

## **Alaska Mayors on Public Education**

Funding education and supporting students is a responsibility that we all share, and it is one of the few fiscal responsibilities demanded by the Alaska Constitution. It isn't a partisan issue.

As mayors, we try to manage local governments as efficiently and effectively as possible. Like the private sector, we cannot effectively budget for our operations unless we adapt to and account for annual cost increases due to inflation. Asking schools to operate with appropriations based on 2017 costs is untenable.

These are real cost increases that the State, local governments, schools, and businesses experience. It is worth noting that local governments are also contributing more to education each year because of inflation's impact on valuation, even as the State's contribution lags behind.

While funding is certainly not the only issue that needs to be addressed in our education system, it remains a primary factor. Just like any private sector business model, funding certainty is a necessity in order to deliver operational consistency and a path to outcome excellence. Until we fix the funding issue, we are destined to make little progress on other challenges that face our educational system.

Fix funding first, and we can work together on the rest. We know that education is critical to our economic development and creating a workforce that will take Alaska into the future.

Representing the majority of mayors responsible for providing local contributions to municipal school districts, the undersigned express the following priorities for consideration by the Legislature and Governor Dunleavy.

1. While we understand that an inflation-adjusted amount of \$1,400 is not politically feasible, a BSA increase of \$300 is insufficient. We encourage a significant investment by the state to bring education funding closer to par with expenses experienced by our districts.
2. An increase to the BSA this year should be accompanied by an inflation adjustment for future years. Something similar to the five-year trailing average for the smoothing of inflation, implemented in each budget cycle, would ensure that education is adequately funded as costs increase.
3. The extent to which the State chooses to additionally fund teachers as part of a recruitment and retention initiative should be administered and budgeted for by the State, and separately from a BSA increase.
4. Additional funding for pupil transportation and special needs is critical to account for increasing costs in those areas that are outpacing other cost areas of inflation.
5. Decisions related to new or alternative public schools should be made at the local level, to ensure that the taxes raised in those communities to contribute to public education are appropriately represented. Local government leaders expect to be part of a deliberative process that builds on the strengths of the current system without destabilization.
6. School construction and major maintenance continues to fall behind without sufficient State investment, with the State funding an average of only 15% of need. This year's capital budget should address priorities identified by school districts and local governments.

Approved by the following signatories in February 2024.

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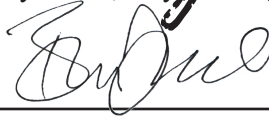
Alvin Osterback, Aleutians East Borough



Kasey Smith, City of Craig



Chris Noel, Denali Borough



Bryce Ward, Fairbanks North Star Borough



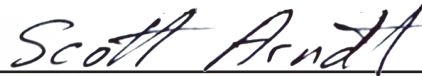
Alice Ruby, City of Dillingham



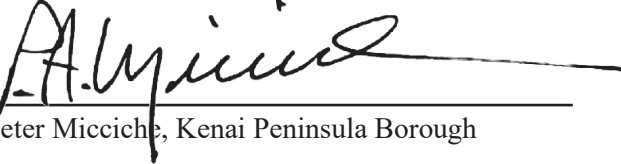
Rodney Dial, Ketchikan Gateway Borough



Beth Weldon, City and Borough of Juneau



Scott Arndt, Kodiak Island Borough



Peter Micciche, Kenai Peninsula Borough



Josh Verhagen, City of Nenana



Albert Smith, Metlakatla Indian Community



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Dickie Moto, Northwest Arctic Borough



Steven Eisenbeisz, City and Borough of Sitka



Mark Jensen, Petersburg Borough



Vincent Tutiakoff, City of Unalaska



Cindy Bremner, City and Borough of Yakutat



Sharon Scheidt, City of Valdez