

ACSA Joint Position Statements 2020

Adequate funding for public education is our number one priority.

Priority Funding for Education

The State of Alaska must provide timely, reliable, and predictable revenue for schools; funding the actual cost of education in all districts and providing full funding for all initiatives, laws, and mandates that require additional services. Early notification of funding and forward funding are crucial to sound financial management, as well as recruitment and retention of quality educators.

Revenue Enhanced Fiscal Plan Imperative

Alaska has made progress by cutting the budget and restructuring the use of Permanent Fund earnings for sustainable funding of both the permanent fund dividend and a portion of government services. State expenditures have been cut by approximately 44% (\$3.5 billion) excluding dividends since FY13 when the current run of deficit spending began.

The need to finalize and implement a long-term, multi-revenue fiscal plan remains, especially with the commitment to additional PFD payments. Diversified revenue streams would address the remaining deficit and ensure the ability to fund service increases associated with economic development, inflation, and deferred maintenance capital requirements, while maintaining the existing minimal reserves in the CBR.

ACSA opposes cost shifting state expenditure responsibilities to local governments.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health

Alaska's students endure extremely high rates of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). One in two of Alaska's youth have lived through one or more ACEs by the time they begin kindergarten, and two in three will have one or more ACEs by the time they graduate. Higher exposure to trauma increases the likelihood of suicide, the second leading cause of death for American teenagers. Alaska has the highest rate of teen suicide attempts in the nation. We urge the state to provide resources so schools can partner with local communities to implement comprehensive, culturally appropriate school-based mental health programs that foster the health and development of students.

ACSA supports funding to enable schools to recruit, retain and increase their access to school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, nurses and mental health specialists. Increased professional learning opportunities for school leaders and other school staff in planning and implementing interventions for students experiencing childhood trauma and other mental health challenges is also needed. ACSA supports increased SEL training, funding and/or personnel to increase SEL in our schools.

School Safety

ACSA advocates for safe and secure schools as a catalyst for the prevention of school crime and violence. ACSA supports improving the safety and well-being of our students. We support providing school communities and their school safety partners with quality information, resources, consultation, and training services. School safety is developed through maintaining effective, positive relationships among students, staff, communities, and tribes responding to local needs.

ACSA supports full funding for law enforcement, VPSOs, and state troopers. School districts should have access to these public safety supports.

Early Childhood Education

According to the 2019 Alaska Developmental Profile, nearly 70% of Alaska's students enter kindergarten lacking foundational preparation for learning. ACSA believes equitable access to fully funded, sustainable 0-5 and pre-K learning programs provides a foundation of excellent social, emotional and cognitive instruction to students. Research clearly demonstrates that early intervention and instruction is one of the best ways to increase student achievement across all demographics and create the greatest opportunity for all students to read proficiently by third grade. Early childhood education should be part of public school funding through the base student allocation.

Increasing Bandwidth in Under-Served Areas

Alaska's students need and deserve the full transformative power of technology and equitable access to online resources. Students, teachers and school leaders of Alaska, some of whom live in the most remote areas of the world, require access to modern technology in order to transform learning, create efficiencies, provide online health services, and keep pace with their peers globally.

ACSA supports continuing the Broadband Assistance Grant (BAG) and increasing the level of state-funded bandwidth for schools to a minimum of 25 megabits of download per second. This funding leverages federal E-Rate funds up to 9:1 match to provide Alaska's students and educators fair access to the digital world.

Career and Technical Education

Career and Technical Education (CTE) for both rural and urban schools is critical to high academic standards and Alaska's economic growth and stability. Collaboration through professional learning with the Department of Education & Early Development (DEED), the Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DOL), and the University of Alaska with educators and industry-based professionals is needed for the academic integration of rigorous and relevant curriculum. ACSA fully supports voluntary internships that prepare students for high-earning, high-demand jobs, as well as dual credit offerings that provide opportunities to obtain an occupational certification or credential. These give students the opportunity to build future-ready skills. The alignment of CTE programs to meet the needs of local, tribal, regional and state labor markets through this collaboration is also important for improving on-time graduation rates, higher career earnings, and decreasing dropout percentages.

Preparing, Attracting and Retaining Qualified Educators

Retaining effective educators and leaders is essential to closing achievement gaps and increasing student performance in all subjects across all grade levels. ACSA strongly encourages the development of comprehensive statewide programs to prepare, attract and retain high quality educators and professionals. ACSA further recommends strengthening statewide and national recruiting efforts along with a renewed commitment to growing our own educators, teachers, principals, and superintendents.

The national teacher shortage makes the need to better align the state's K-12 system with the University of Alaska paramount. We strongly support one unified University of Alaska College of Education. Exploring innovative alternative pathways is needed to attract high quality educators to the education profession and address unique circumstances. A competitive state retirement system must be available.

Health Care Costs

We encourage solutions to the escalating costs of health insurance in the state. We support exploration of various mechanisms to decrease health care costs by such measures as: allowing employers to purchase health insurance policies across state lines, appropriate controls of the cost of medivacs, and promotion of pro-wellness lifestyles and proactive health care options.

Other State Issues

Capital Improvement (CIP) Funding must be restored. Long-term fiscal planning is needed to maintain and protect infrastructure.

ACSA supports and expects the State of Alaska to fully utilize matching federal grant monies such as those required for Head Start and other early learning programs.

ACSA supports the local control and autonomy of Alaska's communities who are served through *all* 54 unique school districts.

The state should continue efforts to control the cost of workers' compensation claims, including adoption of medical treatment guidelines, improved management of claims, and an improved reemployment benefits process.

ACSA supports a non-partisan and independent State Board of Education whose sole purpose is ensuring a quality education for all of Alaska's children.

ACSA is proud and supportive of educational alternative programs, so long as the directive in Alaska's Constitution is upheld: "***No money shall be paid from public funds for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution.***" This restriction includes vouchers and/or any other mechanisms. Our funding system must be transparent, inclusive and collaborative.

2020 JPS Federal Issues

Forest Receipts (Safe and Secure Rural Schools Act)

ACSA strongly endorses the continuation of the 100-plus year partnership that was created between the Federal Government and communities to compensate communities financially impacted by the placement of timber reserves into federal ownership. ACSA supports a long-term solution.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

ACSA encourages the United States Department of Education to continue to fulfill the bipartisan intention of ESSA by honoring local control.

Further, we encourage Congress to eliminate discretionary funding caps, to allow adequate investment in education, including full funding of the education programs authorized by the bipartisan Every School Succeeds Act.

Affordable Care Act (ACA)

ACSA supports repeal or modifications to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) “Cadillac Tax” and how it applies to Alaska. The current calculation, due to begin in 2022, would unfairly penalize Alaskan employers for factors beyond their control. Solutions may include a geographic differential or other mechanism to recognize Alaska’s unique cost structure.

Other Federal Issues

We strongly oppose the use of public money to fund private/religious education through vouchers or other mechanisms.

We support full funding with cost of living increases of E-Rate, Indian Education, Impact Aid, and all Title programs with no significant program changes.

We support funding for social emotional learning, social workers, mental health support and 0-5 learning for all.

We encourage increased financial support and focus on school safety issues but do not support arming school personnel. We do support hiring additional safety officers.