

2023 Nome Public Schools Board of Education  
Legislative Priorities

**2023 State Legislative Priorities**

The Nome Public Schools Board of Education has chosen the following priority areas for the 2023 Legislative Session. We will focus our advocacy efforts with the Alaska Legislature around the following:

- Early, Predictable and Full Funding for a High Quality Education

The Board supports full and predictable funding for a high quality education for all students, which should provide revenue to cover the actual cost of education in all districts, allows for inflation and increasing costs, and includes 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. The Base Student Allocation should be adjusted to a figure of approximately \$7,000 in order to keep up with the 21% inflation rate over the last five years (2017-2022) and provide competitive salaries, keep up with the rapidly growing cost of energy and supplies, and allow for the increase in the cost of health insurance and other employee benefits.

- 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 for buildings many of which were opened in the mid-1960's. 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 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.

- 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. Turnover of less than 10% annually is critical to allow programmatic changes to take hold and produce desired results in the long term. Programs and professional development to grow equity leadership are crucial in making changes to a system we acknowledge has not always served our children well. Equitable and inflation-responsive funding of school districts to provide competitive salaries and wages in response to the high cost of living in many areas in the State, control of health care costs, follow 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. The teacher preparation programs offered through the Alaska University system should focus on graduating students who are prepared to serve students in the various rural communities around the state, with proficiency and background knowledge in culturally affirming instruction.

Affordable housing is a crucial factor in this area, and is lacking in Nome and the Bering Strait Region in general. The District's efforts to provide additional housing for educators has been hampered by the lack of available funding for either school districts or municipalities; the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation's Teacher Housing Grant is an important funding mechanism, but is limited to building small projects and is inadequate in scope or funding to support the rapid expansion of projects needed to meet current needs.

- Culturally Responsive Education and Language Revitalization

Culturally responsive classrooms and school settings are foundational and fundamental to any school with a high percentage of Alaska Native students. Our students deserve to see their culture, language and knowledge as an integral part of everyday instruction. 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.

Professional development for all staff in culturally responsive teaching and curriculum development, 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.

Last but not least, 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.

- 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. Adding three and four-year-old children in quality pre-K programs to the Base Student Allocation and promoting sustainable collaborative community partnerships between school districts and existing pre-K providers would provide strong foundations to build needed school readiness skills.

- Social, Emotional and Mental Health of Children

The negative impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on the social, emotional and mental health of our children has turned the spotlight on the need for support and funding for school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists, as well as professional development for educators and families in trauma-sensitive and trauma-preventative practices. Schools must now 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.

- 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. The recent passage of the Alaska Reads Act is a starting point and provides a framework for moving literacy achievement forwards in Alaska schools. 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. We believe the greatest focus should be on increasing the pedagogical knowledge of primary grade teachers on teaching fundamental reading skills, as well as expanding early childhood education to expand the timeframe for teaching these skills in the most critical learning years. Low teacher/student ratios in the primary grades are also critical to providing personalized high-quality student support. Nome Public Schools encourages the Legislature to continue to partner with districts and the Department of Education and Early Development to provide continued financial and structural support for early literacy efforts.

- Career and Workforce Development

Nome Public Schools recognizes that the Alaskan and U.S. workforce is undergoing a unprecedented shift and schools must be poised to prepare students for rapidly changing needs, including growth in jobs in infrastructure. The coming deep draft expansion of the Nome Port will mean our schools must deepen and expand our existing partnerships with local employers and the University of Alaska's Northwest Campus to create more formalized school-to-work pathways including apprenticeships and internships. The Northwest Arctic Career and Technical Center (NACTEC) is a pivotal linchpin in ensuring students from Nome and the Bering Strait Region are prepared to fill these positions and keep economic growth tightly centered and benefiting their home communities.

### **2023 Federal Legislative Priorities**

The Nome Public Schools Board of Education has chosen the following priority areas for the 2023 Legislative Session. We will focus our advocacy efforts with the Federal Legislature around the following:

- Legislation that supports and/or coordinates with our State Priorities
- Removal of limitations and/or barriers to access federal funds, especially those designed to meet the educational needs of Alaska Native students