

State Board of Education & Early Development
Draft Meeting Minutes
December 5, 2024
Virtual Meeting

Thursday December 5, 2024

Chair Fields called the meeting to order at 12:03 p.m.

Roll was called, and the following members were present to provide a quorum: Member Kimberly Bergey, First Vice Chair Sally Stockhausen, Second Vice Chair Lorri Van Deist, Military Advisor Lt. Colonel James Fowley, Student Advisor Joshua Pak, Member Barbara Tyndall, Member Pamela Dupras, and Chair James Fields.

Chair Fields called a quorum. First Vice Chair Stockhausen gave the invocation, and the board pledged allegiance to the flag.

Second Vice Chair Van Diest motioned, and Member Bergey seconded a motion to adopt the agenda of the December 5, 2024 meeting. Without further discussion the motion passed in a roll call vote. There were no potential conflicts of interest identified by board members.

Public Comment

There were no public comments provided.

Work Session

Agenda Item 1 – Presentations

1A. Alaska Bible College

Dr. Matthew Lindquist, Dean, from Alaska Bible College provided an update on their Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) process. The college is in the self-study phase and remains committed to its mission of fostering Christ like servant-leader educators in Alaska. Unfortunately, the sudden passing of their CAEP liaison caused a slight delay, but they are still on track for accreditation by May 2026, barring any additional setbacks.

Dr. Lindquist highlighted the formation of their EPAC council, which includes members from the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) school district and the community, ensuring cultural responsiveness and program alignment with local needs. Recent successes include their first program graduate, now teaching at a private school, and a current senior completing his student teaching practicum at Butte Elementary. The college's partnership with Mat-Su district continues to grow, emphasizing effective teacher preparation. Additionally, Alaska Bible College is now authorized to offer master's-level courses, including workshops and continuing education opportunities, which aim to support local and incoming educators. The college remains optimistic about meeting its accreditation goals and will provide further updates by December.

1B. University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)

Dr. Tonia Dousay, Dean, and Dr. Denise Runge, Provost of the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), presented updates on their CAEP accreditation process.

Dr. Denise Runge, Provost of the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), reaffirmed her commitment to supporting the institution's efforts in achieving accreditation through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). She highlighted her personal involvement since the conditional licensure of

UAA graduates and expressed her continued dedication until full accreditation is achieved. Dr. Runge introduced Dr. Tonia Dousay, Dean of the School of Education, who provided an in-depth presentation on UAA's progress and strategic initiatives in educator preparation.

Dr. Dousay detailed the structured timeline for CAEP accreditation, emphasizing the school's continuous improvements and the data-driven processes leading to the 2028 goal of full accreditation. The School of Education is actively engaged in data collection, reporting, and implementing enhancements informed by these efforts. Enrollment in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program has shown significant growth, with 101 students officially enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts program and 43 additional apprentices participating through a U.S. Department of Labor-registered apprenticeship program. This brings the total pipeline of early childhood educators to 144, reflecting UAA's success in addressing Alaska's workforce needs.

The presentation also highlighted the innovative frameworks and pathways supporting educator preparation at UAA. These include flexible entry and exit points for students, culturally responsive scheduling, and integration of comprehensive field experiences. The apprenticeship model developed by UAA, in partnership with the Department of Labor, opens new funding avenues and provides practical, community-focused training. UAA's programs incorporate professional standards, cultural competencies, and progressive coursework, ensuring candidates are equipped to support literacy and learning for Alaskan children. This comprehensive approach is designed to meet both state and national educational priorities while fostering sustainable pathways for aspiring educators in Alaska.

The program emphasizes culturally responsive education, flexible pathways for students with varying levels of prior education, and robust fieldwork requirements. Additionally, UAA integrates Alaska Reads Act readiness into its curriculum, ensuring comprehensive literacy preparation for future educators. The apprenticeship model supports local educators by addressing logistical and financial challenges, fostering accessible teacher training statewide.

Agenda Item 2 – FY24 AKSTAR Assessment Results

DEED Innovation and Education Excellence Deputy Director Kelly Manning presented the FY2024 statewide assessment results for the Alaska System of Academic Readiness (AKSTAR) and the Alaska Science Assessment. AKSTAR integrates Fall and Winter MAP Growth interim assessments with a Spring summative component for students in grades 3-9. This innovative design reduces overall testing time while providing comprehensive performance data. The Alaska Science Assessment, adopted in 2019, evaluates students in grades 5, 8, and 10, and has been consistently administered over the years.

The statewide participation rate for assessments ranged from 90-94% in brick-and-mortar schools, reflecting a positive recovery following declines during the pandemic. In terms of proficiency, approximately 30% of students statewide were proficient or advanced in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, with stronger performance in grade 5 and challenges noted in grades 8-9 (ELA) and grade 9 (Math). Science proficiency was higher, with 37% of students scoring proficient or advanced, and grade 5 showed a 5% improvement in performance compared to the previous year.

Efforts to address areas for improvement include targeting reading through the Reads Act, hiring subject-specific content specialists, and providing districts with resources to better utilize assessment data for curriculum and instruction. Additionally, schools identified as needing improvement are receiving focused support through the state's school improvement playbook and empowerment coaches. Career and Technical Education (CTE) initiatives are also being expanded to enhance student engagement and participation.

To support districts in adapting to the new AKSTAR system, the state has prioritized assessment literacy. These efforts aim to ensure that educators understand how to use the data effectively to drive decision-making and support student achievement. The overall goal is to provide targeted resources and interventions to improve performance while celebrating progress in areas like science proficiency growth.

Agenda Item 3 – Attendance/Chronic Absenteeism Discussion

Dr. Deena Bishop, Alaska’s Commissioner for the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) addressed the alarming issue of chronic absenteeism, with 45% of Alaska’s students missing over 10% of the school year—double the national average. Chronic absenteeism correlates with academic struggles, lower graduation rates, and diminished future prospects. Bishop stressed collaboration with districts, engaging families as partners, and reevaluating pandemic-era attendance policies. Solutions include community engagement, data-driven strategies, and tailored interventions like reward systems and relationship-building.

Board members discussed national comparisons, noting Alaska’s lower instructional time (170 school days, shorter hours) as a potential contributor to absenteeism and academic disparities. Suggestions included adopting successful practices from other states, emphasizing in-person learning, and improving e-learning standards. Teacher turnover in rural areas and staff absenteeism were highlighted as factors impacting student attendance and engagement.

Moving forward, DEED plans to enhance support through evidence-based strategies, community partnerships, and addressing structural barriers like instructional time. Board members emphasized the importance of attendance in improving outcomes and suggested forming committees to focus on solutions collaboratively.

Agenda Item 4 – Regulations for Adoption

4A. Social Studies Standards

Kelly Manning, Deputy Director for the Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, presented proposed revisions to Alaska's social studies standards, encompassing updates to geography, history, economics, civics, and inquiry. Following public comment after the October Board meeting, the department reviewed feedback and incorporated relevant suggestions. Manning recommended adopting the revised standards and noted that additional feedback would be integrated into resources being developed with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to assist districts with curriculum and implementation.

Key points from the discussion included:

- **Public Feedback Integration:** Member Stockhausen inquired if public comments would influence resource development. Manning confirmed that AIR and the department's social studies specialist are reviewing and incorporating feedback into the tools and resources.
- **Post-secondary Transition:** Member Bergey asked if the standards addressed the transition from high school to post-secondary education. Manning explained that while the standards reflect Alaska-specific and national best practices, the transition was not explicitly addressed.
- **Review Cycle:** Bergey also inquired about the state’s review process, noting that districts often follow a six-year cycle. Manning stated that a 5- to 7-year review cycle is ideal but can be affected by resources. The department is considering implementing a more regular review process.
- **Content Gaps:** Second Vice Chair Van Diest raised concerns about potential gaps in the standards, citing public feedback, such as a narrow focus on Alaska in 6th grade. Manning clarified that these concerns often reflect philosophical differences or instructional decisions, with the standards designed as a framework for districts to build their curricula.
- **Interim Review and Support:** Bergey emphasized the importance of an interim review to address gaps early. Manning highlighted tools and resources being developed to assist districts during implementation, with training and curriculum alignment support planned for rollout in the spring. She noted the importance of allowing sufficient time for implementation before formally evaluating the standards.

The board emphasized the need for a structured follow-up process and reassurance that the standards provide a robust framework while giving districts the flexibility to tailor their curricula.

4B. Student Advisor Elect for the State Board of Education

Commissioner Dr. Deena Bishop explained that the board will vote on revisions to the Student Advisor Elect process for the State Board of Education. The changes were prompted by concerns that not all school districts belong to the Alaska Association of Student Governments (AASG). Under the new process, the AASG will continue to submit recommendations to the Department of Education, but an additional open application process will be available for other students to apply. This ensures broader participation. Commissioner Bishop noted that there was no public comment on this item.

Student Advisor Pak asked for clarification on whether it will be noted during Board interviews if a candidate is recommended by the Department of Education or by the Alaska Association of Student Governments, as the wording of the recommendation is not very clear.

Commissioner Bishop responded that they could clarify a candidate's recommendation source if desired, either upfront in the application process or during the interview, as such questions might naturally arise.

4C. Broadband Assistance Grant (BAG)

Faye Tanner, Program Coordinator for School Finance, provided an update on the Broadband Assistance Grant (BAG) program. The BAG program, established by the Alaska State Legislature in 2014, aims to assist schools in achieving sufficient internet download speeds. Initially set at 10 Mbps, the requirement increased to 25 Mbps in 2020, and most recently to 100 Mbps in 2023, necessitating updates to the regulations.

Tanner outlined the regulation update process, which included three public comment periods. The main concern raised in comments involved the determination of the *initial negotiated capacity date*, which affects funding calculations, particularly when schools experience gaps in BAG funding. While comments suggested funding the difference between E-Rate reimbursement and actual costs, Tanner clarified that such changes would require a statutory amendment beyond the scope of the regulation update.

The proposed updates simplify the existing regulations by reducing the four categories for determining the initial negotiated capacity date to two:

1. **Category A:** November 1, 2014, for schools continuously funded since the program began.
2. **Category B:** March 1 of the most recent year the school re-entered the program after a funding gap.

The simplified approach improves clarity, aligns with statutory requirements, and benefits schools by allowing earlier baseline dates, which can result in higher funding. Tanner also highlighted program improvements, such as increased transparency, weekly Q&A sessions, and support for appeals, ensuring schools can navigate the application process effectively.

Business Meeting

Agenda Item 5 – Regulations for Adoption

5A. Social Studies Standards

Second Vice Chair Van Diest motioned, and Member Bergey seconded the following motion: I move the State Board of Education & Early Development adopt the proposed revisions to 4 AAC 04.140. Content Standards and the proposed social studies standards. Without further discussion, the motion passed in a roll call vote with seven yes, and one abstain.

5B. Student Advisor Elect for the State Board of Education

First Vice Chair Stockhausen motioned, and Member Dupras seconded the following motion: I move the State Board of Education & Early Development adopt the proposed revisions to 4B AAC 03.025(c). Advisory members of state board.

Student Advisor Pak explained that he would abstain from voting because his internet cut off during earlier discussions, preventing them from fully participating. Pak noted the dual role of representing the board to students and students to the board and expressed concern that the change might compromise the valuable platform of the Alaska Association of Student Governments. He suggested the Association could have prioritized expanding access to other districts but, lacking broader student perspectives, chose to abstain respectfully.

Without further discussion, the motion passed in a roll call vote with seven yes, and one abstain.

5C. Broadband Assistance Grant

Second Vice Chair Van Diest motioned, and Member Bergey seconded the following motion: I move the State Board of Education & Early Development adopt the changes to 4 AAC 33.605 – 5C AAC 33.690, dealing with increased internet speed for districts through the School Broadband Assistance Grant program. Without further discussion, the motion passed unanimously in a roll call vote.

Agenda Item 6 – Approved Special Assistant to the Commissioner

Second Vice Chair Van Diest motioned, and Member Bergey seconded the following motion: I move the State Board of Education and Early Development approve the Commissioner’s appointment of Jacob Almeida as Special Assistant to the Commissioner II, effective immediately. Without further discussion, the motion passed unanimously in a roll call vote.

Agenda Item 7 – Approve Finance and Support Services Director

Second Vice Chair Van Diest motioned, and First Vice Chair Stockhausen seconded the following motion: I move the State Board of Education and Early Development approve the Commissioner’s appointment of Heather Heineken as the Finance and Support Services Director, effective immediately. Without further discussion, the motion passed unanimously in a roll call vote.

Agenda Item 8 – Commissioner’s Report

Commissioner Bishop provided several updates to the board:

1. **Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Pathway (TREP):** The U.S. Department of Labor approved Alaska’s TREP, an innovative program that allows aspiring educators to work, learn, and earn while becoming certified. TREP will begin as a pilot in spring 2025 and expand statewide by fall 2025. Additionally, a principal registered apprenticeship pathway is being developed to address leadership shortages, expected to launch in spring 2026.
2. **Green to Teach Pathway:** DEED is collaborating with military officials to create a Green to Teach model, transitioning military personnel into teaching. A resolution supporting this initiative will be presented to the Board in January 2025.
3. **Artificial Intelligence in Education:** DEED is developing guidelines for districts regarding AI use in education, with a focus on computer science standards. These guidelines will be ready by the next school year, following public feedback.
4. **Cell Phone Policy:** Deputy Commissioner Morrison provided an update on the cell phone resolution, aiming to foster learning-focused environments. DEED is collaborating with the Alaska Association of School Boards (AASB) to create model policies for portable electronic devices, with a focus on limiting cell phone use during instructional time. The proposed timeline includes stakeholder engagement in February 2025 and policy updates in March.

These initiatives are aimed at improving education in Alaska by addressing teacher retention, leadership shortages, AI integration, and classroom distractions.

Board Comments

First Vice Chair Sally Stockhausen expressed gratitude to DEED staff for their presentations on assessment and attendance, as well as to UAA and ABC for their dedication to teacher preparation programs. She echoed Chair Fields’ enthusiasm for the apprenticeship program, acknowledging the hard work involved and expressing excitement for its future. Stockhausen also thanked Member Van Diest for her valuable service

to the board, insight, and willingness to research issues, stating that she will be greatly missed.

Second Chair Van Diest expressed gratitude to fellow board members and DEED staff for their support, acknowledging that the decision to step down was difficult but made in peace after discussions with Dr. Bishop and other board members. Reflecting on contributions, particularly in getting the Alaska Reads Act online and addressing absenteeism. While planning to take a break, she expressed interest in watching future test scores and how the state can improve education and inform parents. Happy to hear the Deputy Commissioner's report on cell phone use and electronic devices in schools, emphasizing the importance of student engagement.

Military Advisor Lt. Col. Fowley thanked the board for the presentations, particularly on the Green to Teach initiative, expressing excitement about helping military personnel transition into teaching roles. He also expressed appreciation for Member Van Diest's mentorship. Fowley ended on a lighthearted note, mentioning that his organization would help track Santa through NORAD, providing a link for people to follow along with their children. He wished everyone a happy holiday.

Student Advisor Pak thanked DEED staff, the State Board, and Member Van Diest for their contributions. He then presented a resolution from the Alaska Association of Student Governments (AASG) Conference, held from October 11-13, which called for the Alaska State Legislature to release the state education budget before school districts finalize their operational budgets. This resolution was passed unanimously at the conference and emphasizes the challenges school districts face when they encounter unexpected budget cuts due to the late release of the state budget. Pak noted that the resolution would be sent to the Legislature for consideration in January.

Member Bergey expressed gratitude to Chair Fields, DEED staff, and Member Van Diest for their contributions. She particularly appreciated DEED's focus on teacher and principal preparation programs, emphasizing their importance in fostering local educators who are connected to and invested in their communities. She encouraged continued attention to student achievement, including policies on electronic device use, AI, and attendance. Bergey suggested incorporating parent involvement in committees and policy development to help model engagement at the state level and promote faster dissemination of information among parents.

Member Tyndall expressed appreciation for the apprenticeship program, the attendance breakdown, and the impressive work of DEED staff. Reflecting on past experiences, she emphasized the importance of attendance in keeping kids engaged and out of trouble. Tyndall thanked the board for their mentorship, particularly Member Van Diest, and acknowledged the ongoing learning process. She also praised the Commissioner's leadership and passion.

Member Dupras echoed appreciation for efforts to improve education in Alaska. She explained her two abstentions: the first was due to arriving late, and the second was related to discomfort with incomplete information and public comments about Alaska history inclusion. As an Indigenous Alaskan from the Aleutian region, Dupras emphasized the importance of including Alaska's rich Indigenous history in education, noting past gaps in representing the state's diverse cultural perspectives.

Chair Fields thanked Member Van Diest for her support, dedication, and friendship, expressing hope to reconnect in the future. He also commended DEED leadership and staff for taking on challenging tasks, acknowledging their proactive efforts in gathering information to support decision-making. He concluded by wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

The board adjourned at 4:09 p.m.