

Testimony of Margo Bellamy, Past-President – 10/30/25

Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB)

Alaska Legislative Task Force on Education Funding



Introduction

Chair and members of the Task Force, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Margo Bellamy; I currently serve as the past-president of the Association of Alaska School Boards. I also serve as the Vice Chair of the Anchorage School Board. I have served on the AASB Board of Directors for five years, and I am in my 6th year on the Anchorage School Board.

1. Public Schools Are Complex Systems

Public schools are not simple organizations that can be fixed with one lever or one policy change. They are complex adaptive systems made up of teachers, administrators, families, community partners, and—most importantly—students. Every part affects every other part. Decisions about funding, staffing, facilities, and curriculum ripple through the system in ways that either strengthen or strain our ability to meet student needs.

That's why school boards play such a crucial role. Elected locally, they understand this complexity because they live it every day. They balance budgets, negotiate contracts, oversee policy, and engage their communities—all while keeping the focus on student learning. The work of these boards is not merely administrative—it's governance rooted in community and accountability.

2. AASB's Role: Supporting Conditions for Learning

At AASB, we don't just advocate for education funding—we work to create the conditions for learning that make funding effective. Our Conditions for Learning Framework identifies the essential elements that lead to student success: safe and supportive environments, family engagement, effective instruction, and responsive leadership. Without those conditions, even well-funded programs struggle to reach their full potential.

3. Supporting Family, Youth, and Community Engagement

Through our grant-funded programs, AASB provides practical tools that strengthen the relationships between schools and the communities they serve. Our Family and Community Engagement initiatives help districts build trust with parents and caregivers, so families become true partners in their children's education.

Our Youth Engagement programs ensure that students' voices are heard and that they develop the skills to be contributors, not just recipients, in their school systems. By supporting initiatives such as the adoption and implementation of trauma-engaged frameworks, we assist schools in organizing academic and behavioral supports to ensure every student gets what they need to succeed, regardless of their starting point.

These programs are not side projects—they are evidence-based systems that translate funding into measurable outcomes.

4. Continuous Planning, Evaluation, and the SCCS

AASB also works closely with districts on strategic planning—a continuous process of engagement and evaluation among boards, administrators, and communities. One of the most powerful tools we use is the School Climate and Connectedness Survey (SCCS).

This survey gives schools and districts data on how students, staff, and families feel about their learning environments—whether they feel safe, supported, and connected. Those insights guide decisions about resource allocation, school improvement, and staff development. You can't manage what you don't measure—and SCCS helps districts measure what truly matters.

5. Culturally Responsive Education and Tribal Partnerships

Finally, I want to emphasize that Alaska's success depends on being culturally responsive. Our students come from diverse communities with deep traditions, languages, and worldviews. To be effective, public schools must respect and reflect that diversity.

Through AASB's Cultural Responsiveness Framework and support for tribal consultation, districts are learning how to honor local knowledge, engage Alaska Native leaders, and adapt curriculum and governance to better serve Indigenous

students. When schools partner authentically with tribes and families, they build not only cultural understanding but also student confidence, attendance, and achievement.

Closing

Members of the Task Force, funding our schools is crucial—but providing funding alone, or focusing on only one aspect like hiring more teachers, is not enough. To achieve meaningful outcomes, Alaska must invest in systems—systems that connect governance, community, culture, and data-driven improvement. That’s the work AASB does every day: helping local boards govern effectively within the complexity of their systems, ensuring that every dollar spent builds stronger, more connected schools.

Thank you for your attention and for your continued commitment to Alaska’s students and communities.