

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 31, 2025

4:25 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Senator Jesse Kiehl

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Mike Cronk

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PUBLIC TESTIMONY: STATE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN ALASKA

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

LISA EAGANLAGERQUIST, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

SARAH LEWIS, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

ANNAROSE MACARTHUR, representing self
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

MARILYN NOYAKUK, representing self
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

CAROLINE STORM, Executive Director
Coalition for Education Equity

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

EMILY FERRY, representing self

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

TRACY FISCHBACH, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

MEGAN PELTIER, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

TAMARA KRUSE ROSELIUS, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

JACQUELINE MUEHLBAUER, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

NICKY EISEMAN, representing self

Ester, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

CHRISTINE VILLANO, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

EVELYNN TREFON, representing self

Newhalen, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

ERICA MONAHAN, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

MEGHAN REDMOND, representing self

Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of school funding.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[4:25:34 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 4:25 p.m. Present at the called to order were Senators Kiehl, Bjorkman, and Chair Tobin.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY:
STATE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN ALASKA

[4:26:24 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the committee would continue hearing public testimony on the state of education in Alaska.

[4:27:25 PM](#)

LISA EAGANLAGERQUIST, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She testified that Alaska needs a permanent and inflation-proof increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA), stating that one-time funding is not sufficient. She emphasized that inadequate funding forces schools to choose between essential courses and leads to unmanageable workloads for teachers and insufficient staffing for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). She urged the legislature to make funding dependable and commit to overriding a potential gubernatorial veto.

[4:30:10 PM](#)

SARAH LEWIS, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She thanked the House Education Committee for recognizing the financial crisis in Alaska's public schools and criticized Governor Dunleavy's emphasis on school choice as a solution. She argued that inflation has eroded the value of education funding, noting the BSA has not changed since 2011 while costs have risen. She rejected the notion that money is not the root issue, stating school closures across the state clearly show otherwise. She urged legislators to support HB 69 and resist tying basic education funding to reforms that create inequities between types of schools.

[4:33:03 PM](#)

ANNAROSE MACARTHUR, representing self, Nome, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She stated that without a BSA increase tied to inflation, the Nome Public Schools face cutting 10 teachers and one assistant principal. She emphasized that these educators are community members whose livelihoods and morale are at risk. She noted additional cuts to student travel and staff housing funds, stressing that years of underinvestment threaten the viability of raising a family in Nome. She urged legislators to fulfill their constitutional duty by strongly funding public education.

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MARILYN NOYAKUK, representing self, Nome, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She stated she is a student at Nome-Beltz Middle High School and testified in support of her teachers and teachers across Alaska. She emphasized that education funding impacts future generations, including her younger siblings. She expressed concern that eliminating non-core classes like music would negatively affect students, teachers, and the broader community.

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CAROLINE STORM, Executive Director, Coalition for Education Equity, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She expressed frustration over the ongoing education funding debate and emphasized that these issues have persisted for over a decade. She pointed out that from FY 2019 to FY 2025, the state corrections budget more than doubled, with over \$40,000 spent per incarcerated individual compared to \$21,000 per student. She compared corrections to education and questioned why schools are expected to operate on inadequate budgets until students' scores increase while corrections funding continues to rise despite a high recidivism rate. She suggested prioritizing education instead. She also noted that Alaska's high healthcare, construction, and energy costs make operating schools more expensive.

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EMILY FERRY, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She shared that her children have had a great experience in Alaska's public schools, including participating in hockey and leading a high-scoring robotics team. She expressed concern that future students may not have the same opportunities due to declining investment in education. She noted that after Juneau's high schools combined, 30 students lost access to cross country because the team couldn't accommodate all interested participants. She emphasized that these diminishing opportunities affect family decisions to stay in or move to Alaska.

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TRACY FISCHBACH, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She urged the legislature to fully fund the BSA and inflation-proof it. She and her husband chose to stay in Alaska for nearly 30 years because of the strong public schools, but said she wouldn't make the same decision today. She described growing class sizes and inadequate staffing

that now limit her high school children's educational experiences. She emphasized the need for more counselors, teachers, and smaller class sizes so students can build meaningful relationships and access opportunities.

[4:42:12 PM](#)

MEGAN PELTIER, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She urged substantial and inflation-proof increases to the BSA. She highlighted how valuable programs like gifted education and language immersion improve outcomes, but face cuts each year the BSA remains flat. She noted that even basic safety equipment at her school is provided by PTA fundraising, underscoring inadequate state support. She emphasized that increasing the BSA is critical for Alaska's future.

[4:44:05 PM](#)

TAMARA KRUSE ROSELIUS, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She stated that schools across Alaska are in emergency mode, noting that in Fairbanks, four schools have closed and five more are proposed for closure, including Title I schools. She emphasized that cuts to programs like elementary music and art, along with contracting out custodial services, still leave a \$6 million deficit. She called for a permanent and meaningful increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA), including inflation proofing. She urged legislators to ensure all public schools—traditional, charter, magnet, and correspondence—receive adequate funding and to override any veto of increased education funding.

[4:46:57 PM](#)

JACQUELINE MUEHLBAUER, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She stated that the education crisis in Fairbanks is severe and only the legislature has the power to resolve it. She emphasized that even with the closure of five schools, the district will still face a multimillion-dollar shortfall. She urged legislators to work together, regardless of party, and increase the BSA to \$1,808 to match inflation. She asked lawmakers not to use children as political pawns and to take immediate action.

[4:48:30 PM](#)

NICKY EISEMAN, representing self, Ester, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She advocated for a permanent increase to the BSA. She criticized the use of standardized assessments as a funding benchmark, pointing out that only about 15 percent of correspondence students participated in English

language arts testing, compared to 94 percent of brick-and-mortar students. She expressed concern that over \$100 million goes to correspondence programs with little data on their effectiveness, while neighborhood schools remain underfunded. She urged lawmakers to prioritize sustainable, adequate funding for all public schools.

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CHRISTINE VILLANO, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She stated she has spent decades serving as a PTA and union leader, teacher, and community volunteer, repeatedly testifying for increased and inflation-proofed school funding. She said continued inaction has led to overcrowded classrooms, underfunded programs, and school closures, with five more schools now slated to close in Fairbanks. She emphasized that even with those closures, the district remains \$16 million short. She urged lawmakers to treat this as a nonpartisan crisis and fully fund education by raising and inflation-proofing the BSA, warning of consequences for community health and economic stability.

[4:53:56 PM](#)

EVELYNN TREFON, representing self, Newhalan, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She said she is the president of her school's Local Advisory Committee and parent of a sixth grader. She described severe impacts of underfunding in the Lake and Peninsula Borough, an area the size of West Virginia. She stated that the district has cut music, art, shop, one counselor, 20 school days, school-sponsored sports, and student meals. Local families now provide food, relying on bingo proceeds and silent auction for financial support. She said she is meeting with the Food Bank of Alaska to explore lunch options for next year and warned that without increased funding, deeper cuts are inevitable.

[4:55:57 PM](#)

ERICA MONAHAN, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She urged the legislature to raise the BSA, inflation-proof it, and override a potential veto. She emphasized that in times of fiscal constraint, top priority must be fully funding brick-and-mortar public schools, not choice programs or vouchers. She supported directing dollars primarily to classroom instruction and teachers, with lean administrative support. She concluded by warning that diverting funds to choice programs undermines public education and society.

[4:57:54 PM](#)

MEGHAN REDMOND, representing self, Homer, Alaska, testified in support of school funding. She said she is a principal at Homer Middle School and parent of four. She spoke in support of increased public education funding and equal accountability expectations for all schools. She highlighted that her school had a 97.53 percent participation rate in the AK STAR assessment, while several homeschool programs had rates between 7 and 15 percent, far below the 95 percent requirement. She emphasized the importance of this data for guiding instruction and questioned how accountability is applied across different types of schools. She also noted that rising operational costs without funding increases force districts to make harmful cuts that negatively impact students and classrooms.

[5:00:14 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN closed public testimony on the state of school funding in Alaska.

[5:01:29 PM](#)

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