

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
JOINT MEETING  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 31, 2025  
8:03 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Jesse Kiehl  
Senator Mike Cronk

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Jesse Bjorkman

HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Maxine Dibert

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative Justin Ruffridge  
Representative Jeremy Bynum

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION(S) : THE STATE OF EDUCATION FROM THE FIELD

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

LISA PARADY, Executive Director  
Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented The State of Education from the Field.

LORI RUCKSDASHEL, President  
Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented The State of Education from the Field.

RICK DORMER, President  
Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals  
Ketchikan, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented The State of Education from the Field.

JENNIFER RINALDI, Executive Director  
Alaska Association of Elementary Principals  
Willow, Alaska,

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered a question concerning the principal mentorship program.

CLAYTON HOLLAND, President  
Alaska Superintendents Association  
Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented The State of Education from the Field.

PHIL HULETT, President  
Alaska Association of School Business Officials  
Dillingham, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented The State of Education from the Field.

KATIE PARROTT, President Elect  
Alaska Association of School Business Officials  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented The State of Education from the Field.

JENNIFER SCHMITZ, Director  
Alaska Educator Retention & Recruitment Center  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented The State of Education from the Field.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:03:24 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN called the joint meeting of the Senate and House Education Standing Committees to order at 8:03 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Kiehl, Stevens, Cronk, and Chair Tobin; Representatives Eischeid, Elam, Schwanke, Underwood, and Co-Chair Story and Himschoot.

**PRESENTATION(S): THE STATE OF EDUCATION FROM THE FIELD**

[8:04:23 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the presentation The State of Education from the Field by representatives from the Alaska Council of School Administrators and affiliate organizations including Alaska Superintendents Association, Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals, Alaska Association of School Business Officials, and the Alaska Educator Retention and Recruitment Center.

**Alaska Council of School Administrators**

[8:06:05 AM](#)

LISA PARADY, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), Juneau, Alaska, Co-presented The State of Education from the Field. She stated that she has served as Executive Director of the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) for 11 years and has used that time to bring members before the committee to share insights from the field. She explained that ACSA, a private nonprofit operating for over 50 years, focuses on leadership, unity, and advocacy for public education. ACSA represents a broad group of education leaders, including superintendents, principals, and school business officials across Alaska.

[8:07:18 AM](#)

MS. PARADY moved to slide 2 and highlighted that ACSA also administers the Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN), which

has provided professional development for Alaska educators for over 40 years. She emphasized excitement about ACSA's newest division, the Alaska Educator Recruitment and Retention Center, which partners with the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development to address staffing challenges, an issue second only to education funding.

8:08:19 AM

MS. PARADY moved to slide 3 and introduced several affiliate presidents joining her: Principal Lori Rucksdashel, President of ACSA and the Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals; Principal Rick Dormer, President of the Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals; Superintendent Clayton Holland, President of the Alaska Superintendents Association; Mr. Phil Hulett, President of the Alaska Association of School Business Officials; and Ms. Katie Parrot, President-Elect of the same association. She concluded by noting that Ms. Schmitz would present on ACSA's newest initiative.

8:09:05 AM

MS. PARADY moved to slide 4, ACSA Joint Position Statements, and acknowledged that committee members are likely familiar with the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) Joint Position Statements and noted that copies were included in their packets. She explained that ACSA members collaborate annually over several months to reach consensus on the highest current priorities in public education. The resulting document reflects significant effort to identify critical needs for educators, which are all centered on improving student achievement. She added that the affiliate presenters would highlight specific position statements during their remarks.

8:10:11 AM

MS. PARADY moved to slide 5, One State, 53 School Districts, a map of Alaska with school district boundaries. She stated that she shared a slide to help legislators see the school districts they represent and recognize that many education leaders present also represent those same districts. She emphasized ACSA's commitment to serving all students, regardless of district size or location, urban, rural, large, or small. She noted that public education in Alaska includes charter schools, correspondence programs, and neighborhood schools, all of which serve every student. She concluded by affirming that the collective focus of ACSA and its members is on making all students the highest priority.

8:11:20 AM

MS. PARADY moved to slide 6, Alaska's Statewide Resource for Professional Development, and discussed the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Alaska's Statewide Resource for Professional Development**

**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 webinar series with national education experts that serve over **700** Alaskan educators
- Host the largest PK-12 professional development conference in Alaska with **1 in 10 Alaskan educators** in attendance

[8:12:13 AM](#)

MS. PARADY moved to slide 7, MTSS Effective Instruction Conference and described the MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) Effective Instruction Conference as the largest PreK-12 professional development event in Alaska, with one in ten Alaskan educators attending and over 1,200 education leaders participating this year. She noted that the conference includes virtual options and covers topics such as trauma-engaged practices and staff recruitment and retention. She emphasized that the conference addresses the specific professional development needs of school districts, especially as many no longer have funding to send staff out of state. She added that ACSA brings in top educational talent from across the country and the world to ensure Alaska's educators still have access to high-quality training annually.

### **Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals**

[8:13:19 AM](#)

LORI RUCKSDASHEL, President, Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals, Anchorage, Alaska, Co-presented The State of Education from the Field. She moved to slide 8 and said she is also the Chinook Elementary School principal and president of the Alaska Council of School Administrators.

[8:13:49 AM](#)

MS. RUCKDASHEL moved to slide 9, containing names and photographs of AAESP board members. She noted that members of the board represent many school districts from across the state.

[8:14:00 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 10, School Principal Duties, that contains a list of job duties and responsibilities of principles:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **School Principal Duties**

- The instructional Program
- Student Management
- Safety
- Scheduling
- Hiring/Staffing
- Staff Evaluations
- Staff Performance Management
- Labor Relations
- Improvement Planning
- communication
- Community Partnerships
- Stakeholder Complaints
- Compliance Reporting
- Budget

MS. RUCKSDASHEL stated that the duties and responsibilities of principals change daily and often require shifting from planned schedules to addressing immediate needs of staff and students. She emphasized that the role demands flexibility and responsiveness each day. She noted the list of responsibilities is not exhaustive and has expanded over time. She concluded that principals are consistently being asked to do more with fewer resources.

[8:14:35 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 11, Early Childhood Education. She stated that ACSA supports defining elementary education to include universal pre-K, ensuring equitable access to fully funded and sustainable birth-to-five learning programs and nutrition services. She emphasized that three- and four-year-old children have unique developmental needs that require age-appropriate instructional materials and playground equipment. She added that meeting these needs depends on sufficient funding.

[8:15:14 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 12, Early Childhood Education, a graph showing that preschool participants fare better than non-preschool participants. She said research shows students who participate in early childhood education are more likely to graduate from high school, own a home, and be employed. She added that the data also indicates these students are less likely to be incarcerated.

[8:15:35 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 13, Early Childhood Education, a graphic showing the economic benefits of investing in early childhood education. She stated that early investment in childhood education yields a significant return, with every \$1 invested producing a \$16 return. She said such investment leads to increased high school graduation rates and decreased incarceration rates.

[8:16:00 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 14, Alaska Reads Act, and stated that the Alaska Reads Act recognizes early intervention, instruction, and parent and family education as the most effective strategies to ensure students read proficiently by third grade and reduce dropout rates. She emphasized the need for sustainable early childhood education funding as part of the Base Student Allocation. She added that this includes full 1.0 Average Daily Membership (ADM) funding for pre-K students.

[8:16:45 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 15, Alaska Reads Act, that shows two photographs of students reading. She stated that, as a Title I principal, she and her staff prioritized implementing the Alaska Reads Act during onboarding by using federal Title funds to create a dedicated position focused solely on ensuring compliance with the Act. She explained that this staff member oversees timely completion of Individual Reading Improvement Plans (IRIPs), ensures curriculum fidelity, reviews data, and

applies necessary interventions. She described a daily 40-minute schoolwide intervention block where kindergarten through fifth grade students rotate through 35 targeted "What I Need" (WIN) groups. She emphasized the value of this dedicated staff member but acknowledged that not all principals have access to similar federal funding and that her school had to trade off other staff positions to make this investment.

[8:18:06 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 16, Preparing, Attracting, and Retaining Qualified Educators, and stated that ACSA supports enhancing both statewide and national recruitment efforts, while also committing to growing Alaska's own workforce of educators, including teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, principals, and superintendents. She encouraged the state to invest in strong mentorship and induction programs to support new teachers and educational leaders during their early years. She emphasized the importance of having highly qualified and well-trained teachers in schools. She also clarified that an Individual Reading Improvement Plan (IRIP), as defined in the Alaska Reads Act, outlines student interventions, includes meetings with families, and communicates the student's academic level and the specific strategies being used to support their progress.

[8:19:27 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 17, Attract and Retain Qualified Educators, showing a chart of district-level turnover expenditures per teacher by cost category. She stated that 2017 data showed the estimated cost of teacher turnover at \$20,000 per occurrence. She noted that this figure has significantly increased between 2017 and 2025. She added that, according to the Wallace Foundation, the estimated cost of principal turnover is approximately \$75,000.

[8:19:58 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 18, Attract and Retain Qualified Educators:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**ATTRACT AND RETAIN QUALIFIED EDUCATORS**

In Alaska high teacher turnover correlated with poor student achievement

Average	Average Percent
Teacher	Student Scoring
Turnover	proficient in
	Reading

5 Lowest  
Turnover District 8.7 percent 85.8 percent

5 Highest  
Turnover Districts 37.9 percent 46.9 percent

MS. RUCKSDASHEL stated that teacher retention has a significant impact on high-needs schools, particularly Title I schools, where efforts are focused on attracting and retaining qualified educators. She highlighted data showing that the five districts with the lowest teacher turnover have the highest student proficiency rates, while the five with the highest turnover have lower proficiency. She emphasized that investing in teacher retention and ensuring continuity in high-quality instruction directly improves student outcomes over time.

[8:20:36 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 19, Cost of Teacher Turnover:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **Cost of Teacher Turnover**

- ISER Study - 2017
  - Every time Alaska replaces a teacher, it costs the school district a minimum of over \$20,000
- RAND Study - 2019
  - Average cost to replace a principal is \$75,000
- Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff - 2013
  - Students in grade-levels with higher turnover score lower in both ELA and math and this effect is particularly strong in schools with more low-performing and minority students. Moreover, the results suggest that there is a disruptive effect of turnover beyond changing the distribution in teacher quality.
- Mid-Year Turnover

MS RUCKSDASHEL reiterated that the Wallace Foundation estimates the average cost to replace a principal at \$75,000. She emphasized that, across all staffing levels—paraprofessionals, teachers, principals, and superintendents—the shared goal is consistency, strong

relationships, and continuity. She stated that these elements are essential for delivering clear, efficient instruction to students.

[8:21:03 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 20, Attract and Retain Qualified Educators, showing a bar graph with facts about teacher turnover. She stated that ACSA's goal is to attract and retain qualified educators by understanding why they are leaving the state. She noted that nine out of ten teachers hired each year replace colleagues who left voluntarily, and more than two-thirds of teachers quit before retirement. She added that turnover rates in Title I schools are 50 percent higher than in other schools, and up to 70 percent higher in math and science. She emphasized that the removal of the defined benefit retirement system has contributed significantly to teacher attrition.

MS. RUCKSDASHEL shared her personal story of moving to Alaska after a high school visit and conversation with a teacher who praised the state's teacher pay and retirement benefits. She explained that the retirement system was a major factor in her decision to move to Alaska, where she has now taught for 25 years and raised her family. She expressed concern that new teachers do not have the same long-term financial security, which is causing many to leave.

[8:23:05 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 21, Retirement Systems, and read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **RETIREMENT SYSTEMS**

ACSA calls on legislators to provide and fund a public pension system or a viable alternative retirement system that fairly compensates all district staff who devote many years to Alaska's children.

According to the 2022 study by the Economic Policy Institute, the average teacher earns 26.4% less than other professionals with college degrees. The gap must be offset by providing an excellent benefit package, including a robust defined benefit retirement system.

[8:23:41 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL moved to slide 22, Why Educators Are Leaving and Staying in Alaska, which listed four reasons why educators leave or stay in Alaska:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Why educators are leaving and staying in Alaska**

#### **Why they leave**

- Lack of Defined Benefit
- Better opportunities in the Lower 48
- cost of living
- Uncertainty of education funding

#### **Why they stay**

- Positive school culture
- They grew up in Alaska/Family in State
- They like their community
- They are TRS Tier II employees

MS. RUCKSDASHEL said the Alaska Educator Recruitment and Retention Center (AERRC) surveyed principals and superintendents to understand why teachers are leaving the profession. The survey found that teachers are leaving due to the lack of defined benefits, better opportunities in the Lower 48, the high cost of living, and the ongoing uncertainty around education funding. She shared that just this morning, she had to notify multiple staff members of displacement, including the school nurse who is a professional and parent of three students at the school that chose to support Alaska's children while being present for her own family. She emphasized that displaced staff are unlikely to wait indefinitely for potential funding to return, especially when other opportunities exist. She added that teachers stay because of positive school culture, community ties, and, for those in Tier II, the security of a defined benefit retirement system.

[8:25:21 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT referred to slide 22, Why They Leave, and asked for an explanation of what "better opportunities in the Lower 48" means.

MS. RUCKSDASHEL explained that other states offer better salaries, lower class sizes, and hiring opportunities.

[8:25:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE UNDERWOOD asked for the source of the survey data given on slide 22.

[8:25:57 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL said she would provide the committee with the source.

[8:26:10 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked what the role of an assistant principal entails and framed the question in the context of Unalakleet School and the external challenges students face that are unrelated to academics. She expressed interest in understanding how school administration, specifically assistant principals, plays a critical role in supporting academic achievement. She emphasized the importance of how administrators help students become prepared and ready to learn despite those external challenges

MS. RUCKSDASHEL stated that assistant principals play a key role in building the capacity of future school leaders in Alaska, as many are preparing to step into principal positions. She emphasized that while administrative tasks such as reports, evaluations, observations, and community communication could easily fill the day, assistant principals are essential for responding in real time to student needs, especially in high-traffic schools. She shared that at Chinook, staff regularly support students facing serious mental health and anxiety challenges not formally identified under other categories. She underscored the importance of having administrators available to meet struggling families and students at the start of the day to ensure they are supported and able to enter the classroom. Together, principals and assistant principals balance administrative duties with being responsive to the needs of students, staff, and the broader school community.

[8:28:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked what the displacement of 375 teachers in the Anchorage School District means for the children.

[8:28:56 AM](#)

MS. RUCKSDASHEL explained that at her school, staffing was reduced by four teachers, a half-time assistant principal, a half-time nurse, and a paraprofessional. Because the school receives federal Title I funds, they were able to cover the cost of two of those positions, reducing the number of staff

displaced to two. She clarified that displacement does not mean layoffs, staff are not receiving pink slips, and they are assured continued employment within the Anchorage School District, just not at Chinook.

8:29:41 AM

MS. RUCKSDASHEL emphasized the disruption this causes for students. She stated that the school invests years in building relationships, continuity, and consistency, which are critical to student success. Staff are trained to ensure smooth classroom transitions, even for substitutes, to minimize disruption. Displacing staff breaks those carefully built connections and affects the school climate. She acknowledged that some turnover is expected—such as retirement, relocation, or career changes—but highlighted that forced displacements undermine the school's ability to maintain a stable and qualified team familiar with state, district, and school-level expectations.

MS. RUCKSDASHEL also explained that Title I schools serve a population with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students and receive additional federal funding to meet those needs. These funds are used to lower class sizes and hire support staff such as counselors. However, she noted that her half-time counselor position has remained unfilled all year, despite the critical role these positions play in supporting families facing greater challenges.

8:31:21 AM

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked Ms. Rucksdashel whether, in addition to advocating for full Average Daily Membership (ADM) funding for early childhood education, there were other specific formula components she would like applied to early education students. He noted her earlier reference to the need for additional facilities, playgrounds, and staffing and asked at what age children should be included in the ADM calculation.

MS. RUCKSDASHEL stated that Chinook has a preschool classroom for four-year-olds and noted that preschool students have specific requirements, particularly for playground equipment. She explained that the school is working to ensure playgrounds meet those standards. She emphasized that preschoolers have different learning needs than elementary students, and appropriate funding is necessary to provide age-appropriate curriculum, resources, and environmental supports.

8:32:28 AM

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked if the funding would apply to areas or be statewide.

MS. RUCKSDASHEL replied statewide.

CHAIR TOBIN stated that under the Alaska Reads Act, for pre-K programs to receive Base Student Allocation funding, they must include developmentally appropriate curricula, programming, support structures and systems. She emphasized that meeting these requirements is a condition for receiving funding.

[8:32:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE stated that she had heard the replacement cost for educators was \$20,000, with \$11,000 of that attributed to orientation and training, as shown a slide. She asked for an explanation of how that cost is calculated.

[8:33:21 AM](#)

MS. PARADY stated that the data on educator replacement costs was compiled by the University of Alaska Anchorage and offered to provide that information. She added that the university can break down the specific calculations used to arrive at those figures.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked whether young professionals graduating from Alaska's university system are adequately prepared to step into the classroom and begin teaching.

MS. RUCKSDASHEL stated that universities are preparing educators with a strong foundation in educational philosophy and theory. However, once new teachers arrive at the school level, additional training is required to align them with state, district, and site-specific expectations. She explained that this includes understanding the curriculum, schoolwide goals, daily operations, and navigating the school environment. She emphasized that many new hires come from out-of-state or internationally, and it takes coordinated efforts at the state, district, and school levels to ensure they are fully prepared to meet classroom expectations.

[8:34:42 AM](#)

MS. PARADY added that the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development requires numerous training courses for all new staff.

[8:35:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE UNDERWOOD asked whether there have been reports from other districts about teacher recruitment and retention concerns, specifically related to teachers feeling they lack the autonomy to direct classroom instruction. She noted that she heard similar concerns while serving on her local school board and asked if others are providing that same type of feedback.

MS. RUCKSDASHEL stated that one of the goals in Anchorage is to provide consistency across schools due to the high turnover and student transiency within the district. She explained that teachers are expected to implement the district curriculum as outlined, but there is flexibility within the school day to adjust instruction as needed to meet students' needs.

### **Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals**

[8:36:17 AM](#)

RICK DORMER, President, Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals (AASSP), Ketchikan, Alaska, Co-presented The State of Education from the Field. He moved to slides 23 - 24 and shared that he is also the principal of Ketchikan High School. He recognized the board members of AASSP stating they come from diverse areas of Alaska and are hard working.

[8:36:49 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 25, Career and Technical Education, and shared the joint position statement:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION**

ACSA fully supports continued and increased targeted funding for voluntary internships and pre-apprenticeship programs that prepare students for high-demand, high-skill, high wage jobs, as well as dual credit offerings that provide students opportunities to obtain an occupational certification or credentials.

[8:37:02 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 26, Career and Technical Education (CTE), a graph showing the make up of CTE students across Alaska from 2023-2024. He stated that Career and Technical Education (CTE), formerly known as vocational education, plays a vital role in student engagement and success. As a 16-year CTE director in both Petersburg and currently the Ketchikan Gateway

Borough School District, he emphasized that CTE courses bring students to school by offering hands-on learning experiences that are both engaging and relevant. He noted that students thrive when working in programs such as auto shop, maritime, construction, aviation, and culinary arts, and many walk into well-paying jobs straight out of high school.

MR. DORMER explained that CTE programs require significant resources and infrastructure but offer high value. He highlighted various programs including boat repair, home construction, aviation partnerships with Alaska Airlines, and opportunities in healthcare and education. He shared that CTE students typically graduate at higher rates than their peers.

MR. DORMER provided personal examples, noting that his daughter earned her Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) license in high school, which led to more stable and professional employment during college. His son, graduating from Petersburg High School, has studied CTE and is pursuing a career as an electrician. He concluded by thanking legislators for expanding the Alaska Performance Scholarship to include CTE tracks, recognizing its importance to the state's workforce development.

[8:39:16 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 27, School Safety and Social, Emotional and Mental Health. He stated that school safety remains a foundational priority, as ensuring students are safe must come before education can occur. He emphasized the importance of supporting student well-being, particularly in the area of social-emotional health. He shared that when speaking with legislators, including at the federal level, the first question often asked is about how students are doing emotionally. He acknowledged that many—if not all—legislators share the belief that continued support for student mental health is essential.

[8:39:56 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 28, Rate of Suicide Attempt, a graph of suicide attempt rate by age. Data from the Alaska Department of Health highlights Alaska's high youth suicide rates, particularly among ages 11-14 and 15-19. He shared that in just the past month, Ketchikan experienced a teen suicide and another student who attempted suicide and required life flight. He stressed the urgency and reality of the youth mental health crisis in Alaska.

MR. DORMER referenced the 2022 Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted in his district, which found that 37 percent of Ketchikan High School students reported feeling anxious, nervous, tense, or scared every day for at least two consecutive weeks that they were unable to function as students. Additionally, 41 percent reported feeling so sad or hopeless that they stopped participating in usual activities. He stated that such emotional distress directly impacts students' ability to learn, socialize, and engage in school life. He concluded by saying these statistics are likely consistent statewide and reiterated the critical connection between mental health and student achievement.

[8:41:18 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 29 and shared data from a 2023 Learning Policy Institute study that directly linked mental health supports and school safety. He stated that students need greater access to mental health resources. As principal of Petersburg High School, he wrote three separate three-year grants to fund counseling support because existing resources were insufficient. He expressed gratitude for partnerships across the state that have helped support similar efforts.

MR. DORMER shared that Ketchikan High School was fortunate to receive a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant, which funded a social worker to support over 500 students, alongside existing counselors. He acknowledged that having even one social worker is more than many schools have but stressed that it is still not enough. He noted the reliance on federal funding for these supports and shared concerns about the long-term sustainability of such funding.

[8:42:03 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 30, US K-12 Parent's Concern About Their Child's Safety at School. The slide has a graph of parents' response to the question, "Thinking about your oldest child, when he or she is at school, do you fear for his or her physical safety?" He said the graph shows a growing concern among families about student safety in schools. He noted that the 2023 data reflect a steady increase in these concerns over the past 20 years. He emphasized that the trend is moving in the wrong direction and underscores the urgent need to address school safety issues.

[8:42:25 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 31, US K-12 Parents Saying Their Child Has Expressed School Safety Concerns, a graph of parents' response to the question, "Have any of your school-aged children expressed any worry or concern about feeling unsafe at their school when they go back to school this fall?". He stated that in 2022, students reported feeling unsafe at the highest rate since the Gallup organization began collecting this data in 2000. He said [Alaskans] should ask themselves why schools are not providing support at the level students say they need. He cited the American School Counselor Association's recommended ratio of 250 students per counselor, while the national average is 376 students per counselor.

MR. DORMER shared that, as a principal, hiring counselors is extremely difficult due to both funding limitations and a shortage of qualified candidates. He emphasized that even when schools have resources, retaining counselors remains a major challenge. Counseling positions are often the first to be cut when districts face budget constraints. He added that many schools across Alaska do not have counselors at all. In the Ketchikan School District, Ketchikan High School has two counselors serving 500 students, and one charter school has a counselor, but no other schools in the district do, which he noted is common statewide.

8:43:30 AM

MR. DORMER moved to slide 32, a graph on the number of casualties in active shooter incidents at elementary and secondary schools: 2000 through 2022. He stated he would be remiss not to share this data, emphasizing the consequences of ignoring the growing mental health crisis. He added that educators live with the constant fear of school shootings and that the upward trend shown in the graph must be acknowledged.

MR. DORMER described how schools have changed significantly in recent decades. Today, all doors are locked, many are alarmed, visitors are buzzed in through cameras, staff wear ID badges, and teachers have emergency applications on their phones—purchased through grant funding, as normal budgets cannot cover such costs. He noted that while these safety measures are necessary, they are also expensive, and many rural schools cannot afford the retrofits required to meet current safety demands.

8:44:17 AM

MR. DORMER stressed that positive, long-term relationships between staff and students are essential to school safety. He

shared that he once worked with a national advisor on school shootings who told him that in every school tragedy, students knew about the threat beforehand. He concluded that consistent staffing and trusted relationships are critical preventive measures.

[8:44:41 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 33, Preparing, Attracting and Retaining Qualified Educators:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**PREPARING, ATTRACTING AND  
RETAINING QUALIFIED EDUCATORS**

Recruiting and retaining highly effective educators and leaders is imperative to increase student achievement and eliminate academic disparity for all of Alaska's students.

According to a survey done by the Governor's Task Force on Teacher Retention and Recruitment, of over 3700 Alaskan educators, the top issues related to retention status are: Salary and Benefits

MR. DORMER spoke about the importance of retaining and attracting not only quality educators but also effective school administrators. He referenced survey data from the Governor's Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force, which showed that among more than 3,700 Alaska educators, salary and benefits were identified as the top concern.

He emphasized that retaining experienced principals is critical, as research from the Wallace Foundation shows that long-term, effective school leaders positively impact student learning, attendance, teacher satisfaction, and teacher retention.

[8:45:04 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 34, Administrator Recruitment and Retention, a graphic with the following information:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Only one in four principals are in the same building after five years

- It takes five to ten years for a principal to turn around a large school
- Only one out of four principals are in the same building after five years. This high turnover rate of building principals is costly in dollars, time, relationships, and- most importantly impact of student learning.

MR. DORMER expressed frustration that, during last year's conference, five administrators personally told him they were planning to leave Alaska. Within a year, all five had followed through. As president of the Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals (AASSP), he has actively participated in recruitment efforts, even interviewing in Oregon, where administrators can earn higher salaries, receive a defined benefit retirement plan, and have a lower cost of living. He noted that out-of-state opportunities also eliminate the need for expensive travel to visit family.

[8:45:55 AM](#)

MR. DORMER emphasized that while Alaska's administrators want to stay, they are highly educated professionals with personal and professional goals, and many are being drawn to competitive offers in states like Washington and Oregon. He concluded that Alaska is in a tough position and that he and others are fighting to change that with committee support.

[8:46:19 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 35, Alaska School Leadership Academy (ASLA), and stated that the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) is actively working to reduce the high administrator turnover rate by developing a mentoring program launched in 2018. The program is built on three pillars: personalized mentoring, professional networking, and leadership development. He explained that the idea originated from veteran elementary and secondary principals who recognized a need for stronger support systems.

MR. DORMER expressed appreciation for the funding partnership with the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, supported by federal Title II-A grants. He shared that as of FY24, the program has served 230 mentees across more than 77 percent of Alaska's school districts, resulting in over 2,657 individual mentor meetings and more than 1,780 hours of mentoring. He noted that the program has nearly quadrupled in size since its inception, reflecting strong interest from both

veteran principals wanting to give back and new principals in need of support.

[8:47:12 AM](#)

MR. DORMER said he was a mentor for seven years. He shared that he benefitted early in his career from a similar mentoring program, which he credits as a key factor in his 16-year tenure and ability to navigate the challenges of school leadership.

[8:47:27 AM](#)

MR. DORMER moved to slide 36, Principals Trained Across Alaska 2018 - 2024, a map of Alaska showing locations where principals trained from 2018-2024 and providing the following data regarding the Alaska School Leadership Academy (ASLA):

- Six cohorts
- Two-year induction
- 230 ASLA Principals and AP's
- 39 Alaska School districts (77 percent)
- 186 Alaska Schools (36 percent)
- 68 percent First year Principals who complete a second year in ASLA.

MR. DORMER highlighted the broad and meaningful impact of the Alaska School Leadership Academy (ASLA) across the state, noting its growing importance as Alaska faces a surge of new principals who need support. He acknowledged the geographic challenges of connecting educators across such a vast state but affirmed that ASLA is working hard to meet those needs. He reiterated that every student in Alaska, whether in public schools, charter schools, or homeschool programs, deserves access to a high-quality education. He emphasized that this includes not only strong teachers but also skilled and experienced administrators. He warned that Alaska is losing its educational leaders at a rapid rate and urged legislators to take action to ensure that every child, every day, receives the best possible education from effective teachers and supported school leaders.

[8:48:20 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN commented that on the capital improvement list this year all Anchorage projects are vestibule upgrades, which is about student safety.

[8:48:31 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated that the legislature has attempted, without success, to pass legislation supporting dual credit

opportunities with the university system. He acknowledged that Mr. Dormer had found success in this area and asked him to briefly discuss the university's involvement and how dual credit programs have worked for schools in his district.

[8:48:48 AM](#)

MR. DORMER expressed pride in the dual credit programs in Ketchikan and noted how fortunate the district is to have the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) Ketchikan campus located directly behind his office. He shared that the small campus allows for strong collaboration, with some students walking over to take classes such as biology or participate in the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program, which the high school cannot offer on its own due to the absence of a nurse instructor. He highlighted the initiative of his teaching staff, specifically a physics teacher currently working with the University of Alaska Fairbanks to offer dual credit to students who are excelling in a rigorous physics course. Although the teacher is not AP-certified, the university agreed to award credit if the instruction meets their academic standards.

MR. DORMER explained that these partnerships typically begin through direct communication between high school teachers and university faculty, and while there is sometimes a small cost to students, the schools work to provide scholarships through donated funds when possible. He emphasized that although it takes extra effort from staff and students, these collaborations are valuable and demonstrate how universities can successfully support high school dual credit opportunities.

[8:50:12 AM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked why nearly one-third of new principals do not return for a second year of mentoring in ASLA.

[8:50:41 AM](#)

MR. DORMER stated that he did not have the specific data regarding why nearly a third of new principals do not return for a second year of mentoring. He explained that, in his experience, mentoring typically involves a two-year relationship, and he usually mentors two to three principals each year, often working with the same principal over both years.

[8:50:59 AM](#)

MS. PARADY said one of the reasons is principal turnover.

[8:51:25 AM](#)

JENNIFER RINALDI, Executive Director, Alaska Association of Elementary Principals, Willow, Alaska, answered a question concerning the principal mentorship program. She explained that the principal mentoring and induction program is designed to span two years, but the high turnover rate among principals affects participation. Some principals choose to return to the classroom, while others leave the state in search of better opportunities. She noted that principals in the program express strong support for it; however, ongoing challenges such as the lack of a defined benefit retirement system, along with uncompetitive salaries and benefits, contribute to the decline in second-year participation.

[8:52:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT referred to slide 31, a graph showing student fear and asked whether the fear expressed by students and families is more closely related to bullying or specifically to concerns about mass shootings.

MR. DORMER stated that he did not have specific data on the sources of student fear reflected in the national survey but noted trends in the graph showing a spike following the 2000 school shooting and a continued upward trend that has now surpassed that point. He shared that, based on his personal experience in Ketchikan, the fear expressed by students and families has not been primarily related to school shootings. Instead, it is more commonly linked to high anxiety, peer pressure, and bullying—issues that schools constantly work to address. He emphasized that bullying is never tolerated but remains a widespread, ongoing challenge.

[8:53:13 AM](#)

MS. PARADY said she would provide the study to the committee.

[8:53:28 AM](#)

SENATOR CRONK expressed appreciation for the previous speakers who acknowledged that public education includes brick-and-mortar schools, charter schools, and homeschool programs. However, he shared frustration over seeing an administrator publish a disparaging article about correspondence and homeschool students, as well as hearing similar testimony in both House and Senate education hearings. He questioned whether administrators would unify and support all students. Correspondence students are funded at .9 ADM. He asked if the legislature would fund them at 1.0 ADM. He expressed appreciation to those who testified saying "they're all our kids."

[8:54:15 AM](#)

MS. PARADY thanked Senator Cronk for the question and said she wanted to "myth bust" that school districts and the ACSA do not support correspondence education. She stated that she regularly attends education hearings and has not heard of attacks on correspondence courses. She emphasized that she represents all districts, including those with correspondence schools, and her organization supports these programs. She clarified that while negative media may exist, her group is not responsible and remains committed to supporting all students. She concluded by expressing support for increasing the Base Student Allocation (BSA), noting it benefits all students, and reaffirmed her organization's past support for related legislation that would have funded correspondence students as 1.0 ADM. She encouraged continued collaboration moving forward.

[8:56:24 AM](#)

CLAYTON HOLLAND, President, Alaska Superintendents Association, Soldotna, Alaska, Co-presented The State of Education from the Field. She moved to slide 37 and said he is also the Superintendent for the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District.

[8:56:36 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND moved to slide 38 and stated that members of the ASA board are from all areas of Alaska and represent both urban and rural schools.

[8:56:48 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND moved to slide 39, Constitutional Duty, and said the State of Alaska has a constitutional responsibility to provide timely, reliable, and predictable revenue for schools, funding the actual cost of education in all districts. It is to provide full and equitable funding for all initiatives, laws, and mandates that require additional resources. He reminded legislatures that although they have many competing interests, funding education is a constitutional duty.

[8:57:21 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND moved to slide 40, a graph of Alaska's K-12 funding created by ACSA. The BSA is represented by pencils. The orange line is the inflationary pressures over time (FY11-FY25). Above the pencils are the one-time funding amounts, which show the inflationary pressure on school districts' ability to purchase over time.

[8:57:52 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND moved to slide 41, a bar graph showing that if adjusted for inflation since FY11 the amount of the BSA in FY25 would equate to \$1808. He said the graph highlights what happened to education funding and why school districts are struggling. He stated that although school districts appreciate one-time funding, it makes budgeting and teacher contracts difficult. His school district has 160 staff members waiting to hear if their positions will be funded. The uncertainty results in employees looking for work elsewhere. Lack of funding within the BSA hinders recruitment efforts when there is already shortage of qualified applicants.

[8:58:24 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND moved to slide 42, Why Fund Inside the BSA, and discussed the following reasons why funding should occur with the BSA:

#### **Why Fund Inside the BSA**

- Reliability
- Predictability
- Putting one time money into fixed costs is discouraged, risky, and uncertain
- Allows our school Boards to be better stewards of their obligation to adopt budgets for their school districts
- One time money does not meet the needs of teachers, classrooms, other educators and students in the future.

[9:00:02 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND moved to slide 43, Proposed State Budgets and Change since 2017, and said the chart shows how every other department in the state of Alaska has been funded since FY17. He said there was a period in time when all departments were on hold but since that time every department has seen budget increases of two to three times their previous amounts. He noted that during this time inflation rose by 25 percent. He emphasized that K-12 support for school districts was the only area that did not receive similar increases.

[9:00:31 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND moved to slide 44, Major Maintenance. He emphasized that major maintenance is a statewide issue, not limited to rural areas like Sleepmute. He cited Soldotna High School, where walls are deteriorating. In his district there are roofs across

multiple sites that need replacement and cause significant heat loss. He described severe conditions in the village of Nanwalek, where corroded pipes require the principal to use a vacuum to remove sewage to keep the school operational. He concluded by stating that the Kenai Peninsula school district has \$400 million in deferred maintenance and expressed concern that such conditions have become normalized in Alaska.

[9:01:30 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND moved to slide 45, Ongoing Challenges, and highlighted the current backlog of deferred maintenance is \$330 million and growing. He explained that many districts are not submitting proposals because the likelihood of funding is low and the application process is costly and complex. He emphasized the aging infrastructure across the state, with the average school building age at 45 years and 83 schools over 60 years old.

[9:02:18 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND moved to slide 46, First Day Teacher Vacancies in Alaska. He stated that residents in the Kenai area frequently raise concerns about insufficient efforts to recruit teachers. He noted that his district had about a dozen vacancies while there were 601 open education positions statewide on the first day of school, reflecting a sharply increasing trend. He emphasized that Alaska is not competitive in teacher recruitment. He added that delays in the budgeting process hinder districts from even beginning efforts to address these staffing shortages.

[9:02:51 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND moved to slide 47, Educator Turnover, a photo taken in 2018-19 showing the turnover of superintendents in Alaska. The blue hearts over the photos represent all the superintendents who have left the profession, and yellow represents superintendents leaving this year. Purple hearts indicate superintendents who have taken different jobs since then. [The photograph shows the faces of 54 superintendents; six photos do not have a heart on them.] He said instability in the superintendent position also leads to principal turnover, which leads to teacher turnover, resulting in instability across the education system, including a measurable impact on students' learning and wellbeing. Alaska has among the highest superintendent turnover rates in the nation.

[9:03:42 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND moved to slide 48 - 49, New Superintendent Induction and Support Program. He said ASA has started a new program to help with superintendent turnover through mentorship and training. He shared the following information:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **New Superintendent Induction and Support Program**

#### **Superintendent Turnover**

- ASA provides voluntary in-depth on the job learning opportunities to first and second year superintendents relevant to the Alaska school district and superintendent experience and
- ASA provides individual support through a research-based mentoring program
- Program began in 2014/2015
- In the last 6 years
  - 79 percent of current superintendents have participated in the program
  - 100 percent of 2023-2024 first year superintendents returned to their position this school year
  - 89 percent of the 2024-2025 cohort are on track to return for their second year

[9:04:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY stated that listening to the discussion had been very emotional because of the significant impact on students. She expressed concern that students do not have consistent educators and principals. She acknowledged the strain this causes for families. She thanked those present for their daily work, emphasizing its importance.

CO-CHAIR STORY stated that the education committees are working hard to provide stability and acknowledges that the state has a failed education funding policy. The speaker emphasized the need to fund education inside the Base Student Allocation (BSA) and to provide early funding to help correct the course. She asked what a \$680 increase to the BSA would mean for his district.

[9:05:39 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND stated that a \$680 increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA) currently represents a significant budget shortfall for his district. He listed immediate impacts, including the elimination of reading specialists, all elementary counselors, and half of both the distance education and Middle College programs. Gifted and talented positions would be cut, the pupil-to-teacher ratio (PTR) would increase at the elementary level, and upper-grade reading and class sizes would also be affected. He added that sports stipends would be eliminated, and due to the loss of budget transfer for transportation, seven bus routes would be cut, forcing all routes onto highways rather than safer loop roads

MR. HOLLAND also noted potential loss of small school counselors and reductions in staffing for pool managers and theater technicians. He emphasized that while some cuts may seem minor to others, they deeply affect the district. He explained that the school board prioritizes protecting the district's core functions—literacy, math, career and technical education (CTE), and dual credit. He concluded that with only a \$680 BSA increase, the district's ability to serve all students is severely compromised.

[9:07:11 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS acknowledged the committee's strong support for education and praised its aspirational vision. He noted that once legislation leaves the education committee, it moves to finance, where the challenge shifts to addressing how to fund those goals. He pointed out the state's limited savings and declining oil revenues as major constraints. He urged education advocates to emphasize to their legislators that without additional state revenue, the necessary funding for education will not be available.

[9:08:05 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND expressed appreciation for the comment and acknowledged that questions about funding sources are common. He recognized that identifying revenue is a major responsibility for legislators. He stated that his district understands the state's fiscal reality and supports efforts to bring in new revenue.

[9:08:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE thanked the educators for bringing forward their concerns and acknowledged that while the issues are familiar, such as deferred maintenance and inflation, the impacts are still deeply felt. She shifted the conversation to

the broader challenge that one-third of students are reporting coming to school frightened and unprepared to learn. She expressed concern that school responses, such as locking doors, installing surveillance, limiting student movement, and reducing outdoor and physical learning, may be contributing to student disengagement.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE urged the group to reflect on how education can be done differently to build student resilience and re-engage learners. She challenged educational leaders to find ways to help students recognize their strength and emphasized that while educators can't control home environments, their time with students matters. She concluded by pushing back on the idea that placing behavioral health specialists in every school alone will address the root issues.

[9:10:37 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND shared that his administrative group recently discussed the current period as one of the most transformational in education in recent history. He acknowledged the challenge of identifying next steps amid budget reductions and said that while many suggest expanding distance education or homeschooling, no one provides clear guidance on which policies need to change. He identified student anxiety, helicopter parenting, and the influence of social media as significant factors contributing to absenteeism and disengagement, particularly among older students.

Mr. HOLLAND stated that building student resilience and perseverance is a specific goal within the district's strategic plan and that educators actively work to promote those traits. He noted Alaska's low kindergarten readiness rates, an issue that often goes unmentioned. He highlighted the district's progress through the READ Act, describing how at-risk indicators shown in a student performance "pyramid" often reverse by year's end, especially at the elementary level. He emphasized that this progress requires consistent effort.

MR. HOLLAND concluded by pointing out the paradox of trying to maintain core academic functions while also recognizing that elective and hands-on programs, such as career and technical education (CTE) and outdoor education, are what keep many high school students engaged. He described the current state as one where reducing these offerings leads to further student disengagement and said this tension is something districts are actively grappling with.

[9:13:04 AM](#)

MS. PARADY Alaska stated that the U.S. leads the world in chronic absenteeism. She agreed with Mr. Holland's remarks and pushed back on the narrative that education is failing, stating instead that "education is starving." She emphasized that restoring full funding is essential to retaining students, maintaining their interest, and providing necessary support. She concluded that while there is broad agreement on the need to rethink education, meaningful change cannot happen while funding continues to be cut, and educators are expected to do more with less.

[9:14:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE opined that repeatedly referring to cuts in education is disingenuous as no cuts have occurred at the legislative level. She acknowledged there are inflationary pressures.

[9:14:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE UNDERWOOD referred to the superintendent "heart page" on page 47 and found it very informative. She asked if there was any secondary feedback beyond funding that might explain the high number of superintendents leaving their positions. She suggested that other factors may be contributing to the turnover.

MR. HOLLAND stated that retirements and the lasting effects of the pandemic have accelerated superintendent turnover. He emphasized that increasing pressures on superintendents, including inflation-related budget reductions, have intensified the stress of the role. He noted a rise in public frustration, which often turns inward toward leadership, particularly in smaller communities. He shared that, despite his long tenure, he is personally feeling cracks in support and added that this pattern is consistent with what he is hearing from colleagues across the country.

[9:16:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked if Mr. Holland enjoys sports.

MR. HOLLAND replied in the affirmative.

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID posed a question comparing the structure and success of athletic teams to education in Alaska, using "March Madness" as a metaphor for results and accountability. He emphasized that successful teams rely on a full range of support, coaches, staff, and infrastructure, to achieve

outcomes. He asked what is happening to the educational "teams" in Alaska, referencing the broad network of superintendents, teachers, support personnel, and bus drivers. His question aimed to highlight how the erosion of that team structure may be affecting educational success across the state.

[9:17:34 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND called the analogy a great way to view the situation and said he thinks about it often in relation to schools. He noted that in some districts, particularly village schools, staff turnover occurs almost every year, including in food service roles. He emphasized that, like in coaching, success in education relies on relationships. Educators, like coaches, need time to build trust, teach a system, and develop consistency. He concluded that with continual turnover, it is nearly impossible to have success.

[9:18:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM expressed appreciation for Mr. Holland's leadership, particularly through COVID-19, and acknowledged their ongoing work together. He thanked Mr. Holland for raising the issue of major maintenance and noted that while taxing structures exist in more urban parts of the Kenai Peninsula, the scale of infrastructure needs across the state remains overwhelming. He pointed out that the region reflects a mix of urban and rural challenges and questioned how to effectively begin addressing severe facility issues, such as schools relying on pumps just to stay operational.

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked whether increasing the Base Student Allocation (BSA) alone could address these maintenance needs or if a separate solution outside the BSA is required to deal with deteriorating school facilities statewide.

[9:19:40 AM](#)

MR. HOLLAND stated that the Base Student Allocation (BSA) is essential for supporting instruction, retaining educators, and maintaining the core functions of the school district. He explained that deferred maintenance and capital improvement needs must be addressed through separate funding streams, such as the Capital Project Improvement (CPI) list. He emphasized the enormity of the issue, acknowledging that while it is unrealistic to tackle every need across Alaska or even the Kenai Peninsula, incremental progress is still valuable. He concluded that legislative support for deferred maintenance funding and bond debt reimbursement would make a significant difference in addressing facility needs.

[9:20:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM complimented Mr. Holland on his district's CTE program.

[9:20:52 AM](#)

MS. PARADY stated that her organization strongly supports placing strategic focus on the state's deferred maintenance issues. She suggested that interim work could help clarify the full scope of the problem. She emphasized the need to quantify both the known issues and the unknown issues. She concluded that a more comprehensive understanding is necessary to begin effectively addressing the challenges.

**Alaska Association of School Business Officials.**

[9:21:59 AM](#)

PHIL HULETT, President, Alaska Association of School Business Officials (ALASBO), Dillingham, Alaska, Co-presented The State of Education from the Field. He moved to slides 50 and 51 and said he is also the Chief Financial Officer of Galena City School District. ALASBO is a 50-year-old organization and its board of directors are from all parts of the state. The organization exists to support all aspects of school business operations. He noted that it provides training and mentorship programs in finance, human resources, maintenance and facilities, and administrative support. He also highlighted the New Business Manager Institute as part of their professional development efforts. He shared the mission, vision, and values of ALASBO:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Alaska Association of School Business Officials**

**OUR MISSION:**

To promote the highest standards in school business practices

**OUR VISION:**

Educating stakeholders in the effective use of resources for the benefit of Alaska's children

**OUR VALUES:**

ethical standards • sharing knowledge and expertise •  
advancing the interests of all members • accurate,  
objective, consistent information • collegiality •  
efficiency • collaboration

[9:22:54 AM](#)

MR. HULETT moved to slide 52, Priority Funding for Public Education, and stated that the primary focus of his testimony was to address the fiscal cliff that school districts across Alaska are facing. He acknowledged appreciation for one-time funding but emphasized that the absence of a permanent increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA) has undermined the sustainability of programs statewide. He explained that districts cannot effectively plan or budget without consistent formula-based funding. He cited rising fixed costs, such as annual health care increases of 13 to 20 percent, escalating transportation expenses, and significant utility cost hikes, as key factors worsening the fiscal cliff. He said these increases in costs make it nearly impossible to maintain academic achievement, implement system-wide improvements, or meet unfunded mandates.

[9:24:01 AM](#)

KATIE PARROTT, President Elect, Alaska Association of School Business Officials, Anchorage, Alaska, Co-presented The State of Education from the Field. She moved to slide 53, Instructional (Functions 100-400) = 74 percent. She mentioned she is also the Senior Director of the Office of Management and Budget for the Anchorage School District.

MS. PARROTT stated that school districts across Alaska are subject to multiple financial accountability standards, with one of the primary frameworks being the Alaska Chart of Accounts. She explained that this system, established in statute, dictates how districts classify expenditures and structure their budgets. She highlighted that instructional functions, categorized as 100 through 400, primarily reflect classroom-related spending. These include direct instruction, special education, and instructional supports, such as school administrators.

[9:25:04 AM](#)

MS. PARROTT moved to slide 54, Non-Instructional (Functions 450-780) = 26 percent. She said non-instructional functions include the operational aspects of school districts. She noted that while student activities fall under non-instructional spending, her organization views them as essential to educational engagement. She emphasized that student activities contribute

significantly to skill development and remain highly important for students.

[9:25:38 AM](#)

MS. PARROTT moved to slide 55, which features a pie graph illustrating FY 2024 school district expenditures statewide. She stated that the chart clearly shows the majority of district funds are directed toward supporting education and student outcomes, with approximately 74 percent allocated to instructional functions. She addressed a common criticism that districts are "top heavy" or allocate too much funding to administration. She pointed out that only 2 percent of expenditures went to district administration in FY 2024, which she described as a typical and consistent figure. She noted that 15 percent of operating expenditures are allocated to operations and related costs

[9:26:46 AM](#)

MS. PARROTT moved to slide 56, School Bond Debt Reimbursement, and emphasized the critical importance of school bond debt reimbursement for districts and urged the legislature to reject any future moratoriums on the program. She explained that the existing moratorium has caused many districts to defer necessary construction projects, leading to facility deterioration, unsafe conditions, and ultimately higher long-term costs. She added that when key funding mechanisms like this weaken, they have a direct impact on instructional funding by forcing districts to shift limited resources toward emergency repairs, resulting in a costly and unsustainable "band-aid" approach.

[9:27:52 AM](#)

MS. PARROTT moved to slide 57, Anchorage School District Maintenance Backlog, a graph for the Anchorage School District showing the causal effect of the maintenance backlog overtime. She said the graph clearly shows that the reduction of school bond debt reimbursement has had a noticeable impact to the facility maintenance backlog for Anchorage School District, and other downward pressures from inflation in the district's operating fund, has also resulted in cutting back on some of the positions capable of taking care of some of the maintenance issues.

[9:28:32 AM](#)

MR. HULETT moved to slide 58, Transportation Funding. He stated that transportation funding is another major challenge districts are facing. He explained that many districts have been forced to use general fund dollars, intended for instructional support, to

cover transportation costs that exceed the state reimbursement rate. He cited one district that will need to spend \$200,000 of its general fund to cover the shortfall. He emphasized that transportation costs continue to rise, while funding has remained unchanged.

[9:29:09 AM](#)

MR. HULETT moved to slide 59, Transportation Funding, explained that the graph illustrates the growing burden of transportation costs on school district general funds. He stated that the chart shows projected and actual expenses that districts must cover beyond what the state reimburses. Over the past 10 years, districts have spent approximately \$44 million from their general funds to cover transportation costs exceeding state allocations.

[9:29:31 AM](#)

MR. HULETT moved to slide 60, Education is Accountable, and addressed recent scrutiny over school financial accountability and presented a list of common audits and oversight measures that school business officials regularly manage:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **Education is Accountable**

- 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
- Fund Balance Reporting
- Per Pupil Allocation
- Grant funding Monitoring - SPED, Title I, Competitive Awards
- NSLP/Food Service Annual Audit
- Special Award Audits as Required by Funding Agency
- DEED Quarterly Reimbursement Reports

MR. HULETT noted that the list was not exhaustive but reflected the routine demands districts face. He shared that, in the previous year, he underwent nine separate audits for various accounts and programs in his district. He emphasized that school

funding and grants come with strict accountability requirements and concluded by saying that school business professionals are not trying to build a castle—they are simply trying to maintain the cottage they already have.

[9:30:20 AM](#)

MS. PARROTT moved to slide 61, Education Accountable - Budgets and Actual Reporting Overview, information taken from the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) website, which also includes historical records for all districts in the state across many years to show how money is spent. She encouraged anyone interested to review these reports, which are organized by the same functional categories she previously discussed. She also noted that individual district websites provide additional resources, including annual audit reports and budget documents. She emphasized commitment to transparency and financial accountability.

[9:31:20 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN noted that the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) website includes the Report Card on Public Schools, which can be broken down by district and individual school. She emphasized its value as a tool, highlighting that it provides assessment data, attendance data, and financial and audit information in one place. She described it as a helpful resource.

[9:31:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked whether any districts in Alaska had received an extension to spend COVID-related funds beyond September 2024. She referenced recent news indicating that some federal extensions had been halted.

[9:32:11 AM](#)

MS. PARROTT responded that she believed some districts may have received extensions but could not identify specific ones. She stated that the vast majority of COVID relief funds provided through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding have already been retired and were not eligible for extension. She noted that while there may be individual funding streams that received extensions, she was not aware of which districts applied for them.

[9:32:48 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY referenced previous testimony from Ms. DeFeo to both House and Senate committees, noting that Alaska has dropped just below average in school funding compared to other states.

She emphasized that while other states are increasing their investments in education, Alaska has remained flat. She acknowledged that the comparison is based on U.S. Census data and recalled a prior presentation from ALASBO that addressed how this data was interpreted. She asked whether Ms. Parrot had considered how that national data reconciles with what is reflected in Alaska's Chart of Accounts.

[9:33:45 AM](#)

MS. PARROTT responded that while she did not recall the exact data, she is aware that Alaska is lagging, particularly when compared to other Western states. She noted that other states have made investments that translate into more competitive wages and benefits, which impacts workforce stability. She referenced data showing that, compared to ten years ago, Alaska's competitiveness has declined and now falls well below the national average. She added that she would need to review the data further to provide a more detailed response.

### **Alaska Educator Retention & Recruitment Center**

[9:34:52 AM](#)

JENNIFER SCHMITZ, Director, Alaska Educator Retention & Recruitment Center (AERRC), Anchorage, Alaska, Co-presented The State of Education from the Field. She moved to slide 62 and stated that she is a lifelong Alaskan and previously served as a teacher and principal in the Anchorage School District before retiring in 2019. Since then, she has worked with ACSA, primarily supporting principals until the launch of the AERR. She noted that most principal calls to ACSA were related to recruitment and retention challenges, such as sudden departures and lack of school support. She explained that the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking a backbone organization to lead recruitment and retention efforts aligned with the Governor's Teacher Recruitment and Retention (TRR) report, and the center was created to fulfill that role.

[9:36:04 AM](#)

MS. SCHMITZ moved to slide 63, Alaska Education Retention and Recruitment Center Branches. She explained that AECRR has three primary focus areas. The first is implementation of the Teacher Recruitment and Retention (TRR) recommendations from the Governor's playbook. She noted that a steering committee has been formed to guide this work and thanked Representative Himschoot and Senator Bjorkman for participating. The committee is ensuring that the recommendations are accessible statewide.

MS. SCHMITZ said the second focus is the Alaska Teacher and Personnel (AT&P) platform, which was recently acquired from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She described AT&P as a virtual job board where districts can post vacancies and applicants from within Alaska, across the U.S., and internationally can apply. The third area is international hire support. She stated that districts are working with various outside agencies to recruit international teachers, each with differing policies and costs. She expressed concern that some teachers have been taken advantage of financially. She said AERRC is working with the Department of Labor to become a centralized, in-state resource for districts needing support with international hiring.

[9:37:53 AM](#)

MS. SCHMITZ moved to slide 64, Potential Solutions - Recommendations from the TRR Action Plan, and discussed the TRR Teacher Recruitment and Retention (TRR) Action Plan, highlighting a partnership with the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to build on the Governor's workforce group efforts from 2020 and the resulting playbook developed in 2023. She explained that the action plan outlines potential solutions to address recruitment and retention challenges, some of which are already in progress, though not consistently implemented statewide.

MS. SCHMITZ cited administrator mentoring as an example, noting that through the Alaska Council of School Administrators' program, there is a strong mentorship system for early-career principals. Currently, about 69 percent of new principals participate, and the steering committee's goal is to reach full participation. She added that while some initiatives are being actively pursued, others, such as restructuring the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) and Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS), need legislative support to advance.

[9:39:00 AM](#)

MR. SCHMITZ moved to slide 65, AERRC Virtual Job Fair, and shared that, alongside the Alaska Teacher and Personnel (AT&P) database, AERRC is offering virtual job fairs. The first fair is scheduled for April 5, 2025, with 12 school districts currently registered to participate and over 1,200 applicants signed up. She highlighted that of the 5,400 active applicants in the system, more than 3,900 are international, suggesting that much of the current interest is from international candidates.

MS. SCHMITZ noted that only 12 of Alaska's 53 districts are participating in the upcoming fair due to uncertainty around school funding. Many superintendents and HR directors have said they do not yet know how many teachers they can hire because the funding outlook remains unclear. In response, AERRC plans to hold another job fair later in the year. However, she warned that a late job fair, held in June or July, limits access to quality candidates, as most out-of-state applicants will have already accepted contracts elsewhere. Although international candidates remain interested later in the year, she explained that the visa process takes two to six months, often leaving districts with unfilled positions at the start of the school year. She emphasized that timely and sustainable funding is critical for effective hiring and to avoid losing qualified applicants.

[9:40:56 AM](#)

MR. SCHMITZ moved to slide 66, Increasing Number of International Teacher Applications. She shared data on the use of H-1B and J-1 visas for international teacher hires in Alaska. In FY 2024, 20 districts employed teachers on H-1B visas, with 134 receiving initial visas and 63 receiving continuation visas. She noted that the J-1 visa data was from 2022 and showed 91 teachers sponsored by 8 districts at that time, though current numbers are likely higher. She emphasized that many districts report strong success with their international teachers. While the goal remains to fill all teaching positions with Alaska-grown educators, she acknowledged that this is not currently feasible. She stated that AHRQ is actively working to support districts in recruiting international teachers, ensuring they are not overcharged by outside agencies, and providing ongoing support beyond visa paperwork, including onboarding assistance, as part of their member service model.

[9:42:07 AM](#)

MR. SCHMITZ moved to slide 67, Supporting New to Alaska Teachers, and stated that districts hiring international teachers have noted a need for support in classroom management, specifically with positive and proactive strategies, due to varying approaches in different countries. In response, the Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN) developed a course last year focused on these strategies for new-to-Alaska teachers. Over 200 educators participated in the course, and it will be offered again this year with expectations of even higher participation.

MS. SCHMITZ stated that, like the legislature, AERRC is focused on solving problems and creating solutions. She expressed appreciation for the legislature's efforts and said she looks forward to partnering on initiatives that could meaningfully support school districts in recruitment and retention.

[9:42:57 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked Ms. Parady if she would like to make closing remarks.

[9:43:09 AM](#)

MS. PARADY thanked the committee for hearing from members and emphasized that over a decade of flat funding amounts to cuts, limiting districts' ability to serve students. She stated that the organization is committed to problem-solving and addressing Alaska's recruitment and retention crisis, part of a broader national education shortage. She affirmed the group's readiness to support policymakers with information and collaboration, and she expressed deep appreciation for the dedication of Alaska's educators.

[9:45:05 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN thanked the educators present and referenced the Urban Institute report and 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores, which showed significant learning loss across all states during the pandemic. She noted that Alaska's learning loss was less than that of most other states and commended educators for their excellent work in achieving that outcome.

[9:45:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked about the funding difference between the 0.9 rate for correspondence students and the 1.0 for neighborhood school students. She noted her understanding that the difference is based on system costs such as professional development, shared classes, and district-level support and not valuing one student over another. She requested clarification on the history and rationale behind the funding structure.

[9:46:28 AM](#)

MS. PARROTT responded that the 0.9 funding rate reflects the lower cost of providing correspondence programs. She acknowledged that inflation has impacted all educational programs, including correspondence. She cautioned that increasing the rate to 1.0 could result in comprehensive high schools receiving less funding per student than correspondence programs, despite higher operating costs. She emphasized the

importance of supporting both correspondence and brick-and-mortar schools equitably.

[9:48:47 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT stated that state mandates on classroom instruction reduce teachers' professional autonomy by dictating how classroom time is used. She referred to the WIN ("What I Need") program as effective, but noted some teachers are given strict schedules that limit time for subjects like science and creative instruction. She emphasized that this narrowing of instructional flexibility stems from policy-level decisions, not classroom teachers. She expressed appreciation for educators managing ongoing uncertainty, acknowledged that districts have already made deep cuts, and stressed that a well-rounded education is essential to student engagement and citizenship.

[9:51:02 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS expressed appreciation for the discussion and shared that he learns something new at each meeting. He stated that MS. Parady's comment, "education is not failing, it is starving," resonated with him and affirmed its truth.

[9:51:28 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID thanked participants and reflected on how deeply the testimony resonated with him. He noted that he is typically reluctant to call something a crisis, but based on what he heard, believes education in Alaska is in crisis. He used a sports analogy to emphasize that success comes from investment, not cuts, and urged continued collaboration to address the challenges facing students and schools.

[9:54:12 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY thanked educators for their daily work and acknowledged the important role of school board members, noting their alignment with educators in wanting well-rounded education and classroom-focused funding. She recognized the division that is created by parents desiring to keep different programs and the difficulty school leaders face, with competing priorities among parents and staff. She expressed appreciation for principals, superintendents, and business officials for maintaining focus amid challenges and affirmed the legislature's responsibility to work alongside them.

[9:55:45 AM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN thanked educators for their daily work and echoed support for school board members and school leaders. She agreed with previous comments from her co-chairs and the Senate

President, stating that rather than shrinking the pie, the goal should be to grow a bigger, better one so everyone benefits more.

9:56:29 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 9:56 p.m.