



### **Position Statement on Education Funding in The American Recovery & Reinvestment Act**

Alaska's locally elected school officials understand the need for an open and transparent discussion about investing these funds wisely in programs that will benefit our kids without growing the bureaucracy. Alaska and other states have faced mandated programs from the federal government for several decades. The American Recovery & Reinvestment Act offers a promise of funding to help meet these mandates, from IDEA and Title I to English language proficiency, 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills, as well as improving graduation rates. School districts in Alaska also need to ensure that we can continue to address infrastructure and equipment needs, such as broadband communication capabilities.

It is for these reasons that we support state certification under section 1607 of the new federal law and that we accept all requirements for accountability and transparency.

The Office of Management and Budget has suggested potential opportunities to use these funds without long-term costs. The suggestions include:

- Intensive teacher training
- Expand student and teacher use of technology in schools
- Obtain state-of-the-art assistive devices that reduce barriers to employment, learning or living independently
- Equipment, technology and software upgrades to sustain or enhance services in education
- Rapid deployment of workforce development strategies on work skills and work preparedness for targeted populations
- Modifications to facilities for safety, efficiency, improved durability and longevity.

Our member districts believe we are in the business of human development, and these suggestions describe many of the needs that exist in local schools. AASB would also encourage the state to take advantage of other funding opportunities in the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act.

March 30, 2009



The Honorable Sarah Palin  
Office of Governor  
P.O. Box 110001  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0001

March 20, 2009

Dear Governor Palin,

The announcement by your administration of your intent to decline an estimated \$170 million in federal funding for public education programs in Alaska startled many members of the education community. I am writing this letter to explain why our 53 member school districts believe it makes sense for the State of Alaska to accept this funding on behalf of our public school children.

As you may know, Alaska and other states have been under a federal mandate since 1975 to provide educational services to disabled students. This laudable initiative for approximately 18,000 Alaska children has been hampered, however, by the failure of the federal government to provide adequate funding for this mandate. The State of Alaska has requested assistance to overcome this unfunded mandate of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), but until the stimulus package was proposed in Congress, only incremental progress was made in eliminating this funding gap. The \$33 million proposed for IDEA programs in Alaska public schools would go a long way towards providing relief from what amounts to a federal tax on our schools.

Another \$29.5 million in stimulus funding is proposed for Title I schools in Alaska. By declining to accept this funding, the State of Alaska would be forfeiting an opportunity to help approximately 285 schools across the state that serve predominately children from economically disadvantaged families. At a time when schools in every district in Alaska face ever higher standards to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, the extra Title I funds offered by the federal government would be most welcome.

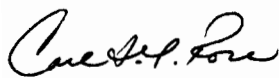
The fiscal stabilization funds offered to Alaska total \$113.7 million, of which \$93 million would be dedicated to early childhood, K-12 and post-secondary education. As fashioned by Congress and the U.S. Department of Education, these monies can go towards most anything in our schools, including modernization, renovation or repair of classrooms and student housing. It cannot be spent on school district central office administration.

The "strings" attached to the fiscal stabilization money require the state to document plans to improve teacher effectiveness, establish better student tracking data through their educational career, enhance academic standards and support academically struggling schools. As yet, we have not heard from the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development whether statutory changes would be necessary to implement these requirements. Our member districts may also face additional burdens due to the

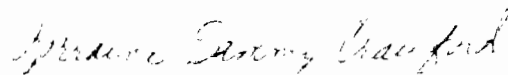
requirements of this funding program. But, I understand, the stimulus bill has grant money available, if needed, to help meet the requirements.

In conclusion, our association asks that your administration and the Legislature consider the impact of turning away \$170 million for our schools. The funds would provide relief from a federal tax on local schools, improve programs for some of our most needy students and allow our education community to tap the innovative spirit of Alaska's teachers and students.

Sincerely,



Carl Rose  
Executive Director



Sammy Crawford  
President, Board of Directors

cc: House Speaker Mike Chenault  
Senate President Gary Stevens  
Larry LeDoux, Commissioner, Department of Education & Early Development