

**AASB 2024 Leadership Academy & Legislative Fly-In  
& Youth Advocacy Institute  
Juneau, Alaska February 8-14<sup>th</sup>**

Board Member Penny Vadla

**Personal Perspective** ... The training component of our February Leadership Academy Fly-In was over-the-top fantastic!!!

**Thursday, February 8<sup>th</sup> I spent the day gathering info at the Juneau Capitol**

**Special Pre-Conference Session      Friday - February 9<sup>th</sup>      Highlights**

**Understanding Alaska Education Funding & Embracing the (Civil) Discourse**

**- Funding Public Education and Advocacy** – Lon Garrison and John Sedor

Advocacy is integral in education. Advocacy is about discussing and listening. It is not a dance. The reality is for individuals to know the facts and to present those facts in a clear, concise, and respectful manner. When a person is having a discussion with someone who presents an opposing view, it is essential to be engaged and listen carefully to understand the other person's perspective. In this two-way discussion, it is equally important for the responder to provide facts along with personal views on the subject in a respectful manner to avoid the discussion being 'shut down' before the person is finished speaking. Consideration and kindness are essential to the success of any discussion.

**-Examining the Evidence Between Funding Systems and Educational Outcomes** – Larry Picus  
Research and data is essential to success. How do we use expenditures and attain the 'student outcomes' districts desire? A successful district should look at cost and function, use professional judgement, and provide evidenced based research to determine what schools should look like to meet student needs.

**-Funding Does Not Exist in a Vacuum: The Role of the Political Process** – Moderator- former Senator Tom Begich asked several questions to legislative panelists: Senator Tobin, Representative Stapp, Representative Prax, Commissioner Bishop, and NEA Director Moser -

Questions asked of the panelists: **1.** Do you support change in (a) how and where districts are funded and (b) Long-term adequate funding? **2.** How do you tie the funding mechanism to better outcomes? **3.** Local Control and what is the states' responsibility? **4.** Funding Mechanisms – ADM Count should be clear (if mandated= fund it!); and the final Challenge Question: What would you like in a Grand Bargain?

The questions former Senator Begich asked of the panel generated a plethora of responses from a variety of perspectives. This 1:45 minute very interactive panel sectional was one of the highlights of the conference!

## **Leadership Academy & Legislative Fly-In Saturday/Sunday February 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup>**

### **AASB Legislative Advocacy Day - February 10<sup>th</sup> Highlights**

**-The Necessity of Your Advocacy - former Senator Begich** – How a person approaches a legislator is very important. Be prepared. Have factual evidence ready and explain district needs in detail. Understand that the people you are meeting with might not share the same beliefs you have or have the same energy. Listen very carefully. Have a sense of humour. It is important to share a story about who you are. Put a human face on it. Remember to connect with people and places. When advocating for education, support students who want to speak to legislators about their educational experiences in their schools and communities. All voices matter, and all voices have an impact. It is also extremely essential to have financial support for resources and professional development as the 'Reads Act' is implemented in school districts around the state.

**-Understanding Your Legislative Context & Legislative Bill Review** Norm Wooten & Lon Garrison Remember that you are a publicly elected representative. Let the legislators know you represent our students, our teachers, our schools, and our communities. It is important to remember that every bill should have a proper vetting if it goes forward. Norm presented a very thorough overview of bills before the Legislature. It is important to understand the back story in a bill as this can provide additional information. Norm and Lon have been tracking 57 education bills. Overall, this bill review was exceptional and supported our efforts on the hill during our in-person meetings with legislators.

**-Senator Bjorkman and Representative Schrage guest speakers at AASB Luncheon** – Highlights  
**Senator Bjorkman** -If we want results and improved outcomes, we need to make investments in public education. Do not take accountability away from local control. Bonuses will not work. We will hand out bonuses and pink slips too. Our long-term educators work hard and deserve a retirement plan with dignity. Return to a defined benefit system in support.  
**Representative Schrage** – Advocate for a high BSA. Fight to not strip local support from districts. We don't pit local brick & mortar schools against district charter schools or local home schools, we partner with the local school districts and form stronger schools/districts. What we do now impacts all districts. Reach out to the community and make a call-to-action in support of public schools.

**-Your Role Facilitating Advocacy at Home** – Emily Ferry, Lon Garrison, and Andrea Watts - Take the time to get to know your legislators. An essential role of School Board members is 'Grass Roots Advocacy. Know your message! Remember, factual information is essential. Reach out to schools, teachers, parents, assembly members, businesses, town hall meetings, site councils, have coffee with a legislator events, and other avenues. The more the message is shared, the more effective the result will be. Please note that I have included a few legislative resources for individuals to access: [www.akleg.gov](http://www.akleg.gov); [Kenai.LIO@akleg.gov](mailto:Kenai.LIO@akleg.gov); Gavel Alaska; AASB; and campaign websites and brochures.

## **AASB Advocacy Day February 11<sup>th</sup> - Highlights**

**-NSBA Advocacy Institute** – Margo Bellamy and Pete Hoepfner - “If the board isn’t together and providing the ask, it doesn’t get done!” How to ask questions, connect, and share data is what is meaningful to legislators. Our voices are needed! Equity is essential in education. A reference entitled, the “Dignity Index” resource was shared with attendees. This resource is an eight-point scale that scores speech along a continuum from contempt to dignity in as unbiased a manner as possible. This is an excellent resource!

**-Partner Voices** – Lisa Parady, Nils Andreassen, and Caroline Storm – From the group... We support ‘all’ students, and we are united in our support. Unfortunately, we have lost purchasing power. Alaska presents the most unequitable funding contribution in the USA. With investment in education, we see achievement. It was mentioned in the newspaper that the state needs to ‘focus’ on the student’s education not on bureaucratic entities.

**-Representative Edgmon guest speaker at AASB Luncheon** – It is important to encourage the public to advocate for education. It is all about getting resources into public schools. Often there is too much polarization which can slow momentum and movement forward. Public schools need support from us because all students deserve an education. Funding is a state obligation.

**-Honing Your Advocacy Skills (board member and student participation)** – Andrea Watts and Lon Garrison – We need to have conversations. At the onset of the sectional, presenters posed this question: What have you lost as a student? We run the risk of losing teachers and staff, students, class offerings, counselors, reading specialists, extra curricular activities, school closures, professional development, CTE offerings, essential opportunities, and the list goes on. Infrastructure and basic become impacted. With continued ‘flat funding’, all aspects of education weaken. The reality is that we need fully funded schools. What can you do? You can advocate, be persistent, and reach out to people who want to partner with you. Tell your story, be specific, and keep things interesting. Listen to understand and speak to be understood. Think about why the audience should listen to you. The connections you make will help determine the path forward.

**-Student Panel and Skits** – Students presented a panel discussion and some very animated educational skits. Both presentations were interesting, informative, and quite enjoyable!

## **(KPBSD Board Member) Meetings with Legislators - February 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>**

Our dedicated board secretary set up 21 district/legislative appointments for us. Thank you!!

**-Legislative Meetings - Monday Feb 12<sup>th</sup>** 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

-Our team met with Senator Kiel, Senator Bjorkman, Rep Hannon, Rep Carpenter, Senator Gray-Jackson, Rep Schrage, Rep Story, and Rep Josephson.

Additional Meeting Attendance

-Maggie Grenier was asked by the House to be a Guest House Page for the Monday House Floor Session. (10:30-12:00) Our Board was present at this Session. Ms. Grenier did a stellar job!!

-(Monday Special Senate Education Committee Meeting – (Public Testimony 3:30-5:00 p.m.) Maggie Grenier - Student Representative to KPBSD Board; Jeren Nash - Sohi Student Council Representative; Shea Nash -River City Principal; and Penny Vadla KPBSD Board Member testified before this Senate Education Committee meeting.

I am very proud to have been given the opportunity to deliver my testimony alongside the wonderful testimonies of Maggie Grenier, Jeren Nash, and Shea Nash. Our testimonies were from the heart and painted a clear, factual picture of the needs of our district and other districts around the state. A special thank you to the Senate Education Committee for providing this opportunity for all of us.

**-Legislative Meetings - Tuesday February 13<sup>th</sup>** 8:00 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.

Our team met with Senator Giessel, Rep Galvin, Rep Ortiz, Rep Stapp, Senator Tobin, Rep Tilton, Rep Ruffridge, Rep Himschoot, Senator Stevens, Rep Stutes, Rep Vance, and Rep Tomaszewski.

Generally speaking, the meetings we had with Legislators on February 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> were very informative, inclusive, and welcoming. Discussions were open and the dialogue was very interactive. Legislators discussed their positions on issues and bills and asked us for information regarding KPBSD issues and what our district needs were. The legislators open, candid, thoughtful discussions and comments added to my appreciation for the depth and breadth of the work our legislators do for Alaska and Alaskans during their session and oftentimes beyond the session.

**I would like to thank the following people who made this trip possible and so successful.**

-Superintendent Clayton Holland for sending our team to the AASB Academy & Legislative Fly-In.

-District Office personnel who helped in the development of the KPBSD Information packet.

-Nikkol Sipes for providing us with our organized packets to share with legislators, for working with me on the legislator appointment list, and for making reservations for individuals.

-AASB (Association of Alaska School Board) for providing one of the best Leadership Academy and Legislative Fly-Ins & Youth Advocacy Institutes I have attended. You really provided a stellar opportunity for districts, school boards and students in attendance.

-Our legislators in Juneau – Thank you for listening to us and hearing our voices.

-Most importantly, I would like to thank our student representatives to Juneau: Maggie Grenier and Jeren Nash accompanied by each student's parent chaperone Janel Grenier and Shea Nash; and fellow Board members Patty Truesdell and Tim Daugharty.

-I would also like to thank the KPBSD community for supporting our district, central office, administration, the board, schools, school staff, and our students. You make a difference!

Respectfully,  
Penny Vadla