

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 12, 2024

3:32 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

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: ASSOCIATION OF ALASKA SCHOOL BOARDS LEGISLATIVE
FLY-IN

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

DAVE JOHNSON, President
Kodiak Island Borough Board of Education
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

TESSA DAVIS, Student
Kodiak Island Borough School District
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increase the BSA.

GWYNETH EGGLESTON, Student
Bettye Davis East Anchorage High School
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 24.

MAGGIE COTHRON, Student

Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 65.

COLTON PENETAC, Student
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 65.

ACA UTICA, Student
Frontier Charter School
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school choice.

MARGO BELLAMY, President
Anchorage School Board
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of students.

KELLY LESSENS, Member
Anchorage School Board
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

JARRON NASH, President
Soldotna Student Council
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

SHAY NASH, Principal
River City Academy
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

MAGGIE GREINER, Student
Nikiski Middle-High School
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
Nikiski, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

PENNY VADLAR, Member
Kenai School Board
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

KERRY MAHONEY, Member
Unalaska School Board
Unalaska, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

AMANDA SCHAMAHL, Member
Unalaska School Board
Unalaska, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

JASMINE WOLFE, Student
Sitka School District
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 65.

AUBREY LARUE, Student
Sitka School District
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 65.

KYLIE ORLANDO, Student
Sitka School District
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 24.

EDWARD RICHARDS, Student
Sitka School District
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

NEAL STANFORD, Student
Sleetmute School
Kuspuk School District
Aniak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

KAYLA, NLN, Student
Sleetmute School
Kuspuk School District
Aniak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support Sleetmute.

KILEY HAYDEN, Student
Sleetmute School
Kuspuk School District
Aniak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

ELSIE SIMON, Member,
Kuspuk School Board
Aniak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of an increase to the BSA.

LAUREY THOMAS, President
Yukon Flats School Board
Fort Yukon, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

MARLIN JIMMY, Member
Yukon Flats School Board
Fort Yukon, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of increasing the BSA.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:32:33 PM](#)

CHAIR LÖKI TOBIN called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:32 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Gray-Jackson, Bjorkman, Stevens, Kiehl, and Chair Tobin.

PRESENTATION:

ASSOCIATION OF ALASKA SCHOOL BOARDS LEGISLATIVE FLY-IN

[3:33:10 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of a presentation by the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB). She stated that school board members and students from across Alaska would testify by district. The meeting is held in conjunction with the Legislative Fly-in, Leadership Academy, and Youth Advocacy Institute, which is sponsored by AASB.

[3:34:20 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN stated that representatives from Kodiak Island School District would start the presentation.

[3:34:34 PM](#)

DAVE JOHNSON, President, Kodiak Island Borough Board of Education, Kodiak, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. DAVE JOHNSON testified that he came to Juneau last year and shared his life story, highlighting his journey from a lower-middle-class background in Seward, Alaska, to a 20-year career in the U.S. Coast Guard. He expressed concern over the ongoing funding crisis in the education system, noting that despite previous warnings, little has changed. He criticized the state for neglecting teachers, who have seen their pay drop from the highest in the nation to the middle, and for using poor educational outcomes to justify further cuts. He said the argument that the State spends the most per student is a false narrative and opined that when healthcare, fuel and transportation are eliminated from the equation, the spending on students is not where it needs to be. He urged the Legislature to take meaningful action, condemning the reliance on charter schools as a solution and stressing the importance of preserving programs like Career and Technical Education (CTE) that are vital to Alaska's future. He concluded by calling on those who benefited from public education to address the crisis rather than offering empty platitudes.

3:38:25 PM

TESSA DAVIS, Student, Kodiak Island Borough School District, Kodiak, Alaska, testified in support of increase the BSA. She expressed support for HB 65. She shared that her family moved to Kodiak because of the diverse opportunities and clubs offered by Kodiak High School, which had greatly enhanced her educational experience compared to her previous school in Wyoming. Tessa emphasized how much she enjoys participating in extracurricular activities like jazz band, chess club, cheer, and swim, which make learning more engaging. She expressed concern that flat funding is causing these programs to disappear, jeopardizing both her education and future opportunities. She continued by questioning how Alaska can expect to produce the next generation of professionals if programs such as Certified Nursing Assistant, welding, and woodshop are not funded. She emphasized the importance of investing in quality teaching positions to sustain arts and technical education, which are essential for a well-rounded education. She argued that raising the Base Student Allocation (BSA) is not optional but essential for the well-being of students and the state's future. She noted that the BSA hasn't been increased in eight years, and the consequences are now visible, urging that the time to act is now. The BSA has not increased in eight years. She stressed that raising the BSA would not only enhance education quality but also encourage students like her to remain in Alaska. She highlighted the

disheartening effects of budget cuts and appealed to legislators to pass the bill, emphasizing that students are only asking for the bare minimum and trusting lawmakers to make the right decision.

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CHAIR TOBIN invited members of the Anchorage School District to testify.

[3:42:04 PM](#)

GWYNETH EGGLESTON, Student, Bettye Davis East Anchorage High School, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 24, which advocates for mental health education for students and teachers. She shared that her family moved to Kotzebue, Alaska, due to the community's need for her mother, a therapist, highlighting the severe lack of mental health education in rural areas. Now living in Anchorage, she noted that the issue persists even in urban settings, where many students struggle with mental health issues, often resorting to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as isolation, lashing out, or self-harm. The speaker emphasized the alarming statistic that 90 percent of people who die by suicide have a diagnosable and treatable mental or substance abuse disorder, underscoring the urgent need for better mental health education and resources. She argued that SB 24 is crucial in providing students with the tools to understand and manage their mental health and enabling staff to support students effectively. She questioned whether any alternative legislation would address the growing youth mental health crisis in Alaska, stressing that students cannot focus on education if their mental health is neglected.

[3:44:34 PM](#)

MAGGIE COTHRON, Student, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 65. She emphasized the critical need to increase the Base Student Allocation (BSA). She reflected on the difficulty of imagining what a fully funded school district looks like, noting that she has never experienced it herself. Sharing her personal story as a dyslexic student who only received the necessary support in upper elementary school, she highlighted that many students do not share her success. She warned that without a BSA increase, the district could face the largest class sizes in 20 years, which would further strain teacher retention and hinder meaningful student-teacher connections.

[3:46:18 PM](#)

COLTON PENETAC, Student, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 65. He stated schools need the Base Student Allocation (BSA) raised to \$1413. He warned that if this bill doesn't pass, class sizes will increase significantly, citing a projected rise from 27.4 to 32.18 students per teacher for grades 6-12. He noted that services will diminish, user fees will rise, and the district's emergency reserve is nearly depleted. He highlighted the potential loss of 36 teaching positions, cuts to immersion programs, and increased counselor ratios, totaling over \$8 million in necessary funding. He stressed that passing this HB 65 would reverse these cuts and emphasized the importance of stable teacher-student relationships, sharing how his teachers helped him, but many have since left. He urged support for the bill, especially for his sister, who is struggling and would benefit from improved educational resources.

[3:48:23 PM](#)

ACA UTICA, Student, Frontier Charter School, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of school choice, emphasizing its importance for Alaska's diverse needs. He highlighted that students involved in sports or those with special needs often struggle to get the right education in traditional brick-and-mortar schools, citing his special-needs cousins who benefit from Family Partnership's tailored program. Utica noted that charter and correspondence schools in Alaska offer a more efficient student-teacher ratio, allowing for personalized education. He shared his success as a lifelong charter school student, dual-enrolled at the University of Alaska, and mentioned his sister, who graduated from Family Partnership with significant college credits and is now Miss Alaska. Utica argued that school choice empowers parents and students to make the best educational decisions, leading to more successful outcomes for the state.

[3:51:40 PM](#)

MARGO BELLAMY, President, Anchorage School Board, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of students. She emphasized the urgency of addressing the needs of students, highlighting that these are critical times that require immediate attention. She acknowledged the financial challenges facing the community, stating that the situation affects not only Anchorage's 43,000 students but also the entire state of Alaska. She underscored the importance of listening to the voices of students, thanking everyone for taking the time to consider their perspectives.

[3:52:56 PM](#)

KELLY LESSENS, Member, Anchorage School Board, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA and shared that a girl in fourth grade was reading, "Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus," noting her concern that this book is typically for younger children, while the girl's peers were reading more advanced material. She also recounted an interaction with another fourth grader who urged her to save the Ignite program and suggested solutions to the district's financial challenges. She highlighted the wide range of student needs and stressed that current funding levels are insufficient to support all students, especially with a pupil-teacher ratio of 28 in fifth grade, the highest it has been in 20 years. She asked her colleagues for support to help students reach their potential.

[3:55:30 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON expressed appreciation for support of SB 24 and asked that Ms. Eggleston provide her testimony in writing.

MS. EGGLESTON replied she would submit written testimony.

[3:56:10 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS commented that he was pleased to hear Ms. Eggleston attend Betty Davis High School, as she was a powerful woman who served as chair of the Health and Education Social Services Committee before there was an education committee.

[3:57:07 PM](#)

JARRON NASH, President, Soldotna Student Council, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, Soldotna, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. He emphasized that an increase is necessary to preserve communities and schools. Nash, who aspires to become a teacher in Alaska, shared his experience teaching a lesson to elementary school students and the joy he felt in creating a safe space for learning. He highlighted the importance of education in fostering growth and capability in students. Nash urged for support in funding schools, stressing that it impacts future generations of Alaskans. He asked what could be done to ensure that when he tells people he will be teaching in Alaska, they respond with the same excitement he feels.

[3:59:09 PM](#)

SHAY NASH, Principal, River City Academy, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, Soldotna, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. He shared a personal anecdote as the father of Jarron Nash. He explained that River City Academy had a mentor for students in the middle college program, which his

son participated in. He expressed concern over a comment made by a legislative representative to his son, stating that the mission of schools is limited to reading, writing, and arithmetic. He questioned the value of these subjects if they don't lead to student success. He then recounted how the mentor's support helped his son during a critical moment, ultimately leading to life-saving medical intervention. He emphasized the importance of roles like this mentor's, which go beyond traditional academics, and urged support through a BSA increase to preserve such essential positions. He noted that the position no longer exists due to budget constraints.

[4:01:21 PM](#)

MAGGIE GREINER, Student, Nikiski Middle-High School, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, Nikiski, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. She said she is the student representative of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District and shared her recent experience with a middle school student council class. She was impressed by the sixth and seventh graders' understanding of complex ideas like compromise and empathy, which they were applying in their student government. Greiner noted that such outcomes, while valuable, are difficult to measure. She expressed concern about the impact of current education funding levels, stating that her school stands to lose various programs and positions, including student councils, advanced classes in world languages, music, art, CTE, middle school musical theater, sports, and several staff members. Greiner emphasized that these losses reflect just one Alaskan school out of 500 and likened the situation to cutting branches from a tree until it dies. She warned that without increased funding, Alaska risks losing not only current students but also future generations who wish to contribute to the state's communities. Greiner concluded by urging the committee to consider the importance of empathy and compromise, as exemplified by the middle schoolers, when deciding on an increase in the Base Student Allocation (BSA).

[4:03:28 PM](#)

PENNY VADLAR, Member, Kenai School Board, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, Soldotna, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. She gave a brief history of her work in education and said predictable, equitable, and reliable funding is needed to maintain high quality education in Alaska. She reflected on her years teaching when Alaska's schools flourished but noted that, without adequate financial support, options have diminished. Numerous positions, programs, and activities have

been cut due to lack of funding, including interventionists, counselors, and other staff.

MS. VADLAR highlighted the strain on the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, which is now managed by one person responsible for a wide range of duties that were once distributed among several staff members. She also pointed out the thinning of central office staff, leading to burnout and overextension among those remaining. She stressed that this overextension impacts students, teachers, administrators, families, and communities.

MS. VADLAR emphasized that if there were adequate Base Student Allocation (BSA) funding, schools could continue pursuing their goals and strategic plans effectively. She urged support for a \$900 increase in BSA, agreeing with a previous speaker who suggested an even higher amount, to ensure student success and positive outcomes. She concluded by thanking the committee for their advocacy and attention to education, particularly appreciating the voices of students.

[4:08:11 PM](#)

KERRY MAHONEY, Member, Unalaska School Board, Unalaska, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. She said she is in her third year on the school board and has lived in Unalaska for 30 years. She asked that the BSA be raised to a minimum of \$1413. She emphasized the importance of an increase in the Base Student Allocation (BSA) for improving teacher retention and reducing burnout among staff. She described the challenges faced by their school, including significant staff turnover and the overwhelming demands placed on remaining staff members. As a parent, she recounted an experience where the principal, who also serves as the special education and testing coordinator, was found in a scene of chaos doing lunchroom duty due to a lack of substitute teachers. The principal's workload was so extensive that she ultimately chose not to renew her contract, highlighting the impact of burnout.

MS. MAHONEY stressed that an increase in BSA is crucial not only for retaining staff but also for building trust and stability within the school community. Additionally, she advocated for the implementation of a defined benefit system to make Alaska's schools more competitive with those in the lower 48 states, encouraging staff to settle in and become integral parts of the community.

[4:10:47 PM](#)

AMANDA SCHAMAHL, Member, Unalaska School Board, Unalaska, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. She spoke about the financial challenges faced by teachers and school staff, particularly classified staff. She noted that a recent compensation study conducted by the city council revealed that city employees are grossly underpaid, and the results showed a significant disparity between the current pay and what should be paid. Amanda highlighted the large difference in compensation between city employees and school employees, which makes it difficult for schools to compete. She expressed concern that qualified school employees might leave for better-paying city jobs, stressing the importance of schools being competitive not only with external opportunities but also with local businesses within the community.

[4:11:56 PM](#)

BRIAN RANKIN, Member, Unalaska School Board, Unalaska, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. As a newly elected school board member and nearly lifelong Unalaska resident, he shared his concerns about the impact of funding cuts on educational programs in Alaska. He has lived in Alaska since 1975 and attended the state's school system from preschool through graduation. He noted that both of his children have also gone through the system. He highlighted the loss of the local Native language teacher due to funding cuts, a vital cultural program that was eventually reinstated but lost again because the school could no longer afford to maintain it. He also mentioned that his daughter, who is passionate about art, lost access to the art program before her junior year due to similar financial constraints. He emphasized that these programs, though sometimes seen as non-essential, are critical to students' quality of life and mental health. He urged for adequate funding to ensure that students can enjoy a well-rounded education and be happy and successful.

[4:15:05 PM](#)

JASMINE WOLFE, Student, Sitka School District, Sitka, Alaska, testified in support of HB 65. She shared her personal experience from the past fall, where in just four months, ten individuals confided in her about having suicidal thoughts, and she tragically lost a dear friend around a year ago due to mental health struggles. She explained that her education and awareness of mental health issues enabled her to recognize the signs and direct these individuals to seek help from adults. However, when she brought these concerns to school staff, including two teachers, the vice principal, and a school counselor, the situation was not taken seriously, and

appropriate actions were not taken. As a result, she later found herself comforting a friend in crisis. She stressed that adequate training for school faculty is crucial and can be the difference between life and death.

[4:16:44 PM](#)

AUBREY LARUE, Student, Sitka School District, Sitka, Alaska, testified in support of HB 65. She shared her struggles with mental health issues, which began during her freshman year of high school after the loss of people close to her. She emphasized the importance of not bottling up emotions, recounting an instance where she shouted at her grandfather. She said she is currently enrolled in Certified Nurse Aide (CNA) training at the University of Alaska, motivated by a desire to help others, particularly due to the shortage of nursing staff in hospitals. She also discussed the challenges of balancing her responsibilities at home, where she cares for her grandfather, with her schoolwork and CNA training. She expressed concern about the lack of mental health resources in schools, noting that while her school has one counselor for four to five students, other schools in Alaska lack adequate support. She stressed that increasing mental health resources in schools could lead to lower dropout rates and fewer suicides, addressing Alaska's high suicide rates.

[4:20:15 PM](#)

KYLIE ORLANDO, Student, Sitka School District, Sitka, Alaska, testified in support of SB 24. She highlighted the need for better education of school staff on student mental health, citing stories from her district that show current programs are outdated and ineffective. She mentioned that some teachers merely click through training and feel unprepared to support students, leading to missed opportunities to help. Kylie stressed that students shouldn't have to carry the burden of supporting their peers and that properly trained staff could make a significant difference. She expressed support for Senate Bill 24 and urged the state to fulfill its obligation to fund schools adequately, emphasizing that protecting students is the top priority.

[4:22:21 PM](#)

EDWARD RICHARDS, Student, Sitka School District, Sitka, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. He emphasized that Alaska's schools have been flat-funded since 2017 and improperly funded since 2012, with no adjustments for inflation. He described how this lack of funding has led to suffering among students and staff. He shared a personal story from last August,

when he nearly lost a close friend who had no access to mental health support at school. He stressed that this experience is not uncommon among students and urged for proper funding of schools, emphasizing that it's not just about money but about saving student lives.

[4:23:44 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON thanked students for their testimony on SB 24 and said she is committed to working diligently to get the bill passed in both the Senate and House.

[4:24:53 PM](#)

NEAL STANFORD, Student, Sleetmute School, Kuspuk School District, Aniak, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. He stated he is advocating for funding for Sleetmute.

[4:25:25 PM](#)

KAYLA, NLN, Student, Sleetmute School, Kuspuk School District, Aniak, Alaska, testified in support of Sleetmute.

[4:25:41 PM](#)

KILEY HAYDEN, Student, Sleetmute School, Kuspuk School District, Aniak, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. She highlighted the critical need for assistance in Alaska's schools, particularly in small, rural areas. She explained that many schools in remote locations cannot access additional funding through taxes or bonds. She described her school's ongoing struggle with severe structural issues, initially starting with a leaky roof that has gone unrepaired for over 15 years despite being on the state's major maintenance list. Recent engineering reports revealed that the problem has worsened to the point where sections of the school, including the boys' bathroom, shop, gymnasium, and a mechanical room, are now condemned due to imminent risk of structural failure. She emphasized that her school district lacks the resources to address these issues independently without diverting funds from essential educational services, which would harm already underserved students. She urged the state to provide the necessary funding to repair the school and secure the educational future of the students.

[4:27:52 PM](#)

ELSIE SIMON, Member, Kuspuk School Board, Aniak, Alaska, testified in support of an increase to the BSA. She emphasized that Sleetmute is just one of the many schools in dire need of maintenance and upgrades within their district, where most schools are 40 to 50 years old. She advocated for more funding,

Capital Improvement Project (CIP) requests, and additional teachers, noting that they are very short-staffed, a common issue across rural school districts. She clarified that, as a rural district, they lack a tax base and therefore rely on state support. She thanked the committee for the opportunity to speak and expressed hope that they would receive funding this year.

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At ease

[4:32:07 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN reconvened the meeting and invited Yukon Flats School District to testify.

[4:32:22 PM](#)

LAUREY THOMAS, President, Yukon Flats School Board, Fort Yukon, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. She highlighted the severe challenges faced by their district due to its remote location, where everything must be flown in, making costs extremely high. She noted that their small district serves fewer than 200 students, and one school is on the brink of closure due to declining enrollment.

MS. THOMAS stressed the urgent need for increased funding and a higher Base Student Allocation (BSA), particularly given the exorbitant costs of fuel—\$8.30 per gallon for gasoline and \$6.65 per gallon for heating fuel. She also shared that the district lost three certified teachers after Christmas due to medical issues, leaving them without an English teacher, social studies teacher, and guidance counselor. The community has faced additional hardships, including a salmon disaster on the Yukon River, severe flooding that displaced students, and extreme weather that reached 60 below zero. These conditions have led to tragic losses, including the deaths of community members and a board member, putting immense stress on the students.

MS. THOMAS emphasized that the students are still grieving and currently have limited educational opportunities, with only basic reading, writing, and math courses available. She mentioned that while a CTE grant is helping to improve reading scores, the district is struggling to retain classified staff due to inadequate pay. She urged for increased support and funding to address these critical issues.

[4:36:03 PM](#)

MARLIN JIMMY, Member, Yukon Flats School Board, Fort Yukon, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. He expressed

concerns over the lack of funds, which has forced the school to let go of paraprofessionals, essential for classroom organization and engagement. This has increased the burden on teachers, including his wife, and despite his volunteer efforts, they continue losing staff to better-paying local jobs. He highlighted the urgent need for funding, noting that the Fort Yukon school is now down to one teacher's aide after receiving resignation letters from the last two remaining paraprofessionals. Jimmy stressed that adequate funding is crucial to address these challenges.

[4:38:12 PM](#)

LON GARRISON, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of increasing the BSA. He stated he began his school board career in 2007 in Sitka and started legislative advocacy with Dr. Tom Connolly, a pediatrician and experienced school board member in both Alaska and Wyoming, who served as his mentor. Lon mentioned that despite early progress with education funding, including a brief period of forward funding that brought stability, the state has since struggled to prioritize education, often treating it as secondary to other programs and the Permanent Fund Dividend. He noted that the day's testimony is more than compelling, and how emotional it is facing education budget short falls. He expressed hope that with the committee's support and Senate coalition, a path can be found to secure necessary funding and emphasized the urgency of the administration recognizing the risks of underfunding education. Lon thanked the committee and senators for their ongoing support and participation in recent events, expressing his appreciation for their efforts to advance education funding.

[4:43:21 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS expressed his pleasure in being part of a caucus that has supported two major issues: the Base Student Allocation (BSA) increase and pension changes. He noted that both bills have passed the Senate and are now in the House, emphasizing that while the caucus has done its best, further collaboration is needed with other legislators and the governor to advance these issues. He said he was deeply moved by comments on suicide in Alaska, acknowledging it as a significant issue that requires urgent attention.

[4:44:09 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN thanked everyone who provided testimony, with special appreciation for the group from Nome who, despite not being able to attend, provided a clear example of how Base

Student Allocation (BSA) funds would directly benefit their school district. He highlighted the importance of the specific breakdown they provided, making it clear what those investments would achieve. He also addressed the testimonies from Sitka students, noting that their comments were a strong critique of their teachers. He urged students to give their teachers a chance to help, emphasizing that many teachers across the state are receiving training in Youth Mental Health First Aid. However, he noted that no training can be effective if students do not show signs of needing help or ask for assistance.

SENATOR BJORKMAN underscored that more funding in the BSA would lead to smaller class sizes, allowing teachers to develop meaningful relationships with their students, which is crucial for effective learning environments. He concluded by emphasizing that investing in the BSA enables schools to hire more educators, resulting in better educational outcomes through more in-depth and personalized teaching.

[4:48:33 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN shared that she graduated from Nome Public School, where the Base Student Allocation (BSA) in today's dollars was \$6,775. She recalled having access to guidance counselors, mental health counselors, and Advanced Placement (AP) classes, with her largest class having only eight students. Tobin mentioned participating in chess club, drama, and sports at no cost, and emphasized the impact of having teachers who invested in her. She acknowledged that everyone in the room is working to ensure that Alaska's teachers can continue to invest in the future of the state's students.

[4:49:37 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 4:49 p.m.