

# ALASBO News Link...



**February 2014**

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**ALASBO News Link**  
is published for the members of the Alaska  
Association of School Business Officials  
and its affiliate members.

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**For publishing information, contact:**  
**Amy Lujan**  
**e-mail: [alasbo@gci.net](mailto:alasbo@gci.net)**

**Editing and layout by**  
**Edith Hildebrand, Galena City Schools**  
**[edith.hildebrand@galenanet.com](mailto:edith.hildebrand@galenanet.com)**

*Would you like to receive this newsletter in print,  
rather than e-mail? Send a message to Amy Lujan at  
the above address.*

## **President's Message**

*Jim Farrington, Anchorage School District*

Happy New Year!!!

Moving quickly through the second half of this fiscal year, we find ourselves right in the middle of budget time. As most districts are faced with the possibility that they will have to make cuts to staff and programs, we realize this is not going to be easy. The cuts will likely impact customers who should not have to suffer. Those customers are the children of the State of Alaska.

However, the reality is that this is a serious issue for all districts, not just the big or small, the rural or urban, but every district across our state. How

*(Continued on page 2)*

## **Contents**

1-2	<b>President's Message</b>
2	<b>Photo Reminder</b>
2-3	<b>Executive Director's Message</b>
3-4	<b>SBO of the Year</b>
4-5	<b>Visit to a School in Zimbabwe</b>
5	<b>Power Lunch Schedule</b>
5-6	<b>Going for the Gold</b>
6	<b>Thank you ALASBO Vendors</b>
6-7	<b>Tin Cup</b>
7	<b>ALASBO Website</b>
7-8	<b>Member Spotlight</b>
8-10	<b>2014 ALASBO Liaisons &amp; Mentors</b>
10-11	<b>Employee Passion</b>
11	<b>Upcoming Events</b>

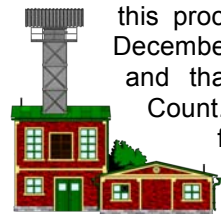
(Continued from page 1)

districts will manage and forecast the cuts that they are faced with will vary, but the bottom line is that most cuts will probably impact the classroom, whether that is with increased class sizes, additional class periods, reduced curriculum, elimination of programs and in some cases more than one of these.

In the Anchorage School District, we recently announced a 6% reduction of our classroom teachers. This accounts for 159 positions being eliminated. The realization is that some of these teachers may have been given notice in prior years, but through attrition and the late addition of one-time funding from the legislature they were not released at that time. However, here we are again in the same position of balancing the budget knowing that we will have to make significant reductions to classroom teachers and support staff in order to make the budget effective.

One-time funding can be a helpful addition once it is proposed and passed. However you cannot budget for it or count on it to happen. The budget needs to be balanced based on what we know. So the question comes back to: how do we do this? Sure, the easy answer is to increase the Base Student Allocation annually and we will have a better ability to foresee and plan for the future. This is a possibility, and if it does happen we can better plan and balance the budget with known factors.

We as school district employees can also help in this process in a way I addressed in December to the ALASBO organization, and that is to "Make Every Dollar Count." How we do this may vary from district to district and position to position within each district. Simple things include preventive maintenance, to make our equipment and facilities last longer, to embracing new technology to better utilize the staff that we do have. I encourage each of you to consider for your district what it means to not just "count every dollar," but to make every dollar count.



Send us your pictures – anytime you're traveling around the district this spring, take a photo for ALASBO! Send them to [yodean.armour@klawockschool.com](mailto:yodean.armour@klawockschool.com).

## Executive Director's Message

Amy Lujan, Executive Director

I'm still enjoying the memories of another great Annual Conference! Thanks to the support of all our members and presenters who helped "pull it off", in addition to the more than 50 participating vendors. Each participant in the conference adds value and helps to make the event possible financially.



We have already kicked off the new year with our Power Lunches, listed in this newsletter and on our website ("events-workshops"). Please make sure to put these on your calendar, along with other upcoming events.

Our next big ALASBO event is our **Legislative Fly-In, March 17-19**. The Fly-In is a great way to learn more about how the legislative process functions, and to work with your colleagues to get the word out about support ALASBO can provide, as well as needs across the districts.

We'll begin with a planning session on Monday from 1:30-5:30 PM, and then I'll be scheduling appointments for Tuesday and Wednesday. There's a tentative plan for our group to meet with Division of Retirement and Benefits representatives on March 18, to discuss GASB 68 implementation.

It's important for legislators to hear from constituents from around the state about the impact of funding levels and proposed legislation. Please let me know if you're able to attend the Fly-In!

On the ALASBO website, you'll find the ACSA Joint Position Statements in the "news" section. This document was approved by ALASBO membership at our annual meeting. After the Fly-In, our updated 2014 Talking Points will also be posted. On the "resources-downloads" page, you'll find a document with tips on how to keep up with legislative activity. There are some nice technology tools to help!

I'm pleased to announce the launch of an **SFO Certification Study Group!** This group has already met via teleconference for the first two of a planned 8-session series to prepare participants for the tests to achieve certification in School Finance and Operations (SFO).

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

Even if you missed the first two sessions, it's not too late to get involved! These sessions will be a great professional development opportunity, whether or not you decide to take the tests right away. The next session will be Tuesday, March 11 at 11 AM, and all members will receive a reminder via email. Study Group sessions are scheduled for every other Tuesday.



#### Why Study for ASBO SFO Certification?

- Certification enables you to demonstrate your professionalism and dedication to the school business profession.
- Certification provides a way to be recognized for your professional knowledge, which builds your own confidence and the confidence of your colleagues and members of the public.

#### Why Participate in the Study Group?

- The Study Group will help you keep motivated and on track to review the material for the exam. You will learn from your colleagues and have a chance to discuss their real-world experiences.
- After you've completed the Study Group, you'll qualify for a **waiver of the exam application fee**, a \$150 value for ASBO members (\$225 for non-ASBO members)! In order to qualify for this waiver, you must attend at least five of the eight Study Group sessions.

In addition to the benefits of the Study Group, Melody Douglas' company DBMS will be sponsoring **reimbursement of exam fees** for up to three new SFO's! Reimbursement of exam fees (excluding re-takes) will be made through ALASBO on a first-come basis, once full SFO certification is achieved. Thanks to Melody Douglas for this generous new sponsorship!

You can find out more about SFO Certification through the documents and links on our website. Click on "opportunities" on the top yellow bar and then on "certifications". We're working on adding the new certifications page to the drop-down menu.

Also new on the website, you can find these items:

- Updated Bylaws, approved at the December Annual Meeting (about ALASBO-Bylaws)
- Updated Policy Manual, approved by the Board in December (about ALASBO-Policies & Procedures); this revision adds guidelines

for ALASBO support of a future candidate for the ASBO International Board

- Numerous presentations from our December annual conference (resources-downloads)

Finally, if you have a colleague who missed the annual conference and has not yet renewed membership for 2014, please encourage your colleague to visit the "membership" tab of our website. Membership is just \$75, and it's an easy way to keep informed about school business topics through the ALASBO network throughout the year!

If you have questions about any ALASBO program, please do not hesitate to contact me at [alasbo@gci.net](mailto:alasbo@gci.net), or 907-500-9086. Our website address is: [www.alasbo.org](http://www.alasbo.org).

## Jenny Martens Named ALASBO School Business Official of the Year

Congratulation to Jenny Martens, Director of Budget & Finance with the Lower Yukon School District who was named the Alaska School Business Official of the Year at ALASBO's December 2013 annual conference in Anchorage. Candidates for this prestigious award are nominated by their colleagues within the Alaska school business profession.

Annually, a panel of previous recipients selects a deserving individual from the nominees submitted based upon their recognized outstanding service, innovative plan design and implementation, and the use of exemplary business practices within school business management.

The award has been sponsored for the past fifteen years by Penair. The recipient receives roundtrip travel certificates, a check for \$500 and an engraved plaque.



(Continued on page 4)

*(Continued from page 3)*

Jenny Martens grew up in Seward, Alaska. She began her work with school districts as a School Board member in Petersburg. She later became an employee of the school district and served as Business Manager. Martens was also Business Manager of Nome Public Schools before moving to the Lower Yukon School District.

Jenny Martens has been active on ASBO and ALASBO committees. She served as ALASBO President in 2012.

In her nomination materials, Jenny's colleagues note that "her work ethic and character are second to none" and that she "always maintains a priority for our students".

Congratulations, Jenny on this well deserved honor!

## ***A Visit to a Primary School in Zimbabwe***

*Amy Lujan, ALASBO Executive Director*



My husband Stan and I recently had a chance to vacation in southern Africa. For us, one of the highlights of our tours with Overseas Adventure Travel is a chance to visit a local school. On this trip, we visited St. Mary's Primary School, located in a rural area about 90 minutes from Victoria Falls.

Zimbabwe has one of the highest literacy rates of any country in Africa. However, recent political turmoil has taken a toll on the education system. Our tour guide explained that most of the students have had few interactions with Caucasians or other people from outside their village, so our visit was important for their exposure to us as well.

St. Mary's School was founded by the Catholic Church in the 1930's but is now run as a community school. The enrollment is about 750

students. Our visit in mid-January was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the new school term, but we were impressed by the organized greeting by some of the older students, who sang a welcome song for our group.

The headmistress gave us some information about the school. Class sizes are 40-50 per room, and space is a problem. Former bathrooms have been converted to classrooms, and there was a row of outhouses behind the school. There is no space for a library. All classes are in English after the first two years. She listed the school subjects, a standard list that also includes local language and HIV/AIDS. This is still an important health issue faced by students in their community.

All students wear uniforms and short haircuts, to decrease the transmission of head lice and ringworm. Local farm animals tend to wander into school grounds, so the staff would like to put a fence around the school. There is one computer at the school for administrative use, and another goal is to find a way to expose students to computers prior to their transition to secondary school. Students typically walk several kilometers to and from school. No school lunch is provided; some bring their lunch and others do not have anything to eat until they return home.

One of the biggest challenges faced by the school is teacher turnover, which is related to a lack of teacher housing in the community – sounds familiar! Another challenge is that parents are shy to tutor and assist their students at home, though they often assist with school maintenance projects.

Occasionally, the school has received support from UNICEF and other charities, but these programs come and go. In spite of many challenges, the headmistress proudly reported that several students from St. Mary's School have scored in the top 10% nationally on primary school tests in recent years.

We visited two classrooms. One of the teachers took the students through an English drill. Some of the visitors in our group were asked if there was snow where they lived. About half the students raised their hands to indicate that they'd like to visit a place with snow some day! In the second classroom, the books I'd brought with me on Alaska were quite popular – snow and some new types of wildlife too!

*(Continued on page 5)*



(Continued from page 4)



Some of the visitors took digital pictures on their cameras and iPad's and shared the pictures with the students right away, which was very popular. We were told that some students don't have a mirror at home, so it was a rare chance to see their own image.

We were impressed by the attentiveness of the students to their teachers. Like students everywhere, these kids deserve a chance for a better future through education!

I've posted pictures from our entire trip to southern Africa on my personal website, [www.stanandamy.com](http://www.stanandamy.com). You can view the highlights of our various trips by clicking on the place names at the top. For even more pictures, click on the Flickr link at the middle of the page, and then I recommend selecting "Sets". Enjoy!

## Power Lunch Schedule

*11 AM to noon, the 3rd Tuesday of each month via teleconference;  
call 218-844-3377, code 252726# (spells ALASBO!)*

Mar 18	National School Lunch Program-new topics
Apr 15	Time Management
May 13	Audit Prep/GASB 68
Jun 17	CIP New Application
Jul 15	Time & Effort Reporting
Aug 19	Grants Administration
Sep 16	Legislative Issues
Oct 21	Impact Aid
Nov 18	Indirect Cost Proposal
Dec	Annual Conference

## Going for the Gold

Holly Holman, Unalaska City Schools

As I've been watching the Olympics this week, I have been struck by similarities between Olympians and ALASBO members.



ALASBO member are "always on their game," always trying to hone their skills and better themselves, much as Olympians are. Some of the tried and true strategies of School Business Official champions are the SFO Certification program, the annual ALASBO conference, and Power Lunches.

A winning strategy that is just starting is the SFO (Certified Administrator of School Finance and Operations) study group. This group is meeting via teleconference every other Tuesday at 11 AM. The study group is led by our very own SFO gold medalists: ALASBO members who have earned the certification in the past. These study group sessions are informative whether or not you plan on taking the tests to earn the certification.

The information is relevant to what we do every day as School Business Officials. For the seasoned School Business Official, some of the material may be review, but there are always new things to learn. The additional discussions that occur during these study groups go above and beyond what is in the study guide and help enrich the learning experience.

The annual ALASBO conference is a power-packed mid-year training camp. This December conference is a great way to get re-energized after the annual audit and the beginning of school is behind us, but before we start getting ready for the following year with finalizing budgets and getting ready for the annual audit again. What I've really come to realize, by attending these meetings for many years, is that everyone can contribute, no matter what the size of your district or your number of years in school business.



I have often felt that being from a small district, I would not have much to offer in the way of training for others, but there is always some way to contribute to the team effort! Serving on the

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

board is an excellent way to help the organization, with everything from planning for the next year's conference to putting together packets for the conference. Presenting or helping facilitate a sectional at the conference, or being part of a panel is another way to help out.

If you don't feel you are ready for a board seat or presentation, an excellent way to get your feet wet is to serve on a committee. There are eight committees to choose from: Audit, Bylaws, Professional Development, Legislative, Awards, Services, Nominations, and Sponsorship. Serving on a committee is usually not a large time commitment, and may consist of several teleconferences per year.

The Power Lunches are a great way to amp up your knowledge base on a monthly basis. These hour-long training sessions are held on Tuesdays at 11 AM – strategically held not too close to the starting blocks of our week on Monday mornings, but not too close to deadline-ridden Fridays, either. These sessions cover a variety of topics, and are the “Power Bars” of school business training – something you can consume in a short period of time, but they give you a lot of “bang for your buck” in terms of job performance. Learning something new in the middle of a workweek can be very energizing!



Olympians help their teammates, and they watch out for one another. This is where ALASBO members really go for the gold! We are always there to lend a helping hand, whether it is answering a question posed by other members through our Team ALASBO Coach, Amy Lujan, serving on a committee, or presenting at ALASBO.

I just experienced this first-hand last month when I had a time sensitive payroll question – and of course it was last minute when I reached out for help. I e-mailed a fellow ALASBO member, and she e-mailed me back right away, telling me what her district has done in a similar situation, but also recommending that I contact our State Payroll Gold Medalist, Jimmy Love. I e-mailed Jimmy, and he answered right away, telling me what his district does, and their rationale. Now, I'm sure these two ALASBO members were as busy as we all were at the end of January, in the finishing sprint to the finish line of that notoriously deadline-packed month, but they dropped everything they were

doing and came to my rescue! This is just one example of the countless times I've put out a distress signal and been rescued by a fellow ALASBO team member.

Olympic athletic comparisons aside, ALASBO members are the most dedicated, hard-working people I know, and they are eager to share their knowledge to help other School Business Officials in any way they can. Don't hesitate to get more involved with our great organization!

Thanks to all the vendors who provided prizes for our annual conference, in addition to registering for trade show booths and sponsorships. When you see an ALASBO vendor during the year, please thank them! If a vendor is not involved, have them check the ALASBO website or contact the Executive Director for information!

## Tin Cup

Todd Poage, AASA President;  
Superintendent, AK Gateway School District

Education in Alaska is at risk. Districts across the state have announced proposed cuts to cover budget deficits, explaining that reductions in staff, instructional programs, and extra curricular activities are imminent for the next fiscal year in order to balance budgets derived mainly from the proposed Base Student Allocation (BSA). Continuing inflation is also contributing to these budget deficits, which are becoming unmanageable. Will increased class sizes, staff reductions, and fewer elective options adequately prepare students to be our future leaders?

The state budget recently submitted to the legislature flat-funds education for yet another fiscal year. If the BSA remains at the currently proposed level, 2015 will unfortunately mark the fifth consecutive year the BSA has languished at \$5,680. This education funding formula has not increased since 2011, while inflation in Alaska has continued on pace, eroding the educational opportunities school districts can afford to provide students.

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

According to the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the annual cost-of-living increase for inflation has averaged 2.7 percent over the past decade. A statement on the department's website calls the Anchorage Consumer Price Index, which measures inflation and the changes in a variety of costs in the city, "probably the state's most important cost-of-living measure." The CPI's 2.7 percent average annual cost-of-living increase in each of the four years since the BSA was last raised in 2011 has now added up to 10.8 percent. This means that, since the last increase in the BSA, school districts have lost nearly 11 percent of our capacity to educate Alaska's children.

As school leaders, all of us have analyzed and re-analyzed our budgets to find cost savings. We all do our best to guarantee that the funds that remain are used as efficiently as possible to ensure every dollar spent goes toward meeting the educational needs of our students. Many districts have now reached the point where further elimination of staff positions may be the only option. However, in his recent State of the State address, Governor Parnell sent an encouraging message when he announced he was introducing legislation to "raise the BSA for each of the next three years." Although packaged with vouchers and changes in charter school funding, a multi-year approach is now on the table for legislators to debate. This development now gives our organizations a great opportunity to advance the highest funding priority in our recent Joint Position Statements: *Adopting a multi-year foundation funding plan.*

Our partnership efforts enjoy the support of many other like-minded organizations. Superintendents and principals, the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children (CEAAC), and business interests from across the state share our resolve to fund our schools at levels that will enable us to reach our goal of providing each child a "world-class education." It's also an election year, which brings enhanced opportunities to draw legislative finance and education committee members to our cause.



We must continue to weigh in during public comment periods, participate in legislative fly-ins, and write letters of support. The governor and others are calling the 2014 legislature the "Education Session," and vowing to enact "real

education reform." Each of us needs to stay involved, speaking to legislators with a strong and united voice to assist them in shaping the future of education in Alaska.

Best wishes for a successful legislative session.

The ALASBO website, [www.alasbo.org](http://www.alasbo.org), is a great source for the latest news and updates. Check here for ALASBO information, such as legislative reports and committee memberships, to register for an ALASBO or ASBO event or to download materials from a Power Lunch training you may have missed!

## ALASBO



### Member Spotlight

Mark Vink, Bering Strait School District

#### Tell us about your school district

I am the business manager for the Bering Strait School District. Our District is based in Unalakleet and serves 15 villages in Northwest Alaska around Norton Sound. Our District covers around 80,000 square miles and all of our villages are accessible by air. Diomedes is served via helicopter.

#### How long have you been in school business?

I have worked as the business manager for the past 7 years and before that, I was in public accounting in Michigan.

#### How did you get into this business?

My wife is the one who got our Alaskan experience started when she moved up and was a teacher in one of the villages in the District. The following year, the prior business manager

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

announced his retirement and I was selected as his replacement. I had no knowledge of school business accounting other than having dealt with one client when I first started in public accounting, whose books did not balance in their computer system.

***What do you like best about your job?***

One of the most interesting things about this job is the continual change. You get to wear many different hats. In one day you are working on budgets, helping with health insurance problems and dealing with aircraft issues. I never quite know what my day will bring, other than what I had planned on doesn't always happen.

***What advice do you have for those new to school business?***

One thing that I would recommend to people getting started in school business is to develop a network of people to help you when you have issues and also use them. There have been many times when I have reached out for advice and asked what others are doing about an issue.

Use your ALASBO membership to find those people who have similar issues to what you are dealing with. The December conference is a great place for this to happen, and don't be afraid to contact Amy or board members. We have all been there and may be able to point you in the right direction to make your job easier.

***What do you like to do for fun?***

In my free time I enjoy outdoor activities and spend time on the river here as well as 4-wheeling to explore the hills around Unalakleet.

***Tell us something about yourself that most people don't know?***

My wife and I have adopted three kids since we have been here. They are all related and are from a neighboring village. The oldest boy turned 5 last December, our second boy turns 5 in May and our little girl turned 3 in December.

It's usually an interesting evening when I get home and all 3 like to get outside to go exploring and spend time on the river.



## **ALASBO 2014 Liaison and Mentor Assignments**

***Liaison/Mentor match-up's are a two-way street; contact your match today!***

**Past-President –Laurie Olson**

Kenai 714-8888 lolson@kpbsd.k12.ak.us

**Robbie MacManus**

Alaska Gateway Schools  
883-5151x109 rmacmanus@agsd.us

**Chelsea Sternicki**

Aleutian Region Schools  
277-2648 csternicki@aleutregion.org

**David Nielsen**

Aleutians East Borough Schools  
383-5222 dnielsen@aebdsd.org

**Mark Foster**

Anchorage School District  
742-4369 foster\_mark@asdk12.org

**Charlene Jimenez**

Annette Island Schools  
886-6332x2265  
cjimenez@aisd.k12.ak.us

**Mark Vink**

Bering Strait Schools  
624-4256 mvink@bssd.org

**Secretary -- Mark Vink --- Bering Strait**

624-4256 mvink@bssd.org

**Sherry Kern**

Bristol Bay Borough Schools  
246-4225 skern@bbbsd.net

**Teri Dierick**

Chatham Schools  
586-6806x235 terid@serrc.org

**Adrienne Fleming**

Chugach Schools 522-7400  
afleming@chugachschools.com

**Loreen Kramer**

Copper River Schools  
822-3234x225 lkramer@crsd.k12.ak.us

**Verna Reedy**

Cordova City Schools  
424-3265 vreeedy@cordovasd.org

**Karen Head**

Craig City Schools  
826-3274 khead@craigschools.com

(continued on page 9)



(continued from page 8)

**Director Seat A – Holly Holman** --- Unalaska  
581-3151 hholman@acsd.net

**Kim Johnson**  
Delta/Greely Schools  
895-4657x25 kjohnson@dgsd.k12.ak.us

**Lorrie Terry**  
Denali Borough Schools  
683-2278 lorrieterry@dbds.org

**Lucienne Smith, Contractor**  
Dillingham City Schools  
677-9263 lucienne.smith@akebs.com

**Mike Fisher**  
Fairbanks North Star Borough Schools  
452-2000x301 mike.fisher@k12northstar.org

**Edith Hildebrand**  
Galena City Schools 656-1883x108  
edith.hildebrand@galenanet.com

**Judy Erikson**  
Haines Borough Schools  
766-6725 jerekson@hbsd.net

**Judy Hankla**  
Hoonah City Schools  
945-3611x203 hanklaj@hoonahschools.org

**Director Seat B – Rebecca Wright** ---Matsu  
746-9260 rebecca.wright@matsuk12.us

**Selina Tolson**  
Hydaburg City Schools  
285-3491 stolson@hydaburg.k12.ak.us

**Morganza Byrd**  
Iditarod Area Schools  
524-1225 mbyrd@iditarodsd.org

**David Means**  
Juneau Borough Schools  
523-1770 david\_means@jsd.k12.ak.us

**Lonnie Cavanaugh**  
Kake City Schools  
785-3995 lmcavanaugh@kakeschools.com

**Antonia Moses**  
Kashunamiut Schools  
858-7713 amoses@chevakschool.org

**Dave Jones**  
Kenai Peninsula Borough Schools  
714-8838 djones2@kpbsd.k12.ak.us

**Matthew Groves**  
Ketchikan Gateway Borough Schools  
247-2116 matthew.groves@k21schools.org

**Director Seat C -- Martha Morgan**--- Kuspuk  
675-4250 mmorgan@kuspuk.org

**Yodean Armour**  
Klawock City Schools 755-2220x232  
yodean.armour@klawockschool.com

**Lisa Pearce**  
Kodiak Island Borough Schools  
481-6105 lpearce01@kibsd.org

**Martha Morgan**  
Kuspuk Schools  
675-4250x253 mmorgan@kuspuk.org

**Laura Hylton**  
Lake and Peninsula Borough Schools  
246-4280x310 lhylton@lpsd.com

**Blair Alden**  
Lower Kuskokwim Schools  
543-4820 Blair\_Alden@lksd.org

**Jenny Martens**  
Lower Yukon Schools  
591-2411x220 jmartens@loweryukon.org

**Luke Fulp**  
Mat-Su Borough Schools  
746-9277 luke.fulp@matsuk12.us

**Director Seat D – Cassee Olin** ---Sitka  
966-1254 olinc@sitkaschools.org

**Carl Horn**  
Nenana City Schools  
832-5400x230 chorn@nenanalynx.org

**Paula Coffman**  
Nome Public Schools  
443-6190 pcoffman@nomeschools.com

**Tammy White**  
North Slope Borough Schools  
852-9683 tammy.white@nsbsd.org

**Karen Goodwin**  
Northwest Arctic Borough Schools  
442-3472x232 kgoodwin@nwarctic.org

**Royce Mattson**  
Pelican City Schools  
735-2236 rmattson@pelicanschool.org

**Karen Quitslund**  
Petersburg City School District  
772-4271 business@pcsd.us

**Earle Trumble**  
Pribilof Island Schools  
546-3324 earle\_trumble@psd-k12.ak.us

(continued on page 10)

(continued from page 9)

**Director Seat E --- Melissa Bell --- EED**  
465-8697 melisa.bell@alaska.gov

**Davey Shields, Contractor**  
Saint Mary's Schools  
245-0651 davey@acsalaska.net

**Cassee Olin**  
Sitka Borough Schools  
966-1254 olinc@sitkaschools.org

**Cindy O'Daniel**  
Skagway City Schools  
983-2960x2 busmgr@skagwayschool.org

**Lucienne Smith, Contractor**  
Southeast Island Schools  
677-9263 lucienne.smith@akebs.com

**Lee Ann Andrew**  
Southwest Region Schools  
842-8207 landrew@swrsd.org

**Stefani Dalrymple, Contractor**  
Tanana Schools  
479-9863 stefani@yukonac.com

**Holly Holman**  
Unalaska City Schools  
581-3151 hholman@ucsd.net

**Director Seat F -- Carl Horn --- Nenana**  
832-5400 chorn@nenanlynx.org

**Amber Cockerham**  
Valdez City Schools 835-4700  
acockerham@valdezcityschools.org

**Pam Roope**  
Wrangell City Schools 874-2347x250  
proope@wrangellschools.org

**Ricardo Tejada**  
Yakutat City Schools  
784-3317x225 ricardot@yakutatschools.org

**Deborah Walker**  
Yukon Flats Schools  
662-2512x32 deborah.walker@yukonflats.org

**Cindy Reilly, Interim**  
Yukon-Koyukuk Schools  
220-629-3344 creilly@yksd.com

**Michele George**  
Yupit Schools  
825-3603 mgeorge@yupit.org

## School Business Academy Mentor Assignments

**Mentor—Jenny Martens Director of Budget & Finance**  
Lower Yukon, 591-2411, jmartens@loweryukon.org  
**Therese Aston, Superintendent**  
Tanana Schools, 366-7203, tashton@aktcsd.org

**Mentor—Laurie Olson Director of Finance**  
Kenai, 714-8888, lolson@kpbsd.k12.ak.us  
**Virginia Durant, Asst Business Manager**  
Lower Yukon 591-2411 vdurant@loweryukon.org

**Mentor—Jimmy Love Payroll Specialist**  
Kenai, 714-8888, jlove@kpbsd.k12.ak.us  
**Kathyn Gearhart, Personnel Officer**  
Copper River, 822-3234, kgearhart@crsd.us

**Mentor—Lee Ann Andrew Dir. Of Admin Svcs**  
SW Region, 842-8207, landrew@swrsd.org  
**Jim Holien, Principal**  
Klawock, 755-2220,  
jim.holien@klawockschool.com

**Mentor—Jim Farrington Treasurer**  
Anchorage, 742-4397, farrington\_james@asdk12.org  
**David Nielson, Business Manager**  
Aleutians East, 383-5222, dnielson@aebd.org

**Mentor—Holly Holman Business Manager**  
Unalaska, 581-3151, hholman@ucsd.net  
**Bernadette Villaroya Accountant III**  
Kodiak, 481-6116, bvillaroya01@kibsd.org

**Mentor--Robin Mullins Dir. of Business Svcs**  
Fairbanks, 452-2000x11303,  
robin.mullins@k12northstar.org  
**Deborah Walker, Finance Director**  
Yukon Flats, 662-2515,  
deborah.walker@yukonflats.net

## Employee Passion

© Mark "Tenacious" Towers 817-421-4744 Email:  
mark@speakoutseminars.com

Creating and sustaining employee passion is a most desirable commodity . . . particularly in a do-more-with-less-and-do-it-faster world. This article will provide key insights into the seven factors that strengthen employee motivation and enhance workplace morale.

**Purposeful Work.** Employees buy into the organization's larger purpose. It has been said that the purpose of life is to find your purpose in

(continued on page 11)

(continued from page 10)

life. When employees are individually connected to the organization's whole picture—the vision, the mission and service to the customer, they are able to find “a reason for being.” As a young man shared with us, “I enjoy working at this not-for-profit agency because I get to interface with lots of folks who really appreciate what I do for them. My three co-workers share the same passion and we remain connected and excited. Work is like psychological glue for me. My morale remains sky high!”

**Fairness.** Employees perceive that there is fairness in regard to pay, benefits, workload, sharing of resources and a sense of participation. As one young woman noted, “I like working in this bank because my boss bends over backwards to hear all points of view in regard to everything that impact our well-being at work . . . including pay. She says that we may not always have a vote, but we will always have a voice. I have never worked in a place where there is such a tremendous sense of respect and fairness. I hope to work here for the rest of my career.”

**An Inspirational Boss.** Closely related to the previous point is the importance of an inspirational boss. Many people get a job and quit their boss. An inspirational boss is a BLT...a **B**elievable, **L**ikeable and **T**rusted leader. As Colin Powell said, “You'll know you are a good boss when people follow you out of curiosity alone.” This quotation implies that employees are prone to follow someone who is honest, forward-looking and passionate about the role.

**Flexibility.** People like flex-time, telecommuting, a reasonable dress code, spontaneous time off for a job well done and setting their own hours. As a superb accountant said, “When I can take time off to take my child to the doctor or run an errand, I deeply appreciate it. Given this freedom, I always make sure that I give back as much as I can to the company. I've worked in rigid places before and I felt like an indentured servant. This freedom means more to me than getting more money in my paycheck.”

**A Dynamic Culture.** As the old saying goes, “Culture eats strategy for lunch.” Research shows that people want to feel a part of a team, have a sense of continual learning and have fun on the job. As a magnificent mid-level manager asserted, “We have a simple motto here . . . it's let's produce terrific results, constantly learn from one another and have fun in the process. We have become a learning organization by

having a “lessons learned” session each month in a staff meeting. We have fun by having a crazy socks contest each year, celebrating birthdays, celebrating holidays and doing our best to create a sense of family. I believe that food, fun and ritual create a strong sense of community and connection with one another.”

**Recognition.** Mary Kay Ash, the founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics, once observed, “People want two things more than sex and money. That's praise and recognition.” Indeed, recognition rates higher than pay in almost every worker survey. One important note here: meaningful praise/recognition is sincere, immediate and specific. As one outstanding CEO shared, “When I really want to deliver powerful praise, I write a detailed hand-written note to the spouse or the significant other and mail it to their home. This has greater impact on an employee than anything I have ever done.”

**Tackle Change in a Head-on Fashion.** Change is inevitable and people's resistance to change is part of the process of dealing with change. That prolific author, Anonymous, once wrote, “People don't fear change. They fear the unknown.” Employees want to be included and feel “in on things.” In turn, terrific leaders and peers are radically transparent—they have a “No Secrets and No Surprises” approach with their colleagues. Feeling armed with the knowledge, skills and motivation to face the future is a lot better situation than NETMA (No One Ever Tells Me Anything).

If you are a leader, please use this article as a checklist in regard to your overall effectiveness. If you are not a leader, then see yourself as a dynamic peer and follower. Share this article with those you know and love. Why? Because little changes always make big differences. Above all, do what you can to create and sustain your passion as well as those who cross your path daily!

## Upcoming Events

- **March 17-19, 2014 – ALASBO Fly-In – Juneau**
- **July 2014 – ALASBO Summer Leadership – date and location TBA**
- **September 19-22, 2014 – ASBO Intl – Kissimmee, Florida**
- **December 7-10, 2014 – ALASBO Annual Conference - Anchorage**