

State Board of Education & Early Development
Emergency Special Work Session
Approved Minutes
March 25, 2020
Audio Conference Meeting
Department of Education & Early Development
801 West 10th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

Chair Fields called the meeting to order at 3:03 p.m. Prior to the pledge of allegiance, First Vice Chair Hamilton offered an invocation for guidance during these new times of COVID-19. After the pledge of allegiance, the board adopted the agenda for March 25, 2020. Member Griffin moved to adopt the agenda. Member Van Diest seconded the motion. Student Advisory Member Mainard was not present. There were no potential conflicts of interest identified.

Work Session

Commissioner Johnson expressed appreciation to the board for their support and is looking forward to meeting with them again in person once the situation has calmed down a bit.

The department's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and school engagement started on February 5th when Todd Brocius with the Health and Safety team began working with Health and Social Service to produce a website giving information about the COVID-19 virus. The department formed a crisis response team during that week and have continued to meet as this situation has unfolded.

DEED has been hosting daily calls with superintendents that started on March 12th to give them updates and encourage them to work collaboratively with each other to support students. In addition to working with superintendents, DEED staff has been connecting with partners around the state such as the Alaska Council of School Administrators, principals, and other leaders to engage with them in terms of how to teach remotely. SERRC is also helping to host the new website through their comprehensive center and have been very generous in their help.

Commissioner Johnson highlighted the fact that DEED's primary goal is to support school districts so that they can support students even when learning now looks different. He also explained AKLEARNNS.ORG and encouraged board members to go visit that web page so that they could view the resources that DEED has made available to schools and students.

DEED has cancelled assessments for this year and are working through all of the downstream issues that will eventually need to be addressed at a later date.

Member Hamilton asked about the status of boarding schools getting back to their villages. All 400 students from MEHS are now home with their home communities and DEED will connect with the other boarding schools regarding if their students are home.

Member Hamilton- what are we doing to ensure students have access to enough bandwidth to do their work remotely. Each school district is working with their schools to ensure that they are getting instruction to kids while ensuring that they are safe.

Member Griffin- asked for IDEA requirements and some of the equity issues that other states are encountering. USDOE has allowed districts to continue offering learning opportunities via electronic communications and Don Enoch has been taking

Member Griffin- what outreach has DEED done to help parents while they are encountering more time with their children. Commissioner Johnson referred back to AKLEARNNS.ORG as there is an entire section of resources for parents. Districts are making thousands of calls to parents to check in with them and provide support during this time.

Member Griffin- will there be any opportunity to make up during the summer? Superintendents will be receiving some money from the federal government stimulus package and they are already having discussions about how to use that money

Member Van Diest- gave a shoutout to Tammy Van Whye and her team for the AKLEARNNS.ORG website. She also gave some insight as to how staff at the Mat-Su school district are reaching out to students and conducting distance learning to come together to educate students in the state.

Commissioner Johnson also mentioned that he has been having weekly calls with other state chiefs to brainstorm innovative ways that they could support students and it is inspiring to see the solutions that are being offered.

Board Comments

Member Kowalski- mentioned that she has taken great pride in how responsive every element of the educational system has been in response to the changing needs of our students. She also mentioned that many principals and superintendents are working in a larger community context and are having to attend to their local community needs in addition to their needs of their students and schools. She gave a shoutout to those leaders who are navigating not only a school environment that has changed but also how that environment is working within the rapidly changing community context.

Member Stockhausen- highlighted the forward-thinking wisdom of the department and thanked the department for their work with superintendents to get students learning in an online capacity

Member Kowalski- thanked Commissioner Johnson for the department's proactive work on their COVID-19 response efforts.

Chair Fields- asked if schools will resume classes on May 1. Commissioner Johnson reiterated the mandate for in person attendance and said that health officials will make the determination to send students back to their brick and mortar school buildings early but that online learning should be up.

Chair Fields thanked DEED for their leadership and their ability to change on a dime. He reminded the board that there will be another update to the board on April 6th.

Commissioner Johnson encouraged the board to email either him or Karen Melin if they have any questions in the interim

Member Scott- highlighted school staff commitment to students and thanked DEED for their work.

Commissioner Johnson concluded the meeting by reaffirming his commitment to working with the State Board of Education on celebrating the educators in this state and our partner organizations who have helped throughout this crisis. He also congratulated parents and students on their optimistic attitude in the way that they have accepted this challenge and have not let the virus stop them from learning. He reminded the board that someday, there will be a lot to celebrate.

Chair Fields adjourned the meeting at 3:41pm