

Proposed 2012 ACSA Joint Position Statements

Introductory Statement: Serving All Alaska's Children

The Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) embraces its partnership with PreK-12 education with a conviction that all children and their families will find public education a rewarding experience. ACSA members recognize, and take their responsibility seriously, that our state's future depends on all children receiving a meaningful education where all graduates are college or job ready. As such, the public education community must embrace innovation and encompass meaningful accountability.

ACSA members are all committed to an education system that best serves the interest of all children. Advocacy will be undertaken with openness to proven research-based strategies and systemic changes necessary to grow public education; meaningful partnerships with families and communities; and rigorous accountability that accounts for the well-being of the whole child, including student academic achievement.

Each year ACSA members come together to formulate joint position statements to guide our legislative advocacy in support of children. We look forward to collaboration with other like-minded organizations and the 27th Legislature to advance public education in several areas:

- Adequate Funding
- Early Childhood Education
- Career and Technical Education
- Preparing, Attracting and Retaining Qualified Educators
- Prior Year PERS Retirement Billings
- ESEA Re-Authorization
- Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act

Adequate Funding

The Alaska Council of School Administrators strongly encourages the Legislature to ensure adequate operational and infrastructure funding for school districts. Without adequate funding support, school districts cannot deliver the quality education services required by Alaska's students, citizens and the State Constitution.

- Enable effective planning by adopting a multi-year foundation funding plan *early in the session*. Increases in funding are needed to deal with persistent inflationary pressures in energy costs, payroll, benefits and transportation.
- Fund capital projects to provide safe and high quality learning environments statewide, through the CIP program, the bond debt reimbursement program, the rural school construction fund and the GO bond program.
- Improve and support broadband infrastructure (and latency) sufficient to facilitate reliable and equitable delivery of valuable educational opportunities for students throughout Alaska.
- Provide full funding of any new initiatives that require districts to provide additional services.
- Reduce the hold harmless funding formula trigger from five percent (5%) of Average Daily Membership (ADM) to two and one-half percent (2.5%), to mitigate the negative educational impact of a sudden drop in enrollment on students.
- Develop a long-term, comprehensive approach to increase available state funding for education, to ensure a quality education for all students and to support the ongoing economic vitality of our state.

Early Childhood Education

The Alaska Council of School Administrators believes early childhood education should be a priority for all Alaskans who desire to increase and improve educational opportunities for all children, and it supports the funding of programs that will offer early education opportunities.

- Research is clear and consistent that the benefits of early childhood education are significant and important to the educational development of young people.
- A reliable system of funding for early childhood education programs is not available for all of Alaska's schools and families.
- The children most impacted by the lack of funding for early childhood education are those without access to alternate educational programs.

Career and Technical Education

The Alaska Council of School Administrators supports adequate and equitable funding for Career and Technical Education (CTE) in order to ensure K-12 students have access to the tools, training, and programs to prepare a future workforce for Alaska. Educational leaders need to be involved in the process of identifying existing rural and urban programs for improving and expanding workforce development opportunities for our children.

- We are appreciative of the additional funding beginning in FY12; however, funding is still insufficient to fully implement the statewide plan for CTE, coordinated by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.
- Reengaging disenfranchised students in all grades through expanded CTE programs and exposure to career pathways will assist educators in increasing graduation rates and reducing the dropout rate for Alaska's children.
- A strong and well-articulated CTE model is integral to supporting high K-12 educational standards and Alaska's economic growth and stability.
- CTE professional development is critical to ensure CTE teachers can provide for the variety of students' interests and the full range of industry demands which require content mastery as well as industry-based credentials and ongoing training.

Preparing, Attracting and Retaining Qualified Educators

The Alaska Council of School Administrators encourages the development of a comprehensive statewide program to prepare, attract and retain quality educators in our schools, which include supporting the reinstatement of the Retire/Rehire provisions. This would allow Alaskan retired educators to be eligible, thus increasing the pool of quality applicants.

- Living conditions related to life in remote areas and the higher cost of living in many Alaskan communities present challenges for teachers and administrators, making it difficult to attract and retain qualified teachers and administrators.
- Teacher salaries in other states exceed Alaska's salaries for teachers and administrators, especially when factoring in Alaska's higher cost of living.
- Alaska's Teacher Retirement System is no longer a competitive draw for teachers and administrators from other states.
- The Alaska university system does not graduate enough students in teacher education, administration, and related services areas to meet school districts' staffing needs.

- Alaska currently allows the hire of teachers and administrators who are retired from other states, not the rehire of our own retirees. Alaska's retired professionals have comparable skills and strengths and the additional knowledge of our Alaska schools, communities, and culture.

Prior Year PERS Retirement Billings

The Alaska Council of School Administrators recommends that the legislature take action to revise the provision in AS39.35.255 requiring an FY08 funding baseline for all future PERS retirement payments.

- The calculation mandated in AS39.35.255 references a single base year, FY08 that unfairly penalizes employers with unusually high FY08 PERS payroll for one-time special project such as construction.
- In the long-term, the FY08 baseline will discourage employers from adopting the most efficient staffing plans, which may include part-time staffing and other efficiency measures such as out-sourcing.
- The unintended consequences of AS39.35.255 are particularly challenging for school districts and municipalities, many of which are already experiencing population loss and declining revenues from various sources.
- Districts that have paid the assessment in FY12 should have the funds either forgiven or reduced.

ESEA Re-Authorization

The Alaska Council of School Administrators calls upon Congress to complete the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2012 in order to prevent costly and irreparable damage to school reform efforts. The reauthorization of ESEA should include:

- Establishing accountability systems that evaluate students, schools, teachers and principals based on multiple and varied indicators.
- Establishing growth models to provide appropriate targets for schools and students.
- Differentiating between "chronically failing" schools and schools making progress but may miss targets in only one or a few categories.
- Emphasizing building capacity within schools and districts rather than punishment.

- Ensuring that efforts to turnaround "failing" schools and districts include options beyond staff replacement and school closures, but rather provide supports and avenues to build on successful steps towards proficiency for all students.
- Placing the highest priority on maintaining quality public schools for all children.
- In the event that Congress is unable to complete the reauthorization of ESEA, all sanctions and other punitive measures should be suspended until the formal reauthorization occurs.

Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act (Forest Receipts)

The Alaska Council of School Administrators endorses the continuation of the 100+ year partnership that was created between the Federal government and rural communities to compensate counties affected by the placement of timber into federal ownership. This partnership stipulates that 25% of the revenue derived from the U.S. Forest Service activities, e.g., timber sales, mineral extraction and grazing fees, be returned to impacted counties. In 2000, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRSCA) to help ensure that the partnership was honored, legislation that expired on September 30, 2011.

- If SRSCA is not reauthorized, funding for the program will decrease from \$440 million to \$62.5 million. For Alaska, SRSCA funding will diminish significantly from \$18.5 million in FY12 to only \$518,000 in FY13.
- Historically, affected communities and schools in Alaska have relied heavily on SRSCA funds to supplement local funding for education. Without positive action, 24 Alaska school districts and the communities encompassing these districts will lose \$18.5 million in revenue resulting in significant community and district job loss, education program reductions and major overall economic upheaval.
- SRSCA is critically important to 24 of Alaska's 54 school districts (44% of all districts) currently supported through the partnership. In at least one single site school district, 25% or more of the district's revenue would be lost if SRSCA funding is not sustained and even more if the corresponding impact aid loss is factored – catastrophic by any standard.
- ACSA urges Congress and the Alaska legislature to join together to support this partnership and Alaska's future.