

SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION TASK FORCE

Appointed Members

Andy Baker

NANA Corporation Member/Kotzebue

1. Why do you want to be appointed to this task force?

I would like to help the education system evolve in both rural and urban Alaska

2. What strengths and/or skills would you bring to the task force?

Strong organizational and leadership and vast rural knowledge

3. Have you been a member of another task force before? If the answer is yes, please provide additional information.

Current member of the Governor's Advisory committee to the Rural Sub Cabinet

4. What's your view about the public education system in Alaska?

There are definitely areas to improve

5. In your view, are Alaskan public schools adequately or not adequately funded? Please explain your answer.

I do not think it is all about funding, I think that first you must look at the delivery and effectiveness and follow that with funding

6. Do you believe that increasing funding for the Base Student Allocation will solve most or all financial problems for public schools in Alaska?

I think it is a much bigger issue than just the BSA

7. What, in your opinion, is the best way to fund public schools in Alaska?

I think there are many options that need to be explored

8. What are some ideas, if any, that you think could improve public education in Alaska in general?

Being able to provide courses needed and relevant to the students' interest and job goals and allowing them to go where they need to to get it

9. Appointed public members are volunteers and should not expect remuneration for their time and work. If appointed, how much time would you be able to devote?

As I am self-employed I have as much time as needed as long as it is productive to give it

10. Please provide any other information that you think might be useful in determining your qualifications as a member of this Task Force.

I am very interested in helping to improve our educational system for our students. I am a strong and decisive leader that will push.

Jerry Covey

Educator

1. Why do you want to be appointed to this task force?

I have been directly involved in Alaska's public education system since 1976. I care deeply about our public school system and desire to work with legislators and other leaders to improve public education for all Alaskan students.

2. What strengths and/or skills would you bring to the task force?

My career as an educator in Alaska and subsequent consulting experience includes being a K-8 teacher in a one-room school, K-12 principal, associate superintendent, superintendent, Alaska Commissioner of Education, instructor at the University of Alaska Southeast, and providing consulting services for urban and rural school district across the state on a wide range of local and state education policy issues. Additionally, as a parent and grandparent, I have an on-going stake in our public education system.

3. Have you been a member of another task force before?

No

4. What's your view about the public education system in Alaska?

I believe that our system of education offers a viable, affordable, and practical way of educating our children and youth. That said, I believe that adjustments can and should be made in our education system that will translate to improved results for students, families, and Alaskan employers.

5. In your view, are Alaskan public schools adequately or not adequately funded? Please explain your answer.

The cost of education delivery is outpacing funding increases provided by state and local governments. Essentially, flat funding levels are eroding school districts' ability to deliver the programs students need.

Please see question 6 for more detail on school funding.

6. Do you believe that increasing funding for the Base Student Allocation will solve most or all financial problems for public schools in Alaska?

No. History shows us that regardless of how much money we put into the education system, it still demands more. Our public education system does need additional funding, but it must be used in ways that are directly linked to increased student success.

7. What, in your opinion, is the best way to fund public schools in Alaska?

School funding has been the subject of countless finance studies and several lawsuits. We have analyzed Alaska's school-funding system from almost every angle and have made few changes in it over the decades.

The big issues with school funding center around funding equity and the amount of funding allocated by the legislature to school districts. That said, I believe our public education system's greatest challenges lie in other areas. See number 8 below.

8. What are some ideas, if any, that you think could improve education in Alaska in general?

First, I believe putting more authority directly into the hands of parents will translate to improved education for students. Programs that expand choice within the public system such as education vouchers – that must be used in schools that meet all requirements of the public school system – would allow parents to access education opportunities for their students that are currently unavailable to them.

Second, when and how education is delivered has remained largely unchanged in the United States for over 100 years. Our commitment to educating students, the level of support and expectation we have for the workforce, and the education delivery model are not meeting the needs of students, expectation of parents, nor adequately preparing many students for entry into post high-school education or entry into the workforce.

Third, fresh approaches to education delivery, parental engagement, workforce development, educator accountability, length and time of schooling, the structure of schooling, and resource commitments for education must be developed and implemented. Our state education system needs to develop the capability and capacity to better respond to the education challenges and opportunities available in Alaska.

9. Appointed public members are volunteers and should not expect remuneration for time and work. If appointed, how much time would you be able to devote?

As a business owner, I am in a position to arrange my work in a way that will allow me to fulfill my commitment to the work of this important task force.

10. Please provide any other information that you think might be useful in determining your qualifications as a member of this Task Force.

Rural education has always been a primary interest of mine. I have been studying rural education for several years and have written several reports and articles on the challenges of educating students in rural Alaska. I have also worked independently and on behalf of clients to support legislation that addresses the needs of rural school districts and students.

Andrew Halcro

Businessperson

1. Why do you want to be appointed to this task force?

As the president of the largest business trade association in Alaska, education continues to be a major concern of the business community. The public school population in Alaska represents close to all of our emerging workforce, and the business community has a role to play in helping public policy makers determine the skills needed to be considered graduation ready. In serving on the education task force, I will bring a comprehensive view from the private sector, the end user of Alaska's public school graduates.

2. What strengths and/or skills would you bring to the task force?

As a former Anchorage School District graduate, Gladys Wood Elementary School PTA president, statewide business owner, state legislator, and the creator of the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce's current education initiatives, my combined insight at the intersection of public education and the economy will bring significant value to the task force.

3. Have you been a member of another task force before? If the answer is yes, please provide additional information.

No.

4. What's your view about the public education system in Alaska?

I believe the public education system in Alaska is good but needs to be better. There are challenges inherent to educating young Alaskans including geographical and cultural barriers. The vast expanse of the state levies tremendous socio-economic costs in rural school districts due to distance and isolation. This creates problems when trying to address adequate and balanced statewide funding. In urban districts, rapidly changing demographics have added to the complexity of delivering education including a growing population where English is not their first language. However, over ninety percent of Alaskan students attend public schools which means we need work harder to understand the changes and adopt policies that reflect the dynamic environment.

5. In your view, are Alaskan public schools adequately or not adequately funded? Please explain your answer.

I believe there are legitimate arguments on both sides of the funding question.

Can any organization be expected to keep pace with rising costs and a changing environment when it is flat funded for four years in a row? No. Should any organization who invests as much as we do on education be happy with the return on our investment? No.

The equation for breaking this circular argument is a collective approach. School districts must be willing to embrace non-profit agencies like the Anchorage Chamber and the United Way who are leveraging private sector resources to help boost education. In return, successful collaboration will bare education results that will become an argument for additional investments.

6. Do you believe that increasing funding for the Base Student Allocation will solve most or all financial problems for public schools in Alaska?

Money will never solve all of the challenges that education faces. What will solve challenges is how well we manage the money we do spend while leveraging non-profit/private sector partnerships to help support teachers, address critical socio-economic issues and contribute to defining graduation readiness.

7. What, in your opinion, is the best way to fund public schools in Alaska?

I believe the Base Student Allocation is a misleading number. The average of what the state invests every year in the BSA is an average that doesn't accurately reflect the true cost per student based on actual consumption of education resources and allows for gross misrepresentation. With 16% of the Anchorage School District students requiring additional resources due to special needs, this large and growing percentage of students costs significantly more per student than say my daughter cost while attending West Anchorage High School. The challenge is, and always has been, how do you establish a formula that fairly reflects the cost differentials for geography and a changing student population? In order to craft an equitable formula, the committee needs to be looking at socio-economic data beyond the normal education dashboards that have historically been used.

8. What are some ideas, if any, that you think could improve public education in Alaska in general?

I believe the best idea going forward is to create stronger collaboration between traditional education groups, the business community and government agencies to create alignment in addressing the growing socio-economic problems that are negatively impacting education in Alaska.

9. Appointed public members are volunteers and should not expect remuneration for their time and work. If appointed, how much time would you be able to devote?

As much time as the committee demands. This year education will be one of the primary areas of focus for the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, so work on the task force would align with our existing 2013/14 strategic plan.

10. Please provide any other information that you think might be useful in determining your qualifications as a member of this Task Force.

My experience as a former state lawmaker who dealt with education funding issues when oil was \$10 per barrel, my years as an Anchorage Daily News columnist writing about how the economy and education intersect and my current position of leading the largest Chamber of Commerce in Alaska all point to a knowledge of education that is substantive and relevant to the work of the task force. I believe my qualifications will add value as one of the two business seats on the task force.

Brad Keithley

Businessperson

1. Why do you want to be appointed to this task force?

Over the last few years I have spent a significant amount of time focusing on and writing about state fiscal policy. In its January 2013 report on Alaska fiscal policy, the University of Alaska-Anchorage's Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) concluded that, largely as a result of current Unrestricted General Fund (UGF) spending levels, Alaska does "not have enough cash in reserves to avoid a severe fiscal crunch soon after 2023, and with that fiscal crisis will come an economic crash." I am committed to helping identify solutions which avoid that crisis. While Health and Human Services has a significantly larger overall budget (largely as a result of federal funding sources), according to the Governor's FY 2014 10-year budget plan K-12 education spending is currently the largest category of UGF spending and, when combined with state higher education (UA) spending, will remain in that position at least until the end of the decade. Identifying the appropriate level of total state education funding within an overall budget context – and an effective means for keeping education funding within that level -- is one of the keys to bringing overall UGF spending back within sustainable levels and avoiding the cataclysmic consequences outlined in the ISER report.

2. What strengths and/or skills would you bring to the task force?

Over the last five years I have developed a significant understanding of state fiscal issues. I anticipate one contribution I would make is to help ensure that the Task Force appropriately considers education spending and policy issues within the context of their impact on overall state fiscal issues.

3. Have you been a member of another task force before? If the answer is yes, please provide additional information.

I have not previously served as a member of an Alaska or of a K-12 task force. I have previously served on a task force created by and advising the Oklahoma regional higher education system.

4. What's your view about the public education system in Alaska?

Generally speaking, I am concerned that the public education system (K-12 plus UA) is playing a significant role in pushing overall state spending above sustainable levels. Going forward, a combination of spending cuts – or at least spending stabilization – and alternative revenue sources may be required to maintain both state education funding and the overall state budget at sustainable levels.

5. In your view, are Alaskan public schools adequately or not adequately funded? Please explain your answer.

When viewed in isolation some might argue that the Alaska public education system (K12 plus UA) is underfunded relative to what it is trying to accomplish. In the context of overall budget policy, however, I am concerned that the draw of the public education system on state funding already is excessive. In FY 2014, for example, overall education spending (K-12 plus UA) constitutes roughly 30% of sustainable state spending levels.

While there is [some evidence](#) that level is within the norm among other states, there are other, unique demands on Alaska's spending priorities (e.g., transportation and infrastructure) that may

mean that education spending is overweighted compared with Alaska's other priorities. In my view the question is as much fitting Alaska's education system within what Alaska can afford as it is funding the type of education system that some, in a perfect world, would like to have.

6. Do you believe that increasing funding for the Base Student Allocation will solve most or all financial problems for public schools in Alaska?

Not necessarily. While increasing the BSA might enable the Alaska education system to more comfortably accomplish its aspirations, it is not clear that Alaska can afford the type of education system that some would like. Identifying what type of education system Alaskans can afford is as important as identifying what type of education system Alaskans want. The BSA level should be a result of the combination of the two discussions, not an objective in itself.

7. What, in your opinion, is the best way to fund public schools in Alaska?

A combination of state, local and private (e.g., grant, donations) sources. State level funding should continue to come from the Unrestricted General Fund (rather than long-term dedicated sources) in order to avoid prioritizing some state needs over others. (I oppose creating a dedicated Transportation Fund for the same reason.)

8. What are some ideas, if any, that you think could improve public education in Alaska in general?

1. Require administrators to prioritize programs and needs to various budget levels so that it is clear what level of education system Alaskans will receive at a given level of funding.
2. Evaluate the application of managed competition principles and other, competition generating approaches to the Alaska education system as a means of incenting efficiency and cost reduction.
3. Significantly improving alumni and other private giving rates at the state's higher education institutions (which would reduce the burden on state funding).

1. Appointed public members are volunteers and should not expect remuneration for their time and work. If appointed, how much time would you be able to devote?

15 – 20 hours per week.

2. Please provide any other information that you think might be useful in determining your qualifications as a member of this Task Force.

My background and resume is attached as Appendix A.

David Nees

Educator

1. Why do you want to be appointed to this task force?

Education is Alaska needs major reform a clear set of expectations accountability, and a clear curriculum

2. What strengths and/or skills would you bring to the task force?

28 years of teaching in Anchorage. 75 seasons of coaching, team builder. Highly organized, driven, love research

3. Have you been a member of another task force before? If the answer is yes, please provide additional information.

No

4. What's your view about the public education system in Alaska?

I feel strongly that the education system in Alaska has great potential but cannot effect change from the inside, it needs a clear set of expectations accountability, and a clear curriculum

5. In your view, are Alaskan public schools adequately or not adequately funded? Please explain your answer.

Funding is not the problem, there is more than enough being spent The state DEED has a requirement of 75% the funding goes to "instruction" but it does not have a definition of instruction.

6. Do you believe that increasing funding for the Base Student Allocation will solve most or all financial problems for public schools in Alaska?

No

7. What, in your opinion, is the best way to fund public schools in Alaska?

Clarify what can be spent outside of instruction in district budgets.

8. What are some ideas, if any, that you think could improve public education in Alaska in general?

You have to follow Texas and Mass.in the partnership between education and the state. Take over failing districts, promote community groups to take over failing schools, open schools to competition, demand high results, reward success punish failure. The DEED plan for exemption from NCLB has none of these in place intact attendance not performance will earn schools a passing mark, this is unacceptable.

9. Appointed public members are volunteers and should not expect remuneration for their time and work. If appointed, how much time would you able to devote?

24 -30 hours a week

10. Please provide any other information that you think might be useful in determining your qualifications as a member of this Task Force.

I will give you references, Tom Fink, David Boyle, Bethany Marcum, Senator Mike Dunleavy