Advocacy Until the Gavel Falls
by Dr. Dave Herbert, ACSA President; Superintendent, St. Mary’s Schools

At the commencement of the 28th Legislature in January, I encouraged members of our association to engage with the Alaska Legislature to ensure that our voice is heard and that we were partners in guiding and supporting beneficial educational reforms being conceived, and in some cases already under way, in our districts. I would like to commend members who have taken the time out of a hectic schedule to testify and help members of the legislature better understand issues being faced in our schools and the implications—and sometimes unintended consequence—of legislation proposed for public education.

Looking back over the past ten weeks of the legislative session, it is obvious that many association members have and continue to play a vital role in shaping legislation moving through both the house and senate. Members of our association have been engaged in positive dialogue with legislators, testified in committee meetings, provided written documentation, and when appropriate have professionally stood tall for public education in Alaska.

As the first session of the 28th Legislature winds down, we need to remain vigilant whenever possible to influence legislation and the budgets necessary to allow our public school system to thrive in the coming year. This requires a continued focus on each educational bill before the legislature, the need to ensure that our voice is heard and that we stand silently by, we may find ourselves faced with radical change that may not be in the best interest of all Alaska students.

Time is of the essence, and now is the time to make personal contact with your senators and representatives to make sure they have a thorough understanding of legislation coming before them. If you find it difficult to catch your legislator’s attention, tell your story to a legislative aide who will carry your valued message forward. And don’t forget the power of e-mail messages—short and to the point on bills of importance. Finally, when ACSA places a call for action or voices a need for critical information, please respond quickly and precisely.

We are all aware that any bill introduced and/or heard can move very quickly through several committees at the end of a legislative session. Some of these bills can have serious ramifications, so never count a bill out that can easily be activated by an influential legislator during a brief, hastily called committee meeting. Although we may not all agree on each educational bill before the legislature, the democratic process demands that as educational leaders, we represent the students we serve in a prudent and sophisticated manner, in order to bring about necessary and positive change for all Alaskan students.

On behalf of our association, I sincerely want to thank each member who has had the gumption, the motivation, and the courage to represent the best interests of students during this first session of the 28th Legislature.

Challenging Times, Yet Success Is Being Achieved
by Glen Gelbrich, Juneau Superintendent and AASA Seat E Director

School Districts continually hear from political pundits and lawmakers a cry for accountability, and their questioning of any sustained commitment to Pre-K–12 funding without that accountability. The cry for results is often couched in the assumption that we in public education are not focused on or achieving improved success for our students. It just is not true.

In the Juneau School District, and in many of our school districts across Alaska, local educators are identifying and striving toward more rigorous standards and more diverse ways to achieve success. Here in Juneau and elsewhere in the Last Frontier, we didn’t wait for our legislature, the U.S. Education Department in Washington, D.C., or others to set higher standards and retool for greater student success.

We began, as did our colleagues, to elevate our academic standards, expand our career technology programs, and explore different teaching strategies and innovative ways to help all Alaska students. As the first session of the 28th Legislature draws to a close, we believe we have a solid foundation for continued growth and for positioning our schools to succeed in the years to come.

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Beyond Reading, Writing and Math
by John Pothast, AAESP President; Principal, Redoubt Elementary School

In kindergarten, while his classmates drew stick-figure family portraits, Cody was drawing near-perfect images of the movie character Shrek. Shrek was Cody’s favorite movie and, according to his mother, he would spend hours watching it, pausing frequently to draw his green-skinned friend in various poses and settings. Cody is now in third grade at our school, and as evidenced by the included drawing (made about a month ago), one would be hard pressed to tell the difference between Cody’s version and a Shrek original. Last fall, Cody also drew the picture of Thomas Edison.

Our school’s challenge, as is the challenge in every one of our schools, is to find ways to challenge students like Cody, at their levels and with their incredibly diverse interests and talents. No Child Left Behind ushered in unprecedented levels of accountability for teachers and schools, and I believe our schools are now stronger and better when dealing with, and accounting for, our struggling students. I also feel, however, that our focus on struggling sub-groups of students has left less time for schools to encourage and help students on the other end, like Cody. If we are going to truly adopt the philosophy of leaving no child behind, that includes the need to develop every student’s strengths and passions and help nurture their talents.

It is incumbent on us to foster classroom environments where every student is truly and individually challenged, no matter where they fall on the ability spectrum. Also, as we continue to balance how our various resources are used throughout our districts and schools, I hope we do not forget the importance of the arts in our schools. There is a plethora of research that demonstrates the need and value for students to engage in art and music to help fully develop their brains and thinking. Even though some students may not show great talent in the realms of our currently tested reading, writing or math, let’s not forget that our schools are filled with incredibly talented students who have strengths and passions worthy of our appreciation and development. Cody is my reminder of that.
Air Travel is Still Essential to Rural Education in Alaska

by Adam Mokelke, AASSP President; Principal, Burchell High School

Ask a youngster in a rural school what they want to be when they grow up, and the most likely answer will be, “A pilot!” Growing up in rural Alaska I idolized those who piloted small planes like the Piper Super Cub, Cherokee 6 and Cessna 207. These bush pilots delivered essential services to my family where we lived in remote places around McGrath. They also brought thrill and excitement to a young boy’s life and triggered my imagination. My first dream, like so many boys growing up in Alaska, was to be a bush pilot like them. As an adult and a lifelong Alaskan educator, my respect for bush pilots and the services they provide to rural communities and schools has grown deeper each year. Flying in bush Alaska is one of the many unique and diverse aspects of living and teaching across the remote stretches of our state.

Through my experience as a teacher and administrator for the Lake and Peninsula School District, encompassing the Alaska Peninsula and Bristol Bay area, I spent a lot of time flying with and getting to know bush pilots. Like many rural administrators, my job required air travel. Serving three or more schools at a time, each only accessible by air, I spent a lot of time flying with these amazing men and women from village to village in small planes over vast and varied terrain. Flying around Bristol Bay and the Alaska Peninsula is not easy. On one side is the volatile Bering Sea, with frequent winds whipping across cold waters from Siberia. On the south side is the Pacific Ocean, which brings swirling weather patterns in from warmer climates to the south and creates massive clashes with colder air fronts. Separating them is the Alaska Peninsula, a thin strip of rough, mountainous terrain whose peaks, valleys, gullies and funnels channel high winds, fog, and freezing rain. Pilots navigate the coasts, mountains and weather, traversing from village to village with an amazing record of safety and success. Calm and competent, bush pilots embody Hemingway’s quote, “Courage is grace under pressure.”

Urban or “road system schools” and rural schools have some deep and distinct differences. While the bulk of our population resides within the railbelt, we must always be conscious of the unique challenges of “the bush.” Rural schools and districts still rely heavily on the local air taxis that provide transportation and essential services. Much of life in rural Alaska, including schools, revolves around air travel. Administrators and support staff serve many schools, flying in for coaching and support, observation and evaluation, community meetings, testing, and much more. Sports, especially basketball, are the lifeblood of small communities, providing a positive outlet for kids and a reason for the community to gather and celebrate at the school. In Alaska, rural sports teams can’t hop on a bus; every road game involves an airplane ride. School lunches rely on the delivery of food, and the physical plant only runs if fuel is delivered regularly. I’ve been in situations where the village was running out of fuel for heat and generators, and we could only have school the next day if airplanes could land. Most critically, life can hang in the balance when a Medevac flight is needed to airlift a patient to one of the regional hospitals.

Essential transportation and supply services in our great state still rely heavily on air carriers and the people who work for them. Despite great efforts toward improved safety in the industry, each year planes go down and lives are lost. This always affects our rural communities and deeply impacts the districts, schools, educators and students so closely connected with the pilots and airlines. My heart and thoughts are with the families of those lost in recent airplane accidents. Each time there is an air carrier tragedy, I reflect with great admiration the amazing men and women who face the challenge of flying in our state. With the unpredictable weather and vast territory, the track record and safety of flying Alaska is truly amazing. Bush pilots are real Alaskan icons, true heroes of the last frontier, and critical cogs in the unique system that supports rural Alaskan public education.

Air travel is just one example of the incredible and unique circumstances of living in rural Alaska. As we wrestle with school funding changes and challenges, I worry about small rural districts and their huge and growing costs of travel, fuel, facilities and staffing. With the reduced number of rural legislators, I hope those who represent us keep in mind the small and sparsely populated villages that have little or no tax base and require the state’s funding support to thrive while providing a quality public education.
The Value of Public Education

by André Layral, Executive Director, AASSP

In a 1785 letter to John Jebb, U.S. President John Adams wrote, “The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people and be willing to bear the expenses of it. There should not be a district of one mile square, without a school in it, not founded by a charitable individual, but maintained at the public expense of the people themselves.”

A strong commitment to quality public education benefits each community in Alaska by contributing to our local and statewide economies, attracting and retaining our residents and providing our students with the tools they need to succeed and be contributing members in our communities. While money alone cannot improve education, money does matter when considering increased annual costs. Flat funding means schools will be asked again to do more with less, curtailing efforts to continue promising reforms that are making a difference.

Some in Alaska believe our public schools are failing us, but my career in public education in Alaska, and now working with school leaders, tells me otherwise. Alaska’s public education system is doing remarkably well despite the challenges schools face. Yet some schools do struggle to make success possible for every student. Many of the factors that contribute to low student achievement and failure to graduate are complex and originate outside the control of schools. Addressing these factors requires equal commitment and accountability from students, families and communities.

We have witnessed one call or another for improving and reforming public education from within and outside of education circles over the past 30 years. From Nation at Risk through No Child Left Behind, these reform efforts set out to achieve educational goals never before attempted in the United States. It seems that each generation demands more of public schools than its predecessor to meet emerging needs. This is also true in Alaska. These reform efforts have focused on better teacher preparation, providing early education, standardizing curriculum, ensuring college and career readiness, conducting annual assessments of students, and demanding greater accountability of teachers and school leaders. While they have been worthwhile, measuring schools on test scores alone ignores the fact that much of what is taught and learned is difficult to measure.

In this legislative session several bills have been introduced that purport to reform education in Alaska by providing more choices outside of public education. The conversation pits the notion that parents are in the best position to decide how to educate their children against the Alaska Constitution’s prohibition of using public money to support private and religious schools. The larger conversation appears to have shifted away from a collective commitment to improving our existing K-12 public education system and school choices. Allowing unlimited public and private school choices leads to an array of troubling consequences.

The relationship between student achievement and state spending on public education is obvious, and the importance of a good education is evident. Shifting resources away from public education through tax credits or vouchers at a time when our state’s evolving economic picture is uncertain only serves to undermine the sustainability of efforts currently underway by dedicated teachers, principals and other school staff.

Embracing School Change

by Rod Morrison, AASSP President-elect; Principal, Gilson Junior High School

Across Alaska and throughout our country we hear that public education needs to change and better serve students, especially those students not currently taking advantage of all that we are offering. This leads to naysayers claiming that public education is failing. As school administrators we can positively affect public perception of our schools by sharing in our own communities a clear vision of our schools’ success.

I am proud to say that in 2005, at Gilson Middle School, we adopted the motto Success is the ONLY option!, which captures our vision, has helped keep our focus on the outcomes we want for our students, and has served as a vehicle for systemic change. Our motto is prominently displayed on large posters in our classrooms, on the front of our school, and even engraved on our pencils.

The staff felt committed to helping all students, but we did not realize how tough this goal would be. Teachers often come to my office to seek advice on how to help an “unmotivated student,” even when it is clear the student may not appreciate the help. If I cannot help come up with a creative solution, we brainstorm strategies with other school or district staff so we can make a difference for this one student. We challenge ourselves daily to find “success” for every student. Many know that Thomas Edison conducted over 2000 experiments before he got the light bulb to work. When asked how he felt about all the failures he had before he got it to work, he responded, “I didn’t fail, it was just a two thousand step process.” We remind students of this daily, that mistakes will be made, but they are on the path to success.

Students and staff at Gilson Middle School work together to navigate toward the end goal—student academic achievement and success. In order to be effective and progressive in this systemic change, we needed to review our student data. All data sources were analyzed because we did not want to “leave any child behind.” We looked at Terra Nova scores, Standards Based Assessment results, student/community/staff surveys, the AASB School Climate and Connectedness Survey, and the longitudinal results of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. With help from our school counselor, this data was broken down by learning objective.

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The Value of Public Education

Measures introduced this legislative session to amend the Alaska constitution or provide tax credits for residents who make contributions in support of private and religious schools will become a slippery slope, benefitting only a few who already choose to send their children to private schools. As educators, we each have a responsibility to help others understand the value of K-12 public education. Whether the democratic ideal of common good in Alaska can survive the onslaught of bills proposed by outside interests will depend on engaging others to renew their commitment to support a free and public education for all students. Without this support the market mentality will prevail, threatening to turn every human relationship into a commercial transaction.

Embracing School Change

and then disaggregated by gender, ethnicity and economic status. We not only reviewed current student results, but we also looked at the incoming fifth and sixth grade students in order to plan programs that will serve their needs. We quit the blame game for failures and began asking ourselves, “What can we do better to serve the students?”

Data is a key component to making best-practice decisions for the developmental needs of the middle school students. In the past, staff and students would dread the release of any data out of concern the results would not be positive. Now there is an excitement felt throughout our school whenever results are published. I can remember more than one conversation with teachers who felt they had failed their students because the students’ score was not a true reflection of the performance they saw each day in the classroom. Rather than blaming, the student and teacher took ownership for the results. Students now know what standards they excel in and what standards need more work. More importantly, students believe they can succeed.

Schools should celebrate their successes often and highlight the incredible things teachers do in their classrooms every day. I truly believe that if we share school successes every day, our jobs become far easier. This is the evidence that school reform works for students. Curriculum, instruction and assessment are a part of everyday school life. It is important that we don’t always merely accept the status quo, just show up for work, or do things the easy way. Our teams need to believe in what they do: making our jobs easier, but most importantly, doing it for the students, who are the direct beneficiaries of all we do!

Sven Gustafson and Dan Gallego Are AASSP Principals of the Year

The Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals has selected Sven Gustafson, Principal of Anchorage’s Romig Middle School as 2013 Alaska Middle School Principal of the Year, and Dan Gallego, Principal of Anchorage’s Bartlett High School as 2013 Alaska High School Principal of the Year.

Gustafson has served as principal of Romig since 2008. Prior to that he served as an assistant principal at Clark Middle School (2002-04), Romig (2004-05) and Gruening Middle School (2005-07). He has also served as Assistant Principal at Large and Region IV Director on the AASSP Board of Directors and has mentored numerous aspiring principals.

Gustafson is highly respected by the staff at Romig, who cite the priority he gives to the interests and welfare of students in his school, developing effective learning opportunities for his students, and his laser focus on improving student performance. Gustafson is successful in making sure every student and their family feels welcome from the outset when students enter the school as seventh graders. His success turning school climate into a unified, secure and proud learning community was key to his selection.

Gustafson has served as principal of Romig since 2008. Prior to that he served as a K-12 principal at Tri-Valley School in Healy, and then as Assistant Principal at Bartlett (2005-06). He has also served as Region II Director on the AASSP Board of Directors and on the board of directors of the Anchorage School District Business Partnership Board of Directors.

Gallego’s success introducing and developing Bartlett into Smaller Learning Communities was key to his selection. His peers cite the priority he gives to his own and his staff’s professional development. Those who nominated Gallego also cited his visibility as a school leader and his focus on implementing the school’s mission while meeting the interests and needs of his students.

Gustafson and Gallego are now eligible for consideration as 2013 MetLife/NASSP National Middle and High School Principals of the Year. Each will attend the NASSP Principal’s Institute and Awards Gala on September 18-21, 2013 in Washington, D.C., where all state Principals of the Year will share their expertise among peers and national leaders in education.
Victor’s Story
by Dr. Robert Thomason, AASA President; Superintendent, Petersburg City School District

Victor Trautman is a veteran science teacher at Petersburg High School. He is one of those teachers every child should experience in his or her educational journey. Victor told me a story about a student in one of his classes who exemplified what education and learning look like now that we are thirteen years into the 21st century. The student is not an advanced placement student; she is not significantly different from any of the other 451 students in Petersburg School District. Today it seems everyone is focused on testing to obtain concrete, objective, hard data to document educational attainment. As a scientist, I “live” hard, quantifiable data that is neither inherently good nor bad, but there are times when hard data does not exist or is not the appropriate descriptor. We must then seek and highlight positive anecdotal evidence of learning.

One of the major questions now in the educational forefront revolves around the value of technology in the classroom and in the hands of students. Victor’s story is about a student in his geology class who was responsible for creating a podcast. This student took the assignment to a new educational level due to the availability of technology in Petersburg School District, and because she knew how to use it appropriately. The student located a physics professor’s college level cosmology class at iTunes University and listened to the lecture on dark matter and dark energy. She took detailed notes, then incorporated them into her podcast presentation.

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offerings to students, align our coursework to post-secondary options for our students, and to provide the professional development to support our teachers’ efforts to help students meet those standards. We believe, as we always have, that a vibrant and sustainable public education system is critical to the economic viability and long-term viability in our great state.

The results in Juneau and elsewhere in Alaska are clear. Graduation rates are up. Achievement is up. Discipline referrals are down. Our students are gradually and steadily more successful. The work is paying off. This is happening despite staffing reductions across the state. As an example, in Juneau we have eliminated over 100 positions in the past three years. Last year alone, we reduced our certified staff by almost 7%, our classified staff by nearly 12%, and our administrative staff by nearly 17%. We eliminated 22% of the jobs in our central office building alone.

With all of the discussion about investing in the cultivation of our natural resources, we believe the greatest natural resource we have is the collective group of young people who enter our classrooms everyday. We believe in them and we believe in the educators who serve them. We also believe that a strategic and sustainable investment in their success will brighten our future as Alaskans. We need to share these successes with our neighbors, with our community, and with our lawmakers. The truth needs to be told.
Alaska House of Representatives Public Opinion Survey

The Alaska House of Representatives contracted with Dittman Research to conduct a poll measuring citizen opinion on a variety of issues, including K-12 education. Highlights of results released in late March:

• 44% indicated state spending was about right, 38% felt it was too high
• 53% believe that the current level of state spending is not sustainable in the future
• 80% gave an A-C letter grade for Alaska’s K-12 public school system
• 48% stated that student performance should be improved before increasing education funding
• 61% agree that parents should be allowed to send their child to a school of choice and allow a portion of the public funds to follow the child, creating healthy competition to improve all Alaska’s schools

The poll also questioned respondents about amending Alaska’s constitution to allow a school choice program. Two questioning formats were used with half of the respondents asked using each format. The first format offered a description of how the change would work, with 56% somewhat or strongly supporting the amendment and 29% strongly opposed. The second format lacked the more extensive description, with 84% supporting a constitutional amendment to allow a school choice program in Alaska.

Complete results of the public opinion survey can be viewed online.

Alaska Council of School Administrators
2013 Joint Position Statements

Each year, through a committee process, representative ACSA members—principals, business officials and superintendents—reaffirm and/or develop position statements to support our legislative advocacy effort. Eight statements will guide ACSA members in 2013, including:

Adequate Funding: ACSA strongly encourages the Legislature to ensure adequate operational and infrastructure funding for school districts. Without adequate funding support, school districts cannot deliver the quality education services required by Alaska’s students, citizens and the State Constitution.

Early Childhood Education: ACSA believes early childhood education should be a priority for all Alaskans who desire to increase and improve educational opportunities for all children, and it supports the funding of programs that will offer early education opportunities.

Career and Technical Education: ACSA supports adequate and equitable funding for Career and Technical Education (CTE) in order to ensure K-12 students have access to the tools, training, and programs to prepare a future workforce for Alaska.

Preparing, Attracting and Retaining Qualified Educators: ACSA encourages the development of a comprehensive statewide program to prepare, attract and retain quality educators in our schools.

Prior Year PERS Retirement Billings: ACSA recommends that the legislature take action to revise the provision in AS 39.35.255 that requires an FY08 funding baseline for all future PERS retirement payments.

ESEA Re-Authorization: ACSA calls upon Congress to complete the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2013 and in doing so, restore state discretion on best approaches to bring about meaningful student achievement improvement.

Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act (Forest Receipts): ACSA endorses the continuation of the 100+ year partnership that was created between the Federal government and rural communities to compensate counties affected by the placement of timber into federal ownership. This partnership stipulates that 25% of the revenue derived from the U.S. Forest Service activities, e.g., timber sales, mineral extraction and grazing fees, be returned to impacted counties.

Worker’s Compensation Fee Schedule: ACSA asks that the legislature take action to return to the historical method of setting a fixed fee schedule for allowable medical fees in worker’s compensation claims. Implementation of AS 23.30.097 in 2011 has resulted in rate increases averaging 10% in FY13.

The complete ACSA Joint Position Statement document is available at alaskaacsa.org.
Funding for Intervention is Money Well Spent

by Laurie Olson, ALASBO President; Director of Finance, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District

Providing students with the help they need to succeed is the goal of all school districts. Acquiring literacy skills is our schools’ most important task for primary students. No other educational success can compensate for failure to teach reading early and well. Our emphasis on collaboration between classroom teachers and specially trained interventionists is making a difference for students in our district.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) has developed a 3 Tiered System of Interventions to provide all students with high quality instruction and, when necessary, additional academic support. Students in Tier 1 receive high quality core instruction provided by the classroom teacher. Tier 2 provides additional academic support from the classroom teacher or from an interventionist for students who are not successful at Tier 1. For students who continue to struggle after Tier 1 and Tier 2, Tier 3 provides more intensive academic support from interventionists.

Students are tested to identify sub-skill deficiencies and determine what type of intervention will be most effective. Tier structures specify daily time allotments, depending on student data and deficits. The goal of intervention is always to bring the student up to grade level performance. In order to do that, students receive targeted supplemental instruction, individually or in small groups, in addition to classroom interventions. This additional daily instructional time and subsequent progress monitoring has proven effective in providing students with the support they need to make enough academic growth to bring them up to grade level.

Currently, 13.5 FTE interventionists are working with students in seventeen of the KPBSD elementary and middle schools. While this is a substantial commitment of funds, the results for students are worth the investment. In the six years that this intervention strategy has been used in KPBSD, the number of students identified as Learning Disabled has dropped by about 10%. More students are catching up before the gap is too great to make adequate gains because they are receiving targeted instruction based on their individual deficits.

KPBSD is committed to ensuring that each child makes significant academic progress. Providing the additional support for K-2 students who are learning to read is the best way to help those students be successful for the rest of their lives. KPBSD’s continued use of intervention teams and interventionists to work with students who need help is the most effective way to continue to increase student achievement.

Start with “Thanks for Your Support of Education!”

by Amy Lujan, ALASBO Executive Director

This year, as I’ve been working with our members to communicate our K-12 education needs to legislators, I’ve seen more than ever the power of starting with a simple “Thank you for your past support!”

Starting with a “thank you” has long been the strategy of ALASBO’s Legislative Committee Chair, Dave Jones. As other mentors have told me, “You catch more flies with honey than vinegar!” But there are other important reasons to start our conversations this way in a difficult year for funding.

- “Thank you” recognizes the strong support for K-12 education at the state level through the operating budget, which has resulted in a sharp rise in aggregate state funding per student over the past ten years. Many calculations showing the increase include large payments by the state for TRS and PERS costs. While these funding increases did not directly increase funding to
classrooms, the fact remains that without the TRS/PERS funding from the state, Alaska school districts would be unable to cover basic education costs.

• “Thank you” recognizes strong support of capital projects in school districts, including bond debt reimbursement, in addition to construction and renovation of REAA schools.

• “Thank you” recognizes additional funding mechanisms in recent years, including one-time energy support, changes to pupil transportation reimbursements to better match rising costs, and increases in Career and Technical Education funding.

• Finally, “thank you” recognizes that virtually all public officials want to be seen as supporters of education. Beginning the conversation this way sets a positive note for the discussion.

We are likely to be dealing with a scarcity of resources at the state and federal level for the next few years. Painful cuts have become a way of life in school districts, along with a constant scramble to do more with less. While under these pressures, school officials are asked to be innovative about finding more ways to squeeze blood out of each turnip.

I truly believe that each public official is trying to do what is best for our state’s future, although perspectives can be wildly different. Education officials must show evidence of programs that work and provide suggestions about policy that can help us manage effectively. Solid arguments about the value of public education for our state’s long-term success will help us continue to ensure that K-12 education receives strong funding support in Alaska.

Site Visit: An Innovative Vocational Center

by Amy Lujan, ALASBO Executive Director

Over the past three years, the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) International has reformatted its Executive Leadership Forum, held in February each year, to offer the highest quality leadership training available. I’ve had the privilege of attending several of these events with my ALASBO colleagues.

This year’s event included a site visit to St. Charles Parish Schools in Luling, Louisiana, just outside of New Orleans. The Assistant Superintendent of this district is a long-time member of ASBO International, and he organized a fantastic visit as a way to “give back” for all the excellent training he’s received over the years.

Our visit focused on an innovative facility in the district called the Satellite Center, which opened in 2001. This facility is located between the district’s two high schools. Students from both high schools are selected to participate in Satellite Center programs for up to two years, attending the Satellite Center for half of the school day. The students focus on just one of the programs: Advanced Television Broadcasting, Culinary Arts, Digital Media, Engineering Design, Health Care Exploration, Hotel/Restaurant/Tourism, Interactive Media, Patient Care, Processing Technology, and Student Teaching. Each program has a large, well-equipped resource center where students can truly explore these vocational areas with hands-on activities.

We were impressed by the real-world projects students engage in to apply their learning:

• cable news coverage of local sports events, including pre-game interviews
• regular restaurant-style dinners to practice culinary skills
• participation in New Orleans Superbowl preparations to accommodate tourists
• digital media design packages for local companies (website, stationary, etc.)
• national competition for interactive media, with well-known judges
• classroom internships for student teachers

As we toured the facility, students were our tour guides. They were clearly enthusiastic about the programs offered. For some, participation in a vocational program helps a student identify what s/he does NOT want to do! For others, life-long passions are discovered that can lead directly to advanced studies or to jobs in the region.

Development of the Satellite Center is an example of district administrators thinking “out-of-the-box” to maximize resources. Locating the center midway between the two high schools made it possible to provide top-notch facilities to the entire high school population. Some were initially worried about the strong rivalry between the high schools; however, it turned out that the students enjoyed mingling, and the rivalries might linger more with the adults than with the students themselves!

In Alaska, we have also begun to develop innovative vocational programs to maximize our resources. This trend must continue to prepare our students for 21st century careers.

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Feeling Overwhelmed with Choice

by Dr. Bruce Johnson, Executive Director, ACSA and AASA

Reflecting on the first session of the 28th Legislature, I am struck by the significant role played by choice in the legislative conversation about education. Scarcely a week went by that choices regarding public education were not part of the conversation. Most notable are the Senate and House Joint Resolutions (SJR9 and HJR1) calling for a change to Alaska’s constitution allowing public funds to be used for private and religious schools. On the surface, this issue appears rather straightforward, but as the testimony and public input is considered, the complexity of choice grows large.

Choices in the case of these resolutions could involve:

- tax credits for corporations and others to provide funds directly to private schools to help grow student enrollment (SB89)
- scholarships provided to families to enable their children to attend schools of choice—private or public
- expansion of our current statewide or districtwide correspondence programs with parents participating in the development of Individual Learning Plans that outline where education services will be accessed—private or public (SB100)

The reference to choice is evident in other pending legislation, too:

- students in alternative schools who attend programs that don’t offer interscholastic activities can participate in private schools’ interscholastic activities (SB41)
- students electing to attend residential high schools where sponsoring districts receive funds to operate comprehensive boarding programs (SB47)
- in-district, variable-length, residential high schools designed to provide extensive opportunities to better meet the needs of students attending small high schools with only limited course offerings and faculty (SB47)
- charter school “authorizers” beyond the local school boards that could hire non-union employees (HB93)

This brief reflection on the choices currently before the legislature is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative of society’s (and Alaska’s) desire for personalized services. Clearly, educators have recognized for decades that a “one-size-fits-all” approach is not workable, and thus public schools have evolved to include alternative schools, charter schools, correspondence schools, magnet schools, blended schools involving partial-day or select-course attendance, and others. Yet even with these choices the needs of some students have not been met, and the demand from parents and others to do more has spurred a call for even greater choice — a smorgasbord of offerings from which families would select options, tailoring their sons’ or daughters’ education to fit their individual needs.

Like many others, I have struggled with the concept of how much choice is enough, the overall cost of choice, and how to preserve equity in the best interest of all Alaska’s children. Logic suggests that Alaska cannot offer unlimited choices because choice often increases cost. For example, if additional variable-length or full-year residential programs are created across our state, some small schools may become less efficient or populated, potentially necessitating school closure. As another example, if Alaska were to build residential dormitories costing millions of dollars to accommodate additional residential students, those funds would not be available to support more traditional schooling options. Money becomes an issue, especially over time.

We can probably all agree that as Alaska enters a projected period of revenue scarcity due largely to declining oil production, it is critically important that we make wise choices. To do otherwise might be costly and could severely limit opportunities for both rural and urban students to receive the education they deserve. All Alaskans need to join the conversation, offer thoughtful advice, and where appropriate ask the hard questions that demand thoughtful answers. In all likelihood we will have a few months to ponder the best choices, drawing on the experiences and insights of colleagues, policy makers, and the families demanding more choices. We know that education is key to Alaska’s economic prosperity and to equality for all. Therefore, it is incumbent on each of us to weigh in and press for equitable learning opportunities for every Alaska child, however difficult that conversation may become.
The Rural Alaska Principal Preparation and Support Project (RAPPS) is a comprehensive, grant funded, USED leadership development program focused on preparation of principals for high-poverty and remote Alaska schools, and on support for those who are currently serving in those schools.

RAPPS has provided scholarships to 73 promising, practicing teacher-leaders from sixteen high-need rural districts so they can obtain their Type B credential and become rural principals.

RAPPS offers a complete system of support for aspiring and practicing school leaders, including a distance-delivered, rural-focused cohort within the UAA Educational Leadership Program; mentoring for aspiring principals during their internship with coaches from the Alaska Administrator Coaching Project; and no-cost, distance-delivered and face-to-face professional learning opportunities provided throughout the year by the Alaska Staff Development Network for all staff from the 16 partner rural districts.

Our goal is to train and place at least 55 new, rural principals during the course of this five-year project and to strengthen the leadership skills of practicing principals from 135 of Alaska’s highest-need schools.

2012-2013 is the final year for the RAPPS project. Over the course of our first four years:

- 42 principals have completed the program and are certified as school administrators.
- Of this group 23 are currently serving in a site administrator position.
- 73 educators have enrolled in the rural cohort at UAA, and we anticipate this project to have produced a total of 60 certificated, rural administrators by next fall.
- Almost 450 school leaders have attended the annual, week-long Alaska School Leadership Institute (duplicated count).
- Nearly 2,000 educators from RAPPS districts have enrolled in an ASDN/RAPPS webinar series (duplicated count).
- Kelly Tonsmeire, Director of the Alaska Staff Development Network, serves as RAPPS Project Director. RAPPS partners include:
  - Alaska Staff Development Network
  - Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
  - University of Alaska Anchorage
  - Alaska Administrator Coaching Project
  - Measured Progress
  - Alaska Gateway School District
  - Bering Strait School District
  - Chatham School District
  - Iditarod Area School District
  - Kake School District
  - Kashunamiat School District
  - Klawock School District
  - Kuspuk School District
  - Lower Kuskokwim School District
  - Lake & Peninsula School District
  - Lower Yukon School District
  - Northwest Arctic School District
  - St. Mary’s School District
  - Southwest Region School District
  - Yukon Flats School District
  - Yukon Koyukuk School District

This summer, join the Rev. Dr. Michael Oleksa, a leader in the development of cross-cultural communication in Alaska and student of Native cultures, for two Summer Institutes: Alaska Alive!, a three-credit, 500-level Alaska History course, and Communicating Across Cultures, a three-credit, 500-level multicultural education course.

Both courses begin with two and one-half days of instruction from Father Oleksa at the BP Energy Center in Anchorage, and are then completed online. Participants will also take a half-day guided field trip to the Anchorage Museum of History and Art as part of the Alaska Alive! course, and a half-day, self-guided field trip to the Alaska Native Heritage Center as part of the Communicating Across Cultures course. All other activities will take place at the BP Energy Center.

Dates for Alaska Alive! are May 30–June 1 or August 7–9, 2013.

Dates for Communicating Across Cultures are May 28–30 or August 5–7, 2013.

For more information, please visit asdn.org.
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The Alaska Association of School Administrators is grateful for the sponsorship and financial support of the businesses that provide goods and services to public schools across Alaska.

2013 Educational Association Events

**ASDN Annual Meeting**—Anchorage
April 11

**NSBA Annual Conference**—San Diego, CA
April 13–15

28th Legislature Adjourns
April 14

ACSA Quarterly Board Meeting—By teleconference
May 22

State School Board Meeting—Soldotna
June 6–7

**NAESP National Conference**—Baltimore, MD
July 11–13

ALASBO Summer Leadership Conference—Juneau
July 26–28

AASA/EED Summer Meeting—Juneau
July 28–29

AASA Annual Conference—Anchorage
September 25–28

AAESP/AASSP Annual Conference—Anchorage
October 13–15

**ASBO International Annual Meeting & Expo**—Boston, MA
October 25–28

ALASBO Annual Conference—Anchorage
December 8–11