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No Signature: But HB156 Holds Help for School Districts

Gov. Bill Walker has allowed a contentious omnibus bill on K-12 education to become law without his signature. House Bill 156 was endorsed by AASB because it repeals expensive and cumbersome notification requirements for school surveys and questionnaires, and the 70/30 mandate for spending state funds directly on classroom instruction.

The bill also allows school districts to target staff training required under Erin and Bree's Laws (HB 44) and child restraint and de-escalation laws at reasonable costs, and reduces the cost of state procurement requirements at the Department of Education & Early Development.

Executive Director Norm Wooten said these changes were the focus of AASB's support for the bill. He noted the amendments to state law that would help member school districts save money and time:

- Change the "opt-in" requirement for the administration of surveys and questionnaires to an "opt-out". This still gives parents the option to forgo their children's participation. For more than decade over half of Alaska's school districts have administered AASB's School Climate and Connectedness Survey to measure and improve school climate. This provision would allow this important work to continue.
- Require Restraint & Seclusion training only for staff that actually need to utilize it rather than mandating the training for every staff member, saving districts considerable time and money.
- Repeal the 70/30 requirements for expending 70 percent of foundation funding directly in the classroom. Approximately 45 percent of districts apply for a waiver each year and are routinely approved by the State Board of Education. It is near impossible for rural district to meet this 70 percent threshold because of the high cost of travel, transportation and fuel.

The contentious portion of HB 156 pitted parents, students, special interest groups and politicians against each other in a debate over teaching sex education. Specifically, the bill establishes that curriculum for reproductive education classes must be approved by school boards and be made available for parents to review. The bill also requires that a certified teacher, or a person supervised by a certified teacher, deliver the instruction after a school board approves their hiring.

The governor said his decision to allow HB 156 into law on July 28 was a close call. He posted two letters on his website as samples of the advice he got in reviewing the bill.

"Governor Walker, as a parent and a pragmatic, conservative policy-maker, if I were in your shoes I would either sign HB 156 or allow the bill to become law due to the improvements in sound and responsible educational policy," wrote Sen. Peter Micciche, R-Kenai, a co-sponsor of the bill. "Primary opposition is the result of carry-over based on a previous version of the bill that no longer exists in the current law."

Commissioner of Education and Early Development Michael Johnson wrote that the sex-ed requirements of the bill conform to "what already happens in many districts, and more importantly, (to) what most parents would expect as a common courtesy when sensitive topics are discussed as part of the planned curriculum."

"This portion of the bill with its notoriety could actually serve to encourage greater parent involvement in curriculum decisions for all subjects. Additionally, as amended, the portion of the bill making school boards responsible for curriculum decisions regarding human sexuality and reproduction is consistent with the administration's position regarding transgender policies as outlined in Attorney General Richards' memo dated June 21, 2016. It is an issue that can be decided locally," Johnson wrote.

Planned Parenthood Votes Northwest and Hawaii expressed disappointment at Walker allowing HB 156 into law and predicted it would lead to restrictions on getting needed information into the hands of young Alaskans who lead the nation in rates of sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy.

Sen. Mike Dunleavy, prime sponsor of the changes to the sex education portion of the bill, said he was most concerned about the rights of parents and children to be in charge of their public education. The Wasilla Republican lauded Walker for allowing the bill into law.

Other sections of HB 156 require school boards to adopt policies that allow parents to withdraw their children from classes, programs and standards-based assessments to which they object, and mandate an annual report comparing Alaska's school system to other states'.



TIFFANY JACKSON

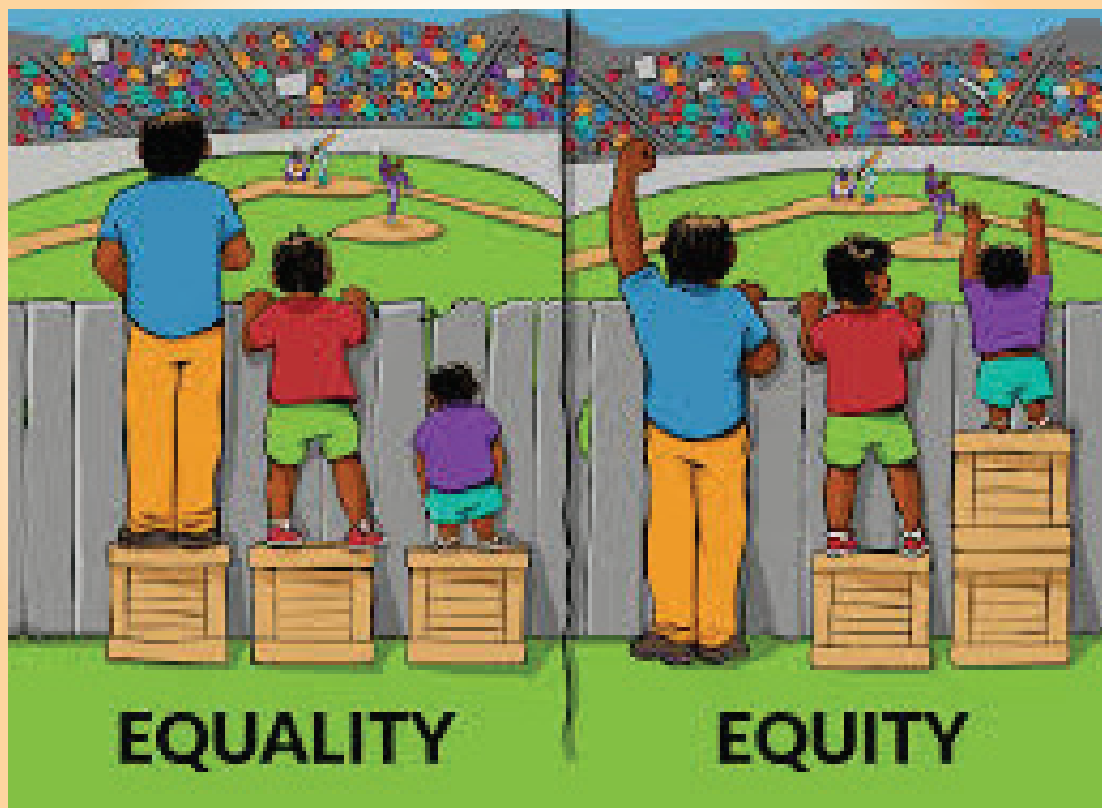
FROM the PRESIDENT

You may have heard a lot of talk lately about Equity in Education. What is equity, how does it differ from equality, and why is it important in education? This is something I've spent a considerable amount of time thinking about during my tenure as President of AASB. Frankly, the more I learn and understand, the more I wonder why I hadn't heard more about this sooner, or thought of it myself.

On June 11, Andi Story, Norm Wooten, and I attend NSBA's first annual Equity Symposium. With the Association of Alaska School Boards recently adopted the goal to "Empower our boards to increase the academic success of Alaska Native Students and increase graduation rates of Alaska Native Students who are grounded in their cultural identity with the ability to successfully pursue their goals" so attendance at this type of event seemed timely to pursuing our goals.

So why is attending an Equity Symposium important when we're looking at the work we want to do? Dr. Joseph Weimelt succinctly described Equity as preparing all students for success in a complex world, which is something we as school board members are constantly trying to figure out how to do. It's not a matter of providing every student with the exact same educational program. It's more about providing every student with what they need to be successful. It's not making sure each kid has a shirt; it's making sure each kid has a shirt that fits.

Equity In Education



A question I always ask myself when attending conferences like this is how can I apply this at home? One of the statistics shared at this conference was 7 in 10 teachers assign homework requiring internet access, but 1 in 3 households don't subscribe to internet services. I suspect in Alaska the number of households who don't subscribe to internet services is even higher, and the number of households with insufficient internet access is higher yet. My own child has faced difficulty in completing his homework because the internet access at home was too slow to establish the connection he needed to access his assignment. As Dr. John H Jackson said, we don't have an innovation challenge, we have an implementation challenge. I think we all agree moving forward integrating technology is critical to the success of our students, but how do we do it equitably?

I don't have the answer. I don't know how we serve all of our stu-

dents equitably, not just equally. However, one thing I do know is policy is power. Something we share during the boardroom boot camp training at the annual AASB conference each year is the school board is the policy maker of the district. What are the policies and practices we can address to provide each child a fair and substantive education? Yes, we want our kids to not just be technology literate but technology masters. What policies we can develop to do this equitably, not just equally, when we know the households our students are living in don't have the capacity to complete some of the homework assignments they're getting? What other areas do we need to look at to help our students be as successful as possible?

On August 2nd an email went out to districts with a call for resolutions for the Association of Alaska School Boards. We take the resolution process seriously, as the resolutions passed by the mem-

bership are your marching orders to us as an association. When law makers and policy makers in education ask us what our stance is on an issue, the board and staff refer back to the resolutions passed by the membership in November as to what our position is. In cases where there isn't a resolution, we don't take a position. You'll notice in this year's email the AASB board of directors is proposing a new Belief Statement for the membership to consider with acknowledges the necessity to allocate resources to provide equity for every student. I urge all board members to take time to review the resolutions, proposed new belief statement and resolution, and consider submitting a new resolution if you think there is an important issue facing education which hasn't been addressed in the resolutions yet.

I hope you've all had a prosperous summer, and are prepared and gearing up for a wildly successful new school year!



**NORM
WOOTEN**

FROM *the* EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In January the legislative session opened with on a dire note. Oil prices had fallen to \$26 per barrel and the state deficit stood at \$3.5 billion. Various predictions were given that the state at current spending levels only had three to five years before the savings were depleted.

Governor Walker introduced a fiscal plan with a menu that included:

1. Budget reductions
2. A proposal to “re-plumb” the Alaska Permanent Fund - which included capping the dividend and utilizing the reserves to use for government.
3. A series of new taxes ranging from fees for services to an income tax.

As the regular session continued several plans to utilize the earnings of the permanent fund were introduced. Committees in both bodies held multiple hearings to consider the various fiscal proposals. Committee testimony from the Governor’s Office, Department of Revenue, Department of Administration as well as Legislative Finance on the various plans before the Legislature.

Two major legislative bills were passed. These were Medicaid reform and a crime reform bill.

A Legislative Recap

Toward the end of the regular session the Senate Finance Committee introduced legislation to increase the employer contribution for the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) and the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS). AASB, the Alaska Municipal League (AML) and the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) coalesced to prevent this legislation from advancing. At one point the Executive Directors from all three organizations were invited to testify before Senate Education. AASB, ASA and ALASBO held a press conference to get our message before the public. ALASBO had a critical role for all our organizations through providing accurate numbers on the effect to local school districts.

Two special sessions failed to pass a fiscal plan and the Legislature adjourned.

The Legislature failed to enact a long-term fiscal plan and forwarded an operating budget to the Governor. Governor Walker then exercised his veto power to reduce the budget by about \$1.3 billion, including:

- \$665 million in Permanent Fund Dividend payments
- \$430 million in oil and gas tax credits
- \$6.35 million in K-12 foundation formula funding
- \$6.35 million in pupil transportation funding
- \$4.7 million in one-time foundation formula funding
- \$30.5 million in school bond debt reimbursement, and
- \$10 million in rural school construction funding

One bill important to the Association was enacted, HB 156. This bill was misunderstood by many who saw it as an attack on outside providers being utilized to teach healthy sex education. The final version of HB 156 did not create new requirements but rather emphasized that parents were to be given at least two weeks notification before this subject was to be taught; allow them to opt out of the instruction; require the school board to vet the material; and require a certified teacher in the classroom where the instruction was being delivered. This legislation was important for AASB’s School Climate and Connectedness Survey (SCCS). It corrected legislation enacted last year that specified opt-in for parents.

In our advocacy this year made ample use of the resolutions and provided staff with the authority to press forward on your behalf. The following resolutions were particularly important this year.

- 2.1 – Sustained, reliable and adequate state fiscal plan and educational funding for Alaska’s students through a non-volatile funding source.
- 2.2 – Urging adequate, equitable, and predictable funding of public education.
- 2.12 – School construction debt retirement for bonded indebtedness.
- 2.14 – Pupil transportation.
- 2.15 – Funding for school district-operated regional boarding home programs.
- 2.19 – Legislative financial relief for ongoing TRS and PERS employer rate increases.
- 2.24 – Funding for schools by establishing the base student allocation in advance.

Civics Education Task Force

A legislative task force examining ways to improve civics education in Alaska held its first meeting on Aug. 19. Created by the passage of Senate Concurrent Resolution 1, the 12-member group includes five members of the public, in addition to six legislators and the commissioner of Education & Early Development.

The resolution prescribes the duties of the task force to examine the current state of civics education in the state, identify best practices in K-12 schools elsewhere, consider how to

fund any recommendations, and to look into the merits of requiring high school seniors to pass the civics portion of the naturalization test used by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services as a prerequisite for graduation.

An aide to Sen. Gary Stevens, R-Kodiak, the task force chair, said the Aug. 19th meeting in Anchorage would likely be one of five public hearings held before the group completes its work with a report in January. Other meetings were scheduled on Oct. 14, Nov. 18,

Dec. 15 and Jan. 10.

Stevens is joined by Sens. Mia Costello and Berta Gardner, both of Anchorage, and Reps. Wes Keller of Wasilla, Lance Pruitt and Ivy Spohnholz of Anchorage. Commissioner Michael Johnson of EED is joined by Pamela Orme, a retired teacher; student Emma Potter; Forest Nabors, a political science professor at the University of Alaska; former Supreme Court Justice Dana Fabe; and Norm Wooten, executive director of AASB.

Personalized Learning "Buckets" of Categories



Making Learning Personal

By Dr. Robert Whicker, Director, and Steve Nelson, Project Coordinator, Consortium for Digital Learning

Personalized learning can be a hot topic. It's somewhat difficult to grasp within our system of education. Asking a group of educators to define it usually results in a range of opinions and "Yes, but what about this?" clarifications.

It seems that personalized learning includes "buckets" of categories, like:

- A shift from "seat time" to a "competency-based" system.
- Anytime, anywhere learning opportunities that correspond to system standards.
- Empowering students to determine their own learning experiences and take ownership of their education.
- 21st century life-skill development of communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking through personal connection with others.
- Real-life, real-time authentic learning opportunities that include community-based resources and work-related experiences based on competencies and meaningful assessments.

Who can argue with that? But how do we develop a system of education that can make this shift. One key is putting students at the center of their learning process, and in recent Commentary articles we've discussed identifying key components needed to support this shift.

In the March issue of Commentary, we discussed aspects of digital learning that can personalize learning for students through innovation. AASB defines innovation as any opportunity, methodology or technique that facilitates a more personalized learning environment, resulting in a positive effect on student achievement. We

outlined system-wide considerations of a personalized learning environment in broad terms (access, professional development, scheduling, etc.) and demonstrated ways one school district is localizing curriculum and preserving culture and language through digital publishing in a technology-infused school setting.

In our May issue we set forth some ideas about how digital learning platforms can be used to meet individual student needs and learning styles, and provide anytime, anywhere learning by online personalized curriculum delivery, flexible pacing, and assessment within a standards framework.

Let's talk about authentic learning opportunities. The need for real-life learning opportunities based on alignment of student interests and the education system standards is a new subject, right? Not!

We've been trying to "make the school environment like the real world" for a long time. My children are well into adulthood and, as a school leader, I dreamed of a kind of student-centric education that they might enjoy when they were young. I've always thought that having my child go to school and sit in a desk for five or more hours among 20-25 of their same age peers doing book work or listening to lectures wasn't too "real-world". There are places that happen in the "real world" but not very many.

We've attempted to educate our kids through traditional methods of bringing the "real world" into their education by inviting guest speakers from the community, taking field trips to local resources or businesses, and participating in after-school clubs or programs such as Future Teachers of America and Junior Achievement. We've developed in-school courses around career tracks with talented teachers from dif-

ferent occupational backgrounds, developed simulations of isolated job skills, and offered internships to seniors who have finished their core academics.

Yet we still have school-based constraints that make these efforts difficult. Time issues (class scheduling, amount of seat-time, calendars, bus/transportation, and lunch schedules), student groupings (age vs. ability), teacher's contract times, career tech programs that are expensive due to specialized machinery and resource needs, and student-to-teacher ratios all present challenges to making "real-world" connections.

Some schools have made new strides to change the environment by tackling these challenges. By doing so, real-world connections become easier. Having real-world projects with real-world partners bring another level to 21st century work/life skills, as well as career education. Involving community-based partners and including students as "co-workers" in accomplishing their mission can make powerful connections.

One excellent example of research and development collaboration in a school setting is the Kodiak Island Borough School District's World Bridge project, developed by Trillium Learning. In a collaboration between KIBSD, AASB and Trillium Learning, a team of four high school students, advised by Trillium's CEO Ron Fortunato, worked alongside NASA scientists to develop data collecting sensor arrays that aid in forecasting earthquakes.

Throughout the project, NASA researchers considered the student team as co-workers. The students completed project tasks that were archived in an online project management system for review and feedback from their NASA colleagues. This collaborative relationship was

critical to the success of the project. The work students were doing was important, and the deadlines were real. As a result, the student team knew that much was expected of them, and rose to meet the challenge. Real work = commitment. Kids get that.

Their passion and commitment to the project resulted in the Kodiak student team winning first place in the Europa Challenge, an international competition among businesses and universities held annually in Como, Italy.

The World Bridge project has also sparked student collaboration across districts. Kodiak students are working on new sensor arrays that can be launched from a rocket into the atmosphere. Students in the Copper River School District are designing the rocket that

will launch the sensors.

As part of AASB's Annual Conference, on Thursday, Nov. 10, the Experienced Board Member Academy will explore the theme of Personalized Learning. Keynote presenter Fred Bramante, CEO of National Center for Competency-Based Learning and the 10,000 Mentor program, will share his ideas on personalized learning, and what has been accomplished in his home state of New Hampshire. The 10,000 Mentor program matches the interests of students with business people for potential career opportunities. Mr. Bramante's message will include the need to move from credit for seat time (the number of hours a student spends in class, known as the Carnegie Unit), to credit for demonstrated learning (anytime, anyplace, any how, any pace) and community-based assessment.

The goal of providing students the capabilities they'll need for the "real world" that follows their K-12 experience is now possible as never before through a focused and intentional effort to bring our long-standing efforts into a modern day. Truly placing each learner at the center of a personalized 360-degree educational experience will require technological, community and business support targeted to each student's individual academic, career and life readiness.

As people who care deeply about education, we must be purposeful and intentional in connecting to each other, and supporting each other, in making any transition. Working together to create success, a student-centered personalized learning model can be possible for our Alaska students.

Michael Johnson Named Education Commissioner

The State Board of Education and Early Development has appointed Dr. Michael Johnson as Commissioner of Education and Early Development. Governor Bill Walker approved the appointment, which will officially begin July 1.

"I am pleased to welcome Dr. Michael Johnson as the Department of Education and Early Development Commissioner, and as a new member of my cabinet," said Governor Walker. "As a longtime educator, administrator, and the President of the Alaska Superintendents Association/Alaska Council of School Administrators, Michael brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to this position."

"With 53 school districts across the state, Alaska's education system has unique challenges and opportunities associated with it," said Lt. Governor Byron Mallott. "Having spent a large portion of his career in rural Alaska, Dr. Michael Johnson brings a perspective to this job that will serve our students well."

"The State Board of Education and Early Development has unanimously selected Dr. Michael Johnson to be the next Commissioner of Education and Early Development. We look forward to Dr. Johnson's leadership and the support he will give to Alaska's dedicated educators as they provide every student the opportunity to succeed," said Board Chair James Fields.

Dr. Johnson has served in the Copper River School District as superintendent, school principal, district curriculum and staff development director, elementary teacher, and special education program assistant. During his tenure as its principal, Glennallen Elementary

School was named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Johnson also is a recipient of the prestigious Milken Educator Award.

Dr. Johnson holds a bachelor of arts degree and a master of arts in teaching degree in elementary education from Columbia International University, and a doctorate of philosophy in education and intercultural studies from the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

"It is an honor to be named the Commissioner of Education and Early Development by the State Board of Education and Governor Walker," Dr. Johnson said. "During this time of economic transition for Alaskans, the mission to improve academic achievement for all students remains crystal clear. I am eager to work with Alaska's outstanding educators to support their work in the classroom."

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development oversees and provides assistance to Alaska's 53 school districts, and oversees operations of Mt. Edgecumbe High School in Sitka. Additionally, the department is in charge of the Alaska State Archives, the Alaska State Library, the Alaska State Museums in Juneau and Sitka, and the Alaska State Council on the Arts. The Professional Teaching Practices Commission is part of the department, as well. The Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education is included in the department's budget.

As chief executive officer of the Department of Education & Early Development, the commissioner serves at the pleasure of the board for no set term and is a member of the Governor's



Dr. Michael Johnson

cabinet. Additionally, the commissioner serves as ex-officio secretary of the board.

"The Association of Alaska School Boards is pleased to congratulate Dr. Michael Johnson as the Commissioner Designee of the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development," said Norm Wooten, AASB Executive Director. "Dr. Johnson is a distinguished educator who has always had student achievement as his primary focus and we are pleased the State Board of Education is bringing this level of expertise forward to lead the department. AASB looks forward to continuing our work with the department and Dr. Johnson as partners serving Alaska's public school students."

Call for Resolutions

The AASB Board of Directors has issued its annual call for resolutions from member districts. The resolutions will be considered at the 2016 Annual Conference on Nov. 10-13 at the Anchorage Hilton Hotel.

“Resolutions are crucial in guiding any membership organization such as AASB,” says President-elect Peter Hoepfner, who will chair the Resolutions Committee at the Annual Conference. “We encourage all School Boards to look ahead to 2017 and consider resolutions that will help address issues facing education in Alaska.”

The AASB Boards recommends the members consider updating resolutions related to the Elementary & Secondary Education Act (**Resolve 1.6**) to reflect passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act and to delete several resolutions (**Minimum Instructional Expenditures, 2.20, and Cost of Physicals, 2.40**) to reflect changes in state law enacted as part of House Bill 156. Several other resolutions will need updates to reflect changed circumstances.

Nine resolutions are scheduled to sunset in November 2016. They are:

- 1.6 School Improvement & Student Achievement (ESEA)
- 1.8 Compulsory Attendance Law
- 2.3 Secure Rural Schools
- 2.22 Marine Highway service
- 2.23 Bypass Mail
- 2.24 Forward Funding for Schools
- 2.35 Grade-level Proficiency for 3rd Grade Students
- 2.36 Remediation
- 3.16 Parental Permission Requirements for Questionnaires

The AASB Board recommends all resolutions scheduled to sunset in November be continued, except

resolve 1.6, which would be replaced with the new one below:

1.6 (New) School Improvement and Student Achievement

AASB supports the goals of the Every Student Succeeds Act, in particular its emphasis on reaffirming local school board authority over public education and limiting federal overreach. AASB urges Congress to fully fund the law.

Rationale. ESSA requires the adoption, review and approval of new state plans for education by the 2017-18 school year. These plans must have a statewide accountability system and support and improvement strategies. While the measure of Adequate Yearly Progress in the former law is no longer in effect, accountability systems within each state must cover all students and subgroups of students and include measures

of interim academic progress. Here is the draft of a new **Belief Statement** on equity in education that was approved by the AASB Board on July 23:

All children must have access to an educational program that meets their individual physical, academic, social and emotional needs. The Association of Alaska School Boards believes that the allocation of educational resources must provide equity for every student regardless of their economic status, geographic location or the economies of scale.

Your school board may wish to comment on these proposed changes or submit resolutions of your own. But to do so, **AASB requests that your board schedule time to discuss the resolutions at a regular meeting and vote by official board action. The deadline established by our bylaws for AASB to receive your comments and proposals is October 1.**

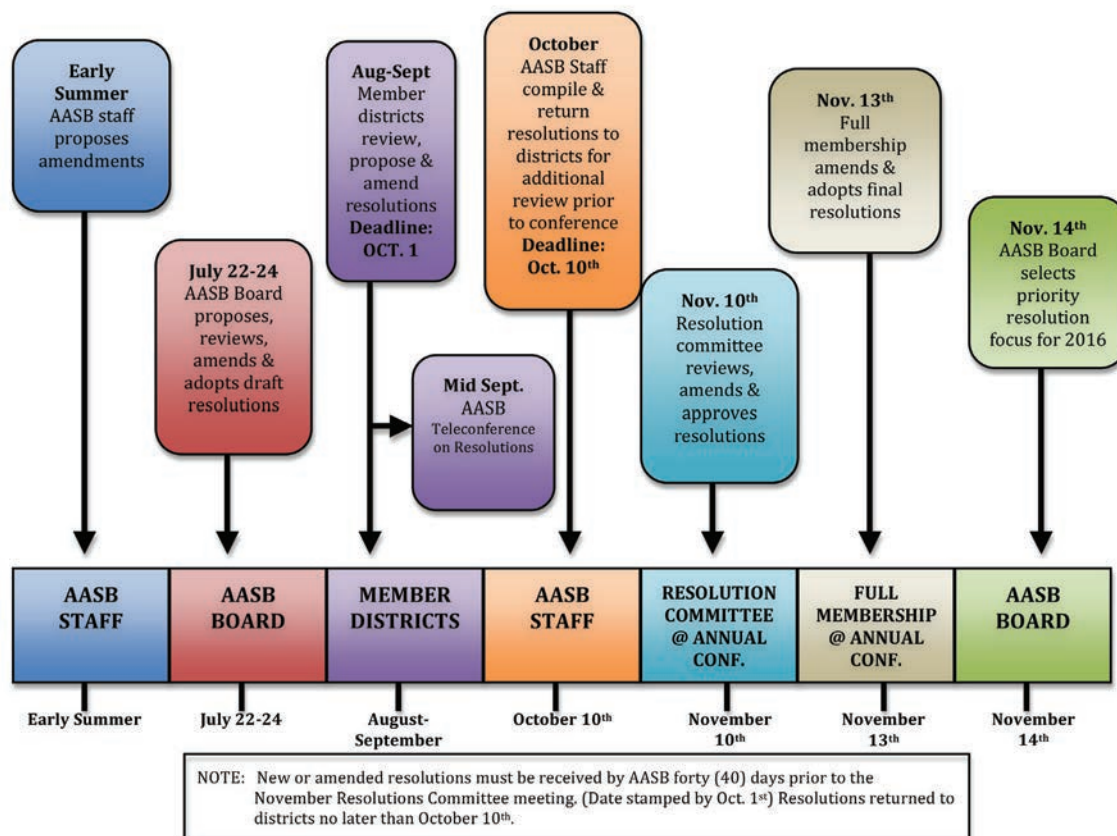
All resolutions received will be compiled and a complete set of resolutions containing proposals from districts will be sent back to your board 30 days before the annual conference, or by Oct. 10, 2016. If you have any questions regarding the resolutions, please contact John Greely or Norm Wooten at 463-1660 or at jgreely@asb.org or nwooten@asb.org

Address your district's proposed resolutions and/or amendments to:

Resolutions Committee
Association of Alaska
School Boards
1111 W. 9th Street
Juneau, AK. 99801

A link to Where We Stand, showing all existing and proposed resolutions, is available here. A teleconference is scheduled for mid-September with AASB staff to answer any questions you may have.

AASB 2016 Resolution Process & Timeline



ASSOCIATION OF ALASKA SCHOOL BOARDS



Calendar

SEPTEMBER

17-18 AASB Fall Boardsmanship Academy – Fairbanks, AK

OCTOBER

19-20 AASB Maintenance Directors Workshop – Anchorage, AK (Wed/Thur)

NOVEMBER

10-13 AASB Annual Conference – Anchorage, AK (Hilton)

14 AASB Board of Directors Meeting – Anchorage, AK (Hilton)

DECEMBER

TBD NSBA Pacific Region Winter Meeting - TBD

8-9 AASB Secretary Workshop – Anchorage, AK (Thurs/Fri)

9-10 AASB Winter Boardsmanship Academy – Anchorage, AK (Fri/Sat)

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