



ALASKA COUNCIL OF  
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

# JOINT POSITION STATEMENTS

2021

***Student achievement***  
is our ***number one priority.***

***Adequate funding***  
remains our most ***critical need.***

## **Priority Funding for Education**

The State of Alaska must provide timely, reliable, and predictable revenue for schools, funding the actual cost of education in all districts and providing full and equitable funding for all initiatives, laws, and mandates that require additional resources. Early notification of funding and forward funding are crucial to sound financial management, as well as recruitment and retention of quality educators.

## **Revenue Enhanced Fiscal Plan Imperative**

Alaska has made progress by cutting the budget and restructuring the use of Permanent Fund earnings for sustainable funding of both the permanent fund dividend and a portion of government services. State expenditures have been cut by approximately 43% (\$3.45 billion) excluding dividends since FY13 when the current run of deficit spending began.

Implementation of a long-term, multi-revenue fiscal plan remains imperative to maximize districts' ability to meet student needs. Diversified revenue streams are critical in the current fiscal climate to address the remaining deficit and ensure the ability to fund service increases associated with economic development, inflation, and deferred maintenance capital requirements while maintaining the existing minimal reserves in the Constitutional Budget Reserve. For the coming fiscal years, the state legislature must consider options for new revenue, such as new taxation (income, sales, education head tax, etc.), changes in oil taxes, and further restructuring of the Permanent Fund Dividend income stream.

ACSA opposes cost shifting state expenditure responsibilities to local governments.

## **COVID-19 Hold Harmless Funding**

October student enrollment numbers are the biggest determinant of state revenue for districts in Alaska. COVID-19 has caused major enrollment disruptions. Current Hold Harmless statutes provide some relief to districts for enrollment losses in neighborhood brick and mortar schools, but Hold Harmless does not provide protection for migration to homeschool or loss of intensive needs students. ACSA supports legislative action that would provide FY21 Hold Harmless funding at 100% for the entire Foundation Formula based on FY20 OASIS enrollment counts for districts with decreased brick and mortar enrollment. This will allow districts to honor employment contracts and commitments made for FY21.

## **Social, Emotional, and Mental Health**

Alaska's students endure extremely high rates of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), reflected in Alaska having the highest rate of teen suicide attempts in the nation.

ACSA urges the state to provide funding and resources so schools can partner with local communities to implement comprehensive, culturally responsive, school-based mental health programs to foster the health and development of students.

ACSA supports targeted funding to enable schools to recruit, retain, and increase students' access to school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, nurses, and mental health specialists and to provide additional professional development for all staff to meet the increasing and diverse needs of all students.

## **School Safety**

ACSA advocates for safe and secure schools as a catalyst for the prevention of school crime and violence. ACSA supports improving the safety and well-being of our students knowing this is critical to increasing student achievement. ACSA supports providing school communities and their school safety partners with quality information, resources, consultation, and training services. School safety is developed through maintaining effective, positive relationships among students, staff, communities, and tribes responding to local needs.

ACSA supports full funding for law enforcement, Village Public Safety Officers, and state troopers. School districts should have access to these public safety supports.

ACSA supports funding through the Department of Education and Early Development's (DEED) school construction process for construction and modifications to existing school district facilities in order to provide students a safe and healthy learning environment. ACSA urges that all safety improvements should be made a priority.

## **Preparing, Attracting, and Retaining Qualified Educators**

Retaining effective educators and leaders is essential to increasing student achievement and eliminating academic disparity for all of Alaska's students. ACSA strongly encourages the development of comprehensive statewide programs to prepare, attract, and retain high-quality, diverse educators and professionals. ACSA further recommends strengthening statewide and national recruiting efforts along with a renewed commitment to growing our own educators, teachers, principals, and superintendents.

The national teacher shortage compounds our need to fund a robust educator pipeline with the University of Alaska. ACSA strongly supports a unified and aligned University of Alaska College of Education. Exploring innovative alternative pathways is paramount to attracting high-quality educators to the state and the education profession to address Alaska's unique circumstances. A nationally competitive state retirement system is imperative for attracting and retaining effective educators and leaders.

## **Career and Technical Education**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) for both rural and urban schools is critical to high academic standards and Alaska's economic growth and stability. Collaboration through professional learning with DEED, the Department of Labor & Workforce Development, and the University of Alaska with educators and industry-based professionals is needed for the academic integration of rigorous and relevant curriculum.

ACSA fully supports voluntary internships that prepare students for high-earning, high-demand jobs, as well as dual credit offerings that provide opportunities to obtain an occupational certification or credential. These programs give students the opportunity to build future-ready skills. The alignment of CTE programs to meet the needs of local, tribal, regional, and state labor markets through this collaboration is also important for improving on-time graduation rates, higher career earnings, and decreasing dropout percentages.

## Health Care Costs

Providing health insurance to our employees is essential for retaining and recruiting high-quality staff who can maximize student achievement. Controlling the cost of health care for our essential workers is critical. We encourage solutions to the long-term, escalating costs of health insurance in the state. We support exploration of various mechanisms to decrease health care costs by such measures as: lowering the overall cost of health care in the state of Alaska, allowing employers to purchase health insurance policies across state lines, appropriate controls of the cost of medivacs, and promotion of personal wellness and proactive health care options for example.

## Early Childhood Education

According to the 2019 Alaska Developmental Profile, nearly 70% of Alaska's students enter kindergarten lacking foundational preparation for learning. ACSA supports the definition of elementary education to include Pre-K, thus ensuring equitable access to fully funded, sustainable birth to age five learning programs. This provides a foundation of critical social, emotional, and cognitive instruction to students. Research clearly demonstrates early intervention and instruction is one of the best ways to decrease opportunity gaps across all demographics and create the greatest opportunity for all students to read proficiently by third grade and minimize the dropout rate. ACSA supports adequate early childhood education and Pre-K funding as part of the base student allocation.

## *Other State Issues*

Capital Improvement (CIP) funding must be restored. Long-term fiscal planning is needed to maintain and protect infrastructure.

ACSA supports and expects the State of Alaska to fully utilize matching federal grant monies such as those required for Head Start and other early learning programs.

ACSA supports the local control and autonomy of Alaska's communities who are served through all 54 unique school districts.

All of Alaska's schools depend on reliable transportation via air, ferry, or road to meet the critical medical, economic, and basic needs of all residents. As a state with diverse transportation necessities, Alaska must ensure that all communities have equitable access and opportunity to meet those needs.

The state should continue efforts to control the cost of workers' compensation claims, including adoption of medical treatment guidelines, improved management of claims, and an improved reemployment benefits process.

ACSA supports a non-partisan and independent State Board of Education with the sole purpose of ensuring a quality education for all of Alaska's children.

ACSA is proud and supportive of educational alternative programs, so long as the directive in Alaska's Constitution is upheld: ***"No money shall be paid from public funds for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution."*** (Article VII, section 1.) This restriction includes vouchers and/or any other mechanisms. Our funding system must be transparent, inclusive, and collaborative.



## **Increasing Bandwidth in Underserved Areas**

It is critical that we recognize the ongoing and increasing need for Alaska's students, educators, and leaders to have equitable access to the digital world both inside and outside of the school environment. Access to modern technology in order to transform learning, create efficiencies, provide online health services, and keep pace with peers globally is especially essential in rural and under-served communities where infrastructure is extremely limited or non-existent.

ACSA supports continuing the Broadband Assistance Grant (BAG) in order to ensure all schools are able to access a minimum of 25 megabits of download per second as this leverages federal E-Rate funds up to a 9:1 match. ACSA also supports efforts by the legislature to increase innovative infrastructure capacity through public/private partnerships and statewide consortiums in an effort to provide all communities with equitable access to affordable, reliable, and high-speed internet.

## ***Federal Issues***

### **Forest Receipts (Safe and Secure Rural Schools Act)**

ACSA strongly endorses the continuation of the 100-plus year partnership that was created between the federal government and communities to compensate communities financially impacted by the placement of timber reserves into federal ownership. ACSA supports an equitable, long-term solution that supports the many facets of funding Alaska's school districts.

### **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**

ACSA encourages the United States Department of Education to continue to fulfill the bipartisan intention of ESSA by honoring local control.

Further, ACSA encourages Congress to eliminate discretionary funding caps to allow adequate investment in education, including full funding of the education programs authorized by the bipartisan Every School Succeeds Act.

### **Other Federal Issues**

ACSA strongly opposes the use of public money to fund private/religious education through vouchers or other mechanisms.

ACSA supports full funding with cost of living increases for E-Rate, Indian Education, Impact Aid, and all Title programs with no significant program changes.

ACSA supports funding for social-emotional learning, social workers, mental health support, and birth to age five learning for all.

ACSA supports legislation banning the marketing and online sale of tobacco, vaping, and e-cigarette products to children.

ACSA encourages the inclusion of legal immunity for schools in future CARES Act and other COVID-19 relief legislation.

# COVID-19 Response Policies

## Equitable Internet Access

Ensure every student has reliable internet access throughout the pandemic by enacting a moratorium on internet service suspension.

## District Operations Flexibility

Create a waiver process to allow districts additional flexibility with respect to required instructional time for the duration of the pandemic.

## Healthy School Environment

Protect the safety of all students and staff by allocating state funding to provide adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), cleaning equipment, and supplies to ensure a sanitized environment.

## Commitment to Adequate Staffing

Provide state funding to ensure staffing levels are adequate to meet the safe educational environment requirements of small groupings and/or cohorting created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Funding Continuity

Guarantee districts who experience a loss of enrollment receive at least their FY20 funding levels, including formula-based grants and revenues. Long-term regression of academic, behavioral, and social/emotional growth from birth to university will be significant. These losses will increase the cost of operations through COVID-19 and beyond due to significant recovery needs.

## Legal Protection

Provide each district a broad civil liability shield for COVID-19 related injuries, death, or damages unless it can be established the district committed gross negligence related to the incident.

## Flexibility for Accountability

Suspend state and federal accountability assessments in consideration of the high-level impact COVID-19 has had on student learning and support opportunities.

*Federal COVID relief funds should not be used to supplant the constitutionally required funding for public education.*



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*Leadership, Unity, and Advocacy  
for Public Education*

