

Part I Alaska Education

Preface.

This article is the first of four part series which explore the current data presented on the Department of Education & Early Development website. I hope it is useful for the reader. The data is the state's and a result of individual districts and schools reporting on various components of attendance, proficiency and expenses. I must admit I am disappointed over my findings but these are the facts as presented by the DEED website. I will let you be the judge. Thank you.

Last month, I had a conversation with a very educated and articulate person who has children in our local Eagle River schools. I had mentioned that I am the chair of the AK Republican Party for Districts 13 (Chugiak) and 14 (Eagle River) as well as the chair for EAGEXIT, an organization proposing the detachment from the Municipality of Anchorage and incorporation as a separate municipality. As the Republican chair, I was calling people about our District Convention on February 22 and I struck up a friendly conversation. In my discussion, I was impressed at the certainty and conviction this person shared with me regarding Alaska's political atmosphere as well as its government services, especially public education.

I considered for some time how this person praised our public schools, especially, after I had just published an article on the problems in Alaska's education system. As a result of that conversation, I decided to review Alaska's education system a bit more to see if maybe my first article may have missed important information.

https://education.alaska.gov/DOE_Rolodex/SchoolCalendar/Home/Districts¹ is a website that provides valuable public information for Alaska's people to review the current status of our public government schools and school districts in both the Unorganized Borough and the Organized Borough.

It is organized by district and then categorized by individual school. The link to the individual school reveals the name of the school, the attendance rate, grades served, number of students, average math and English language arts proficiencies² in percentage, and number of teachers. What is also revealed on this website is the school's "Overall School Index Value", "Safety & Well Being", "Teacher Quality", and "Student Demographics". We'll talk about these in another article soon to come.

Here's what anyone can discover on this website. Alaska has a total of 18 School Districts in the Organized Borough and 36 school districts in the Unorganized Borough for a total of 54 school districts. The Organized Borough has a total of 323 schools and the Unorganized Borough has 180 schools for a total of 503 schools. The Organized Borough has approximately 104,575 students and approximately 5,996 teachers. The Unorganized Borough has approximately 22,794 students and approximately 1,450 teachers. Teacher student ratio in the Organized

¹ As of 01/27/2020, Alaska's Public Schools, A Report Card to the Public: 2018-2019 has been added to this website.

² "Average Proficiency" means "Student meets the standards at a proficient level, demonstrating knowledge and skills of current grade-level content." 2017 PEAKS District Summary Report Performance Evaluation for Alaska Schools (PEAKS)

Part I Alaska Education

Borough is 17.44:1 and in the Unorganized Borough 15.72:1.³ The national average is 16:1. Attendance averages for the Organized Borough are 92.69% and the Unorganized Borough are 91.24%.

The next set of data is startling, sad and frightening.

Average math proficiency in the Organized Borough is 39.45% and in the Unorganized Borough it is 25.17%. Average English language arts (ELA) proficiency in the Organized Borough is 44.30% and in the Unorganized Borough it is 28.85%.⁴ Granted this is not a representation of the entire Alaska student population, but it is a sampling test of a smaller percentage of students.

In other words, more than 60 out of every 100 children in the Organized Borough and almost 75 out of every 100 children in the Unorganized Borough are not meeting state average math proficiency. More than 55 out of every 100 children in the Organized Borough and more than 71 out of every 100 children in the Unorganized Borough are not meeting state average ELA proficiency.

Remember this is from the state's own website.

It is stark representation of the current state of education for the entire state.

Would anyone reviewing these statistics from the State's own website reach the reasonable conclusion that Alaska is knowingly raising a functionally illiterate future citizenry?

³ These ratios also include charter and home school.

⁴ https://education.alaska.gov/DOE_Rolodex/SchoolCalendar/Home/Districts

Part II Alaska Education

In my first article, I indicated the average math proficiency in the Organized Borough is 39.45% and in the Unorganized Borough it is 25.17%. Average English language arts (ELA) proficiency in the Organized Borough is 44.30% and in the Unorganized Borough it is 28.85%¹.

Next to health care, education is the largest total spend for the State of Alaska every year. With this state provided documentation, could a reasonable person conclude the root and existential cause of this large spend is the state's government education system itself?

In 2018, former Eagle River/Chugiak Senator Anna MacKinnon understated the dilemma when she said, "We always see districts asking for more money to do exactly what they're doing. And I'm telling you: It appears the system is broken."

There is no appearance.

The system is dysfunctional and mangled.

This is a fact wrapped by the reality of the state's own website, skewered by undeniable data revealing our failure and a failing future roasting over an unattended and chaotic fire fueled by obstinacy, unintelligence and myopia and sprinkled with a bit of denial and delusion.

Our local, state and federal employees as well as our local, state and federal policy makers (state legislators pay attention!) who are responsible for this clearly known epic failure should not be fired. They should all voluntarily resign for this tragic outcome like failed samurai fall on their sword en masse.

Alaska's children are failing to meet the state's own education proficiency standards. Regardless of whoever wants to assuage these facts with whatever rationale, excuses and prevarications, the state's own Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) has posted the data for all of us to see. The result is our own failure to educate our progeny in the two most vital education prerequisites, math and English language arts. Without these, our children will fail in modern society.

How can any Alaskan adult not be angry and demand immediate competent measurable change?

Going back to the state's website, the "Overall School Index Value" is the "sum of the school's performance points in each indicator with the appropriate weight applied".² The more government gets involved in the execution of education, especially the federal government, the more hierarchically obtuse and profusely dogmatic the outcome - with the financial benefits going to everyone but our own children.

Remember my friendly conversation. I'd assumed Eagle River High School was the praised school based on that chat.

¹ <https://education.alaska.gov/compass/ParentPortal/SchoolProfile?SchoolID=51130>

² System for School Success, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, Page 3

Part II Alaska Education

Here's what is on the state's website for Eagle River High School. Attendance is 94.06%. Not bad. Grades served 9 through 12. These students are the future of our community. Awesome.

Number of students is 841 and number of teachers is 38 yielding a student teacher ratio of 1 to 22.12% to 1. Not bad. A little higher than the national standard of 16:1.

Here again are the startling realities of the data presented in the state's website.

With a sampling of 247 students tested (almost 30% of the 2018/2019 enrollment), the average math proficiency at Eagle River High School is 50.20% and with a sampling of 251 students tested (almost 30% of the 2018/2019 enrollment), the average ELA proficiency is 48.61%. In other words, of the tested students, more than 49 out of every 100 students tested at Eagle River High School are not meeting average math proficiency and more than 51 out of every 100 students tested at Eagle River High School are not meeting average English language arts proficiency.

Why not?

I can't see this as success. Can you?

Part III Alaska Education

I need to give you a little further depth on the federal requirements tied (when I say “tied” I mean “like a needle in a junkie’s arm”) to Title I federal funding. Title I is Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015.

It provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Alaska school districts get federal funds through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, which is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, and a replacement of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001.

To be clear, I am not picking on Eagle River High School, since the two other high schools, Bartlett High School¹ and Chugiak High School², in Assembly District 2 (AD2), which includes Eagle River, Chugiak, Birchwood, Peter’s Creek, Eklutna and JBER, have even lower proficiency outcomes than Eagle River High School.

What do our state, districts and schools use for Title 1 funding? A quick review of stats provided by the state’s website are aggregated into the “Overall School Index Value”³.

The way I started reading this page (and I am open to anyone offering better insight) was from a student performance and outcome perspective, because isn’t that what we should be seeing to be able to draw at a minimum a general understanding of outcome?

Yes, there is some data regarding performance and outcome, but these data record sets are tied to Title I funding and not a student’s education success. The more I dug into it, the more I began to realize the criteria used to determine the “Overall School Index Value” is not really a measure of student performance or outcome based. Instead, it is about money.....government money.....I mean, your money after you gave it to the federal government, saw it redistributed to everyone but our children.

The first criteria in putting this determination together is the school’s poverty level. What is Eagle River High School’s poverty level? Low-Poverty. At first glance, I thought, wait a minute, per various internet inquiries, Eagle River has an estimate average annual income of over \$100,000. How was this school’s poverty level determined and by whom?

But on closer examination, I realized this category is based on another government eligibility criteria. Under the National School Lunch Program, the low-poverty schools are those where 25.0 percent or less of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL). Annual FRPL data are regularly used within school districts to determine a school’s eligibility for Title I funds. Because of this FRPL, the school district gets federal funds through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, and a replacement of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001.

¹ Bartlett High School math proficiency 16.81% & ELA 27.51%

² Chugiak High School math proficiency 39.82% & ELA 46.12%

³ <https://education.alaska.gov/compass/ParentPortal/SchoolProfile?SchoolID=51130>

Part III Alaska Education

As a sidebar to this discussion, under the NCLB, there was also used as a substitute for low-income status when determining whether a subgroup of needy students is making what Title I calls “Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)”. AYP was used to determine if schools are successfully educating their students. It appears this was discontinued in after 2011/12 year. In a 2012 DEED document, it optimistically stated, “Over time, the targets for language arts and math will go up, reaching 100 percent in 2013-2014.”⁴

What is interesting is a decade ago, Eagle River High School during the 2008/2009 school season with a total of 206 students tested of 429 students, the average math proficiency was 79% and average ELA proficiency was 91%.⁵ What is even more fascinating is Eagle River High School during the 2013/14 school season with a total of 206 students tested reading proficiency was 93.69%, with a total 212 students tested writing proficiency was 82.55%, with a total of 216 students tested mathematics proficiency was 82.87%⁶.

What happened?

In my opinion, we have focused as a government on that criteria which best provides for financial benefit to educational support and hence the “education industry”. On the surface, some may posture this is not wrong, but after you spend some time reviewing the website and realizing the criteria really has nothing to do with performance and outcome, I suspect you will draw the same conclusion as I did.

It’s not designed to benefit education performance and outcome for the kids.

Data record sets, including “graduation rate”, “safety & wellbeing”, percentage of chronic absenteeism, number of nurses, “teacher quality”, economically disadvantaged, student demographics, orientations and more, are all prerequisites for government program eligibility or government control or both.

Under the revised DEED report card, demographics, as an example, take on a data record set for performance which is categorized by “Advanced”, “Proficient”, “Below Proficient” and “Far Below Proficient” and a plethora of data record sets for actual demographics including , All students, female, male, African American, Alaska Native/American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Caucasian, Hispanic, Two or more Races, Economically Disadvantaged, Not Economically Disadvantaged, Disabled with Accommodations, Students with Disabilities, Students without Disabilities, Limited English Proficient, Not Limited English Proficient, Migrant Students, Non Migrant Students, Active Duty Parent/Guardian, Not Active Duty Parent/Guardian, Homeless, Not Homeless, Foster Care, and Not Foster Care.

And there’s more. It’s exhaustive.

⁴ Understanding adequate yearly progress in Alaska public schools” by the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development

⁵ https://education.alaska.gov/DOE_Rolodex/AYP/2010/search.cfm?Status=&Growth=

⁶ <http://education.alaska.gov/compass/Report/2013-2014/5/51130>

Part III Alaska Education

When current performance and outcome in ELA and math is a disaster, shouldn't our focus as a government, which originates with we, the people, founded upon our will only and instituted solely for our good as a whole⁷, be making sure our kids have a future as good if not better than our own?

⁷ Alaska State Constitution, Article I, Section 2, as paraphrased.

Part IV Alaska Education

We've all seen the news about Alaska being on the very bottom in the nation in education reading and math performance. We've all seen the news about Alaska having one of the highest costs per student in the nation. Some of us have denied these facts. Some of us are angered by these facts. And still some of us have chosen to ignore these facts.

Yet with the state's website and subsequent data proving failure, what are our options?

You've talked with your children's teachers and school administrators. What are they reporting to you? Are the DEED's report cards for your school provided to you?

The data provided on the DEED's website is plain and incontrovertible as it is provided by each school and each school district. By June 30, 2020, the website will also have all the general financial information on each district and school as reported by these districts to the state.

The point is Alaska K12 government education not only adopts failure in education performance and outcome for the purpose of government funding, but, with government controls promulgated by the National Education Association (NEA) and its subsidiary, the Alaska Education Association (AEA), Alaska state legislators, local politicians, including assembly and council members and school district board members, and the media, our government is embedding and proselytizing educational outcomes into an irreversible pattern of limited performance and disastrous results. We are witnessing this on the state's website as well as in Alaska's education landscape.

Please let me repeat what I said earlier. I started looking at this as a result of a conversation. My intent was not to pick on Eagle River High School, but rather to return to my first Must Read Alaska article to determine if I missed something. Don't get me wrong the culprits to blame have not changed, just the facts are more tragic and egregious than I ever imagined. I have reviewed the math and ELA proficiency in all 503 Alaska schools. I have reviewed the available costs per the DEED's website for these performance results.

How could we have let our children down so miserably?

I am left with one ramification based on my review of the data in this website.

What are the obvious questions?

Is public education designed to receive more money from the government for poorer performance and outcome? Is poor performance incentivized? Is excellent performance disincentivized?

Remember the words of former Eagle River/Chugiak Senator Anna MacKinnon, "We always see districts asking for more money to do exactly what they're doing. And I'm telling you: **It appears the system is broken.**"

The mechanism is simple: more money, more power and more control. It is on the basis of this data that government funding is awarded, students are processed, and promotions and subsequent graduations are demonstrated apparently regardless of performance and outcome. Most Alaska students are pushed into the education pool only to drown.

Public education has adopted the funding model. It harnesses programs to reinforce its paradigm by excluding dissenting voices from all levels of government funding, publication, and promotion methods, hence government funding sustains failing education paradigms, and that

Part IV Alaska Education

artificial sustenance—when coupled with the pressure to increase money, power and control—degrades positive educational outcome.

The unfortunate and tragic outcome is, that for many of us, is that as far as public education is concerned the science of education (public education) is settled, yet we are harvesting diminishing returns and negative social consequences.

If there is only one source of the funding and control for education, and that is the government, then there is only one paradigm for education that is permitted. Hence the danger of non-cooperation and non-competition results in the realities not just presented in these articles but observed and experienced by all of you.

I will contend that the first foundational change to improve the situation is how we spend Alaska public education monies. With our state constitution clearly prohibiting non-secular receipt of public education funds, the restrictions on parental choice and an open education market for competition is also prohibited.

I'm told by many that amending the Alaska State Constitution is a "heavy lift". Are they right? Should we give up on making a better future for our children than our own present, because it's a "heavy lift"? Should we sell our kids to the government, because it's a "heavy lift"? Should we kick back to chips and beer on the couch, because it's a "heavy lift"?

I sincerely hope Alaskans will not fall for this deception.

This is in my opinion.

It is the lynchpin required for education success in Alaska. Amend the Alaska State Constitution. Repeal the "Blaine Amendment". Allow public education money to follow the children through parental choice. Trust parents to make the right and better decisions for their kids. Get the public employee unions, the school districts and their failing politics as far away from better educational performance and outcome as possible.

Give our kids the future that they deserve, not what they have to settle for.

The problem is the NEA and its Alaska based subsidiary, the AEA, and their confederates are myopic and insane. (Remember "insanity" defined by doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results). They will together with Republican and Democratic state legislators and the Alaska media sell their souls to prevent this from happening as it will change the power and control structure they have maintained over the Alaska education system since statehood.

After all, the Alaska education industry has nothing to do with educating our succeeding generations, it is and has always been about public money and how best to peel it off for special interest. If it was not, I suspect the state constitution would have been amended years ago and parental choice would be the education law of the State of Alaska.

Remember, it IS about the kids, isn't it?