

**AASB Superintendent Search
APPLICATION FORM**

If you are applying for more than one position, it is **not** necessary to complete a separate application. If you desire, AASB will duplicate this completed form for any subsequent position applications.

I. PERSONAL INFORMATION

First Name: John Middle Name: Gary Last Name: Pothast

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 2717 Soldotna, AK 99669

Home Telephone: 907.262.8551 Work/Message: 907.714.8882 Cell phone: 907.252.3826

Email: jpothast@kpbsd.org

List any other name under which application materials may be received: N/A

Have you ever been convicted of, or pled guilty to, a misdemeanor or a felony? If yes, please give details and attach to application: No

Have you ever been convicted of, or pled guilty to, a DWI? No

CERTIFICATION

The superintendent position requires an Alaska Type B certificate with a superintendent endorsement. Do you hold a current Alaska Type B Administrative Certificate with a Superintendent Endorsement?

Yes: Type B No: Superintendent's Endorsement

If yes, expiration date is: Type B Certificate expires 12/20/2020

If No, have you applied for a Type B certificate with a superintendent endorsement with the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development?

Yes: No: I am not currently enrolled in a Superintendent Endorsement program, but I certainly will if the school board requests such.

Information on requirements for the specified certificate may be obtained from:
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
Teacher Certification
801 W. 10th, Suite 200
Juneau, AK 99801-1894
Tel. 907-465-2857

Alaska law requires at least six semester hours of college academic credit in the last five years in order to receive a Superintendent's Certificate in Alaska. Do you meet these qualifications?

Yes: No: In Progress

In what other states do you hold a Superintendent's Certificate? None

II. PRESENT EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

Present Employer: Kenai Peninsula Borough School District

Employer's Address: 148 N. Binkley Street, Soldotna, AK 99669

Your Title/Position: Director of Elementary & Secondary Education

Years in Position: 4

Are you presently under contract? Yes: No:

Present Salary: \$117,994

Does your employer know of this application? Yes: No:

III. EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Please list all FULL TIME experience. List present employment above and all others here, beginning with the most recent, and work backward in chronological order. (Please list on additional sheet if necessary.)

DATES OF SERVICE	POSITION/DUTIES	ORGANIZATION ADDRESS	SIZE OF ORGANIZATION # TEACHERS./# STUDENTS
7/2015-present	Director of Elementary & Secondary Education	Kenai Peninsula Borough School District. 148 N. Binkley St. Soldotna, AK 99669	600 teachers/8800 students in school district
8/2005- 5/2015	Principal, Redoubt Elementary School	Kenai Peninsula Borough School District. 148 N. Binkley St. Soldotna, AK 99669	26 teachers/400 students in school
8/1999 – 5/2005	Principal, Skyview High School	Kenai Peninsula Borough School District. 148 N. Binkley St. Soldotna, AK 99669	40 teachers/600 students in school
8/1993 – 5/1999	High School English Teacher & English Department Chair	Cibola High School. 4100 W 20th St, Yuma, AZ 85364	100 teachers/2300 students at the high school
8/1992 – 5/1993	High School English & PE Teacher	St. John's School. 911 North Marine Corps Drive, Upper Tumon, GU 96913	35 teachers/500 students in school
8/1989 – 5/1992	High School English Teacher	Cibola High School. 4100 W 20th St, Yuma, AZ 85364	100 teachers/2300 students at the high school

Please summarize your work experience in years as applicable:

Superintendent: 0	Asst. Superintendent: 0	Principal: 16	Asst. Principal: 0
Teacher:	Elem:	Mid:	HS: 10
Central Office:	4 years		

IV. EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

(Please list on additional sheet if necessary.)

INSTITUTION NAME	MAJOR/MINOR	DATES ATTENDED	DEGREE EARNED
Northern Arizona University	Educational Leadership	1997-1999	M.Ed.
University of Minnesota-Duluth	English & Communications	1984-1988	B.A.A.
Bemidji State University	Undeclared	Fall, 1983	

V. APPLICANT'S STATEMENT

1. *Philosophy/Orientation:* Summarize your general philosophy of the status of public education in the U.S.- what is working and what challenges lie ahead in the next 10 years, and some of your best ideas for addressing that challenge.

The biggest strength of the American public education system is just that: that our county has a system whereby all students are afforded the opportunity for a free education. Despite the challenges, we have a multitude of public school educators and advocates who tirelessly work to provide that right to students on a daily basis, which is undoubtedly our system's greatest strength not only on a national and state level, but also locally here in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District. Additionally, another strength is that KPBSD is doing well teaching our students, and preparing them for their futures. We have a passionate and talented staff, and our students typically perform at some of the highest levels in the state, which we should be proud of.

One of public education's biggest challenges, however, is that despite significant changes in American society over the past approximately two hundred years, our educational system has changed relatively little. Our schools were originally designed to prepare students for a future that does not exist anymore, and which is significantly different than the futures for which we need to prepare our current students. Likewise, although the students in our district are doing well, I believe we can always do better. KPBSD's focused work with personalized learning continues to be my vision for how we address the challenge of preparing our students for their futures, not our past. Structuring our classrooms to personalize learning opportunities to our students, and better allow our students to learn in a rigorous, relevant, and responsive environment, would be a focal point of mine to address those needs.

Similarly, school choice is an issue facing education today, and will continue to do so in the future. For so many years, the local public school was the only choice students and parents had. Today, students and parents have choices of private schools, charter schools, home school programs, online courses, college/dual credit choices, and often times more than one neighborhood public school. As choice continues, and even increases, the challenge is to figure out a way for our neighborhood schools to be "the" choice, while also maintaining a standard of rigor and quality. Again, I believe that our work with personalized learning is a significant means to address that issue, by engaging students to help them take ownership of their learning and give them a broader array of choice within our schools and district.

Budget issues seem to continually loom on education's horizon, and our state's current fiscal problems definitely make budgeting processes one of the biggest challenges our district is not only facing today, but will potentially continue to face for years to come. Unfortunately, there is no simple answer to the budget dilemma. Our reality is that education is completely dependent on other agencies to provide funding, and therefore advocacy at the state and borough levels is paramount. Part of my work with the state principal's associations over the years has been to work with legislators, both at the national level in Washington, DC and down in Juneau with our state legislature. I would continue to advocate on our district's behalf, along with developing strategies to help and encourage parents and community to join in that advocacy. In addition to advocating for additional funding, there is also the reality of looking at ways to cut expenditures when funding is tight, and the best way to do that is with ongoing communication, conversations, and dialog with staff, parents and community. Although this is often times the hardest part, because they are hard conversations, it is also the most important to do. At its very nature, our work in education is working with people: our staff, the students who walk through our doors every day, their parents, and the people who make up our greater communities. And as such, our ability to develop and foster those relationships demands that we have ongoing and open communication with those people, and that is particularly important when dealing with difficult issues, like cutting budgets.

2. Personnel Management: Describe your approach to personnel management and your ability to utilize staff effectively.

My ability to connect and build relationships with others is a vital piece to my management style. Every level of our organization has people at the center of our work: teachers working with students and parents, principals working with teachers, students and parents, and district level administrator working with, and supporting, all of those people. My ability to work with, and utilize, staff requires a connection and relationship with those people. The more solid of a relationship a teacher has with a student, the more productive and successful the student's learning experience will be, and the same goes for the Superintendent's relationship with his/her board, district staff, building principals, teachers, students and parents. As connections and relationships are built, trust is established, and trust is a central key to having successful working relationships. Additionally, regular and ongoing communication is essential in developing those relationships and management of staff. As with any relationship we have with others, open, honest, and regular communication is necessary, including communication with our staff.

Similar to communication, effective personnel management includes setting and communicating clear expectations. People do not like surprises, so the more clear we can make expectations, the stronger our communication patterns and relationships will be. Years ago I began the practice of establishing clear expectations with new staff I hired. Before I officially offer a job to someone, I sit down and share with them what my expectations will be when they become a staff member in our building. I want them to know very clearly what will be expected of them regarding things like: their responsibility for our students, their commitment to contribute to the greater school and professional community, and our school and district's expected communication with students, parents, colleagues and me, to name just a few. As I said, I have these conversations before I officially offer them the job because I want them to know what will be expected of them before they accept the job offer. I have used a similarly successful process in situations where I was not hiring, but instead when I was coming into a new position, and I share with my new staff what exactly they can expect from me. Without exception, the feedback I have received is people greatly appreciate the open and clear communication about expectations. Additionally, if I ever have an issue that needs to be addressed with a staff member, referring back to those expectations helps keep the conversation focused and grounded.

The final piece to my personnel management is understanding what everyone's role is, and ensuring that we all perform our duties, and do our part to contribute to the greater whole in a positive manner. I am not a micro-manager. I believe in hiring the best people we can, then stepping back and letting them do what we hired them for. Open and regular communication then allows me to check in and give any support that may be needed.

3. Fiscal Management: Appraise your approach to developing a budget, managing budget implementation, and your ability to utilize scarce resources effectively.

For any budget, regardless of size, the entire process begins with assessing expected revenues and expenditures, and when a shortfall is expected, there needs to begin a conversation about prioritizing items. Collaboration, combined with clear and open communication, are the central tenants for not only starting this process, but also successfully developing and implementing a budget, particularly when resources are scarce. That collaborative process needs to happen as early as possible, in order to allow all stakeholders the opportunity to give input. That process also needs to be ongoing, because as input is given, additional ideas are generated, priority items may move around, and how much one priority will "cost" or "save" will change the overall budget projections as they fluidly move around during the course of the conversations.

The challenge of larger budgets, such as KPBSD's budget, is it involves a significant number of line items, spread out over a large number of buildings and schools, coupled with greatly varied interests and priorities throughout the vast diversity of our district, and that is where the implementation management comes in. Ultimately the school board, with the help and support of the Superintendent and district administration, needs to wrestle with the diversity, and often conflicting, ideas and priorities from the various stakeholders. Our five-year strategic plan needs to be the focal point for helping to make those decisions. If a particular idea directly supports our mission and plan, then it needs to be prioritized. If not, there needs to be serious consideration about whether it should be included or continued.

I believe the key to successfully managing that process is, once again, open, honest, and ongoing communication. In the end, people know and understand the complexities of the budgeting process, and they also know, respect and support that the district administration and school board are ultimately responsible to make those decisions. Most of the angst that comes from stakeholders through that process is when they feel as though they have not been a part of the process, or that their voices have not been heard. Shortly into my tenure as principal at Skyview High School, we faced a budget dilemma similar to our current problem, which ultimately led to the loss of many teaching positions, and even educational programs, throughout our district. At Skyview alone we lost six teachers in one year, and lost our auto shop and welding programs, and greatly reduced other academic programs. Although those were extremely difficult times, and hard conversations to have with our community, we still had the conversations. Many of them. Teachers, parents and students all shared their thoughts openly. We had local school meetings, but the district also had many larger-scale conversations. In the end, some hard decisions had to be made by both building and district administrators as well as the school board, but communities and stakeholders were deeply involved from the start, which ultimately helped the process move forward.

Finally, this entire budgeting process needs to be an ongoing, collaborative process. Budgets change, dollar amounts change, goals are met and new goals are made, staffing changes, and because of that constant flux, the budget priorities need to be looked on a continual basis. What was a priority last year or two years ago may not be the same priority for next year, especially when budgets are lean. But again, keeping our mission, vision and strategic plan at the forefront helps guide those conversations.

4. *Communications:* Appraise your ability in public speaking, writing, persuasiveness, media relations, and capacity to develop a credible public image. What are your approaches to internal communications? To public communications?

One of my strengths is my ability to communicate with others, including public speaking and writing, along with my ability to be persuasive in those formats. The Superintendent is the face and voice of a school district, and I would excel in my ability to represent the school district in that capacity, deal with the media, public, communities as well as our own staff. I have spent twenty years as an administrator in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, and in that time I have developed relationships with staff in nearly every building in our school district, as well as a wide variety of parents and community members. I have worked hard to earn a reputation for being credible, fair, open, honest and trustworthy, and I would continue to act in such a manner as the Superintendent. I spent much time as a building principal interacting with various stakeholder and seeking out their thoughts, feelings and attitudes about what our school did well, as well as areas that we could improve upon. Those feedback loops are what enable us to know how we are doing, and how we can improve. I have continued that process of collecting feedback in my current Director role, particularly in the area of personalized learning, how it is going, and how we can do better. I view working with the community, including the media, as a means to be able to share our stories and our successes, and I thoroughly enjoy being the person who gets to share in that way.

Whether internal or public communications, my first desire is to always communicate face-to-face, as there is no substitute for connecting with others in person. There are nuances that are lost to some degree when something other than in-person communication is used. However, the reality is that in a district the size of KPBSD, with its varied geography and activities, face-to-face communication is not always practical, so connecting with others over the phone or video call are equally viable options. On a larger scale, mass communications to large groups of internal stakeholders is often best served via email, or if the content and length of message is appropriate, sending out a link to a quick video message is a good way to add some elements of a personal connection back into the message. Externally, technology can be leveraged to connect to large groups of the community. The district's webpage and a Superintendent's Blog are good ways to send out information and updates that are done on a regular basis. Twitter and Facebook are excellent ways to immediately share small pieces of either important messages, or equally adept at sending out short messages on a regular basis, such as Weekly Showcases. Facebook Live Events and Twitter Chats are two other effective means to highlight events, presentations, or focused discussions.

5. *Experience with ethnic and cultural groups:* What experiences have you had in working with groups with varied ethnic, cultural and economic backgrounds?

Before moving to Alaska, I was a high school English teacher in Yuma, Arizona, where the predominant culture was Hispanic. In the middle of my teaching tenure in Yuma, I taught for a year in Guam, which was a varied mix of ethnic and cultural background including the indigenous people of Guam, Japanese, Korean and Chinese. Both locations had a mix of students from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and in both locations I had, and still have, a deep appreciation for the beauty and unique qualities of those cultures.

Moving to Alaska, my work as a building principal was not as ethnically diverse as my experiences in Arizona or Guam, but the community is definitely culturally and economically diverse. Like my previous experiences, students come to our KPBSD schools from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Moving to the Director's position at the district level has broadened my exposure to even more ethnic, cultural and economic diversity within our school district. I have visited, and worked with, staff and community members in our across-the-water villages, our Head of the Bay Russian Villages, and from Homer to Nikiski to Seward, and everything in between. Those varied backgrounds, combined with the expanse of geography that separate each of those communities, is simply part of the fabric that makes our school district rich, and I find working with each of those unique communities as joyful, fulfilling, and rewarding as any other.

6. *Alaska knowledge and experience:* Describe the nature of your experience in education in Alaska. Explain how this experience and perspective would contribute to your qualifications for this position.

I am finishing up my twentieth year working in Alaska, all of that time as an administrator in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District. My first six years were as the principal of Skyview High School (back when it was still a high school) and the next ten years as the principal at Redoubt Elementary School. My first year at the district level, I was the Director of Secondary Education & Student Activities. Budget cuts at the end of that first year resulted in my job title and duties changing, and I became the Director of Elementary and Secondary Education & Student Activities, and I am currently finishing up my third year in that capacity. All of those experiences make me uniquely qualified for the KPBSD Superintendent's position because of the varied experiences I have within our district.

I have been a high school principal, dealing directly with most of the same issues our current secondary principals are dealing with today. Although it was a little less back then, our staff wrestled with student choice and students wanting to leave our school for homeschool programs, private schools, or other educational opportunities in the area. I created a master schedule to meet the academic needs of our students while struggling with limited staffing. Hard budget times came in the early 2000's, and I dealt with teacher cuts, loss of programs, and significant conversations around closing schools. I have also been an elementary school principal, again dealing with all of the same issues our current elementary school principals are dealing with. Having that significant experience at both the elementary and secondary levels gives me a unique view of our district, along with a strong empathy for the challenges that our district faces, on a true K-12 level.

Likewise, when I moved to the district level, my work as a Director has given me the experience of working with every single school in our vast school district. I have physically been to all but three of our forty-three schools, working with principals and their staffs in a variety of capacities. Through that work I have come to experience first-hand the joys of each school and community, as well as their unique challenges. I have also come to see how each of their distinctive strengths and struggles are intertwined with our greater district strengths and challenges.

As I said, I have been working in KPBSD for twenty years. I know our district. I know our strengths and I know our challenges. With the issues facing education in our state, and district, it is imperative that the leader of our district have intimate knowledge of those issues in order to help plan the best route forward. Our state's leadership has proposed a grim budget that is solely based on a final number, and our district's

ability to navigate successfully through this process demands someone with knowledge of state and district level operations, of sifting through priorities of our local communities to help set goals and visions: someone who sees our KPBSD students as more than just a number, and knows our district well enough to help guide the conversations and find solutions to the issues facing our district.

7. Educational achievement: What have you done to upgrade the educational program in schools under your supervision? How have you evaluated the results?

While at Skyview High School, I began the Aspirations Advocates program, designed to mentor students who were struggling with finding meaningful connections to the school and the adults in the school. It was one of the first significant attempts in the district to meet the social-emotional well-being of our students. Additionally, as stated earlier, we faced tremendous budget challenges, yet I worked with our entire community to still provide a solid educational program to meet the needs of our students. In our efforts to provide those opportunities, we also set up the district's first video-conference based distance class, whereby Skyview students attended an AP Literature class, taught at Soldotna High School, via video conference equipment. Although not perfect by any means, it helped create a new understanding of possibilities for delivering educational opportunities throughout our school district.

As the principal at Redoubt Elementary School, we implemented PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports), which was a significant step to improve the overall climate of the school, codify behavior expectations for adults and students alike, as well as refine the management of our student discipline processes. Implementing PBIS was a resounding success that indeed changed the culture and dynamic of the entire school. Information was put into and tracked through PowerSchool, and the district's IT department developed a spreadsheet matrix to help analyze the data, which then helped the school team to evaluate the results. During my tenure at Redoubt, we also helped develop and implement the standards-referenced reporting system that is still in use in our elementary grades. This shift was significant as it removed some of the perceived "grey" areas of letter grades (with questions such as "what does a 'B' truly represent") and made the reporting of student progress tied to the standards they are expected to learn, thus being able to report to parents very clearly which standards, or skills, the student is able to perform, and at what level of performance.

In my role as Director at the district level, I helped develop our district's Key Performance Indicators, which has helped our district move away from assessing students on a single data point (i.e. how well they did on the state test in April), to looking at student achievement through multiple views, including not only academic indicators, but also looking at the social-emotional well-being of students, their attendance, and engagement in school and community beyond the academic day. By looking at students from this multi-faceted view, we get a much clearer and more holistic understanding of how students are performing and achieving in our schools. I have also worked to develop more dual-credit opportunities for our students, most notably developing Concurrent Credit courses in our schools, which are college classes, but they are taught by our district's teachers, in our schools, during the school's regular bell schedule. Finally, I believe the biggest task I have taken on to improve and upgrade the educational program in our schools has been my work with personalized learning. It has been my responsibility to move each of the three Waves of schools through the PL process over the past two years, and that has been resoundingly successful thus far! Wave 1 is finishing up their first full year of using Learning Walks as their primary means for self-sufficiency with their PL transformations, and are beginning to plan for their second full year, and moving to new levels of PL implementation. Wave 2 is nearing the end of their "guided" PL work, and are now starting to plan for next fall as they follow Wave 1 in their self-sufficiency Learning Walks. Wave 3 recently finished their formal workshop and training work with PL, and have just started their guided work with Learning Walks in their buildings. They will continue into next fall, and by this time next year they will be the final group to move into their self-sustaining Learning Walks and PL work. I am proud of the work we have done with PL, and I see the practice transforming classrooms, and learning, for the better throughout our entire school district!

8. Labor Relations: Describe your experiences in the area of labor relations.

When I was the principal at Skyview High School, I had the presidents of both KPEA and KPESA working in my building. I referred earlier to the importance of open, clear, honest and ongoing communication. Although I have spent my career, and even life, living by those communicative ideals, having the union presidents in my building reinforced and solidified for me why such communication is so imperative. Drawing parallels again, the environment and climate back then was similar to now: state funding was extremely low and significant budget cuts were made, and the district and associations had not settled their contracts and had gone through arbitration. I experienced first-hand the importance of sitting down regularly with teachers, the community, and the presidents of the associations, and simply talking through issues. I learned that just coming together to talk regularly helped keep the communication channels open. I also learned that when communication stopped, those channels closed down, which then created angst, anxiety, mistrust, and a host of other negative feelings. I watched how our Superintendent at the time went out of her way to try and keep communication going by getting together frequently and simply talking through the issues we were facing and constantly collecting input and feedback. I want to follow that example if I am Superintendent. Open, clear, honest and ongoing communication is imperative in general, and is a key to successfully engaging in positive labor relations.

As a former member, executive board member, and president for the Kenai Peninsula Administrator's Association (KPAA), I have been on the negotiating team for KPAA, and have thus experienced labor relations from "sitting at the table". During that time, I have experienced labor relations from a traditional negotiations point of view, and have also been involved twice in the Interest-Based Bargaining process, so I have knowledge and experience for different approaches to labor relations.

9. Board/superintendent relations: In your view, what is the proper or appropriate relationship between the school board and its superintendent?

Ultimately, the superintendent is hired by the school board, and is therefore the board's direct employee. Because that is the foundation of the relationship, the interactions and relationships need to be based on professionalism. Additionally, the very nature of the work done by the board and superintendent demands a professional relationship. Issues arise, hard conversations take place and sometimes there are disagreements among various people involved. Those are a normal part of the running and management of a large organization. Yet, the board and superintendent still need to maintain a positive relationship with each other, based on open and honest communication, collaborative practices, professional and collegial interactions, and mutual trust and respect.

With solid communication channels in place, boards and superintendents can talk openly and honestly and work through any issues. With collaborative practices established, hard issues can be addressed and resolved by focusing on the issues at hand rather than emotion. By grounding ourselves with professionalism and collegiality, we can again engage in discussions about challenging topics from a point of positive intent, understanding we all have a role to play and an obligation to bring all voices to the discussion, and be able to do so in a respectful and trusting manner.

Even though the relationship between the school board and its superintendent is based on professionalism, we sometimes live in the same neighborhoods, our own children may attend school together, we may encounter each other at school activities or social events, and we definitely run into each other in the produce aisle at the grocery store. Because that is a reality of our school district, our relationships with each other reach beyond our professional work, which then makes it even more important to remember our roles and maintaining a foundation of professionalism.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District is unique in that we are a geographically vast district, yet at the same time a community that has a relatively small feel to it. We are culturally diverse made up of a variety of unique communities, yet we all share the same mission and focus on our students. Despite the size and differences, we are a greater community with a common district mission, and our professional relationships help keep us grounded and focused on our primary mission: our students.

10. Other: Any other points or comments you would like to make which could aid in the selection process?

As we are acutely aware, the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District is facing some incredibly difficult choices and engaging in some hard conversations as we navigate our fiscal reality and how that projects into the coming years. Despite that, I know that we will get through this. We have been there in the past, and we can learn from those past experiences to help us get through these times again. My wide and varied experience in this school district, the relationships I have formed in all corners of our district, and the reputation I have earned to be an ethical problem solver and bridge builder, is what our school district needs right now in its senior leadership. Additionally, I have experience advocating for education in general, and for KPBSD specifically, both at the national level in Washington, DC, as well as with our state legislators down in Juneau. I possess both the reputation and communication skills to effectively be a credible public face for our school district, and I have the energy and enthusiasm to lead our district to the next level of greatness.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Your file with the Association of Alaska School Boards must contain the following items for your candidacy to be considered:

- Formal letter indicating interest in the position
- Completed application
- Confidential placement file (if it is current)
- College transcripts (graduate work in administration only)
- AASB Reference forms (3)
- Alaska Superintendent Certificate (copy)
- Up-to-date Resume
- Other items of your choice
- Photo (optional)

I certify that the foregoing statements are true and correct and authorize you to investigate all references listed and to secure additional information if necessary. I also agree to waive my right to a public discussion of my candidacy as provided in AS 44.62.310©, thereby permitting a board or committee formed by the board to screen application files and/or interview finalists in executive session.

3.11.19

DATE



APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE