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ALASKA STATE VOCATIONAL ASSOCIATION

ANCHORAGE, AK 99504

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Testimony

presented to the

ALASKA STATE HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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Alaska State Vocational Association

The Alaska State Vocational Association is an organization of school administrators and teachers interested in the improvement and extension of needed vocational education programs within the State. There are currently over five hundred persons employed in vocational education in Alaska. The Association is a loosely organized umbrella for divisions representing Agriculture and Aquaculture, Business and Office, Career Education, Distributive Education, Guidance and Counseling, Health Occupations, Home Economics, Industrial Arts, Technology, Trades and Industries, Manpower Programs, Local Administrators, and New and Related Services. So far as I am aware, it is the only professional education organization that is composed of both administrators and classroom teachers. ASVA is proud to represent both.

The organizational structure is based on a concept of area chairpersons in order to more actively involve the membership in both current problem solving and the dissemination of professional information. We have area chairpersons serving in northern Alaska, in Fairbanks, in Juneau, in south-central Alaska, and as far east as Tok Junction. A chairperson serves as the initiator of legislative information needing to be disseminated through our communications network.

ASVA holds a conference in March when a concentration of effort is given to improvement of instruction through planned workshops for teachers in each of the division areas expressing a need or interest for such professional development.

We also publish a newsletter four times annually and a directory of members, state legislators, advisory council members, and state department of education personnel.

Our interest in appearing before this committee, then, is to make our services available to you in whatever way we can to further our strong belief that vocational education should be available to everyone in the State.

NEED FOR STATEWIDE PROGRAMS

To provide a philosophical base for comments, the following points are outlined as necessary to improve statewide programs:

1. Programs are already strong and continuing in many areas; however, there is need for quality vocational education statewide.

2. It is basic to program development that there be a strong staff within the State Department of Education with a well qualified director for this unit to provide leadership in coordination and planning. It is gratifying that after almost a year, the position of unit administrator for career and vocational education has recently been filled.

3. Program specialists are needed in each area at the state level.

4. There is need for specific certification requirements and endorsements for vocationally qualified personnel to insure the best instruction.

5. The needs of rural Alaska must be met in providing quality vocational instruction, training, and preparation for employment.

Staffing. Vocational education at the state level is currently understaffed. Whereas specialists or program chiefs are usually available as resource persons in most academic areas--at least in larger school districts--even these are generally lacking in vocational education because of the numbers of professional personnel involved in any one district. In the past program specialists have been provided through the Department of Vocational Education. Recently, because of understaffing caused by growth and reorganization within the DOE, specialists have been reassigned to more

administrative functions leaving the important curricular areas with no resource persons except as they may be available and "as time allows." This is not acceptable. If more staff is needed, funds should be available in order to hire them.

Youth Organizations. Youth organizations have not received the total support they need. These groups are an integral part of vocational education programs. Much of teaching is done through chapter activities in Future Farmers of America (FFA), Future Homemakers of America (FHA-HERO), Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA), Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), Office Education Association (OEA), and Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA). A full-time resource person at the state level is needed to coordinate statewide leadership conferences and student organization activities. Activities are now largely supported by volunteer efforts of instructors and the students themselves in organization of community service projects, sales promotions, and intra-school activities.

Certification Requirements. Quality programs are possible only when fully qualified instructors and administrators with periodically updated skills and knowledge are available to direct them. The State DOE has recently waived special endorsements as a criterion for certification to teach vocational courses. We believe the State should continue to require certification, to include a requirement for work experience in the major area to be taught. The recent action of the Department to delete this certification is a step backward.

We are aware of the concern in rural school districts for securing and retaining qualified personnel, but we believe the best interests of quality education in Alaska will not be served by eliminating certification and/or endorsements by the State. Rather, a provision for waivers could be made that

includes a planned program to provide for in-service instruction in areas of deficiency. This would require funding for implementation.

ALASKA STATE FIVE-YEAR PLAN FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

During the hearings on the State Plan in May, 1977, the Association went on record as being particularly pleased with the depth of in-service plans and the provisions for their expansion as well as the emphasis given articulation. Legislative support is needed to finance centers and institutions able to coordinate offerings for this purpose. Vocational degree programs should be readily available within the State. Approved apprenticeship programs are needed for some teachers.

We are concerned that opportunities be made available for vocational personnel to continue to upgrade skills. Even the best prepared instructor is in need of technological update at intervals. For this reason, legislative support is sought for a cooperative education program for instructors that would allow them to leave their current teaching positions to join cooperating business and industrial firms willing to employ them for periods of from six weeks to a year to become familiar with new equipment, systems, and industry policies. ASVA will be pressing for the inclusion of cooperative education programs for teachers in the State Plan.

ARTICULATION

Talent Bank. There are many ways in which articulation of programs can be achieved through additional support at a state level. Currently the Department of Education supports a talent bank which in concept was meant to provide a delivery system for innovative and outstanding programs throughout the State. This talent bank has not been utilized to the extent that it could provide services. The program should be funded fully for maximum use.

Film Production. Plans are being considered for the cooperative production of film clips and 15-20 minute film presentations suitable for use on television as well as on the banquet circuit and in classrooms to teach persons in the State with a concise presentation of what is available in the field of vocational education in Alaska and where and how it can be made available to individuals. These films have been successfully produced in several states in the lower 48 through assistance from the American Vocational Association. Results have been very worthwhile. Information about existing programs could, in this way, be transported to the most remote villages in the State as well as to urban areas. The Alaska Advisory Council for Vocational Education has expressed interest in a cooperative production. Total funding need is estimated to be \$5000 for "seed" money. Production staff (provided by AVA) then secure the rest of the financing through local business and industry.

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

ASVA members are very concerned that in the State Department of Education both the Commissioner of Education and the Unit Administrator for Career and Vocational Education have expressed the belief that federal dollars are not "worth the strings attached." We believe that at present these "strings" represent a necessary quality control for programs, and we would strongly protest the denial of federal funding in Alaska.

IN CONCLUSION, let me reiterate that the Alaska State Vocational Association stands ready to serve as resource personnel in any way we may be of service to the Committee in securing the best possible program in vocational education for the State of Alaska.