

As I got off the plane in Juneau thinking about what my function would be in the legislative Fly-in I remembered advice a school board colleague stated, just be friendly and ask questions. Sound advice, as I started to talk to someone at the car rental center and found out that he was a cohort of mine as a principal on the North Slope. As we rode into town, I found that he had found a home as the executive director of the Bristol Bay Regional Career Technical Education (BBRCTE) program.

Zach Stensen, was implementing all the things we had been castigated for on the North Slope. After leaving the slope, he had found a niche similar to what we had promoted in developing education programs for local schools particularly relevant to the place students were raised.

He invited me to be a participant in the symposium he was giving the next day for rural school districts to implement CTE programs with limited resources. I suddenly realized that this was the reason I had mistakenly booked my flight early. The energy of the participants was contagious. I found that the BBRCTE model was exactly what we need for the small schools in our district, not to mention something to strive for with the big 5 schools.

I found the program was one of the most exciting and gratifying programs I have witnessed in many years of education. The BBRCTE is a partnership of four school districts in the Bristol Bay region that combined strengths and resources to benefit all the students in respective districts. They identified real life skills that rural students need, developed training, and created educational opportunities for successful completion of high school requirements which gave them a jump start in the careers of their interest. Success was not only high school completion, but allowed them to fit into the local forceforce. This is a model that KPBSD could adopt and emulate. With my dumb luck, I stumbled upon something I have tremendous passion

for. After only thirty six hours, I realized this program was the perfect model for possible immediate implementation for the schools of our district.

I entered into the opening of the AASB flyin as my first day's experience had created an enthusiasm for outcome possibilities of the next few days. I sat at the breakfast table that morning and we were seated next to the delegation from Kodiak and the student they had brought. She was representing her student council and was well briefed on what was to occur in the next few days. She was to read a letter to the Senate education committee. We talked of the salient points, not to mention her courage of taking on such an intimidating testimony. There was an inertia in the room that was contagious, and we all brought a hopeful energy to a process that was transpiring. The addition of youthful exuberance was a valuable asset to the older population.

Many personal acquaintances of my past years of Alaska education were still in the field and it was gratifying to see we were all continuing the educational fight. We had some great presenters who explained what we were to expect as we lobbied the legislators in the next few days. Plans were developed and we got to honestly talk to not only our own local board members but those of other districts. Conversations were rich and meaningful and my confidence was bolstered as to what our entourage may accomplish.

We invaded the capital building for our scheduled appointments. It was obvious from the onset which legislators supported education and those who did not. The supporters opened their offices in a friendly manner and encouraged the students to become advocates for their educational needs. It was rather enlightening to watch those legislators who did not support the students and some (including ours) went so far as to not even honor constituents with appointments. I could sense a line in the sand drawn between those who chose to honor their constitutional obligation of supplying adequate funding for education and the old guard who still promises full funding of the permanent fund while neglecting our children. I personally witnessed

some legislators huddling in hallways making rude comments about not funding the BSA in front of the young people. Personally, the revelation was rather shocking.

As I waited to testify before the Senate education committee and watched the students testify I was impressed with their articulation of issues. It was powerful and I was proud of their naive enthusiasm. That pride was exacerbated when I sat down at the table and looked at our homegrown Senator who queried me about my testimony. Senator Bjorkman is taking the senate by storm and we should congratulate and encourage him if we get the chance.

I had never met Justin Ruffridge before and found him to be a straight shooter. I sensed he could be counted on for asking the tough question when need be. His requests for pertinent information was spot on and as a freshman representative he too is a force to be reckoned with in Juneau. I was very impressed with all of the new faces in Juneau who are trying to crack that good old boy network. I hope they do not become disenfranchised with the ingrained attitudes of the veteran lawmakers.

Now as I reflect on my observations, the things I will take to our local school board are as follows:

1. The CTE program template is out there and we need to proceed to implement it as quickly as possible to prevent further attrition of our student populations.
2. The Fly-in is great for board members to understand the scope, processes, and procedures of educational lobbying. We also need to educate our constituents about what and how to be heard in Juneau.
3. A concentrated effort needs to be made to recruit and train students to be active members of the lobbying effort. Their voice carries the most weight of all.
4. I applaud our district's model for a concise brochure that identified our specific priorities. Many district's stated they would bring something similar next year.

5. We as a group need to understand the importance of early commitment to the Fly-in so costs can be minimalized. A designated coordinator may help this process.
6. I would not recommend a monthly school board meeting and for sure a hearing be scheduled during the Fly-in. The effectiveness of our last board meeting lost something in being so scattered. I also question whether decisions made were of the quality we pride ourselves in because of limited person to person interaction.

Lastly, I would like to say how appreciative and how I enjoyed the company of my fellow board members. I left with a sense of comradery and confidence in our educational priorities that I have not experienced during my tenure on the board. I really believe we can be educational leaders for other school boards statewide. Many districts are struggling with board identity, we may be able to assist through our professionalism and forward thinking.