**Joint Position Statements of the Association of Alaska School Boards and the Alaska Superintendents Association**

In November of 2018, the Association of Alaska School Boards and the Alaska Superintendents Association came together to work on identifying where both entities aligned in priorities for the upcoming year. The memberships of the Association of Alaska School Boards, and the Alaska Superintendents Association, have jointly identified the following items as priorities which they will both be advocating for in 2019.

The following are the joint statements, along with rational and talking points to assist school board members and superintendents when advocating for public education.

**We support the development of a long-term fiscal plan to ensure sustainable education funding for current and future generations, and provide for a quality education as required by Alaska’s constitution.**

*Rationale:* Under the current funding process, State spending trends up and down with volatile commodity-based revenues. Alaska School Districts are required to develop budgets without consistent funding by the State. A long-term plan for fiscal integrity is key to ensure Alaskans receive essential community services like public education. The State of Alaska must provide timely, reliable, and predictable revenue for schools based on the true cost of a child’s education.

**We support the expansion of Career and Technical Education opportunities to prepare a workforce to supports Alaska’s economy.**

*Rationale*: Career and Technical Education (CTE) provides applied learning opportunities that contribute to academic knowledge, higher order reasoning and problem-solving skills, employability and technical skills, occupation-specific skills, and knowledge of industry. Key elements include career-pathway course offerings, internships, apprenticeships, certifications, micro-credentialing and dual credit opportunities. Nationally, students who participate in CTE programs have an average graduation rate of 90% compared to the national average of 75%. CTE generates high personal income through lifelong education and preparation for high-skill, high-demand and high-paying positions. Providing effective CTE programs creates a better-educated, better-paid workforce and leads to a more robust economy for the state.

**We support funding for school safety, security, and embedded practices, to support the whole student and whole school (trauma engaged), in order to ensure schools are safe and supportive for Alaska’s children.**

 *Rationale:* We all recognize that Alaska students experience high rates of Adverse Childhood Experiences and childhood trauma. These experiences disproportionately impact education, health, safety and employment outcomes of Alaskans. We all support whole-school and trauma-informed approaches that transform learning environments, school climates, teaching practices, and relationships with students and their families.

School Districts dedicate a significant portion of Operating Funds to maintain a safe and healthy environment for students and staff.  Safety is of even greater concern for rural Alaska where access to public safety personnel is limited.

We all have experienced a host of mental health and safety concerns in both our schools and communities that have adversely affected our student’s wellbeing.  The difficult conditions and isolation that many communities face contribute to problems such as high suicide rates, substance/alcohol abuse, depression, and sexual abuse/assault.

The tragic murder of Ashley Johnson-Barr in Kotzebue early in the 2018-2019 school year was a direct result of these issues. To safeguard against a similar tragedy, issues must be addressed to provide a safe and nurturing environment for our students and staff.

Resources currently available to school districts for these efforts include information on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Social Emotional Learning (SEL) practices, Trauma informed practices, school climate and prevention. Funds to access these preventive resources for safety/mental health support, curriculum, infrastructure, safety, personnel, and mental health staff are essential.

Given the increased threats experienced by schools across the country, state and the unique difficulties present in rural districts, it is appropriate for the State to consider increasing sources of education funding for this purpose. Safety grants could provide additional funding to schools without revising the Foundation Formula.

*Possible Talking Points:*

* Caring relationships are foundational
* An understanding of trauma and resiliency
* Integration of learning experiences for the whole child (social, cognitive, emotional, & physical)
* Prepared adults practicing and modeling skills
* School-wide coordination and climate building

**We support increased accessibility for high quality early learning opportunities for all children, to improve school readiness and future success throughout their entire school career, and beyond K-12 education.**

*Rationale:* Early education promotes positive development, improved health outcomes, and school readiness for young children. It positively impacts our state in the form of reduced crime and reliance on welfare. Investments in early education realize a benefit to our state of $8 for every $1 invested. Currently, Alaska leads the nation in child maltreatment and also has the 7th lowest investment in preschool programs that can help our children overcome these obstacles.

Access to fully funded, sustainable preschool programs provides a foundation of strong social, emotional and cognitive instruction while reducing the inequity of opportunity that Alaska’s children living in poverty face. Research clearly demonstrates that early intervention is the best way to increase student achievement across all demographics and creates the greatest opportunity for all students to read proficiently by third grade.

**We support comprehensive programs that prepare, attract, and retain highly qualified educators to support Alaska’s public school students.**

*Rationale:* We are experiencing a nationwide educator shortage and educators are leaving the profession at increasing rates. This is especially true in Alaska and it negatively impacts student achievement and the economy of our state (and our country) when we face a limited, and shrinking, pool of candidates. Additionally, when we do find quality candidates they often leave. In order for us to compete nationally we must strategize ways to attract, hire and retain quality educators. Areas such as Math, Science and Special Education are particularly hard to fill. In addition, locations away from major hubs in Alaska find it especially hard to find quality candidates that will stay. High teacher turnover is very costly and a constant revolving door of teachers is bad for our state, our communities, our schools and most of all our students. Preparing, Attracting and Retaining Quality Educators is hard and it is the single most important thing we do.

*Possible Talking Points:*

* Approve the state budget early. A delayed state budget negatively impacts recruitment and retention resulting in the late hiring of teachers. Late hiring creates uncertainty on the part of teachers when they don't have a contract. This uncertainty encourages teachers to seek employment in other districts and other states. A late budget negatively impacts recruitment especially when we are competing for candidates due to posting delays for positions. (Please see attachment A)
* We need to increase compensation to encourage Alaskans to become teachers and for nation-wide teacher candidates to seek positions in Alaska and stay. The cost of living is high throughout Alaska, especially rural Alaska. Housing, medical, and food are all very expensive in various locations and most districts in Alaska are not on the road system. Let's make pursuing a career in teaching at least as attractive as the well-paying jobs in oil and resource development the State of Alaska continues to promote.
* See the Alaska Senate's own online survey that shows that a majority of Alaskans believe education is underfunded. https://www.alaskasenate.org/2020/priorities/2019-poll-results/
* Improve and provide resources and opportunities for districts to obtain quality professional support for new and mid-career teachers in conjunction with the University of Alaska regional campuses to eliminate the long- standing achievement gap.
* Target legislative funding to the University of Alaska, School of Education to increase the pool of quality and culturally proficient candidates from within the state.
* Create alternate pathways to Alaska Teacher Certifications.
* Allow and make simple the reciprocity process for teachers seeking an Alaska Teacher Certification.
* Create and provide resources to develop a focused group or advisory committee to the legislature with the purpose of brainstorming solutions pertinent to the topic of Hiring, Attracting and Retaining Quality Educators. AASB/ACSA/ASA involvement would be critical.
* The federal government, states, and districts must invest in comprehensive human capital systems to prepare and retain competent and committed teachers for long-term careers in the classroom.
* Anne Podelsky, Tara Kini, Joseph Bishop and Linda Darling Hammond, Solving the Teacher Shortage How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators; Learning Policy Institute (2016).