

This past February we have had many exciting events happen! I apologize in advance, because my report is somewhat long.

On February 9th–12th myself and 6 other students: Anagail Hamby, Austin Keys, Bonnie Campbell, Megan Christopherson, Teagen Taylor, and Nash Lovell all traveled up to Juneau to participate in a Youth Advocacy Institute and Legislative Fly-in. This is the first time in several years that the district has sent students, and the largest group we have ever had. This was a great opportunity, and we all learned so much!

On our first day we learned how a bill becomes a law, how to advocate at the capitol, and what to expect when meeting with legislators. That morning we played a few icebreaker games and then in a group with other school districts (including the Sitka School District) we were able to discuss issues our districts might have in common. Afterwards, we wrote up questions we would like to ask state legislators. Later in the day we were able to tour the capitol building and then went up to a committee room on the second floor to see Representatives CJ McCormick and Dan Ortiz and Senate member Jesse Kiehl on the floor in action. They talked about what places they represent and why and how they became involved in politics. Next they invited us for a Q&A. This gave students the opportunity to ask questions that we had worked on earlier. I am very proud that our district had some students asking questions for our group, and giving powerful corresponding personal stories.

That night the leadership institute had rented a bowling alley, so we got to have some fun and interact with students from other districts. This was great, as some of us had never bowled before.

The second day of the Institute was really focused on polishing off our testimonies and testifying for practice. Some students read their testimonies and got feedback from house Representative Andi Story. In the afternoon, as everyone was gathered, a speaker invited students to raise their hands if they would like to do a mock testimony. Teagan Taylor raised her hand and was invited onstage to present her testimony as AASB director Lon Garrison pretended to be a Senator.

That night during dinner we got to spend some time with everyone who traveled with our district and were able to discuss our plans for the next day to meet with and give our testimonies to Dan Ortiz and Rebecca Himschoot. We were also conveniently seated right next to a pool table where we played a game with some other students we had met at YLI.

Our last day was filled with meetings. Each student had prepared a testimony about a certain aspect of our district that we were able to share. We started our day meeting with Dan Ortiz and giving our testimonies to support a BSA increase, followed by doing the same with Rebecca Himschoot later. Next, we had a brief appointment gap so we sat for a quick breakfast, then went to the Juneau Museum to look at Art Through the Heart submissions from Coffman Cove. After that, because there were so many people, districts were rotated into the galleries to be introduced to the house floor by their Representatives. Rebecca Himschoot introduced Anagail, Bonnie, Megan, Teagan, Nash, and Myself, while Dan Ortiz introduced Austin. They announced our school district, our names, and that we were there in support of a BSA increase. They showed all of the districts who attended that meeting on Gavel Alaska, so if you were watching T.V. on KTOO, you would have seen us!

In addition to the Youth Advocacy Institute, I also had the amazing opportunity to travel back to Juneau last month for a Rising Educators Conference that was held at UAS! I traveled with students from AK-TRAILS, Hollis, Thorne Bay and Coffman Cove. We are all taking an elective class taught by Ginger White called Educational Development and Psychology. The materials are provided through the Rising Educator's platform. In the class we are learning about teaching strategies, and may even be eligible for future college credit if we complete the requirements.

During the two day conference, we attended a ton of sessions. We learned about some of the University of Alaska's programs, toured the Juneau campus, learned college skills (such as writing professional emails), and got to explore uas's online classes and listened to some very knowledgeable professionals tell us about the most effective methods of teaching. This made teaching seem like an interesting career choice, and really opened my eyes to possibilities within Alaskan classrooms. Overall, this was one of the best learning experiences on a trip that I have ever had. Thank you so much to Ginger White and Matt Gore for chaperoning and making this a possibility. They were amazing chaperones who really made this a positive and fun experience.

In other events, on February 23rd-24th, students shot a state archery tournament in Thorne Bay. A couple of us were on a field trip during this time, so I would like to say a big thank you to James and John who made special arrangements for us to shoot at an alternate time. Also, congratulations to all of the students who will be representing our district at Nationals!

As I have been traveling to different events, students around the district have been sharing their thoughts with me on how we can improve the district.

A few of the things that I heard was that students around the district feel that the planning of stream week should be at the beginning of the year so that students will have an idea of activities well in advance. One idea that was thrown around for next year is having a coast guard helicopter or ship visit and let the kids tour it and have the Coast Guard provide career information. In the past, before Covid, we did this, and students remembered. There are also a lot of students in our district interested in becoming a pilot as a career pathway, so if we could include something to do with that, it would be great.

Another thing students mentioned is that they would like to see the return of the option of Thursday electives in Thorne Bay. They feel that it would be better for communication throughout the district and add to an overall sense of community.

Below are a few pictures, and I have included more in my slideshow. Thank you for your time, and this concludes my report.

-Tia Christopherson

