

# Senate Finance Education Committee

September 11, 2013

By Ron Fuhrer, President  
& LaDawn Druce, Vice President



# Introductions

- Ron Fuhrer
  - 30+ year teacher in Anchorage
  - Taught at Clark MS and McLaughlin School
  - President of NEA-Alaska



# Introductions

- LaDawn Druce
  - 18 year teacher in Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
  - 12 years at Soldotna High School and as a counselor at Ninilchik School and River City Academy
  - Vice President of NEA-Alaska



# Introductions

- NEA-Alaska
  - Represents nearly 13,000 teachers and support personnel across Alaska
  - 64 local associations
  - Organization direction set by 30 member Board of Directors and approx. 350 member who attend yearly Delegate Assembly





# Introductions

## **Mission statement:**

NEA-Alaska exists to be an advocate for an excellent public education for each child in Alaska and to advance the interests of public school employees.

*A child's learning conditions are a teachers' working conditions.*



Where are schools  
headed educationally?



# Status of Public Education

- Progress has been made
  - Over 10 years graduation rate has increased by 10%, 3x faster than national average<sup>1</sup>
  - One-third of Alaska's public school students enter school with no preschool experience<sup>2</sup>
  - State is 3<sup>rd</sup> in nation for growth between 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade



# Status of Public Education

- Progress has been made (cont.)
  - Drop out rates have decreased by 20% since 2004-05 school year<sup>3</sup>
  - Alaska students score higher than the national average on ACT and SAT tests<sup>4</sup>





# Challenges

- Over 41% of students receive free and reduced lunch because of their socio-economic status<sup>5</sup>
- Between the 2009-10 school year and the 2010-11, student homelessness increased by 31%<sup>6</sup>



# Challenges

- Increased diversity – more students English Language Learners
- From 2006 until 2011, Alaska has seen on average a yearly 20% turnover rate of teachers. Teacher turnover in rural Alaska is greater than double that of urban areas<sup>7</sup>



What do our students  
need from a K-12 system?



# What our Kids Need

- Highly Effective Teachers
  - Educational Policies that:
    - Support team building
    - Increase instructional time
    - Increase individualized student contact
    - Embrace student diversity





# What our Kids Need

- A Rich and Varied Curriculum
  - Curriculum that:
    - Meets the expectations of the communities
    - Engages the broad spectrum of student needs and interests
    - Is relevant to the experiences of the students
    - Encourages curiosity, exploration and critical thinking
    - Is innovative and responsive to community and student needs



# What our Kids Need

- Effective School-Family-Community Partnerships
  - Empowered communities
  - Educators connected to community resources
  - One-size-fits-all solutions weaken public schools



# Five Things to Change



# A Partner in Finding Solutions

- 1) Improve and enhance teacher evaluation system (e.g., peer review, etc.)
- 2) Develop an Alaskan state of the art Teacher Preparation Program
- 3) Invest in quality Early Childhood Education
- 4) Provide a defined benefit retirement system
- 5) Develop a long-range, state education plan





**NEA-Alaska is eager to be a partner with the Legislature in developing plans to ensure all Alaska's public school students receive the highest quality education opportunity no matter their geography, socio-economic status, or challenges.**



"There is a place in America to take a stand: it is public education. It is the underpinning of our cultural and political system. It is the great common ground. Public education after all is the engine that moves us as a society toward a common destiny... It is in public education that the American dream begins to take shape."

—Tom Brokaw



# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Lyndsey Layton, “High School graduation rate rises in U.S.,” Washington Post, March 9, 2012.
- <sup>2</sup> G. Williamson McDiarmid and Alexandra Hill, “Alignment of Alaska’s Educational Programs from Pre-School through Graduate Study: A First Look,” ISER Working Paper 2010.1, pg. 5.
- <sup>3</sup> Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, State Report Cards, various years.
- <sup>4</sup> Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, Kids Count Alaska 2011-12, pg. 37.
- <sup>5</sup> Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, Kids Count Alaska 2011-12, pg. 22.
- <sup>6</sup> Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, Kids Count Alaska 2011-12, pg. 7.
- <sup>7</sup> Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, Kids Count Alaska 2011-12, pg. 36.

