and utilizing new sources of materials.

----- **MARIE** -----

For the record this is Marie Paul again.

We know that these innovations are making a difference in the learning of our students. During a recent basketball tournament held at the “Chief” Ivan Blunka School in New Stuyahok, a group of 5 or 6 students were running a “print shop” on their own, to raise funds for student activities. Utilizing skills learned in a Computer Aided Design (CAD) Fabrication & Entrepreneurship course, the students operated computer aided design software, industry standard vinyl cutting equipment, business concepts for the purchasing and manufacturing of goods, and customer relations skills. The students were hardworking, dedicated, and responsible and completed all their orders for custom tee shirts. There was pride and ownership displayed by these students. The students recognized each other’s strengths and expertise and worked as a team.

----- **KAY** -----

For the record, this is Kay Andrews.

In conclusion, the District realizes the importance of ensuring that students graduate with the skills necessary to meet Alaska’s Education Challenge. Our students deserve stable educational funding to meet the high expectations of our State.

We stand ready to meet Alaska’s Education Challenge and hope for your continued support in doing so.