

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

Anchorage, Alaska

July 23, 2020

10:08 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair  
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair (via teleconference)  
Representative Grier Hopkins (via teleconference)  
Representative Chris Tuck (via teleconference)  
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky (via teleconference)  
Representative DeLena Johnson (via teleconference)  
Representative Mike Prax (via teleconference)

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION(S): REOPENING SCHOOLS SAFELY: AN UPDATE FROM  
STATEWIDE LEADERS IN EDUCATION AND HEALTH AND THE ADMINISTRATION

- HEARD

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative Bryce Edgmon (via teleconference)  
Representative Dan Ortiz (via teleconference)

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-provided a PowerPoint presentation,  
entitled "Safely Reopening Alaska Schools for the 2020-2021  
School Year," dated 7/23/20.

ANNE ZINK, M.D., FACEP, Chief Medical Officer  
Central Office

Division of Public Health  
Department of Health and Social Services  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-provided a PowerPoint presentation, entitled "Safely Reopening Alaska Schools for the 2020-2021 School Year," dated 7/23/20.

LACEY SANDERS, Director  
Administrative Services Section  
Department of Education and Early Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave a PowerPoint presentation which provided a Federal Education Funding Update.

JO DAWSON, School Food Coordinator  
Child Nutrition Services Section  
Department of Education and Early Development

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered a question during the presentation on "Safely Reopening Alaska Schools for the 2020-2021 School Year."

TOM KLAAMEYER, President  
National Education Association, Alaska Affiliate  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave a presentation regarding "Reopening Schools Safely."

LISA S. PARADY, Ph.D., Executive Director  
Alaska Council of School Administrators  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented a PowerPoint, entitled "Providing a Safe Smart Start for Alaska Public Schools 2020-2021 District Plans."

KERRY BOYD, Superintendent  
Yukon-Koyukuk School District  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the PowerPoint, entitled "Providing a Safe Smart Start for Alaska Public Schools 2020-2021 District Plans."

JOHN CONWELL, Superintendent  
Unalaska City School District  
Unalaska, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the PowerPoint, entitled "Providing a Safe Smart Start for Alaska Public Schools 2020-2021 District Plans."

BRIDGET WEISS, Ph.D., Superintendent  
Juneau School District  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the PowerPoint, entitled "Providing a Safe Smart Start for Alaska Public Schools 2020-2021 District Plans."

TERRI WALKER, Superintendent  
Northwest Arctic Borough School District

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the PowerPoint, entitled "Providing a Safe Smart Start for Alaska Public Schools 2020-2021 District Plans."

DEENA M. BISHOP, Ed.D., Superintendent  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the PowerPoint, entitled "Providing a Safe Smart Start for Alaska Public Schools 2020-2021 District Plans."

BETH LOUGEE, Superintendent  
Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District  
Ketchikan, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the PowerPoint, entitled "Providing a Safe Smart Start for Alaska Public Schools 2020-2021 District Plans."

JOHN O'BRIEN, Ph.D., Superintendent  
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District  
Kenai, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the PowerPoint, entitled "Providing a Safe Smart Start for Alaska Public Schools 2020-2021 District Plans."

CLAYTON HOLLAND, Assistant Superintendent  
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District  
Kenai, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the PowerPoint, entitled "Providing a Safe Smart Start for Alaska Public Schools 2020 - 2021 District Plans."

DAVE JONES, Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Support  
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District  
Kenai, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the PowerPoint, entitled "Providing a Safe Smart Start for Alaska Public Schools 2020-2021 District Plans."

SHAWN ARNOLD, Superintendent  
Valdez City Schools;  
President, Alaska Superintendents Association  
Valdez, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the PowerPoint, entitled "Providing a Safe Smart Start for Alaska Public Schools 2020-2021 District Plans."

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[10:08:58 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 10:08 a.m. Representatives Story (via teleconference), Johnson (via teleconference), Hopkins (via teleconference), Zulkosky (via teleconference), Tuck (via teleconference), Prax (via teleconference), and Drummond were present at the call to order. Also present were Representatives Edgmon (via teleconference) and Ortiz (via teleconference).

**PRESENTATION(S): Reopening Schools Safely: An Update from Statewide Leaders in Education and Health and the Administration**

[10:10:57 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND** announced that the only order of business would be an update on reopening schools safely, from statewide leaders in education and health, as well as the administration.

[10:13:14 AM](#)

**MICHAEL JOHNSON, Ph.D., Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)**, estimated it had been three months since he last updated the House Education Standing Committee on the statewide efforts to ensure continued student learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. He said a lot has happened since then, and more is known about the virus. He said he would be presenting alongside Anne Zink, M.D., of the Department of Health and Social Services, to whom he expressed gratitude for her work alongside Governor Mike Dunleavy "to inform us, to guide us, to keep us steady" and for the sacrifices she has made for Alaskans. He emphasized the collaboration of DEED and DHSS in preparing for the upcoming school year. He acknowledged

members of "the education team." Referring to the PowerPoint presentation, entitled "Safely Reopening Alaska Schools for the 2020-2021 School Year," he listed the three categories that would be covered, as shown on slide 2: Science & Data Regarding COVID-19 and Children; School Reopening Guidance and Support; and Federal Education Funding Update. He then turned the presentation over to Dr. Zink.

10:17:28 AM

ANNE ZINK, M.D., FACEP, Chief Medical Officer, Central Office, Division of Public Health, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), prefaced the PowerPoint presentation by expressing appreciation for all involved in the process of learning the science and data of COVID-19. She said she would talk about three basic categories: Children and their risk of COVID-19; teachers and their risk of transmission; and the science and education behind teaching as a whole. She remarked on the changing nature of information, as new discoveries about the virus are made, emphasizing that information can change in a matter of just a couple weeks. She recognized the hard work being done by superintendents.

DR. ZINK turned to the PowerPoint presentation she would co-present, entitled "Safely Reopening Alaska Schools for the 2020-2021 School Year." She directed attention to slide 4, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

#### COVID-19 risks to children

- Most children have mild symptoms or no symptoms if they get COVID-19
- Deaths in children are rare but have happened
- Children with underlying medical conditions are at greater risk of severe illness if they get COVID-19
- Diabetes
- Obesity (between  $\frac{1}{3}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  of Alaska children are overweight or obese)
- Chronic lung disease
- High blood pressure
- Tobacco use (10.9% of Alaska teens had smoked a cigarette in the last month in a 2017 survey, 15.7% had used a vape pen)
- Multisystem inflammatory syndrome is reported in children and can have devastating effects

DR. ZINK then focused on slide 5, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

COVID-19: What we know about long term effects

- At 6 months in, nobody has been recovered long enough for true long-term effects
- Many survivors of SARS and MERS, coronaviruses causing disease like severe COVID-19, had lung problems, bone problems, fatigue and PTSD symptoms that lasted for years or decades
- COVID-19 survivors report lasting fatigue, muscle aches, shortness of breath, even in some young, previously healthy people with mild COVID-19
- People who had to be in ICUs report fatigue, aches, shortness of breath as well as PTSD symptoms
- One study found that only 12.6% of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 were symptom free two months later; 44% reported worse quality of life; 53% had fatigue; 43% had difficulty breathing; 27% had joint pain; 22% had chest pain

DR. ZINK related that the study was done in Italy from 143 patients with an average age of 56.5 years; 5 percent were intubated; all were hospitalized.

[10:21:37 AM](#)

DR. ZINK addressed the role children play in transmitting diseases. She said school can be "an effective place for transmission" of highly contagious diseases. She covered the information on slide 6, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

COVID-19 transmission in children

- Evidence is limited
- Children under age 10 may be less likely to get the virus and less likely to give it to others (10-50% less, depending on the study)
- Children under age 10 may also be the least likely to leave the house during periods of restriction, when many of these studies were conducted, so may have been exposed less
- Children over age 10 appear to be able to get the virus and give it to others at least as easily as adults can

- In one South Korean study of 60,000 contacts of 5,700 cases, children age 10-18 were more likely to give it to other members of their household than adults were
- We cannot rely on all children having decreased transmission dynamics

DR. ZINK continued to the information on slide 7, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

#### School reopening: projected community effects

- Anytime we have increased numbers of people coming into contact with each other we expect increased opportunities for viral transmission
- Physical distancing, face coverings, hand hygiene, and encouraging people to stay home when sick are the mainstays of prevention
- Whether a community sees increased cases after school reopening depends a great deal on:
  - Community transmission rates
  - Other community factors (Use face coverings in public, community gatherings, density of population etc.)
  - Children and others staying home when they are sick
  - Maximizing prevention measures (distancing, face coverings, hygiene, cohorts) in schools

DR. ZINK, regarding the first bullet point, noted that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has defined close contact as greater than 15 minutes within six feet of another person.

DR. ZINK moved on to slide 8, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

#### Risks of NOT reopening

- The American Academy of Pediatrics issued a strong recommendation in favor of holding school in person whenever possible starting Fall 2020
- Social interaction is key to child development
- Many children experience barriers that make distance learning less than ideal
  - Insufficient access to internet or computer
  - Learning disabilities
  - Language barriers

- Young children in particular may not learn well independently
- Schools also provide services difficult to deliver remotely
  - School meal programs
  - Physical activity
  - After school childcare
  - Child abuse detection
- Significant economic effect if parents must stay home or find childcare

DR. ZINK said all these factors must be taken into account when making decisions going forward.

[10:25:23 AM](#)

DR. ZINK moved on to slide 9, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Student Mental Health Supports Routine and Predictability

- Last year, DEED in partnership with the Association of Alaska School Boards, released Transforming Schools: A Framework for Trauma-Engaged Practice in Alaska
- In August, DEED will be releasing the online Transforming Schools Trauma Toolkit for educators, which is specifically designed to address stress and anxiety for children and adults

DR. ZINK said children's mental health is a continued area of focus for both DHSS and DEED. She said during a time of stress, providing routine and predictable education is essential. She talked about the stress students may feel about returning to school, and she emphasized that "mental health services ... must be a part of every school's planning for in-person instruction."

DR. ZINK covered the information on slide 10, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Alaska's school risk mitigation approach

- Watch community case levels
- Watch for early warning signs of cases in schools
- Be ready to switch to distance learning

- Maximize physical distancing, wearing face coverings, hygiene
- Minimize mixing
- Age-appropriate cohorting [sic] as an additional risk mitigation strategy

DR. ZINK moved on to slide 11, which addresses community case level indexes with two maps of the state. The map on the left shows a seven-day case rate map [cases/100,000 people], and the map on the right depicts Alaska COVID-19 alert levels, which Dr. Zink called a "14-day case alert map." She said the 14-day map will show a more stable look, while the 7-day map has a graduated scale. She proffered, "You can also hover over those regions and get the actual number." She stated, "These are going to be applied to behavioral health regions, because that's where people move, and they have at least 20,000 people in their community." She imparted that this is a tool that communities and schools can use to estimate transmission levels.

[10:28:20 AM](#)

DR. ZINK continued to slide 12, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Early warning signs

- Schools to perform symptom screening
- If several children in a school or community have new symptoms, will draw increased attention
  - If they are contacts of each other, consider small outbreak
  - If they are not contacts, consider large undetected outbreak or increase in community transmission
- Can isolate specific cohorts or classrooms to avoid closing schools

[10:32:29 AM](#)

DR. ZINK, in response to Representative Zulkosky, repeated the statistic regarding youth.

[10:33:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS referred to the 14-day model map and asked for an explanation of what each color indicated and how

the colors correlate with the red, green, and yellow "Smart Start" levels.

[10:34:26 AM](#)

DR. ZINK answered that the maps are tools that may not correlate "one-to-one" with the Smart Start colors, because some of the areas on the map are quite large. For example, some communities are 300 miles apart, with a wide variance in transmission rates, yet they exist within the same behavioral health region. She said communities may have a better sense of a rising risk prior to it being reflected in "the dashboard." In Anchorage it is easier to use this tool because it is one school district and one community zone. Remote locations will have to work closely with their medical providers "to use these tools to make meaningful decisions at a local level." She explained the reason for the two different maps is that the 7-day map shows big spikes and drops in outbreaks; there will be a lot more fluctuation and variability in the data. She indicated the alert levels are more stable when averaged over the 14 days, which can provide more support to communities by showing what the transition looks like. She deferred to Joe McLaughlin, M.D., the chief of epidemiology, for further questions on the topic. In response to a follow-up question, she said [DHSS] encourages communities to work with their local medical teams and create a task force to understand the data and information. She said DHSS has health nurses assigned to every community, even if they may not live on site, to ensure communities are understanding information and risk levels.

[10:38:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON, regarding incoming data and trends, asked how quickly a spread could happen and how responsive the schools could be.

DR ZINK answered that there can be significant delays. She outlined the chain of events: A person does not feel well; the person gets tested; it can take a while for the test result to come back; the case is recorded on "the dashboard"; and the case becomes part of a 14-day average. She continued:

You could have a large community outbreak that would take a while to show up in the overt level specifically, and that is why we're encouraging communities to work with their local health authorities and their local health departments and

their public health nurses [to] have a better understanding of what's happening in that community, to make sure that we're not overly sensitive to those changes, but also not delayed in the response - to be able ... to respond to what's happening from a local situation.

DR. ZINK said the people "on the ground" will have the best sense of the trends. She said DHSS appreciates that many communities and emergency operations centers (EOCs) are setting up their own dashboards. She indicated that [the colored maps] will be better with respect to moving down from red to orange or orange to yellow as cases decline but will definitely lag with respect to the moving up phases.

[10:41:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON said many decisions are made at the district level, and she understood that the department is working on guidelines. She asked Commissioner Johnson whether the department has recommendations, based on levels of community spread, about when districts would have their students moved to virtual classroom learning.

[10:42:08 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON responded that he thought some of his upcoming presentation would provide an answer. Nevertheless, he said districts are working hard to ensure the delivery of education during this pandemic, and it is not something that can be done based on only one metric. He gave examples of decisions he has had to make based on singular data versus more complex input. He echoed Dr. Zink's remark that individual communities receiving information from their local health authorities are going to gather information pertaining to their communities before it reaches the trend maps.

[10:44:14 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Dr. Zink about child obesity in Alaska.

[10:45:17 AM](#)

DR. ZINK assured Representative Story that DHSS continues to work on all health issues, including obesity, even during the pandemic, and she offered to supply further information.

CO-CHAIR STORY opined that it is important for DHSS to get that information out to the general public, and she said [obesity] is something that Alaskans can work [to prevent or reverse].

[10:46:01 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON resumed the PowerPoint presentation. He covered the information on slide 18, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Supporting teachers, students, families, and communities

Guiding principle: Teaching, learning, and activity are the constants. COVID -19 is the variable.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON emphasized the importance of educating children, the frustration and disruptiveness of the coronavirus, and the importance of working together to ensure the former while overcoming the latter. He talked about the benefits of aklearns.org, listed on slide 19, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

School Reopening Guidance and Support

Online Resources

- aklearns.org
- education.alaska.gov
- Restart Guidance (last revised July 15, 2020)

Professional Development and Informational Webinars

- ZOOM sessions
  - Spring Smart Start 2020 Series (475+ participants)
  - Summer Smart Start 2020 Summit in August
- ECHO sessions
  - School Health (Tue, 3pm)
  - Classroom Teachers (Wed, 1pm)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON directed attention to the information on slide 20, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

School Restart Guidance

- Last revised July 15, 2020

- Local school districts need the authority, responsibility, and flexibility to make decisions to be responsive to their communities.

- DEED and DHSS' joint mission is to provide information, resources, and leadership to support districts in these tough decisions

- District Plans Tracker:

- [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1PMpqGUXxV9cG7aQhZq91j2L35vU9AzjJtHLDi\\_k1Jno/view#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1PMpqGUXxV9cG7aQhZq91j2L35vU9AzjJtHLDi_k1Jno/view#gid=0)

- Guidance:

- <https://education.alaska.gov/news/COVID-19/Alaska%20Smart%20Start%202020%20Framework%20Guidance.pdf>

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said that in partnership with DHSS, DEED released a framework guidance to kindergarten through twelfth grade (k-12) schools for the upcoming 2021 school year. This guidance establishes health parameters for the safe operation of schools in low-, medium-, and high-risk environments. The guidance will continually be updated as more information is released from the CDC and other organizations. He noted that the guidance was built on the recommendations of health officials and in collaborative conversation with education stakeholders; it is aligned with opening guidelines provided by state and federal leaders, and it is designed to help districts prioritize the health and safety of students and teachers. He expressed thanks to Dr. Parady for facilitating numerous meetings identifying many of the elements in the Smart Start plan. He said DEED is requesting each district use this framework to develop a comprehensive plan for teaching and learning and to submit the plan to the department, via an online Google form. He indicated this information will be provided to the public. He emphasized that the plans visible online are currently in the process of being formulated.

[10:51:14 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON, in response to a question from Representative Hopkins, reiterated that DEED is asking every district to work with its local health officials. Additionally, he said, Elizabeth Ohlsen, M.D., [Staff Physician for DHSS], is helping those districts that have more difficulty identifying local health officials. He told Representative Hopkins he thought he would hear some excellent examples of how this is working when superintendents present later during the meeting.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS explained he was concerned about those districts that do not have the local health officials with which to collaborate.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON invited Representative Hopkins to share information about any districts with which he would like DEED to work. He assured him that the department reaches out to schools.

[10:54:42 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON, in response to a query from Representative Zulkosky as to what conversations have been held by DEED to identify "that we're really not in a low-risk environment during our global pandemic," acknowledged that there is always some level of risk. He said the department is continually assessing the risk. He deferred to Dr. Zink.

[10:57:49 AM](#)

DR. ZINK confirmed that everyone is at some degree of risk. She indicated that this is reflected in the varying risk level colors on the alert dashboard and by both statewide and targeted messaging about social distancing, wearing masks, washing hands, and "keeping your [social] bubble small." Further, there is ongoing surveillance and testing across the state. She said decisions can be made based on transmission, risk tolerance, adverse effects of not conducting school or businesses. She said the dashboard shows overall state levels and rising trends. She spoke of the connection worldwide wherein higher cases in the Lower 48 can mean higher risk for Alaska.

[10:59:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND noted that she had just looked at the DHSS dashboard and the interactive maps.

[11:00:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked how DEED would address a situation in which a school district disagrees with the assessment of its local health officials.

[11:00:53 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said he has not had that conversation and has not been made aware of that circumstance. If he were, he would follow up with the district and "have that conversation with the team."

11:01:26 AM

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON returned to the PowerPoint. He spoke about the Summer Smart Start 2020 Summit, information shown on slide 21, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Summer Smart Start 2020 Summit in August

- Virtual, multi-day professional development event
- August 4 - 27, 2020
  - Mondays offer sessions developing communities around various topics, collaborating in size-alike districts;
  - Tuesdays present specific topics within Capacities and Conditions for Learning;
  - Wednesdays provide opportunities for Virtual Consultations; and
  - Thursdays focus on the Continuity of Learning.
- <https://aklearns.org/smartwebinar/>

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON related that summit session had been developed for stakeholders, teachers, administrators, and parents, and he invited the committee members to participate. He said the goal of the summit is collaboration, sharing of resources, and development and refinement of the restart plan. He moved on to slide 22, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

ECHO Information Sessions

- DEED & DHSS co-host weekly webinars
  - Technical support provided by Project ECHO at UAA
- School Health ECHO Series (Tue, 3pm)
  - Superintendents, Principals, School Health/Nurse Leaders
- Classroom Teacher ECHO Series (Wed, 1pm)
  - Current classroom teachers
- Alaska ECHO Projects:

•<https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/college-of-health/departments/center-for-human-development/AK-ECHO/index.cshtml>

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said these sessions cover topics including the following: how to establish a school health team; determining a protocol team for when a positive case is identified; and building communication plans for health protocols in schools. He said the first meeting was held this week, and over 90 school health officials participated. He said the second session is focused on classroom teachers, and he and Dr. Zink answer questions posed by teachers. He explained that in an echo session, they answer questions from the field, and then that gets echoed to the wider community.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON offered to answer questions before turning the PowerPoint presentation over to Lacy Sanders, who would provide an update on federal education funding.

[11:05:07 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON, in response to a question from Co-Chair Story, as to how support professionals are being informed, said the sessions are available to them. He said the support team at DHSS is working daily to support individual groups. For example, he related that "the facilities team" has been researching building ventilation and how it may mitigate the spread of the virus. He said, "That's true for each division and unit in the department."

[11:06:53 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON, in response to a question from Representative Johnson regarding how much money was saved by not having schools open the last portion of the school year and how that may affect future funding, said some of that information is not yet available. He said DEED applied for every waiver possible that would allow districts to carry over their federal monies. He said Governor Dunleavy, through the disaster declaration, allowed districts to carry over more than 10 percent, if needed. Districts have been working on this. He said Ms. Sanders would share information regarding CARES Act money and some of the waivers that allowed districts to carry over the money. He said that money can be applied to future expenses, which districts may not even be able to name yet.

[11:08:43 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON, in response to a question from Representative Hopkins as to whether DEED would be accepting all plans from school districts as is or requiring changes, said the department does not have the authority to approve or disapprove plans. He said DEED and "Dr. Ohlsen and the team there" will review them and provide feedback to districts. He indicated the authority to approve plans lies with local school boards. He added that superintendents are being given "the flexibility they need to lead in a crisis that develops day by day."

11:10:12 AM

LACEY SANDERS, Director, Administrative Services Section, Department of Education and Early Development, gave a PowerPoint presentation providing a Federal Education Funding Update. [In the committee packet, Ms. Sanders' PowerPoint is adjoined with the previous PowerPoint from Dr. Zink and Commissioner Johnson.] She reminded the committee of her previous address to them in late April and that the CARES Act included \$30.75 billion in emergency education funding to states. She said the U.S. Department of Education (DoE) allocated funds to three pots: the state education agencies for state activities and grants to school districts; governors' discretionary funds; and higher education. She said today's information would address the first two pots. She directed attention to slide 25, the headings of which read as follows [original punctuation provided, with some formatting changes]:

CARES Act: General Education Funding Update (\$44.9M)

Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund

Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund

MS. SANDERS related that out of the \$44.9 million allocated to the State of Alaska, approximately 86 percent went to school districts; 8 percent went to DEED to distribute through grants and contracts; 3 percent went to the University of Alaska (UA); 1 percent went to the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP); 10 percent went to grants to other education entities; and less than 1 percent went to DEED to cover administrative costs. She said DEED's website offers a detailed breakdown by school. She stated, "All of the above funds that I have listed to outside entities, with the exception of the \$1 million in grant to other education entities, has been made available to spend." She noted Alaska is ahead of most states

in this regard. She said the \$1 million grant to other education entities, through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund was publicized by DEED in June. She said, "The purpose of the competitive grant is to provide education-related entities the opportunity to establish innovative strategies to carry out emergency education services to students, childcare and early childcare education, cultural and emotional support, and to support education-related jobs." She said grant amounts range from \$20,000 to \$250,000. She said the application period has closed, and DEED received 67 applications, which it is reviewing. These applications are available to view on the department's website under "forms."

[11:13:59 AM](#)

MS. SANDERS noted that slide 26 provides an additional breakdown of the aforementioned grant allocations. She then turned to slide 27, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

CARES Act: Child Nutrition Programs Update (\$41.8M)

- DEED's Child Nutrition Programs received \$41,869,616 in CARES Act funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
  - Purpose: Paying National School Lunch/Breakfast, Special Milk, Child and Adult Care Food, and Summer Food Service Program claims for reimbursement for meals served
  - Time Period: March 2020 - September 2020
  - Allowable expenses: These funds are to support the school nutrition program

MS. SANDERS reported that approximately \$17.3 million of this funding has been dispersed to school districts. She said, "As of right now, our regular block grant will pay for child nutrition programs after September 2020."

[11:14:54 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked what the usual allocation of funds from the USDA to the State of Alaska for child nutrition funding is.

MS. SANDERS deferred to Jo Dawson.

[11:15:27 AM](#)

JO DAWSON, School Food Coordinator, Child Nutrition Services Section, Department of Education and Early Development, said DEED traditionally receives a block grant annually from USDA; it is approximately \$61 million. She said DEED received CARES Act funding in March that replaced the block grant for the duration of COVID-19 response through September 20, 2020. She explained that the funding the department normally receives is still in place.

[11:16:56 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY noted there was a \$30 million cut to districts, and she asked Ms. Sanders what the conversation has been in terms of how to pay for operations.

[11:17:38 AM](#)

MS. SANDERS answered that the school districts have a three-schoolyear time period in which to spend the funds. This funding and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF) monies are available through September 20, 2020. She said there is carryover ability to school districts for both federal and non-federal funds. She said CARES Act funding is available as reimbursement. She related that the congressional delegation is currently working on an additional COVID-19 funding package, which will include additional funding for school districts. She advised there are hold harmless provisions in statute that allow districts to continue to receive funding.

[11:19:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY clarified her interest was knowing what conversations have taken place surrounding the known \$30 million cut.

MS SANDERS reiterated that school districts are receiving additional funding to meet their needs, as well as multiple waivers at the federal level to carry forward their funding.

CO-CHAIR STORY concluded that Ms. Sanders had not spoken with the districts. She offered her understanding that the money the governor "put in" was "the same amount of money that would have been the cut." She stated that if that money is to pay for COVID-related expenses, then there will still be a lack of money for services. She encouraged that conversation take place, and she said she would like a follow-up on the topic.

MS. SANDERS said she would continue to work closely with the school districts on their funding plans.

[11:22:04 AM](#)

TOM KLAAMEYER, President, National Education Association, Alaska Affiliate (NEA-AK), expressed that these are unprecedented times. Currently COVID-19 has claimed more than 600,000 lives globally, 144,000 of whom are U.S. Americans. He said that is more Americans than those who died in the Vietnam War, Korean War, Iraq War, Afghanistan, and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, combined. He expressed hope that consensus can be reached on measures to protect Alaskans, mitigate risks, and prevent needless illness and death. He stated that until there is a vaccine, "our lives and institutions cannot operate as normal." He emphasized that this applies especially to schools, where student populations make it difficult to operate safely, especially in larger communities. He said teachers want to be in their classrooms where they can have an impact on students, and educators and public health officials must be active participants in the discussion about reopening schools, as well as when and how to reenter classrooms. He opined that everyone's safety should be the top priority.

[11:24:57 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER said from July 17-22, 2020, NEA Alaska conducted a survey of its members to gauge feelings about reopening schools in their districts. There were over 3,500 responses from 39 different school districts across the state, and the responses varied. The response rate alone indicates the importance of the issue. He shared a key observation from the results of the survey was that over 76 percent of respondents had been informed about their districts' reopening plans. He said this is good; however, it does not speak to how involved teachers were in the discussions or whether their recommendations were followed. Of concern, he said, is that over 75 percent of respondents are "at least somewhat uncomfortable with reopening public schools in their district." Half of NEA Alaska's members indicated they are "very uncomfortable" with reopening; only 10 percent responded they were "completely comfortable" with a full reopening. He related that when asked their preference on how to reopen school in the fall, 47 percent favored an online or distance delivery; 34 percent favored a partial reopening, which is referred to as a "blended" or "hybrid" model. He reported only 16 percent of respondents preferred a full reopening. He

said the top three concerns were: personal safety; safety of family members; and the possibility of sick students or staff coming to school. He added that only 2.6 percent of respondents had no concerns.

[11:27:56 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER said school buildings exist because they are the best place to foster students' success, and they will continue to serve in that capacity but will need to be retrofitted and updated to ensure learning can happen safely. He said in some urban areas "flat funding" has created crowded classrooms, with up to 30 students in elementary school classrooms and 40 or more in secondary school classrooms. In rural Alaska, that flat funding has been exacerbated by the attrition of teachers and administrators, as well as rising healthcare costs. He said, "Public education has been in crisis response mode for years." Mr. Klaameyer relayed that more recently, funding specifically appropriated by Congress for COVID-19 response "was used to backfill the governor's veto." He clarified that rather than "preparing and protecting our kids for COVID," the funds, which are ultimately "one pot of money," will need to be used "to hold the line against the corrosive effects of inflation, rising energy costs, and healthcare costs."

MR. KLAAMEYER said over the summer, stakeholders have collaborated with DEED on the Smart Start plan, which prepares for various contingencies that districts may face in the upcoming school year. He said this narrative was "highjacked ... by national political rhetoric seeking ... to link school funding to a full reopening, without the concern of the safety of students or educators." He said this has eroded public confidence in schools, much consternation, unnecessary division, and has been detrimental to the planning process. He said Alaska educators know many districts will face challenges related to variables such as COVID presence, geography, and student density/capacity. He said some communities have taken deliberate measures to control exposure to COVID-19, while others are grappling with the impact of the virus on their communities and families. He said the infections suffered and untimely deaths occurring nationwide serve as a reminder of the stakes.

[11:31:22 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER stated that school reopening guidance should allow for local discretion and input from communities; however, it

should be based on scientific data, not political expediency. He said one shortcoming of the Smart Start structure is that it is advisory. He emphasized, "Ignored guidelines don't protect anyone." He said NEA Alaska is concerned about those districts in Alaska that seem to be forging ahead without following all the guidelines, "including one of the top five districts in the state."

MR. KLAAMEYER stated that with adequate resources and public health data supporting a safe return of students to schools, Alaska's educators stand ready to work with students. He considered that the opinions of public health experts ought to be taken into account to inform decisions and ensure the safety of students. He said in order to accomplish this, the absolute preconditions for reopening schools are twofold: One, scientific consensus that the virus has been sufficiently contained and local health infrastructure that can effectively address current and future outbreaks; and two, a plan to continue to contain the virus that includes robust COVID-19 testing, effective contact tracing, and case isolation within the school community, in coordination with large community and state efforts. He said elected officials must utilize and act upon available public health data to keep everyone safe. He said educators want to go back to classrooms, but only when confident that decisions regarding districts plans and frameworks are driven by CDC guidance and public health officials, like Dr. Zink.

[11:34:03 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER said he worries that a premature return to schools will directly impact the work of the governor's task force on educator attraction and retention. He said NEA Alaska has already had inquiries from teachers about the ramifications of early retirement, which they are considering rather than taking the risk of returning to schools not in compliance with health and safety protocols. He shared his military background and spoke of esprit de corps, in which everyone does his/her part. He said everyone involved in the education system works as a team to make learning happen safely and effectively. He expressed thankfulness for the governor's decision this past spring to close schools in response to the uncertainty of the pandemic. He said the result of that was that many lives potentially were saved, the healthcare system was not overwhelmed, and schools did not become centers for the spread of COVID-19.

[11:36:11 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER said districts scrambled to create continuity of education through remote classroom learning for the rest of the school year. Since then, DEED, district leaders, principals, and NEA Alaska's members have been working to capitalize on the lessons learned during that process to be ready for the possible continuation of remote learning in the fall. He mentioned development of the Alaska Smart Start structure; investments in computers and Internet connectivity to provide equitable access statewide; professional development from districts; the Alaska Staff Development Network and NEA Alaska; and a collaborative effort to provide an online community to provide the support and content needed by educators and to share resources statewide. He said distance education this fall, if necessary, will be much better than it was in the spring.

MR. KLAAMEYER said NEA Alaska is working on other measures with federal legislation to improve access in rural schools by being able to rebroadcast the Internet signal that goes through schools via "the e-rate" to students' homes. He indicated that NEA Alaska is developing a platform for shared resources, and he expressed appreciation for the commissioner's work in facilitating that. He expressed NEA Alaska's commitment to ensuring education to students and looking forward to the day when students can safely convene in person. He expressed his appreciation to the House Education Standing Committee for facilitating this conversation and inviting him to speak.

[11:39:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON noted that the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued guidelines for the functioning of schools in a safe manner. She asked Mr. Klaameyer to specify what he meant when he mentioned the scientific community.

MR. KLAAMEYER concurred that the AAP is a scientific source. He said CDC guidelines have been clear, and Dr. Zink's testimony covered many strategies being put in place "to accomplish that." He said it will probably be safe to return to school in communities where there has been little spread; it's the other communities where there has been spread that will pose difficulty. He said the Smart Start protocol is not being followed everywhere.

[11:43:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON offered her understanding that there is some indication that "the big research groups" feel that a danger to children is the long-term effect of being out of school. She said she supports making "a data-given decision," but pointed out the changing nature of the data. Meanwhile, she said, children are getting older, and Alaska is required by constitution to educate its children. She said she had spoken with an older, retired teacher, and she offered her understanding that "the older you get, the more likely you are to have effects from COVID." She asked whether anyone had considered giving the younger teachers with lower risk the opportunity to teach in the schools, and to have the teachers move between the classrooms.

MR. KLAAMEYER thanked Representative Johnson for the question. He said he thinks "those things" are going to vary by community based on what is happening in each community. He expressed his confidence in the ability to continue education by operating in a blended or remote environment. He emphasized that NEA Alaska is not proposing nothing be done; conversely, it is proposing "we do the best we can." Time and money have been invested to learn about remote learning, and more professional development will happen to ensure this can be done safely. This can protect older staff with underlying health concern and students who live with family members with underlying health concerns. Some parents are not comfortable with their children returning to school during the pandemic. He said accommodations need to be made to ensure those students get their education. He suggested students who need to learn remotely could be paired up with educators who need to teach remotely. He agreed with Representative Johnson that it would be a lengthy process [before a vaccine is developed].

[11:47:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND said the committee would next hear from Dr. Parady, followed by school superintendents.

[11:48:37 AM](#)

LISA S. PARADY, Ph.D., Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), co-presented a PowerPoint, entitled "Providing a Safe Smart Start for Alaska Public Schools 2020 -2021 District Plans." She directed attention to slide 2, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The AASA COVID-19 Recovery Task Force Guidelines for Reopening Schools: An opportunity to Transform Public Education

1. Plan for Multiple Reopening Scenarios and Contingencies to Ensure the Health, Safety and Well-Being of All Students and Staff
2. Build a COVID-19-Response Reopening Infrastructure Aligned with Changing Scenarios and Needs
3. Ensure Students' and Families' Equitable Access to Technology Required for Virtual Learning
4. Provide Continuing Support to Students and Adults to Address Their Immediate and Long-Term Physical, Psychological, Social and Emotional Needs
5. Ensure All Schools Are Trauma-Informed and Trauma-Skilled
6. Prepare for COVID-19-Related Changes in Human Resource Management and Practices
7. Offer Ongoing Personalized and Differentiated Professional Learning
8. Transform the Teaching-Learning-Assessment Process to Ensure Personalization, Engagement and Differentiation
9. Anticipate COVID-19-Related Budget and Fiscal Management Issues
10. Embrace a New Paradigm for Public Education

DR. PARADY stated that the Alaska Superintendents Association (ASA) serves to ensure high quality education for all children. She thanked all superintendents for their leadership through unprecedented times and encouraged support for them. She thanked Commissioner Johnson, Dr. Zink, and others for their guidance and support, and she extolled the benefit of collaboration when responding to a rapidly changing environment. She emphasized that "every plan is in process." She said district leaders must have the ability to react quickly. She noted that slide 2 shows the number of considerations being navigated. She said most district leaders have not had a break,

and they are dealing with a multitude of issues that upcoming speakers would address. She said ASCA hosts regular meetings for superintendents, principals, and statewide education leaders "for ongoing COVID communication collaboration." She said the Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN), a private, nonprofit organization, is supporting the return of school in August, providing three weeks of no-cost topical webinars covering a variety of subjects, along with tools for remote instruction. She said ASDN provided these webinars in the spring, and thousands of teachers and educators took part.

[11:52:07 AM](#)

DR. PARADY related that [the American Association of School Administrators, referred to as the National School Superintendents Association] (AASA) partnered with the [Alaska] Association of School Business Officials (ALASBO) and released estimates in June of likely costs of reopening schools in a COVID-19 pandemic environment. Taking into account health protocols, staffing needs, personal protection equipment (PPE), transportation, and childcare, the estimated total additional expense for an average national district would be \$1,778,000. She said she would provide a breakdown of that to the committee. She said schools will need additional funding to support this expense. She spoke of a roundtable with Senator Lisa Murkowski, who noted that pre-pandemic funding for schools was not sufficient, and it is certainly not adequate now. She indicated that approximately \$105 billion was in a U.S. Senate support package, and she expressed her hope that "all of us" can talk to the congressional delegation to encourage the package to go forward, "without strings." She said districts will continue to need funding, because "all of our collective focus is on the health and safety and ongoing learning of our students, our staffs, and our ... communities." She said she looks forward to continuing work with the committee on funding and policy issues, as well as other issues, including connectivity issues in remote areas.

[11:54:43 AM](#)

KERRY BOYD, Superintendent, Yukon-Koyukuk School District (YKSD), said she would cover the following topics: safety and health, scheduling childcare, essential needs students, CARES Act funding, loss of learning, and challenges. She offered an overview of YKSD, including its unique combination of urban and rural areas totaling over 70,000 square miles with 9 remote schools ranging in size from 12-90 [students]. She related that

the district already has 900 more students enrolled than its average; its special needs population and homeschool programs have doubled; and the height of its enrollment is not until August. She said the Raven Homeschool offices will be following local protocols in terms of whether they operate via distance education. The remote schools, being small, are better suited for social distancing.

11:57:14 AM

MS. BOYD, addressing the information on slides 4-5, remarked on the speed at which things can change during a pandemic and said currently the district was between a "green" [low risk] and "yellow" [medium risk] "opening." She said YKSD has stringent guidance in place; it does symptom and temperature checks at the door [of the schools], trains parents, holds classroom size to 8-10, with one exception at its largest school, which has 90 students, and where it will spread out those students. She said parents in village schools are anxious for their children to get back to school. When school was closed in March, the district did not have the infrastructure for distance delivery; while the Internet use was being gifted by the supplier, YKSD was not able to take advantage of it. It is working to build the infrastructure to prepare for future closure, but it is a slow process, she remarked.

MS. BOYD said communities in the district are being vigilant [in keeping out anyone with COVID-19] by patrolling waters and airplanes. Currently there is only one case. She said in order to get in or out of the villages, a person must have permission of the chief and community leaders. She said this presents a challenge. School is starting late, because teachers [coming to or returning to a district] are required to quarantine for 2 weeks in Fairbanks. She said there is a provision allowing communities with populations up to 1,000 to require additional restrictions for incoming and outgoing travelers. She said she believes this helps keep out COVID. She said she is aware of only one case in the district. She said the district is relying on self-reporting. She mentioned there is a stigma. She said the district is working with local health communities to develop a plan.

12:00:13 PM

MS. BOYD said at this time, YKSD's schools are scheduled to open at their regular hours Monday through Friday. She indicated that the schools will be sanitized frequently, and children will

be socially distanced on busses, as well as in classrooms. To minimize the spread of COVID-19, no travel is allowed for staff or students for the remainder of the year. She said the district ordered PPE months ago and will continue to order it. Plexiglass dividers are in place for administrative staff, with desks further apart. Sanitizing supplies have been sent out to the schools. She said the state has ordered cloth masks for every student and staff.

MS. BOYD said if the schools "go to yellow," then there will be stricter guidelines in place. She talked about a heat map but said it doesn't identify specific communities. She said the district is working with the local health community on this. She reiterated that YKSD is working on its Internet capacity. It is practicing Zoom meetings and online delivery inside classrooms while it has the Internet there to do so. She said teachers do have Internet in the district housing provided to them.

MS. BOYD addressed the issue of childcare. She spoke of the challenge to parents who are working and homeschooling when schools are shut down. She noted that Commissioner Johnson has given her a template to use that she said is helpful. She credited DEED, the association, and the medical community in meeting with superintendents. In terms of special needs, she said there is a plan in place now to be able to meet the needs of students, especially those with critical needs. She said with Raven Homeschool growing "from 170 to over double with special needs," there are currently five vacant positions. There was a learning period in March when the schools closed. Work has been done over the summer. Contingency plans have been considered for green, yellow, and red risk levels. She said in the first two weeks of school, students will be assessed, and learning plans will be created for each. The district will hire consultants to help get this big job done.

[12:04:43 PM](#)

MS. BOYD talked about social/emotional learning (SEL). She said there is only one counselor for its "nine river schools." There is one vacancy. She said YKSD coordinates with Tanana Community College (TCC). She indicated that staff is being trained, and there are challenges in this area. She said YKSD does not have a health nurse for any of its schools, and some villages do not have health clinics. She listed the partnership with TCC as a strength. She said Commissioner Johnson is helping YKSD get a townhall meeting to discuss and get answers to questions about

COVID-19 from the medical community. She relayed that about 20 percent of staff is over the age of 60; several staff had requested not to work. She said those who will want to leave for Christmas will end up out of school longer due to quarantine. She said the turnaround time for COVID-19 testing is running 6-10 days. She said a lot of work is being done overall, and the work continues because of the changes happening daily.

[12:06:52 PM](#)

JOHN CONWELL, Superintendent, Unalaska City School District (UCSD), picked up the PowerPoint, on slide 7, which read as follows [original punctuation provided, with some formatting changes]:

Plans developed with guidance from:

- Federal, state and local health and educational agencies
- City Risk Manager and local Emergency Operations Center
- Survey responses from UCSD families

Unified Incident Command Structure

Formed at the inception of the pandemic, this team met daily through the initial phase of the crisis and created a unified voice for local leaders that community members now look to for guidance.

Plans are EVOLVING

The plan will continue to evolve up to and after the first official day of school on August 19. The overarching goal of the plan is to provide in-person PK-12 education while protecting the health of employees, students and the community at large.

MR. CONWELL paraphrased advice Dr. Zink gave to school districts and superintendents, as follows: "Keep the essence of what you do alive, while keeping the spread of the coronavirus minimized." He said UCSD is effective at in-person instruction and less so with remote instruction. He explained this is because of the lack of adequate bandwidth. He said the district believes it can open its schools five days a week while practicing the safety protocols. It is working closely with its

local unified incident command structure and has access to local healthcare authorities, its city risk manager, and other experts in the community. He noted that the city's risk thresholds are more stringent than that of the state. Currently there has been no community spread in Unalaska, although there have been positive cases coming in on fishing trawlers and the ferry.

MR. CONWELL referred to the information on slide 8, which read as follows [original punctuation provided, with some formatting changes]:

August 12-15  
Professional development devoted to training in Smart Start Plan implementation.

Aug. 19-21  
"soft-opening" whereby only 2 classes per half day will attend to meet teachers and learn new Smart Start routines.

Low/Medium Risk Protocol Measures:

- Social distancing: 6 ft. spacing, plexiglass dividers,
- Face coverings: School buses, hallways, locker rooms and anywhere 6 ft distance isn't possible
- Personal hygiene: Proper handwashing measures
- Temperature and health screenings: Family "care kits"
- Visitors: Face masks, social distancing, secured access
- Recess: Encouraged outdoor recreation
- Social Emotional Learning/Mental Health: instruction incorporated daily when feasible
- Training for personnel devoted to Smart Start
- Training for students first days devoted to Smart Start education
- Remote Education an option for families

MR. CONWELL talked about creating a fun environment for learning amidst these safety measures.

[12:11:38 PM](#)

MR. CONWELL directed attention to slide 9, which read as follows [original punctuation provided, with some formatting changes]:

If the Emergency Operations Center elevates local risk to HIGH, schools would need to pivot to home-based education much like last spring.

Our current planning includes the implementation of measures that would seek to improve on the home-based learning experience from last spring.

High Risk Protocol Measures:

- Home-based education for all students
- Adoption of standardized learning platforms for online, district supported for K-4 and 5-12.
- Transitioning to a hybrid 1:1 computer device program
- Offer Alaska Statewide Virtual System as a distance learning option
- Maintain a daily class schedule with limited flexibility for special circumstances
- Re-launch the homework and removable drive exchange program
- Continued partnership with KUCB Channel 8 to broadcast educational content that is developed locally or from PBS

[12:13:28 PM](#)

BRIDGET WEISS, Ph.D., Superintendent, Juneau School District (JSD), continued the PowerPoint, bringing attention to the information on slide 12, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

JUNEAU: BLENDED MODEL

- ELEMENTARY: 4 HALF DAYS
- MS/HS: AB SCHEDULE
- ALL SCHOOLS: WEDNESDAY AS AN E LEARNING DAY FOR STUDENTS
- CONSIDERATIONS MADE:
- STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS WILL ATTEND FULL DAY, 4 DAYS A WEEK AT ELEMENTARY
- ADDITIONAL DAYS AS POSSIBLE AT MS/HS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
- ISSUES: SAFETY AND EQUITY JUNEAU: BLENDED MODEL
- ELEMENTARY: 4 HALF DAYS
- MS/HS: AB SCHEDULE

- ALL SCHOOLS: WEDNESDAY AS AN E LEARNING DAY FOR STUDENTS
- CONSIDERATIONS MADE:
  - STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS WILL ATTEND FULL DAY, 4 DAYS A WEEK AT ELEMENTARY
  - ADDITIONAL DAYS AS POSSIBLE AT MS/HS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
  - ISSUES: SAFETY AND EQUITY

DR. WEISS explained that with four, half days for elementary students, the fifth day would be used for teachers to prepare and train and for staff to disinfect the buildings. She said the decision was based on the vulnerability of elementary school children, in terms of their learning needs and capacity for learning development. She explained that two full days would have left them with too big a gap between learning sessions. She explained "AB SCHEDULE" for high school students meant they would be attending school full days, two days a week. She emphasized the difficulty in making these decisions regarding time in school versus distance learning the remainder of the week. She said when the risk level drops, the district may be able to increase the number of days students have in-person learning at school. She said the district is constantly balancing equity and safety.

[12:16:14 PM](#)

DR. WEISS turned to slide 13, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

CHILDCARE, CARES \$ AND OUR MOST VULNERABLE

- CHILDCARE
  - SIGNIFICANT challenge!
  - WORKING WITH CBJ TASK FORCE
  - DEVELOPING STRUCTURE FOR STAFF—but not sure yet how to support it financially
- CARES
  - Developed a 1:1 device program
  - PPE for buildings and personnel
  - NOT enough—we will need additional funding for staff and academic recovery

DR. WEISS said the district seldom disrupts the support structures families have regarding childcare; [closure of in-person classroom learning] affects families in the long term.

Further, she noted that there are approximately 80 staff members with children in the district. Regarding expenditure of CARES Act funds, she said the 1:1 devices that were purchased addressed the issue of equity, and she relayed that the district brought 500 "humanity shields" and is prepared to purchase more if needed. She acknowledged Co-Chair Story's previous remarks concerning the lack of funds in the district prior to the pandemic, and she emphasized that the district needs financial support.

[12:19:26 PM](#)

DR. WIESS introduced slide 14, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

#### RESPOND, REBOOT, AND RECOVERY

- Current response effort is something we have never done before:

- Distance delivery, home schooling options, special education needs, curricular strategies with blended model, mitigation in environments where the guidelines are nearly impossible

- Reboot:

- We hope to learn from our experiences and be better for it in the end, but in the here and now we are asking A LOT from every individual in our organizations. And the real threat of loss of enrollment and the impact to our funding is daunting.

- RECOVERY:

- The stages of recovery will take on a life of their own as we proceed: we need support now in order to deliver high quality instruction with the level of mitigation necessary for safety, however...as we proceed, the losses will take time to recoup. Summer of 2021 will be a critical stretch of time for us to augment learning opportunities and the cost is going to be a huge challenge.

DR. WEISS emphasized that students would be starting back to school after five months of no structured learning and emotional support environment. She pointed out there have not been typical social environments like Sunday school and summer camps.

She talked about the programs necessary in summer of 2021 and the money that would be necessary to fund them.

[12:20:52 PM](#)

TERRI WALKER, Superintendent, Northwest Arctic Borough School District (NABSD), continued with the PowerPoint and drew attention to the information on slide 16, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

#### Mission

The Northwest Arctic Borough School District's mission is to provide a learning environment that inspires and challenges students and employees to excel.

#### Priorities for Reopening

- Safety and security of students, staff, and community
- Social and emotional well-being of our students and staff
- Targeted instruction for students using platforms that can be used in classrooms and remotely

MS. WALKER noted that there are 2,000 students spread out over 39,000 square miles in NABSD. She moved on to slide 17, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

#### Flexible Learning Plan

- Extended start date
- School will start on August 20, 2020
- Orientation for parents/students the first two days
- Staggered schedules
- 1:1 electronic device for each student K-12
- Middle/High school block schedule
- Blended learning model

MS. WALKER said the August 20 start is late because teachers need to quarantine. She spoke of the necessity of responding to various risk levels during the pandemic. Regarding the orientation, she said parents would meet teachers and learn about devices, schedules, safety protocols, and the meal service plan. She said the staggered schedules would be two days a week in classroom and three days a week distance learning. Each student will have an iPad. The middle school and high school students will have three classes per "quarter" totaling six

classes in a "semester." This was a plan to avoid overwhelming students trying to cover six classes at home.

[12:25:15 PM](#)

MS. WALKER directed attention to slide 18, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Medium Risk Opening

- Practice protocols and expectations
- Cohort rostering and staggered scheduling
- On-site and remote teaching
- Blended learning lessons
- Social and emotional needs of students
- Meals at home and in-school
- Provide information and training
- Safety measures in place

MS. WALKER noted that the district had spent CARES Act funds on face masks, gowns for the special needs department, gloves, and disinfectant. She indicated the district had also spent money on long-distance audio calls to connect teachers with students without Internet "last year." She said the district does not have the funds to provide a counselor at each site, so it bought a SEL program for its elementary students, having already purchased it for high school students. It has purchased iPads for each student. The district anticipates costs for hotel and per diem of employees on layover in Kotzebue and Anchorage for COVID-19 testing. She said the district issued "a number of EDCs" for principals and teachers to work over the summer and assist with the Smart Start plan. She emphasized that COVID expenses would far exceed the amount the district has received from CARES Act funds; it will not cover the expense necessary to keep students safe over the next school year, including Internet access and ongoing supplies.

[12:29:31 PM](#)

DEENA M. BISHOP, Ed.D., Superintendent, Anchorage School District (ASD), took over the PowerPoint presentation and said she would speak to risk level decision-making and ASD's response to schooling and safety. She directed attention to slide 21, which shows two matrixes regarding risk assessment. She said that with input from medical and science professionals, ASD created a response and decision-making matrix. She brought attention to the left-hand side of the matrix and pointed to the

three colors indicating the municipality's alert levels created by DHSS: high [red], intermediate [orange], and low [yellow]. On the right side she pointed to DEED's risk levels for ASD: high [red], medium-high and medium-low [yellow], and low [green]. She said the state's dashboard provides the modeling and matrix per cases over a 14-day mean; as of last week, a 7-day average was also provided. She said ASD utilizes a more stable look at alert levels; the two are side by side in order that the community "can understand the decision-making." She said ASD has broken down the 300,000-person population into the number of new cases daily averaged over 15 days. She referred again to the yellow medium-risk level on the right and said, "We wanted to engage our community as much as possible, but with a slow start, so that our staff, students, and families feel safe and are comfortable with the protocols."

DR. BISHOP moved on to slide 22, which showed the ASD School Start Risk Level Response Plan for low, medium-low, medium-high, and high risk, and for ASD at school or ASD at home. The latter has a new virtual program, as well as enrollment choice in one of ASD's three home schools. She said, "The ASD at home is for families that want to stay connected to their home school but don't feel necessarily comfortable." She stated, "We are operating this on a cohort model, as suggested by Dr. Zink." She compared it to a one-room schoolhouse.

[12:32:56 PM](#)

DR. BISHOP directed attention to slide 23, which is a response matrix based on the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases. She said two weeks ago she announced a high-medium risk level, and with the rise in numbers, she predicted ASD would be moving into the high-risk category. She noted that the matrix shows remarks based on the number of cases, as well as the assumptions that inform those remarks. A high-risk model does not mean everyone will be at home, she said. Students would "begin at home," and ASD staff would report to the buildings and use the Internet provided by the school. She said the district would plan time for parents to come in to meet teachers for the new school year, and safety protocols would be followed. She said ASD staff will be wearing masks. Those who choose not to are invited "to utilize the virtual at-home program." She added that those who cannot wear masks for medical reasons would be provided with waivers.

[12:35:28 PM](#)

BETH LOUGEE, Superintendent, Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District (KGBSD), resumed the PowerPoint presentation by showing slide 25. She said KGBSD serves approximately 2,300 students from preschool through twelfth grade and offers a wide variety of programming in its three elementary schools, two charter schools, two middle schools, one high school, and one junior/senior alternative school. She said the district also provides a homeschool correspondence program, called "Fasttrack," and provides online courses via its digital academy platform. Ms. Lougee said the district employs over 400 permanent, full-time staff and over 150 temporary or substitute personnel, many of whom are graduates of the district's school system. She said KGBSD is the second-largest employer in Ketchikan. She said the district has responsibility to enter into fall schooling with a careful plan that will ensure the health and safety of students, staff, and community, and for that reason, the district has been working closely since March with the local emergency operations command, the Ketchikan Education Association (KEA), parents, local agencies, DEED, ASA, and the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), as well as state and local public health experts.

MS. LOUGEE turned attention to slide 26, which shows a learning plan timeline for KGBSD. She spoke about the information on slide 27, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The district's top priority is providing for the needs of our students, families, staff, and community during this time, charting a path forward for educating our students, and keeping them safe at the same time. We are committed to doing what we need to do to accomplish this.

Considerations and Challenges:

- Planning time and training for different tiers of instruction
- Resources to support the different tiers of instruction (staff, space, PPE)
- Managing the daily changes with updated information due to new recommendations and restrictions

MS. LOUGEE said KGBSD will provide each student with a device to access learning remotely, and it will acquire additional space to facilitate on-site student attendance. She said public input asks for a variety of options in the fall. The district will need to respond to all scenarios, and "there is no one-size-fits-all model." She said the district is taking a blended

approach and plans to provide: onsite instruction Monday through Thursday, with Friday serving as a distance-learning day for students, a professional development/planning day for teachers, and day for disinfecting schools; district learning for all families not able to facilitate onsite schooling; small bubbles in classrooms, with limited congregate settings; increased health and safety measures; and onsite schedules structured around the needs of each grade level and often around each student. She named barriers to success as the level of risk of COVID-19 at the beginning of the year that may constrain the district's on-site efforts; the level of risk to staff and students, some of whom are high risk; and the limited resources on hand "to be able to quickly redesign education as we know it."

[12:39:36 PM](#)

MS. LOUGEE referred to slide 17 [but covered material not on that slide] regarding the district's use of CARES Act funding, which was a total of \$588,598 for fiscal year 2020 (FY 20). She related that minus the private school allocation, the district was left with approximately \$564,938 in expendable funds. Of that, the district will have less than \$150,000 to carry into FY 21. She said, "All of those costs are currently encumbered to cover the cost of PPE, sanitation, online and distance-learning tools, and additional staff time." She said the district expects to incur \$500,000 in additional expenses to provide for space, materials, training, sanitization, devices, additional supplies and equipment, and staffing needs to ensure a safe environment for all. She expressed appreciation for the allocation of money through the CARES Act but said it does not cover everything. She said the shortage of money is compounded by Governor Dunleavy's veto of the supplemental appropriation. She emphasized that the district must have additional resources. She thanked the local borough assembly and mayor for supporting the district with an allocation of \$258,100 in additional CARES Act funds. She said schools provide students and the community with more than reading, writing, and math, and she asked the committee for its continued consideration for the needs of KBGSD in making it through this challenge and creating a more effective education system for all students.

[12:42:35 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND asked for more details regarding the private school support subtracted from the CARES Act allocation.

MS. LOUGEE said she would have to get back to Co-Chair Drummond with details.

[12:43:14 PM](#)

JOHN O'BRIEN, Ph.D., Superintendent, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD), directed attention to slide 29 of the current PowerPoint and said he would discuss the district's Smart Start plan and the "serious fiscal concerns facing most of Alaska's school districts." He turned to slide 30 and said the Smart Start startup plan was unanimously approved by the KPBSD Board of Education on July 13, 2020. The plan will see many revisions throughout the school year as new medical information is gained and the science and situation revolving the pandemic fluxes. He said the first revision will likely be the requirement for all staff members and older students to wear face coverings through all risk levels, green through red. He stated that many of the same provisions discussed by former superintendent speakers are also incorporated in the KPBSD plan.

[12:45:14 PM](#)

CLAYTON HOLLAND, Assistant Superintendent, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, stated that KPBSD has a comprehensive plan and information that can be found on its web page. Its school work group consists of 20 core members, including school leaders, health experts, and the union president. All staff, parents, and students were surveyed in May and June, with over 3,000 responses; a statewide PTA survey was reviewed; and there has been consultation with numerous other district leaders and members of the community. He thanked Dr. Zink and Commissioner Johnson for their involvement. He said equity is sought for all students when considering a plan. He said KPBSD comprises 42 diverse schools across a vast area, and not everyone has the same access to technology or support at home. He emphasized the importance of parent choice in the district, and named three choices: in-person learning, five days a week; remote learning at neighboring schools; and homeschooling. He said there is flexibility to move between these choices as risk and comfort level changes. He said KPBSD also focuses on continuity and consistency in learning. He indicated that students' ability to know when they are going to be at school is key to their social and emotional learning. Mr. Holland said the district is concerned with safety and wellbeing. Further, he emphasized the importance of flexibility as new information becomes available.

[12:49:27 PM](#)

DAVE JONES, Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Support, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, directed attention to slide 31, which read as follows [original punctuation provided, with some formatting changes]:

Issue

- Neighborhood school enrollment shift to our KPBSD Connections Homeschool
- Neighborhood school enrollment loss to nonKPBSD statewide correspondence programs Solutions
- Short term: FY21 Hold Harmless for declining enrollment districts
- Long term: FY22 enrollment based on prior year actual enrollment

Decreased funding = reduction of staff and educational opportunities

What if: when the COVID19 pandemic risk is over, possibly mid-year, and students want to return to KPBSD neighborhood schools

MR. JONES said teachers and staff are scheduled to return for in-service on August 11. Staffing is based on pupil/teacher ratios, and salaries and benefits equal approximately 82 percent of the district's total expenditure budget. He said based on last year's enrollments, the district predicts it will have 8,573 students in FY 21; 7,763, or roughly 91 percent, were predicted to be in KPBSD's neighborhood schools; 810, or 9 percent, were predicted to be in the district's Connections Homeschool. He said the concern in any year is whether the revenue the district receives from "the October 20 day count" will support the expenditures for which the district has already predicted and to which the district has made a commitment. He stated, "I believe this lag in the revenue determination is the one inherent weakness in the current foundation funding formula." He continued:

This year, the revenue concerns have been heightened by the volume of calls we have already received from parents expressing concerns of having their children attend the in-person neighborhood schools and potentially be exposed to the coronavirus. What we have been hearing is parents saying they are going to protect their children by placing them in homeschool correspondence classes until the coronavirus concerns pass, and then return to their neighborhood schools.

At this time, it would appear that any resolution to the coronavirus crisis will last until at least after the October 20 day count period. If students move to our KPBSD Connections Homeschool program from our neighborhood school, it's better than if they move to a non-KPBSD statewide program, but for the Connections students, we will only receive 90 percent of the [base student allocation] (BSA) value for those students, and they will not be put through the multipliers within the foundation formula, which will be a significant revenue loss for KPBSD.

On the other hand, if they choose a non-KPBSD statewide correspondence program, we will receive no funding for FY 21, but we will be expected to provide educational services when those students return to our neighborhood schools after the coronavirus crisis resolves. This revenue loss concern is especially alarming, because our current FY 21 general fund budget deficit is expected to eliminate all our unassigned fund balance.

MR. JONES said KPBSD would like to see a hold harmless revenue plan for districts with declining enrollments, so that they can fund the commitments they have made based on pre-pandemic enrollments. For the long term, he suggested revenue be based on the prior year's actual enrollment, which would help districts plan for declining enrollments. He shared that a similar funding model in another state provides districts the opportunity to recalculate support if they have an enrollment increase of 10 percent or greater.

[12:54:10 PM](#)

SHAWN ARNOLD, Superintendent, Valdez City Schools (VCS); President, Alaska Superintendents Association, said he has worked with all the presenters to "make the best of the situation" and look out for students. He said there are no easy answers, but he emphasized that [districts] are in a better place now than they were entering spring break in March 2020. Mr. Arnold directed attention to slide 33, which read [in part] as follows [original punctuation provided]:

#### Phase Transition Considerations

- Prevalence in Community
- Average Daily Number of Positive Cases

- Daily Hospitalizations
- Number of patients in ICU
- Staff/Student Absences

#### Components of Each Phase Include

- Health and Safety Protocols
  - Parent and Family Engagement
  - Wraparound Support and Community Services
  - Transportation
  - Trauma Informed Practices/ Social and Emotional Needs
- 
- Welcome Back Planning
  - Connections with Stakeholders

MR. ARNOLD discussed the phases shown on the righthand side of slide 33, [phases 1 through 5]. He said part of the role of educators and local leaders is "to match what the community wants," and he said one of the requests from the community was "to set a definitive number" [regarding risk factors]. He explained that in terms of a Smart Start framework, VCS's phase 1 and 2 are considered low risk; phase 3 is medium risk, and phase 4 is high risk. He said the numbers shown can be "deceptive." He explained that VCS depends on the input of a variety of experts, including local stakeholders, medical experts, a phase-in committee, local physicians, and nurses, including an infectious disease nurse. Further, VCS is attempting to contract with an epidemiologist for advice. It is considering "multiple ... factors based on local condition" and makes its adjustments within its schools based on recommendation.

MR. ARNOLD said Valdez has a transient population of people who work in the fishing and oil industries, but "many of those individuals don't interact with any of the households within our community." He said Valdez has been lucky to have had limited COVID-19 cases.

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MR. ARNOLD turned to slide 34, which shows an overview of the previously mentioned phases from slide 33. Instructional leave will be changed depending on the phases. He said there is concern that even with limited cases in Valdez, students and staff may be at risk, and VCS wants to give its support by offering options. There is an at-home option wherein students

can "check in live" and teachers can check in with students at home. There is also a local homeschool program.

MR. ARNOLD moved on to slide 35, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

#### Considerations and Challenges

- Planning time and training for multiple tiers of instruction:
  - In-class instruction
  - Fully virtual
  - Hybrid of the two
  
- Adequate supplies and staffing available to support healthy hygiene practices, and to routinely clean and disinfect objects and surfaces.
- Support from local health officials to review and update plans, and to determine if or when to dismiss schools.
- Physical, social, and emotional well-being of staff and students.
- Reacclimatizing students and staff back to physical settings, new routines.
- Managing expectations and logistical issues.
- Re-entry plan changes as more information becomes available and as recommendations and restrictions evolve.

MR. ARNOLD talked about bringing teachers back early and the challenges of learning online delivery of classes. He questioned whether there is time to adequately train staff. He described the challenges of finding products for purchase in the state, such as plexiglass and various styles of hand sanitizer pumps. He said there is no local labor pool for increasing staff needed, for example, for sanitizing the schools; some are making more on unemployment than they would be starting with the district.

MR. ARNOLD offered his understanding that VCS is receiving approximately \$170,000 in CARES Act funds. A big portion of that has been allocated for a school nurse. He said teachers are being asked to make determinations about whether a child may have signs of COVID-19, and medical support for that is important. Regarding support from local health officials, he stated, "We wouldn't be able to do it if we didn't have the resources available at our community." He said he can imagine

what a challenge it would be for any school without a nurse. He talked about social distancing and the need for continual evolution with time. He offered to answer questions.

1:06:05 PM

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked all the presenters. She remarked there were more than the typical amount of people listening to the meeting telephonically. She stated that on July 10, 2020, the American Academy of Pediatrics changed its guidance on school opening from its previous guidance of June 29, and she highlighted that it had already been two weeks since July 10; therefore, she predicted there would continue to be rapid change necessitating everyone's attention to "what's going on out there in terms of information that is critical to the health of our children."

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND read from an article by National Public Radio (NPR), entitled "The Nation's Pediatricians Walk Back to the Court for In-Person School," as follows:

The previous guidance was criticized for saying little about the safety of educators and other school personnel. Friday's statement ..., co-signed by the two national teacher unions and ASA, ... calls for putting educators, as well as other stakeholders, at the center of decision making. It emphasized that reopening safely will take more money. We call on Congress and the Administration to provide the federal resources needed to ensure that inadequate funding does not stand in the way of safely educating and caring for children in our schools.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND said she thinks the committee has heard from almost all the superintendents that spoke today that money is an issue. She said she is not aware of what Congress would do, but "we clearly need help," and "it's good to know what school districts are doing around the state in order to advocate for that additional assistance."

1:09:27 PM

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 1:09 p.m.