



Alaska Council of School Administrators

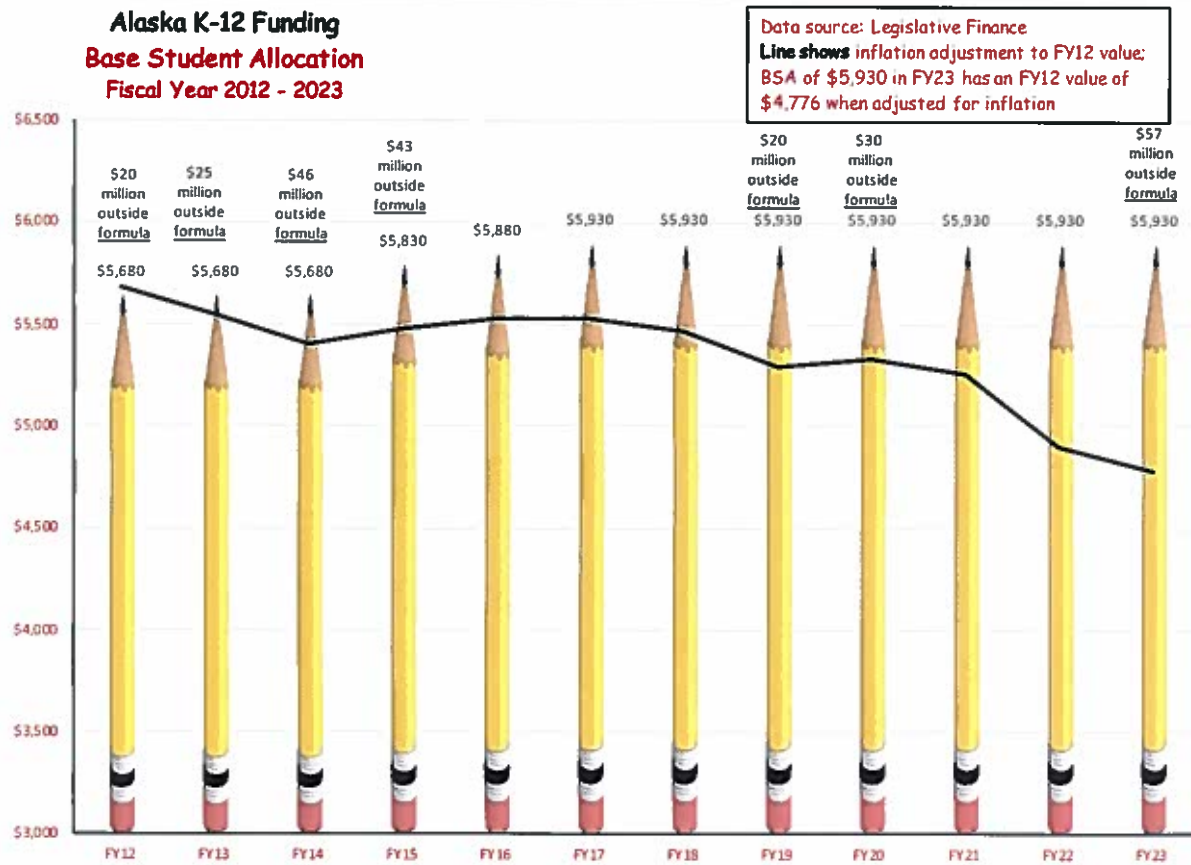
2023 JOINT POSITION STATEMENTS

**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. **Early notification of funding and predictable funding are crucial to sound financial management, as well as recruitment and retention of quality educators.** Policymakers must recognize that continued flat funding coupled with historic 40 year high inflation creates a loss of purchasing power that schools cannot sustain while keeping achievement high and meeting legislative requirements. Inflation is up almost 8% in Anchorage from last year, as of October 2022, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



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.

Many districts utilized federal COVID relief funds, but these should not be used to supplant the constitutionally required funding for public education. The end of COVID funding makes prioritizing funds for public education urgent. State funding should be adjusted with inflation to enable districts to use COVID relief funds to address educational deficiencies caused by the worldwide COVID pandemic rather than be used to maintain existing operations.

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

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. Alaska's students endure extremely high rates of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The trauma felt in our schools is not just limited to students; staff also feel the impact 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. One way to do this is to work with the UA system to provide a pathway for school districts to grow their own mental health support staff. This is especially crucial because as of 2020, the CDC listed Alaska as the second highest suicide mortality rate of any state, with 27.5 deaths per 100,000 total population.

Studies by the American School Counselor Association show that school districts with lower student-to-school-counselor ratios produce higher graduation rates, higher college entrance, lower absenteeism rates and fewer suspensions. By improving access to mental health professionals in public schools, students will have better outcomes in the classroom.

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.

INCREASING BANDWIDTH IN UNDER-SERVED AREAS

ACSA supports continuing the Broadband Assistance Grant (BAG) to ensure all schools are able to access a minimum 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 of 1 gigabyte per second, per student.

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. 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 also supports efforts by the legislature to continue to increase innovative infrastructure capacity through public/private partnerships, partnerships with tribal entities, and statewide consortiums in an effort to provide all communities with equitable access to affordable, reliable, and high-speed internet.

RETIREMENT SYSTEMS

ACSA calls on the Legislature to provide and fund a retirement system that will offer educators an incentive to spend a long career working with Alaska's children. According to a study by the Economic Policy Institute, the average teacher earns 21% less than other professionals with college degrees. This gap must be offset by providing excellent benefits packages, including a robust retirement system. Alaska's educators need and deserve a retirement system that surpasses what is offered by Social Security. Alaska's districts need and deserve the best teachers. The support of the state in providing these crucial benefits is essential.

SCHOOL SAFETY

ACSA advocates for safe and secure schools as a catalyst for the prevention of school crime and violence. We emphasize the importance of preventative as well as reactionary measures to ensure 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 full funding for school counselors, 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 calls for a statewide clearinghouse of safety trainings, internal safety processes, and policies to assess threats to the school and to have a secure school facility. ACSA also recognizes the need for more regular access to Village Public Safety Officers in remote villages who may be visited by VPSO's as infrequently as once every two weeks.

HEALTH CARE COSTS AND BENEFITS

Providing health insurance to our employees is essential for retaining and recruiting high-quality staff who can maximize student achievement. 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. **Controlling the cost of health care for our essential workers is critical and promises long-term benefits in recruiting and retaining effective educators and other school staff.**

MAJOR MAINTENANCE

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 improved lock technology be made a priority.

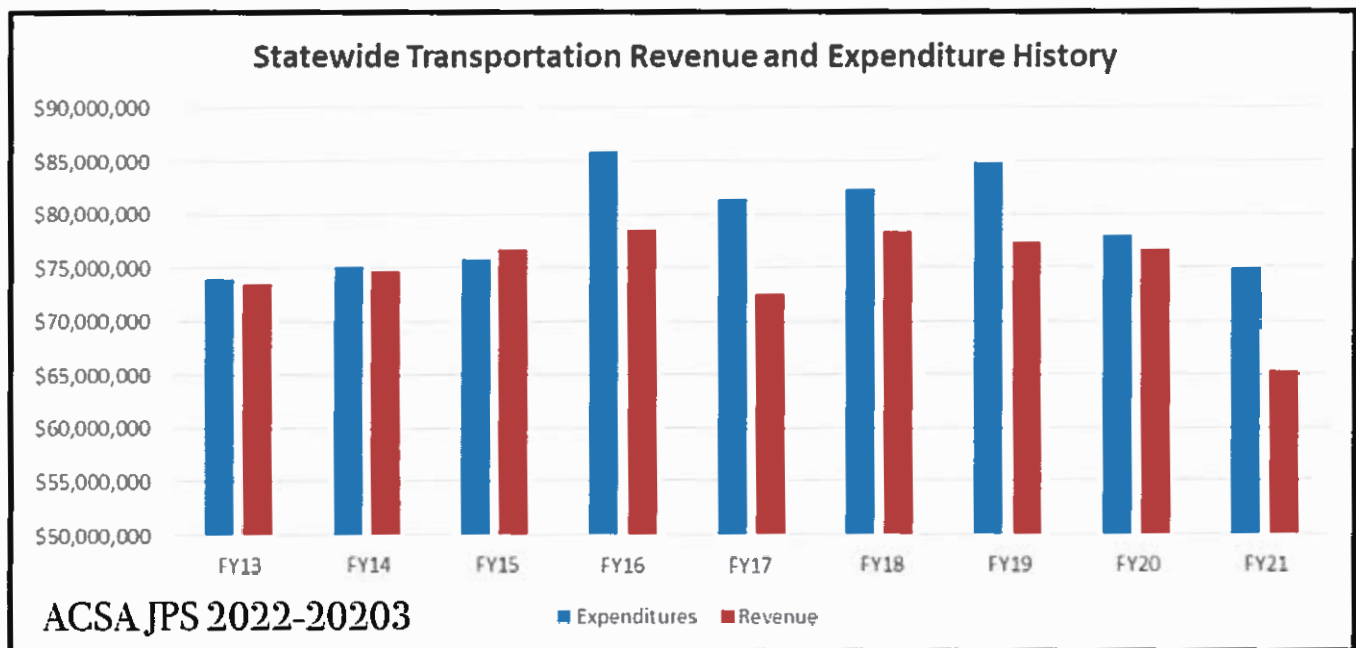
CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

ACSA fully supports continued funding for voluntary internships and pre-apprenticeship programs that prepare students for high-demand, high-skill, high wage jobs, as well as dual credit offerings that provide opportunities to obtain an occupational certification or credentials. **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. 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 graduation rates, higher career earnings, and decreasing dropout percentages. These programs must also either be available to students before they graduate around age 18 or include funding for postgraduate programs for students above age 18 in industries where only adults may receive training, for instance marine welders.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

The State of Alaska must provide full funding for school transportation of students and inflation- proof this amount to protect student transportation from future cuts and erosion of service. Transportation represents one of the fastest rising categories of inflation, running over 20% higher in April 2022 compared to the previous April. **Alaska's students deserve safe, reliable transportation from home to school. The per student amount provided to districts from the state for this vital service has not increased since 2016.** Since 2016, statewide transportation costs have exceeded the funds provided by the State, thereby causing districts to use operating funds for transportation rather than for student instructional services.

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 needs, Alaska must ensure that all communities have equitable access and opportunity. Funding for transportation should be adjusted to match actual costs and inflation protected to ensure continuity of services in future years.



SCHOOL BOND DEBT REIMBURSEMENT

ACSA advocates for the legislature to end the moratorium on school bond debt reimbursement. In 2015, the state placed a moratorium on school bond debt reimbursement until 2025, thereby placing the burden on school districts to fully fund bonds with their own tax revenue. **Due to the moratorium on school bond debt reimbursement, many districts have deferred school construction projects, which may result in deterioration and long-term damage, leading to unsafe conditions and higher costs to school districts.** It will also take costs from the general fund, leading to higher class sizes and less funds for supplies needed for effective educational programs.

Additionally, funds for REAA school maintenance and construction is tied to the amount of bond debt reimbursement. The 10 year moratorium on bond debt reimbursement will have lasting effects on the capitalization of that fund and lead to the deterioration of facilities in communities served by REAAs.

PREPARING, ATTRACTING, AND RETAINING QUALIFIED EDUCATORS

ACSA strongly encourages the development of comprehensive statewide programs to prepare, attract, and retain high quality, diverse educators, and professionals. **Retaining highly effective educators and leaders is imperative to increase student achievement and eliminate academic disparity for all of Alaska's students.** 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. ACSA also recognizes the difficulty in finding adequate housing for educators and encourages the state to provide funding and policies improving access to safe housing for all. In partnership with school districts, the state should fund and deploy a team of marketing experts to create a direct campaign, such as "Teach Alaska."

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. In addition, the state should prioritize the removal of barriers for certified teachers coming from out of state. A nationally competitive compensation and benefits package, combined with a robust state retirement system is imperative for attracting and retaining effective educators and leaders.

ACSA requests the state become a sponsoring agency for J-1, H1-B, and other visa types.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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. These programs also require sufficient funding to incorporate developmentally appropriate instructional materials, playground equipment, and classroom equipment for both 3 year old and 4 year old Pre-K students into neighborhood schools, recognizing the developmental differences between students at these different stages. According to the 2021-2022 Alaska Developmental Profile, over 80% of Alaska's students enter kindergarten lacking foundational preparation for learning and reaching up to almost 90% in some communities, including over 50% of entering kindergarteners who lack critical foundations in literacy. These services would have the most impact on kindergarten readiness by running a minimum of 5 days a week, 6 hours a day.

This provides a foundation of critical social, emotional, and cognitive instruction to students. As the Alaska READS Act acknowledges, early intervention, instruction and parent education are 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, Pre-K, and parent education support funding as part of the base student allocation - including full (1.0) ADM funding for Pre-K students.

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 FY24.

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 Student 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 increased funding for child nutrition.

ACSA supports increased funding for teacher housing in rural communities.

ACSA supports funding for social emotional learning, social workers, mental health support, school nursing, and birth to age five learning for all. For more specifics, refer to our Social, Emotional, and Mental Health Position Statement.

ACSA advocates continued support for Alaska school districts under the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF).

ACSA supports the use of federal funds to retrofit and make infrastructure repairs in Alaska schools to align with modern school safety best practices. For more specifics, refer to our School Safety Statement.

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*Leadership, Unity and Advocacy for Public
Education*



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