

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 29, 2025

8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Rebecca Himschoot, Co-Chair
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair
Representative Maxine Dibert
Representative Ted Eischeid
Representative Jubilee Underwood
Representative Rebecca Schwanke
Representative Bill Elam

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 69

"An Act relating to education funding; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 69

SHORT TITLE: EDUCATION FUNDING: INCREASE BSA

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) HIMSCHOOT

01/24/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25	(H)	EDC, FIN
01/27/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
01/27/25	(H)	Heard & Held
01/27/25	(H)	MINUTE (EDC)
01/29/25	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

TRAVIS VAUGHN, Member
Mt. Edgecumbe High School Board
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ALAN GARRISON, Executive Director
Association of Alaska School Boards
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

BRIDGET SMITH, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

CAROLINE STORM, Executive Director
Education Equity
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

MEGAN PELLTIER, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

AMANDA THOMPSON, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

LANDA BAILEY, representing self
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ROZLYN GRADY-WYCHE, Alaska Education Chair
Alaska Oregon Washington State Area Conference
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

BRIAN TEMPLEN, City Administrator
Craig, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

LAURA NORTON-CRUZ, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

BARB JEWELL, Chair
Cordova Board of Education
Cordova, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

RODNEY DIAL, Mayor

Ketchikan Gateway Borough
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

MIKE BRONSON, Member
Education Committee

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ROBYN TAYLOR, Superintendent
Petersburg School District
Petersburg, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

CODY MCCANNA, Principal
Aurora Borealis Charter School
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

MELODY MCCULLOUGH, representing self
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

RONDA SCHLUMBOHM, representing self
Salcha, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ALEX WERTHEIMER, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

CHARLIE FRANZ, representing self
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

CARA RUDE, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

DAVID BOYLE, representing self
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

ELLEN JAIMES, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

HERMAN BECKER, Teacher
Juneau School District
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

RACHAEL POSEY, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

MARYSIA SZYMKOWIAK, Teacher
Juneau School District
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

WENDY BURKE, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

CHRISTINA TUMAN, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

RANDY TRANI, Superintendent
Matanuska-Susitna School District

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

MARY MACARTHUR, representing self
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

MARILYN BUCHANAN, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

RACHEL DONKERSLOOT, Member
Kuspuk School District Schoolboard
Aniak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

PATRICIA MACPIKE, representing self
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

EMILY KIZZIA, representing self
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ALDEN LARRABEE, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

JENNI BRIGHTON, representing self
Kenai, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

BRANDY HARTY, Member
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District School Board
Fairbanks, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ERIK ANDERSON, representing self
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

RACHEL LORD, representing self
Homer, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

GRANT ARROW, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

RHIANA GAY, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

SHARON HANSEN, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ED MARTIN, representing self
Kenai, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

REBECCA BERNARD, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

CINDY ROQUE, representing self
Dillingham, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

KIM HANISCH, Superintendent

Unalaska School District
Unalaska, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:17 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Eischeid, Underwood, Himschoot, Story, Dibert, Schwanke, and Elam were present at the call to order.

HB 69-EDUCATION FUNDING: INCREASE BSA

[8:03:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 69, "An Act relating to education funding; and providing for an effective date."

[8:03:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY reminded the committee that the amendment deadline for HB 69 was set for Friday, January 31, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. and delivered committee announcements.

[8:05:54 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease from 8:05 a.m. to 8:06 a.m.

[8:06:12 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on HB 69.

[8:06:58 AM](#)

TRAVIS VAUGHN, Mt. Edgecumbe High School Board, testified in support of HB 69. He said that teachers, firefighters, and policemen are never to be told "we don't have enough money for you." He encouraged the committee to view HB 69 as an opportunity to restore trust in the Alaska State Legislature.

[8:09:30 AM](#)

ALAN GARRISON, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards, testified in support of HB 69. He said, "When students succeed, parents and communities also succeed." He explained that the inconsistent funding from the state in recent years "has a tendency to create stress" instead of helping school districts. He cited testimony from the House Education Standing Committee meeting on 1/27/25 and a study done by Mayor Suzanne LaFrance of Anchorage as reasons behind his support for HB 69.

[8:12:11 AM](#)

BRIDGET SMITH, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She quoted Thomas Jefferson saying that "an educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people." She cited her experiences working in rural schools and emphasized the importance that they be well-funded, as they are often the heart of the community they occupy.

[8:14:37 AM](#)

CAROLINE STORM, Executive Director, Education Equity, testified in support of HB 69. She challenged the idea that the state should decrease its funding towards school districts that are displaying declining performance metrics and said that an evidence-based study claims that Alaska is underfunding its schools by a mark of over \$7,000.

[8:17:07 AM](#)

MEGAN PELLTIER, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She said that each year the base student allocation (BSA) is not increased, the Anchorage School District (ASD) faces an ultimatum of cutting more and more vital programs. She said that the Anchorage Parent-Teacher Association is generous and works hard to fundraise for the ASD and emphasized that fundraising as a means to make up for a lack of funding from the state is unsustainable on a long term scale.

[8:19:04 AM](#)

AMANDA THOMPSON, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 69. She said that charter schools "get results" and said that HB 69 should be opposed because it does not include a clause for state funds to be directed towards charter schools.

[8:21:59 AM](#)

LANDA BAILEY, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She directed committee members to written testimony that she had e-mailed prior to the committee meeting and said that a strong public school system is of paramount importance to every Alaskan. She said that the Alaska Legislature has failed to keep up with inflationary impacts on the BSA since 2017 and emphasized the outsized impact that underfunded schools are having on Alaska.

[8:24:30 AM](#)

ROZLYN GRADY-WYCHE, Alaska Education Chair, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Alaska Oregon Washington State Area Conference, testified in support of HB 69. She cited the Alaska State Constitution's clause that mandates every Alaskan to a fair and free public education. She said that "underfunding schools today means fewer opportunities for tomorrow" and urged the committee's support of HB 69.

[8:26:46 AM](#)

BRIAN TEMPLEN, City Administrator, testified in support of HB 69. He said that the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program was not reauthorized by the United States Congress in 2025 and emphasized the impact that the cancellation of that program will have on rural schools in Alaska. He explained that a further flat-funded BSA, along with the loss of the SRS program, would make for a compounding loss of funding to his local school district with immense funding implications. He urged the committee to support HB 69.

[8:28:17 AM](#)

LAURA NORTON-CRUZ, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. As a concerned parent, she said that one time funding boosts are not the same as adjusting and increasing the BSA and challenged the idea that schools and teachers must prove themselves before they receive public funding.

[8:29:59 AM](#)

BARB JEWELL, Chair, Cordova Board of Education, testified in support of HB 69. She shared that the Cordova Board of Education is facing a \$1.5 million deficit for fiscal year 2026

(FY 06)and said that things like school activities and food programs are at risk of being cut if the proposed legislation were to fail to become law.

[8:31:58 AM](#)

RODNEY DIAL, Mayor, Ketchikan Gateway Borough, testified in support of HB 69. He said that the Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District (KGBSD) has created its FY 26 budget based off of the current BSA and explained that the KGBSD would have to make major cuts if HB 69 were not to become law. He emphasized the disparity between urban and rural school districts in the funding that they receive and emphasized the impacts of a flat-funded BSA on both types of school districts.

[8:33:56 AM](#)

MIKE BRONSON, Education Committee, NAACP, testified in support of HB 69. He said that the Alaska State Legislature is responsible for funding Alaska's public schools and is letting them languish. He cited a series of impacts that poorly funded public schools are having on Alaska and said that HB 69 is "a big step in the right direction."

[8:36:32 AM](#)

ROBYN TAYLOR, Superintendent, Petersburg School District, testified in support of HB 69. She emphasized the continual cycle of budget cuts that school districts Alaska are being faced with year after year are forcing school districts and school boards to make unconscionable decisions. She said that the predictable funding of an inflation adjusted BSA would allow for districts to properly budget and adequately fund schools and their programs.

[8:39:18 AM](#)

CODY MCCANNA, Principal, Aurora Borealis Charter School, testified in support of HB 69. He emphasized that the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District is facing a \$16-17 million budget deficit in the coming years and said that an investment in public education is "an investment in the future."

[8:41:26 AM](#)

MELODY MCCULLOUGH, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 69. She said that "we keep throwing money at the BSA; we

need real policy changes to hold districts accountable." She shared her belief that Alaska needs to have stronger incentives and support in order to recruit and retain its public school teachers.

[8:43:23 AM](#)

RONDA SCHLUMBOHM, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She shared that the Salcha School Board is nearing a decision to close one of its schools and said that HB 69 could stop that from happening. She said that there should be a path for rural schools to obtain more state funding and urged the committee's support of HB 69.

[8:45:29 AM](#)

ALEX WERTHEIMER, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. He shared his concern that his grandchild will not be able to receive the same quality education that his children received. He said that HB 69 would alleviate issues caused by a flat-funded BSA and said that he "enthusiastically supports" HB 69.

[8:47:19 AM](#)

CHARLIE FRANZ, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 69. He said that "throwing more money at the schools is not the way to approach this." He said that any additional funding provided to public schools must include performance standards and "ultimatums" for the funds.

[8:49:00 AM](#)

CARA RUDE, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She echoed the points made by previous testifiers in support of HB 69. She said that the cornerstone of Alaska's economy and its vitality is based in a well-funded public education system. She opined that HB 69 would allow her to speak with pride about Alaska's public school system.

[8:51:30 AM](#)

DAVID BOYLE, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 69. He shared his opinion that more funding would not solve Alaska's problems. He said that increasing the number of charter schools and "doing away with Diversity, Equity, and

Inclusion (DEI) and Critical Race Theory (CRT)" would solve the public education issue.

[8:54:30 AM](#)

ELLEN JAIMES, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She used the general cost of living as an example of inflationary pressures that have impacted all of Alaska, including the cost of public education in Alaska. She explained that school district expenses have increased for heat, electricity, hot water, and healthcare while teachers' wages and benefits have not been increased. She said that the "stress in our schools from staffing shortages is palpable" and emphasized that one-time funding boosts are not sustainable for school districts on a long term basis.

[8:58:26 AM](#)

HERMAN BECKER, Teacher, Juneau School District, testified in support of HB 69. He said that HB 69 is long overdue and shared his experience as a teacher in seeing classrooms and teaching environments decline over the previous 15 years due to a flat-funded BSA. He said that HB 69 is a "Band-Aid" solution that would not adequately address the problems facing Alaska's public school system but is a step in the right direction.

[9:01:13 AM](#)

RACHAEL POSEY, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She said that the Alaska State Legislature must adequately fund its schools to achieve any positive outcomes. She shared a series of anecdotes about her child's experience in the Alaska public school system.

[9:04:09 AM](#)

MARYSIA SZYMKOWIAK, Teacher, Juneau School District, testified in support of HB 69. She said that the cost of living has increased by 26 percent since 2020 while the overall funding for public education has only increased by 5 percent. She said that she knows of 10 families who have chosen to leave Alaska as a result of its failing public education system and emphasized that the issue of adequately funding public education is bigger than the schools themselves.

[9:06:30 AM](#)

WENDY BURKE, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She said that children in Alaska are suffering because of a flat-funded BSA and shared that it has been "devastating" to see the impacts of inadequate school funding. She urged the Alaska State Legislature to override any veto from the governor and encouraged the committee's support of HB 69.

[9:08:01 AM](#)

CHRISTINA TUMAN, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She shared her understanding that the Legislative Finance Division has already determined that the BSA should be increased by \$1,800. She highlighted that the Fairbanks School District is seeing a 15 million dollar budget deficit and said that Alaska State Legislature "must" pass HB 69.

[9:10:53 AM](#)

RANDY TRANI, testified in support of HB 69. He said that his school district is facing a \$15 million deficit that might jump to \$45 million in the following year if HB 69 is not passed. He emphasized that the uncertainty of one-time funding or a bill passed late in session might negatively affect school districts across Alaska.

[9:13:08 AM](#)

MARY MACARTHUR, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She described what budgetary decisions might have to be made in the Nome School District if HB 69 were to fail to become law. She emphasized that all of the issues related to Alaska's outmigration and declining economy could be directly tied to a failing public school system.

[9:15:26 AM](#)

MARILYN BUCHANAN, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 69. She purported that the reason for a lower enrollment in Alaska's public school system is because students are being forced to read "anti-American, Anti-white, anti-men, and pro-gay" books.

[9:17:07 AM](#)

RACHEL DONKERSLOOT, Schoolboard Member, Kuspuk School District, testified in support of HB 69. She said that her biggest concern in choosing to raise a child in Alaska is its failing

public education system. She said that HB 69 would alleviate intense budgetary pressures currently being put on school districts around Alaska by a flat-funded BSA.

[9:18:51 AM](#)

PATRICIA MACPIKE, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She said that the Alaska State Legislature has continually failed its students in passing one-time public education funding increases. She said that the Alaska State Legislature must stop the "bloodletting" of the Alaska public school system by passing HB 69 into law.

[9:20:54 AM](#)

EMILY KIZZIA, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She shared her experience in attending Alaska's public schools as a child and said that she loved growing up in Alaska, loves living in Alaska, and wants to live in Alaska now. She said that the state of public education is dismaying to her and is "enough to make her leave the state." She said that she does not view HB 69 as throwing money at a failed endeavor, rather HB 69 would be acknowledging and solving a wrongdoing by the State.

[9:22:56 AM](#)

ALDEN LARRABEE, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 69. He said that he supports funding public education but doesn't support HB 69 because it does not include any clauses for performance standards metrics.

[9:24:39 AM](#)

JENNI BRIGHTON, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She shared the experience of her husband, who is teaching in and her child that is attending public school in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD). She said that parents, communities, and students are suffering as a result of a flat-funded BSA.

[9:27:54 AM](#)

BRANDY HARTY, Schoolboard Member, testified in support of HB 69. She said that one resounding thing she has heard from public testimony in her community is the love and need for its public schools. She said that "our schools are not failing, they are

starving" and emphasized that charter schools would also benefit from an increased BSA.

[9:30:31 AM](#)

ERIK ANDERSON, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. He said that the state needs to provide adequate funding and shared the experience of his son attending public school in Alaska. He said that it is "hard to imagine how a teacher would be able to teach and engage with students in such an environment" of 40-student classrooms.

[9:32:49 AM](#)

RACHEL LORD, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She said that the KPBSD has been stretched and reworked year after year due to a flat-funded BSA and emphasized the size and scope of a school district as large as the KPBSD. She said that there are "barely enough bodies" to run the schools in the KPBSD and highlighted that public schools are the one school option that may not be taken away.

[9:35:25 AM](#)

GRANT ARROW, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 69. He explained that he is opposed to HB 69 because it does not include any language regarding fiscal accountability.

[9:38:17 AM](#)

RHIANA GAY, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She explained that raising the BSA would provide schools with better support and allow schools to provide more resources to students and communities alike. She recited:

For homelessness we can break the chain,
With counseling resources they'll gain.
A stable life, a brighter mind,
Education is the key for all to find -
So raise the BSA, help them grow,
A future for students to hope and show.

[9:39:52 AM](#)

SHARON HANSEN, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She noted that she is a stay-at-home mom. She said that her community is being torn apart by an inadequately funded public

school system. She said that fingers are being pointed at the local school board, at the local PTA, at legislators, and emphasized that the year-after-year advocacy effort to increase the BSA is getting exhausting.

[9:42:34 AM](#)

ED MARTIN, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 69. He said that there should be accountability in government and said that HB 69 needs to include language for funding ultimatums and fiscal accountability.

[9:45:16 AM](#)

REBECCA BERNARD, representing self, testified in support of HB 69. She said that 2011 was the last year that public education was properly funded and explained that she has seen the decline of Alaska's public school system herself. She said that charter schools are a great option but are not and should not be the only answer for students looking to receive a quality education.

[9:48:44 AM](#)

CINDY ROQUE, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 69. She said that she is opposed to HB 69 because there isn't any language related to funding accountability. She said that she made the "difficult decision" in 2007 to transfer her daughter to an aviation high school in Washington state due to the lack of opportunities in Alaska. She said, "No amount of money is going to fix Alaska's education system without any accountability."

[9:51:24 AM](#)

KIM HANISCH, Superintendent, Unalaska School District, testified in support of HB 69. She shared a series of programs and staff that have been cut in the recent years due to a flat-funded BSA. She said that the cutting of the programs and staff is hurting her community.

[9:53:42 AM](#)

LISA PARODY, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators, testified in support of HB 69. She said that every type of school from charter schools to public schools need an increase in the BSA. She said that there is clear evidence that increased funding to public education is correlative to a

better-performing student population. She said that accountability is already existent in the Alaska State Legislature's obligation and accountability to the Alaska State Legislature.

[9:56:49 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, public testimony on HB 69

[HB 69 was held over.]

[9:57:12 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:57 a.m.