



**Senate Education Committee
CS SB225 Testimony of support
March 30, 2022**

Good Morning chairman Holland and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Lon Garrison, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Association of Alaska School Boards. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on **Committee Substitute for SB225**.

The Association of Alaska School Boards is in support of CS SB225. AASB's membership has four resolutions that directly or indirectly support the elements of this legislation. These include:

- **4.1 SUPPORTS FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT**
- **4.5 ADDRESSING THE TEACHER, SPECIALIST, AND ADMINISTRATOR SHORTAGE**
- **4.17 ADDRESSING THE PARAPROFESSIONAL SHORTAGE**
- **4.18 ESTABLISHING A NEW TEACHER INCENTIVE PROGRAM FOR ALASKA**

School boards and superintendents across the state, whether rural or urban, face a common and daunting challenge, the ability to find and retain teachers. For most districts, the teachers entering the educational workforce are young, inexperienced, and have little or no Alaska experience. In nearly all school districts, the teaching staff is not reflective of the cultural and ethnic makeup of the student population. As a result, teacher turnover has averaged about 22% or greater per year, or on average for each district, nearly 1 in 4 teachers will be new each year.

Teacher turnover has a direct impact on student achievement and the overall health and well-being of each student. This means that progress in improving student outcomes is negatively affected by the fact that students don't have the opportunity to experience stable lasting relationships with their educators.

SB 225 provides the opportunity to create alternate pathways for local individuals or content experts to become effective, reliable, and relevant educators that are much more likely to choose to stay in a teaching position. This ultimately creates an improved sense of connectedness and support for each student resulting in better outcomes.

AASB continually hears many school boards' desires to create alternate ways to allow classified staff to enter a teaching program while staying in their home district and continuing to work. The proposed paraprofessional training program or an apprenticeship can provide those opportunities. Furthermore, subject matter limited



certificates can open a world of possibilities for all sorts of experts with real-life experience to engage and compel students to learn from those individuals.

By statute, school boards are responsible for allocating resources (a budget) on a local level in order to provide an excellent education for every student every day. Utilizing those funds to support locally grown teachers is far more cost-effective than hiring nearly 25% of your workforce each year. School boards know that student outcomes are what matter and that one of the most significant ways to improve student achievement is to support the creation of a workforce that is reflective of the student population, is committed to the school and community, and brings something relevant and engaging to the classroom.

For these reasons, AASB strongly supports and urges the passage of Committee Substitute 225 as one more tool in the toolbox for addressing Alaska's teacher shortage.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Lon Garrison,
Executive Director, AASB

AASB Resolutions Supporting CS 225

4.1 SUPPORTS FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

AASB supports funded opportunities and sufficient resources for quality and relevant staff preparation and demonstrably effective continuing development in both urban and rural settings for those educating Alaska's public-school students. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Professional development for teachers to implement the Alaska State Standards;
- Pre-service: State training programs through postsecondary and other institutions;
- Expanding Department of Education & Early Development packaged training programs for all school districts to use in providing consistent mandated training to employees and in meeting the requirements of the (Every Student Succeeds Act 2015) Elementary and Secondary Education Act;
- Developing resources to allow the sharing and implementation of best educational practices;
- Quality in-service programs at the local district level;
- Necessary training for paraprofessionals and special needs educators.

- Promote local mentors to foster the enculturation of teachers/administrators.
- Cultural orientation and ongoing training in local language, culture and history.

4.5 ADDRESSING THE TEACHER, SPECIALIST AND ADMINISTRATOR SHORTAGE

The Association of Alaska School Boards urges the Alaska State Legislature, Alaska State Board of Education, and Teacher Education Programs in Alaska's universities to address the severe shortage of teachers, specialists, and administrators in the State of Alaska. Suggested strategies may include:

- Incentives (salary bonuses, loan forgiveness, loan assumption, competitive retirement benefits, interest rate reduction, etc.);
- State supported marketing and licensure assistance to recruit teachers;
- Flexibility in certification requirements and reciprocity;
- Alternative routes to teacher certification;
- Improved access to technology including bandwidth and knowledgeable staff;
- Increasing availability and/or quality of teacher housing, including state subsidized teacher housing
- Mentoring programs for new teachers and administrators;
- Streamline the rehire of retired teachers and administrators;
- Professional support/development.
- Eliminate redundant or unnecessary paperwork.
- Increasing awareness about the lives and communities of Alaska's children.
- A defined benefit retirement system
- Utilize research on system supports that promote teacher retention.
- Train more Alaska students as educators
- Seek training opportunities for staff and high school students to increase the pool of qualified staff who are representative of the diverse population they teach.

4.17 ADDRESSING THE PARAPROFESSIONAL SHORTAGE

In light of the statewide shortage of paraprofessionals, the Association of Alaska School Boards encourages and urges the Alaska State Legislature and Board of Education to enact legislation and programs to fully fund the recruitment, retention, training, and development of paraprofessionals. Suggested strategies may include:

- Marketing programs aimed at recruiting and retaining paraprofessional talent;
- Development/Mentoring programs;
- Increased allocation for paraprofessionals in the funding model;
- Incentives and assistance to encourage paraprofessionals to become teachers.

4.18 ESTABLISHING A NEW TEACHER INCENTIVE PROGRAM FOR ALASKA

AASB requests that the Alaska State Legislature establish and fund a New Teacher Incentive Program for the purpose of attracting and retaining new teachers to rural Alaska school districts. A sample incentive program that could include the following:

1. The requirement that a participant be a graduate from an approved teacher certification program meeting the requirements of initial certification for the State of Alaska and have not taught in a Public School within 36 months of hire by a rural district; or

2. Meet the requirements of [14.20.022](#) (Subject-matter expert limited teacher certificate) and be currently enrolled in a Teacher Certification Program of no less than 12 credit hours per year directly related to the graduation requirements for a Teaching degree, certificate, or endorsement qualifying the person for a Professional Teacher Certificate or Second Initial Teacher Certificate; and
3. Have all eligible Federal student loans consolidated with a loan program that qualifies for Teacher Loan Forgiveness (FFEL) as long as that program or any substantively similar program exists; and
4. The student must make minimum payments as required to maintain eligibility for Teacher Loan Forgiveness (FFEL); shall be provided
5. A one-time relocation bonus to the new teacher and his/her family of \$10,000 to the district in which they are hired; and
6. A student loan forgiveness payment of the lesser of 10% or \$15,000 directly to their student loan servicer upon completion of each of their first five years of teaching in the same district; and
7. Provide a student loan forgiveness payment directly to the loan servicer of the lesser of 10% or \$10,000 directly to their student loan servicer upon completion of each of their sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and 10th years teaching in Alaska, and
8. Payoff all remaining student loans, public or private, not to exceed \$25,000 total, after the eleventh year teaching in Alaska and after the employee provides evidence that he has applied for Teacher Loan Forgiveness and met all application requirements; and
9. Providing a retention bonus of \$3,000 per year, through year 10, for any qualified teacher not receiving a student loan forgiveness payment in the program; and
10. Provide an additional retention bonus of \$5,000 per year for any teacher certified or endorsed in a Math or Science Subject, or in Special Education, in addition to any loan forgiveness payments or any other bonus.
11. Fund the program as a state Grant through DEED for \$10 million per year (\$150 million total over 15 years) with preference for Teachers, State of Alaska Residents, graduates from Alaska Colleges and Universities, and members of Alaskan Federally-Recognized Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations.