

State Board of Education & Early Development
Approved Minutes
April 6, 2020
Audio Conference Meeting
Department of Education & Early Development
801 West 10th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Monday, April 6, 2020

Chair Fields called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. After the pledge of allegiance, the board adopted the agenda for April 6, 2020. First Vice Chair Hamilton moved to adopt the agenda. Member Kowalski seconded the motion. Student Advisory Member Mainard was not present. There were no potential conflicts of interest identified.

Work Session

Chair Fields reminded the board that this was a work session only so that board members could hear an update from Commissioner Johnson regarding DEED's work with the COVID-19 virus.

Commissioner Johnson welcomed the board to the call and reminded the board that we are in unprecedented times and acknowledged that this trickles down from the department to classrooms and teachers. He thanked the AK Superintendents Association for their morning meetings that the commissioner has been able to attend and talk to superintendents. Each individual district is addressing this issue in their own way and DEED is doing everything they can to assist districts. Commissioner Johnson continues to have regular calls with CCSSO to get as much information as possible about the CARES Act and its implementation.

Commissioner Johnson addressed the Florida Virtual School. He apologized that in his effort to provide instructional content to students, educators, and families, through this partnership with the Florida Virtual school didn't live up to his standard to work together with others. His intent to provide as many content options as possible as quickly as possible should not have prevented him from demonstrating that communication and cooperation with others. He apologized that the roll-out of the program did not go as smoothly as it could have. He also stressed the importance of the fact that this is not a separate school to take enrollment from others, but it is merely virtual content so that educators can access that content and use for their students. He also pointed out that it is not a mandate but that it is another option for students to access virtual instruction.

He also informed the board that the department is working with the Anchorage School District to provide some of our most rural schools and our youngest students with preloaded iPads to ensure that they do not lose pathways to become proficient in these new times.

Member Hamilton asked Commissioner Johnson about lack of broadband access in rural Alaska and asked what work DEED is doing to get better broadband out to those communities. Commissioner Johnson commended the telecom companies for their work to expand broadband. They are still working with individual districts and the federal government about this issue. Most of those communities also have cell phones as another option and DEED is exploring options for increasing their data on those

devices. The commissioner hopes that we can get to the end of the school year and then work with the telecom companies to fill any gaps in instruction.

He then handed it off to Deputy Commissioner Melin to provide individual staff updates.

Karen Melin put herself on the record and requested that Jo Dawson, the Nutrition Programs Manager for the Department of Education and Early Development start with child nutrition program updates.

Jo began with an update on the waivers that DEED has received to support child nutrition while schools are closed including parent pickup of meals, meal pattern waivers, and the allowance of weekend meals. As of April 6, 42 districts have been approved for 257 feeding sites including mobile routes and home delivery. They have also approved nine Headstart and after school programs for non-congregate food distribution at 25 sites. Some districts lack the capacity to sustain a meals-to-go program at their districts, so they have opted to take part in a pilot project that DEED has been approved to participate in called Meals to You. As of March 30, 2020, Alaska was the first state to be approved by the USDA for their emergency food assistance programs to work with food pantries to quickly disseminate food for the needs of the communities that they have the programs at.

Member Kowalski asked Jo to recap the waivers that DEED has received. Jo reiterated those waivers and explained the differences between them.

Member Stockhausen asked what age children are eligible for meals. Ms. Dawson responded that the meal programs are determined at the local level. The waivers allow for communities to make that determination and some have decided based on capacity to allow only for their students while some districts have decided to open their programs to all children.

Lacey Sanders, Director of Administrative Services, updated the board on the DEED budget process. On Sunday, March 29, the legislature passed the operating budget and then took an extended recess due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She walked the board through the changes that were made by the legislature to the Governor's budget with regards to the Department of Education and Early Development. She also noted that the budget bill, HB 205, was transmitted to the governor for his review, and is due back to the legislature On April 17, 2020. The legislature will discuss the capital budget when they reconvene at a later date in which is the sale of land in the City of Sitka to the Mount Edgecumbe High School is included in that discussion.

Bobi Jo Grimes, DEED's Human Resources Manager, updated the board on the Human resources department and DEED's internal work. Bobi Jo informed the board that as of April 3rd, 67% of DEED staff workforce are telecommuting at least part time and most of them have elected to telecommute full time. DEED has been providing information to staff and supervisors on how to make telecommuting productive and efficient and have begun to collect data on how telecommuting is working for those who are working remotely. Staff have been diligently working to ensure that the public can get the services and answers that they need.

Patience Frederickson, Director of Libraries, Archives, and Museums, updated the board on the work that the Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums is doing to support both their staff and the public. She also informed the board that the School BAG at 25 megabits per second law has been passed and been signed by the governor. They are fast-tracking updates to the regulations and they will appear on the June agenda for the board to approved. The state library has provided virtual resources to students

that have been added to the AKlearns website and other online sources have been made available for students to access. Libraries, Archives, and Museums staff have been working with other libraries to provide support and resources to local libraries as they work through the COVID-19 closures.

Niki Tshibaka updated the board on his work. He detailed his work on interfacing with organizations that serve youth impacted by homelessness or domestic or sexual violence to identify ways that DEED can be of support to them in serving the youth for whom they're caring.

Todd Brocius of the Health and Safety team updated the board on the work that their team has been using. The Health and Safety Team, in partnership with Rochelle Lindley, DEED's information officer, has regularly distributed COVID-19 resources and updates to districts as well as developed a dedicated COVID-19 webpage for districts. This webpage is regularly updated to reflect new state health mandates that affect schools, provide quick links to USED, CDC, and Alaska DHSS websites for up to the minute updates on COVID-19 and guidance for school districts, and provide at-a-glance information on how COVID-19 is affecting state educational requirements. Their eLearning Program has also seen an uptick of classes that have been taken on student trauma during times of crisis. They have seen over 2800 course completions in March for this subject matter specifically.

Deb Riddle Division Operations Manager updated the board on the work that they have been doing to track the US Department of Education guidance and requirements regarding questions regarding assessments

Don Enock the Administrator for the Special Education section updated the board on ways that their challenges for special education services have been addressed in different ways. Many remote school districts without internet or phone services are serving students through a daily delivery of paper packets. Larger districts with internet access provide services through virtual classrooms with individualized services, such as speech, being delivered via web conferencing platforms (Zoom, WebEx..) The special education team continues to provide daily webinars to distribute information as it is received from the Federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). A daily Q&A session is conducted with new questions and concerns addressed in the updated FAQ distributed to all special education directors and superintendents daily. The Department acknowledges that not all individualized solutions will work for all students with disabilities. Students that absolutely must have face to face services may be eligible for Compensatory Education services which can be set up through a phone meeting with the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. If parents or students encounter problems, they should contact their school district special education director, or call the state special education team at (907) 465-2972 or email at sped@alaska.gov.

Tammy Van Whye, Director of Innovation and Education Excellence, updated the board on aklearns.org which serves as a resource for educators, families, and students. The site itself has grown to a very large comprehensive site which cover various content areas as well as offering online and digital references for families to continue virtual learning to students. The site offers offline paper based materials and practice activities for students as well as schedules that help families plan their days at home. She also highlighted the work of the IEE program administrators as they have transitioned to telework platforms and have successfully utilized alternative methods to communicate with their teams to ensure work is completed on time and correctly.

Deputy Commissioner Melin concluded the division reports and thanked the department for their work while being flexible to the changing work environment they have faced.

Commissioner Johnson thanked the board for attending this call and reminded them that we will have another update on this issue on April 22nd. He also informed the board that the June board meeting will be held virtually due to the closures caused by COVID-19.

Board Comments

Member Griffin thanked the commissioner and the staff for their work on the aklearns website and the online content that they were able to make available for students and educators so quickly.

Member Kowalski thanked the commissioner and the staff for their reports so that the board can stay aware of the work that the department is doing to ensure that schools and students are being supported. She also noted her support for the department on their work with the Florida Virtual School as it will increase the opportunities that students have for them to learn in a new way. She also stressed the importance that the department continue their work to address the issues of equity but also of opportunity for the students across the state.

Chair Fields thanked the board for attending the call and commended the department for their work and expressed his hope that the department continues in wisdom and encouraged the department to take the time to stay healthy during these times.

The meeting adjourned at 3:56pm