



March 24, 2026

House Education Committee

Co-Chairs Himschoot and Story, and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Lon Garrison, Executive Director of the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB).

AASB supports the intent of House Bill 358 and appreciates the focus on expanding access to Career and Technical Education opportunities for students across Alaska—particularly those in rural and remote communities.

At its core, **HB 358 addresses a fundamental challenge** in our state: **not every school district has the capacity to offer the full range of high-quality CTE programs** that today's students need and deserve. Geography, scale, and cost create real limitations. This bill recognizes that reality and offers a practical framework to help bridge those gaps.

By enabling students to access programs across district boundaries, **HB 358 expands opportunity**. By **prioritizing small and remote districts, it acknowledges the inequities** created by Alaska's geography. And by aligning education with workforce pathways—through certifications, apprenticeships, and dual credit—it strengthens both student outcomes and Alaska's economic future.

This approach is **consistent with AASB's 2026 Legislative Priorities**, particularly our focus on **improving student achievement and expanding meaningful opportunities for all students**. We strongly support multiple pathways to success, recognizing that not every student's future follows the same trajectory, but every student deserves access to a high-quality education that prepares them for life beyond high school.

The bill also aligns with AASB's long-standing support for career and technical education, workforce development, and partnerships between schools, industry, and postsecondary institutions. These connections are essential to keeping students engaged and helping them see a future for themselves in their communities.

We also **appreciate the inclusion of facility and equipment grants**. In many parts of Alaska, the cost of developing and **maintaining modern CTE facilities is a significant barrier**. Targeted investments—especially those that can be shared regionally—are a smart and efficient way to expand access.

That said, AASB offers a few important considerations.

First, the **success of this program depends entirely on adequate and sustained funding**. The fiscal note associated with the bill addresses administrative costs, but not the level of investment



needed to make the grant program meaningful. Without sufficient appropriations, this risks becoming a well-intentioned framework without the resources to deliver real impact.

Second, we encourage **careful attention to the performance-based funding structure**. While outcomes such as certifications and employment pathways are important, achieving them can be more difficult in rural and remote areas due to limited industry presence and workforce infrastructure. We ask that the program be designed in a way that ensures equity and does not unintentionally disadvantage the very districts it is intended to support.

Finally, we emphasize the **importance of maintaining strong local governance**. School boards and districts must remain central to decisions about student participation, program partnerships, and implementation. Local knowledge and context are essential to making this work effectively.

In closing, HB 358 is a thoughtful and forward-looking proposal. It recognizes both the challenges and the opportunities facing Alaska's education system and workforce. With adequate funding and careful implementation, it has the potential to significantly expand opportunities for students across our state.

AASB supports the intent of HB 358 and looks forward to working with the Legislature to ensure it is implemented in a way that is equitable, effective, and sustainable.

Appended to this testimony is a document demonstrating the alignment of this bill to AASB's Beliefs and Resolutions and our 2026 Legislative Priorities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Lon Garrison
Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards