

State Board of Education & Early Development
Unapproved Minutes
July 22, 2020
Department of Education & Early Development
801 West 10th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Wednesday, July 22, 2020

Chairman Fields called the meeting to order on July 22, 2020 at 3:01pm. Roll call was taken and a quorum established. Members present included: Chair Fields, Member Stockhausen, Second Vice Chair Van Diest, Lt. Colonel Hammill, Student Advisor Scott, Member Kowalski and Member Hamilton. Member Griffin was not present. After the pledge of allegiance, Member Van Diest motioned to adopt the agenda for July 22, 2020 the motion was seconded by member Kowalski. The agenda was adopted. There were no potential conflicts of interest identified.

Work Session

Agenda Item 1. Commissioner's Report. Commissioner Johnson thanked the board members and staff for being present. He explained that the meeting would provide a deeper look into facilities and those processes as well as an update on the restart plan for school starting. He explained that the updates with Dr. Zink that have been taking place are a good resource for those who wish to stay up to date.

a. Alaska Smart Start 2020 Update

Commissioner Johnson described how the state medical team and the department of education are collaborating with Project ECHO to help address questions that teachers and the community have regarding the upcoming school year. These meetings will be ongoing to address concerns as they arise.

Every day of August there will be webinars hosted that relate to getting school started. The agenda will include experts from in-state and out-of state. This is being made possible through the Comprehensive Center and SEARHC. He thanked Bernie Sorenson and her staff for all their work to put together the summit. Similar meetings will be held throughout the school year.

Commissioner Johnson said that the school districts are beginning to submit their plans for the school year. He explained that these plans are not a final product and will be amended and updated as more is learned about this virus and how it spreads throughout the community. Commissioner Johnson complemented the school districts, leadership, teachers and all those working diligently to get through these challenging times.

Commissioner Johnson explained that congress is working on another relief package. The starting point for schools is significantly more than the first act that came out. The Alaska delegation is keeping a close eye on this and would be a good point of contact if members would like more information.

Commissioner Johnson notified the board that on the evening of August 4th he would be joining Dr. Zink and school leadership for a press conference to update the public on school start and re-entry.

The department submitted a grant application in collaboration with NEA-Alaska President Tim Klaameyer, Cook Inlet Tribal Cooperation, Gloria O'Neill with CITC, former legislative liaison Marcy Herman, ASDN and many others. We will know by the end of August if we receive the grant. The funding would support staff development around distance delivery, virtual platforms and other ways to get instruction to kids who might not otherwise receive it for the next two to three years.

There will be a House Education meeting tomorrow, July 23rd. This will be an informational meeting updating the committee on the developing plans for school reopening. Dr. Zink, Commissioner Johnson and seven superintendents will be presenting.

Deputy Commissioner Melin and Janell Vanasse gave a brief update on the plans for Mt. Edgecumbe. After working with their advisory board and the community of Sitka and utilizing the Smart Start tool, local health officials have written a letter of support for the plan that they have in place. Member Kowalski expressed gratitude for the hard work that is going into the plans for reopening. She asked what is being done as far as testing. Deputy Commissioner Melin explained that there is a robust testing plan in place that will be done with SEARHC on campus. They will be encouraging students to be tested prior to arriving. If they are unable to do that there will be rapid tests available upon arrival. Every student will also receive a second test at seven days and a third at the fourteen day mark. Upon completing the first two weeks of initial testing they plan to administer tests to a fourth of the student body every week to gauge potential asymptomatic spread.

Chairman Fields asked what school districts have been experiencing as far as students changing over to homeschool or charter school options and how this will effect funding. Commissioner Johnson explained that there is currently a "hold harmless" statute in place that would prevent any district from falling below seventy-five percent of what they received the previous year. The department is doing everything possible to run analysis on different funding scenarios. They are also working on a platform to allow teachers to teach and kids to learn even if they are not in a brick and mortar building. They wish to ensure parents that their local schools can still provide quality education to avoid enrollment movement. In addition, the Governor waived the ten percent carry over rule so that school districts have the ability to carry over all of their state money and most of the federal money that they may not have spent last year. He also

reminded the board of that Congress is currently debating additional legislation that would provide support to schools. They anticipate that there will be additional costs for schools this coming year with the need for personal protective equipment and sanitization supplies. Commissioner Johnson thanked ALASBO for their hard work to monitor these things on a day to day basis.

b. State Aid for School Capital Projects

Heidi Teshner and Tim Mearig provided the committee with a presentation on state aid for school capital projects. The overview was broken down into two categories:

1. State-Aid Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) Programs

Tim Mearig began with an explanation of the CIP program. The origin of this program comes from the legislature. He explained that the State Board of Education has what could best be described as a supporting role. He walked the committee through the timeline of funding options and reviewed the current project categories for major maintenance and school construction found in AS 14.11.013. Tim Mearig then explained the entity types which include; regional educational attendance area (REAA), small municipality and city/borough. A matrix was provided to show which funding mechanism the various projects and entities are eligible for.

Chair Fields asked if there were separate applications for the school construction and major maintenance funds. Tim Mearig replied that all grant allocations, regardless of which fund, are all submitted as grant applications that come through the annual process. Chair Fields followed up by asking what priority lists are kept. Tim Mearig responded stating that they keep two priority lists – one for major maintenance and one for school construction.

Member Hamilton asked about projects that get dropped off the list. He used Kachemak City as an example. A Russian village received approval for funding from capital improvements but the borough didn't match the funding that was needed so the project was put on hold. Tim Mearig explained that once a project has been funded it will not show up on the list anymore. They are currently working with the district to advance that project to completion. If the necessary contribution is not yet met the state funding doesn't disappear as long as they have approval from the state to continue getting the participating share at some point in the future.

2. CIP Grant Application

Tim Mearig emphasized that this is the area where the state board of education has a leadership role. He provided a flow chart detailing the CIP application timeline and steps. The state board has been mandated by the legislature to be the final arbiter of any disputes that arise in the process of the departments review and prioritization on the list as well as the allocated dollar amounts. In addition, the board has the

opportunity to be involved in the CIP application review and scoring through the regulatory process. He then went into detail regarding the detailed scoring categories and how they are balanced in the scoring process.

Member Hamilton asked if there was a response to the questions that arose at the previous meeting in regards to the costs that were being incurred. Tim Mearig responded that they always struggle with increasing cost for a variety of reasons. He stated that school projects are constructed in such a way that isn't always aimed at the lowest possible first cost but rather aimed at the best possible building for the lifecycle cost of the investment. He explained that the state has many opportunities throughout the application process to review the projects and make adjustments when necessary to the project scope in order to ensure quality buildings that are cost effective. Member Hamilton had a follow up question regarding a school that was built in rural Alaska in the forty million dollar range. He asked if the forty-fifty million dollar range is what will be expected for school buildings in rural Alaska moving forward. Tim Mearig responded that generally speaking he felt that would be a reasonable expectation for that size and location of project. He went on to explain that in some communities the robust infrastructure work that is necessary drives up cost. Member Hamilton thanked Tim Mearig for his work in keeping the prices as fair and low as he possibly can for the sake of the state.

c. Board Comments

Member Van Diest thanked Tim Mearig for walking them through such a thorough and clear explanation of the CIP process.

Commissioner Johnson echoed the previous statements and thanked Tim Mearig for his presentation to the board and for the work that he has put into the program and processes.

The meeting adjourned the meeting at 4:14pm.