

I was honored and humbled to attend the 66th annual Association of Alaska School Board (AASB) meeting in Anchorage, Alaska November 7-10, 2019. The theme of this year's conference was Relevant Committed Empowered. It was three and a half days filled with great speakers, stimulating content, and thought provoking intervals. KPBSA had a good contingent of people there representing our district and I think we all came away with many take aways to consider for our district, our students, ourselves, and our community.

The conference days all started with breakfast and mingling, a general session and then breaking out into smaller groups going to different sessions. Day 1's general session started with a welcome from Education Commissioner Johnson. He of course noted the struggle we are all aware of due to Alaska's economic situation currently and how we can best advocate for our students. He said in times like this we first need to remember who we are which made my mind temporarily drift to the movie segment in Disney's film The Lion King when Mufasa appears to Simba in a cloud type apparition and tells him, "Remember who you are." Johnson stated one of our core strengths is our diversity and we need to celebrate that because it will make us stronger as a whole. He said we need to look to our students as our mirror, while being ethical, using appropriate demeanor, the right decorum, do not falsify things, and don't make emotional appeals. The final thing he noted to truly advocate for our students is not capitulate with the ordinary.

At this point Cameron, John, Penny, Patti, Debbie, and I split up to divide and conquer (well, not literally divide and conquer) to gain the most we could out of the few days we had there. I stayed in the main ballroom at this point which was an academy for experienced board members breakout session and the topic was Family Engagement. This session was led by Lisa Worl with AASB, Lori Grassgreen with AASB, and the keynote speaker Michelle Brooks who is a nationally recognized educator, researcher, and speaker. Michelle started out telling us a short personal story about a time (one of many) when she was called to the school to meet with her daughters principal. She said at times like these her alternative personality (momma bear) would come to the surface and take control and she was no longer "Michelle" but instead "Shelly." Her daughter's school had a new principal and she said she walked in like she was going to 'turn the place out.' The principal brought her into his office and started out the conversation saying, "I work for you, what can I do for you?" She said it was that encounter that sent her on her journey into education. We all have many encounters everyday with different people and we need to be aware of the power of encounters and how we impact others. She said family engagement starts with participation which is really getting parents to do something. Followed by involvement which is getting them to act on something. Those two steps are needed for engagement and partnership. Engagement is figuring out roles and interests of parents so you can hook them. The final step is partnership which she likened to 'the marriage' meaning commitment toward mutual goals. Lisa and Lori focused more specifically on family engagement in Alaska's schools. Lisa told a personal story of her childhood in Southeast Alaska and how she fit like many do here on the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) scale and how it impacted her school experience. Lori focused more on the 'what are we going to do' to make the necessary changes to increase family engagement in our own districts. I found it interesting in a survey AASB initiated the results showing 54% of respondents are never involved in their children's schools and classes/decision making of schooling. In the afternoon

- *Introduction & Family Partnership in Alaska*
- *Building Block 1: Building Intentional: Embed a spirit of collaboration*
- **Building Block 2: Relationship-centered: Build relationships and connections with students and families**
- **Building Block 3: Culturally Response: Honor cultures and community**
- **Building Block 4: Linked to Learning -Connect families to classroom content and student outcomes**
- **Building Block 5: Skills-based: Build confidence and skills of families and staff (Building Block 5)**
- *Putting Together: Visioning Family Partnership*

part of this session we had Sonya Hunte, the Senior Director of Equity & Compliance speak about Family Partnerships with education in Alaska. We broke out into smaller groups to explore the specific building blocks she highlighted in the family partnership process. I was in a building block 4 group which she titled Linked to Learning. We explored ways to help families support and celebrate student growth. When partnership is reached; the school, the student, the family and community are all collaborating on the educational goals of their individual students. The end goal is positive outcomes for students and family engagement is one way to increase those occurrences.



Michele Brooks presenting
 "Leveraging Engagement for Achievement and Equity"

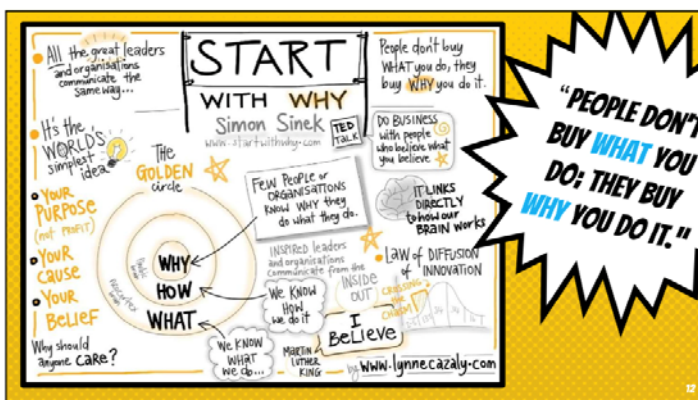


Day 2 started with Michelle Brooks delivering the keynote speech on transformation and what is needed to accomplish it, what the research says about engagement in education, and what the challenges are to implement it systemically. I moved from the general session to a breakout session on School Law. This group was led by Allen Clendaniel with Sedor,

Wendlandt, Evans, and Filippi and Michael Caulfield with Jermain Dunnagen & Owens, P.C. The two main topics of discussion were conflicts of interest and school board elections. After lunch Friday we did speed rounds of 15-20 minute rotations through roundtables each with different focus topics that we were interested in. I went to Entrepreneurship Learning Outside the Classroom, Early College & Career Exploration, Free STEM (Science, technology, Engineering, & Math) Energy Education Curriculum, and Not Your Father's VocEd. After this general session I attended a breakout session on ESSA (Every Student Success Act) and its Alaska implementation led by Rusty Creed Brown.



This is time when you realize how intense these meetings are and if you are anything like me you are ready for more but still digesting the past two days worth of sharing. Day 3 started with a general session presentation led by Tiffany Jackson who is AASB Board President and keynote speaker Donna Oser with Michigan Association of School Boards. Her message was that we can all be



superheroes and as school board members in particular, we hold responsibility to be superheroes for our students. Following this general session, I attended a section on Language and Cultural Immersion in Schools. This was a very interesting breakout section with a few speakers from the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) and Danielle Riha who is an Alaska Teacher of the Year recipient who teaches at the Alaska Native Cultural Charter School in Anchorage. LKSD has partnered with a publishing company to create their own textbooks specific to their

region that teaches their native language and the English language. Danielle spoke on her charter

school and immersion of students to learn about native cultures of Alaska and at the same time embrace everyone's heritage and cultural ancestry in their learning. A couple students performed a Hawaiian dance for the session participants.

The final day of the meeting was to vote on Resolutions AASB will prioritize for the year and the AASB business meeting. Overall this was a very informative and interesting meeting for me. I hope to be able to attend more of these in the future. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or clarification.

