

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT MEETING
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

March 28, 2022

8:33 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Roger Holland, Chair
Senator Shelley Hughes
Senator Peter Micciche

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky (via teleconference)
Representative Mike Prax
Representative Mike Cronk
Representative Ronald Gillham

MEMBERS ABSENT

SENATE MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Tom Begich

HOUSE MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Grier Hopkins

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Dan Ortiz

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: ANNUAL UPDATE FROM THE ALASKA COUNCIL OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

DR. LISA PARADY, Executive Director
Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced the ACSA presentation.

DR. BOBBY BOLEN, President
Alaska Superintendents Association (ASA)
Superintendent, Bering Strait School District
Unalakleet, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a status update as part of the Alaska Council of School Administrators.

BRENDAN WILSON, President
Alaska Council of School Administrators
President, Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals
Principal, Begich Middle School
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a status update as part of the Alaska Council of School Administrators.

JENNIFER RINALDI, President
Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals (AAESP)
Principal, Willow Elementary School
Willow, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a status update as part of the Alaska Council of School Administrators.

ANDY RATLIFF, President
Alaska Association of School Business Officials (ALASBO)
Senior Director, Office of Management and Budget
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a status update as part of the Alaska Council of School Administrators.

SAM JORDAN, Grants and Outreach Administrator
Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN)
Alaska Council of School Administrators
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a status update as part of the Alaska Council of School Administrators.

ROBIN JONES, Principal
Chief Ivan Blunka School
Southwest Region School District
New Stuyahok, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a gift made by school students.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:33:00 AM](#)

CHAIR ROGER HOLLAND called the joint meeting of the Senate and House Education Standing Committees to order at 8:33 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Micciche, Hughes, and Chair Holland; and Representatives Gillham, Cronk, Prax, and Co-Chairs Drummond and Story. Representative Zulkosky arrived (via teleconference) as the meeting was in progress. Representative Ortiz was also present.

PRESENTATION: Annual Update from the Alaska Council of School Administrators

[8:34:17 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND announced the presentation, Annual Update from the Alaska Council of School Administrators. He invited Dr. Parady, the council's executive director, to begin the PowerPoint presentation.

[8:34:56 AM](#)

DR. LISA PARADY, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), Juneau, Alaska, introduced ACSA, stating the council is a private, nonprofit, 50-year-old organization created to represent the collective voice of school administrators across the state.

DR. PARADY advanced to slide 2, stating the mission of ACSA is leadership, unity, and advocacy for public education; advocacy is the focus of this fly-in. The members are excited to share the highest priorities of public education today.

MS. PARADY advanced to slide 3, ACSA represents the following associations:

Alaska Superintendents Association
Represented today by Dr. Bobby Bolen

Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals

Represented today by Brendan Wilson

Alaska Association of Elementary School Principal
Represented today by Jennifer Rinaldi

Alaska Association of School Business Officials
Represented today by Andy Ratliff

Alaska Staff Development Network
Represented today by Sam Jordan

DR. PARADY advanced to slide 4, One State: 54 School Districts, which showed a map of Alaska and the school districts therein. She reminded legislators that members are committed to represent the health, safety, student achievement needs, and well-being of all students, not just the needs of each member's individual school district and community.

DR. PARADY advanced to slide 5, 2022 Joint Position Statements, explaining student achievement is ACSA's number one priority, and adequate funding remains ACSA's most critical need. The following presenter's messages center around the:

Joint Position Statements:
Unified Priorities for Supporting Alaska Students

Developed collaboratively each year by:

- Superintendents
- PK-12 Principals
- School Business Officials
- ACSA

DR. PARADY said that priorities change each year according to needs in public education; for example, there was a priority change related to social-emotional learning this year as a result of COVID. She introduced the next presenter, Dr. Bolen.

[8:38:14 AM](#)

DR. BOBBY BOLEN, President, Alaska Superintendents Association (ASA), Superintendent, Bering Strait School District, Unalakleet, Alaska, gave a status update as part of the Alaska Council of School Administrators. He qualified his work experience, stating he has 24 years in education, 14 years in the Bering Strait School District, and the last eight years as superintendent.

[8:38:39 AM](#)

DR. BOLEN advanced to slide 7, the ASA 9-Member Board:

Dr. Bobby Bolen
President
Bering Strait School District

Kerry Boyd
Past-President
Yukon-Koyukuk School District

Dr. Bridget Weiss
President-Elect
Juneau School District

Scott MacManus
Secretary/Treasurer
Alaska Gateway School District

Dan Polta
Director, Seat A
Denali Borough School District

Bill Hill
Director, Seat B
Bristol Bay School District

Terri Walker
Director, Seat C
Northwest Arctic Borough School District

Patrick Mayer
Director, Seat D
Aleutians East Borough School District

Dr. Randy Trani
Director, Seat E
Mat-Su School District

[8:39:08 AM](#)

DR. BOLEN advanced to slide 8, Increasing Bandwidth in Under-served Areas:

- 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.

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

DR. BOLEN said that superintendents support House Bill 363 and are excited to sit at the table to discuss the opportunities to support the federal [Infrastructure, Investment, and Jobs Act] and the opportunities it might provide the students of Alaska.

[8:39:45 AM](#)

DR. BOLEN advanced to slide 9, Closing the Opportunity Gap - Equity and reviewed the following:

- The sudden shift to virtual learning during the pandemic has highlighted 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.
- There is no such thing as unlimited internet in rural Alaska!
- All communities should have equitable and critical infrastructure to support online learning!

DR. BOLEN advanced to slides 10 and 11, Career and Technical Education (CTE) and reviewed the following points:

- CTE for both rural and urban schools is critical to high academic standards and Alaska's economic growth and stability.
- Collaboration through professional learning with DEED, the Department of Labor & Workforce Development, and the University of Alaska with educators and industry-based professionals is needed for the academic integration of rigorous and relevant curriculum.
- ACSA fully supports continued funding for voluntary internships and pre-apprenticeship programs that prepare students for high-earning, high-demand jobs.

- The alignment of CTE programs to meet the needs of local, tribal, regional, and state labor markets through this collaboration is also important for improving on-time graduation rates, higher career earnings, and decreasing dropout percentages.
- CTE programs provide students with the foundation for high-paying, skilled jobs
- Robust CTE programs are a critical component of schools with high academic performance and high graduation rates
- Gives students the opportunity to build future-ready skills in and for Alaska

DR. BOLEN reviewed the points on slide 12, New Superintendent and Pipeline Support Programs:

- New and Incoming Superintendent Support: To address the leadership turnover within Alaska's superintendent ranks, ASA provides voluntary in-depth on the job learning opportunities to first and second year superintendents relevant to the Alaska school district and superintendent experience and provides individual support through a research-based mentoring program
- Aspiring Superintendent Cohort Support
- District Office Cohort Support

[8:42:31 AM](#)

BRENDAN WILSON, President, Alaska Council of School Administrators, President, Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals (AASSP), Principal, Begich Middle School, Anchorage, Alaska, gave a status update as part of the Alaska Council of School Administrators, stating Begich Middle School is the largest middle school in the state and also one the most diverse middle schools in the country. It is diverse in its range of ethnicities and scope of learning modalities. He praised House Bill 19 which enabled Begich Middle School to be the first middle school in Anchorage to welcome a class of Chinese immersion students.

[8:43:06 AM](#)

MR. WILSON advanced to slide 14, AASSP's Board Members, stating the association prides itself on representing all Alaska regions and keeping the executive board balanced between large and small districts:

Brendan Wilson
President
Begich Middle School

Robin Jones
Past-President
Chief Ivan Blunka School

Rick Dormer
President-Elect
Petersburg High School

Roger Franklin
Region I Director
Shungnak School

Jennifer Mason
Region II Director
Peak and Cantwell Schools

Heather Norton
Region III Director
Kodiak Middle School

Robyn Harris
Region IV Director
Whaley High School

Dave Dershin
Region VI Director
Randy Smith Middle School

Shelli Lincoln
Region VIII Director
Burchell High School

Robyn Taylor
NAASSP Region Coordinator
Hutchison High School

Clarice Louden-Mingo

AP at Large
Lathrop High School

[8:43:22 AM](#)

MR. WILSON began with a position statement on school safety, showing a picture of eroding shorelines near Napakiak School. He stated that school safety presents two distinct but connected issues, student safety and facility safety. Begich Middle School is a gorgeous, modern facility built in 2007 thanks to bond debt reimbursement. He contrasted it to schools in rural Alaska that need upgrades to meet basic standards. He advanced to slides 15 and 16, School Safety, and reviewed the following points:

- ACSA supports improving the safety, physical and mental well-being of our children, knowing this is critical to increasing student achievement.
- ACSA supports increased 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 supports providing school communities and their school safety partners with quality information, resources, consultation, and training services.
- ACSA urges that all safety improvements including air and water quality be made a priority
- Adequate staffing and training for law enforcement and OCS is important for the safety of our staff and students.
- Several national polls find that at least one-third of educators have been physically or verbally threatened this year.
- The average school in Alaska is 40 years old. Water and air quality was already a concern before the pandemic.
- Providing a welcoming, caring environment remains the most effective way to make our students feel safe. School safety depends on having great

educators, mental health supports, and up-to-date facilities.

- School safety is linked with every other important educational issue.

[8:44:45 AM](#)

MR. WILSON said the following joint position statement focuses on preparing, attracting, and retaining qualified educators. He was asked to switch to Begich Middle School to address the high teacher turnover, among other reasons. In his first year at the school, he had to hire 18 new teachers out of a staff of 55, which is nearly equal to the turnover seen in rural Alaska. He said the issue is very personal and important.

MR. WILSON advanced to slides 17 and 18, Preparing, Attracting, and Retaining Qualified Educators, and reviewed the following:

- Retaining effective educators and leaders is imperative to increase student achievement and eliminate academic disparity for all of Alaska's students.
- ACSA strongly encourages the development of comprehensive statewide programs to prepare, attract, and retain high quality, diverse educators and professionals.
- ACSA further recommends strengthening statewide and national recruiting efforts along with a renewed commitment to growing our own educators, teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, principals, and superintendents.
- ACSA supports aligned and accredited University of Alaska Schools of Education. Exploring innovative alternative pathways is paramount to attracting high quality educators to the state and the education profession to address Alaska's unique circumstances.
- A nationally competitive compensation and benefits package, combined with a robust state retirement system is imperative for attracting and retaining effective educators and leaders.

- A 2021 report by the Wallace Foundation found that after teachers, effective principals have the highest impact on student achievement.
- Effective principals are a key factor in teacher recruitment and retention.

[8:45:54 AM](#)

MR. WILSON advanced to slide 19, Annual Turnover Rates (Percent). The slide showed two charts. One chart depicted teacher/principal turnover rates from 2012 to 2021. The other chart compared turnover in these areas of Alaska: rural-remote, rural-hub/fringe, urban-fringe, and urban areas. He said the data for last year shows a decrease in turnover. These figures are a little misleading as they reflect the esprit de corps surrounding the difficult circumstances of COVID. He does not know an educator who will not tell you that this year is much harder than last year. He fears the turnover numbers will trend back up.

Slide 19 read:

Turnover rates for both teachers and principals reduced last year, but the gap between urban and rural schools remains large.

MR. WILSON advanced to slide 20, Alaska Statewide Leadership Development that read as follows:

Designed to provide early-career principals with a collegial cohort that is engaged in networking, skill building and mutual support.

MR. WILSON advanced to slide 21, Principals Supported 2018 to 2021. This program supported 103 new assistant and head principals, served 65 percent of school districts, and helped 85 schools over the last four years:

- Four cohorts
- 2-year induction

| | |
|------------|----------------------------|
| 103 | New Principals |
| 65 percent | of Alaska School Districts |
| 85 | Alaska Schools |

This slide showed a map with the schools the Alaska Statewide Leadership Development serves.

[8:47:22 AM](#)

MR. WILSON advanced to slide 22, stating that the Alaska School Leadership Academy (ASLA) has three pillars of research-based design:

ASLA Design

| | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| PERSONALIZED MENTORING | PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING | ADVANCEMENT OF LEADERSHIP SKILLS |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|

He explained that personalized mentoring involves pairing an experienced principal with an inexperienced principal. They get the opportunity to converse privately; conversations are not shared with supervisors and are kept confidential. The professional network enables staff to learn and grow, problem-solving with each other. A series of professional development sessions are held online, covering topics like evaluating staff, building school culture, and striving for cycles of continuous improvement.

MR. WILSON advanced to slide 23, The Mutual Value of Mentoring. He stated that the mentorship program is a reciprocal process. It is a well-established fact that there is no better way to learn something than to teach it to someone else. The mentor grows through the process of guiding and coaching too. The slide read:

"The process of being a mentor is helping me be a better principal in my building with my staff. I am reflecting on how often I am guiding and supervising versus allowing staff to come up with answers. I have transferred some mentoring strategies to working with my own staff."

In a single year:

33 Mentors
767 Mentor Contacts
509 Hours of Mentoring

[8:48:37 AM](#)

MR. WILSON advanced to slide 24, Ways the State Can Help, which read:

Continue to enhance our educator pipeline so we can enhance "grow our own."

Continue to explore alternative pathways to teacher certification.

Invest in infrastructure that helps attract and keep teachers: better facilities, housing, and broadband are all factors in rural Alaska.

Help us get more competitive with compensation, especially by returning to a defined-benefit retirement system.

MR. WILSON closed his presentation by sharing a story about a recent trip to Washington, D.C., where he met with Congressman Don Young shortly before his passing. He told the congressman that he did not expect to get rich in education; however, he could count on excellent health care and a stable retirement. It offered assurance he would be okay, but the current workforce does not have a retirement guarantee. The congressman agreed few would find the benefits package desirable.

[8:50:40 AM](#)

JENNIFER RINALDI, President, Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals (AAESP), Principal, Willow Elementary School, Willow, Alaska, gave a status update as part of the Alaska Council of School Administrators, stating she was born and raised in Alaska. She served in education for 20 years, 14 years in Anchorage as a teacher, and as a principal in the Mat-Su. She presented the following two joint position statements:

- social, emotional, and mental health, and
- early childhood education

MS. RINALDI advanced to slide 26 to introduce the AAESP board members:

Jennifer Rinaldi
President, Mat-Su

Josh Gill
Pres. Elect, LKSD

Joanna Hinderberger
Vice Pres., Juneau

Linson Thompson

Treasurer, Anchorage

Eric Pederson
Past Pres., KPBSD

Aimee Kahler
Secretary, Anchorage

Doug Gray
State Rep. Anchorage

Shawna Henderson
Region Rep. Fairbanks

Jennifer Schmitz
AAESP Exec. Director

[8:51:46 AM](#)

MS. RINALDI introduced slides 27 - 33, Social, Emotional and Mental Health. She has two beliefs that guide her when challenges arise. One belief is that an ounce of prevention equals a pound of cure. An incredible amount of latitude is gained for course correcting when issues are approached from a proactive perspective. In education, operating from a reactive mode can affect generations to come. The second belief is the importance of being solution-driven when problems occur. Potential solutions must accompany identified problems. Slide 27 read:

Alaska's students endure extremely high rates of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The impact of COVID-19 has elevated many Alaskan students' ACEs scores.

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

MS. RINALDI advanced to slide 28, Social, Emotional and Mental Health, which read:

According to the Office of Children's Services, 3,142 children were mistreated in Alaska in 2019. This was

the highest number they had seen in the past 5 years with an increase of 18% over that time.

Alaskan children are 56% more likely to be abused compared to the national average. Additionally, Alaskan children have high rates of repeat child maltreatment which results in a great chance of encountering child welfare or the child entering the juvenile justice system.

Data compiled from United Health Foundation and published in America's Health Rankings found that Alaska ranked as the least-healthiest state in terms of adolescent suicide, with a rate of 44.9 deaths per 100,000. In comparison, the two healthiest states were Massachusetts and New Jersey at 5.4 deaths per 100,000.

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services classifies adolescents as people between 12 and 19 years old. The suicide rate among Alaska Native adolescents nearly doubled from 2018 to 2019.

MS. RINALDI advanced to slide 29, Social, Emotional and Mental Health. This slide categorized adverse childhood experiences into three main segments: abuse, neglect, and household instability. The slide read:

"Adverse Childhood Experiences" (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic experiences, including abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, or growing up with substance abuse, mental illness, or a parent in jail.

[8:55:53 AM](#)

MS. RINALDI advanced to slide 30, and continued to discuss Social, Emotional and Mental Health. This slide illustrated the number of Alaskan youth 6 to 11 years old and 12 to 17 years old who had an adverse childhood experience. She noted the slide was ten years old and guessed the numbers had increased. The slide indicates that many young Alaskans have experienced one or more ACEs prior to the age of 12, and 27 percent of those students have had two or more adverse childhood experiences. Slide 30 read:

Alaska's students endure extremely high rates of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs),

reflected in Alaska having the highest rate of teen suicide attempts in the nation.

MS. RINALDI advanced to slide 31, Social, Emotional and Mental Health (continued), which stated ACEs have life-long impacts. The slide illustrated the mounting life-long consequences of ACEs, beginning with disrupted neurodevelopment as a toddler; social, emotional and cognitive impairment during childhood; high-risk behaviors during adolescence; and ending with disease, disability and social problems during adulthood.

MS. RINALDI said it is difficult to find updated information related to COVID implications, but slide 32 shows the effects of the pandemic on teen mental health and the percent of parents noticing a new problem or worsening of an existing problem.

8:57:35 AM

MS. RINALDI advanced to slide 33, Social, Emotional and Mental Health (continued), stating the key to solutions is adequate staffing and support. She paraphrased the following solutions:

- ACSA urges the state to provide funding and resources so schools can partner with local communities to implement comprehensive, culturally responsive, school-based mental health programs to foster the health and development of students.
- ACSA supports targeted funding to enable schools to recruit, retain, and increase students' access to school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, nurses, and mental health specialists and to provide additional professional development for all staff to meet the increasing and diverse needs of all students

MS. RINALDI stated that the responsibility for the social, emotional, and mental health of students cannot fall solely on the teaching staff; the load has affected staff and their families on an incredible level.

8:58:09 AM

MS. RINALDI introduced the next joint position statement on slides 34 to 36, Early Childhood Education. She said an important factor leading to positive generational outcomes is access to early childhood education. Slide 34 read:

According to the Alaska Developmental Profile, nearly 70% of Alaska's students enter kindergarten lacking foundational preparation for learning and reaching up to almost 90% in some communities. This includes over 50% of entering kindergarteners who lack critical foundations in literacy.

ACSA supports the definition of elementary education to include universal Pre-K, thus ensuring equitable access to fully funded, sustainable, birth to age five learning programs and nutrition services.

ACSA supports adequate, sustainable early childhood education and Pre-K funding as part of the base student allocation.

8:58:32 AM

MS. RINALDI advanced to slide 35, Early Childhood Education (continued). This slide includes statistics on the need for and the positive impacts on early childhood education. The slide read:

- According to a grant funded study (The Early Childhood Alaska project) recently published,
 - 15% of Alaska children birth through 5 years of age live in poverty; 29% in rural areas live in poverty.
 - About 10% of children in Head Start/Early Head Start are homeless.
 - About 1/3 of Alaska kindergarteners meet 11 of 13 Alaska Developmental Profile standards,
- The Abecedarian Project (2021) demonstrated that young children who receive high-quality early education from infancy to age 5 do better in reading and math and are more likely to stay in school longer, graduate from high school, and attend a four-year college.
- Research also shows that quality early care and education help close achievement gaps so all children can thrive, enables parents and caregivers to work or study and increases economic mobility, underpins a robust economy, reduces need for special education, improves lifelong health and reduces rates of crime in adulthood.

[8:59:22 AM](#)

MS. RINALDI advanced to slide 36, Early Childhood Education (continued). This slide contained cost/benefit analyses demonstrating the range of benefits to society based on a per dollar investment in early childhood programs. The analyses were based on three different studies and criteria:

Three rigorously studied early childhood programs, the Perry Preschool Project, the Abecedarian project, and the Nurse Family Partnership, show a range of sizable returns to the participants and to the public for every dollar invested. Source: Karoly et al (2005); Heckman et al (2009). Credit: Center on the Developing Child.

MS. RINALDI advanced to slide 37, Early Childhood Education and Social, Emotional, and Mental Health, which read:

Early childhood programs don't just give our children a way to enter school ready to learn and to have a better chance at overall success in life, they can also help to reduce the cases of child abuse and neglect by working to support families and connecting them to agencies that provide education and support. Children from all socio-economic levels and backgrounds should have access to these resources.

Early childhood education programs in partnership with strong school counseling and mental health supports are fundamental in keeping students safe and providing them opportunities for success. Funding and supporting these programs will make our homes, towns, cities and state stronger and healthier places to be. There is no more important investment that could make a greater impact for our students and communities.

MS. RINALDI said that as educators learn more about students and their development, they face more challenges. The state cannot leave education and education funding the same. Alaska has work to do and can get there by addressing the challenges, identifying the resources, and providing the support needed in schools.

[9:00:44 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY joined the meeting (via teleconference).

[9:01:02 AM](#)

ANDY RATLIFF, President, Alaska Association of School Business Officials (ALASBO), Senior Director, Office of Management and Budget, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, gave a status update as part of the Alaska Council of School Administrators. He qualified his experience, stating he has worked with the Anchorage School District for over 16 years in various accounting, finance, and payroll positions. He now works on the budget. ALASBO professional organization focuses on professional development, promoting high standards in school business. The organization includes mostly business managers, but also includes human resources, information technology, transportation, and other business-related offices.

[9:01:35 AM](#)

MR. RATLIFF advanced to slide 39, introducing the ALASBO board members:

Andy Ratliff, President
Anchorage School District

Yodean Armour, President-Elect
Klawock City School District

Jimmy Love, Past-President
Kenai Peninsula Borough Schools

Cassee Olin, Treasurer
Juneau School District

Heather Heinekin, Secretary
Yukon Koyukuk School District

Phil Hulett
Seat A
Dillingham School District

Megan Williams
Seat B
Northwest Arctic Borough School District

Robbie MacManus
Seat D
Alaska Gateway School District

Katie Parrott
Seat E

Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District

David Nielsen
Seat F
Aleutians East School District

[9:01:41 AM](#)

MR. RATLIFF advanced to slide 40, ALASBO's Mission, Vision, and Values, which read:

Mission: To promote the highest standards in school business practices.

Vision: Educating stakeholders in the effective use of resources for the benefit of Alaska's children.

Values: Ethical standards
Sharing knowledge and expertise
Advancing the interests of all members
Accurate, objective, consistent information
Collegiality
Efficiency
Collaboration

[9:01:54 AM](#)

MR. RATLIFF said slide 41 contains the joint position statement about priority funding for education. It read:

Priority Funding for Education

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

- ACSA opposes cost shifting state expenditure responsibilities to local governments

[9:02:32 AM](#)

MR. RATLIFF advanced to slide 42, the Foundation Formula. The formula is designed to provide equitable funding, not equal funding. The illustrations detail the six steps of going from an average daily membership (ADM) to an adjusted ADM:

- Step 1 involves a school size adjustment which accounts for economies of scale. The graph at the bottom illustrates how school size matters in calculating the ADM value.

- Step 2 factors in the location differential for the cost of doing business in different districts.

- Step 3 factors in a 20 percent increase for bilingual, special, gifted and talented, and vocational education.

- Step 4 factors in another 1.5 percent increase for CTE.

- Step 5 factors in a multiplier of 13 for each intensive needs student.

- Step 6 factors in a correspondence student count multiplied by .90.

MR. RATLIFF said the formula works well and only suggests making periodic adjustments as some factors change over time.

[9:05:16 AM](#)

MR. RATLIFF advanced to slide 43 to review the Base Student Allocation (BSA):

Data Source: Legislative Finance

Current BSA \$5,930

BSA Increased 4.4% from 2011 to 2022

Line shows inflation adjustment to FY11 Value BSA of \$5,930 in FY22 has an FY11 Value of \$5,052 when adjusted for inflation

MR. RATLIFF explained that the pencil chart depicts K-12 funding FY 2011 ~ FY 2022. The blue line across the pencils indicates the loss of purchasing power due to inflation.

MR. RATLIFF advanced to slide 44 that depicts an Anchorage School District (ASD) funding bar graph. The BSA is flat, but it does not mean schools have been flat-funded. The legislature has provided money outside of the formula, such as stimulus money. He described adjustments that were made in years where inflation outpaced BSA funding. He said the bar graph design emphasizes the upcoming (ASD) fiscal cliff in FY24. He indicated many school districts around the state have a chart with a similar impending budgetary shortfall.

[9:07:02 AM](#)

MR. RATLIFF advanced to slide 45, ASD School Funding 2017-2026. He extended the bar graph on slide 44 out two years and overlaid the house bills currently under consideration. It shows ASD would have enough support if the bills were enacted.

MR. RATLIFF advanced to slide 46, showing the budget expenditures on a pie chart:

**Combined Alaska School Districts
General Fund (School Operating Fund)
Budgeted Expenditures - Fiscal Year 2022**

75 percent - Instructional Functions 100-400
25 percent - Non-instruction Functions 450-780

MR. RATLIFF advanced to slide 47, illustrating the breakdown of funds used for instructional and non-instructional expenditures on two pie charts.

The non-instructional pie chart accounts for 25 percent of the total 2022 expenditures, broken down as follows:

- 14 percent Operations and Maintenance
- 5 percent District Administrative Support
- 3 percent School Administrative Support
- 2 percent District Administration
- 2 percent Student Activities
- 0 percent Community Services

The instructional pie chart accounts for 75 percent of the total 2022 expenditures, broken down as follows:

- 41 percent Instruction
- 14 percent Special Education Instruction

- 9 percent Support Services Instruction
- 4 percent each to School Administration
- 4 percent Support Services for Students
- 4 percent Special Education Support

[9:10:08 AM](#)

MR. RATLIFF advanced to slide 48 to explain the factors driving costs:

Costs are Higher in Alaska:

CPI Increased by 11.5% from 2011 to 2021

- Alaskan **health care costs** are the most expensive in the nation. Examples of other school district annual benefit costs per employee:
 - Atlanta (\$11,340)
 - Seattle (\$12,312)
 - Portland (\$15,341 - \$18,662 depending on bargaining group)
 - Anchorage (\$21,000)
 - Matsu (\$23,525)
 - Kenai Peninsula (\$26,600)
 - Lower Yukon (\$38,110)
- High cost of **workers' compensation**; direct correlation with health care costs.
- Higher **energy costs** vary widely between urban and rural areas of the State.
- Nationwide increases in liability insurance

MR. RATLIFF said liability insurance has increased 100 percent over the last few years fueled by nationwide factors like trans and sexual abuse claims, school violence, and traumatic brain injuries.

- Must provide teacher housing in remote school districts.
- Shipping and transportation costs are very high.

[9:11:36 AM](#)

MR. RATLIFF advanced to slide 49, showing a map of the United States that illustrated a nationwide composite cost of living

index, the 2021 annual average cost of living per state. The index for Alaska is probably predominately based on Anchorage. He expressed his belief that the index for outlying areas would probably be exponentially higher than Anchorage. Slide 49 read:

Factors Affecting the Cost of Operations in Alaska

- Most geographically dispersed state in the nation
- Fuel and supplies must be delivered in the summer when rivers or oceans are open or it must be flown in, increasing total cost
- Impact of reduced and/or eliminated Alaska Marine Highway System
- Increasing reliance on air transportation by school districts for supplies, staff, and students

9:11:58 AM

MR. RATLIFF advanced to slide 50, Additional Education Business Resources, which read:

- Legislative Budget & Audit Reports:
<http://lba.akleg.gov/documents/publications/>
- DEED Uniform Chart of Accounts:
https://education.alaska.gov/publications/chart_of_accounts.pdf
- Alaska Association of School Business Officials (ALASBO): <http://www.alasbo.org/>
- Comparison of Alaska K-12 Expenditures to National Averages: <http://www.alasbo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/White-PaperAlaska-compared-to-US-Average-JAN-2020-final.pdf>

9:12:21 AM

SAM JORDAN, Grants and Outreach Administrator, Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN), Alaska Council of School Administrators, Palmer, Alaska, gave a status update as part of the Alaska Council of School Administrators. He qualified his experience, stating he has been a public educator for 20 years and a proud parent of two great kids in the Mat-Su Borough

School District. ASDN is a private, nonprofit organization and the largest provider of educational-professional development outside of school districts.

[9:13:14 AM](#)

MR. JORDAN reviewed slide 52, Alaska's Statewide Resource for Professional Development for Almost 40 years, which read:

Our Mission: To improve student achievement by providing researched-based professional development programs for Alaska's teachers and school administrators.

Annually we:

- Host almost **6,000** overall professional learning registrations, serving more than 3,000 educators -- almost **40 percent** of the classroom teachers in Alaska.
- Serve over **2,500** with online classes. We Offer **80** self-paced, high-quality professional development courses.
- Offer **8** webinar series with national education experts that serve almost 1,000 Alaskan educators
- Host the largest K-12 professional development conference in Alaska with **1 in 10 Alaskan educators** in attendance

MR. JORDAN said ASDN serves as a lead professional development partner for several federal grants.

[9:14:46 AM](#)

MR. JORDAN advanced to slide 53 to discuss the Alaska Effective Instruction Conference. This conference is in its 11th year and provides Alaskan educators with an opportunity for reflection and deep learning about their profession. The conference is held locally in Anchorage, a substantial cost-saving for school districts. It brings world-class voices to Alaska, so teachers do not have to travel to the Lower 48. ASDN researches the education space nationally and brings the most important K-12 voices in education to Alaska. This year the conference initiatives focused on Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). The keynote presenters were dynamic, ranging from Hadi Partovi, who spoke on the future of

computer science as a foundational skill for K-12 education, to imminent literacy educator Dr. Anita Archer and world-renowned mathematics educator Jo Boaler. The slide read as follows:

Alaskan Education Conferences

Annual RTI / MTSS Effective Instruction Conference

- Served **almost 1,300** Alaskan educators from 44 districts in 2022
- Largest statewide PK-12 Conference in Alaska
- Cost savings for districts to stay in-state and receive high quality professional learning

[9:16:17 AM](#)

MR. JORDAN advanced to slide 54, stating ASDN hosts the Alaska School Leadership Institute (ASLI). It will target supporting leaders from rural and small schools but is open to anyone that would like to attend. Many district teams use this time to strategize and plan for the next school year. This year's institute will focus on instructional leadership and creating productive school cultures as teachers return to in-school instruction. This conference also supports meetings for the new and incoming superintendents' cohort and the Alaska School Leadership Academy cohorts that Principal Brendan Wilson mentioned.

MR. JORDAN advanced to slide 55, stating ASDN is leading the advancement of computer science instruction in Alaska. ASDN serves as the Code.org regional partner for Alaska, which is in its 4th year of empowering educators across the state to teach computer science. Code.org is the world's leading resource on computer science instruction, providing an accessible and exciting computer science curriculum taught across Alaska in rural and urban areas. Alaska has an excellent opportunity for advancing computer science; it has enormous implications for the job market for young Alaskans and the economy. ASCA will continue promoting this and invites partnership along the way.

[9:18:46 AM](#)

MR. JORDAN advanced to slide 56, which read:

Our Alaskan Schools Blog

Sharing the Great Things Happening in Alaska's Schools

3 Years of stories from Alaska's classrooms and schools

Slide 56 showed a snapshot of the website highlighting blog stories featured this past year.

MR. JORDAN said that he has two ASDN passion projects. The first is serving as the Alaska School Leadership Academy lead, which supports early career principals. The second is Our Alaskan Schools blog. ASDN staff can be in constant contact with educators across the state, hearing what they are excited about and what they are doing. ASDN staff saw the remarkable things happening at the school and classroom levels and recognized these things did not make it into the public discourse. ASDN put together a blog four years ago highlighting the positive, exciting stories in public schools. To date, there are about 120 stories written by or with educators. He encouraged committee members to read some stories, which are searchable by region and topic. The stories are dynamic and exciting, reflecting great instructional practice.

[9:20:41 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND invited committee members to ask questions.

[9:21:05 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE asked Mr. Ratliff what the cost of liability insurance is statewide.

MR. RATLIFF said that he does not have the statewide data on-hand but will get it.

SENATOR MICCICHE indicated that the committee needs to understand, in detail, costs affected by outside factors. He asked for a collection of costs that are beyond the control of business/budget managers, so the committee could explore ways to provide relief.

[9:22:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND requested Mr. Ratliff review the factors affecting the cost of liability insurance for the Anchorage School District and its increase over a relevant period of time.

MR. RATLIFF expressed his belief that liability insurance is in the \$1 to \$2 million range. There are claims costs for workers' compensation and liability. He explained nationwide trends are

driving costs and are not necessarily specific to the schools in Anchorage. He said factors affecting nationwide costs are sexual abuse claims, school violence claims, and traumatic brain injuries incurred in sports. It has been more challenging to get insurance. In the past, the district had insurance renewals completed by this time of year. Now, renewals are completed in June/July, just before the next school year starts. Many carriers are dropping school districts altogether, so the prices are escalating. He committed to get the committee the exact numbers and the percentage increases over time.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND inquired whether schools could operate without liability insurance, asking what happens on July 1 if a liability insurance contract is not signed.

MR. RATLIFF expressed his belief that a school technically could operate without liability insurance; however, a significant event could expose the district to some costly claims. A school shooting claim like Parkland is enormous. If an event like that happens without insurance, solvency is at stake.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked Mr. Ratliff for the information, stating the details were sobering.

[9:24:59 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES commented on broadband and coding. She said the money for broadband infrastructure will allow access where none existed, stimulating rural economies. She knew a fellow that worked in a cabin in Delta. He had good Wi-Fi and worked for a big New York company making \$300,000 - \$400,000. She expressed hope that rural schools, students, and communities are dialoguing about potential job opportunities in their villages.

SENATOR HUGHES expressed grief over the social, emotional, and mental health situations in schools. The focus should be on academics, but schools are now tasked with much more. She wondered whether schools have explored partnering with organizations, making space available in schools for partners to address non-academic issues, thus freeing-up educators to focus on teaching.

SENATOR HUGHES asked Mr. Ratliff whether new teachers receive the same level of health care benefits as Tier I and II employees and what percentage of district budgets go to the cost of health care.

MR. RATLIFF answered that almost 20 percent of the ASD budget goes to health care. It is about a 100-million-dollar line item. Teachers have access through the public education health trust, and the rest of the district is mostly self-insured. The district purchased a clinic, the Vera Clinic. It offers primary and acute care for employees. The model limits profit margins. The city of Anchorage opened a clinic and ASD partnered with them, offering reciprocity between the two organizations. The district tries to limit health care costs; however, the costs keep escalating. The health insurance renewal increased by about 10 percent this year. He spoke to the question on health care for new teachers, asking if the question pertains to health insurance in retirement or as active teachers through the district.

SENATOR HUGHES said that Mr. Wilson mentioned health insurance was different for new teachers. She expressed her understanding that retirement health insurance is different, and new teachers have the same health care package as Tier I and II employees.

MR. RATLIFF confirmed that the district's health insurance plan is the same.

[9:29:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY said it is painful to hear about students' social, emotional, and mental health needs. She acknowledged the challenge of teaching when students struggle with these issues. It is difficult for children to function at higher levels when distressed. Recognizing these complications, she brought up the subject of academic gaps. She specifically asked about reading, stating it is crucial to the foundation of learning. She inquired about the interventions in schools to strengthen reading.

DR. BOLEN answered that learning gaps are a major concern. Superintendents want students to achieve their highest potential. Many basic needs require tending before students even walk into the school, particularly in rural Alaska. The time spent on closing the achievement gap diminishes during the school day as meeting basic needs, like food, clothing, and attendance detracts from academics. He recalled a former, long serving colleague from the Bering Strait School District that said one of his biggest concerns was never making a huge change in student outcomes. This is attributable to many factors, including the lack of an assessment system. The state has not had a reliable state assessment program since the [University of] Kansas [fiber optic cable] problem shut down and suspended

testing. He said standardized testing is not the only growth measure, but schools are mostly judged by it, and superintendents often use it to calculate student gains. Overloading teachers with tasks that focus on the well-being of students does not necessarily register in academic achievement scores. Alaska now uses the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing three times per year, and educators are excited about the new Alaska System of Academic Readiness (AK STAR) assessment that will show growth.

MS. RINALDI further explained that every educator knows the term "Maslow before Bloom." It means children need their basic needs met before they are able to effectively receive academic instruction. Students who are hungry, unhealthy, unloved, uncared for, or feel unsafe have difficulty switching attention from their basic needs to academic education. She said meeting the needs of students has never been this challenging for schools in her 20-year experience. She addressed Senator Hughes' suggestion that schools partner with outside agencies to manage the situation. Willow Elementary did not have a school counselor. The Mat-Su Health Foundation was instrumental in obtaining one for the school. She wrote a grant partnering with Sunshine Community Health [Center] for an in-school counselor one day per week, which expanded to include Talkeetna for 2019/2020/2021. The Mat-Su School District now works with the Mat-Su Health Foundation to provide counseling services. However, Willow Elementary needs counseling services more than one day per week for its 130 students. She estimated that the school needs a counselor 2 1/2 to 3 days per week. The counselor has a long waiting list of students that need support. Schools need counselors, and even if funds were available to hire more, there is a nationwide nursing and counselor shortage. She recommended the state address workforce and labor development to remedy the problem in Alaska.

[9:36:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY said districts are working towards trauma-informed schools to support students and address basic needs. She asked what interventions are employed at Willow Elementary when children underperform at grade level in reading.

MS. RINALDI answered special education staff support reading interventions. Tier 3 students are divided into small groups. Tier 3 interventions include pulling a student out to offer reading support, or available staff will push in to support a teacher in the classroom.

MR. WILSON added that schools identify Tier 3 students ready to advance to the next level of instruction and move them to a more inclusive, co-taught classroom environment where a special education professional might work alongside a teacher. He spoke to the cochair's point about trauma-informed schools, stating educators look at restorative practices when children make mistakes and try interventions that do not involve too much time out of school on suspension.

9:39:09 AM

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Ms. Rinaldi who pays Sunshine Community Health Center for counseling services to Willow Elementary students.

MS. RINALDI answered the initial grant was for \$10,000 through the Mat-Su Health Foundation. It was a direct pass-through. She used \$5,000 in title funds the second year, and Talkeetna came on board. The grant covered both schools with the addition of \$5,000 each. She did not write the grant this year but assumes Medicaid is paying a lot and possibly funds come from the district.

MR. WILSON said Begich Middle School has clinicians and is trying to expand using funds Volunteers of America grants provided. Begich Middle School has a Volunteer of America counselor available to students on a walk-in basis, and this year it opened to staff too. Alaska Behavioral Health is a partner that provides one more clinician. He uses title funds to pay for a counselor who targets family engagement, making families feel more comfortable reaching out for help.

9:41:05 AM

SENATOR MICCICHE said slides 48 and 49 of the presentation convey the big-picture factors affecting operational expenses in Alaska. However, the committee needs detail to explore methods of providing relief and to get a handle on what is driving uncontrollable costs. Earlier, Mr. Ratliff expounded on the price hike of liability insurance, shedding light on the problems affecting insurance costs. He asked school districts to separate and quantify the following uncontrollable costs: energy, transportation, housing, and health care and to compile the data with a focus on rural Alaska. The data will help people understand Alaska's cost differences. He also wondered what percentage of Alaska's schools are off the road system and if other states have schools off their road systems.

MR. RATLIFF said the state has the data; a chart of accounts allows it to be separated out. To ensure the data is useful, he asked whether the compilation would be more helpful organized by district or aggregated statewide.

MR. RATLIFF segued to a previous ASD liability insurance question to address the scope of cost escalations, stating:

Property insurance was \$864,000 in 2019 and \$1.3 million is budgeted for next year.

Liability insurance was \$658,000 in 2019 and \$1.66 million is budgeted for next year.

SENATOR MICCICHE said it would be helpful if the data was organized by both school districts and aggregated statewide. Because liability insurance does not have a rural reference, it should be kept separate.

[9:47:39 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked how spending in the classroom is affected by the escalation in uncontrollable costs.

MR. RATLIFF answered that to the extent districts pay more in some areas from general fund dollars, less is available for expenditures elsewhere. That is the way it is without increased funding.

[9:49:06 AM](#)

DR. PARADY answered a previous question from Senator Micciche, stating 30 percent of Alaska schools are off the road system. The school administrators will work with ALASBO and the state to provide that information.

DR. PARADY made two points. Larger districts are represented today, but the committee should recognize that rural and remote districts are experiencing the same issues, but more deeply. She invited members to join the Heart through Student Art reception to see the fabulous projects happening in public education. The student art is remarkable, the auctioneer is Senator Micciche, and the art will look good in your offices. She introduced Robin Jones to present handmade gifts crafted by Chief Ivan Blunka School students.

[9:51:17 AM](#)

ROBIN JONES, Principal, Chief Ivan Blunka School, Southwest Region School District, New Stuyahok, Alaska, relayed that she

holds the title of Alaska's Principal of the Year for two more weeks. She presented handmade thank you cards from New Stuyahok students. The cards show how bright, deserving, and talented the students are. They serve as a reminder of the things that are working together at Chief Ivan Blunka School, and these things are producing beautiful student outcomes. She thanked committee members for supporting public education, especially their efforts to close the opportunity and equity gaps in rural Alaska.

[9:52:47 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND agreed the cards were beautiful. He referenced slide 45, ASD School Funding 2017 - 2026, stating funding is a constant tug-of-war and dollars have to come from somewhere. One idea to reverse child poverty is to pay a permanent fund dividend. Education is essential, but he is uncertain whether these two funding sources are mutually exclusive. He is concerned the state has allowed irresponsible growth of the permanent fund when there are competing efforts for funds and money in the bank to pay for some of these obligations. He concluded, saying the cards are beautiful and he hates to distract from them.

[9:54:35 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE amended a previous request for data. He asked that the data include an urban aggregate and a rural aggregate, keeping liability insurance separate because the housing differential is substantial.

[9:55:10 AM](#)

DR. BOLEN provided liability insurance numbers for a rural, large Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA). The liability insurance was \$160,000 in 2018, jumped to \$354,000 in 2019, increased to \$436,000 in 2020, and this year the cost was \$486,000.

[9:55:55 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY commented that making priorities work with the budget is one of the complex jobs of lawmakers. Legislators need to remember that the Permanent Fund value went from \$83 billion to \$80 billion recently. The ebb and flow of this investment affects the budget.

[9:56:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GILLHAM asked whether school districts have explored alternative insurance carriers or combined government offices to purchase a group insurance package to reduce costs.

DR. PARADY expressed her belief that every district tries to find the best and least expensive insurance. She receives texts on different insurances. She mentioned cyber insurance as an option that school districts may want to research. Many borough schools have few insurance choices because they are piggy-backed on the borough's insurance, which is a consideration in terms of uncontrolled costs. Conversations about merging public entity health insurance and other types of insurance have swirled around the legislature for many years. There has been movement in that direction, but it has yet to gain traction. Any relief the legislature offers to support schools with these costs, which school districts have no control over, is welcome.

[9:58:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK said he is a product of the rural Alaska school system. He attended the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, became a teacher, and served as a regional school board member, giving him a broad view of the education system. The question is which costs school districts can control. A lot of schools, especially rural schools, are old. He asked how much effort school districts have made to ensure the buildings use electricity efficiently. Saving money on operations means more money to invest in teachers in classrooms.

[9:59:31 AM](#)

DR. PARADY answered that school maintenance and capital construction backlogs are of major concern to school districts. The lists the Department of Education and Early Development developed only include a portion of Alaska's school maintenance projects. She explained that it costs approximately \$10,000 for each district to pursue adding a project to the list. The projects on the list still need to be fully funded. Representative Cronk's point is well taken. School districts need to make their buildings more efficient, and to do that major maintenance and school capital construction projects need funding.

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK said that falls under building the proper infrastructure to reduce those costs. The bottom line is that the legislature and education administrators need to have some hard conversations about how to do better, whether in health insurance costs or being more efficient. He expressed his belief that no one is having those conversations and that the issues will not be resolved until everyone, as a group, does. Just asking for more money does not fix the problems. He would like to participate in problem-solving conversations.

DR. PARADY spoke on behalf of the school administrators, stating they were more than happy to have problem-solving conversations with policymakers on these important issues. She clarified that school administrators were not just asking for more money. They are hurting, and the situation is not stable in many ways. They have no control over some things, so administrators want to work with the legislature to find solutions. She asked legislators to include the experts in the room in problem-solving discussions. She expressed hope that committee members know how tirelessly educators and administrators work on behalf of students every day for their safety, well-being, and instructional needs. The legislature and school administrators are partners in helping to stabilize schools.

[10:02:41 AM](#)

SENATOR HOLLAND asked who the Alaska School Principal of the Year is.

DR. PARADY replied Robin Jones.

[10:03:27 AM](#)

There being no further business before the committee, Chair Holland adjourned the joint meeting of the Senate Education Standing Committee and the House Education Standing Committee at 10:03 a.m.