

## FEDERAL POSITIONS

### G. Forest Receipts/SCRSA

ACSA strongly endorses the continuation of the 100 plus year partnership that was created between the Federal Government and communities to compensate counties financially impacted by the placement of timber reserves into federal ownership. This same situation still exists in 2014-15, The partnership stipulates that 25 percent of revenues derived from U.S. Forest Service activities including timber sales, mineral extraction and grazing fees be returned to impacted counties.

In 2000, the Congress of the United States passed the Secure Rural Schools and Self Determination Act (SCRSA) to help ensure that the original partnership was honored. Although this legislation expired in 2012, Congress acted to extend SRSCA through the end of 2014 with a 5% reduction. As that new deadline looms the impact on our communities still exists.

1. If SCRSA is not reauthorized, funding for the educational programs in Alaska will decrease from \$15.6 million in FY13, and 12.17 million in FY14, to less than \$ 500,000 in FY15.
2. SCRSA is critically important to 24 of Alaska's 54 school districts. In fact, the revenues from SCRSA represent more than 33% of the annual budget in some of the 24 districts. A reduction in funding of this magnitude will have significant impacts on districts and create significant hardships for the local communities we serve.

### H. ESEA Reauthorization - Federal Funds to Schools

ACSA calls upon Congress to complete the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2015 and in doing so restore state discretion on best approaches to bring about meaningful student achievement improvement.

If Congress fails to act, all sanctions and other punitive measures should be suspended until a formal reauthorization occurs. ESEA reauthorization should include:

1. Returning responsibility for improving student learning to the state and local level while supporting quality public schools for all children.
2. Establishing state initiated accountability systems that emphasize capacity building and recognize the uniqueness of each school and district.
3. Enabling a state developed academic growth model that provides realistic targets for individual schools, teachers and students based on multiple and varied indicators.
4. Restore federal dollars to school districts at pre-FY 13 levels. Since FY 13 there has been a marked decline in federal dollars traditionally provided to school districts in Alaska. These include Title I, Migrant Education, Special Education and Carl Perkins. Such reductions impact the ability of school districts to provide basic services.



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*Student photos courtesy of Anchorage School District- Scenic Park Elementary and Valdez City Schools- Gilson Middle School*

## CORE PURPOSE

Professional education leaders' forum and  
advocacy for public education



## 2015 JOINT POSITION STATEMENTS

The Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) serves as an umbrella for four of Alaska's premier educational leadership organizations, including:

- Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals
- Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals
- Alaska Superintendents Association
- Alaska Association of School Business Officials

### Introduction: Serving All Alaska's Children

ACSA members are united in support of these 2014 - 2015 joint position statements, which will guide our legislative advocacy in support of PreK-12 education and the students we serve. Eight key priorities (six state and two federal) have been identified that ACSA members trust will receive serious consideration by other like-minded organizations, the Alaska State Legislature and United States Congress.

### State Positions

- Legislative Studies
- Adequate Funding
- Preparing, Attracting and Retaining Qualified Educators
- Worker's Compensation Fee Schedule
- Prior Year PERS Retirement Billings
- Mental Health

### Federal Positions

- Forest Receipts/SCRSA
- ESEA Re-Authorization

ACSA members look forward to spirited debate as policy makers consider constructive solutions for advancing public education on behalf of Alaska's children. Our members recognize that Alaska is facing declining revenue and to that end, will seriously consider beneficial cost containment initiatives, recognizing that Alaska's future requires constraint as state budgets are enacted. From ACSA's perspective, building Alaska's future by ensuring a quality education for each Alaskan child and family is a priority that must be met.

## STATE POSITIONS

### A. Legislative Studies

1. We support the studies authorized in HB278 and anticipate providing meaningful input to them, including:
  - The Department of Administration study to provide a proposal for a salary and benefits schedule for school districts and for teacher tenure.
  - The Department of Education and Early Development study to report to the legislature on school design and construction.
  - The Legislative Budget and Audit Committee studies on public education funding.
2. We further support a transparent process that is observable and provides multiple opportunities for stakeholder input.



3. Relevant data from all parts of our diverse state needs to be used to support the outcomes of each study.

4. Proposals generated from these studies should be data-driven, promote educational best practice and benefit all students in an equitable manner, providing an excellent education for all.

### B. Adequate Funding

We strongly encourage the Legislature to adequately fund operations and infrastructure for schools. Adequate, multi-year foundation funding enables districts to effectively deliver quality education needed by Alaska's students, and required by our citizens and the State Constitution. A long-term, comprehensive approach to increasing funding is vital to quality education for all students and the economic success of our state over the long term.

ACSA's Definition of Adequate Funding Includes:

1. Funding of capital projects to provide safe, high quality schools statewide.
2. Full funding of new initiatives requiring districts to provide additional services.
3. Reducing the hold-harmless funding formula trigger from 5% of Average Daily Membership (ADM) to 2.5%, to mitigate the impact of sudden drops in enrollment.
4. Reliable, long-term funding of early childhood education programs is essential to students and families.
5. Career Technical Education (CTE) for both rural and urban schools is integral to high standards and Alaska's economic growth and stability. Involvement and management is needed by DEED and DOL, while collaborating with educators.
6. CTE professional development is critical to ensure teachers can meet the full range of industry needs, which require content mastery, industry-based credentials and ongoing training.

### C. Preparing, Attracting & Retaining Qualified Educators

ACSA strongly encourages development of a comprehensive statewide program to prepare, attract and retain quality educators, due to the following trends:

1. The Alaska university system does not graduate enough students in teacher education, administration, and related services areas to meet school districts' staffing needs.
2. Living conditions in remote areas and the higher cost of living in many Alaskan communities present challenges for teachers and administrators.
3. Compensation packages in many states exceed Alaska's salaries and benefits for teachers and administrators, especially when factoring in Alaska's higher cost of living.

Additionally, innovative alternative pathways are needed to attract leadership talent to the education profession and to address unique circumstances. This may include acceptance of alternative qualifications and retire/rehire provisions.

Finally, increasing the capacity of DEED to support the many initiatives affecting teachers in the classroom, including standards, assessment and evaluation is necessary if those initiatives are to be successful.

### D. Worker's Compensation Reform

ACSA asks that the Legislature continue to take action to control the costs of worker's compensation claims.

1. Alaskan employers currently pay the highest rates in the country for worker's compensation coverage, straining resources. Payments for medical expenses now make up 76% of the amount paid for claims in the state.
2. The Legislature's passage of a plan to implement a fixed fee schedule in 2014 will help control costs but will likely also increase utilization.
3. Legislation to help control utilization rates has been successful in over half the states and should be adopted in Alaska. These measures include evidence-based medicine treatment guidelines, limits on opioid use and eliminating physician dispensing of pharmaceuticals. The Worker's Compensation Research Institute (WCRI) reports savings of between 30 and 40 percent from eliminating physician dispensing of pharmaceuticals.
4. Legislation to improve management of claims, addressing indemnity factors including an emphasis on Return-to-Work/Stay-at-Work and limiting the legal costs of claims would also help control costs.
5. Legislation to address the Reemployment Benefits process, which provided retraining for only 8% of eligible employees at a cost of \$12.9 million in 2012 is also needed. Recommendations include a repeal of the 90-day mandatory reemployment evaluation, stricter criteria for reemployment specialist credentialing and implementation of reemployment specialist fee schedules.

### E. Prior Year PERS Retirement Billings

ACSA supports finding a solution to the charges imposed on school districts and municipalities with regards to PERS termination studies and "below the floor" charges. These charges are currently in addition to the 22% of salary currently paid to the State for current and past PERS costs. If districts and/or municipalities are unable to pay these above costs, these charges continue to grow due to the prevailing interest charge of 12%.

1. The calculation mandated in AS39.35.255 references a single base year, FY08 that unfairly penalizes employers with unusually high FY08 PERS payroll for one-time special projects such as construction.
2. In the long-term, the FY08 baseline will discourage employers from adopting the most efficient staffing plans, which may include part-time staffing and other efficiency measures such as out-sourcing.
3. The unintended consequences of AS39.35.255 are particularly challenging for school districts and municipalities, many of which are already experiencing population loss and declining revenues from various sources.
4. Districts that have paid assessments should have the funds refunded, or otherwise forgiven.



### F. Mental Health

ACSA strongly encourages the Legislature to take action to assure that quality mental health services are funded and available to support all of our schools.

1. We recognize the fact that experiencing trauma and behavioral health disorders has a direct relationship to suicide and high school dropout rates, incarceration, school violence, and more.
2. Research\* shows that school environments in which staff and students are equipped to recognize and respond appropriately to individuals in crisis or struggling with behavioral health disorders have lower incidence of youth suicide, violence, and risky behaviors.
3. We support community partnerships and intensified support for mental health services that will aid school counselors and psychologists in providing comprehensive and cost effective mental health services through a culturally competent and preventative approach. These professionals may serve as liaisons for students and families requiring community-based mental health supports.

\*See [www.alaskaacsa.org](http://www.alaskaacsa.org)