



Alaska Council of School Administrators
Leadership, Unity and Advocacy for Public Education

234 Gold Street • Juneau, AK 99801
Phone: (907) 586-9702 • Fax: (907) 364-3805
www.alaskaacsa.org

Senate Bill 111
Alaska Academic Improvement and Modernization Act
ACSA Testimony

Senate Education Committee

Senator Holland, Chairman
Senator Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Begich, Member
Senator Hughes, Member
Senator Micciche, Member

Honorable Chairman Holland and members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for inviting the Alaska Council of School Administrators to testify on SB 111. ACSA represents superintendents, elementary and secondary principals, school business officials and school administrators serving our students across Alaska. We would first like to thank Senator Begich for his leadership in bringing this issue to the forefront and Senator Begich and Senator Hughes for reaching out to ACSA to solicit ongoing educator input. We also thank Commissioner Johnson for recognizing the importance of early literacy and reading for Alaskan students.

ACSA is thankful to this committee for introducing this bill and recognizing the need to take action to support Alaska schools. Being willing to innovate and tackle problems in new ways is exactly what our state needs. This bill is a great step toward raising achievement for Alaska students, and identifies some of the core issues we need to address to support schools and students. We look forward to continuing to work with the committee and future committees to shape this into the best bill possible for all Alaska students.

ACSA's advocacy is guided by our Joint Position Statements (JPS), which are developed collaboratively by educators statewide. Student achievement is at the core of everything we do as educators, and our goal is always to foster a statewide education environment that allows every student to thrive. Consistently our JPS supports expanding early childhood education opportunities and programs to ensure each student has a high-quality teacher, both of which are advanced by SB 111.

In particular, our JPS is clear about the need to include Pre-K in the foundation formula, to ensure our early childhood programs are sustainable and meet the needs of communities statewide. Research is clear that Pre-K is one of the best possible investments, both in terms of education outcomes and economic return on investment. Funding Pre-K today will save the state money down the road in the form of less need for remedial instruction in high schools, lower use of social safety net programs, and improved long-term health and economic outcomes.

The effects of quality early-childhood education can be seen throughout a student's academic career. A middle school principal in Anchorage recounted how one school year the new sixth grade students were having far fewer disciplinary referrals and were performing better in class. He asked the principal of the feeder elementary school what they had done differently, and the elementary principal realized it was the first cohort of his Pre-K programs. Early childhood education teaches children how to be in classrooms and how to learn, and equips them with social-emotional learning skills that enable them to thrive throughout their time in schools.

The Pre-K grant programs in SB 111 are a great way start to addressing the need for high-quality early childhood education in our state. But to fully support Alaska's students and schools, we join our colleagues at AASB and NEA-A recognizing that we need funding for every district in the state as soon as possible, not just \$3 million added each year. We need long-term, sustainable funding built into the foundation formula, and not a program with a ten-year sunset date.

We also want to thank the committee for the change in the committee substitute recognizing that hard test-based retention is not an evidence-based practice to benefit students. Focusing instead on the remediation and additional interventions for literacy that the bill includes is a much better approach for supporting all students. Alaska's reading performance absolutely needs to be improved, and with this bill educators and policymakers are on the same team to find solutions and help our students.

By creating a virtual education consortium, this bill recognizes that Alaska needs to continue to build innovative approaches to deliver high quality instruction across the state. ACSA proudly supports increasing students' choice in education and access to alternative programs, and virtual education is an excellent way to promote choice while upholding our constitutional prohibition on use of public funds for private education. The incredible work of teachers this year in pivoting immediately to virtual delivery shows that Alaska schools can deliver high-quality instruction through innovative formats. However, the shift to virtual delivery did not work for all students and regions equally. Rural Alaska's persistent lack of broadband capacity should remain a primary consideration in any effort to expand virtual education. A program that works for only urban or connected Alaska could further the digital divide and thus falls short of ACSA's goals.

While this legislation alone does not fully address the needs of Alaska's schools, it is an excellent step with targeted programs to meet some of our most critical needs. We must continue to address all the factors that limit student achievement, including poverty, high rates of Adverse Childhood Experiences, and lack of access to mental health services. In

the meantime, SB 111 will make big strides toward ensuring all Alaska children can achieve academic excellence.

Again, we'd like to thank Chairman Holland and his staff for excellent ongoing communication about the bill and the Committee for their hard work bringing this bill forward, and particularly for engaging with our members and other education stakeholders to create a bill that works for all Alaska schools and students.

Please contact me if we can help, our members stand ready to assist.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth Shiles Parady". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Dr. Lisa S. Parady
Executive Director, ACSA