

**Coalition for Education Equity** is a member-based nonprofit organization founded in 1996 as **Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children** (or CEAAC), dedicated to ensuring all Alaska children have a meaningful opportunity to be educated. As CEAAC, we worked to address inadequacies in Alaska schools through the courts and legislative activity. Today, as **Coalition for Education Equity**, we represent Alaska school districts, organizations, and individuals concerned about the quality and breadth of educational opportunities available to Alaska's children. We continue to advocate for equity and adequacy in education across Alaska and use research, policy development, and partnerships to find and advance solutions to performance issues in our schools, while still protecting the gains made through litigation.

**We believe:**

- ▶ Our state must ensure adequate investment in Alaska's public education system and public schools. We seek to ensure that education funding sources are reliable and adequate, and that funding decisions are made in a timely manner that enables school districts to plan efficiently and responsibly.
- ▶ Pre-elementary programs are essential to ensuring our children are ready for kindergarten and improving school performance. We seek to sustain and expand pre-elementary programs so that all Alaska's children have a strong foundation when they start kindergarten.
- ▶ Recruiting and retaining quality teachers has a significant impact on student outcomes, and teachers who are prepared in Alaska are much more likely to stay. We seek to reduce the challenges that lead to teacher turnover and expand the practices that lead great teachers to stay.
- ▶ Broadband access is an equity issue for our schools. Improving broadband access for our communities and schools opens up opportunities for expanded curricular choices and access to high quality instruction, extending the benefit of great teachers.
- ▶ Keeping small schools open is vital to our communities and enables our children to obtain an education while being supported by their connection to their family, community, and culture.
- ▶ Equitable, reliable funding of school construction and major maintenance will reduce deterioration of schools, save the state millions of dollars in future full school replacement costs, and ensure all Alaska children have safe facilities in which to learn.

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## Coalition for Education Equity Legislative Priorities for 2018

### **1) Ensure adequate investment in Alaska's public education system and public schools.**

The **Coalition for Education Equity** believes that a thriving state requires a successful education system. This means that we need a stable, sustainable, and predictable budget supported by diversified revenues. Any reductions to our education budget are not in the best interests of a successful education system and would threaten the ability of our schools to provide instruction in the standards and the ability of the State Department of Education and Early Development to provide adequate oversight and accountability to our schools. We seek to ensure that education funding is consistent, reliable, adequate, and inflation-proofed and that funding decisions are made in a timely manner that enables school districts to plan efficiently and responsibly.

### **2) Highlight issues that affect teacher recruitment and retention (salary, benefits, retirement, retire/rehire, alternative pathways to teacher certification, teacher housing)**

We will work this legislative session to support legislator awareness of the issues and factors that affect teacher recruitment and retention across Alaska. In particular, we would like to share findings from our 2015 ***Educator Quality and Quantity (EQQ)*** report and our current ***Research based Educator Systems Support (RESS)*** pilot study, and also invite partners and stakeholders to share their research, potential solutions, and successful approaches in a coordinated collaborative approach.

**Teacher housing** is a concern for many of our member districts. Lack of teacher housing can lead to districts being unable to open positions due to the inability to house a potential new teacher. Aging teacher housing units require expensive maintenance, and in some cases present safety and health concerns. Lack of safe, sufficient, comfortable teacher housing has an impact on districts' ability to recruit and/or retain quality teachers. We would like to highlight this issue and work with legislators, legislative staff, and stakeholders to surface potential solutions to this concern.

### **3) State & Federal level: Federal Impact Aid**

The Impact Aid Program office has recently started conducting reviews of properties claimed in school district Impact Aid applications. Many districts do not have the required documentation to prove eligibility of properties in Alaska, and if such documentation is obtainable, it is often expensive and time-consuming to locate. The burden on districts to research and collect this verification is tremendous, and districts that are unable to provide sufficient documentation are being denied impact aid funding, resulting in the loss of millions of dollars to our state. This loss of federal funding to school districts must be made up by the State. We seek to highlight this issue with state legislators and bring them into our work with CEE members, Senator Murkowski's office, DEED, and Federal agencies to develop a statewide response and provide direct support to districts.

### **4) Statewide, voluntary pre-elementary programs**

We support sustained pre-K funding at FY2018 levels (\$3.2 million) and advocate expansion of pre-elementary programs so that all Alaska's children have a strong foundation when they start kindergarten. We support SB99.

## **5) Broadband access and BAGs**

We support holding steady or expanding funding for broadband assistance grants, and seek to set a minimum threshold amount for BAG funding (\$10,000). We support efforts and opportunities to improve broadband access for all school districts. CEE will work with DEED to improve clarity in grant language to reduce confusion and increase access.

## **6) Ed Connector**

Ed Connector is an interactive online portal, moderated by professional staff, designed to expand district, school, and educator capacity and cultivate leadership collaboration. Ed Connector provides a platform for promising education practices developed across the state to be shared with others, and an opportunity for Alaska to cultivate a rich resource bank of dynamic content, built on the knowledge and expertise of our educators. We would like to share information and provide demonstrations of Ed Connector in order to promote this platform as the place to house and share statewide education resources, tools, and best practices – to include curricula aligned with state standards – in order to increase the capacity of school and district leaders and to expand collaboration and knowledge building.

## **7) Continue efforts around REAA school construction and major maintenance funding**

### ***HB 212***

As part of a multi-year effort, we continue to advocate for the Rural School Construction Fund being made available for qualifying districts' major maintenance needs. This will reduce deterioration of schools and, in the long run, save the state millions of dollars in full school replacement costs. In the past, the school construction fund was underutilized, but a 2016 AG's opinion has permitted DEED to fund schools on the list that qualify once revenue is appropriated into the fund. Knowing that the State has the ability to draw on the fund, securing use of the fund for major maintenance will keep that list moving and save us millions in the long run as we maintain our structures instead of having to completely rebuild them. We worked to introduce HB 212 in the last legislative session and support passage of this bill in the House and Senate.

### ***HB 135***

This bill allows the Commissioner of Education to extend the time frame in which a district must provide the required participating share of the projected construction cost to five years, with a three year extension for good cause. The bill passed the House and has moved to the Senate for consideration. We support passage of HB 135.