

Introductory and Closing Testimony

Joint Legislative Task Force for Educational Funding
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Lon Garrison, Executive Director, AASB

Co-Chairs Himschoot and Tobin and members of the **Joint Legislative Task Force for Educational Funding**. My name is Lon Garrison. I serve as the Executive Director of the Association of Alaska School Boards. We are a nonprofit association established in 1954, serving 52 of Alaska's 53 school districts.

AASB's mission is to **advocate for and strengthen locally governed public education** focused on student success and community engagement.

I am joined today by two of the officers of the AASB Board of Directors.

Dana Mock is AASB's current President. Dana is the chair of the Delta/Greely School board, an REAA located in interior Alaska. Dana has served on his local board for 16 years and the AASB Board for 11 years.

Margo Bellamy is AASB's Past-President. Margo is the former president and now vice-president of the Anchorage School Board, serving on that board for six years and the AASB Board for five years.

Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today. Our testimony will focus on the following topics:

Mr. Mock will speak about:

- REAA's, their purpose and history
- The importance of local governance and a decentralized public education system
- Local Contribution/Impact Aid
- Recommendations for the Task Force

Ms. Bellamy will speak to:

- **How Public schools are complex systems**
- AASB's work to **support the conditions within and around schools** that make learning possible:
- Programs to build capacity in **family and community engagement, youth leadership, cultural responsiveness, and continuous improvement**
- These efforts help ensure that every dollar invested in public education translates into **tangible benefits for students, families, and communities across Alaska.**

I will conclude our testimony with a few closing statements and an additional recommendation for your consideration.

I now turn to Mr. Mock and Ms. Bellamy for their comments.

Closing Statements and Recommendations

Our intent today was **not to replicate the excellent fiscal data, analysis, and technical insights** already provided by our valued partners at the **Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA)** and the **Alaska Municipal League (AML)**.

Instead, we sought to bring forward the **local governance perspective**—the lens through which school boards must make sense of funding decisions, policy changes, and the complex systems they are elected to steward.

Local boards must continually **balance educational goals with community expectations, fiscal realities, and the diverse cultural contexts** of their regions. That is the foundation of Alaska's system of public education.

As you consider the Task Force's charge—to ensure that Alaska's education funding system is equitable, sustainable, and effective—we urge you to **keep the governance perspective at the center** of the conversation. Because it is at the local board table, in every community across this state, that policy becomes practice, and funding becomes opportunity for students.

One of AASB's three legislative priorities is that sufficient, sustainable, and stable funding is required to meet Alaska's obligation to provide quality, public education for every Alaska student. Educating Alaska's youth is the best strategy for successfully meeting and safeguarding Alaska's prosperity.

We believe Alaska's Foundation Formula is one of the best in the nation. It has been thoughtfully designed to meet Alaska's needs. Can there be improvements? Sure. The simple truth is that it is not our foundation formula that is lacking. It is the state's inability to come to grips with a long-term fiscal plan so that it may sufficiently fund public education in concert with policies that promote best practices and honor local governance.

One last suggestion: to enhance stability and predictability in school funding, I recommend that the Task Force consider using a three-year rolling average of the past three years' ADM for each district to estimate next fiscal year's ADM. This approach would provide districts with more certainty and predictability in at least one part of their budget planning.

As an example, Alaska already uses a 3-year rolling average to determine the distribution of the salmon enhancement taxes to the state's regional aquaculture associations.

Thank you again for your thoughtful attention, for listening to our members' voices, and for your ongoing commitment to the success of Alaska's students and communities.

Lon Garrison