

ALASKA COUNCIL OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS 2022

JOINT POSITION STATEMENTS



Student Achievement
is our **number one Priority.**

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

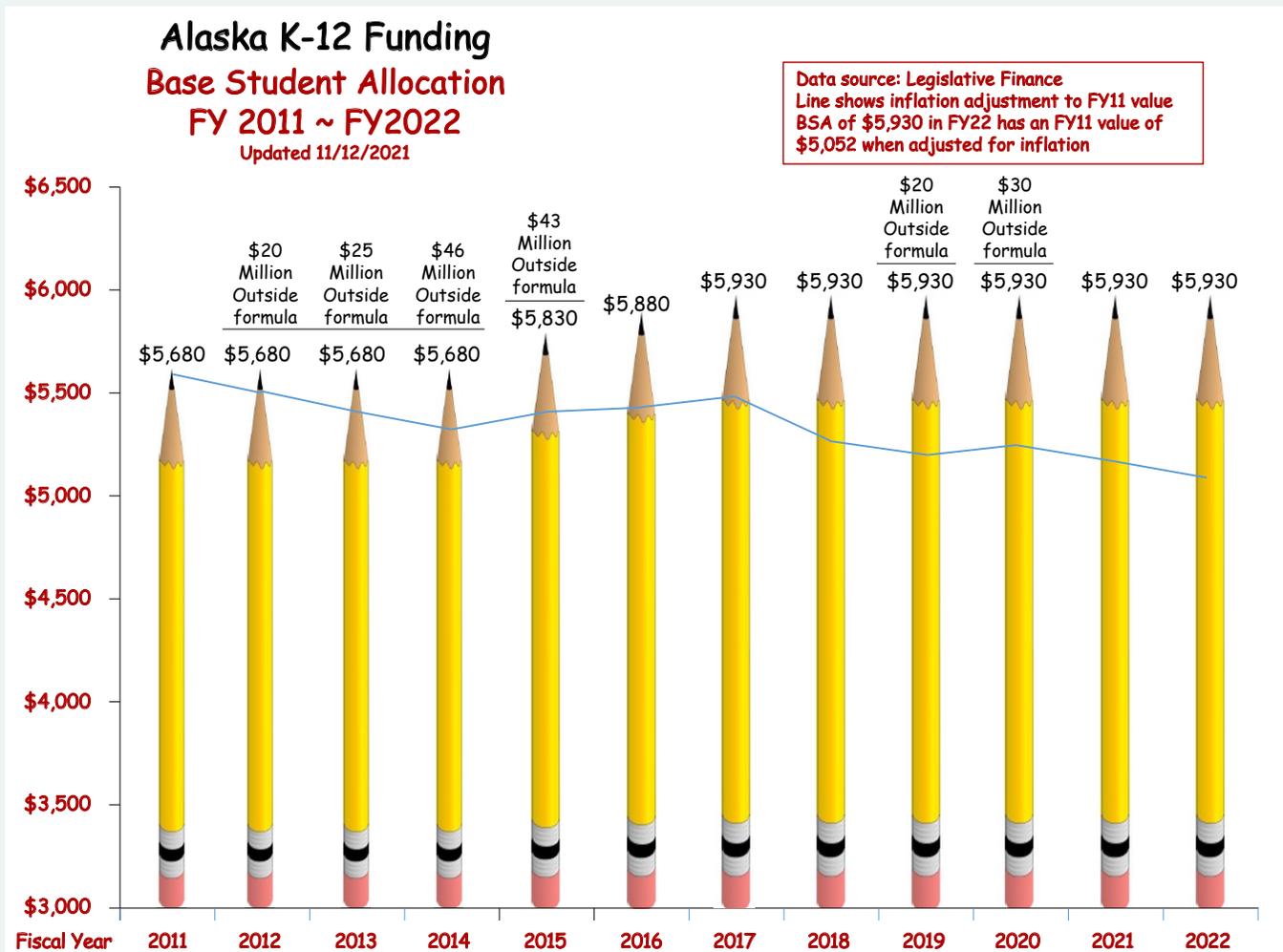
PRIORITY FUNDING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

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. Policy makers must recognize the diminishing value of flat funding in relation to inflation. Early notification of funding and forward funding are crucial to sound financial management, as well as recruitment and retention of quality educators.

Implementation of a long-term, multi-revenue fiscal plan remains imperative to maximize the ability of districts to meet student needs. Diversified revenue streams are critical in the current fiscal climate to address any deficit and ensure the ability to fund service increases associated with economic development, inflation, and deferred maintenance capital requirements, while preserving the Permanent Fund Dividend for future generations. 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.

Federal COVID relief funds should not be used to supplant the constitutionally required funding for public education. State funding should be adjusted with inflation to enable districts to use COVID relief funds to address educational deficiencies caused by COVID rather than be used to maintain existing operations.



COVID-19 ADJUSTED FUNDING FOR FY23

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 is intended to ease the burden of a sustained enrollment decline. In the current situation, districts need to be able to staff to serve students who may return to brick and mortar schools later in the school year. 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.

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Alaska's students endure extremely high rates of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The impact of COVID-19 has elevated many Alaskan students' ACEs scores. Pediatric studies and CDC studies report positive depression screenings and positive suicide risk screenings increased during the pandemic, as well as an increase in suicide attempts, especially for adolescent girls.

In the journal *Pediatrics*, a study found that from April 2020 through July 2021, around 140,000 children have lost a primary caregiver due to the pandemic. The same study says that Alaska Native children were 4.5 times more likely to lose a primary caregiver to COVID. ACEs brought on by pandemic will have long-term impacts on students.

The trauma felt in our schools is not just limited to students; staff have also felt the impact of COVID-19 on their own social, emotional, and mental health. These issues have connections in other legislative priorities identified, such as attracting and retaining educators and access to health care.

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 and provide structures to support the wellbeing of staff.

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.

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 healthcare and health insurance in the state. We support exploration of various mechanisms to decrease health care costs, including such measures as: allowing employers to purchase health insurance policies across state lines, controlling the cost of medivacs, and promoting personal wellness and proactive health care options.

SCHOOL SAFETY

ACSA supports improving the safety and physical and mental well-being of our children, 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 advocates for safe and secure schools as a catalyst for the prevention of school crime and violence. ACSA supports full funding for law enforcement, Village Public Safety Officers, state troopers, and other agencies such as the Office of Children's Services who are trained to work as partners with school districts supporting children.

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

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

According to the Alaska Developmental Profile, nearly 70% of Alaska's students enter kindergarten lacking foundational preparation for learning and reaching up to almost 90% in some communities. This includes over 50% of entering kindergarteners who lack critical foundations in literacy. ACSA supports the definition of elementary education to include universal Pre-K, thus ensuring equitable access to fully funded, sustainable, birth to age five learning programs and nutrition services. This provides a foundation of critical social, emotional, and cognitive instruction to students. Research clearly demonstrates early intervention, instruction and parent education 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, sustainable early childhood education and Pre-K funding as part of the base student allocation.

INCREASING BANDWIDTH IN UNDER-SERVED 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. ACSA wants to ensure every student has reliable internet access throughout the pandemic by enacting a moratorium on internet service suspension. Access to modern technology in order to innovate 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 download speed of 25 megabits per second as this leverages federal E-Rate funds up to a 9:1 match; we support efforts to continue to increase download speed to meet national recommendations. ACSA also supports efforts by the legislature to continue 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.

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 continued funding for voluntary internships and pre-apprenticeship programs 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 and contribute to their local economy after high school. 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.

PREPARING, ATTRACTING, AND RETAINING QUALIFIED EDUCATORS

Retaining effective educators and leaders is imperative to increase student achievement and eliminate 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, paraprofessionals, counselors, principals, and superintendents.

The national teacher and education shortage compounds Alaska's need to fund a robust educator pipeline with the University of Alaska and create incentives for graduates to stay in Alaska. ACSA supports aligned and accredited University of Alaska Schools 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 compensation and benefits package, combined with a robust state retirement system is imperative for attracting and retaining effective educators and leaders.

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. Funding for transportation should be adjusted to match actual costs and inflation protected to ensure continuity of services in future years.

OTHER STATE ISSUES

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.

If the school funding formula is reviewed, ACSA strongly supports that it be done by a task force including nationally-recognized school finance experts, with input from Alaska school finance experts.

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. "This restriction includes vouchers and/or any other mechanisms. Our funding system must be transparent, inclusive, and collaborative.

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 sources of funding for Alaska's school districts. ACSA supports the reauthorization of the Safe and Secure Rural Schools Act, included in the bipartisan infrastructure bill, that would provide funding beyond FY23.

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, school nursing, and birth to age five learning for all.

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



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Leadership, Unity and Advocacy for Public Education

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