



# Anchorage School District

## 2020 Legislative Priorities

### **Schools**

- **Forward fund education**

Rationale: Predictable and timely funding is essential to facilitate more effective and responsible financial management. It provides administrators and educators the ability to adequately plan for services and curriculum, while significantly enhancing recruitment and retention.

- **Adjust education funding for inflation**

Rationale: Flat-funded school operating budgets equate to a deficit, without taking annual inflation into account. School districts need to receive automatic annual increases to account for salary increases and rising costs, much like the State does for its own budget.

- **Champion high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction**

Rationale: National tests, state assessments, and local reading data all provide clear evidence that too many of Anchorage's children are not reading at acceptable levels of proficiency and are far below their peers across the nation. A marked increase in reading proficiency has been directly attributed to evidenced-based teaching of the five components of reading (Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension). Every student deserves a high-quality curriculum and instruction practices based on the science of reading.

- **Provide competitive retirement and health benefits**

Rationale: Recruiting and retention of teachers continue to be a significant challenge for the Anchorage School District. Dedicated, committed, and talented educators are essential to the success of Anchorage students. Ensuring our teachers have competitive and attractive benefits is a key way to ensure they stay committed to our students and the District.

- **Review District Cost Factor in the State's funding formula**

Rationale: The District Cost Factor was implemented in 1999, and the State identified Anchorage as having its lowest cost of living. The legislature is supposed to receive updated cost factors every other year; however, the last differential study was updated in 2005. A statewide evaluation will ensure the factor is applied correctly to all school districts.

## Services

- **Expand Average Daily Membership (ADM) per-student funding for voluntary age 4 preschool**

Rationale: Preschool at age 4 has been proven to build a strong foundation for school success, as it builds on all areas of development (social/emotional, physical, cognitive, language, literacy, and mathematics). According to research by University of Chicago Economist, James Heckman and an independent Harvard Study:

- Every \$1 invested in early childhood programs yields a return between \$4 and \$16
- Children that attend preschool are more likely to graduate from high school
- Children that attend preschool are less likely to:
  - Need special education services-
  - Require social services
  - Be arrested
  - Be retained in a grade
  - Be suspended from school

- **Fully support children with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) by increasing mental health providers, school counselors, nurses, and safety personnel**

Rationale: Alaska has the highest rate of childhood ACEs (traumatic events related to or involving domestic violence, sexual assault, drug/alcohol abuse, etc.) per capita in the country. In order to provide these students with the best possible educational experience, Alaska's school districts require additional resources to support students with these traumatic experiences.

## Support

- **Secure school buildings, taking into account urban safety needs**

Rationale: Anchorage School District has more than 90 school sites that it must maintain and secure; continued funding for these buildings is critical for student safety. Projects such as upgrading surveillance cameras, transitioning from keys to fob access control, strengthening internal and external communications, implementing a district-wide visitor management system, and emergency preparedness initiatives such as ALICE drills cannot be fully implemented nor maintained without adequate funding.

- **Restore bond debt reimbursement**

Rationale: Rural Education Attendance Areas have no tax base for their school capital needs. These needs are funded by the State on a percentage of State bond allotment. Anchorage has shouldered the full cost since 2015. Years of uncertain or flat funding have increased deferred maintenance and needs have grown. The State is reducing bond debt that was granted to voters 15-20 years ago, which shifted the burden to local property owners. It is time for our state to support the capital needs of its school districts.

- **Maintain transportation funding at true costs for service**

Rationale: The State Pupil Transportation Funding formula has not been adjusted since 2015. Without an annual adjustment, transportation costs will continue to exceed revenue. Without a current adjustment to the Anchorage CPI-U, ASD incurred a \$3.75 million transportation shortfall in FY20.