

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

February 5, 2024

8:03 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
Senator Jesse Kiehl  
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Jamie Allard, Co-Chair  
Representative Justin Ruffridge, Co-Chair  
Representative Mike Prax  
Representative CJ McCormick  
Representative Tom McKay  
Representative Rebecca Himschoot  
Representative Andi Story

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

All members present

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative Ortiz  
Representative Schrage

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: STATE OF PK-12 EDUCATION IN Alaska

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

LISA PARADY, Executive Director  
Alaska Council of School Administrators  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented State of PK-12 Education in Alaska.

ROY GETCHELL, President  
Alaska Superintendents Association  
Haines, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented State of PK-12 Education in Alaska.

RICK DORMER, President  
Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals  
Ketchikan, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented State of PK-12 Education in Alaska.

JOSH GILL, President  
Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals  
Bethel, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented State of PK-12 Education in Alaska.

HEATHER HEINEKEN, President  
Alaska Association of School Business Officials  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented State of PK-12 Education in Alaska.

DOUG GRAY, Director  
Profession Development  
Alaska Staff Development Network  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented State of PK-12 Education in Alaska.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:03:28 AM](#)

**CHAIR LÖKI TOBIN** called the joint meeting of the Senate and House Education Standing Committees to order at 8:03 a.m. Senate members present at the call to order were Senators Kiehl, Stevens, Gray-Jackson, Bjorkman, and Chair Tobin. Representative members present at the call to order were Representatives Prax, Co-chair Allard, Co-Chair Ruffridge, McCormick, McKay, Himschoot, and Story.

[8:04:35 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of a presentation State of PK-12 Education in Alaska.

Chair Tobin stated that today's presentations will be from the Alaska Council of School Administrators and its member organizations. She mentioned that the committee will hear from those on the front lines providing public education to Alaska's students. The presentations include the:

- Alaska Council of School Administrators
- Alaska Superintendents Association
- Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals
- Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals
- Alaska Association of Business Professionals.

[8:05:42 AM](#)

LISA PARADY, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), Juneau, Alaska moved to slide 1 and introduced the ACSA. She said the ACSA is a private, nonprofit organization that has served the needs of school districts and its members across Alaska for more than 50 years. She has been in this job for 10 years, and members have been presenting to the legislature for more than a decade allowing educators to share a "boots on the ground" perspective and enabling committee members to ask questions and understand what is happening daily in school districts and schools, directly affecting our students.

[8:06:24 AM](#)

MS. PARADY moved to slide 2 and introduced the ACSA umbrella organizations that would present.

[8:07:53 AM](#)

MS. PARADY moved to slide 3 and stated that she included the slide of an Alaska map divided by region so committee members could see their region of the state.

She emphasized that for educators, it serves as a good reminder that while they advocate for individual districts and the students in those districts, they also advocate for every child. Each committee member has a statewide responsibility to every student in Alaska to ensure they receive the education they deserve. Members of ACSA understand they are here on behalf of every student, highlighting the inclusive nature of public education, which serves every child as they come.

[8:09:05 AM](#)

MS. PARADY moved to slide 4 and said in the packet provided to committee members, there is a product that has been developed over many years: the ACSA joint position statements. These statements represent the highest priorities for public education at the current time. They are the result of a collaborative effort among members from every region in Alaska, discussing current issues and what needs to be stressed to policymakers regarding district and school needs for students. She maintained that student achievement is the number one priority and remains at the forefront of all their efforts, with sustainable funding being the most critical need.

[8:10:14 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced that Representative Ortiz joined the meeting.

[8:10:20 AM](#)

ROY GETCHELL, President, Alaska Superintendents Association, Haines, Alaska, moved to slide 5 and introduced himself and provided a brief history of his 33 years in education.

[8:11:24 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 6 and introduced the Alaska Superintendent Association Board of Director. He said Alaska is a large state with a variety of needs therefore it is important to have a voice at the table to provide support to superintendents throughout Alaska.

[8:12:08 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 7 and recalled learning that the federal government purposely left the responsibility of public education up to the states. He spoke to Alaska's constitutional duty to education:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Constitutional Duty  
Priority Funding for Public Education**

The State of Alaska has a constitutional responsibility to public education, which means to provide timely, reliable, and predictable revenue for schools, funding the actual cost of education in all districts and to provide full and equitable funding for all initiatives, laws, and mandates that require additional resources. **Early notification of funding and predictable funding are crucial to sound financial management, as well as recruitment and retention of quality educators.**

[8:13:22 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 8 a bar graph that depicts Alaska's purchasing power using data provided by Legislative Finance. He noted that the black line shows inflation adjusting to FY 12 value. He pointed out that educators can't create budgets using one time funding. The \$87.4 million in outside funding that his district received was about 5 percent of the total budget. He started the year with a 10 percent fund balance and expressed that he started the school year halfway in the hole. He noted that he cannot budget based on one time funding.

[8:14:30 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 9 and discussed the importance of funding inside the Base Student Allocation (BSA):

[Original punctuation provided.]

Why Fund **Inside** the BSA?

- Reliability
- Predictability
- Putting one time money into fixed costs is discouraged, risky, and uncertain
- Allows our School Boards to be better stewards of their obligation to adopt budgets for their school districts
- One time money does not meet the needs of teachers, classrooms, other educators and students in the future

[8:15:36 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 10 and provided a cost-of-living example, explaining that there are three factors in the formula. He noted that one of these factors is the cost component. He asked members to consider their own living expenses, acknowledging that costs may seem cheap to some and expensive to others.

He highlighted the example of Haines, emphasizing a cost factor of 1.2 in the formula. He then compared this to the Northwest Arctic, which has a cost factor of 1.82, illustrating the higher living costs there. He indicated that this example demonstrates routine items and familiar costs in different communities.

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Cost of Living Examples**

#### **Haines Borough School District**

- One Bedroom Apartment - \$1250
- Gallon of Milk - \$8.99
- Case of Bottled Water - \$ 24.99 • Dozen Eggs - \$6.99
- Gallon of Gasoline - \$5.54

#### **Northwest Arctic School District**

- One Bedroom Apartment - \$1800/month (plus utilities)
- Gallon of Milk - \$10 - \$30 (depending on region)
- Case of Bottled Water - \$38-\$50
- Dozen Eggs - \$9.59
- Heating Fuel - \$9.97/gallon (Noatak - flown in)

[8:16:32 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 11 and described it as the opportunity graph. The graph shows what the BSA would have been if inflation adjusted since 2017 - FY 25. He pointed out his pin, which says "1413," representing the dollar gap between the top of the red line and the pencil tip on the far right. This gap illustrates the difference in the opportunity to pay bills, hire high-quality teachers, and innovate for student achievement. He stressed that concerns over basic expenses like fuel and snowplow bills create lost opportunities for student benefits.

[8:17:39 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 12 and emphasized that education is accountable. He cited his administrative assistant in Haines, who has served for 34 years and maintains a growing list of over

50 tasks that she performs. These tasks include Special Education audits, compliance checks for funding and grant money, state monitoring of federal programs, multiple On-line Alaska School Information System (Oasis) reports, attendance and achievement data for various grants and program audits. He noted that these reports require significant time and are crucial for accountability.

[8:18:49 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 13 to address the cost of district administration. He explained that personnel costs typically range from 80 percent to 90 percent of a district's expenses. In administration for the five largest school districts in Alaska, costs range from 0.4 percent in Mat-Su to 1.4 percent in Fairbanks. He aimed to clarify misconceptions about administrative expenses by presenting these figures.

**District Expenditures: District Administration**

Anchorage School District	1.1 percent
Fairbanks North Star School District	1.4 percent
Juneau School District	.435 percent
Kenai School District	.88 percent
Mat-Su School District	.4 percent

[8:19:46 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 14 and apologized for the dense data, directing attendees to a source for deeper exploration. He highlighted the change in average teacher salaries from 1989 to 1990, noting a decrease from \$95,847 to \$73,722 in equivalent dollars. He attributed this decline partly to teacher turnover and the absence of the defined benefit program that existed in 1989, which previously helped retain teachers.

[8:21:39 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 15 to discuss the number of emergency certificates and first-day vacancies. He pointed out the significant increase in vacancies from about 150 in 2020 to over 500 today. The number of emergency certificates also rose sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting the challenges in recruitment and the need for emergency hires to fill vacancies. He noted that the rise in emergency certificates is almost on the same trajectory as the number of first day teacher vacancies.

[8:22:51 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 16 to highlight the cost of teacher turnover. He referenced a 2017 ICER study indicating that replacing a teacher costs a district at least \$20,000 and a 2019 RAND study showing that the cost of replacing a principal was \$75,000. He emphasized the learning costs associated with turnover, noting its negative impact on student achievement, especially among minority and low-performing students. Mid-year turnover exacerbates these challenges, often requiring emergency hires.

[8:23:56 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 17, showing a photo of superintendents in Alaska when he was hired in 2018. He highlighted the high turnover rate among superintendents by noting that, in a six-year period, seven superintendents had changed districts, eight remained in the same district, and 39 had left, retired, or found other work. He stated that high turnover of superintendents leads to instability.

[8:24:56 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 18 and stated that ensuring superintendents are effective in their roles is crucial for student stability. He highlighted the New Superintendent Induction Support Program, which he found extremely beneficial when he was a new superintendent. This program involves meeting several times a year with new and experienced colleagues and mentors. He shared that his district had the foresight to hire a mentor who had previously worked in the same district, which greatly aided his development. The program provides in-depth, on-the-job learning opportunities for first and second-year superintendents, recognizing that the first couple of years are critical. Typically, after two to three years, superintendents are well on their way to success.

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **New Superintendent Induction and Support Program**

#### **Superintendent Turnover**

- 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
- ASA provides individual support through a research-based mentoring program

[8:25:44 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL moved to slide 19 and provided outcome data from the New Superintendent Induction and Support Program:

**New Superintendent Induction and Support Program**

- Since the program began 5 years ago
  - 72 percent of superintendents have participated in the program
  - 88 percent of 2022-2023 first year superintendents returned to their position this school year
  - 100 percent of the 2023-2024 cohort are on track to return for their second year

[8:26:35 AM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked what is included in the administrative cost percentage.

[8:26:46 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL replied that a significant portion of the administrative cost is attributed to training investments. He emphasized that districts invest heavily in training their principals, covering necessary skills, leadership, and mentorship. These investments are essential for principals to meet the demands of their roles effectively. He likened the situation to starting over each time a leader leaves, highlighting the high costs involved.

He shared that the Haines Borough School District has invested substantial resources to ensure he receives the necessary support and training to succeed as a leader. This includes staying current with state mandates, federal laws, and federal mandates to lead the school in a way that improves educational outcomes. He stressed that the goal is not just to survive but to help students thrive, noting that principals who receive significant investment tend to lead thriving schools.

[8:28:11 AM](#)

MS. PARADY stated she is willing to provide the body of research to the committee.

[8:28:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked for clarification on national studies that report higher administrative costs than what was presented. She also inquired about the details of emergency certification and who is teaching under those criteria.

[8:28:54 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL replied that the data he referred to might be outdated, and he would need to research and provide more current information regarding national administrative costs. He emphasized that while the financial aspect is significant, his primary concern is the impact on students whenever a principal or superintendent leaves. This turnover results in the loss of learning opportunities and the emotional investment in the education system.

MR. GETCHELL explained that emergency certification occurs when a district cannot find a qualified candidate for a teaching position after posting the job. Emergency certification allows someone with a relevant degree but without a teaching license to be considered for the role. The district must then determine if there is a suitable candidate within the community or school who, despite not being licensed, can perform the duties with the necessary support. This ensures that the individual can manage the job's demands, even without full licensure.

[8:30:45 AM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN said it has been suggested by Commissioner Bishop that school districts this year, without a Base Student Allocation (BSA) increase, have enough money to meet their mission and educate the children of the state of Alaska. He asked Mr. Getchell what the size of his district's deficit is going into 2025. He also inquired about the changes the district will make to educational opportunities if no additional dollars are added to the formula. Finally, he asked if the district has received any guidance from DEED or the commissioner's office concerning how to spend money differently to meet the mission of DEED.

[8:31:30 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL replied that he has a 9.9% fund balance, which is about one month's worth of expenditures. He mentioned that his board maintains this practice to cover emergencies, such as the 2020 landslide in Haines. However, he noted that with the current budget, this fund balance would likely be cut in half. He emphasized the need to look at other expenditures and mentioned the AK Reads Act, which requires a reading support specialist. He has a classroom teacher assigned to this role but would prefer to hire a dedicated interventionist, which would cost \$100,000. This cost, along with inflation, would significantly impact the district's budget.

MR. GETCHELL stated that all districts are facing financial challenges and are working hard to avoid negative outcomes. He stressed the importance of the AK Reads Act and the need for adequate funding to comply with it. He expressed the need for additional support beyond the fund balance. He urged the panel to consider the impact of no additional funding, noting that it would lead to changes in programs and difficulties in attracting high-quality educators. He urged members to talk to their superintendents and ask what is going to happen if there isn't an increase in funding. He stated his belief that superintendents will unanimously say there will be changes to programs and a loss of high-quality educators who want to come to Alaska but can't afford it. Mr. Getchell also mentioned that he has not received any guidance to reduce spending but noted that requirements are increasing over time, not decreasing.

[8:34:57 AM](#)

SENATOR JACKSON asked what the independent auditor's recommendation was for the fund balance.

[8:35:16 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL replied that the auditor will report the findings to the school board. He stated that the board wants a 10 percent fund balance because Haines is a small community and needs funds available for emergencies. He emphasized that the community must manage emergencies independently. Auditors get concerned as the fund balance approaches zero. Whenever the audit is presented, the first item the board examines is the fund balance to determine emergency funding. He added that while he did not know the auditor's specific opinion, he knows they get gravely concerned if they see the fund balance decreasing over time.

[8:36:38 AM](#)

MS. PARADY interjected that experts in the audience provided a lifeline, noting that the Government Finance Officers Association recommends a fund balance of five to 15 percent of operating revenues or one to two months of operating expenditures, which aligns with Mr. Getchell's testimony.

[8:37:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE referred to slide 12, labeled "Education is Accountable," noting numerous bullet points on auditing and reporting of funds. He highlighted the position statement indicating that student achievement is the number one priority and asked about the relationship between accountability and achievement. He mentioned that constituents often inquire about

how these two aspects align and how they can be certain that funds are being used to prioritize student achievement.

[8:38:04 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL said he would speak on behalf of all superintendents, sharing his own story, which he believes is common across the state. He explained that his board has set goals within their strategic plan based on student achievement, which they monitor through data. For example, he mentioned that they just took the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measurers of Academic Progress (MAP) exam, and he will report the mid-year data to his board. He emphasized the importance of this practice.

CHAIR TOBIN asked for an explanation of MAP.

MR. GETCHELL replied that the MAP test is an achievement test similar to the Iowa Test of Basic Skills but updated and nationally normed, with data from about 30 states. This test helps monitor student achievement and predict performance on the AK STAR test. He explained that his board looks at various assessments for accountability, such as DIBELS, the early literacy screener required by the Alaska Reads Act, ensuring second graders are on grade level before moving to third grade.

MR. GETCHELL mentioned the high turnover of superintendents, comparing it to the National Football League, which also has high accountability. Superintendents face accountability from school boards, especially if they are not meeting expectations. He emphasized accountability for both brick-and-mortar students and those in correspondence programs. They work hard to ensure students in correspondence programs participate in literacy screeners, with varying participation levels. He noted that brick-and-mortar students have higher participation rates and less opting out compared to correspondence students, which impacts reporting and progress tracking.

[8:41:42 AM](#)

MS. PARADY added that it is a great question and one they wrestle with often. She noted research on the slide indicating that turnover impacts student achievement. Superintendent turnover affects principal turnover, which in turn affects teacher turnover. This instability lowers student achievement. Stabilizing school districts by retaining high-quality staff is key to improving achievement. Competitive wages and benefits are crucial for attracting and retaining teachers.

MS. PARADY highlighted the dire straits in recruitment, necessitating the hiring of many foreign teachers. For example, one district has 87 foreign teachers, and the superintendent from Northwest Arctic had turnover of 100 teachers. The national shortage of educators exacerbates this crisis. The loss of competitiveness makes it difficult to attract teachers to Alaska. Stabilizing school districts is essential to focus efforts on student achievement.

[8:44:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX said he did not disagree with the points made so far but believed the bigger picture was being missed. He found it interesting that the NFL was used as an illustration, pointing out that the fundamental difference between the NFL and the state legislature is that the NFL must please the people sending them money. People voluntarily give money to the NFL, whereas it is not voluntary nor discussed by the people the legislature represent. He opined that this is creating a long-term fiscal problem for Alaska that applies to school districts, healthcare, roads, energy, and other areas. He asked if the association had considered this fundamental problem of mandatory funding and how to attract more voluntary funding into Alaska.

[8:45:23 AM](#)

MR. GETCHELL referred to slide 12, "Constitutional Duty," and emphasized that funding education is a constitutional duty agreed upon by the state. He acknowledged the validity of the question but reiterated the importance of this duty as part of the state's identity and Constitution. Regarding revenue streams and funding education, he stated his belief that this is a larger conversation that legislators are already having. He said that as an education advocate, he speaks on behalf of the children, driven by both the Constitution and his moral obligation to ensure a better future for all children in Alaska.

MS. PARADY added that they are very supportive of the efforts to develop a long-term sustainable fiscal plan with additional revenues. She noted that they discuss this issue frequently and are very supportive of the legislature, which is responsible for making those decisions.

[8:46:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX mentioned that the Constitution assigns the legislature the responsibility of setting up and maintaining a school system of public education. He pointed out that in the Statehood Act, Alaska was admitted as a state based on the recognition that resource development, not taxation of residents, is the fundamental way to make the state work.

Without voluntary incoming money, there is no funding to argue about. He stressed the need to reconcile the internal conflict between those opposing resource development and the necessity of having money to operate the state. He emphasized the need for an alliance to support resource development against opposition both within and outside Alaska.

[8:48:03 AM](#)

RICK DORMER, President, Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals, Ketchikan, Alaska, said he is also the principal of Ketchikan high school and provided a brief work history. He turned to slide 21 and presented the names and photos of members of the Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals Board of Directors. He encouraged members to reach out to these principals with questions about education in Alaska. He stated he would share challenges from the viewpoint of an Alaskan principal.

[8:49:29 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 22 and discussed the following joint position statements:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **SCHOOL SAFETY**

ACSA advocates for safe and secure schools as a catalyst for the prevention of school crime and violence. We emphasize the importance of preventative as well as reactionary measures to ensure school safety.

**ACSA supports improving the safety, physical and mental well-being of our children, knowing this is critical to increasing student achievement.**

#### **SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH**

ACSA supports targeted funding to enable schools to recruit, retain, and increase students' access to school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, nurses, and mental health specialists and to provide additional professional development for all staff to meet the increasing and diverse needs of all students.

[8:50:13 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 23 and presented sobering statistics: 20 percent of students experience emotional, mental, or behavioral disorders, with one in six youth facing mental health issues. In Alaska, 8,000 teenagers suffer from depression, and 64 percent of these cases do not receive treatment. He shared a personal story of his children, who struggled with anxiety and found support in a teacher they had a positive relationship with, illustrating the vital role of school relationships in managing mental health.

He described the diverse family structures and challenges many students face, including homelessness and couch surfing. Schools aim to stabilize these students and partner with families to ensure they are college or career ready upon graduation. He emphasized the unprecedented scope of mental health needs among students and adults in the community.

[8:51:33 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slides 24-27 and showed a map indicating that every state has experienced school shootings, underscoring the importance of mental health supports and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs in preventing such incidents. He noted that many school shooters have been victims of violence or have low social-emotional health. He highlighted the lack of resources and training to address these issues properly, noting that public schools average one counselor for every 408 students and one school psychologist for every 1,127 students, with only 42% of schools offering mental health treatment services.

He stressed the need for more mental health supports and strong SEL programs to ensure safety and improve educational outcomes. He concluded by sharing state-specific facts about mental health, urging everyone to consider these staggering statistics and the critical need for mental health services in schools.

MR. DORMER shared a recent story about a student in a village who, after school, would leave their unsafe home environment and sleep underneath the school. This harrowing portrait highlights how schools can be a safe haven and place of comfort for some students. He noted that Alaska has the highest suicide rate in the nation. Suicide affects the entire community, sometimes even reaching beyond it. For instance, a recent suicide in nearby Metlakatla impacted the entire Southeast region. He expressed

that virtually all of Alaska is affected by mental health issues, emphasizing that students and their families need help.

8:54:48 AM

MR. DORMER moved to slide 28 and discussed educator retention. He highlighted a crucial position statement: preparing, attracting, and retaining qualified educators in Alaska. He referenced a recent survey by the governor's task force, noting that the top two issues related to retention are salary and benefits. Alaska was once a destination for professionals seeking adventure, strong employment opportunities, and excellent benefits. Educators often moved to Alaska with their families, as was his experience when he moved from Oregon 15 years ago, having a wonderful experience since then.

[Original punctuation provided.]

**PREPARING, ATTRACTING AND  
RETAINING QUALIFIED EDUCATORS**

Recruiting and retaining highly effective educators and leaders is imperative to increase student achievement and eliminate academic disparity for all of Alaska's students.

According to a survey done by the Governor's Task Force on Teacher Retention and Recruitment, of over 3700 Alaskan educators, 2 of the top issues related to retention status are: Salary and Benefits

\*Page 6 ACSA Joint Position Statements

8:55:30 AM

MR. DORMER moved to slides 29-30 and said the table shows the top ten factors that Alaska educators consider when deciding on jobs or staying in their current positions. These factors include sustainable funding, good retirement and health plans, and feeling safe and connected at their workplace. He noted that Alaska is losing qualified educators every year. He emphasized the importance of retaining quality educators, warning that without them, the future of Alaska's school system is at risk.

MR. DORMER shared personal examples of the impact of this issue. Recently, the Ketchikan School District lost a top administrator, a high school counselor, and another experienced administrator to other states. He highlighted that this problem is not unique to Ketchikan but is prevalent across Alaska. The

applicant pool for a high school science teacher position in his school mostly consisted of candidates from outside the United States, a stark change from five years ago. Many Alaskan administrators hold additional licenses in other states, making their departure easier.

MR. DOMER stressed the urgent need to retain quality educators, citing research from the Wallace Foundation that a strong administrator has a significant impact on student achievement. The retention of school leaders is critical, as it can take five years for a leader to make a meaningful difference, yet only one in four principals stay in their position longer than five years.

[8:59:16 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slides 31-33 and emphasized the importance of fixing retention issues to ensure quality education. He mentioned various school options, such as charter schools, parochial schools, magnet schools, and correspondence schools, but noted that without addressing personnel retention, these options won't have quality educators to staff them. He expressed excitement about being part of a collaborative with 11 other states focusing on school leadership through a shared leadership framework. They have also started a new aspiring leaders program, thanks to funding from DEED, to support early-career principals.

He concluded by discussing the Alaska State Leadership Academy (ASLA) program, which provides statewide support and high-quality professional development. He highlighted the program's growth, with the addition of Alaska's two largest districts in 2024. Supporting leadership is a significant strategy for improving schools in the state. He wrapped up by sharing data from the program's annual report, showing its positive impact, and expressed enthusiasm for continuing this program and supporting educational leaders.

MR. DOMER thanked the legislators and introduced a video featuring Caitlin Stasis, who summarized the discussed points and exemplified the importance of their efforts.

[9:02:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said she was familiar with school psychologists as individuals who administer tests to students and asked for more information about their role in addressing the mental health needs of students. She also requested insights on the mental health of educators.

9:03:29 AM

MR. DOMER replied that in Southeast Alaska, school psychologists typically travel between schools, which limits their availability. Their primary role is to help identify student needs and conduct testing. In Petersburg and Ketchikan, they had one counselor for both middle and high schools, who also partnered with local health agencies because one counselor couldn't meet all the needs.

MR. DOMER said counselors are expected to provide both academic and social-emotional support to ensure students are college- and career-ready and feel secure. Finding counselors is challenging, so partnerships with local mental health agencies are crucial. Even with these partnerships, places like Petersburg struggle to provide enough counselors, utilizing community resources to bridge the gap.

He noted that Ketchikan secured a grant, allowing them to hire two additional counselors and two social workers, creating a supportive environment for students. These professionals are busy all day, addressing serious issues beyond typical adolescent concerns. To support counselors, Ketchikan's superintendent has arranged for counselors for the counselors, acknowledging the emotional toll of their work.

MR. DOMER stated that the situation highlights the layered approach necessary for effective mental health support in schools. However, grant funding is temporary, and efforts are ongoing to stabilize support systems for students, as teaching academic subjects becomes challenging when students face significant personal issues.

9:05:53 AM

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT REPRESENTATIVE HIMSHCOOT expressed concern about staff mental health, particularly secondary trauma. She noted that the counselors do both academic and mental health counseling and asked for data on the ratios. She inquired if the social workers are functioning as mental health counselors, allowing academic counselors to focus on academic counseling, and asked what numbers they should be looking at for mental health and academic support staff.

9:06:23 AM

MR. DOMER replied that he didn't have specific statistics on the need for mental health support, but he emphasized that the current resources are insufficient. In Ketchikan, they have

doubled their support by adding two social workers, resulting in two counselors handling both academic and social-emotional needs, and two social workers focusing almost entirely on social-emotional needs. Despite this increase, all four staff members are constantly busy.

MR. DOMER said in Petersburg, the superintendent mentioned a shortage of mental health support and multiple staff absences due to mental health needs. He noted that while the primary focus has been on supporting students, they should also address mental health supports for staff. He acknowledged the importance of this issue but admitted it might have been overlooked.

MR. DOMER stated that Ketchikan's current ratio exceeds the one counselor per 400 students guideline but stressed that even this isn't sufficient. He committed to working with Dr. Parady to gather more data on the necessary numbers for adequate mental health and academic support staff.

[9:07:34 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced Representative Schrage joined the meeting.

[9:07:38 AM](#)

MS. PARADY added that Doug Gray from the Alaska Staff Development Network will discuss further efforts regarding trauma support. She mentioned that for the past 13 years, they have organized the largest education conference in the state, which includes trauma-informed and trauma-engaged support for staff. This training has been in high demand and continues to grow each year. She emphasized that this basic training is essential for educators to support their students effectively.

[9:08:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX noted that at the state level, mental health and family needs are being addressed through organizations within the Department of Health and the Department of Family Services. He acknowledged that schools are significantly involved in this effort and asked if there has been communication with these departments to potentially break down barriers. He suggested that in the short term, reallocating funds from these agencies to schools might be a solution, although he recognized the complexity of the issue in the long term. He inquired if there had been any discussions with those agencies.

[9:09:08 AM](#)

MR. DOMER replied that he has not been in communication with the Department of Health and the Department of Family Services, and he is unsure if their superintendent has. He mentioned that during his time in Petersburg and Ketchikan, they regularly met with hospital administrators to discuss available supports. Petersburg had a Mental Health Coalition, with which he maintained a positive relationship. He noted that while they use Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) for these partnerships, he is not familiar with any conversations happening at the state level with those departments.

MS. PARADY added that many schools partner with local health clinics or available community resources to form coalitions addressing student needs. She noted that this is a common model but acknowledged that there is always more that can be done.

[9:10:06 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked about the connection between student mental health and assessments. She noted that discussions often focus on student achievements and opportunities for success and inquired about the correlation between these factors and student mental health.

[9:10:28 AM](#)

MR. DOMER replied that they use assessments like the MAP test by the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) from Portland, Oregon. This third-party assessment helps gauge student performance by providing a comparative analysis. While students may not be excited about assessments, these evaluations are impactful for understanding student progress. He emphasized that formative assessments, conducted by teachers daily in the classroom, are particularly effective. These assessments involve direct interaction with students, allowing them to demonstrate their learning and skills.

MR. DOMER highlighted the importance of the positive relationship between students and caring educators. This relationship, along with hands-on activities and peer collaboration, leads to higher attendance rates and success in the classroom. He acknowledged the lack of specific data correlating student mental health with academic achievement but expressed interest in exploring this further to share insights with staff.

[9:11:51 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN shared that a colleague mentioned the assessment data for students in Wrangell might be lower this year, raising concerns about the impact of trauma on student performance.

[9:11:59 AM](#)

MS. PARADY added that they will look for specific data on the impact of trauma on assessment results and noted that Doug Gray might address this issue during his testimony.

[9:12:14 AM](#)

JOSH GILL, President, Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals, Bethel, Alaska, Co-presented State of PK-12 Education in Alaska moved to slide 34 and introduced himself and stated he is also the principal of Ayaprun Elitnaurvik, a charter school in the Lower Kuskokwim School District. The district is about the size of West Virginia. There are no roads connecting the schools in the delta, but the district works closely to do what is best for its students.

[9:13:17 AM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slide 35 and introduced the Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals (AAESP) board, which is a diverse group that represents students from all areas of Alaska. The mission of AAESP is to support school leaders in their work, strengthen Alaska communities, and provide excellent opportunities for all students.

[9:13:46 AM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slide 36 and highlighted the joint position statement for early childhood education:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

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

The developmental differences of 3 and 4 year old pre-K children require developmentally appropriate instructional materials and playground equipment, all of which depends on sufficient funding.

\*Page 8 ACSA Joint Position Statements

MR. GILL stated that many people on the board have worked very hard on the Alaska Reads Act. Most children should enter kindergarten with a 5,000 - 6,000-word vocabulary, but in his region, students enter kindergarten with a 2,500 - 3,500-word vocabulary. He asserted that Alaska needs to address readiness for kindergarten.

[9:14:42 AM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slide 37 and provided statistics on at risk children who don't receive a high-quality early childhood education:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- 25 percent more likely to drop out of school
- 40 percent more likely to become a teen parent
- 50 percent more likely to be placed in special education
- 60 percent more likely to never attend college
- 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime

MR. GILL asked members to think about the additional cost to the state when children do not receive high quality early education. He opined that Alaska needs universal early childhood education for students. Investing in kids saves the state money.

[9:15:35 AM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slide 38 and said the data is clear that early childhood programs have a monetary value in Alaskan communities in the long term and prepare children socially, academically, physically and emotionally to enter kindergarten. He discussed the success of a grant program that he and Paul Sugar implemented at Mikelnguut Elitnaurviat, a K-2 grade school, and the success low-income students experienced. He stated that with the right tools the trajectory of students can change.

[9:17:04 AM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slides 39 - 41 discussed another joint position statement concerning bandwidth in Alaska:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **INCREASING BANDWIDTH IN UNDERSERVED AREAS**

ACSA supports continuing the Broadband Assistance Grant (BAG) to ensure all schools are able to access a

minimum speed of 100 megabits per second, which leverages federal E-Rate funds up to a 9:1 match,

We also support efforts to continue to increase download speed to meet national recommendations of 1 gigabit per second, per student.

**It is critical to recognize the ongoing and increasing need for Alaska's students, educators, and leaders to have equitable access to the digital world both inside and outside of the school environment.**

\*Page 5 ACSA Joint Position Statements

#### **INCREASING BANDWIDTH IN UNDERSERVED AREAS**

- 44 percent of Alaska communities are unserved
- Almost 50 percent of Alaska's communities are unserved or underserved
- Rural Alaskan students are particularly vulnerable to digital inequities

#### **INCREASING BANDWIDTH IN UNDERSERVED AREAS**

- Alaska currently ranks 51st among states and the District of Columbia in BroadbandNow's annual rankings of internet coverage, speed, and availability.
- Inequitable access to electronic devices and reliable internet has a negative impact on opportunity and achievement for Alaskan students.

[9:17:32 AM](#)

MR. GILL said geographic location should not determine bandwidth. Bush Alaska operates with very low bandwidth. Much of rural Alaska is artificially capped at 25 mbps. The national average is 322 mbps. In addition to better connectivity students need more professional development, which often is provided virtually through the internet. However, it is difficult to school because students use the bandwidth during and after school. Due to limitations at LKSD high school students do not always have access to highly qualified certified teachers in the classroom and instead have a virtual teacher with an aide in the classroom. When high school students are instructed virtually

the other students in school must stay off the internet because there is not enough bandwidth to share. Also, there is not enough bandwidth for students to take standardized tests at the same time and during testing, no other students can access the internet. He stressed the importance of the Broadband Assistance Grant (BAG) and infrastructure grants.

[9:19:46 AM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slide 42 and discussed data accountability for school leaders:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- School Safety
- Teacher and Principal Evaluations
- Accreditation Process
- Title I Data
- Alaska Reads Act Implementation
- Graduation Rates
- Attendance
- DEED School Report Card
- Facility Management
- Program Budgets
- Staff Retention
- Program Audits
- Special Ed/IEP Audits

[9:20:42 AM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slide 42 and discussed data accountability for school leaders:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **School Leaders are Accountable**

- School Safety
- Teacher and Principal Evaluations
- Accreditation Process
- Title I Data
- Alaska Reads Act Implementation
- Graduation Rates
- Attendance
- DEED School Report Card
- Facility Management

- Program Budgets
- Staff Retention
- Program Audits
- Special Ed/IEP Audits

[9:22:04 AM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slide 43 and stated that in 2015 there was a fire at Ayaprun Elitnaurvik and invited members to the opening of the new school this fall. The community is excited to have a gym and aspects that represent the culture. He mentioned some school options in Alaska and said charter schools have a great impact on communities and education in Alaska.

[9:24:36 AM](#)

HEATHER HEINEKEN, President, Alaska Association of School Business Officials, Fairbanks, Alaska, Co-presented State of PK-12 Education in Alaska, moved to slide 44 and introduced herself and stated she is also the chief financial officer for Yukon Koyukuk School District. She stated that the Alaska Association of School Business Officials (ALASBO) consists of board members and professionals from districts across the state. In addition to business managers, the membership includes professionals from human resources, instructional and informational technology, facilities, and other support divisions. The mission of ALASBO is to promote the highest standard in school business practices.

MS. HEINEKEN highlighted the financial challenges faced by Alaska school districts statewide, emphasizing a significant financial shortfall. Over the weekend, educational leaders from across the state participated in the ACSA fly-in and discussed similar challenges for different reasons, all relating to financial shortfall. She said that at the House Education Committee meeting on Friday, the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) provided an in-depth look into school funding, highlighting state aid generated by the Base Student Allocation (BSA), federal funds, and local contributions. The federal funds discussed included COVID funding, which expires this year with no plan to fill the gap, referred to as the fiscal cliff. These funds have supported mental health, social-emotional support, and learning loss mitigation over the past five years.

MS. HEINEKEN detailed other federal funds such as Title I, II, III, IV, Title VI-B Section 619, Carl Perkins, and other smaller funds totaling about \$245 million. These funds are distributed through an application process and targeted at students such as those in migrant education or special education. She said that

in her district, only 300 of the 3,300 students qualify for these specialized funds. Districts must comply with federal regulations, reporting, and compliance requirements when accepting these funds. Except for COVID funds, there are also restrictions on supplanting, which means districts cannot use these funds for general expenses like heating, electricity, or property insurance.

[9:27:34 AM](#)

MS. HEINEKEN moved to slide 46, an overview of education funding in the form of a pie graph for FY 24 school district expenditures by category. She reviewed the distribution of state aid by function as defined by the State of Alaska Department of Education Uniform Chart of Accounts. The functions are characterized by instruction and non-instruction:

**Non-Instruction = 26 percent**

Community services 0 percent  
Debt Service 0 percent  
Student Activities 1 percent  
Operations and maintenance 15 percent  
District administrative support 5 percent  
District Administration 2 percent  
School Administrative support 3 percent  
School Administration 4 percent

**Instruction = 74 percent**

Support Services Instruction 9 percent  
Support Services Students 4 percent  
Special Education support 4 percent  
Special Education Instruction 13 percent  
Instruction 40 percent

**FY 24 School District Funding by Payor**

State 67 percent  
Local Contribution 26 percent  
Other 2 percent  
Federal 5 percent

[9:27:48 AM](#)

MS. HEINEKEN moved to slide 47 and named instructional functions:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Instructional (Functions 100-400) = 74 percent**

- Instruction
- Special Education Instruction
- Special Education Support
- Support Services - Student
- Support Services - Instruction
- School Administration (Principals)

DEED Uniform Chart of Accounts:

[https://education.alaska.gov/publications/chart\\_of\\_accounts.pdf](https://education.alaska.gov/publications/chart_of_accounts.pdf)

9:28:09 AM

MS. HEINEKEN moved to slide 48 and named non-instructional functions:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Non-Instructional (Functions 450-780) = 26 percent**

- School Admin Support
- District Administration
- District Admin Support
- Operations & Maintenance - 15%
- Student Activities - 1%
- Community Services

DEED Uniform Chart of Accounts:

[https://education.alaska.gov/publications/chart\\_of\\_accounts.pdf](https://education.alaska.gov/publications/chart_of_accounts.pdf)

MS. HEINEKEN said non-instructional functions, which comprise 26 percent of expenditures, include 15 percent for operations and maintenance, covering costs like fuel, electricity, and property insurance, and keeping schools safe and clean. Other non-instructional categories include student activities, school and district administration, human resources, business office operations, instructional and informational technology. Approximately 2 percent is district administration, which includes the Office of the Superintendent and Board of Education.

9:28:50 AM

MS. HEINEKEN moved to slide 49 and provided a list of ways there is accountability in education:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Education is Accountable**

- DEED Approved Budgets Publicly Published
- Annual Financial Audits
- GEER/ESSER Reporting Requirements through DEED for COVID Expenditures
- TRS/PRS Audits
- Title I comparability reporting
- Program Audits
- Fund Balance Reporting
- Per Pupil Allocation
- Grant funding Monitoring - SPED, Title I, Competitive Awards
- NSLP/Food Service Annual Audit
- Special Award Audits as Required by Funding Agency
- DEED Quarterly Reimbursement Reports

MS. HEINEKEN emphasized the accountability of school districts stating each district submits numerous reports and audits to state and federal agencies. Continued funding often depends on the completion and submission of the reports.

[9:29:21 AM](#)

MS. HEINEKEN moved to slide 50 and said many of the reports are available on DEED's website or directly on school district websites, with reporting occurring year-round to ensure ongoing monitoring of a district's financial welfare:

[9:29:52 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE moved to slide [45] highlighting a bullet point underneath "Fiscal Cliff" which states that the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) opposes cost shifting of state expenditure responsibilities to local governments. He requested further explanation on this point. He said in reviewing the slides as a whole, what thoughts are there on the current budget situation, noting that the governor's budget had a billion-dollar shortfall.

CO-CHAIR RUFFRIDGE outlined three potential options to increase school funding: budget cuts in other areas, Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) reduction, or generating revenue through a new tax. He noted that opposing cost shifting would prevent local governments from increasing property taxes. He asked if the ACSA

has taken a position on prioritizing funding and identifying potential sources.

[9:31:12 AM](#)

MS. PARADY opined that this specific policy statement primarily concerns major maintenance and capital construction. She noted that as those budgets have significantly shrunk over time, facilities, which are largely 40 to 60 years old, face issues like leaky roofs and other necessary maintenance. Often, these costs are shifted to the local municipality. She highlighted that as funding has remained flat, cost shifting has occurred. Regarding caps or allowing districts to contribute more, she stated that this is a different context.

[9:32:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX said the function that the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) performs involves administrative costs, which are often the subject of complaints. He clarified that he did not intend to criticize but acknowledged the concern. He noted that a presenter mentioned administrative costs averaged 4 percent across the state and asked if there is any information on administrative costs per district rather than a statewide average.

[9:33:16 AM](#)

MS. HEINEKEN replied that slide 46 presented earlier listed administrative costs under the non-instructional functions. She explained that the five districts presented had administrative costs ranging between 0.4 and 1.4 percent, specifically for the Superintendent and the Board of Education offices. However, the overall non-instructional function comprises 26 percent, with 15 percent dedicated to running the buildings. She noted that the definition of administration depends on how it is defined, but school districts follow the State of Alaska Uniform Chart of Accounts. When discussing non-instructional costs, if equated to administration, it amounts to about 26 percent, broken down into various functions. For example, student activities account for 1 percent of that total, which includes expenses like basketball trips. Though not spent in the classroom, these activities still impact students.

[9:34:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked if the information on administrative costs is available per district. He stated that he understands smaller rural schools have higher costs but would like to have the information per district if it is available.

[9:35:09 AM](#)

MS. HEINEKEN replied that the numbers are available, either through individual audits that are publicly accessible or potentially published by the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). She stated she would provide a resource where the numbers are available.

[9:35:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT inquired about the impact of recent inflation on fixed costs for the districts, specifically regarding facility insurance, health insurance, energy costs, and other expenses that cannot be negotiated, avoided, or bargained away.

[9:36:18 AM](#)

MS. HEINEKEN replied that she has specific numbers, though not immediately at the table. She noted that electricity, fuel, and property insurance costs have increased significantly in her district over the last two years, with increases ranging from 20 percent to 60 percent. She mentioned she has 10 rural school districts around the interior of Alaska. She said statewide, she does not have exact figures, acknowledging that the severity of the increase may vary among districts. She stated they have been working on gathering this information and can provide actual figures upon request.

MS. PARADY added an example from President Stevens' district where last week the superintendent received a health insurance bill for the year, showing another 20 percent increase. This increase adds an additional million dollars to the district's deficit as the superintendent tries to finalize the district's budget this year. She noted that this is happening across the state.

[9:37:51 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN sought information about the retention and recruitment of business officials. She noted there has been some attrition in offices and asked if there has been attrition within ALASBO membership over the last 10 years. She also inquired about recruitment and retention of business officials for school districts.

[9:38:05 AM](#)

MS. HEINEKEN replied that a lot of business officials are either retiring or leaving the industry. Many offices have one or two staff.

[9:38:28 AM](#)

At ease.

[9:39:03 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN reconvened the meeting.

MS. HEINEKEN Ms. Heineken said it is a constant challenge to recruit and replace staff, and often there aren't people in the local communities available to fulfill the roles. Many districts are starting to contract with outside services, even outside the state of Alaska. She mentioned that the ALASBO organization has created a three-year program called the New Business Manager Institute to support new business managers. This program includes a mentorship component where participants undergo course training to learn necessary skills. The hope is that, by the end of the program, participants remain in the field, either as business managers or in school district business, as this role is becoming a lost art.

[9:40:18 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN

[9:40:26 AM](#)

DOUG GRAY, Director, Profession Development, Alaska Staff Development Network, Anchorage, Alaska, moved to slides 51 52 and introduced himself. He stated that the Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN) operates under the umbrella of the Alaska Council of School Administrators. ASDN is a private nonprofit small business organization that has been providing high-quality professional development for almost 40 years. He shared a few highlights of the work done through ASDN. He drew attention to the catalog included in the committee members' packets, which lists the materials and professional development areas they offer.

MR. GRAY explained that ASDN provides educational webinars offering professional development opportunities that support the state's initiatives with research-based strategies, including feedback, teacher clarity, and collective efficacy. These webinars have reached thousands of educators throughout Alaska. This spring, ASDN is offering a CHAMPS workshop, focusing on building strong positive classroom management strategies. This workshop resulted from requests from districts seeking to train teachers who are new to Alaska, new to education, and new to America.

MR. GRAY noted that ASDN strives to keep up with current trends impacting education. This month, they are offering a webinar on AI in education, highlighting the relevance of AI in classrooms. Mr. Gray mentioned ChatGPT and offered to share a link to the webinar if anyone is interested. He noted that their first class on Wednesday was eye-opening, demonstrating how AI is becoming very relevant in schools today. In addition to webinars, ASDN supports many asynchronous courses, allowing educators to build their skills while earning credit and recertification. He emphasized that ASDN constantly reviews its course library to ensure it offers meaningful content to educators.

[9:42:43 AM](#)

MR. GRAY Mr. Gray said that each year ASDN puts on the largest educational conference in the state. The Multi-Tiered Systems of Support conference brings up national researchers and speakers to reach educators across the state. This year, ASDN was able to bring some of the leading national and international educational researchers. Dr. John Hattie, one of the top researchers recognized worldwide for his work on best practices to support student learning, was among the speakers. This year's conference had over 1,200 participants from all over Alaska. A new offering at the conference was focused on trauma-engaged practices. Initially expecting around 200 registrants, they were surprised by over 400 people expressing interest. Topics included how mental health impacts assessment, highlighting the strong need for such discussions among educators.

[9:43:59 AM](#)

MR. GRAY moved to slide 54 and said he was also very excited to share that ASDN was able to offer its first DEED-approved science of reading course, which meets the Alaska Reads Act requirements for K-3rd grade educators. He mentioned that ASDN developed this course with two of their reading experts who have been working with ASDN for many years. ASDN staff were able to enroll over 70 educators in their first cohort.

[9:44:26 AM](#)

MR. GRAY moved to slide 55 and said ASDN is now in its second year of a project with the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), supporting 18 school districts by working with nationally recognized coaches to enhance their multi-tiered systems of support. This initiative aligns with the Alaska Reads Act. He noted that these districts independently reexamined their practices to better meet the needs of all learners. He mentioned ASDN's close collaboration with the state on various

projects, including support from DEED for their work with Code.org to bring computer science into schools.

MR. GRAY emphasized ASDN's commitment to seeking feedback to continually meet the needs of educators and ensure the delivery of high-quality professional development in Alaska.

[9:45:13 AM](#)

MS. PARADY added that ASDN serves all educators, but its primary audience is teachers.

[9:45:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked how ASDN handles the conflict between local control and central control. For instance, how does ASDN resolve the differences in needs between rural and railbelt schools.

[9:46:37 AM](#)

MR. GRAY replied that ASDN advertises statewide and ensures the courses it offers are relevant to both rural and urban settings. He noted that webinars are often linked to grants that work directly with rural school districts. ASDN strives to be responsive to what school districts ask them to provide, emphasizing that it is a collaborative effort.

[9:47:20 AM](#)

MS. PARADY added that need assessments are conducted across the state to gather feedback from districts about their needs. She opined that ASDN is aware of best practices and providers. She noted that districts often cannot afford to travel for professional development opportunities, making ASDN's delivery methods even more critical. She emphasized that ASDN focuses on quality instruction, which transcends rural, remote, and urban settings. The science of reading class is an example of a course that was created at the request of teachers statewide.

Mr. Gray suggested looking through the ASDN catalog of materials or watching videos of recorded courses to better understand what is offered.

[9:48:44 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX said he sees that ASDN does not take a cookie-cutter approach to instruction delivery for the various districts.

[9:49:04 AM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN referred to the "Base Student Allocation \$1413" buttons that presenters wore. He said many policymakers are trying to decide what outcomes and opportunities are at stake with every BSA dollar and what happens if districts don't receive additional funding within the BSA formula. He had hoped to hear answers to these questions during the presentation, rather than "fluff."

He noted that in considering the consequences or opportunity costs of funding additional dollars to K-12 education, educators need to provide answers if they expect to receive more funding. Many decision-makers are not interested in hearing about mental health because it was not part of their reality when going through school. Others believe pre-kindergarten education is the role of parents. He opined that in his experience, parents fall short in this area. If K-12 schools are to meet their mission and maximize the use of education dollars, the role of pre-K must be considered.

[9:50:57 AM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN said the state must also address the duplication of services. Education constantly duplicates services and then complains about the cost. Legislators need to hear from educational leaders how various education bills affect their districts. The commissioner tells legislators the state doesn't need more money while students are requesting that programs be saved. Legislators need to know what is at stake if the BSA is funded at \$1413 or \$680; what opportunities will be available to students in the coming year. Business leaders want educated students with skills. Alaskans need to know the consequences of investing or not investing in students.

[9:53:29 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked Ms. Parady to answer what is at stake if the BSA is funded at \$1413 and \$680.

MS. PARADY replied that regarding the unique needs of each district and communicating with policymakers, she was reminded of a statement made last year by Representative Stapp, "When I need something from my district, I ask them, and they give it to me." She mentioned that the more than 100 people who came to the legislative fly-in want to talk to their senator and representatives. She implored legislators to meet with constituents, noting that some legislators have not accepted requests to meet. She opined that the presentation was not "fluff." Rather, legislators need to understand that Alaska is struggling with the worst crisis it has ever experienced in

terms of educator turnover. Fundamentally, teachers are very important for high-quality instruction. Districts are reliant on foreign teachers in many cases. She stated that Alaska is not in a crisis, but rather an emergency never before experienced. She said numbers would be provided to members.

9:55:50 AM

CHAIR TOBIN asked what the difference is between funding under the BSA and policies like a teacher incentive bonus.

9:55:55 AM

MR. GETCHELL gave an example of how funding under the Base Student Allocation (BSA) is important. He opined that schools in Alaska are unique and that communities have the answers to what is best for their needs. Rural schools have basic Maslow needs when it comes to school buildings. Funding inside the BSA will allow superintendents to address the needs of their districts. Ms. Walker is a tremendous superintendent and might not have high staff turnover if funding were inside the BSA. Outsourcing education to another country gives responsibility to teachers who will leave every three to five years. Hiring quality staff within the United States who are going to stay and be part of the community is what Alaska needs. One-time bonuses during the pandemic were an attempt to not lose staff, which is a band-aid approach to the problem. He appreciates looking at different approaches, but teachers and staff need predictability and long-term relationships with Alaska's communities.

MR. GETCHELL suggested that priorities for the state need determining and that needs should be determined at a local level. Boards and leaders can make good decisions. Districts have cut to the bone, and there is no room for mistakes. BSA funding of \$1413 gives educators hope that Alaska can have the best education system in the country and be proud that it was made better on their watch.

9:59:51 AM

MS. HEINEKEN said she can only speak for the Koyukuk school district because districts have varied needs. However, she is now at the point of having to decide whether to heat the school or pay teachers. She believes many school districts are facing this type of choice.

MS. HEINEKEN stated that she allocated fifty-one percent of general funds into food service because if kids are hungry, they will not learn. Speaking unofficially about the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, she noted that the closure of two

schools affects her family. Class sizes are 30 students for elementary schools, 32 for middle schools, and 35 for high school, which she described as crazy. Alaska's students are in a dire situation.

[10:01:39 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN stated that the National Education Association (NEA) recommends a ratio of 1 teacher for every 10 pre-K to kindergarten students and 1 teacher for every 15 elementary school students. She opined that a class size of 30 seems very untenable for one educator.

[10:01:52 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the joint Senate Education Standing Committee and House Education Standing Committee meeting at 10:01 a.m.