



Setting the Record Straight – Responding to Commissioner Bishop’s Letter to You.

Dear School Board Members and Superintendents,

Commissioner Bishop sent a letter dated October 2nd to school board members across the state. The letter is intended to “spotlight misrepresented aspects” of the governor and commissioner's understanding of what was achieved in the last legislative session for education. It also appears to promote the governor and commissioner's policy goals, using unsupported comparisons and conclusions.

AASB and ASA aim to provide you with the facts, as we have done consistently every year. We represent the interests and positions that you, our members, have agreed upon through either the AASB Resolutions process or the ACSA Joint Position Statements.

Education Funding

The commissioner’s letter first seeks to clarify that the FY 2025 education budget increased from previous budgets. Here are some facts about education funding for FY2025:

- \$174.6 million of one-time funds outside the BSA was the most funding appropriated in recent history. We are grateful for that accomplishment.
- However, the funds did **NOT** result in a \$680 Base Student Allocation (BSA) increase or address the impact of inflation since 2017.
- Consequently, the BSA **remains at \$5,960**. That is where the funding discussion begins for FY26.
- The \$7.3 million increase to pupil transportation was the first increase since 2016, but it did not cover the cost inflation.
- The Legislature failed by one vote to override the governor's veto of CSSB 140, which would have increased the BSA by \$680.
- Furthermore, the governor vetoed an additional \$5.2 million to help implement his primary education policy, the Alaska Reads Act. Therefore, the Reads Act remains an unfunded mandate.

Public School Options

Most school districts across the state offer correspondence school options as well as charter schools, magnet schools, academies, and more. AASB and ASA have consistently supported these educational options when they are implemented and supported by local school boards and administrators. It is the support of the local school district that helps to create successful programs.

Commissioner Bishop's letter makes some questionable statements about student achievement on standardized testing concerning charter and correspondence schools. Here are the facts to consider:

- A study released last year by the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance ranked Alaska's charter schools as the best in the nation by a considerable margin when comparing proficiency measured by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) compared to other charter schools.
- Alaska's charter school distinction as the top performer is based on comparisons **to other charter schools** across the country and is not a comparison of student proficiency to regular neighborhood or village schools.
- **The Harvard study is a comparative ranking. It is not a study linking causation to increased performance on the NAEP exams.** Dr. Paul Peterson, author of the study, confirmed this when questioned by the Senate Education Committee.
- Similarly, Commissioner Bishop noted that correspondence school students score substantially higher on the AK STAR assessment than neighborhood schools; however, as you can see below, [the percentage of correspondence school students taking the exam is quite low.](#) For any trained researcher, implying **that correspondence school students far outperform all other non-correspondence students is simply inappropriate.**

Student Participation in Spring 2024 Assessments



Full assessment results can be viewed here
<https://education.alaska.gov/assessments/results>



School boards, superintendents, and teachers in Alaska know our students face many unique challenges. Nearly all of our public school systems deal with high rates of poverty. We have a highly diverse population of students who often speak many languages. Many students suffer from mental illness, hunger, and the lack of a safe living environment. Our public schools open

our doors to all of them. While setting high expectations for students is a good thing, in and of itself, it may not be the most significant factor for improving student achievement. Instead, we know that engaging parents, families, and communities in fostering a culturally responsive and inclusive public education system is the key to success.

The governor and commissioner speak of parental rights and choice as the preferred means to improve student outcomes. School boards also recognize the need for parental or guardian rights, including access to public school options. School boards and superintendents work on behalf of all students. Board members are locally elected parents, grandparents, guardians, and community members. They are not “outside” special interest groups but, in fact, are elected by the same constituents who elect the governor. We strive to meet the needs of all students through a local democratic and public process of governance focused on student achievement.

We urge school boards, Superintendents, and staff to communicate to our policymakers, the state administration, and your associations the positive measures your districts are taking to improve student success. At the same time, we urge you to voice the financial and policy challenges you face that hinder your ability to provide the highest quality education to your students.

We will be holding a joint meeting by Zoom on October 16th at 11:00 a.m. Details to follow. Please plan to attend to discuss this further as we plan collectively for the upcoming legislative session.

As the presidents of AASB and ASA, we wanted to let you know that we will work to remain a trusted, nonpartisan source of factual information for you and your communities. We will continue to be staunch advocates for promoting, improving, and protecting Alaska’s public education system.

Most respectfully,



Margo Bellamy
President
Association of Alaska School Boards



Clayton Holland
President
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