

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 1, 2023

3:31 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: IMPACT OF INFLATION ON K-12 FUNDING AND COST ESTIMATES OF A POTENTIAL BSA INCREASE

- HEARD

SENATE BILL NO. 52

"An Act relating to education; increasing the base student allocation; and providing for an effective date."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to report.

**WITNESS REGISTER**

ALEXEI PAINTER, Director  
Legislative Finance Division  
Legislative Affairs Agency  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Offered the presentation Impact of Inflation on K-12 Funding and Cost Estimates of a Potential BSA Increase.

RODNEY DIAL, Mayor  
Ketchikan Gateway Borough  
Ketchikan, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

THOMAS KENNEDY, representing self  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

MICHAEL BUCY, representing self  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of teacher funding.

JESSICA PARIS, representing self  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

TANYA ROUST, representing self  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

HANNIBAL GRUBIS, representing self  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

VALERIE BROOKS, representing self  
Ketchikan, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

BRIDGET WEISS, Superintendent  
Juneau School District  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

DANIELLE LOGAN, representing self  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

CAROLINE STORM, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

POLLY CARR, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

CHRIS BYE, representing self  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified with concerns about school funding.

SUSANNA LITWINIAK, representing self  
Moose Pass, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

DAVID BOYLE, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding with concerns.

CAREY CARPENTER, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

CALLIE CONERTON, representing self  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

SARA DYKSTRA, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

KELLY LESSENS, Member  
Anchorage School Board  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

LOY THURMAN, representing self  
Big Lake, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified with concerns about school funding.

DANIELLE SPECHT, representing self  
Kodiak, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

SCOTT BALLARD, Superintendent  
Yupiit School District  
Bethel, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding with concerns.

CAROLE BOOKLESS, representing self  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of school funding.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:31:28 PM](#)

**CHAIR LÖKI TOBIN** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Kiehl, Bjorkman, Gray-Jackson, and Chair Tobin.

**PRESENTATION**  
**IMPACT OF INFLATION ON K-12 FUNDING AND**  
**COST ESTIMATES OF A POTENTIAL BSA INCREASE**

[3:32:25 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of a presentation on the Impact of Inflation on K-12 Funding and Cost Estimates of a Potential BSA Increase.

[3:34:01 PM](#)

ALEXEI PAINTER, Director, Legislative Finance Division, Legislative Affairs Agency, Juneau, Alaska, offered the presentation Impact of Inflation on K-12 Funding and Cost Estimates of a Potential BSA Increase as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

You asked for a comparison of Alaska's K-12 foundation formula funding to inflation over the past decade, as well as for cost estimates of various potential BSA changes.

**Background on Foundation Formula**

Alaska's K-12 foundation formula (AS 14.17) is the largest source of funding for Alaska's school districts. The formula is based on multiplying the actual student count on Alaska's schools (known as the Average Daily Membership, or ADM) by a series of factors to adjust for differences between districts, including a school size factor and district cost factors, as well as block grants for special education and career and technical education, to arrive at an adjusted student count (Adjusted Average Daily Membership, or AADM). The AADM is then multiplied by the Base Student Allocation (BSA) to arrive at Basic Need, the total amount of funding provided by the formula. Basic Need is then paid by a combination of required local funding for municipal school districts, deductible federal impact aid, and State funds.

MR. PAINTER added that 128,000 students was the projected count for FY 24, and the adjusted average daily membership (AADM) projection was 257,000. He returned to his presentation as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

In addition to funding inside this formula, the legislature has frequently included one-time funding outside the foundation formula but distributed in the same way as the formula. This outside the formula funding makes comparisons across years that only use the BSA somewhat incomplete. This analysis will provide both comparisons to provide a fuller picture.

MR. PAINTER mentioned that as an example of funding outside the BSA formula, the legislature distributed \$57 million in FY 23. He said he would discuss the impact of inflation in two ways. First, he would consider just the statutory base student allocation and formula, and second, he would include funding outside the formula because it is state money. He continued the presentation as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **Impact of Inflation from FY14 through FY24**

This analysis equalizes funding to the level in calendar year 2022, the most recently completed year, and applies that to FY23. It then assumes 2.5% inflation in FY24 (based on Callan and Associates' assumptions that are used by the Alaska Permanent Fund). The inflation data is the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics data for all urban Alaska consumers.

MR. PAINTER noted that the Division of Legislative Finance had done BSA inflation analysis many times with varying results depending on the methodology chosen to best address the question.

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MR. PAINTER stated that the table at the top of slide 2 shows the inflation rates that accompany each year. There was low inflation until FY 22 and FY 23, where it rose to 4.9 and 8.1 percent.

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MR. PAINTER said one dollar appropriated in FY 14 would have the same buying power as \$1.21 appropriated in FY 23, based on the Alaska Consumer Price Index (CPI). The Base Student Allocation, FY 14 - FY 24 Projection graph shows the statutory base student allocation (BSA) in blue and the BSA in FY 23 dollars in orange. He provided the following description:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The BSA was \$5,930 from FY17-23 and is \$5,960 in FY24. The peak year over the past decade, adjusted for inflation, is FY17, which would be \$6,981 in FY23 dollars, while the FY24 figure is \$5,815 in FY23 dollars. Adjusting that FY17 figure to projected FY24 dollars would total \$7,155. To match the buying power of the FY17 BSA in FY24, the BSA would therefore need to increase by the \$1,195, from \$5,960 to \$7,155.

Depending on which year is selected as the base, "inflation proofing" the BSA would require different amounts: \$611 (to match the BSA in FY22 in real terms) to the above calculation of \$1,195. Therefore, which year is selected as the "base" for inflation-proofing makes a substantial difference in how much the formula would need to be adjusted in FY24.

#### **Incorporating Outside-the Formula**

Funding In Fiscal Years 2014, 2015, 2019, 2020, and 2023, the legislature appropriated additional funding outside the formula ranging from \$20 million to \$57 million. This funding is distributed according to the formula, and so the following graph converts it into a BSA equivalent.

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MR. PAINTER turned to slide 3, Base Student Allocation Plus Outside the Formula Funding FY 14 - FY 24 Projection. The graph included the legislature appropriated additional funding that was outside the formula. School districts received outside funding in FY 2014, 2015, 2019, 2020, and 2023. The amounts received ranged from \$20 - \$57 million. The graph converts funding into a BSA equivalent. He noted that the peak year was FY 15 because the legislature took back funds in FY 16 and FY 17 when oil prices fell. The BSA equivalent for FY 15 was \$7,130. The BSA would need to increase by \$1,348 for FY 24 to match FY

15's funding level in real terms; the \$860 increase quoted in some meetings only considers the last three years.

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MR. PAINTER moved to slide 4, Cost of Increasing the BSA. He said the table is a linear calculation showing how \$100 incremental increases to the BSA multiplied by an AADM of 257,000 affects state funding. He noted that four school districts pay a local contribution based on 45 percent of the prior year's basic need. These four districts would experience an increase in their required local contribution. The effect is under \$400,000 for every \$100 increase to the BSA; therefore, he did not include it in the table.

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SENATOR KIEHL said the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is supposed to be a market basket of goods. He opined that the basket is light on health care expenses at seven percent compared to district budgets that tend to be 14 - 19 percent. He asked whether being detailed makes a significant difference in determining the BSA or is rounding errors accurate enough.

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MR. PAINTER replied that nationally over the past 70 years, school and service-based costs have increased faster than inflation. He said he did know whether there would be a significant difference even if there were market baskets for schools in Alaska. Alaska is a semi-closed economy, so there could be interaction effects. Providing increased funding could go towards increasing certain costs.

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SENATOR KIEHL asked whether it would be wise to use state money to investigate detailed costs.

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MR. PAINTER said that rather than finding a CPI for an Alaska-specific school, looking at broad changes to school funding nationwide and comparing how inflation has grown over the past decade would be better. He said he wanted to avoid promising that detailed data would be useful.

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CHAIR TOBIN asked whether any of the amounts provided in the presentation address pupil transport, retirement plans, recruitment, retention, health care costs, or major school maintenance.

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MR. PAINTER replied that pupil transportation is a separate formula adjusted in FY 14. Expenditures for school maintenance can come from school funds and municipal funds through the school bond debt reimbursement program or through the REAA program. However, he said this presentation is specific to the foundation funding formula.

CHAIR TOBIN commented that the BSA is just one mechanism the legislature can utilize to fund education adequately. Providing other mechanisms with funding would help schools avoid using BSA funds to cover expenditures.

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SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON asked if the BSA and transportation formulas are the only formulas used to calculate the amount of money schools receive.

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MR. PAINTER answered that those are the only two operating formulas. However, school debt reimbursement and REAA fund capitalization are formula-driven programs, although there is a current moratorium on new school debt through 2025. The REAA fund is only for certain school districts. There is no formula for non-REAA schools' major maintenance. Instead, there is a program that is subject to appropriation.

[3:50:16 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN opened public testimony on school funding.

[3:51:16 PM](#)

RODNEY DIAL, Mayor, Ketchikan Gateway Borough, Ketchikan, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. He stated his desire for the legislature to inflation-proof education funding and increase the BSA. The Ketchikan Gateway Borough is facing many funding challenges. Ketchikan funds education as much as legally possible. One hundred percent of borough property tax goes to education, but a funding shortfall of over \$3 million remains. Fifty employees face being laid off without assistance from the state. Every year the legislature finds funds for inflation-proofing and covering the expenses of unorganized boroughs. Organized boroughs contribute to education and see the state shifting costs. It is reasonable for organized areas to expect state funds to be adjusted yearly for inflation. He encouraged the legislature to find ways to promote the formation of boroughs. He requested that the legislature adequately fund

education in organized areas just as it does for unorganized areas.

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SENATOR KIEHL asked whether the Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District is putting additional funds into education facilities separate from operations.

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MR. DIAL responded that Ketchikan spends about \$3.5 million annually towards school maintenance issues and bond debt reimbursement, on top of cap funding.

3:54:33 PM

THOMAS KENNEDY, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, said he had been a teacher for 27 years and supports funding schools. He has taught in rural areas and now teaches high school in Fairbanks. He stated he would like to share what is happening in Alaska's schools. Class sizes are reportedly 29 students, but generally, there are 34 to 35 students per class. He has sold prep time to help the school district. He stated \$600 is taken from his paycheck every two weeks for health care insurance. He is a co-director of a school food pantry program, and this year was his first-time witnessing teachers needing food assistance. Districts are doing what they can to provide teachers with equitable wages, and the education committee values education. Still, new teacher wages are the lowest he has ever seen, and it affects morale. Young teachers are switching careers to higher-paying jobs. A young teacher recently left the profession to be a truck driver and earns \$20,000 more yearly.

3:59:10 PM

MICHAEL BUCY, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of teacher funding. He asked what Alaska would need to do to have a world-class school system and then quoted Don Young as saying teaching was the hardest job, and teachers should be given a paid sabbatical every five years. He opined that some legislators speak about accountability as though teachers and school districts are not working hard enough, which is not true. It is the legislature's responsibility to maintain public schools. Alaska's students tested higher thirty years ago than they do today. Alaska has the least number of people attending college, unions are at an impasse with school districts, and Alaska is not attracting new teachers because the pay needs to be higher. He opined that underfunding schools is driving away young skilled, and professional families. The minimum suggested increase to the BSA is \$860. The BSA needs to be increased by

\$1300 to adjust for inflation. He opined that Alaska and the children in Alaska are worth more than the minimum.

[4:02:38 PM](#)

JESSICA PARIS, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She stated that as a teacher class sizes 20 years ago were typically 20 - 30 students. Positive impacts occur when class sizes are reduced by as little as five students because there is more time for talking, feedback, and individual attention. Students and teachers know each other better. She recollected picking up on various risky behaviors that students engaged in and students feeling comfortable enough to talk with her about those behaviors. Her children's class sizes are 30 in elementary school, 43 in middle school English, 40 in high school History and English, and 50 in Physical Education. Their cousins in the Lower 48 are in class sizes of 25, counselors meet regularly with students, and schools have activity buses. The quality of schools is a key consideration for people when deciding where to live. Underfunded schools are a reason not to live in Alaska when it could be swelling with economic opportunities through telework. She asked that the legislature radically update the BSA for Alaska's kids and economy.

[4:05:05 PM](#)

TANYA ROUST, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She stated that her passion and hobby for the past 10 years has been teaching. She works far beyond her contract hours, providing students with academic, social, emotional, and family needs. She opined that there are not enough teachers, which is overwhelming. Teacher and student stress is increasing. Raising the BSA to \$1,086 is crucial for students and educators. Flat funding is a budget cut. Alaska must do better for its students. She requested that the legislature make this the education session.

[4:07:37 PM](#)

HANNIBAL GRUBIS, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. He stated he is a 25-year teacher, coach, and nationally certified math teacher. He said Alaska is no longer competitive for students or teachers. The BSA needs to be increased in the short term because Alaska is ranked 44th out of 50 states for teacher pay. In the long term, Alaska's teachers need a pension to stay in the state. He noted that teachers could not afford to take extra duty contracts.

[4:09:51 PM](#)

VALERIE BROOKS, representing self, Ketchikan, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She stated she is a retired schoolteacher and reading specialist. Support for Alaska's public schools requires a sizable increase to the BSA and a focus on adequately funded public education. She quoted an article in the Anchorage Daily News from January 23, 2023, which provided statistics regarding the BSA in Alaska. She said the BSA needs to increase by \$1,195 to match the buying power of the BSA in FY 17. She opined that an increased BSA and an updated funding formula could beneficially impact Alaska's public education budgets and activities. Smaller class sizes, quality PreK programs, stipulations of the Alaska Reads Act, and the ability of school districts to attract and retain great teachers positively impact education. Alaska schools need funds for intense instruction to occur. She urged the legislature to increase public education funding because Alaska's students and future depend on it.

[4:12:20 PM](#)

BRIDGET WEISS, Superintendent, Juneau School District, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of school funding and described what the lack of school funding has meant for Juneau and what adequate funding would mean. She stated that in 1984 she took a first-year teaching position in Spokane, Washington, that paid \$14,600. She would have been paid \$27,000 if she had worked in Juneau. Today, the starting salary of both locations is about the same. Teachers need to be supported, and students need quality teachers. Budgets are inadequate, and costs are going up. For example, Juneau School District's property liability insurance policy went from \$200,000 in FY 21 to \$1.2 million in FY 23. Next year's BSA increase of \$30 means the Juneau school district budget will increase by \$243,000. Juneau teachers are negotiating increased salaries. If the district applies the \$243,000 to teacher salaries, they will receive a 0.0025 percent wage increase for three years. She opined that is not enough.

[4:16:06 PM](#)

DANIELLE LOGAN, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She said she is a seven-year educator and the Education Support Staff Association president. She opined that the Fairbanks North Star Borough needs help with support staff turnover. Support staff receives the short end of the stick regarding budget cuts. Custodial staff are shorthanded, paraprofessionals do more with less, and teaching assistants work outside their job classification. Educators are leaving the profession, and students suffer. She described the various duties of support staff and how closely they work with

students. She asked that the legislature consider the needs of support staff when addressing education funding.

4:18:34 PM

CAROLINE STORM, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She said she is an architect and a school volunteer. She asked that children be placed at the center of Alaska's decision-making because there is no future without investing in children. Investments do not show immediate returns. Investing in children is a question of priority rather than dollars. The legislature is striking a hopeful tone by putting the BSA at the center of the legislative session. She implored the legislature to consider the BSA contribution as part of being a civilized, creative, and humanitarian society. Children are human beings with a host of potential and sometimes traumas. Alaska is a wealthy state that can spend its riches on corporate profit or its children. She asked that the committee lobby the House of Representatives and the governor to restore the BSA to the FY 15 level per the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee memo of January 30th.

4:21:21 PM

POLLY CARR, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She stated she has lived in Anchorage for 25 years, has a 12-year-old child, and has worked with high school students throughout Alaska. She helped launch a small business in 2008. She opined that the state's underfunding of schools has been detrimental to students, the workforce, and economic and social morale. A presentation by the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation described Anchorage as having a talent crisis. It proposed solutions such as the establishment of youth entrepreneurship and information technology education programs. However, districts can only consider these programs when schools have funds to operate. Classrooms are overflowing. People who believe spending has been misguided are misinformed. The resourceful scrappiness of Alaska's schools is incredible but unsustainable. She encouraged the legislature to increase the BSA and return to a defined benefit plan.

4:23:54 PM

CHRIS BYE, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified with concerns on school funding. He stated he appreciated the testimonies of parents and teachers and the information published by the Department of Education. However, the only solution they suggest for fixing education is money. Alaska's student population has decreased by 3,000. Scholastics have not improved since 2010. He recollected that a few years ago,

Fairbanks schools received additional funding. Some employees received pay increases while class sizes remained crowded, opportunities were lost, and the district laid teachers off. Inflation affects all Alaskans. Taking money from the PFD hurts both students and families. The cost of living is high in Alaska, and the PFD helps offset those costs. He opined that the construct of Alaska's traditional public school system needs more diversity and flexibility. Capable teachers could teach outside of the time-restricted curriculum of the public-school format. Diversity in the public-school format would provide more opportunities for students. A free-market approach funds a cottage industry that rises the tide for every boat. Teachers enjoy a better instructor-to-student ratio. Pathways must be flexible if the end goal is for every student to be educated. Money should follow students. He mentioned being in favor of teacher retirement plans.

[4:27:27 PM](#)

SUSANNA LITWINIAK, representing self, Moose Pass, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She stated that it was ideal when her daughter started attending Seward high school in 2014 because the schools afforded students opportunities without being too big. The school district has cut electives, extracurricular activities, and counseling at a time when teenage anxiety and depression are at record-high levels. Students deserve to have access to art, music, and other curriculums. She requested that the legislature invest in student education.

[4:29:49 PM](#)

DAVID BOYLE, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of school funding with concerns. He said his children had attended schools in five different states. He has been researching Alaska's education system for 15 years and little has changed regarding student achievement. Alaska is consistently last in fourth-grade reading. The solution has been to throw more money at the education system without considering the improvement of student outcomes. He opined that the legislature must be at the table when union contracts are made because they are responsible for funding them. He described areas where he believes excessive funding exists and where auditing should be required. He stated that the Anchorage School District has 41,000 students but enough infrastructure to house 51,000 students, yet the legislature plans to bail the district out to avoid school closures. He stated that educators cherry-picked the base year 2017 for inflation-proofing the BSA because it was the last year the BSA was substantially increased. He

opined that it would be more accurate to use the year 2000 because it would ensure a smoother funding curve and more accurate inflation numbers. The BSA was \$3,940 in 2000. Adjusting for inflation using 2000 as the base year would make the BSA amount in 2022 \$6,528. These figures were derived using the Department of Labor's CPI calculator. The Anchorage Comprehensive Financial Report for 2022 shows \$19,250 per student and 29 students per teacher in the high school classroom. The problem with the student-teacher count is that many teachers are part of the management bureaucracy. He stated that the legislature needs to ensure more accountability of expenditures and that funds go to the classroom because increasing K-12 funding does not mean student achievement will increase.

[4:33:13 PM](#)

CAREY CARPENTER, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She stated she has lived in Alaska for 23 years and is the mother of two children. She opined that people want to raise their children in locations with a good education system. It is why she stayed in Anchorage. She said her children are in the Japanese immersion program, which the district may cut if additional funding is not provided. Low test scores are directly proportional to how much parents earn. Children with fewer resources tend to have lower test scores. Education cannot work as it should without proper funding.

[4:36:34 PM](#)

CALLIE CONERTON, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She said she had taught Montessori school for six years and knows that flat funding decreases what districts can provide for students and schools. She stated she was a product of the legislature's investment when education was well funded and educators fought to have a teaching position in Alaska. She grew up in Juneau, received her degrees from the University of Alaska, and joined Alaska's workforce as an educator. Many of her colleagues are leaving the state for better teaching opportunities. Every year that teaching in Alaska is underfunded makes it more difficult to justify staying. All other states have a defined benefit for teachers and allow them to collect Social Security. Recruiting new teachers is expensive. She said she loves teaching in Alaska, but the BSA must be fully funded, or teachers will continue to leave the state or the profession.

[4:39:36 PM](#)

SARA DYKSTRA, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She stated she is a mother and a volunteer with Great Alaska Schools. She said she worries that Alaska will not be a place where her children will continue to thrive. Battles over clear financial plans have left public schools with instability, scarcity, and the inability to think big and plan. The programs that make Anchorage schools unique are being cut. Investment in public schools is an investment in Alaska's future. Funding is crucial to Alaska's workforce, so Alaska's schools need comprehensive, sustainable, reliable, and inflation-proof budgets. Projected cuts traumatize teachers and communities. She urged the legislature to invest in Alaska's children, teachers, and communities by inflation-proofing the BSA and providing a defined benefit.

[4:42:08 PM](#)

KELLY LESSENS, Anchorage School Board, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She said that according to Georgetown University's Edunomics Lab, Anchorage School District's students lost an average of 17 weeks of math growth and 11 weeks of reading growth due to disruptions caused by the pandemic. To remedy the losses through tutoring would cost \$57 million for math and \$25 million for reading. The Anchorage School District (ASD) would like to be able to implement long-term student improvement strategies. However, it has not guaranteed data-driven funding streams for seven years, which makes establishing successful long-term strategies challenging. She stated that ASD has had to rely on piecemeal funding efficiencies to hold the school district together. She described how the district used federal relief funds to backfill funding shortfalls and how class sizes exceeded the evidence-based model recommendations. ASD experienced over 400 job vacancies in the same month that the administration recommended closing six elementary schools and various programs. She opined that a data-driven BSA adjustment would mean ASD could align staffing with the evidence-based model, continue offering outstanding programs of choice, and hire essential support staff.

[4:45:48 PM](#)

LOY THURMAN, representing self, Big Lake, Alaska, testified with concerns on school funding because the only solution he hears to problems with education is money. He said he homeschooled a son with dyslexia because qualified special needs teachers did not understand the basics. The school curriculum was appalling. He opined that the whole system needed to be changed to help his son. Many people in Alaska's workforce have dyslexia, but everyone can learn to read with Hooked on Phonics. He said he is

further frustrated by the amount of money spent on administration. Hawaii only has one "head dog," while Alaska has many. Administrators should reduce their pay by five percent and use the money where it is needed.

[4:49:33 PM](#)

DANIELLE SPECHT, representing self, Kodiak, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She said she has been teaching special education for 15 years and has a tier three retirement. She said flat funding is affecting teacher recruitment and retention. Teacher salaries in Alaska are no longer competitive with other states. She said base teacher pay is \$10,000 below the low-income level of many Alaskan communities, and classified staff pay is below the poverty line. Alaska should not be recruiting teachers and simultaneously have them sign up for subsidized housing. Alaska is losing teachers and support staff. It costs Alaska \$20,000 to recruit and train teachers. To improve student outcomes, Alaska needs to slow staff turnover. She said that 15 years ago, more than half of the teachers where she works had been there for more than 15 years; now, there is only one. Teachers often leave the state after five years when they can receive 100 percent of the state's contribution to their retirement savings.

[4:54:11 PM](#)

SCOTT BALLARD, Superintendent, Yupiit School District, Bethel, Alaska, testified in support of school funding with concerns. He is a graduate of UAA and has taught in Alaska for 25 years. He stated he agreed with other testifiers regarding the funding shortfall. In his district, students and teachers have been using honey buckets for a week, and several schools are dangerously dilapidated. An increase to the BSA of more than \$1,200 and a defined benefit plan for teachers are essential. He said the READS Act is the wrong program for his school district. He opined that the school board believes it has local control over its education system, but it doesn't because the state places unfunded mandates on it. The mandates direct the school district's instructional program. He opined that his district has a good vision and plan for its students. Students in his district are becoming more successful because the district is creating opportunities that interest students. The district's program is based on the Yupiit education system, values, and language. The READS Act is a rebooting of the No Child Left Behind Act, which did not work to improve learning outcomes, and neither will the READS Act because it creates complex requirements for testing and monitoring students that are not necessary or helpful.

[4:57:46 PM](#)

CAROLE BOOKLESS, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She agreed that school districts are administration heavy but can understand why when schools are regulation heavy. Cuts are happening at all levels within the school. Students' breakfast consisted of a carton of milk, a granola bar, and an apple. The district consolidated special needs programs, which removed some students from the school and peers they had grown up with. Bugs fall from the ceiling, toilets do not work, and the carpet is 50 years old. Due to budget shortfalls, reading curriculums will not be updated. She said this is a snapshot of what schools look like due to budget cuts.

[5:01:24 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 5:01 p.m.