

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 25, 2023

3:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
Senator Jesse Kiehl

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION FUNDING FOR ALASKA'S SCHOOLS

- HEARD

PRESENTATION COALITION FOR EDUCATION EQUITY

- HEARD

PRESENTATION LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES AND SUPPORTING RESOLUTIONS

HEARD

PRESENTATION BE A HERO FOR ALASKA STUDENTS

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

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

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the presentation Funding for Alaska's Schools.

SARA SLEDGE, Executive Director  
Coalition for Education Equity  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the presentation Coalition for Education Equity.

LON GARRISON, Executive Director  
Association of Alaska School Boards  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the presentation Legislative Priorities and Supporting Resolutions.

TOM KLAAMEYER, President  
NEA Alaska  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the presentation Be a Hero for Alaska Students

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:30:25 PM](#)

**CHAIR LÖKI TOBIN** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Bjorkman, Steven, Kiehl, and Chair Tobin.

#### **PRESENTATION** **FUNDING FOR ALASKA'S SCHOOLS**

[3:32:15 PM](#)

**CHAIR TOBIN** announced the consideration of the presentation Funding for Alaska's Schools by the Alaska Council of School Administrator's executive director Dr. Lisa Parady.

[3:32:37 PM](#)

**LISA PARADY**, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), Ketchikan, Alaska, stated that the ACSA was created to serve as an umbrella for some of Alaska's premier educational organizations, including the Alaska Superintendents Association, the Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals, the Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals, the Alaska School Business Officials and many other school administrators and educators across Alaska.

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**MS. PARADY** turned to slide 2 and stated that ACSA supports and represents education leaders in all 54 school districts in

Alaska, both urban and rural. She said slide 3 shows facts regarding education expenditures. DEED provided the data, and Legislative Finance compiled it. The compilation shows that 74 percent of school districts' budgets go to instruction, of which 2 percent is spent on district administration.

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MS. PARADY moved to slide 4 and said Alaska ranks 6th in national per pupil K-12 funding in raw dollars, but the cost of living in Alaska, especially in rural areas, is higher than most states. A study by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) found that Alaska is underfunded by 2 percent when adjusted to the national average cost of living.

MS. PARADY said that every year ACSA members put together joint position statements. The statements envelop the highest priorities for education policy positions in Alaska. Student achievement is always the first priority. However, the current most critical need is adequate funding. Flat funding of public education cuts the budget of every public school in Alaska because it does not account for inflation. Policymakers must recognize the diminishing value of flat funding in relation to inflation. Early notification and predictable funding are crucial to financial and human resource management.

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MS. PARADY stated that inflation is at a 40-year high, resulting in an unsustainable loss of purchasing power. She suggested lawmakers put a trigger into statute that addresses inflation's effect on the BSA so that schools are not affected by diminished purchasing power. The graph on slide 7 demonstrates the impact of inflation on education. It shows that a BSA of \$5,930 in FY 23 has an FY 12 value of \$4,776.

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MS. PARADY turned to slide 8 and said many Alaskan schools face transportation issues. Alaskan children deserve safe and reliable transportation to and from school. She noted that the per-student amount provided to districts by the state has remained the same since 2016, causing school districts to shift funding from the classroom to transportation. Transportation is one of the fastest-rising categories for inflation. From April 2022 to April 2023, costs rose 20 percent.

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MS. PARADY moved to slide 9 and said Alaska saw a consumer price index increase of almost 8 percent over the past year. Flat

funding education causes districts to fill in the gaps of increased costs to utilities, insurance, transportation, deferred maintenance, shipping costs, and supplies. Money appropriated for public schools with flat funding will not stretch as far as it did in prior years. She said Alaskan schools used to do more with less, but now less is being done with less because costs have escalated beyond the control of schools.

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MS. PARADY moved to slide 10 and said early notification and stable funding are crucial to the sound financial management of schools. To be good stewards, school administrators need timely, reliable, and predictable funding. The national teacher shortage makes it particularly crucial because administrators need to be able to retain and recruit teachers. Alaska is experiencing the greatest shortage of staff in its history. The crisis is at every level of the K-12 education system, from services to educators and administrators. In 2017, a study by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) found that the cost to Alaska's school districts to replace a teacher is over \$20,000. A RAND study in 2019 reported that replacing a principal was \$75,000.

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MS. PARADY turned to slide 11 and stated that since 2014, there had been almost a complete turnover of the superintendents in Alaska. Frequent turnover of superintendents, principals, and teachers created instability in Alaska's school system. She encouraged members to consider what the outcome would be if a business were experiencing the same turnover of its management and staff. Educators are in the business of educating students. A school district is generally among the top three employers in a community. School districts need to be stable to improve student achievement. However, there were almost 400 teacher vacancies on the first day of school in FY 23. Finding teachers is a struggle in every content area, not just special education.

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MS. PARADY stated that the turnover of school principals also hurts school budgets and deeply affects students. A school leadership study by the Wallace Foundation reported that a solid principal positively influences school culture and the instruction quality of the whole system of teachers. According to the American Journal of Education, when principal turnover occurs, students achieve less in math and reading during the first year after leader turnover. Schools that experience

principal churn year after year realize serious cumulative adverse effects on students. The condition is exasperated by schools serving underprivileged students. She stated that Alaska's schools are in a perpetual state of uncertainty. Unpredictable funding leads to district uncertainty which leads to instability and ultimately impacts instruction negatively.

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MS. PARADY turned to slide 14 and said that through an ASCA survey, its superintendent members were asked what percentage the BSA should increase to compensate for years of flat funding. The response was that a percent increase between 14 - 18 percent is needed to balance current budgets. One district in Alaska experienced a 46 percent increase in fuel costs, a 38 percent increase in utilities, and a 20 percent increase in classroom supplies. Another superintendent commented that FY 24 would be the first increase to the BSA since 2017, and that increase is to fund the Reads Act. However, it does not adequately cover implementation costs. A comment from another superintendent said Alaska would continue to lose high-quality teachers since teacher funding is not competitive. ASCA is willing to share the survey. Alaska can end the cycle of uncertainty that school districts face by inflation-proofing the BSA. Doing so will improve teacher recruitment and retention and ultimately improve student outcomes.

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MS. PARADY said she hoped that the presented information and solutions would help create good policies for Alaska.

[3:53:04 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS referred to slide 7 and asked that Ms. Parady expound on triggers to the BSA.

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MS. PARADY replied that there had been discussion about establishing a statutory trigger, such as the legislature acting on the education budget by a date certain or an agreed-upon metric to adjust for inflation.

[3:54:12 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said the majority caucus is very interested in education funding and ensuring funds are used as intended. He asked if she could comment on the idea of establishing funding criteria.

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MS. PARADY said educators are open to accountability and would be agreeable to guardrails. Education's foundation is cracking, and an increase in the BSA would shore up current underfunding; it would not provide extra. The graph on slide 7 shows that an increase is long overdue. She said making suitable triggers needs further thought. The bottom line is that educators have been problem-solving. They worked through the pandemic without additions to the BSA. Teacher support is urgently needed. Conversations about greater accountability can occur once education's foundation is made whole. School districts can have greater accountability once stabilized. The system can self-right if Alaska continues to do good work in early education, best practices, and career and technical education (CTE). Educators are not asking for whip cream on top of the pie. They are asking for the crust and filling.

[3:58:03 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN reiterated that inflation costs require a 16 percent increase in the budget. An increase in the BSA between 14 - 18 percent makes up for inflation and allows school districts to continue their current level of function. However, over the past 10 years, education has seen cuts to CTE, world languages, counseling services, librarians, nurses, lunch programs, janitorial staff, and other programs. These programs are why students are willing to get up and go to school. Increasing the BSA to 16 percent will stop the bleeding. However, Alaska's schools need an investment significantly higher than 16 percent to return to where they were 10 years ago.

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MS. PARADY stated she agreed with Senator Bjorkman's comment. Alaska's students need to be competitive. It is a myth that Alaska has the highest BSA in the country. It will take significant investment to restore Alaska's schools. A forward focus on filling the workforce's needs can begin once Alaska restores its schools. Alaska's workforce is down by 20 percent in most sectors. Members of ACSA want to be cutting-edge and focus on pedagogy and design because student achievement is its highest priority. Stabilized school districts are needed to do this. A mechanism should be put in place to inflation-proof school budgets. Educators were front-line heroes in helping students, parents, and the community through the pandemic. They pivoted on short notice to continue serving students with no playbook. Some teachers gave students paper packets, and others provided virtual education. Teachers did what was needed to keep

kids safe and educated. Now they need support to make education healthy and stay current.

[4:02:34 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked Ms. Parady to speak to the impact teacher vacancies have on students' opportunities and outcomes.

[4:03:01 PM](#)

MS. PARADY said educators know that not having a teacher in the classroom impacts student learning. Commendation goes to paraprofessionals, office staff, principals, and superintendents covering classes that do not have teachers. Still, expertise and appropriate services are lost when a classroom does not have a permanent teacher. Lack of recruitment is not the reason for teacher vacancies. Alaska no longer draws teachers from the Lower 48 because it does not offer a competitive retirement and benefits package and salary. The University of Alaska is aware of the need for teachers and is working to increase the number of in-state teachers. Also, the marine simulator in Ketchikan is impressive. Alaska should funnel its students into the workforce experiences and programs offered within the state.

[4:06:37 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked where in Alaska teacher vacancies located. exist. The impact of a teacher vacancy in a small school differs from a teacher vacancy in a larger school.

[4:06:54 PM](#)

MS. PARADY stated her belief that teacher vacancies exist across the state. She will investigate it further and share the information with the committee.

[4:07:29 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated he had seen a chart showing Alaska having the highest BSA spending. However, it did not take into consideration the cost of living. He said he would like a chart depicting Alaska's state ranking with the cost of living considered. He said Alaska is somewhere in the middle, not the top.

**PRESENTATION**  
**COALITION FOR EDUCATION EQUITY**

[4:08:20 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of the presentation Coalition for Education Equity by Executive Director Sarah Sledge from the Coalition for Education Equity of Alaska.

[4:08:35 PM](#)

SARA SLEDGE, Executive Director, Coalition for Education Equity, Anchorage, Alaska, stated that some of the information in her presentation might be repetitive of Ms. Parady's presentation. She turned to slide 2 and said the Coalition for Education Equity (CEE) is a member-based, statewide nonprofit organization representing Alaska school districts, organizations, and individuals concerned about the quality and breadth of educational opportunities available to Alaska's children. The organization, formerly known as Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children, was founded in 1996. It litigated and successfully settled both the Kasayulie and Moore lawsuits. These landmark education court cases continue to guide the coalition's work.

[4:09:44 PM](#)

MS. SLEDGE turned to slide 3 and said she was asked to present what is needed to support education in Alaska adequately. CEE membership has identified adequate investment in public education, addressing the staffing shortage, and significant investment in school construction and major maintenance as the most urgent priorities for education. Coalition for Education Equity believes that a successful education system is essential to having a thriving state. There have been thorough articles in Alaska's news that have detailed the impact of the budget squeeze on schools. Continued flat funding is not in the best interests of a successful education system and is damaging Alaska's education structure.

[4:10:41 PM](#)

MS. SLEDGE said current education funding levels are insufficient. Most school districts have been preparing for and are already experiencing a significant budget deficit. Historic 40-year high inflation has resulted in rising costs in all areas. She turned to slide 4, which provides examples of fixed cost increases experienced by three Alaskan school districts. She focused on the cost of new construction and stated it was up 20 percent. School districts receiving the Alaska construction grant program currently in the building process need more funds to complete their projects because bids were made in FY 19 and FY 20 when materials were 20 percent cheaper. All school districts are facing increased costs:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**District cost increases FY22 to FY23**

- Fuel: up 46%
- Utilities: up 38%
- Cost of new construction: up approximately 20%
- Travel: up 40% •Supply costs: up 10- 20%
- Insurance: up 26%

**District cost increases FY17 to FY23**

Total cost increase of 21% from FY17 to FY23

- Maintenance costs: up 12%
- Electricity: up 45%
- Heating fuel: down 3%
- Liability insurance: up 61%
- Health insurance: up 30%
- Workers Comp: up 48%

**District cost increases FY21 to FY22**

- FY21- Oil purchase to keep our facilities heated-\$569,870
- FY22- Oil purchase to keep our facilities heated-\$870,900
- Electricity costs increased by an estimated 30%.
- No carry over funds in our CIP account

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MS. SLEDGE added that school districts put money into carry-over accounts to cover unexpected costs. However, some Alaska school districts have had to use reserve funds to cover fixed costs and no longer have funds in reserve. One Alaska school district reported a shortfall between \$600,000 - \$700,000 in its budget. Another school district reported an \$800,000 - \$1 million shortfall since the last BSA increase in 2017. From 2011 to 2022, the BSA has increased only 4.29 percent, while Alaska's urban consumer price index has risen by 24.6 percent.

MS. SLEDGE said rising costs and budget shortfalls impact multiple aspects of education in Alaska, such as:

- Fuel and energy costs.
- Facilities maintenance and repair.
- Capital improvements.
- Teacher housing.
- Insurance premiums.
- Funding for teacher and other staff salaries.

MS. SLEDGE stated funding shortfalls affect the ability of school districts to provide counselors, nurses, special

education aides, arts and sporting programs, and career and technical education for Alaska's children. Additionally, budget uncertainty and late decision-making mean schools cannot plan effectively and efficiently, which results in lost purchasing power, increased fuel and maintenance costs and teacher turnover.

[4:14:08 PM](#)

MS. SLEDGE turned to slide 5 and asked the legislature and administration to ensure the following for public schools:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Stable, sustainable, and predictable education budget
- Education funding decisions made in a timely manner that enables school districts to plan efficiently and responsibly
- A fiscal plan with diversified revenue to ensure education funding sources are reliable and adequate
- Increase the Base Student Allocation (BSA) to close the funding gap created by inflation

MS. SLEDGE stated that education funding directly impacts the ability to hire and retain teachers. It affects salaries and other factors associated with teacher satisfaction, such as available instructional resources and support staff, building conditions, and housing.

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MS. SLEDGE turned to slide 7 and said recruiting and retaining quality educators has a significant impact on student outcomes. The highest teacher turnover often occurs in the highest need schools. Virtually every CEE school district member has reported that it is becoming nearly impossible to fill all their teacher vacancies. Stability for principals and superintendents has also become volatile, which influences overall institutional stability.

MS. SLEDGE shared an anecdote from one school district to demonstrate the effect of staff vacancy:

We currently have three certified vacancies - one elementary teacher, one SPED teacher, and one administrator (middle/high assistant principal). To address the elementary teacher vacancy, we had to collapse three classes into two; both class sizes are now larger than optimal. The SPED teacher vacancy is

being addressed by the two other SPED teachers taking on additional caseload responsibilities with stipend pay, and our SPED director is spending a part of the day providing services to our pre-K and homebound students, as well as picking up IEP writing responsibilities for some students. The administrator vacancy has played havoc with our discipline system at the middle/high school, exacerbated when we also lost our behavior specialist for about a month. Our principal is brand-new and has not been able to do some of the key work with instructional coaching, relationship building with staff, parents and students, and our out of school suspension rate at the beginning of the year was very high, as we had no place to put students for ISS. We have finally managed to hire a new assistant principal who is coming on board in a week, but there has been a lot of fallout in terms of staff morale, the principal's self-efficacy, etc.

[4:17:13 PM](#)

MS. SLEDGE

We have also had to cut several positions over the last few years due to flat funding, and the expiration of COVID funding, including our elementary school counselor (for next year), our music teacher at the elementary school, and the behavior specialist position at the elementary school. This puts a lot more strain on the administrators to support students in a time when mental health issues are rising. Arts and music are also a crucial part of student education, so cutting those impacts both our students, and our community at large which looks forward to student performances each year.

We have seen a large amount of turnover in classified positions - continue to struggle to hire special education paraprofessionals, custodians, and the substitute shortage is REAL. We've had to shut down our high school twice and do remote learning days because we had too many staff out and not enough subs to have any safe way to hold school.

[4:18:03 PM](#)

MS. SLEDGE advanced to slide 8 slide and said teacher housing is an increasingly prevalent issue for school districts on and off the road system. Appropriate housing is unavailable in some

villages and unaffordable for teachers in urban areas due to high housing costs. There is a continued issue with the teacher retirement system, which is one of the top cited factors affecting teacher turnover. Compounding these other issues is the ongoing concern around the lack of perceived value of and respect for educators, education as a profession, and the state public education system.

[4:18:56 PM](#)

MS. SLEDGE turned to slide 9 and stated that school facilities need assistance. Between 2015 and 2022, schools requested 1,047 major maintenance projects. Only 114 projects have received funding. Although the FY 23 budget included funding to backfill a severe backlog of Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) construction, major maintenance, and school bond debt reimbursement, the number of projects currently on the major maintenance list is ninety-seven which totals \$217.6 million. Many school facilities remain in serious disrepair, resulting in unsafe, unhealthy environments for children and school staff. Material costs are skyrocketing, contractors are scarce and expensive, and routine maintenance has become challenging.

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MS. SLEDGE said the capital improvement project (CIP) application process is thorough and ensures school capital projects are needed, well planned, and are a good use of state funding. However, depending on the scope of the project, this process can cost school districts between \$2000 - \$100,000 to prepare for and submit. Getting design teams to rural village schools for assessments and cost estimates can be especially expensive. Many school districts use outside assistance to help them put grant application packets together, ranging from \$2,500 to \$10,000, depending on the number of projects. In addition to this initial cost, there is an ongoing cost to reapply for project funding. The cost to resubmit can be \$8,000 every two years. There are also costs associated with maintenance and making temporary repairs while waiting for major maintenance to be done. These are lost funds to school districts because problems are not solved.

MS. SLEDGE shared slides 11 and 12 and said maintenance issues when not addressed lead to more damage. The school pictured in the slides was built in 1979 and has never been renovated. The roof is damaged and leaks. Repairs are done each summer but last only one season. The foundation is deteriorating due to moisture in the soil. The weight of the building is causing the school to sink. The building is re-leveled every year. Water from the

leaking roof flows through the walls to the foundation. The moisture in the walls causes windows to break due to warping. The bowing walls and pressure from the sinking building causes the main power box to rip off the building in high winds.

[4:24:04 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked if the state is in compliance with the Kasayulie and Moore lawsuits or if it has put itself at risk.

MS. SLEDGE replied that funding levels are low enough that Alaska is dangerously close to not meeting the adequacy benchmark for student education. Kasayulie school major maintenance projects are significant across the state, not just REAA schools. She expressed gratitude that the REAA fund was made whole last year with appropriations from the legislature. However, failure to fund would be a violation of the Kasayulie settlement.

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At ease.

**PRESENTATION**  
**LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES AND SUPPORTING RESOLUTIONS**

[4:26:15 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of the presentation Legislative Priorities and Supporting Resolutions by the Association of Alaska School Board's Executive Director, Lon Garrison.

[4:26:29 PM](#)

LON GARRISON, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), Juneau, Alaska, stated the AASB is a nonprofit association that serves 52 of Alaska's 54 school districts. Sufficiently funding Alaska's public education system is a necessity and moral responsibility. AASB's Board of Directors has adopted three legislative priorities for 2023:

- Sufficient, sustainable, and predictable education funding
- Retention and recruitment of teachers, administrators, and staff
- Student wellness and safety

MR. GARRISON stated he would focus on sufficient education funding, which is a critical factor affecting the retention and recruitment of staff as well as the safety and wellness of

students. Under Article 7, Section 1 of Alaska's Constitution, the state has statutorily fulfilled its responsibility to fund a public education system. However, for over a decade, it has yet to sufficiently invest the resources necessary to ensure every student receives an excellent education daily. The AASB membership has resolved that the base student allocation (BSA) increase should be at least \$860. The amount was determined by an analysis done by the Anchorage School District based on the difference between the current FY 23 BSA of \$5,930 and an estimated inflation-adjusted value of \$6,820, using the consumer price index urban Alaska rate, compounded over the past six years. The BSA needs to keep up with inflation because the state's ability to provide quality education is being damaged.

[4:29:22 PM](#)

MR. GARRISON said further comparison of the BSA to inflation shows that the BSA increased by \$250 in 10 years or 4.29 percent. The cumulative inflation for that same period was 24.6 percent. AASB strongly advocates for statutorily inflation-proofing the BSA. Underfunding of Alaska's public education through the BSA is a chronic issue. One-time discretionary funds previously provided to schools outside the BSA do not lead to the stability and predictability of a statutory increase in the BSA. AASB resolution 2.5 addresses inflation-proofed base student allocation investments.

[4:30:45 PM](#)

MR. GARRISON said that the schools are impacted by how the state governs. School boards by statute must establish, approve, and implement balanced budgets each year. School board members are tasked with governing their districts and allocating funds to execute an educational plan for all public-school students. It is a highly complex task. Schools have had to reduce staffing, eliminate programs, curtail extracurricular activities, and diminish many programs supporting student learning to adhere to the statute.

[4:31:54 PM](#)

MR. GARRISON said that Alaska's school boards have no taxing authority. They rely solely on state and federal government revenue and, in some areas, a local contribution to fund education. Each year school board members and education advocates appeal for education funding to provide an excellent education for every student every day. Over the past year, school board members and superintendents across the state have faced tremendous strain on their budgets. Operational costs have increased, putting pressure on the operating revenue necessary

to employ a full school system, and student achievement has suffered due to a lack of necessary support. Inflated fuel costs have been difficult for schools off the road system. The US Energy Information Administration reported in March 2022 that the summer heating fuel costs for unsubsidized rural Alaska communities were 26 percent higher than the Winter 2021 average. Many locations reported fuel prices higher than \$7 per gallon. The cost of heating school buildings and transporting goods impacts the funding available to hire teachers and support personnel. For example, one superintendent of a remote district noted that for every \$100 of materials purchased, an allocation of \$200 would be needed for freight charges.

[4:34:29 PM](#)

MR. GARRISON opined that the uncertain nature of the annual legislative appropriation for education funding as part of the state's general fund budget, and the potential executive vetoes, continually creates uncertainty that makes it challenging to sustain a maintenance of effort (MOE) effectively and efficiently. School boards and superintendents continually must decide whether to reduce staff, eliminate programs, or cut services. Locally elected school boards have served Alaska well but depend on legislative support. AASB strongly encourages an increase to the BSA by not less than \$860 as a way of further supporting Alaska's public school system and Alaska's future.

MR. GARRISON added that school boards have also experienced a lot of member turnover due to stress from the pandemic and reduced funding. Part of the reason for turnover comes from making tough decisions when resources are scarce, and communities push back. Continual turnover in leadership creates instability. He stated that he agreed with Governor Dunleavy's State of the State address to focus on moving the state forward. However, he disagreed with the statement that educators measure student success by the amount spent on education.

MR. GARRISON asserted that educators measure success by students receiving diplomas, entering post-secondary education, and creating a life for themselves better than they imagined. People must discontinue the false narrative that spending and investing in students is a measurement of success.

[4:38:08 PM](#)

MR. GARRISON said legislators should consider decoupling education funding from the general fund budget. The state should seek innovative ways of creating an opportunity to fund Alaska's public education system that does not dramatically impact its

operating budget. Today, the permanent fund funds state operations for the coming year. He questioned why Alaska could not establish a similar process for education. He recalled former Governor Cooper's attempt to change funding for education.

[4:39:36 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated that school board members did not appreciate the attacks they received for creating mask and vaccination policies. He stated his belief that COVID had much to do with current leadership instability. He asked for Mr. Garrison's opinion on leadership instability due to COVID.

[4:40:09 PM](#)

MR. GARRISON stated he did see pressure placed on school boards due to COVID. Local control allowed each school board to make decisions for its community. Larger areas, such as Anchorage, experienced many trials due to the diversity of its population. Although school board experiences varied, it was a challenging task for all school boards and districts. AASB has seen a lot of turnover and is working to educate people on how to become a board member and its duties.

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SENATOR STEVENS said school board members should not have been abused.

[4:41:33 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN said she agreed with Senator Stevens comment.

**PRESENTATION**  
**BE A HERO FOR ALASKA STUDENTS**

[4:41:42 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of the presentation Be a Hero for Alaska Students, by NEA Alaska President Tom Klaameyer.

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TOM KLAAMEYER, President, National Education Association (NEA) Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, said he is proud to testify on behalf of NEA members.

[4:42:40 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER moved to slide 3 and said NEA members are in classrooms and know that students are struggling. Alaska's students disproportionately faced challenging situations before COVID. The pandemic exacerbated already high social, emotional,

and academic trauma levels. According to Institute of Education Sciences data, the pandemic has taken a dramatic toll on staffing, student behavior, nutrition, attendance, and mental health.

[4:43:17 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER turned to slide 4 and stated that statistics from Alaska Kids Count rank Alaska's students 44th in economic well-being and 41st in overall well-being. It is a fact that 14 percent of Alaska's students live in poverty, and 32 percent of students' parents lack secure employment, which is 5 percent higher than the national average. The report also stated that their levels of anxiety and depression are up 51.9 percent since 2016. These difficulties are the reality for many of Alaska's students. School may create an additional challenge for the students who are already struggling. Now is not the time to cut support to schools.

[4:44:05 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER advanced to slides 6 - 10 and stated that the headlines on the slides are a small sample of impacts on education around the state due to flat funding. Schools face deficits, positions and programs have been cut, and class sizes are up. Data from the Anchorage School District shows that student attendance is down, and the number of students who witnessed or experienced violence in school has increased. Students cannot learn if they are not attending school. They cannot reach their potential if they do not feel safe.

[4:45:05 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER referred to slides 11 - 12 and said he has heard from NEA members that the number of open positions in Alaska may be more than 1,098 because job postings that remain vacant for a long time are removed. Additionally, the Department of Education's website shows that since the 2010-11 school year, 1,041 fewer classroom teachers are working in Alaska's schools. When combined, this means 2,100 fewer adults are working with kids in school today than ten years ago. On average, the pupil-to-teacher ratio has gone up 10 percent. This statistic is alarming because teacher efficacy is the number one factor in student learning. Flat funding has decimated the most effective learning support for students.

[4:45:11 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER moved to slides 13 - 14 and stated that the educator turnover rate in Alaska is 22 percent for teachers and 25 percent for principals and superintendents. The percentages

are higher for areas that are off the road system. Published data on classified staff is limited, but there are school bus driver and school lunch program staffing issues.

[4:46:10 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER turned to slide 15 and said educator turnover directly affects students and schools. A shortage creates momentum and a cyclical effect in one area that places an increased workload in a different area, eventually leading to more turnover. Sadly, this cycle disproportionately impacts vulnerable, remote, and Title I school students.

[4:47:46 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER moved to slide 16 and shared research from the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), demonstrating a clear connection between teacher turnover and student outcomes. He stated that having stable, consistent, experienced, and talented staff builds relationships and nurturing environments for students. Students' performance in schools with the lowest teacher turnover is almost twice that of those with the highest. Other factors contribute to student performance, but retaining educators must be emphasized. In 2017, hiring and training a teacher was \$20,000 per teacher. Statewide the cost was \$20 million. The cost to replace an administrator was \$75,000. An environment must be created where educators are respected to avoid these costs. Restoring a defined benefit retirement option is one of the most effective retention tools to reverse Alaska's "teach and leave" problem.

[4:49:36 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER advanced to slide 19 and thanked Governor Dunleavy for creating the Alaska Teacher Recruitment and Retention Task Force. Creating a task force has led to an extensive survey of certificated educators and an action plan entering its implementation phase. The public can find information about the task force on DEED's website.

[4:50:00 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER turned to slides 20-23 and said the four factors most important to certified teachers for retention in Alaska were salaries, working conditions, connection with students, and fixing the retirement system. For administrators, the most important retention factors were retirement and benefits. Funding schools does not fix retirement. Three of the top eight solutions for retaining teachers were retirement based. The most valued solution is a return to a defined benefit retirement system. Alaska is the only state not offering a defined benefit

to teachers. Teachers participating in the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) are denied the safety net of Social Security. TRS's members who earned Social Security in other jobs before becoming an educator lose a substantial portion of their social security benefits due to the government pension offset windfall elimination provision (GPOWEP). This provision also applies to employees hired after 2006, even though they will not receive a pension. He opined that Alaska puts educators at financial risk at retirement by only offering a defined contribution. This lack of stability is a massive incentive for teachers to leave Alaska. The turnover of teachers in Alaska has become so common that the term "educational tourism" has been coined.

[4:52:14 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER moved to slides 24 - 26 and stated that the Department of Revenue developed a simulation at the request of the Department of Administration. The simulation determined the probability of 10,000 Tier III 30-year-career teachers having enough savings for a 30-year retirement. The study found that 69 percent would likely run out of money early in retirement. He stated that this percentage is appalling and must be corrected.

[4:53:16 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER moved to slide 27 and said increasing and inflation-proofing the BSA are the first and most urgently needed actions to address the crisis facing Alaska's students, families, and schools. He appreciated AASB's determination that the BSA should be at least \$860 per student. It is the minimum amount that only considers the rise in costs since 2017, when schools have been flat funded for the last 10 out of 12 years. The BSA needs to be much higher to do right by students.

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MR. KLAAMEYER moved to side 30 and said that people often talk of tying accountability to an increase in the BSA. Educators recognize the value of tests and appreciate that testing helps identify students' abilities and needs. However, a national standardized test score or any single assessment measure does not capture the innovative thinking, character, or richness of academic knowledge. It does not capture students' talents, abilities, or chances of success in life. A single metric should not be used to assess an entire school system. He opined that more must be done to improve student outcomes. Educators should use assessments to direct instruction, and schools should not be punished for falling short of expectations. Dentists are not punished when patients get cavities for failing to follow advice. They are rewarded for fixing the patients' teeth.

Educators identify an area of need and direct resources to that need to provide the support that helps students grow.

[4:56:28 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER turned to slide 31 and proclaimed that Alaska's Education Challenge is an excellent example of taking a holistic policy approach to direct Alaska's school system in using multiple measures to evaluate progress. The education challenge uses five positive trajectories that use various metrics to determine success by 2025. The timeline for achieving the goals is short, but the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) is doing great work. The funding famine is undermining the ability of school districts to achieve the task force's goals. The bipartisan READS Act is an excellent start to providing early learning opportunities for students and supporting professional development for elementary teachers. The NEA also looks forward to seeing the progress on tribal compacting.

[4:59:07 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked Mr. Klaameyer whether he had said defined benefit pensions were the most expensive or the most effective tool to fix the issue of teacher retention.

[4:59:31 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYER replied that he had said effective. He noted that several defined benefit pension models would save the state money.

[4:59:43 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN thanked the testifiers for their participation in the hearing.

[5:00:53 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 5:00 p.m.