

2021 Nome Public Schools Board of Education
Legislative Priorities

2021 State Legislative Priorities

The Nome Public Schools Board of Education has chosen the following priority areas for the 2021 Legislative Session. We will focus our advocacy efforts with the Alaska Legislature around the following:

1) Early, Adequate and Predictable Funding for Education

The Board supports full and predictable funding for education, which should provide adequate revenue to cover the actual cost of education in all districts, allowing for inflation and increasing costs, and including all initiatives, laws and mandates that require additional costs and services. In addition, forward funding and early notification of funding is crucial to allow for recruitment and retention of quality educators and administrators in today's challenging job market.

2) Funding of School Capital/Major Maintenance Projects

Nome Public Schools currently has well over \$6 million dollars in needed capital improvement projects, due to aging facilities and systems. Reinstatement of school bond reimbursements and full funding of projects submitted through the Capital Improvement Program are crucial to ensuring our school facilities are safe and providing the best possible environment for learning. Ensuring adequate funding for needed construction of teacher housing facilities is also a high priority item that impacts the ability of the district to recruit and retain quality staff.

3) Hold Harmless Funding Plan for COVID-19 Response

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a significant fluctuation in enrollment for the FY21 school year, with many students shifting from brick and mortar enrollment to correspondence/homeschooling programs. The current Hold Harmless statute protects districts from rapid enrollment losses, but does not address shifts to homeschooling or the loss of intensive needs students. Nome Public Schools is advocating for a legislative change that provides FY21 Hold Harmless Funding at 100% of the entire Foundation Formula based on FY20 OASIS enrollment counts. This will allow districts to honor employment and other contract commitments which were made for FY21.

4) Early Childhood Education Funding

The Board places a high priority on funding quality pre-Kindergarten programs, including supports for early literacy efforts. Children entering kindergarten who have participated in pre-K programs (including Head Start) demonstrate a high degree of kindergarten readiness and reading achievement. Pre-K programs provide needed early literacy skill development, social skills, and physical skill development.

5) Culturally Responsive Education and Language Revitalization

Nome Public Schools calls upon the Alaska Legislature to support indigenous language revitalization efforts by supporting immersion programs for students, as well as programs which build language knowledge for school staff. Alaska Native students deserve culturally responsive classrooms and school settings, where their culture, language and knowledge are an integral part of every day instruction. Professional development for all staff regardless of whether they come from within the community or out of the state is vital. In addition, legislation and funding that supports efforts to grow a local teaching force from within the community would ensure more stable and culturally knowledgeable educators.

It is crucial to the achievement of Alaska Native students when identity is validated through content and methods, and they are motivated and successful when they see themselves reflected in their classrooms and schools. Curriculum which reflects students' cultural identity is often lacking in schools, as textbooks and supplemental materials reflect Western views and values. Modifying curriculum and supplemental materials requires additional time and funding, but results in students who feel engaged and connected to their schools.

6) Social, Emotional and Mental Health of Children

Alaska students experience high rates of adverse childhood experiences and childhood trauma. These experiences negatively impact education, health and safety, and long-term outcomes for our children. Support and funding for school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists is needed as well as professional development for educators and parents in trauma-sensitive and trauma-preventative practices in order to assist children in regulating emotions, developing coping skills, and forming strong positive relationships with adults. Recent efforts focused on the social/emotional learning of students must be continued and expanded, especially those based in community partnerships.

Nome Public Schools also embraces the concept of wellness and a whole child approach. Children who are taught to connect their mind, body and spirit through grounding in cultural beliefs and practices have healthy attitudes and make healthy life choices. We support instruction and curriculum that promote these practices.

7) Attracting and Retaining Quality Educators and Administrators

Teacher and leadership turnover hampers progress on district initiatives and negatively impacts student achievement. Alaska students deserve knowledgeable, stable, and committed teachers, principals and support staff, who are culturally grounded in their local communities. Adequate funding of school systems to allow districts to provide competitive salaries, control of health care costs, following through on commitments to the TRS/PERS pension systems, and high quality teacher preparation programs through the University system are all key to developing Alaska's teacher workforce. Adequate, affordable teacher housing is a crucial factor in this area, and is lacking in Nome and the Bering Strait Region in general.

8) Literacy and Reading Achievement

The Board of Education recognizes that reading is a fundamental skill for all students, and one of the most important focus areas for any school. Professional development and support for teachers at all levels in the area of effective reading instruction is a high priority, and ensuring that teacher preparatory programs provide a strong foundation for teacher candidates in reading instruction is crucial for the future of Alaska's students. Nome Elementary School was recently designated as a Comprehensive Support school due to more than 75% of grade 3-6 students demonstrating below grade level achievement on the reading portion of the state assessment, resulting in renewed efforts and commitment of resources on the part of the district to address this need. Nome Public Schools recognizes that a strong partnership between school districts and the State focused on literacy is crucial to improving student achievement outcomes, and encourages the Legislature to find ways to support reading outcomes for the children of Alaska.

2021 Federal Legislative Priorities

The Nome Public Schools Board of Education has chosen the following priority areas for the 2021 Legislative Session. We will focus our advocacy efforts with the Federal Legislature around the following:

1) Infrastructure for Affordable High-Speed Internet

It is critical that we recognize the increasing need for Alaskan students, educators, and leaders to have equitable access to the digital world both inside and outside of the school environment. While advances have been made to allow rural school districts to access more bandwidth for in-school connectivity, the inability of students to have similar access from their homes creates barriers for completing homework, accessing online learning platforms for K-12 and higher education learning, and the ability to keep up with their peers in more suburban or urban communities. Communities where infrastructure is extremely limited or non-existent tend to be disproportionately minority and low-income, exacerbating the "digital divide

Nome Public Schools supports the federal E-Rate program, which provides matching funds up to a 9:1 ratio for low-income districts, but also support efforts to provide more flexibility for districts receiving E-Rate funding to support home access for students. Nome Public Schools also supports efforts by the federal government to increase infrastructure capabilities through a variety of incentives and public/private partnerships in an effort to provide all communities with equitable access to affordable, reliable, and high speed internet.