



association of
ALASKA
school boards

Where We Stand 2022

New and Amended Submissions

**The resolutions and belief statements of the
Association of Alaska School Boards**

Based on

**Member district submissions of
new resolutions and amendments**

BELIEF STATEMENTS

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GOVERNANCE

1.13 LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

“A Land Acknowledgement is a formal statement recognizing the Indigenous people of a place. It is a public gesture of appreciation for the past and present Indigenous stewardship of the lands that we now occupy. Land Acknowledgement opens a space with gratefulness and respect for the contributions, innovations, and contemporary perspective of Indigenous peoples. It is an actionable statement that marks our collective movement towards decolonization and equity.” Anchorage Museum

AASB honors and respect the Ancestral Lands on which all Alaskans live, work, play, and learn and encourage activities and practices that acknowledge and recognize the past and present stewardship of these lands.

AASB supports the following:

1. Having a Land Acknowledgement spoken, for all to hear, on a regular basis, including but not limited to its official meetings, conferences, celebrations, and gatherings.
2. Working with local Tribes to identify appropriate wording for a Land Acknowledgement.
3. Encouraging member School Boards to add a Land Acknowledgement before official meetings, conferences, celebrations, and gatherings.

Rationale:

- A. Almost 20% of Alaska’s population identifies as American Indian or Alaska Native, by far the highest of any state.
- B. A Land Acknowledgment opens a space with gratefulness and respect for the contributions, innovations, and contemporary perspective of Indigenous peoples. It is an actionable statement that marks our collective movement towards decolonization and equity.
- C. Alaska Native Tribes and their descendants have lived and subsisted on Alaska’s lands and waters for thousands of years.
- D. These lands and waters have been cared for through traditions passed from generation to generation.

Proposed 2021 by the AASB Board of Directors

1.14 CULTURAL REGALIA FOR HIGH SCHOOL CEREMONIES

Cultural Regalia for High School Ceremonies, including Graduation

AASB acknowledges the vast diversity within all Alaska's schools. AASB has recognized

the lack of protection for students' choice to use Cultural Regalia at graduation ceremonies throughout Alaska. When Cultural Regalia is chosen to be used in any ceremony, it is considered a high honor and demonstrates the students' high respect for the high school. These regulations are left up to each school district to allow, not allow, or

limit the use of Cultural Regalia for High school graduations. This has led to confusion and misunderstandings.

AASB supports the following:

1. Give all Alaska graduating students the right to choose if they wish to use Cultural Regalia for high school graduation.
2. Give all Alaska graduating students the right to choose if they wish to use Cultural Regalia on or in place of the traditional cap and gown without limits.
3. Cultural Regalia for high school graduations are not to be used for any political statement, protests, or anything other than the honorable use of cultural regalia.
4. Request the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development and Alaska State Legislature implement state-wide regulations that protect the rights of students' choice to use Cultural Regalia at High School graduations and other school ceremonies.

Rationale:

Rules and regulations have not kept pace with increased cultural awareness regarding Cultural Regalia use in schools, especially at High School graduations. Some schools do not allow Cultural Regalia at all, some limit the use of Cultural Regalia, and many schools do not have any rules or regulations on the use of Cultural Regalia. This has led to every school needing their own interpretation of what they think is the best way to regulate Cultural Regalia use at high school graduations.

- A. Alaska is home to 231 federally recognized tribes making up more than 20 percent of the Alaskan student body.
- B. Alaska High schools are one of the nation's most diverse student bodies, according to the 2010 census data.
- C. A lack of universal, state-wide Cultural Regalia use rules has led to avoidable confusion and miscommunication if such protection were in place already.
- D. A lack of basic education for teachers and staff on the cultural diversity in the Alaskan student body can also reduce any misunderstanding.

PROPOSED: 2021 BY JUNEAU SCHOOL DISTRICT

FUNDING**2.58 (NO TITLE SUBMITTED)**

To amend Alaska State Statute A.S. 14.43.700 to retroactively include hub communities that are a gateway to other eligible rural communities, regardless of population, allowing educators in the area to be eligible for the Teacher Education Loan (TEL) Program.

Rationale: In order for a teacher to be eligible for the TEL Program's loan forgiveness they must agree to return to "rural" Alaska to teach for 4 years. AS 14.43.700 states, in relevant part, that "rural means a community with a population of 5,500 or less that is not connected by road or rail to Anchorage or Fairbanks." According to the 2010 Federal Census, Bethel's population is 6080. Therefore, Bethel does not technically meet the definition for a rural community in Alaska; and with increasing population trends, other regional hub communities do risk similar case despite the following facts:

- Hiring of local individuals to teach in local schools has long been a goal of rural school districts. LKSD has a future teacher candidate scholarship that, if coupled with the TEL Program, provides funding to enable local individuals to obtain education degrees and return to our region to teach.
- Teacher retention has been difficult all over the U.S. but has been a critical issue for all rural Alaska. In Bethel teacher retention has been particularly problematic. Funding, such as the TEL Program, would be extremely helpful in encouraging teachers to return home to the Bethel area.
- The population guidelines related to this statute have not been changed since its inception. Yet, according to the definition that applies to Medical Education Support (AS 14.43.510(i)) the definition for rural is the same as the TEL Program except the population restriction is set at a more reasonable 7,500.
- Bethel, like all other rural hub communities, is not connected to any other community by way of a conventional road. All travel and/or supplies must be by completed plane or barge. Because of this the cost of living in Bethel is quite high. Bethel is clearly a rural community.

PROPOSED: 2021 BY LOWER KUSKOKWIM SCHOOL DISTRICT

2.59 SCHOOL FUNDING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Alaska Association of School Boards urges the Alaska Legislature and Administration to provide adequate funding to public education in the State of Alaska, to increase the Base Student Allocation to compensate for inflation, and provide focused support to districts which continue to experience a finance impact from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rationale: Many districts in Alaska are continuing to experience increase in expenses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has also negatively impacted enrollment of several districts, making it even more difficult to maintain critical student educational services. Several municipalities who have been traditional strong fiscal partners for educating children in the districts afce similar expense increases and tax revenue short falls related to the pandemic. Federal and State relief to date has not universally provided funding to address these additional costs, nor declines revenues.

PROPOSED: 2021 BY DENALI SCHOOL DISTRICT

2.60 (NO TITLE SUBMITTED)

The Power Cost Equalization (PCE) Program was established by the state of Alaska in 1985 as one of part of a Statewide Energy Plan to reduce the electric rates paid by rural consumers to levels comparable to those paid by the consumers in Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks.

The PCE program was established to assist rural residents at the same time state funds were used to construct major energy projects to assist more urban areas. Most urban and road connected communities benefit from major state-subsidized energy projects such as the Four Dam Pool, Bradley Lake, and the Alaska Intertie.

The State-funded PCE program provides a subsidy to rural electric utilities that pass on the savings to residents and municipal entities in the form of discounted electric utility bills.

"The Alaska Energy Authority (AEA), along with the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA), administers the program that serves 82,000 Alaskans in 193 communities that are largely reliant on diesel fuel for power generation" (AEA's PCE Frequently Asked Questions).

The Lower Kuskokwim School District stands to lose over \$250,000 a year in PCE savings, if the program is discontinued.

The intent of the PCE program was to provide energy assistance to rural Alaskans with the assurance that rural residents would have a dependable and sustainable program for the foreseeable future.

The Alaska State Legislature has a second chance to fund the Power Cost Equalization (PCE) Program in the FY2022 State Operating Budget when they are called into session on August 2, 2021.

The Lower Kuskokwim School District strongly supports full funding of the Power Cost Equalization Program to honor the historical purpose of the program and help rural residents and municipalities counter the high cost of electricity.

Rationale: The Power Cost Equalization (PCE) program was created through an understanding between rural and urban lawmakers when the legislature agreed to fund the large dam projects to offset energy cost for the urban areas. PCE is the rural equivalent of the large dam projects since large dam projects weren't probable in rural Alaska. The PCE program provides equitable support for affordable energy and reduces the electric rates paid by rural consumers to levels comparable to consumers in urban areas that benefit from the large dam projects. High electric costs increases all other costs due to the "trickle-down" effect on everything. PCE helps families provide adequate setting to prepare students for learning.

PROPOSED: 2021 BY LOWER KUSKOKWIM SCHOOL DISTRICT

**2.61 FUNDING FOR SKILL PROFICIENCY AND CREDIT RECOVERY
RELATED TO COVID DISRUPTIONS**

AASB requests that the Alaska State Legislature increase the Base Student Allocation by 20% for the 2021-2022, 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and 2024-2025 school years to fund skill proficiency building and credit recovery for students in grades K-12. These funds shall be used for extended-day learning or summer intensive programs aimed at increasing proficiency in Reading or Math; or credit recovery in any subject required for a student to meet State of Alaska Graduation requirements.

Rationale: The disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have caused many Alaska children to fall behind in reading and math proficiency; but also in credits needed to graduate. Combined with the enormous budgetary strain faced by almost 20 years of flat funding, districts need additional resources to assist these students in meet standards and stay on-track for graduation. This request will allow districts to rely on stable funding to cope with the extra labor and programmatic demands needed to teach these students in extended learning and summer school programs outside the regular school offerings over the next 4 academic years; starting in the summer of 2022.

PROPOSED: 2021 BY JUNEAU SCHOOL DISTRICT

2.62 SUPPORT FOR THE ADOPTION OF LEGISLATION FOR STATE-FUNDED VOLUNTARY EARLY CHILDHOOD (PRE-K) EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

AASB urges the State of Alaska to transform public education by passing legislation that ensures funding for high quality, accessible, and voluntary pre-K public education. A high-quality public education is guided by learning standards; balances performance expectations across age-appropriate developmental domains; implements and monitors effective teaching and learning practices; and supports the professional development of highly qualified, sustainable staffing.

Rationale: School readiness starts in pre-Kindergarten aged students. The necessity of preparing children for school is never more important than now, and sustainable funding is necessary.

Respected research shows the importance of high-quality pre-K experiences for young children's cognitive, language, and social emotional development. Alaska's reading scores on state assessments are below students' abilities and expected outcomes. Pre-Kindergarten is proven to support language development and reading readiness, along with overall academic performance over time. Children who experienced high quality pre-K programs perform well throughout their school careers and further in life.

Scientific studies repeatedly show that effective early childhood education and support services benefit all groups of children and bring significant value to groups that could otherwise not afford it, thus improving equity in education for all. Additionally, early childhood education is of great value to all children and should be available to all on a voluntary basis because it provides a sound foundation for Kindergarten readiness and helps to develop skills, knowledge, personal competence, confidence, and a sense of social responsibility.

Furthermore, early education (pre-k) programming is a non-partisan policy proven to be one of the soundest educational investments the public can make, providing demonstrated, significant, long-term savings in the costs of special education, grade retention, welfare, and crime. When a community reaches high levels of educational attainment, it becomes a community that is less vulnerable to poverty, unemployment, and crime.

The reduced need for public spending on remedial education, criminal justice, and social support programs, in addition to citizens that are active and productive members of their communities, are key reasons why including pre-K funding within the K-12 system is a necessary investment in our children, our communities, and our state.

PROPOSED: 2021 BY CORDOVA SCHOOL DISTRICT

CHILD ADVOCACY**3.7 COOPERATION AMONG SERVICE PROVIDERS SERVING CHILDREN**

AASB supports information sharing within Federal Rights to Privacy requirements (FERPA, HIPAA, 42CFR) to ensure that children are able to come to school each day ready to learn, and to enable agencies to develop a cooperative treatment plan that involves appropriate school personnel; [including notifying school personnel of infectious diseases such as COVID-19, as necessary, to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to the health or safety of the individual, another person, or the public.](#)

Rationale. Children who receive services from social service agencies are already experiencing disruption in their lives. This disruption frequently makes it difficult for them to concentrate on their schoolwork. These students need to have educational skills to succeed in the world. Yet decisions are frequently made about the life of these children that do not take into account their educational needs.

When children are receiving services from multiple agencies, one agency will frequently have information that may be crucial to the service delivery of another agency and/or the child is receiving duplicating and sometime conflicting services from more than one agency. Addressing the needs of the whole child requires an improved delivery system, which is comprehensive, collaborative, child and family centered, and focused on prevention.

Adopted 2000

Amended 2001, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2017

Renewed 2020

(Sunset 2025)

AMENDMENT PROPOSED: 2021 BY NORTH SLOPE BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

3.30 SAFE AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR LGBTQ+ STUDENTS

AASB encourages member districts, state agencies, and other decision-makers to support policies and practices that ensure safe and inclusive learning environments for LGBTQ+ students. Specific strategies may include enumerating sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in policies relating to harassment and bullying, supporting training for educators and other school professionals on the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming students, incorporating gender-neutral language and practices into school programs and norms, and updating health education curricula to incorporate age-appropriate, medically accurate, and culturally sensitive information on LGBTQ+ issues. AASB supports districts in their efforts to protect the health and dignity of all children and youth, including transgender and nonbinary students, and to ensure equal access to educational programs.

Rationale: AASB recognizes the criticality of positive school climate on student academic success and has long held that every child deserves to go to school excited to learn in a safe and nurturing environment, without fear of bullying, violence, or discrimination.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) students are more likely than their peers to be bullied, physically assaulted and feel unsafe in school because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. In addition, LGBTQ+ students report higher rates of isolation, depression, and suicidal ideations or attempts than their peers.

Harassment and bullying policies that specifically enumerate sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression have been shown to be associated with decreased incidents of harassment relating to sexual orientation, increased reporting of students feeling safe at school, and increased teacher/staff intervention in harassment. AASB encourages member districts, agencies, community partners, and all decision-makers to develop and enact policies and practices that protect the health, safety, and dignity of LGBTQ+ students.

Additional:

The legal landscape defining protected classes from discrimination is evolving. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex. On June 15, 2020, the US Supreme Court held that discrimination on the basis of an individual's status as gay or transgender constitutes sex discrimination within the meaning of Title VII of the Civil Right Act (*Bostock v. Clayton County*). On June 16, 2021, the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights issued a Notice of Interpretation affirming that discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals is discrimination on the basis of sex under Title IX. State laws and local policies across the country are often contradictory and are changing based on court outcomes.

Proposed 2021 by the AASB Board of Directors

PERSONNEL**4.18 ESTABLISHING A NEW TEACHER INCENTIVE PROGRAM FOR ALASKA**

AASB requests that the Alaska State Legislature establish a New Teacher Incentive Program for the purpose of attracting and retaining new teachers to rural Alaska school districts (local districts with less than 4500 K-12 students, excluding Juneau); including:

1. The requirement that a participant be a graduate from an approved teacher certification program meeting the requirements of initial certification for the State of Alaska and have not taught in a Public School within 36 months of hire by a rural district; or
2. Meet the requirements of 14.20.022 (Subject-matter expert limited teacher certificate) and be currently enrolled in a Teacher Certification Program of no less than 12 credit hours per year directly related to the graduation requirements for a Teaching degree, certificate, or endorsement qualifying the person for a Professional Teacher Certificate or Second Initial Teacher Certificate; and
3. Have all eligible Federal student loans consolidated with a loan program that qualifies for Teacher Loan Forgiveness (FFEL) as long as that program or any substantively similar program exists; and
4. The student must make minimum payments as required to maintain eligibility for Teacher Loan Forgiveness (FFEL); shall be provided
5. A one-time relocation bonus to the new teacher and his/her family of \$10,000 to the district in which they are hired; and
6. A student loan forgiveness payment of the lesser of 10% or \$15,000 directly to their student loan servicer upon completion of each of their first five years of teaching in the same district; and
7. Provide a student loan forgiveness payment directly to the loan servicer of the lesser of 10% or \$10,000 directly to their student loan servicer upon completion of each of their sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and 10th years teaching in Alaska, and
8. Payoff all remaining student loans, public or private, not to exceed \$25,000 total, after the eleventh year teaching in Alaska and after the employee provides evidence that he has applied for Teacher Loan Forgiveness and met all application requirements; and
9. Providing a retention bonus of \$3,000 per year, through year 10, for any qualified teacher not receiving a student loan forgiveness payment in the program; and
10. Provide an additional retention bonus of \$5,000 per year for any teacher certified or endorsed in a Math or Science Subject, or in Special Education, in addition to any loan forgiveness payments or any other bonus.
11. Fund the program as a state Grant through DEED for \$10 million per year (\$150 million total over 15 years) with preference for REAA Teachers, State of Alaska Residents, graduates from Alaska Colleges and Universities, and members of Alaskan Federally-Recognized Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations.

Rationale. In 2020, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported, unadjusted to cost-of-living, that Alaska was #9 in median teacher pay (Elementary Teachers, excluding Special Education). For Comparison, California was #1, Washington State was #10, and Oregon was #12 (<https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes252021.htm#st>). Secondary teacher pay was substantively similar.

Alaska has always had challenges recruiting and retaining teachers. But as other states catch-up to and pass Alaska, it will be even harder. Alaska will likely see the impacts first in the REAA and other rural communities who have always experienced teacher shortages. The recruitment and retention of students needs to be addressed before we reach a point of crisis as Alaska teachers retire with an inadequate pipeline of new teachers to replace them.

In 2021, 83% of students had student loans and the average student loan debt at graduation was \$36,140. This historic high represents an opportunity for Alaska to capture students who want to teach, are attracted to Alaska, and have a troubling amount of debt to pay-off. Additionally, by linking the first 5-years of teaching to an rural district, the benefits are targeted to benefit the rural districts first. This will enhance the ability of rural districts to recruit and retain new teachers longer, develop teachers more culturally aware and experienced with Native Alaskan cultures and communities, and eventually help all Alaska districts recruit and retain experienced Alaskan teachers. This program also has reasonable cost controls. With the average student loan debt of \$36,140, this program will be a loan payoff acceleration program rather than loan forgiveness program. This is because the program requires participants to enroll in a qualified Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program and maintain minimum required payments to the lender. Therefore, these payments are in addition to student payment and not replacing student payments. This will also allow more new teachers to participate in the program over the next 15 years. However, it will also attract and retain students with extraordinary student loan debt that would have otherwise left the profession for higher potential earnings.

Finally, this program is built to give preference to REAA Teachers, Alaska Residents, Alaska college graduates, and Alaska Natives. These preferences helps those districts most at risk of recruiting and retaining new teachers but also focuses on groups most likely to remain in Alaska for their entire career. This should maximize the effectiveness of overall teacher retention in the state of Alaska.

PROPOSED: 2021 BY JUNEAU SCHOOL DISTRICT

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

5.13 RELATING TO POSTSECONDARY CLASSES FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS

AASB believes that students, who are enrolled in state-funded institutions offering dual credit college post secondary CTE classes, should have the cost funded by the state.

Rationale. State law encourages students to take college credits or vocational school credits at the expense of their school districts. It is in the interest of the state to help students maintain interest in school and advance toward a college degree or vocational education certificate. Some high school students want to take college or vocational courses prior to high school graduation. Reasons vary, but oftentimes students may be ready for a greater challenge than what is currently being offered at their high school, or may wish to “try out” classes that increase college readiness before committing to a degree program. Some students seek more advanced career and technical training than what may be offered in their district. A limiting factor for many students is cost. The cost for this post-secondary education should not *be required to* be borne by school districts. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask the state to fund these courses.

Adopted 2009

Amended 2010, 2014

Renewed 2019

(Sunsets 2024)

AMENDMENT PROPOSED: 2021 BY VALDEZ SCHOOL DISTRICT

EDUCATION PROGRAMS **CORE RESOLUTIONS**

5.33 RESTORING THE ALASKA LEARNING NETWORK (AKLN)

AASB requests that the Alaska State Legislature re-establish the Alaska Learning Network (AKLN) and fund it to the FY 2017 funding level plus 10% for the purpose of allowing districts to co-op course offerings across districts, providing opportunities to take courses not offered or inaccessible to individual students at their school.

Rationale: Two decades of flat funding have forced many districts to reduce class offerings. This has impacted all subjects, but especially electives in the areas of Social Studies, Foreign Language, and Art. The consolidation of course offerings also create issues for individual students who may need to take specific courses but cannot due to a scheduling conflict in their school.

The need for AKLN is further necessitated by the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This pandemic and the shut-downs that followed caused many Alaska children to fall behind in courses needed to graduate in addition to the lack of course offerings. With districts now forced to offer distance education to students quarantined or unable to attend school in-person and the need for expanded offerings for students to meet graduation and Alaska Performance Scholarship requirements, allowing districts to co-op courses improves the efficiency of education delivery across districts and expands public education course opportunities for students.

PROPOSED: 2021 BY JUNEAU SCHOOL DISTRICT