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Committee Report on the Statewide Teacher Shortage

House Special Committee on Education
Representative Con Bunde, Chair

Hearings Held October 22-24, 2001

in

Kodiak Island Borough School District
Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District
Anchorage School District
Statewide Teleconference
Northwest Arctic Borough School District

Introduction

The House Special Committee on Education held five meetings with education professionals about the ongoing teacher shortage in Alaska. The committee traveled to Kodiak, Mat-Su, Anchorage and Kotzebue. A statewide teleconference was also held.

The committee learned that the problem is greater than just a "teacher" shortage. There are shortages in all areas of the education profession. Superintendents, principals, school board members, union representatives, experienced and novice teachers and others contributed their views of the situation, for which the committee is grateful. These hearings will serve as a basis for further action during the next legislative session.

The following information is a list of the problems and proposed solutions provided to the committee. They are in no particular order, other than to characterize the type of problem or solution. The findings in this report reflect the testimony received. There may be additional problems or solutions that were not offered during these hearings.

Following these lists are statements provided to the committee by the superintendents of the four school districts visited prior to the hearings, and a sample of written testimony submitted after the hearings. All testimony that was received by the committee has been entered into the record and may be found at House Records.

The last section of this report -- "Additional Sources of Information" -- provides short descriptions and website addresses of organizations that offer further information about issues related to teacher recruitment and retention.

Some of proposed solutions to the shortage of education professionals will require money. Some will require creativity of thought and administrative flexibility. Some of these ideas are practical and would serve all districts well, while some are best executed by local districts as they see fit.

There will be continued legislative discussion on this important topic. Our children deserve the best teachers available. However, Alaska will not solve this problem in one year. We may not completely solve it in five years. This is a problem that "needs not one arrow, but a quiver full of arrows" as one testifier put it. Complex problems require complex solutions.

Audio recordings of all five hearings are available on the Legislature's teleconference website. To access these recordings, please go to <http://mp-nt.legis.state.ak.us> and click on "Public Meetings", and then "Past Meetings". Input the date range of October 22-24, 2001. Then choose the "HEDU" meeting in which you are interested. Scroll all the way down and click on "Meeting Recording". Audio cassette tapes of each meeting are also available from House Records. They may be reached at 907-465- 2214.

If you have any questions about these hearings or their findings, please contact me at 907-465-4843 or at representative_con_bunde@legis.state.ak.us.

Representative Con Bunde, Chair
House Special Committee on Education
November 1, 2001

Problems and Proposed Solutions

Shortage Areas:

- A. Administration
 - 1. principals
 - 2. superintendents
- B. Classroom Teachers at all grade levels
- C. Specialty Areas
 - 1. reading
 - 2. math
 - 3. science
 - 4. special education
 - 5. music
 - 6. foreign language
 - 7. occupational and physical therapy
 - 8. speech-language pathology
 - 9. nurses
 - 10. counselors
 - 11. technical teachers
 - 12. certified substitute teachers
 - 13. student teachers

Problems Contributing to the Teacher Shortage:

- A. New Teachers' Problems
 - 1. placed in difficult schools and classrooms
 - 2. high pupil-teacher ratios
 - 3. lack of mentoring/administrative guidance
 - 4. teacher preparation inadequate to the real world of teaching
 - 5. lack of professional development opportunities
 - 6. cost of moving to Alaska can reach \$2,500
 - 7. lack/cost of housing, utilities
 - 8. high cost of coming to job fairs in Alaska
 - 9. Praxis test too difficult or redundant
- B. Certification
 - 1. costly and time consuming
 - 2. time consuming to take Alaska History and Alaskan culture classes
 - 3. teachers who have passed the National Teachers' Exam still have to take the Praxis -- no reciprocity
 - 4. The Praxis exam is too difficult for some qualified teachers to pass
 - 5. background checks are the same for military retirees who had security clearances
 - 6. Multiple certifications: a fee for each specialty area (math, special education, administration, etc.)
 - 7. cost of continuing training to keep certifications
 - 8. can't get Alaska student loans for programs requiring certification, only for those leading to degrees.

C. Rural Schools

1. isolation
2. lack of community support
3. housing availability/cost
4. lack of opportunity to get out for a break
5. lack of paid inservice opportunities for new teachers -- professional and cultural
6. lack of experience living in a small town, lack of preparation for a new culture

D. General

1. schools without sufficient resources -- textbooks, supplies, copy machines, etc.
2. condition of school buildings (size, disrepair)
3. less well-prepared students (reading levels, attention spans, support from home, etc.)
4. increasing pressure from parents and school administration to lower standards, water down curriculum to appeal to the lowest common denominator
5. discipline issues
6. salary not competitive with Lower 48
7. many districts give little salary credit for previous teaching experience
8. overcrowded classrooms
9. mainstreamed students
10. stressful conditions
11. lack of ability to affect school and/or district policy
12. lack of societal respect for the profession
13. lowering the pupil teacher ratio requirements increases need to hire more teachers
14. special education teachers burn out due to long hours in meetings, preparing IEP's, federal paperwork requirements
15. enrollment exceeds predictions, requiring last minute hiring
16. competition with private sector
17. increasing health insurance costs are eating up Foundation Formula increases

Solutions Proposed:

A. Financial Incentives:

1. increase wages
2. reimburse moving expenses
3. loan forgiveness
4. provide funding for teaching materials
5. improve health and retirement benefits
6. address the fiscal gap
7. abolish waiting period to qualify for PFD
8. Milken agenda for merit pay
9. forward fund education
10. provide grants or scholarships for education professionals who must go out of state for training
11. allow teachers to vest in retirement program earlier
12. require the same amount of time to vest in both PRS and TRS
13. return to Tier One for all those in TRS and PRS
14. provide AHFC home loans to teachers
15. provide stipends for coaching and other extra-curricular work
16. merit pay
17. education endowment

B. Teacher Support:

1. mentoring programs (Mat-Su experienced 100% retention for mentored new teachers as opposed to 90% retention for non-mentored new teachers over the past five years.)
2. use retired teachers as mentors, teacher aides, student counselors
3. provide increased administrative support for new teachers
4. provide less stressful assignments to new teachers
5. provide teacher aides to assist with clerical duties
6. improve teacher preparation and professional development opportunities
7. provide breaks to teachers to go to urban areas from rural areas to overcome isolation
8. keep standards high for both teachers and students
9. share software among districts for special education students' IEPs
10. mandate statewide maximum number of students per class

C. Organizational Changes:

1. distance learning could work with satellite feeds -- UAS is working on that with the Kodiak Island Borough School District
2. improve infrastructure
3. institute earlier hiring dates to recruit people from the Lower 48
4. streamline and expedite the certification process
5. support the National Teacher Certification process
6. create a lifetime teaching certificate to encourage retiring or retired teachers to come back into the profession at whatever level is comfortable for them
7. provide principals the ability to hire teachers directly and latitude to offer financial incentives
8. create and expand job training programs, like Mat-Su's Pathways program, which incorporate internships for jobs such as teachers, law enforcement, nursing, etc.
9. hire college juniors and seniors to be interns in schools to establish student-district relationships
10. continue certifying teachers through non-traditional routes
11. contract with local professionals to provide services
12. state take-over of recruiting for all districts
13. unconditional reciprocity for hard to fill specialist applicants
14. allow RIF'd teachers to come back without penalty
15. make changes to allow more efficient hiring of Canadian teachers (INS)

D. University and Student Loan Assistance

1. create programs to train physical and occupational therapists, teachers of the severely disabled, etc.
2. train more nurses
3. work as a team with districts to fill needs
4. recruit outstanding high school students from out of state to programs with greatest shortage
5. recruit more heavily for the MAT program
6. be more responsive to the needs of teacher aides who would like to get a teaching degree
7. remove financial aid barriers to certificate programs
8. provide incentives to teachers to get their principal certificates -- lower interest loans, grants, etc.

E. Other:

1. increase society's respect for the profession
2. increase community involvement in schools

Solutions Rejected:

A. Merit Pay

1. hasn't seen it work anywhere in the country
2. how to evaluate teachers who work with students of different ability levels (special education students)
3. better to reward districts that are doing a good job
4. needs to be standardization of pay throughout the state

Current Helpful Incentives:

- A. PFD
- B. no statewide taxes
- C. beauty of Alaska
- D. small town lifestyle - safe neighborhoods, goodness of people, etc.
- E. good professional development opportunities
- F. good services for special education students
- G. collaboration/team teaching
- H. ACES (AK Center for Excellence in Schools) would like to assist pre-service and in-service teachers

School Districts' Written Comments on the Teacher Shortage

Kodiak Island Borough:

There are any number of concerns that educators might realize as they consider employment in the state of Alaska. Those that have come to my attention are included in the list below although some may fit many other school districts across the state of Alaska. Hopefully, this list will allow legislators an opportunity to be somewhat prepared for what they may hear on Kodiak Island.

Cost of certification. Dual/triple charges are assessed of applicants if requesting more than one certificate type - Type A (teachers)/B (administrators)/C (specialists) are the common certificates sought although several others exist.

Salary as compared to home area. Salaries have been on the rise for several years in the lower 48. While educators often left family and friends for a better life style, they can now remain in comfortable surroundings, support systems, and often a lower cost of living.

Travel to and costs associated with job fairs both in the state and outside. Often people attending Job Fairs have been attending school full time and do not have the finances to travel to locations around the US and Alaska. Additionally, student teachers and teachers do not have the opportunity to travel beyond their teaching location for several days at a time.

Cost of living in rural and remote areas. Expenses associated with getting food and other necessities into remote areas impacts a new teacher's finances.

Giving up family and friends in home area. Home cooked meals, babysitters, family celebrations, etc. are often missed with distance between teachers and their immediate and extended families.

Housing facilities for staff in remote or extremely remote areas. Educators often give up the amenities to which they are accustomed. Flush toilets, hot showers, bath tubs for young children, washers and dryers, fenced yards for toddlers, running water, insulated walls, roofs, floors, household furnishings are often non-existent.

Cost of utilities in rural and remote locations. Fuel and electricity when available are very costly particularly in rural and more remote areas. Insulation is not always adequate making the matter worse. Floor covering is not always available, adding to the cost of heating the home.

Jumping through the hoops as an applicant for the State, District, and the Alaska Teacher Placement Center. Districts have varied applications, the certification requirements and costs often pose problems when directions are not followed explicitly, expectations of different school districts often confuse applicants who are running from one interview to another,

No mentors exist, particularly in one/two teacher schools. Teachers, even those with the greatest education and experience, are "new" to the state, the school district, the grade level. A guide would be helpful for each new staff member but the cost is astronomical. Self-appointed staff often spend incredible amounts of time volunteering to assist new staff get settled in the school site and community.

Cost of moving from one area to another (state to state, in the state). New hires have expenses associated with relocating to a place that they have not lived or even visited. Apartments and homes are not easily found, are not necessarily energy efficient, and are costly even in comparison to more populated areas of Alaska.

Kodiak Island Borough, continued:

Cost of finding housing locally. Expectations for first month, last month and security deposit are not uncommon. Often the meager places to rent want a full year lease (12 months) while many new teachers want to study, travel and/or visit family during the short time between school years.

All staff in small sites could be "new" teachers or new to the District. "New" is not necessarily brand new and often educators bring with them certain ideals, expectations of students and community and are disappointed that the dream is shattered when the picture of Alaska is more than a "new frontier."

Numerous interviews with many districts make a blur."Who said what?" Teachers, specialists and administrators are often anxious, tired and frustrated at Job Fairs as it is a hectic, fast-paced time. More people may be talking to perspective educators as the numbers dwindle. This adds to the confusion of some applicants who want to search for the best opportunities for themselves and their families.

Being accepted in a small (or larger) community. Kodiak Island may be a very different place than a teacher has experienced. While people are friendly and caring, they have also seen teachers move in and out, often not becoming a part of the local community or worse - comparing Kodiak Island or a particular school to their last position or place called home. Families are often concerned that the teacher may not be as good, as understanding, as interested in the children, etc. making transition into a community more difficult.

Student loan forgiveness. Often teachers have expenses for their education which might be paid off in part or fully if they stay in the state where they received their education. Students from Alaska also have those bills unless they received a specific Student Scholarship Loan and are then hired at a rural site that qualifies for the eventual forgiveness. Many teachers with Alaska scholarship loans voice concern that they get mixed information on the forgiveness and apparently must jump through many hoops including paying off the loan before eventually retrieving the benefit of reimbursement.

Time for length of interviews and reference checks. Often applicants become annoyed or frustrated with interview process on Kodiak Island. We do nothing in haste. Children deserve to have the best teachers we can find and parents should expect no less.

Lack of second language teachers within diverse populations. In an area such as Kodiak where 16 languages other than English are spoken, it is imperative to search for role models for students. While it is possible to find speakers of Spanish, it is next to impossible to find certificated teachers who speak Tagalog or other languages spoken in the Philippines, Russian, Japanese and other world languages.

Honesty of interviewers when describing the District, site, home, activities available. Persons interested in Kodiak Island want to know more about the place they will teach and live, what is available for teachers and their families, what the housing is like, etc. It is important to paint a true picture and not to entice a new person with adventure, activities, and the like that may not occur particularly as compared to what they may have grown accustomed.

Lack of special services endorsements special education, speech/language pathologist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, bilingual, gifted. Hard to fill positions cause a critical concern when the Federal law mandates that certain services must be provided for students with special needs. The District must do all in its power to hire individuals with the credentials required and if that is impossible to hire expert consultants to travel from larger cities in Alaska or the lower forty-eight. Finding these professionals is second only to paying the charges that are expected by each one.

Kodiak Island Borough, continued:

Attitude and behavior of interviewers, lack of attention to the applicant. Often we hear that applicants are not treated kindly, or are rushed, herded and the like at Job Fairs. Kodiak Island does not make hasty decisions often causing applicants to take a position from another District to ensure that a contract is in hand by the end of the first or second day of Job Fair.

Contracts in hand of some districts, letters of intent. Often other school districts can offer contracts immediately at a Job Fair. Some districts actually have a Board meeting scheduled during the April Job Fair so that the contract can be processed swiftly. Many districts are using letters of intent to ensure applicants that they are serious about the potential hire. Kodiak Island is concerned about reference checks and further discussion about the school and community before rushing a decision. "I must know by 3 p.m." is NOT something that Kodiak will say. We want people to make informed decisions.

Time necessary for informed decisions by applicants. Pressure is always on at Job Fair and often applicants are persuaded by school districts to make a hasty decision. In not doing that, Kodiak Island often loses a very talented applicant to another district. KIBSD prefers to give applicants time to make a decision that best meets the needs of the individual.

Changes of mind on "Yes, I would love to go to" Applicants jump to say yes to a position but upon further thought decide not to accept a contract putting districts right back where they started. An outstanding applicant is difficult to release from a contract but the alternative is an unhappy employee for one school year.

Temporary housing upon arrival. It is difficult to find inexpensive housing at anytime in Alaska, on Kodiak Island and elsewhere. The arrival of teachers during the peak of fishing season and tourist season make it next to impossible for newcomers to find temporary places to stay while searching for a permanent apartment or house. Staff assist with lists of places, a few days at the home of a current employee, and the like.

Meet and greet at airport, ferry terminal. One way to assist in the transition is to meet families when they arrive in Kodiak.

Material available before deciding - Chamber info, newspapers, flyers (Safeway, etc.). Districts need to ensure that new hires have necessary information to allow for informed decisions made before teachers decide that a district is where they want to work and live.

Money up front to help settle in (utilities, month, month after, deposit). New teachers are not prepared for the costs associated with hooking up to electricity, sewer, water, garbage, telephone, TV, e-mail, etc. Additionally the cost of the regular monthly charges may be much higher than in their previous home area.

Buddy upon arrival - "get settled" tours/dinners. Often teachers informally assist the newcomers by inviting teachers and families to have a meal, ride around housing areas, learn where shops, doctors, and other attractions are found.

Activities/buddies for spouses, partners, children. New hires often must begin school soon after arrival on the island and have concern for the acclimation of their families. Spouses/partners may need to secure employment, children need to be registered for school, and housing needs to be secured.

Kodiak Island Borough, continued:

Classroom mate (grade level/content area). A person with experience can be effective working closely with a new teacher and assisting with classroom organization, lesson planning, curriculum/standards implementation, and classroom assessment.

What to expect in your school, classroom, in a small, or larger community. Newcomers are not always prepared for the placement they receive. It may be a new grade level, a different environment, weather changes, isolation and the like. In servicing of newcomers and having mentors at the site, if possible, would be a tremendous help.

Telephone distance charges for phone and e-mail. The cost of communication to relatives is often an unexpected expense when new teachers arrive. It is important for teachers to continue those contacts until settled with new friends and neighbors as well it is important to allow families to know about the new adventure.

Advising other Districts of outstanding candidates interviewed but not needed. District administrators around the state can help each other by sharing information on perspective applicants who they cannot place.

Connecting prospective employees w/ATP. As people contact school districts it is important to put them in touch with Alaskan Teacher Placement Center where they can receive information on all districts and areas of Alaska.

Not sticking another district with someone a district never wanted. Teachers who have not been successful in a district should not receive outstanding recommendations from that same district.

No money for normal living expenses until first payday. New teachers have costs associate with the trip to Alaska for interviews, the expense of a family move, certification costs, etc. compounded by a lack of funds necessary for renting a place to live. To add to this situation, the first payday may be two weeks or more beyond the new person officially reporting for duty.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this concern of school districts around the state of Alaska.

Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District:

In the Mat-Su Borough School District, we are experiencing critical shortages in qualified teaching staff, specialists, and school-level administrators. Specifically, our district faces difficulties in hiring and retaining Special Education teachers, instructors of math and science, and critical support personnel such as counselors, nurses, school psychologists, and hearing and language specialists. In addition, the district faces challenges in the recruitment of principals.

Large-scale recruitment efforts, especially in the area of special education, have yielded some results. However, our ability to recruit is overshadowed by the teacher shortage being experienced on a national level. One of our area's greatest challenges is our inability to compete with higher salaries and greater benefits being afforded by districts in the Lower-48. The State of Alaska no longer holds the attraction of higher salaries and greater benefits.

Special Education:

Throughout the past three years, the Mat-Su Borough School District has experienced a critical shortage in teachers with special education endorsements.

- In 1999, we hired approximately 25 special education teachers, and were required to grant waivers to four additional teachers.
- In 2000, we hired approximately 38 new special education teachers, and were required to grant waivers to two additional teachers. Further, we involuntarily transferred six teachers from regular education to special education.
- In 2001, we hired approximately 35 new special education teachers, and involuntarily transferred four teachers from regular education to special education.

Math & Science:

In regular education we have noticed that the pool of quality applicants is shrinking in areas such as math and science.

Student Support Services:

The district has struggled to fill critical support positions throughout the past four years. In fact, during the 2000-01 school year, some of the following positions were left vacant as a result of the shortage:

- school psychologists
- counselors
- occupational therapists
- speech therapists
- physical therapists,
- school nurses

**Anchorage School District
Resolution on Teacher Recruitment and Retention:**

The Anchorage School District urges the Alaska Legislature to develop strategies to attract and retain education professionals.

Rationale:

- Alaska's colleges and universities supply about 30% of our state's annual demand for new teachers.
- More than two-thirds of new teachers come from out-of-state.
- A national shortage of teachers and administrators forces Alaska to compete with other states for an ever-shrinking pool of applicants.
- Other states are offering teachers signing bonuses, down payment on homes, mortgage subsidies, and student loan repayment plans.
- As a result, Alaska needs to consider strategies for attracting and retaining qualified educators.

These strategies might include:

ASD Resolution #183	Aligning vesting in the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) with vesting in the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS). Currently, it takes 8 years to vest in TRS, but only 5 years to vest in PERS.
ASD Resolution #183	Providing student loan forgiveness to offset high needs areas such as special education and related services
ASD Resolution #183	Providing housing subsidies for teachers in both rural and urban areas.

Northwest Arctic Borough School District:

More money for:

- Adequate teacher housing
- Competitive Salaries
- Benefits
- Staff Development
- Incentives
- Public safety, VPSO & Troopers

Other:

- Allow RIP'ed personnel to return without a penalty
- Retirement – Return to Tier I
- Invest in teacher preparation programs
- Upgrade the University of Alaska programs
- Forgiveness on student loans
- More scholarship \$\$'s for teacher candidates
- INS – Expediting procedures to hire Canadian applicants
- Allowing personnel to file unemployment claims when they leave to work in another state

Samples of Written Testimony

(The full record of written testimony received by the Committee is in the possession of House Records)

Dear Representative Bunde:

I read with interest today's article stating that you are heading the House Special Committee on Education. Work requirements prevent me from any possibility of airing my comments in person, but I am hoping that you will consider e-mail a viable alternative.

I am a teacher, by all accounts a pretty good one. I have been teaching at the commercial, college, and junior college levels for over five years. Unfortunately Alaska makes it impossible for me to teach at the high school level, where I often think I would enjoy serving, due to its strict certification requirements. I cannot teach in the public school system, in spite of a Masters' degree and years of successful experience, because I have not taken teaching courses at UAA, which is the only certification path in the state. As a teacher and the only breadwinner in my family (my wife is disabled) I cannot take the time to take such courses either. Add to the fiscal difficulties the fact that I've gone over the topics and discussed the courses at UAA with a fellow teacher and really do not hold any respect for what they teach, and I'm really not interested in following the path to certification.

It is my hope that you will consider a path taken by several other states, including Colorado and Pennsylvania, of adopting alternative credentialing mechanisms. In Colorado, for example, a Masters' degree serves as a teaching credential at the high school level (which, certainly, is not a guarantee of a teaching job; it merely gives the principal a bit more hiring freedom in that he or she can consider people with appropriate skills learned elsewhere). In Pennsylvania the requirements are a bit stricter, but it is still possible for a career instructor like myself to work at a high school in a teaching mode.

Thank you for your consideration,

Stephen King

Dear Representative Bunde,

In the Oct. 22 issue of the Anchorage paper there is an article concerning the teacher shortage in Alaska. The NEA representative is quoted as stating that the shortage is due to Pay inequities. I don't concur with that assessment. My Job is trying to find veterans jobs upon separation from service. I get 20 to 30 inquiries a month about the Alaska Troops to Teachers program as presented by the President as a portion of the solution to solving shortages around the country. Unfortunately, I have to refer people to other states, because Alaska has no program and is dragging it's feet to get one started. The problem isn't funding, it is the NEA's opposition to the Troops to Teachers initiative. The Majority of the program is Federally funded and would solve many problems in the State. Why is the NEA holding up progress? I have written to the Governor's people in Fairbanks since March, (the initiative is centered in the Governor's Fairbanks office. Everytime a meeting is scheduled it is canceled and I am still sending my soldiers and airmen out of state. Perhaps if this program were initiated, we could solve the shortage without going broke to pay teachers higher salaries. I for one would love to tell my clients that they could get on board and teach here in Alaska.

Al Griswold

Dear Mr. Bunde,

I would like to introduce myself to you and state that I used to be an Alaskan! My children were born in the state. I co-arranged the Alaska Flag Song arrangement for the children of Alaska used and performed for Concert Band in schools. My school performances were grand. Ask Bob King.. he should remember hearing my band perform at graduation. his comment was.. "it has been and can be accomplished."

I have a story that is revelant to your cause of trying to improve education. You see....I am no longer an Alaskan by choice. I am a laid off employee as a Music Teacher. The cause is due to the economic condition of rural Alaska. My family lost their home...and my children lost their state! You see, I was at the top of my career when I moved to Alaska in 1989 and after putting in 12 years of service to the people of Alaska I have lost nearly everything that I have, except my family. God only knows what my family has been put through because I am a teacher.

I had a wonderful music program in Alaska and through the years I have seen Administrator after adminstrator along with the local board of education and state legislature widdle the Alaskan education system down. I saw the local school board and administration along with the community and state legislature bash the education system and its employees continuously with disrespectful tactics especially during negotiation time. I have fought the battles and have done my home work. I have done what a teacher is supposed to do. Stay and work with the kids. I have seen Kindergartners go through the educational and graduate. To me that is experience. Yet my experience and work has been tossed away due to money. No money at the local level.

You see, after Bristol Bay, I got what I consider to be the top job in the State at Colony High School. I was at Will Rogers International Airport when I got the call from the Colony High School Principals who offered me the position. I accepted and moved my family back to Alaska. After we got back to Alaska I was told by the personnel director at MAT-SU that I had no job with the School District and the principals at Colony High School were no longer the principals. Needless to say, I and my family were crushed. We had been forced out of our home in rural Alaska had moved to Oklahoma moved back to Alaska, set up home again all in the matter of one month. And then had to move back to Oklahoma. All of this at my own expense!

I was informed that a principal doesn't have the authority to hire in Alaska. But yet, I was told I had a job by principals. There is one problem and issue. Well, that is my story.

I am broke, crushed as a teacher but stronger as a person and a parent. I have seen the great state of Alaska bash its teachers and I have seen its own employees turn on one another. I have seen the government take away critical funding that would have supported education. I have lost much respect that I once had for a the State I once called my home. I have worked on countless educational committees for my school. I have represented my colleagues in my educational associations. I am my family have lost but maybe others can gain from what has happen to me and my family when I once was a teacher in Alaska! The problems of education in Alaska are many. Include the unions, the local school boards, the adminstration, the state legislature, and even the local governments.

You want stories? How about the adminstrator who can be a Superintendent and work out of his home from California? How about the local board of educiation who do nothing but tear down the local educational institution as well as bash the state system. How about the adminstration that does the same! How about the State system that bashes the local system! How about all of this! It is a fine mess!

Money can help much of the problems. You start by keeping good employees. A healthy attitude is more likely to bring about success in the classroom. If you would like specifics I can provide you with many. Start with the average length that a principal stays in rural Alaska? The only people who run for school board are those who have personal agendas against the system. You have huge problems in rurual and urban Alaska!

Sincerely yours,
Donald Stambeck

I read with interest Monday's ADN article regarding teacher shortage. Everything I read is valid from my perspective.

I hold graduate degrees in Education and Library Science and I am in the process of applying for Alaskan certification. I have held certifications from other states.

The application procedure is excessively bureaucratic, redundant, costly, and slow. For starters, the application packet indicates the official transcripts must have some colored ink on the page (as verification that the transcript is REAL). How can an applicant be responsible for an institution's transcript format?

Then, Section VII, Institutional Recommendation, asks the degree-granting institution to state whether their standards are NCATE accredited or not. This form must be sent out by the applicant and then the applicant must forward the completed form to Juneau. This is not the applicant's responsibility. This has nothing directly to do with applicant! Certainly there must be a master list available to the certification people in Juneau.

Fingerprinting is required as part of the application process and is costly. Not all states require this, and at least one state, reimburses new hires for this expense. This is certainly a deterrent in the application process. (I was recently notified by another state that I met all the state's qualifications and that I NOW needed to be fingerprinted before I was sent my certification paper.) There ARE states that do not require fingerprinting. In fact, there are states which have been challenged regarding the constitutionality of fingerprinting teachers.

The application fee is excessive, \$165. (The most I have ever paid previously is \$50.)

The certification process takes approximately 3-6 months. Applicants are urged to keep duplicate copies of everything; send documents certified mail; and call Juneau often to follow up. (I was recently certified in another state and the entire process took two months.)

The PRAXIS is required in less than 50% of the U.S. (Alaska does not reimburse hires for this, either.) It is costly, also, costing as much as \$200.

Alaska has no certification reciprocity.

The University of Alaska Education Department is not conducive to providing courses for those who may lack one or two courses. (In order to become certified in Special Education, one must apply to the Special Education Program, even if it is just to take a course or two. This certainly discourages teachers from advancing themselves. The number of education courses offered by UAA is low. Just look at institutions of comparable size.

One must have a pre-qualification interview. Does this mean a trip to Alaska? If so, at who's expense?

I recall applying to teach for the Peace Corps. Their application process was a lot less complicated, they had no shortage of personnel and look at their pay scale! I made \$300 per month! And talk about remote! I went to Central African Republic, lived in a mud hut with dirt floor, no electricity, no running water, and only a moped for transportation. Conclusion: MONEY ISN'T THE ONLY ISSUE, HERE!

These are the issues that face applicants in addition to the substandard salary scale. Along with the issues of competitive salary, I encourage the NEA and state legislators to compare certification and hiring procedures, as well.

Georgia S. Randall
Anchorage, Alaska

Mr. Bunde,

I have been a high school mathematics teacher in Alaska for 20 years. During that time I have been awarded a Presidential Award, Milken Family Foundation Award, Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, and I am currently the only Young Adult/Adolescence Mathematics National Board Certified teacher in the state.

I have personally worked on Alaska State content and performance standards for the last 10 years. I have a lot of my time invested in improving the quality of instruction in this state and I would like you to candidly know what I am feeling as of late.

I mention this to try to let you know of my dedication to teaching in this state and my 'connections' with the rest of the country.

Through these organizations I am part of a professional network of excellent educators. When teaching jobs open up in our state I cannot convince anyone (outside) to apply ! This wasn't the case just 10 or 12 years ago.

When its all said and done - its the money that is making it difficult to attract (quality) teachers (ESPECIALLY in math or science).

I know that when I decide to leave the state, I will be able to make a much better income in most areas of the country. With my credentials I qualify to supplement any teaching income (many of which are equal or better than ours) with supervisory positions in math or science. Those opportunities do not exist in our state which is why our teachers need to be well compensated for their efforts. It is becoming financially difficult for me to remain a teacher in Alaska - my skills are worth more elsewhere.

If I am feeling this way ('forced to leave') that should indicate how others feel about coming to teach in Alaska.

I appreciate this opportunity to 'vent' a bit - but these concerns have been building in the last few years.

Sincerely,
Dick Sander

Dear Representative Bunde:

I am writing to you to express my thoughts and observations concerning the teacher shortage. I had planned to testify via telephone during the hearings, but was unable to arrange to do so.

I am currently Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and Student Services for the Lower Kuskokwim School District. I have been a teacher and administrator in LKSD for 22 years. For the last 11 years I have been responsible for hiring teachers and administrators for our district.

I believe that the best way to address the teacher shortage is to decrease teacher turnover. I have worked hard to do this over the past 11 years.

In spite of harsh living conditions, LKSD has had the lowest turnover of "bush" districts. We have been very proud of our stability and low turn over rates because we recognize that stability of a school staff has a strong correlation with higher student performance.

Having a stable teaching staff is even more critical now because we are making major changes in the way we teach so we can better address the new performance standards. Along with these changes comes an increase in the need for training to teachers. Unfortunately, when teachers leave our district, they take their training with them.

Teaching in rural Alaska is very different from teaching in other places. It usually takes even an experienced teacher one to two years to maximize their effectiveness in our schools.

Of our current Staff:

-1/3 were hired by LKSD this year or last year.

-2/3 have been in the district for 5 or less years.

Over the past decade we have taken the following steps to reduce turnover:

- Made a strong effort to hire local and Alaska residents
- Supported local people in their efforts to become certified teachers
- Provided abundant staff development opportunities for teachers
- Made a strong effort to be careful about who we hire
- Have been honest and ethical in recruiting teachers

Through the first half of the 90s our turnover was around 11% per year, but in spite of our efforts it has risen to above 20% for the past three years. Prior to 1998 we did not travel out of state to recruit. Now we find it necessary to do so.

When recruiting we find it difficult to compete with Districts from the lower 48. I remember three years ago, when I offered a job to an ESL teacher from Texas, and was told, I would like to come to your district, but I can not take that much of a cut in pay. This past recruiting season, I heard this same response over and over again. When you also factor in that the majority of our teacher housing units do not have plumbing, it is hard to entice teachers to come here.

Other states are responding to this crisis by offering higher salaries, bonuses and incentives. School districts in Alaska do not have the means to do this, placing us at a tremendous disadvantage in both recruitment and retention.

Why do we lose so many teachers?

The main reason is substandard housing and low salaries.

What could the legislature do to make a difference?

Support programs that result in "home grown" teachers, and allocate more funding so that we can offer competitive salaries and provide adequate teacher housing.

Sincerely,

Gary Baldwin, Assistant Superintendent of Personnel and Student Services
Lower Kuskokwim School District

Dear Mr. Bunde,

I am responding to your call for ways to help and improve the educational system in the State of Alaska. I attended the Educational Summit in October 2000 and these same questions came up. Every school district was represented at this gathering, and the final quest for the group was to come up with a list of needs in education in this state.

To summarize what many of the teachers said in a few statements, here is a short list.

- The length of the school day and the school year need to be changed; with the testing, three to six days of instruction are removed from the 180 days of student contact for benchmarks, CAT6 and HSGQE; the state should be compensating districts so that the school year can be lengthened to accommodate this mandate.
- Teacher housing needs in the rural districts need to be brought up to standards; the state should consider construction of modular units to house teachers and the district could rent them out to teachers or treat them as a benefit of living in the community
- Schools need to be repaired and brought up to standards; this is a long-term capital project, but it needs to happen; even in the Anchorage schools there are very bad teaching conditions - rooms that get up to 90 degrees without windows and proper lighting and ventilation (Clark Middle School) plague several of the older schools due to lack of space for classrooms.
- Professional development is needed to both build and develop a teacher's content areas and to help each district align the curriculum with the state standards
- There is a need to use more types of assessment within the curriculum to evaluate student growth; standardized testing only gets a snapshot of growth, and if a student is not in a good mood, then they will do poorly; teachers also need to learn how to use the test data from the benchmarks; courses offered by NWREL on Data Driven Decision Making would be very useful for district and school site use
- Quality teachers need to be found and programs designed to recruit and build up the number of teachers in Alaska are critical. Teacher Salaries are very low; urban districts like Fairbanks, Mat-Su and Anchorage no longer pay teachers for the experience they bring from other locations.

As a teacher looking to come back into the classroom from a six year absence, I find it troubling that I will have to take a \$20,000 pay cut since 1994 because the Anchorage District no longer pays for experience. I will have to come back as a beginning teacher. I am a Mathematics teacher with over 10 years of experience, have maintained my teaching certificate, and remained connected to what is happening in education. I see this pay scale very discriminating, against women in particular, as women are the ones who usually take leave because of children. Teachers become better if they are able to take time off from the classroom, either to work in a different field or work on to advance their educational training. Teaching is one of the most difficult jobs there is and teachers need to be well compensated for their labor of love to children.

Even though you think salaries are not the only issues, it is one of the main reasons people leave the public sector for the private one. I encourage you to talk to Lt. Gov. Ulmer, Bruce Johnson or Harry Gamble and get the notes from the Educational Summit. Then compare the notes from the teachers to what the other community members are telling you. I think you will find a high correlation.

Thank you for your time in reading this. I hope I am not too late to have my thoughts added during this state-wide input.

Sincerely,
Helen E. Desinger

Dear Representative Bunde,

Recently hearings were held around the state in reference to the shortage of qualified teachers. As residents of Copper Center we were not informed that these hearings would be held, so I hope you won't mind one more piece of input regarding the teaching certification process.

This past May my girlfriend and I secured jobs with the Copper River School District. Georgia is a first grade teacher in Glennallen and I am a school counselor in Copper Center and Kenny Lake. Georgia has 12 years experience as a special educator and regular educator in Kansas, Kuwait, Oman, United Nations International School in NYC and now Alaska. She holds special education and regular education teaching certificates in both Kansas and Texas (emergency certificate in Alaska) with a Master's Degree in Special Education. For myself, I have taught for the past 10 years social studies, or I've been a school counselor in Wyoming, Czech Republic, Greece, Oman, the University of Wyoming, and now Alaska. I hold a Master's Degree in counseling and a teaching certificate in Wyoming and a type C certificate in Alaska. I mention these credentials because as a former professor and someone involved in education, I know you value people with worldly experience. In Alaska, we both love our jobs and have enjoyed Alaska, however, due to Alaska's certification process we will both be forced to leave at the end of the year.

In my opinion Alaska has the most ridiculous certification process I've ever encountered. The bureaucracy is mind-boggling. However, to get to the point the biggest hassle is the Praxis Exam. As a type C certificate holder I am not required to take this exam, however Georgia indeed has to pass this exam in order to be certified. The problem for her lies in the fact that she has a diagnosed disability in Mathematics. Even with extra time (which the Praxis people have denied her) she probably won't pass the test. However, since she can't process numbers in a timed situation there is no way she will pass this test. This will force both of us to leave at the end of the year. We are not too worried about locating jobs in the lower 48, or internationally, as we both have sought after degrees and experience, however we feel for the kids we currently work with. At Copper Center I work with mostly Athabascan children and continuity is something very important for them to succeed. I guess at the end of the day we ask ourselves, "Is it really worth the hassle and the fight just to stay in Alaska?" You can answer that question.

We are not the only people facing Praxis problems. We know of other people who are similarly qualified, yet can't pass the Math section of the exam (and they don't have a disability). Do we really need to require our first grade teachers to know geometry, algebra, and square roots? Have you taken this exam? Perhaps all the state legislator's should be required to pass an exam before they can serve the "great" state of Alaska. Georgia is a wonderful teacher. She has persevered and risen as a master teacher despite her disability. I guess if you could do one thing for us it would be to get rid of the Praxis as a requirement for teacher hire, or at least allow a panel to issue special certificates for those with experience.

Sincerely

Jeff Lansing

Additional Sources of Information

The Education Commission of the States - ECS provides a wealth of information regarding Teacher Recruitment and Retention. It can be found under the Issue of Teaching Quality. There are also a number of Sub-Issues that provide interesting information.
(<http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/issues.asp>)

Praxis and Alaska Teacher Certification Information:

<http://www.teachingandlearning.org/licnsure/praxis/>
<http://www.teachingandlearning.org/licnsure/praxis/prxak.html>.

Tests at a Glance:

Reading: <ftp://ftp.ets.org/pub/tandl/0710.pdf>
Math: <http://www.teachingandlearning.org/licnsure/praxis/prxtest.html#ppst>
Writing: <ftp://ftp.ets.org/pub/tandl/0720.pdf>

<http://www.educ.state.ak.us/TeacherCertification/home.html>.
<http://www.eed.state.ak.us/qschools/teacherstandards.pdf>.

"Retaining the Next Generation of Teachers: The Importance of School-Based Support", Harvard Education Letter, *Research Online*, Harvard Graduate School of Education.
(<http://www.edletter.org/past/issues/2001-ja/support.shtml>)

Other General Research Web Sites:

National Education Association (NEA) - The Web site of NEA, America's largest teacher organization, offers information on a multitude of education issues. (www.nea.org)

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) - AFT is a professional union representing one million teachers, school support staff, higher education faculty and staff, health care professionals, and state and municipal employees. Featured links on this Web site include publications and press releases, AFT on the Issues and the teacher quality main page. (www.aft.org)

Center for Educational Renewal - The Center for Educational Renewal (CER) was founded in 1985 to advance the simultaneous renewal of P-12 schools and the education of educators within the larger context of education in a democracy. On this Web site, co-sponsored with the Institute for Educational Inquiry and the National Network for Educational Renewal, organization initiatives, programs and publications are presented on how a school and teaching renewal agenda can be implemented. (<http://depts.washington.edu/cedren/CER.htm>)

Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP) - Founded in 1997, CTP is a consortium of five universities which has been created to investigate the relation between excellent teaching and policymaking at national, state and local levels. CTP's mission is to investigate the relation between excellent teaching and policymaking.
(<http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/>)

Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) - CPRE, a consortium of researchers from five of the nation's leading universities, provides a range of publications -- from policy briefs to full-scale research reports -- on the impact of new accountability policies on students, teachers and schools.
(<http://www.cpre.org/index.js.htm>)

Milken Family Foundation - The Milken Family Foundation supports education issues in various ways, including strengthening the profession by recognizing and rewarding outstanding educators; expanding professional leadership and policy influence; and attracting, retaining and motivating the best talent to the teaching profession. Various links to different education initiatives and programs can be found on this Web site.
(<http://www.mff.org/edtech/>)

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future - NCTAF's goal is to transform teacher development in ways that will dramatically enhance student academic achievement and has created a reform agenda for how teachers are prepared, recruited, selected, inducted, and supported, and how schools support, assess, and reward their work. (<http://www.tc.columbia.edu/nctaf/>)

National Teacher Policy Institute - A project of the Teachers Network, this institute was established to bring teachers' voices to educational policymaking. (<http://www.teachnet.org/ntpi/>)

NCSL Teacher Quality Web Site - Provides information on teacher quality issues, such as research, recruitment and compensation, preparation, licensure and certification, induction and professional development. (www.ncsl.org)

Teacher Quality Clearinghouse - The Teacher Quality Clearinghouse is a guide to the latest news, analysis and research on teacher quality policies. Resources available on this Web site include: links to education organizations; research; information about school and educator accountability, teacher pay and incentives, and school staffing. (<http://www.nctq.org/>)

The Holmes Partnership - The Holmes Partnership is a network of universities, schools, community agencies and national professional organizations working to create high-quality professional development and school renewal to improve teaching and learning. Its work is centered around six goals, which the Web site outlines: high-quality professional preparation; simultaneous renewal; equity, diversity, cultural competence; scholarly inquiry and research; school and university-based faculty development; and policy initiation. (<http://www.holmespartnership.org/>)

Thomas B. Fordham Foundation - This foundation supports research, publications, and action projects of national significance in elementary/secondary education reform, as well as significant education reform projects in Dayton, Ohio and vicinity. (<http://www.edexcellence.net/>)

WestEd - WestEd seeks ways to combine traditional and innovative assessment methods into coherent, affordable and valid systems that provide the feedback desired for all levels of accountability. Among others, project areas include teacher professional development and assessment. (<http://www.wested.org/>)