

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 1, 2021

9:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Roger Holland, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Shelley Hughes
Senator Tom Begich

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Peter Micciche

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: OUTSTANDING AND EMERGING ISSUES IN K-12 EDUCATION

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a PowerPoint on Improving Educational Outcomes for Alaska's Students.

NORM WOOTEN, Director of Advocacy
Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a PowerPoint on the Association of Alaska School Boards.

TOM KLAAMYER, President
National Education Association Alaska
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on NEA-Alaska educational issues.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:01:14 AM](#)

CHAIR ROGER HOLLAND called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Begich, Hughes, Stevens, and Chair Holland.

PRESENTATION(S): Outstanding and Emerging Issues in K-12 Education

[9:01:41 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND announced the business before the committee would be presentations from three education agencies that work together to provide quality education for students.

[9:02:37 AM](#)

LISA PARADY, PhD, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), Juneau, Alaska, listed the organizations under the umbrella of the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) as the Alaska Superintendents Association (ASA), Kerry Boyd, President; the Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals (AASSP), Robyn Jones, President; the Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals (AAESP), Jennifer Rinaldi, President; and the Alaska Association of School Business Officials (AASBO), Jimmy Love, President.

DR. PARADY began her overview entitled, Improving Educational Outcomes for Alaska Students.

[9:04:11 AM](#)

DR. PARADY reviewed slide 3, One State: 54 School Districts. She said Alaska's size and diversity is reflected in its schools. Alaska has 54 school districts with enrollment ranging from 20 students to over 46,000. These diverse districts are united in their commitment to provide quality public education to all students. That unity has never been so highlighted as during the collaboration that occurred during the pandemic. She read:

Our advocacy seeks to amplify and unify the diverse voices and needs of each community to ensure a high-quality education for every Alaskan student. There's no room for division between large and small, urban and rural. We are all responsible for all of our students.

[9:05:16 AM](#)

DR. PARADY provided student enrollment numbers [slide 4]. Within its 54 districts, Alaska has 132,576 enrolled students. She reiterated what Commissioner Johnson stated during a previous hearing:

Each of these students is a unique Alaskan child. They are precocious third graders fascinated by science, high school sophomores struggling with math but loving welding, and kindergartners starting to learn to read.

She emphasized the necessity to remember that real children are behind those numbers.

She highlighted issues that the districts face. She said about one fifth or 21.7 percent of students enrolled in the correspondence option during the pandemic year, nearly double the normal correspondence enrollment. This massive shift to statewide correspondence meant families required additional support to succeed and districts have pivoted to provide it. Schools are an integral part of Alaska's communities, culturally and economically, and the largest employer. Almost half of the school facilities in the state are over 40 years old and need substantial maintenance or renovation. Recruiting and retaining quality educators, including teachers, principals, and school business officials is a top priority of districts. Recruiting and retaining educators is essential to higher student achievement and to eliminate academic disparity for all of Alaska's students. Yet, the state's teacher turnover rate is about 20 percent of the 7,592 teachers, she said.

DR. PARADY recognized that Commissioner Johnson and Governor Dunleavy created the Task Force for Teacher Recruitment (TFTR) and Retention. The ACSA is committed to work with the administration and the legislature to act on TFTR's recommendations to curb this huge barrier for Alaska.

9:08:01 AM

SENATOR HUGHES asked if other states have seen similar increases in correspondence students during the COVID-19 pandemic. She further asked if the 11 percent increase is reflective of public and private correspondence students.

DR. PARADY answered that the 11 percent increase was limited to public correspondence schools and not homeschool students. The department does not collect data on private homeschool enrollment.

She offered to research how Alaska ranks in comparison to what other states experienced in terms of the increases in correspondence school enrollments during the COVID-19 pandemic and report back to the committee.

[9:10:02 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked Dr. Parady to predict the correspondence numbers for next year assuming that vaccinations are in place and the worst of the pandemic is over.

DR. PARADY answered that districts have provided estimated numbers, but it is difficult to pin down accurate statewide projections for correspondence students since shifts between correspondence, homeschool, and in-person schools might happen. Some students may decide to return to the district schools, in part, since their parents must work. Parents and guardians try to find the best fit for their children and that process has evolved during COVID-19. Accurate numbers might not be available until school starts in the fall. She cautioned that the hold harmless statute was not designed to address the dramatic changes during the pandemic and that these statutes support more gradual changes in the student population.

[9:12:34 AM](#)

DR. PARADY reported that vaccinations have been sporadic for teachers. Although tribal leaders have worked closely with rural districts to vaccinate educators, it is not the case uniformly throughout the state. ASCA has urged Commissioner Crum, [Chief Medical Officer] Dr. Zink and Governor Dunleavy to prioritize teachers for immunization to safely return them to the classroom.

[9:13:39 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH urged ASCA and AASBO to encourage the districts to provide correspondence numbers now as the legislature deliberates on the budget. He said that waiting until fall is too late. He also requested deferred maintenance figures for school facilities for the finance committees. The legislature will consider Governor Dunleavy's General Obligation (GO) bond proposal so it would help the finance committees.

DR. PARADY answered Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) projections for next year for the hold harmless provision have been presented to the Board of Education. That action will trigger the associations and districts to develop figures to provide to the legislature. She said the estimate for deferred maintenance is over \$250 million.

She reported that 59 buildings in the districts are over 60 years old. The average building age is 39 years, she said. She offered to provide specific figures, noting that DEED has a website dedicated to deferred maintenance.

9:17:39 AM

SENATOR HUGHES reviewed correspondence school numbers, with 22 percent student enrollment in correspondence programs and 78 percent in brick-and-mortar schools. She related her understanding that many students enrolled in brick-and-mortar schools were working online. She asked if superintendents anticipate some of the 78 percent brick-and-mortar students will shift to the public-school correspondence programs, such as IDEA and Mat-Su Central, and if the shift might be substantially higher once the pandemic subsides. She recalled that Governor Dunleavy highlighted increased funding for public homeschools and public correspondence schools in his State of the State address. She noted districts receive less per student enrolled in public correspondence programs. She related her understanding the districts want increased funding, although not to the level of brick-and-mortar formula funding.

DR. PARADY answered that the 78 percent of students enrolled in brick-mortar-schools reflects the COVID-19 pandemic. The districts shifted to a mix of virtual, hybrid, and in-person programs all year long, depending on the risk level in the communities. She suggested the increase in correspondence programs was an attempt to find stability in a pandemic. She said she did not anticipate increased numbers in statewide or public correspondence programs next year. She anticipated that districts and parents that were forced to experience different models of education will continue to explore those systems.

9:22:16 AM

DR. PARADY emphasized the positive experiences and advantages that students and teachers develop with in-person teaching. Teachers can help motivate student performance and many superintendents are eager to get students back to their classrooms.

DR. PARADY related Governor Dunleavy's bill, SB 58, was introduced and would increase the average daily membership (ADM) for correspondence programs to the in-person level.

CHAIR HOLLAND acknowledged that the committee would hold hearings on that bill.

[9:24:04 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said he heard some parents were not prepared to be teachers and now recognize the value of teachers and how crucial it is to get students back in school. He asked Dr. Parady to address vaccinations for staff and students. He further asked her to speak to summer school class costs and funding.

DR. PARADY replied that Dr. Zink indicated that clinical trials for students have not yet been conducted so vaccines for students are not currently available.

She explained that the districts agreed on "lost learning" but since district needs vary, some will offer summer school, but others will elect to provide some intensive student support. Additional federal funds support the short-term intensive need but long-term expenses are not anticipated in the existing allocation, she said.

[9:27:40 AM](#)

DR. PARADY reviewed the joint position statements on slide 5. Student achievement is a priority and adequate funding is the most critical need, she said. She stated that legislators should have received copies of the joint position statements. One focus is to support collaboration between education leaders to articulate unified priorities across Alaska, she said. These statements were developed collaboratively over several months, reviewed and revised, and voted on.

[9:28:27 AM](#)

DR. PARADY turned to the superintendent survey on slide 6. This illustrates that the barriers to student achievement districts identified align directly with the ACSA's joint position statements.

DR. PARADY reviewed slide 7, Students have to Maslow before they can Bloom. She highlighted that factors outside of school impact student ability to perform in school.

[9:30:30 AM](#)

DR. PARADY reviewed slide 8, Social, Emotional, and Mental Health. Alaska has extremely high rates of childhood trauma, the highest in nation in sexual assault, repeat child maltreatment, and suicide, which impact education outcomes. Research has shown that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have lifelong impacts on learning and health. Addressing this trauma is a top priority of schools. This year schools experienced the effects of mental

health impacts of isolation stress due to the pandemic, she said.

[9:31:18 AM](#)

DR. PARADY reviewed early childhood education, slide 9. She thanked Senator Begich and Governor Dunleavy for their work on SB 8 and Senator Hughes for introducing SB 42 that recognize the importance of early childhood education. The 2019 Alaska Developmental Profile found that almost 70 percent of Alaska's students entering kindergarten were not prepared to succeed in school. Students without adequate foundations, including literacy, struggle throughout their academic years. She reported that the state's investment in early childhood development funding could be as high as five to one. Quality early education is a long-term investment and reduces need for high-cost intensive intervention later.

[9:32:26 AM](#)

DR. PARADY discussed career and technical education on slide 10. The early investment in career and technical education (CTE) for rural and urban students is critical to high academic standards and Alaska's economic growth and stability. CTE programs provide students opportunities to build future-ready skills preparing them for high-paying skilled jobs. Programs aligned with local and state job markets allow students to graduate directly into careers in Alaska. Robust CTE programs are a critical component of schools with high academic performance and high graduation rates.

[9:32:54 AM](#)

DR. PARADY turned to slide 11, School Safety. Safety is the foundation of student learning and achievement. Students cannot learn in an environment that is not safe. ACSA supports improving the safety and wellbeing of students, she said.

DR. PARADY discussed increasing bandwidth for districts on slide 12. She thanked Senator Hoffman for the passage of Senate Bill 74, which increased the floor of bandwidth in rural Alaska to 25 [megabits] mpbs. COVID-19 brought connectivity issues to light, in that many Alaska students do not have connectivity at home to access the resources needed to stay engaged with school. She emphasized the need to incrementally increase bandwidth.

[9:34:27 AM](#)

DR. PARADY addressed slides 13 and 14, Educator Retention. Improving teacher retention is ACSA's top priority to ensure that students receive a quality education. Research shows that

teacher quality is the most important school-based factor for student achievement and teacher quality and tenure are directly correlated, she said. Keeping teachers in classrooms and in Alaska is key to improving student outcomes. The state suffers from chronically high superintendent, principal, and teacher turnover. Understanding the reasons teachers leave their classrooms is necessary to address this issue, she said. She described efforts the ACSA makes to assist incoming superintendents, including a first-and-second-year cohort, meeting regularly for professional development, and assigning mentors.

She reported that 12 superintendents have left the districts this year. During her tenure, she has seen nearly 100 percent turnover each year, she said. The Alaska School Leadership Academy has partnered with the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to connect early career principals with a cohort of peers to engage in collective skill building and mutual support with mentorship.

[9:37:48 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH asked if the pandemic has exacerbated teacher retention.

DR. PARADY said there has been an increase in superintendent turnover and she anticipates additional turnover throughout the state. The ACSA has made efforts to collaborate statewide to provide support and work together to help retain teachers and other educators.

[9:40:09 AM](#)

NORM WOOTEN, Director of Advocacy, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), Juneau, Alaska, began a PowerPoint by reviewing slide 1. He said that AASB is a 501 (c)(3) organization that was established in 1954 to represent school districts across Alaska. The AASB is governed by a 15-member board of directors. The current president, Katie Oliver, serves on the school board for the Kodiak Island Borough School District (KIBSD) and the executive director is Lon Garrison, he said.

[9:40:58 AM](#)

MR. WOOTEN turned to slide 2 and highlighted the AASB's mission statement or road map. The mission of the Association of Alaska School Boards is to advocate for children and youth by assisting school boards in providing quality public education, focused on student achievement, through effective local governance. This

model means local government connects with local communities to best meet the needs of students in each community.

[9:41:57 AM](#)

MR. WOOTEN turned to slide 3, which listed ways the AASB assists school boards, including programs and divisions that provide resources to districts.

[9:42:35 AM](#)

MR. WOOTEN reviewed slide 4, AASB Legislative Priorities. He described the process. Districts submit resolutions in the fall. These resolutions are considered at the annual conference and adopted by a vote of the delegate assembly. These resolutions are further debated and prioritized by district forums. The district forums are comprised of districts with similar ADM numbers. The Board of Directors subsequently prioritizes and adopts the resolutions.

[9:43:58 AM](#)

MR. WOOTEN turned to slide 5: Public Education Funding-Adequate, Reliable, Predictable. AASB's first legislative priority is for adequate, reliable, and predictable public education funding. This leads to efficiency and effectiveness within local school districts as districts develop their budgets.

[9:44:40 AM](#)

MR. WOOTEN reviewed slide 6: Student Wellness and Safe Schools. The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the need to effectively meet that challenge. He directed attention to the last bullet point on the slide, "Reduce school and student violence." The AASB has developed policies and provides training related to sexual abuse. Very few school staff cross those boundaries, but one incident of sexual abuse is one too many, he said.

[9:46:37 AM](#)

MR. WOOTEN turned to slide 7. He noted the title should read "Internet Connectivity and Distance Delivery." He directed attention to the first bullet point, "Fully fund E-rate so that schools have the necessary connectivity." He appreciated that the legislature was cognizant of the lack of broadband connectivity across Alaska. The AASB considers it an equity issue. COVID-19 has emphasized the need for additional broadband for all districts and locally adapted and board-approved curriculum. Colleges of education must provide professional development for distance-delivered instruction especially since it is unlikely districts will revert to 100 percent in-classroom instruction. Instead, he predicted a hybrid model will evolve.

[9:48:16 AM](#)

MR. WOOTEN discussed slide 8: Teacher and Administrator Training, Recruitment, and Retention. He serves as a consultant on the governor's task force. He deemed the extremely high rates of teacher and administrator turnover as unacceptable. One solution is the teacher-mentor program since it provides support for new teachers. Another solution is to promote and develop locally-educated teachers in Alaska. Since it is unrealistic to provide all local teachers, the AASB encourages out-of-state teachers to apply for jobs in Alaska.

[9:49:51 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH commented on the loss of accreditation at the University of Alaska, which resulted in a substantial decrease in the number of teachers produced by the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). He acknowledged that the AASB has moved away from reliance on the UAA for teachers, but he hoped the committee would hear from the UAA's new leadership on efforts to recruit homegrown teachers in Alaska and progress that has been made.

MR. WOOTEN agreed with Senator Begich.

[9:51:36 AM](#)

MR. WOOTEN addressed slide 9: Literacy as a Fundamental Human Right. He emphasized the need for funding and support to focus on early childhood literacy skills development. He highlighted that literacy proficiency by the third grade is essential for student success. Graduation rates need to improve. Educational equity is attained through literacy proficiency. The AASB recognizes literacy as a fundamental human right. The AASB has adopted resolutions to support Senator Hughes and Senator Begich's bills.

[9:53:20 AM](#)

MR. WOOTEN turned to slide 10: Educational Outcomes and Efficiencies, which read:

- **Funding - Adequate, Reliable, Predictable.**
- **Minimize Unfunded Mandates.**
- **Comprehensive review of all Alaska statutes and administrative regulations. If they are unnecessary or no longer applicable, repeal them.**

- Provide legislative support (SJR) to districts in advocating to Congress to increase IDEA funding.
- Study the ongoing Governor's Task Force on Teacher Recruitment & Retention report and consider enacting recommendations.
- Fund DEED to create curriculum in the core subject areas (Language Arts, Math, Science) to give local districts without the capacity to conduct a review the option to adopt an "off-the-shelf" version.

He said the committee asked presenters to come up with ideas that are attainable.

He commented that Congress intended to fund IDEA at 40 percent funding, but it has never exceeded 15 percent, he said. He requested legislative support to assist the district as it advocates for additional funding.

MR. WOOTEN acknowledged that districts work together and share curricula. He recalled that a few years ago, the legislature passed a bill to create core curriculum, but funding for the curriculum was withdrawn and the core curriculum was never developed.

[9:58:13 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS noted the governor talked about an office of reading improvement. He pointed out that some of the smaller districts could use assistance.

MR. WOOTEN commented that efficacy depends on the details. The school districts would support an office designed to assist districts to increase literacy.

[9:59:45 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES noted the adequate, reliable, and predictable funding goal. She referred to the last bullet point on slide 5, which read: Prevent state mandated school consolidation, especially in rural Alaska. She pointed out that some districts are so small that it doesn't make sense for them to have separate administration. She asked the association and school boards to work with the legislature to achieve greater efficiency. She envisioned that community input would be considered. She suggested that somewhat larger school districts might have more funding for core areas.

MR. WOOTEN answered that the AASB has had a resolution opposing district consolidation for many years. He said he will not oppose what the membership and delegate assembly have proposed. Since statehood, local control has been a mantra. He noted that districts are not opposed to sharing services in way that still allows for local control. Several school districts are already sharing services.

[10:04:12 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH advised members the legislature has statutory authority for shared administrative services. He said he and Senator Hughes supported funding it. He offered his view that it has been used in the past. He asked for AASB's view on a constitutional amendment for forward funding of the education budget that Senator Costello introduced last year.

He expressed concerned with the governor's Office of Reading Improvement if it exists outside of DEED. He cautioned against separating the focus on reading from an administrative approach and one backed by the Board of Education & Early Development.

[10:06:02 AM](#)

MR. WOOTEN said the AASB's resolutions would support a constitutional amendment for forward funding. The AASB has entered an Amicus [Curiae] brief on behalf of the legislature for separation of powers. He reiterated the importance of the details for the proposed Office of Reading Improvement.

[10:07:20 AM](#)

TOM KLAAMYER, President, National Education Association Alaska, Juneau, Alaska, stated that his organization represents nearly 12,000 educators who support students in schools or via distance learning throughout the state.

MR. KLAAMYER provided his background to committee members. After serving in the US Air Force, he obtained a degree in Education from UAA. Since 1996, he has taught high school social studies in the Anchorage School District. He is honored to serve as NEA-Alaska's president.

[10:09:13 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMYER said the pandemic made the 2020-2021 school year challenging and educators have spent countless hours planning and innovating to deliver instruction to students. Some educators alternate between in-person teaching and distance learning, others juggled brick-and-mortar with distance learning. School employees constantly adapted to meet the needs

of students, he said. Many members and administrators volunteered on Smart Start Committees to develop and enforce plans for the continuation of learning.

He shared that front-line workers, including school nurses and health aides, worked to keep colleagues and communities safe. Everyone pulled together to ensure that students were fed despite school closures even if that meant providing home deliveries. The public school system worked because of the efforts of school personnel, demonstrating the resilient and innovative nature of Alaska's schools.

MR. KLAAMYER said students have not fallen behind but are surviving the pandemic, in part, due to the efforts of educators. NEA-Alaska would like to continue to collaborate on NEA-Alaska's legislative priorities on behalf of students and to help them learn and maximize their potential.

[10:11:34 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMYER said that stability and continuity are essential to improve student outcomes. He emphasized challenges the state faced due to staff turnover in its communities and schools. He quoted Regional Education Laboratory statistics that indicated 22 percent of Alaska's teachers and 25 percent of principals quit their jobs each year. These turnover rates are alarming, especially since Alaska loses some of its best and brightest young educators when it fails to retain them, he said.

He related that job fairs in Alaska were once flooded with interested applicants, but some recent job fairs had more administrators than applicants attend. Alaska recruiters have been turned away from job fairs in the Lower 48 due to similar teacher shortages.

[10:13:02 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMYER reviewed teacher turnover costs. He said the University of Alaska (UA) system produces approximately 300 teachers a year. Using the state's current turnover rate, Alaska recruits about 1,000 teachers per year, which requires districts to recruit outside Alaska. In 2017, UA Anchorage, Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) calculated the cost to recruit a teacher to relocate to Alaska at \$20,000. Multiplying this by 1,000 teachers each year means teacher recruitment and retention costs total \$20 million annually. These figures do not consider hiring costs for administrators or other education professionals. Nor does it consider the impact teacher turnover has on students. Teachers develop relations with their students,

their families, and their communities, leaving a gap when these teachers leave after a few years, He said, "We may never be able to eliminate some of this turnover, but surely we can do better."

[10:14:27 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMYER emphasized Alaska's retirement system for teachers. He said:

In no uncertain terms, Alaska has the worst retirement system for educators in the country.

Alaska has the preeminence to be the only state that lacks both a pension and social security for educators.

He reported that an analysis by the State of Alaska's Chief Investment Officer in 2019 predicted that 75 percent of Alaska's teachers and administrators who were hired after 2006 and worked 30 years would deplete their retirement savings.

[10:15:30 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES predicted that with the national shortage of teachers the problem will only get worse. She would like Dr. Parady to respond later. She emphasized the importance of addressing teacher shortages. She related her understanding that a private vocational/technical school partners with Native organizations and the university system in rural communities. Although NEA-Alaska represents the public teachers, she asked if it is possible to take advantage of private vocational technical teachers to provide opportunities for students. When students get excited about their career fields, it motivates them in the classroom because these students see relevance.

MR. KLAAMYER answered that support for career technical programs is important. He stated he was not familiar with the program so it would depend on the structure. He said NEA-Alaska supports growing Alaska's own teachers to increase the availability of programs for students and pathways to professional teaching careers in the state. He expressed his willingness to explore how public educators could partner with private partners.

[10:18:49 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMYER continued to discuss retirement issues. He explained that due to a lack of retirement or access to Social Security benefits, many teachers leave the state. While it is difficult to get data, he has personally observed award-winning

teachers relocate to other states. He expressed an interest in the work by the Governor's Task Force for Teacher Recruitment (TFTR) to find solutions to these challenges. He said he looks forward to the TFTR's survey results from current educators, and to work with DEED and the TFTR.

[10:20:44 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMYER directed attention to the January 2021 Legislative Budget and Audit Committee consultant's report that outlines a plan designed to offer retirement security at the same cost to the state. He offered to forward the documents to the committee.

He pointed out Senators Steven and Hughes, among others, previously supported forward funding for public education. He said that NEA-Alaska believes that forward funding for public education provides the cornerstone of stable district budgets and programs and the schools need. Many legislators are familiar with Alaska's annual "pink slip problem." which causes many school districts to lay off teachers in the spring and then attempt to rehire them in the fall. He said he hoped forward funding will be part of the discussion this session.

[10:22:15 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMYER highlighted budget fluctuations caused by COVID-19. Alaska's school funding mechanisms were not designed for the wild fluctuations in enrollment and attendance in some districts caused by the pandemic. These fluctuations in enrollment have led to a precipitous drop in anticipated funding. However, the current statutory "hold harmless" language is inadequate in the current crisis, he said. He reported that the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District (FNSBSD) anticipated laying off about 250 employees or about 15 percent of its workforce. The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) plans to eliminate 5 assistant principal positions, 41 certificated positions and 10 support staff positions, he said.

[10:23:35 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMYER turned to student counts. He said that NEA-Alaska agrees with the Council of School Administrators (CSA) that the only reasonable way to hold districts harmless is to allow districts to choose to use current student counts or the 2019 numbers for fiscal year (FY) 2021. NEA-Alaska anticipates enrollment swings are likely temporary, that as schools return to in-person brick-and-mortar schools, enrollment numbers will once again rise. He emphasized the need to maintain the school district's existing educational infrastructure.

He stated that the pandemic resulted in unanticipated costs, which will require additional resources to reopen schools safely. The NEA-Alaska urges the legislature not to cut state funding to offset any federal COVID relief funding, he said. He suggested the committee could invite the Legislative Finance Division to provide historical trends related to education funding for the last decade. When adjusted for inflation, funding has generally declined or has been flat.

[10:24:57 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMYER offered his view that COVID has reaffirmed the value of in-person instruction, but schools must be safe, with adequate ventilation, and adhering to the current US Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) guidelines and public health policies. This includes social distancing and wearing masks. He said that educators must be vaccinated as soon as possible to allow them to safely interact with students and to ensure healthy employees to keep brick-and-mortar schools operating. Prior to the pandemic, Alaska's students needed more access to counselors, nurses, social workers, and mental health services and that need has grown.

[10:26:27 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMYER emphasized the need to work collaboratively with stakeholders on bi-partisan efforts such as the Pre-K and the Alaska Reads Act. He said to improve on the fundamental skill of reading the NEA-Alaska, legislature and districts must support proven solutions like investing in Pre-K funding and reducing class size so teachers can give students individual attention. Districts need resources for reading intervention support programs led by certified teachers, especially in economically-disadvantaged districts, he said. He emphasized the need to fulfill the goals of the Alaska Challenge by empowering school districts and not diverting funding from public schools.

[10:27:03 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMYER acknowledged the incredible investment in online learning technology in Alaska's school districts and the Lower 48. Improving these tools will better allow educators to manage their classrooms more efficiently, to deliver engaging lessons, and connect with students in-person and online.

MR. KLAAMYER highlighted the collaboration of Commissioner Johnson, DEED, and educators use of a common online platform, the Learning Management System (LMS) "Canvas" to support remote, in-person, and hybrid instruction. It also created Alaska Learns Commons, which is a network of educators who build and share

high quality curricula in every discipline. He characterized it as an open source "marketplace" that shares educator expertise and lends itself to improving and vetting materials to produce the best lessons to engage students and meet Alaska's educational standards. The Instructure company, who owns "Canvas," has been providing additional support and professional development and promoted Alaska's model to other states.

[10:29:43 AM](#)

MR. KLAAMYER said district will seek sustained support for this innovative, collaborative educational resource for Alaska's students when COVID relief funding runs out. He said that NEA-Alaska has pledged \$80,000 to provide professional development for educators. It created an incentive program to encourage NEA-Alaska members to contribute to this program.

He emphasized the need to examine the entire educational system to find ways to improve student outcomes. He stressed the importance of assessment, competency-based learning, ways to improve students' life readiness, access to digital educational technology, and making sure that Career and Technical opportunities align with local jobs. He highlighted the goal of providing equal access to educational opportunities for all Alaskan students. The pandemic has deepened the inequities that persist in society, he said.

MR. KLAAMYER said that Alaska's educators stand ready to consult and assist the legislature. NEA-Alaska's members have experts in every discipline, including reading specialists, career and technical instructors, and special education teachers and paraprofessionals.

[10:32:35 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Holland adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 10:32 a.m.