

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 27, 2023

3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Justin Ruffridge

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT UPDATE

- HEARD

PRESENTATION STATE OF PK-12 EDUCATION IN ALASKA

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JHARRETT BRYANTT, Superintendent
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an update of the Anchorage School District.

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

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

BRIDGET WEISS, Superintendent
Juneau City and Borough School District
Juneau, Alaska

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

BRENDAN WILSON, President
Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals
Anchorage, Alaska

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

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

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

BRENDAN WILSON, President
Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals
Anchorage, Alaska

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

YODEAN ARMOUR, President
Alaska Association of School Business Officials
Klawock, Alaska

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

ANDY RATLIFF, Chief Financial Officer
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

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

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

DOUGLAS GRAY, Director
Alaska Staff Development Network

Juneau, Alaska

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

SAM JORDAN, Grant Director
Alaska School Leadership Academy
Juneau, Alaska

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

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:00 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 Bjorkman, Gray-Jackson, Stevens, Kiehl and Chair Tobin.

PRESENTATION **ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT UPDATE**

[3:32:04 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of an update from the Anchorage School District.

[3:32:34 PM](#)

JHARRETT BRYANTT, Superintendent, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, said Alaska's current education policy is failing students, but the legislature can be part of the solution. He stated the following facts:

- According to the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation, living in Anchorage is 26 percent more expensive than the average American city.
- Alaska has the fourth-highest healthcare costs in the nation.
- Alaska has the seventh-highest cost of groceries in the nation.
- The year 2022 marked the tenth consecutive year of Alaska net out-migration.

MR. BRYANTT opined that being an educator in Alaska is no longer a good deal for Alaskan teachers. Alaska's teacher retirement system is portable, making it easy for teachers to gain experience in Alaska and transfer state-matched retirement

accounts to another state. Without sensible reform, Alaska will soon have the least experienced teacher workforce in the nation.

MR. BRYANTT said flat funding of school bus transportation since 2015 caused the Mat-Su and Anchorage school districts to shut down bus service for several months in 2022. Raising bus driver wages by 25 percent using funding for teachers and textbooks resolved the transportation issue. A vote to not invest in schools is to make Alaska education akin to bus service at ASD in 2022, inadequate and in need of support.

MR. BRYANTT giped that there are people who want to invest in schools with accountability. He welcomes policy solutions, but none have been forthcoming. In Texas, the legislature closes schools that do not perform. He has learned through personal experience that many people oppose school closures. The Texas legislature also earmarked millions to pay the best teachers a top salary. Districts fought to obtain the best teachers. He said he was responsible for 26,000 employees, and in response to the legislation, he led the charge to recruit and pay talented educators six-figure salaries. There are various ways to improve schools through policy, but the only solution legislators have put forward is hoping students will learn to read by not investing in schools; data shows this solution is not working.

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MR. BRYANTT said ASD's original budget deficit forecast was about \$68 million. The district balanced the budget by exhausting COVID and one-time funds. Those funds will not be available next year. Last year, the legislature passed a \$30 increase to the base student allocation (BSA). However, inflation has increased by 18 percent, so Alaska is still on track to close schools, lay off teachers, and shrink popular programs. Population growth, a strong economy, safe neighborhoods, and world-class schools are evidence of accountability in Alaska. Budgets are complicated and require prioritization. Schools are Alaska's future. ASD gives students vocational credentials with a promise that there will be high wages and jobs when they graduate. Out-migration means Alaska needs to develop its workforce and prioritize developing its residents to further prosperity, which is the work of schools. He said he is ready to do his part in leading positive change as a superintendent. However, when the legislature does not increase funding, it cuts funding. Schools have had seven years of cuts, and academic performance is at an all-time low. Long-term prosperity in Alaska is jeopardized when schools are not

the priority. He thanked the legislature for wanting to be a part of positive change.

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SENATOR STEVENS said the committee passed a \$1000 increase to the BSA because it understands the importance of increasing funding. He hoped the amount would stay the same as the bill moved through the legislative process. For 23 years, he has heard there needs to be accountability in education. He opined that Alaska has yet to attach accountability to educational funding successfully. He asked Mr. Bryantt for recommendations of accountable measures that Alaska could install.

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MR. BRYANTT said he is open to a variety of policy solutions but has yet to hear any.

SENATOR STEVENS clarified that he was asking for suggestions from Mr. Bryantt.

MR. BRYANTT said he does not want to tell the legislature what bills they should pass. He said Texas is a state with high accountability and provided examples of policies he is willing to discuss. He does not fear accountability because it creates excellent schools.

PRESENTATION
STATE OF PK-12 EDUCATION IN ALASKA

[3:40:28 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of a presentation by the Alaska Council of School Administrators on the State of PK-12 Education in Alaska.

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LISA PARADY, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators, Juneau, Alaska, moved to slide 2 and said the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ASCA) is a 50-year-old private, nonprofit organization representing superintendents, secondary principals, elementary principals, school business officials, and others. ASCA's focus is leadership, unity, and advocacy for public education. Over 100 members came to attend the legislative fly-in.

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MS. PARADY thanked the committee for supporting a \$1,000 increase in the base student allocation (BSA). She said the

committee would hear from ACSA's affiliated presidents. ACSA is an umbrella organization that works to promote the educational priorities of its affiliated members. ACSA advocates for students in all districts of Alaska.

CHAIR TOBIN asked why Alaska has 54 school districts.

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MS. PARADY replied that Alaska has 54 unique school districts to honor local control, traditions, and cultures. The topic of school districting has been studied a lot by the legislature. Last year, under David Teal, the legislative finance division found that consolidation was not cost-effective. Consolidating districts is complex partly because Regional Education Attendance Areas (REAAs) would need to establish local governments. The study found that cost savings would be minimal. Schools help preserve the community in rural areas by being a place where the community can gather for events such as weddings and funerals.

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MS. PARADY turned to slide 5, Annual Joint Position Statements, and said members developed policy statements over several months focusing on prominent education issues. The presentation will reference various positions from the document.

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MS. PARADY noted that school districts in Alaska are generally the largest employer in a community, which means superintendents are stewards of students and the largest business in a community.

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SENATOR STEVENS clarified that the ASD superintendent did not answer his innocuous question regarding accountability. The committee desires to support education. However, other members of the legislature want accountability attached to educational funding. He requested that superintendents think of practical ways accountability can be tied to funding.

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CHAIR TOBIN said Superintendent Trani asked questions and spoke about alternative types of education and accountability happening at ASD. She said she would like to hear about them during the hearing.

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BRIDGET WEISS, Superintendent, Juneau City and Borough School District, Juneau, Alaska, said there are approximately 4,300 students in the Juneau school district. The district has 13 schools; four are choice schools. Four elementary schools have a Pre-K program within them, and there are three in-kind classroom spaces for Head Start preschools. She is from Juneau and has spent 39 years supporting K-12 education.

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MS. WEISS turned to slides 7-8 and stated that the Alaska Superintendent Association has 12 board members. The association works to provide organized leadership to statewide education. Its top priority is ensuring fully funded school districts, which means funding is timely, reliable, and predictable. Superintendents must be able to attract and retain teachers and administrators to provide viable and sustainable programming along with instruction efficacy. Early notification allows superintendents to be fiscally responsive and avoids chaos when funding streams change. Currently, school funding does not keep pace with inflation, resulting in lost purchasing power. A nationwide shortage of educators makes hiring competitive.

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MS. WEISS advanced to slide 9 and said the pencils on the chart represent the actual BSA amount per year and appear as a relatively flat revenue amount. The black line shows the impact of inflation over those same years, demonstrating that flat funding is regressive funding.

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MS. WEISS moved to slide 10, Education is Accountable, and said she is glad senators asked about accountability because school districts already have many accountability measures. Trying to select one quantitative measure to express success with students is faulty due to the complexity of educating students with individual needs and the variety of educational programs. Successful accountability requires multiple measures. Educators have their noses to the grindstone. Finding time to share success stories is a struggle. She spoke to some of the accountability reports superintendents provide to the state:

- Special Education Audits
- State Monitoring of Federal Programs
- DEED Report Card Shared with the Public
- Other Alaska Student ID System (OASIS) Reporting
- Attendance and Achievement Data for Indian Education Grants

- Program Audits

MS. WEISS said each district has strategic plans and metrics corresponding to goals. Every year school boards help keep superintendents accountable for their accomplishments.

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MS. WEISS moved to slide 11 and said a common public misconception is that school administration is top-heavy. While this may have been true of some districts ten years ago, it is no longer accurate. School districts have survived flat funding by trimming non-classroom expenses first. Ten years ago, Juneau did not fill the vice superintendent position due to budget cuts. The position remains unfilled. School districts are doing dynamic work with very little administration.

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SENATOR STEVENS asked for a definition of administration.

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MS. WEISS responded that finance personnel would offer definitions because items within instructional and noninstructional categories are only sometimes intuitive. School districts are disadvantaged businesses because they only generate revenue through grants and taxes. Therefore, superintendents need to pay attention to increases in the fixed costs that schools must have to operate, such as fuel and liability insurance. She said Juneau School District's property liability insurance cost \$200,000 three years ago, \$400,000 two years ago, \$1.2 million this year, and will increase \$59,000 next year. Inflation coupled with flat funding results in schools making programmatic cuts that impact students.

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MS. WEISS turned to slide 12 and said Alaskans had noticed the problem of teacher turnover and retention, but there is also a problem with superintendent turnover. In the past five years, 39 out of 54 school districts have replaced their superintendent at least once. Educator instability is bad for schools, staff, and students. It is challenging for school personnel to continue doing more with less.

[4:02:04 PM](#)

MS. WEISS moved to slide 13 and said the new superintendent induction and support program is an example of how ASA works to resolve problems. ASA created a superintendent cohort that

mentors new superintendents to help reduce turnover. Since the program began four years ago:

- 72 percent of superintendents have participated in the program.
- 100 percent of 2021-2022 first-year superintendents returned to their position in 2022-2023.
- 80 percent of the 2023 cohort is on track to return for their third year.

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MS. WEISS said superintendents are frustrated by the legislature's underfunding of schools. They wonder what their schools could achieve if appropriately funded. She said schools are doing amazing work, and students are excelling despite the challenges caused by underfunding. Schools are the heart of many communities educationally, economically, recreationally, and socially. The following could happen with appropriately funded schools:

- Students could catch a school bus daily and arrive on time.
- Buildings could be sufficiently maintained.
- Nutritious breakfasts and lunches could be served.
- Classrooms could have highly certified teachers.
- Students could have access to classified support when needed.
- Students could arrive at school rested, well-fed, and self-regulated.
- Schools could be fully staffed and have substitute teachers.
- Staff morale could be healthy, invigorated, and ready to innovate.

[4:05:04 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked how early elementary school students in Juneau have been impacted by measures to avoid COVID and how it affected student learning outcomes for the district.

MS. WEISS said she taught secondary school math for 16 years before being an elementary school principal. She is passionate about early childhood and the preventative measures that occur with high-quality learning experiences. The effects of COVID on younger students were extraordinary. For example, schools intuitively knew there would be students arriving at school with limited exposure to learning experiences. Following COVID, the

Juneau school district had several 7-year-old students enter a learning environment for the first time. COVID impacted the self-regulation and the behavioral and emotional needs of K-3rd grade students. Educators must focus on these issues before entering academics. The state does a developmental profile on children entering kindergarten. On average, one-third of Alaska's children are ready for kindergarten.

[4:07:36 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if cutting teachers results in an outcome opposite to what the district wants.

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MS. WEISS said it would help 100 percent. Juneau school district's budget for next year is \$4.5 million short. To accomplish a balanced budget schools must increase the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) even though increasing class size is contrary to the needs of students. She opined that there must be a certified teacher and classified support person in every class to overcome the learning and regulation deficits of students.

[4:08:40 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if cutting teachers results in an outcome opposite to what the district wants.

MS. WEISS replied yes. School districts have trimmed all the low-hanging fruit. Class size is one of the remaining levers superintendents have available to balance their budgets.

[4:09:27 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if the response to intervention (RTI) educational strategy works for the Juneau School district. He asked whether the district is nimble in transitioning students into and out of interventions into full services.

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MS. WEISS said RTI is also called multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). ASA acquired a grant that supports 18 Alaska school districts. The data-driven strategy is terrific and removes bias from achievement across multiple fields of learning. School districts supply interventions to support students based on a tiered level of need; the lower the tier, the more resource interventions are applied. Progress is continually monitored and adjusted on a four-to-six-week schedule. She stated her belief that MTSS is critical to increasing student achievement across Alaska, but it takes resources.

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SENATOR BJORKMAN said staff with years of teaching experience are working through the RTI process while students face significant learning deficits. He opined that there is no time to collect data and wait two months to see if a program works. Students need action now. He encouraged districts around the state to defer to the expertise of educators to decide what interventions students need. Data is great when there is time and support, but schools have yet to receive support, and second graders need to start learning to read.

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MS. WEISS stated she appreciates Senator Bjorkman's sense of urgency. The data she referred to was not state achievement data but real-time, locally based school assessments to immediately identify needed interventions. She agreed there was no time to waste.

[4:14:15 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN referred to slide 14, New Superintendent Induction and Support Program, and said accountability goes two ways. The superintendent support program is incredible, and the legislature should also be accountable for supporting superintendents.

[4:14:44 PM](#)

MS. PARADY said she reflected on Senator Steven's request for suggestions on accountability. She opined that school districts are swimming in accountability and that presenters would provide a list of ways they are accountable. Policymakers need to understand how much accountability there is at the various levels of government. Adding more accountability to existing layers of accountability when school districts have been operating at a deficit is counterintuitive. Government can apply accountability measures to any extra that schools receive once school districts are made whole.

[4:16:27 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said his understanding of Ms. Parady's comment is that there is no silver bullet. There is no single accountability measure, and school districts already have many accountability measures.

MS. PARADY replied that the accountability measures presenters will share are partial lists. She offered to provide the committee with a list of existing accountability measures.

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CHAIR TOBIN acknowledged Representative Ruffridge was in attendance.

[4:17:46 PM](#)

BRENDAN WILSON, President, Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals, Anchorage, Alaska, said he is the principal of Begich middle school. He shared a brief video of an elementary school student saying she likes reading and learning. Principal Thompson from Sand Lake Elementary provided the video. The video is a good reminder that middle school educators stand on the shoulders of elementary school colleagues. It makes teaching easier when students enter middle school liking to read.

[4:19:02 PM](#)

MR. WILSON moved to slide 18 and said the mission of the state board is to promote excellence in school leadership through professional development, advocacy, and mentoring. He thanked the legislators for their focus on education. One of the biggest challenges facing education in Alaska is recruiting and retaining staff. Schools have unfilled positions and positions filled by only partially certified employees. The Governor's Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force stated that salary and benefits are the main issues impacting retention. He said he did not expect to become rich by teaching but was offered world-class healthcare and an excellent retirement system. He opined that teachers leave Alaska after five years due to their retirement benefit. The loss to the state is immeasurable because it takes a new teacher about five years to become proficient.

[4:21:16 PM](#)

MR. WILSON advanced to slide 20 and said educators trained in Alaska are more likely to stay in Alaska. More robust systems of education lead to better teacher retention. He encouraged support for the University of Alaska and was happy that two aides from Begich middle school were preparing to be special education teachers.

MR. WILSON turned to slide 21 and said ACSA advocates for safe and secure schools by providing a supportive, welcoming environment. The BSA directly impacts safety.

[4:22:21 PM](#)

MR. WILSON turned to slide 22 and said the top two safety issues students care about are drug safety and gun violence. Vaping has become a national epidemic for students. Often parents are unaware that their children are using drugs and vaping. Students expressed concerns about gun violence in their communities. He said there is a principal in the room who disarmed a student last year, and one who helped students feel safe after a six-year-old brought a loaded gun to school. He stated that he had lost four students to gun violence in five years, two to suicide, one to domestic violence, and one to homicide by a juvenile.

[4:24:42 PM](#)

MR. WILSON advanced to slides 24-25 and said that the board is proud of its statewide mentoring program, Alaska School Leadership Academy, because many districts cannot offer robust professional development. Mentoring principals is essential because having quality principals in every building is second only to quality teachers as an indicator of student achievement.

[4:25:31 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON asked about slide 23, titled Education is Accountable.

MR. WILSON replied that he would discuss the slide later in the presentation.

MR. WILSON said the photographs on slide 26 were of professional development meetings.

[4:26:07 PM](#)

MR. WILSON turned to slide 23, Education is Accountable, and provided a partial list of the ways principals are held accountable:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Teacher and Principal Evaluations
- Accreditation Process
- Title I Data
- Graduation Rates
- Attendance
- DEED Dashboard
- Staff Retention
- Program Audits
- Special Ed/IEP Audits

MR. WILSON said he would share data from Begich Middle School. The federal government requires Title I schools to set goals. He spoke about the following three goals set by the school:

Goal 1: Students would have a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.8. The use of GPA was selected over standardized test scores because there is a growing body of research showing GPA is a better predictor of student success after high school than standardized tests. He said research shows that 2.8 is the GPA needed to be on track for life, a career, or college. The combined average GPA of the 900 students at Begich Middle School is 2.8.

Goal 2: Reduce the number of suspensions for physical behavior. Following the COVID pandemic, there was a spike in school behavioral problems. Begich Middle School is on track for a 28 percent reduction over last year.

Goal 3: Increase family engagement.

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CHAIR TOBIN asked what scale he uses to determine grade point average (GPA).

MR. WILSON said the scale used in high school is more complicated than in middle school. Middle school uses a simple 4.0 scale. A middle school student would need a minimum of six Bs and one C to have a 2.8 GPA.

[4:28:28 PM](#)

MR. WILSON moved to slide 27 and said ASD envisions a day when schools partner with businesses to identify career paths in Alaska that students can aspire to after graduation. That means exposing middle school students to a wide range of careers so they can enter career paths in high school with a realization that some occupations have yet to be invented. For this to happen, curriculums and career paths must align, which means hiring teachers for a broader range of subjects and staff that can work with the business community.

[4:29:45 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked for information about the leadership academy.

MR. WILSON replied that braided funding through the state and grants fund the leadership academy. Admission to the academy is

voluntary. Experienced principals volunteer to mentor new principals for two years. Next year Anchorage will join the statewide mentorship program. Currently, he participates in Anchorage's mentorship program and learns a lot from his mentee.

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SENATOR KIEHL said it is good the academy is expanding. He asked if 7 - 8 percent of principal participation is adequate to cover turnover.

MR. WILSON replied no, principal turnover is between 28 - 30 percent.

[4:31:36 PM](#)

JOSH GILL, President, Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals, Bethel, Alaska, said he is the principal at Ayaprun Elitnaurvik elementary school in the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD). LKSD is about the size of West Virginia, with 22 sites and 27 schools. It is the largest REAA in Alaska, and no roads connect the villages. He has been the principal of his four children.

[4:32:13 PM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slide 29 and said the people in the photographs are AASP's elementary school board of directors and regional representatives. The representatives ensure statewide representation. The board represents both urban and rural elementary schools. The mission of AASB is to support school leaders in their work to strengthen Alaskan communities and provide an excellent opportunity for all students.

[4:32:34 PM](#)

MR. GILL turned to slide 30 and said the first joint position statement he would address is early childhood education. Early childhood education programs offer many advantages, especially in rural areas where students enter school with language challenges. Students should enter school with a vocabulary between 5,000 - 6,000 words. Instead, many students in his district enter school with a vocabulary between 2,500 - 3,500 words, making it impossible for them to learn to read.

[4:33:13 PM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slide 31 and said the following are long-term risk factors for students who do not have access to quality childhood programs:

- 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 more likely to never attend college.
- 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime.

MR. GILL stated that early childhood education is a preventative measure for the issues secondary school teachers face. He said the graph on the right shows the long-term monetary benefit of implementing preschools. Schools appreciate the Reads Act, which addresses the need for early childhood education but needs more funding. Quality education programs exist in Alaska but must be made available to all students. While working as a principal at a PreK-2nd grade school in Bethel in 2009, he applied for and received a language grant. Only low-income students were allowed in the program. Using data collected over two years, the students scored in the 85th percentile of their peers. He said there is a direct, immediate benefit to early childhood programs.

[4:34:48 PM](#)

MR. GILL turned to slide 32 and said ACSA's statement about the need for mental health support through additional training and staffing should not be surprising. ACSA has also discussed safety and the lack of staffing for early childhood programs directly related to mental health issues across the state.

CHAIR TOBIN said the Senate Judiciary Committee heard the Department of Justice report on behavioral health and the hyper-institutionalization of children. The report's first recommendation was to have more school counselors. She said she wants conversations about using Alaska's resources to keep students living in the state to continue.

[4:35:32 PM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slide 33 and said Alaska has the nation's highest child abuse and neglect rates. Abuse rates were high in Alaska before COVID, but afterward, the rates became extremely high. Many schools do not have counselors or social workers, especially in elementary school. Students are coming to school with greater needs at younger ages. Student learning does not occur unless districts address their social, emotional, and mental health needs. "Compassion fatigue" is a new term to describe the physical, emotional, and psychological impact of

helping others. He said compassion fatigue is taking a toll on education, especially in rural areas with limited outside support.

[4:37:04 PM](#)

MR. GILL turned to slides 34-35 and said geography should no longer be a determinant in connectivity. He provided ACSA's joint position statement on increasing bandwidth in underserved areas as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

ACSA supports continuing the Broadband Assistance Grant (BAG) to ensure all schools are able to access a minimum speed of 25 megabits per second as this leverages federal ERate funds up to a 9:1 match. We support efforts to continue to increase download speed to meet national recommendations of 1 gigabyte per second, per student.

MR. GILL said the graph comprises national data collected during the COVID pandemic and illustrates how social-economic levels affect students and their access to online learning. Some areas of Alaska have major bandwidth issues. Lack of bandwidth also affects educators' access to online professional development. Bandwidth limited the Lower Kuskokwim School District's (LKSD) ability to offer online classes during the pandemic. The school's bandwidth can only support 15 - 20 standardized test users at a time. This results in a lot of lost instruction time. Families in the area do not have online access.

[4:38:18 PM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slide 37 and said the school he works at is an immersion charter school that offers choice. He said he wants to see a fully funded PreK - 8th-grade immersion program that develops bilingual and biliterate students well-prepared for their chosen career path. Students deserve the best, and the state of Alaska should be able to give it to them.

[4:38:49 PM](#)

MR. GILL moved to slide 36 and stated his belief that the video he shared of a mechanical engineering student attending Stanford encompasses the dedication and work of teachers. The student credited the academic rigor and extracurricular offering of ASD for her acceptance into Stanford. She thanked her principal, teachers, and counselors for their help.

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CHAIR TOBIN asked whether young people could compete nationally to enter institutions of higher learning without extracurricular activities.

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MR. WILSON replied that he does not have data to back up what he believes to be true. Extracurricular activities are sometimes the only reason a student attends school. The greater breadth of opportunities schools can offer students, the more likely they will enter a good college, career, or life path.

[4:42:21 PM](#)

YODEAN ARMOUR, President, Alaska Association of School Business Officials, Klawock, Alaska, said Klawock School is a single-site district with 118 students in grades K-12. She is a graduate of Klawock School and is grateful for the education she received.

[4:42:44 PM](#)

ANDY RATLIFF, Chief Financial Officer, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, said ASD has about 44,000 students in 95 schools. His wife works for Fairview Elementary School, and his four children attend schools in Anchorage.

[4:43:10 PM](#)

MS. ARMOUR turned to slide 39 and said that school districts would face a fiscal cliff in the coming year due to the loss of COVID funds. She stressed the importance of inflation-proof funding to ensure schools can continue to use funds to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of students that are present and will continue to exist once COVID funding is exhausted. School districts striving for academic excellence must employ tutors, teachers, counselors, and specialists.

[4:43:40 PM](#)

MS. ARMOUR turned to slide 40 and said the pie chart combines the budgets of Alaska's 54 districts and demonstrates instructional versus non-instructional expenditures. Statewide instructional expenditures are 74 percent of budget spending.

[4:44:03 PM](#)

MR. RATLIFF moved to slides 41-42 and provided a brief overview of what items the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) defines as belonging to instructional versus non-instructional categories:

Instructional (Functions 100-400) = 74 percent

- **Instruction** - the cost of teachers, paraprofessionals, supplies, materials, technology that is directly in the classroom
- **Special Education Instruction** - the cost of teachers, paraprofessionals, supplies, materials, technology that is directly in the classroom
- **Special Education Support (non-direct instruction)** - pull-out services, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychologists, counseling, behavioral supports
- **Support Services (ancillary support)** - counseling, security, nurses
- **Support Services for Instruction (muddled function code)**- librarians, district administration, professional development support, supervision of principals
- **School Administration** - support for principals in the daily needs and functions of the school

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

- **School Admin Support** - front office personnel in schools
- **District Administration** - the cost of the school board, superintendent, and executive level staff, assessment of evaluations, communication team, legal fees, internal and external auditors
- **District Admin Support (items related to running a business)** - payroll, human resources, purchasing, the budget office
- **Operations & Maintenance (cost of operating school buildings)** - rent, utilities, maintenance personnel
- **Student Activities** - activities that generally fall outside of a school day, such as sports or clubs
- **Community Services** - facilitating the use of school buildings by outside community members

[4:47:23 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN commented that there were times she learned more by engaging in sports and other extra-curricular activities than by attending class.

[4:47:30 PM](#)

MR. RATLIFF responded that students learn from activities the state classifies as non-instructional. His job is to report items according to state classifications.

[4:47:44 PM](#)

MR. RATLIFF moved to slide 43 and said transportation funding is not a joint position statement because it is a separate funding stream from the base student allocation (BSA). It is a different statute from the foundation formula. The amount of funding for transportation has stayed the same since 2015. Transportation costs used to be fully supported by the state, but this is no longer the case since prices have increased substantially. Approximately 75 percent of transportation costs are state funded. Transportation costs have outpaced other areas of inflation. Districts increased transportation wages to entice people to apply for positions following COVID. The government is slower to adjust to changes than the private sector.

[4:48:43 PM](#)

MR. RATLIFF turned to slide 44 and stated that the graph shows how much the state has generated in transportation revenue and how much it has spent over the last ten years. From FY13 to FY16, transportation revenue steadily increased because a statute provided inflation-proof funding. The spike in FY 16 was due to a \$9.5 million purchase of Anchorage school buses. The purchase bought down the long-term cost of ASD's contract. In FY17, the state short-funded revenue. Schools needed the same bus routes despite a decrease in student population. For example, in FY21, slightly fewer children were on each route due to COVID. COVID did not affect just one neighborhood. The same bus routes had to be continued even though there were less students on the buses.

[4:49:58 PM](#)

MR. RATLIFF moved to slide 45 and spoke to the following accountability measures that occur within finance:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- 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

[4:50:50 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN said slides titled Education is Accountable have had information on the right side that has gone unaddressed. She asked about that information and where to find it.

MR. RATLIFF replied that budget information could be found on ASD's website in its entirety and on DEED's website as a 10 - 15-page report.

[4:51:29 PM](#)

MS. ARMOUR turned to slide 46 and said that from a business viewpoint, timely, reliable, and inflation-proofed funding is what schools require to issue needed contracts and be good stewards of public dollars. Long-term planning provides the ability to support instructional staff to focus on students and outcomes.

[4:52:36 PM](#)

DOUGLAS GRAY, Director, Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN), Juneau, Alaska, provided a brief work history and said ASDN is a private non-profit small business organization providing high-quality professional development for forty years. He shared highlights of ASDN as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Our Mission: To provide Alaskan educators with multiple pathways to refine instructional practice and maintain certification.

Annually we:

- Host over **5,000** overall professional learning registrations
- Serve over **2,000** with online classes. We Offer **70** self-paced, high-quality professional development courses.
- Offer **8** webinar series with national education experts that serve over **700** Alaskan educators
- Host the largest K-12 professional development conference in Alaska with **1 in 10 Alaskan educators** in attendance

[4:54:00 PM](#)

MR. GRAY turned to slide 48 and spoke to the following points on ASDN's Annual Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) Instruction Conference:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Served over 1,000 Alaskan educators from 44 districts in 2023
- Largest statewide PK-12 Conference in Alaska
- Cost savings for districts to stay instate

[4:55:42 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked about the standard for using attendance to determine whether interventions or other support measures are needed.

MR. GRAY responded that research shows that it takes students ten days to make up for one day of missed instruction. Therefore, families need to know the importance of attendance. As a former principal, he highlighted attendance to provide success to some students.

[4:56:24 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if schools statewide consider the number of days pupils miss school when educators assess them for interventions or special support services.

MR. GRAY replied that it is always a relevant factor that educators look at when determining how to support students. The best strategy for dealing with missed instruction due to assessment is situational. The focus is letting everybody understand that attendance is just as important as studying for a test or participating actively in class. ASDN wants people to know that attendance is a factor in school success.

[4:57:24 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked Mr. Gray if he agreed that schools and administrators are not following best practices if they are not accessing students for interventions or special support services because they missed several school days.

MR. GRAY said he would not want to evaluate a school district regarding how they impact attendance. He strongly encourages every school district to look at its attendance data to see how

students are doing. He said he would encourage schools to look for ways to support students who are absent from school.

[4:58:07 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked if the state has any accountability measures that encourage families to send their students to school.

MR. GRAY replied that he was not aware of any. He knows attendance is reported and offered to follow up on the question.

SENATOR BJORKMAN said attendance plays a vital role in student success, but there is no accountability or expectation that students attend school.

MR. GRAY said he would need to ask school districts what they do with attendance reports. He said he is hopeful that districts are taking action to reduce absenteeism since schools are reporting attendance.

[4:59:18 PM](#)

SAM JORDAN, Grant Director, Alaska School Leadership Academy, Wasilla, Alaska, advanced to slide 51 and said ACSA supports a broad portfolio of state and federal grants in collaboration with school districts statewide. The purpose is to help school districts extend their ability to provide professional learning opportunities to educators and instructional opportunities to students. He spoke about the following innovative projects of the organization:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Performance-Based compensation models
- Support for National Superintendent Certification cohort
- Support for National Board Certification cohort
College and career preparation for rural students/families
- Indigenous language assessment
- Computer science instruction in rural and correspondence schools

[5:01:36 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN said she was excited to hear about indigenous language assessments because DEED expressed concerns about the

ability to support language immersion schools through the Reads Act.

[5:02:30 PM](#)

MS. WEISS answered the question concerning attendance accountability by saying educators are accountable for chronic absenteeism through the school report card published on DEED's website. Chronic absenteeism is one factor of the report. It is measured using a metric of greater than ten absences. Many schools in Juneau, and likely across the state, have student support teams that meet weekly to review lists of at risk students. The lists include students with chronic absenteeism. The team looks for agencies that can provide support to the student. It is an example of school accountability, even though schools do not have control over whether a parent sends their child to school. She said schools could benefit from a statewide campaign regarding how important it is for children to be in school. School attendance is an issue in Alaska and nationally.

MS. WEISS said a lack of attendance could be an obstacle to providing needed support services for students. Special services are considered restrictive environments; therefore, a team cannot deem a child eligible if they have not been in school.

[5:05:52 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Committee meeting at 5:05 p.m.