



An Administrator's Task: Cultivating Culture

By Jennifer Schmitz; AAESP President & ACSA Outgoing President



Whether as a student, parent, or educator, we have all walked into many schools over the course of our lives thus far. In some schools, the minute you come through the door you feel welcome, and there is an immediate sense of calm and belonging. The hallways are colorful, and you see active classrooms with students and teachers

engaged in learning. Interaction between staff and students, as well as the learning activities observed, show obvious knowledge and inclusion of social-emotional skills. Students are taking an active role in their own learning. Chances are, along the way, you met the principal, or at least witnessed other adults deploy with the goal of advancing student academic achievement.

Unfortunately, there are also schools that lack this feeling. You walk the halls and feel more like you are in a place of business that is ultra-serious and lacks warmth. Students do not appear to be engaged in the learning process. There is little to no immediate evidence of activities intended to build and nurture social-emotional skills. And, often, the administrator is nowhere to be seen.

We all know which of these two environments we prefer and which of the two we want our own schools to exemplify. The question is, how do we make sure our school culture mimics the former example? What is the secret to having a school that is welcoming, where students are engaged, and where the social and emotional health of all of our staff and students is deemed important—and they know it?

A variety of research supports the importance of school leadership in relationship to the overall culture of a school. Whether you are a new leader to a school or have been there a while but see the need for a “culture shift,” it helps to remember it can’t happen overnight. In their article “How Leaders Influence the Culture of Schools,” Terrence E. Deal and Kent D. Peterson write that, when wanting to work on the culture of a school, leaders must first “read the culture—its history and current condition. Leaders should know the deeper meanings embedded in the school before trying to reshape it.” This takes both effort and time on the part of the administrator but is paramount in overall student and school success.

Be a leader who shapes your school’s culture. Communicate your core ideals and values in what you say and do each day. Know your own strengths and weaknesses and build on your strengths. Be accessible to staff, students, and community. Have high expectations of your teachers and support their continuous improvement with professional development. Do all you can to ensure your office and school are welcoming places to everyone. Don’t ignore cultural differences in your schools, but embrace and encourage them.

The job of a school principal is not an easy one. However, there are few professions in which you can make such an incredible difference every single day. I encourage you to take the time to look at your school’s culture and choose one small place at a time that you can make even more positive and fun! As “cliché” as it may sound, our students are our future, and they deserve the best from each one of us!

Lead the Opportunity!

By Michael Johnson; ASA President & ACSA Incoming President;
Copper River School District



Alaska’s current financial calamity is, at least in some ways, unprecedented for our young state. As our economy matured, it became almost solely dependent on oil as a source of revenue. Many of today’s education leaders in Alaska began their careers in the early 1990s when Alaska was enjoying income from

1.8 million barrels of oil per day. By 2000, the price had risen, but Alaska produced just under 1 million barrels per day. Today, in 2015, with the price of oil the lowest it has been in years, less than 1/2 million barrels of oil flow through the pipeline daily. As the primary source of revenue for Alaska’s government, the impact of a lower price, coupled with less oil, reverberates through every city, town, village, school, and classroom.

Like it or not, we’ve been called to lead in dramatic times. We have the responsibility to guide our classrooms, schools, and districts through this season of change. There are enormous challenges ahead and, if we can embrace them, groundbreaking opportunities. We are not the first to lead in extraordinary times. Others before us have left worthy examples of how to take a tough situation and turn it into an occasion for growth and progress.

In fact, that is the story of Alaska—finding opportunity in every challenge.

How does one lead in times of fundamental change? How will we lead as Alaska’s economy accepts the new realities and evolves into a new paradigm? These are important questions for us as we begin what will surely be a year of great consequence. It isn’t just finding solutions to today’s problems that is important, it is how we, as leaders, present and support those solutions.

Alaska needs us to be leaders that speak reality and hope. We need to be factual about both the tough decisions facing elected officials and the consequences of those decisions. Without despair, we need to communicate a vision for Alaska’s students that will lead our communities to strive for student achievement higher than the national average. In a fiscal crisis that prompts extremes, we need to be measured leaders for today and, by example, hopeful leaders for tomorrow.

The enormity of the economic challenges facing Alaskans means that today’s students will look back and recognize the pivotal nature of 2015-2016. We must be ever aware that, after us, some of our current students will be called to lead during their own times of epic challenge and opportunity. They are watching and learning from how we lead. As Alaska’s educational leaders, let’s lead the opportunity!



Advocates for Change or Victims of Change?

Dr. Lisa Skiles Parady, ACSA/ASA/AASSP Executive Director

As all of us embrace the new school year and the challenges that come with leading our systems—students, staff, schools, and districts—we recognize that we must sustain our dialogue with legislators, DEED, and Governor Walker regarding our statewide mission. It is one thing to assert, as Senator Kelly

has, “that government has had a good run, but circumstances have changed. Government must shrink.” The question that naturally follows is “Where should cuts actually be made?” The Alaska Senate Finance Committee answered that question last session with an amendment to cut school foundation funds.

With all due respect, I disagree—strongly disagree—with this approach. First of all, it is simply wrong footed to focus solely on cuts without fully considering potential revenue sources. When adjusted for inflation and population, funding for state government operations generally, and education specifically, has essentially been flat for over 30 years. The hard truth is that it costs money to educate our students. Those expenses are what they are, no matter who is in the legislature or holds the governorship. Education costs have remained consistent over time because that is what it takes to do the job reasonably well.

A recent Rasmussen poll found that Alaskans are willing to fund things they value—and that they value education. To simply impose additional cuts would be reckless. It will not be possible to make cuts of the current magnitude without sharply curtailing education in our state. That isn’t the Alaska most Alaskans believe in—the Alaska that makes sure every child has a chance.

Change is inevitable in this fiscal climate. By continuing to be engaged at all levels of the decision-making process, we can ensure that we have a role in shaping that change.

Collectively, we can decide if we are going to be advocates for change or victims of change.

How do we harness the forces of change? Our greatest opportunity is to identify what needs to change in our systems and align our needs with the fiscal changes that are coming. As educators, you are the best situated to collaborate, facilitate, and support positive change in education. You know best how to reduce unfunded or unnecessary mandates. You know best how to achieve cost containment.

Our challenge this year is to find the energy and the ability to communicate in a unified way across the state—to legislators, stakeholders, and business people, and to policymakers and members of the public who too easily think that our budgets are bigger than needed—the plain fact that we steward every dollar we are given to put it to work for student learning. At the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin said it best: “We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.” There is no room for urban/rural, large/small, Interior/Southeast divisions. Our core is at risk.

I challenge policymakers to walk a mile in any one of your shoes; to spend time understanding the hard choices school boards and district and building administrators have already made; to start school not fully staffed; to try to teach a day in a K-3 classroom with 29 kids; to juggle activities, curriculum requirements, SPED, assessment, bussing, food service, counseling, maintenance—ultimately, to face what every one of our teachers and staff face every day in ever trying to do more with less. This is our reality, and now it is time for policymakers to look for the revenue needed to do the best we can for our kids, and not just the bare minimum. It is time for **you** to lead the opportunity!

2016 Alaska RTI Conference to Feature Top National Presenters

Mark your calendars for Saturday, January 23, and Sunday, January 24, 2016, for our 5th Annual Alaska RTI Conference, co-sponsored by the Alaska Staff Development Network and the Anchorage School District, and held at the Dena’ina Civic and Convention center in Anchorage.

Each year, more than 1,100 Alaska educators from 40 school districts attend this powerful conference. This year’s invited presenters include a who’s who of national RTI experts, such as Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson, Dr. Anita Archer, Dr. Louisa Moats, Dr. Karen Karp, Tricia McKale Skyles, Dr.

Margaret Heritage, Tom Gierak, Nicole Frazier, and Sharon Azar.

Please also join us for our 5th Annual RTI Pre-Conference for Small Schools and Rural Districts, presented by nationally recognized consultants Lexie Domaradzki, Shelby Skaanes, and Jacqueline Edmond Long.

Registration is available at asdn.org.

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Alaska's Heart through Student Art

Presented By: Alaska Council of School Administrators, Juneau Arts & Humanities Council, GCI SchoolAccess & Alaska Arts Education Consortium



Lead with Love & Courage

By Mary McMahon, AASSP President

Every once in a while, we meet someone who leaves a lasting impression. That's just what John Hope Bryant did when I met him last year in San Diego, where he was the closing "thought leader" speaker for the national principals' conference. He definitely closed the session out with a message that was full of passion, creativity, and forward thinking. I was blown away at the thought that he is just crazy, smart, and courageous enough to really change our world.

When he was done speaking, he received a standing ovation from the large crowd of educational leaders. My table group immediately left the room to get in line to meet him in person and buy one of his books at the book-signing table. The book I bought was titled *Love Leadership: The New Way to Lead in a Fear-Based World*, with a foreword by Bill George, author of *True North*.

A few hours later on the plane ride home, I began to read his book. I found myself writing notes and ideas in the nooks and crannies of almost every page. I don't even recall the length of the flight home, as I was completely immersed in the words and ideas that were written in front of me. Some of my comments included:

- Speak from the heart.
- Be real with people and they will be real with you.
- Live centered in the storm.
- Courage is reaching through fear.
- Everything happens for a reason.
- Love is central to sustainable success.
- Love survives long after fear dies. Fear comes from low self-esteem.
- Real living takes courage. Live a life of meaning.
- Fear-based leadership is not sustainable & only works over a short period of time. You're not a leader when you lead through fear. You're a manager.
- Over communicate, under commit, and over perform.
- Help people find and follow their passions.
- Have a purpose bigger than yourself.

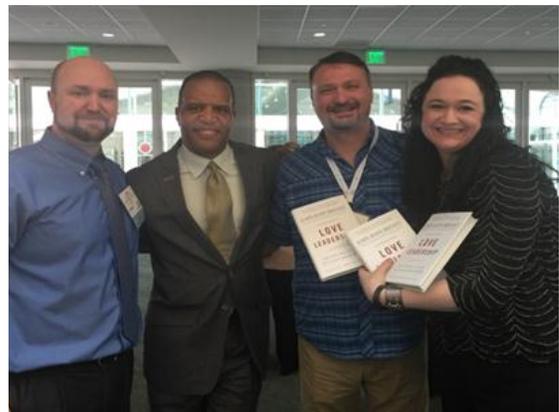
I was inspired to go home and continue my mission of being the change I wish to see. I immediately shared my vision of bringing John Hope Bryant to Alaska. I shared his message with others and began to lead the opportunity on a grass roots level right here at home. As a result, he was with us in Alaska at our 49th Annual State Principals' Conference, on October 19, at 8:30 a.m., speaking at the Sheraton Hotel.

His message was again inspiring and well received, which was evident from the line of Alaska principals in line for his book signing.

His message about love-based leadership includes the following five laws:

1. Loss creates leaders: There can be no inner growth without the pain of legitimate suffering.
2. Fear fails: Leading through fear is antiquated and self-defeating—a crippling indulgence that we can no longer afford.
3. Love makes money: The expression of love in business—creating long-term relationships with customers and employees based on caring for others and doing good—makes everyone wealthy.
4. Vulnerability is power: When you open up, people open up to you. Real leaders know that vulnerability is not a weakness but, rather, their greatest strength.
5. Giving is getting: Leaders give, followers take. Giving inspires loyalty, attracts good people, confers peace of mind, and lies at the core of true wealth.

I love our profession. I am excited and honored to have been with education leaders from all around our state in Anchorage this past October to ignite our collective knowledge, energy, and passion, as we came together for the greater good of our profession at our 49th Annual State Principals' Conference.



Adam Mokolke (AASSP), John Hope Bryant, Rod Morrison (AASSP Past President), Mary McMahon (AASSP President)

BP Alaska Principal's Scholarship Program

The Board of Directors for the Alaska Principals Foundation (APF) is pleased to announce that the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) is now administering the BP Alaska Principal's Scholarship program.

BP has partnered with APF to award 25 graduating seniors across Alaska with a \$4,000 scholarship each. This scholarship will help pay tuition for their first Fall Semester.

The school principal in every high school in Alaska may nominate one graduating senior from their school for the BP Alaska principal's Scholarship. The board of direc-

tors of the Alaska Principals Foundation selects the 25 award winners.

The scholarship nomination period begins January 15 and closes March 20 of each year. Please support this program by sharing information about the BP Alaska Principal's Scholarship with teachers and students in your community.

For more information please visit:

<http://www.alaskaprincipal.org/scholarships/>



Robin Mullins
ALASBO President

ALASBO Conference Registration Is Open

The ALASBO leadership team would like to invite all ACSA affiliate members to our annual conference, which will take place December 6-9 at the Hotel Captain Cook.

We will begin our event with pre-conference sessions on Sunday, including our full-day School Business Academy, which is popular

with Superintendents and new and aspiring school business leaders.

Please check our website, www.alasbo.org, for more information.

Our keynote speaker on the morning of Tuesday, December 8, will be Jody Urquhart, who is passionate about spreading the message of fun and meaningful work. You can learn more about Jody at www.idoinspire.com.



ALASKA'S P-CARD PARTICIPANTS POSTING ROBUST PROCEEDS

Amy Lujan, ALASBO Executive Director

In June 2015, the national P-card program distributed nearly \$3.6 million in rebates, with \$332,957 of those going to Alaska's 16 participating school districts!

For the first time, we sent a rebate that exceeded \$100,000, with Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, receiving \$101,595! Other districts earning more than \$20,000 in rebates included Kenai - \$53,157; Matsu - \$43,280; Lower Yukon - \$24,844; and Ketchikan - \$20,046. Nine other districts received rebates of \$5,000 or more. *This is not a small change. Why should your district miss out?*

What's a P-Card?

P-card stands for procurement or purchasing card. Use of p-cards is increasingly becoming recognized as a best practice in the school business industry. In this program, the p-cards are Mastercards controlled by your school district that can be issued to a person or a department. The district administrator can also control daily, weekly, and individual transaction limits, and even the types of items that can be purchased on each card. The program, designed with school districts in mind, gives the program administrator much more control and many more options than a standard credit card program.



How is the Program Set Up?

Illinois ASBO (IASBO) originated this program and has allowed other state affiliates such as ALASBO to become involved. IASBO provides assistance with setting up the program and with issues that arise. Bank of Montreal, which owns Harris Bank in Chicago, is the card issuer. By participating in the IASBO program, Alaska's districts take advantage of the negotiating power of a much larger group of districts. The rebates are larger than districts could receive on their own. There are NO annual fees! Rebates come through IASBO

annually, in the spring. They are currently 1.18% or more of transaction volume, depending on the billing cycle selected. ALASBO retains a portion of the rebate, which starts at 25% and decreases as a district's purchasing volume grows.

District p-card administrators are trained in Details Online, a system that enables them to monitor card activity in real time. Since we've continued to grow our ALASBO user group, we're able to support training in Details Online during our annual conference, as well as a helpful Discussion Group session and opportunities for sharing among our members.

What are the Benefits?

In addition to the rebates, the p-card program can save money. Management studies have shown that purchase orders and high check volumes are extremely costly. Many districts also struggle to deal with vendors that don't accept POs, small dollar purchases, and last-minute items for maintenance, travel, and special events.

Properly managed p-cards can solve many of these headaches and save costs, with fewer POs, fewer checks, and real-time monitoring of expenditures.

If your district already has a credit card, why not switch to a p-card, with no annual fees and a rebate? Alaska districts that can pay utility bills and other large-volume vendors with the p-

card can generate large rebates quickly, with even a limited program.

How Can I Sign Up?

Further information and links are at www.alasbo.org, under resources-information library. The application process does require a Board resolution (since you are applying for credit) and several weeks for bank approval, so get started now! There will be several sessions at the Annual Conference in December for those interested in starting a p-card program.



“That’s a good story!” - President Barack Obama

By Todd Poage, ASA Past President; Superintendent, Alaska Gateway School District

During President Obama’s primetime speech on Energy Policy in Kotzebue, Alaska, on September 2, 2015, he dedicated a few sentences to highlighting the Alaska Gateway School District’s biomass project at Tok School. The President spoke about how energy cost savings were being used to re-employ staff members key to the success of the district: “In the town of Tok, the school district replaced its expensive diesel heating and power systems with one fueled by biomass,” explained the President. “They saved enough money to rehire the counselor, music teacher and the boiler operator. That’s a good story!” How many opportunities do we have to build a project from inception and then hear the President of the United States herald the results during a primetime broadcast? Being mentioned by the President was just exhilarating for all of us who worked on this project!

Below is a web link to a two-minute video clip of President Obama’s speech: <http://agsd.us/docs/PresidentObamaSpeaksOnBiomass.mp4>

From Forest Fires to School Lights and Heat

In the tiny Interior community of Tok, where temperatures have hit 80 degrees below zero and heating and providing power to Tok School used to run the district nearly \$350,000 a year in fuel costs, students are now being warmed by renewable waste wood. This cutting edge energy system is the continuation of a nine-year effort by the district in partnership with Tok Area Forestry (TOF), the Tok Community Umbrella Corporation (TCUC), and the Alaska Energy Authority (AEA). Through grant and legislative funding, the district was able to build a state-of-the-art, wood chip-fired heating and power facility to provide renewable energy for many years. When the district added the electrical generation component to the system, Tok became the first school in the nation to generate both heat and power using biomass. Since then, we have been actively researching, seeking, and finding the appropriate technology and funding to continue developing the project.

Nearly \$3.5 million in grants from the Governor, Legislature, Alaska Energy Authority, and others were obtained to plan, construct, and facilitate development of the system that provides heat and power for the Tok School complex. Grant funds were also secured to purchase a log-loading trailer to transport timber, a grinder to produce chips, a loader to move chips, a chip storage barn to keep fuel dry, and a steam turbine to generate electricity, as well as a greenhouse, processing center, diesel back-up generator, LED

lights, and upgraded facility operating software. Most of the biomass for the project comes from timber cut as part of the grant-funded state Division of Forestry wildfire fuels mitigation program, which creates defensible space around Tok and reduces hazardous fuels in the area.

Although the biomass facility has been providing heat to Tok School for the past five years, the district is beginning only the third full year of producing electricity, so refining the process to maximize efficiencies is still ongoing. When all aspects of this project are completed and power is being generated at goal levels of 60 kW during seven months of the year, and the sports facility is heated with biomass, our savings will be in the range of \$250,000 per year (while still contracting locally for chips). Through these projects, the district is currently keeping in the community, each year, \$325,000 that would otherwise have left the state to pay for fossil fuels.

The district is pleased with the continued savings and increased efficiency in heating and electrical power generation that comes from the biomass project. The current total savings of just under \$155,000 is mainly utilized to supplement the regular instructional program. Savings will grow as the plant moves from producing 25-40 kW to 40-60 kW, begins to heat more facilities, and utility costs increase. The more heat the biomass facility can displace, the greater the amount of electricity will be produced. Since we added the greenhouse in the summer of 2014, more electricity is being produced because of the increased heat demand required from the biomass facility.

The greenhouse, which is heated for nine months and powered for seven months of the year through the biomass facility, provides fresh produce to the seven schools within the district. Utilizing renewable energy to grow fresh vegetables for the lunch program will not only yield additional savings, but will connect the goodness of fresh food with the energy growing naturally in our backyards. The district also works in partnership with the interior Alaska Campus – Tok Center, a branch of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, to provide hands-on curriculum experiences for all students and interested adults within our seven communities. Our next proposal is to run a heat loop to the sports facility, located a few hundred yards from the biomass plant. We also expect to be adding a second greenhouse. A legislative appropriation will be submitted again this session for grant funding to complete these projects. Our district biomass project is effectively reducing the costs of heat and power, helping to reduce the community’s vulnerability to wildfires, creating new local jobs, and improving economic development. Now, that’s a good story!





ACSA Teacher Shortage

by Steve Atwater, UAS Associate Vice President for K-12 Outreach, former superintendent of the Kenai Peninsula and the Lake and Peninsula School Districts, Alaska Superintendents Association past president

Now that it is officially fall, children across Alaska have bid farewell to summer and are back to the routines of school. During the school year's first days, students' excitement of reconnecting with friends was tempered by questions about

their new teachers. Will they be strict? Will they assign a lot of homework? Will I be able to keep my phone during class? For some students, however, a more urgent concern arose when they learned they did not have a permanent teacher.

As has been the case in recent years, several of Alaska's schools began the year with unfilled teaching vacancies. Tragically, most of these positions are for teachers of children with special needs. Schools are doing their best to fill their personnel gaps by hiring long-term substitutes, combining classes, and asking teachers to cover two classes with additional classroom aides. While the number of these vacancies is relatively small when compared to the state's total number of teachers, it is clear that the pool of candidates interested in teaching in our state's public schools is not what it once was. This is a trend we need to be working hard to reverse.

Each year, Alaska's school districts hire between 700 and 1,000 teachers. Some are moving within the state to a new district, a few are experienced teachers returning to the profession, and some are new graduates of UA and APU. Most of these hires, however, come from out of state. About two-thirds of the teachers hired this year are new to Alaska, with many of them going to work in remote village schools. This dependence on teachers from Outside is not new, but it is a model that is beginning to crack. There are several reasons for this, but two stand out: first, the number of students graduating from teacher preparation programs has been decreasing; and, second, Alaska's teaching salaries and benefits no longer shine as brightly as they once did.

So, what to do?

On the home front, the number of teachers prepared by UA and APU is relatively flat. Convincing 600 Alaskans to become teachers each year will not happen, but we can take a series of short- and long-term steps to begin to address our teacher shortage:

Enact legislation to allow retired teachers to retain their retirement benefit and return to teaching when districts are unable to fill their vacancies. I suspect dozens of such people would take advantage of this option, immediately alleviating the short-term crisis while filling positions with experienced educators.

Increase the number of homegrown teachers by providing additional support for programs that set high school students on a teaching career pathway. The University of Alaska's Plan for Revitalizing Teacher Education in Alaska and its support for the Future Educators of Alaska program is helping to do this, but will need additional support. Local efforts by school districts and Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children are also creating opportunities for rural students and paraprofessionals to become teachers. Both of these efforts can only grow if adequately supported.

Create an ad campaign to attract Alaskans to teaching and teachers to Alaska. We are a unique state with a rich cultural history. This needs to be promoted. Districts are spending more and more of their dwindling resources on recruiting teachers; the state needs to help with a campaign that makes teaching in Alaska appealing.

Finding long-term solutions to increase the less-than-adequate number of students interested in becoming teachers will be more challenging. Surveys show that in the past 10 years teacher satisfaction has gone down. This is likely due to an increasing set of expectations placed on teachers—including the requirement to cover a growing number of social issues without a corresponding increase in support. The profession is also quickly dismissed as ineffective by many in the public without a true understanding of the whole. Although it has become somewhat of a cliché to look to Finland as a model for how to run schools, the professional stature of teachers in that country needs to be recognized as an important piece of their education system's success. Pursuing a teaching career will become much more appealing when the profession begins to be valued as one of the richest pieces of our social fabric. We, as a society, need to do more to elevate the status of the teaching profession.

The beginning of the school year is an exciting time for our state's 133,000 students. Let's pause to recognize that some of these students were less than excited to take their seats before a long-term substitute teacher. The education of our children is arguably the most important public service that we can offer. Let's think in terms of what we can collectively do to create incentives and supports to ensure that, on the first day of school every year, every student has a permanent teacher.

Steve Atwater is the University of Alaska's Associate Vice President for K-12 Outreach. Prior to this, he served as superintendent of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District and the Lake and Peninsula School District. Steve maintains his membership in the Alaska Superintendents Association.

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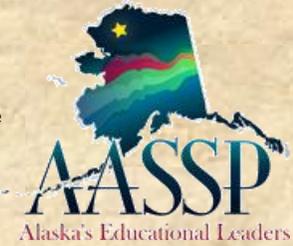
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2015 - 2016 Educational Association Events

December:

State Board of Education Meeting –
December 4-5, Anchorage

ALASBO Annual Conference – Hotel Captain
Cook, Anchorage, December 6-9

January:

Fifth Annual RTI Conference – January 23-24,
Anchorage

State Board of Education Meeting – Video Con-
ference – January 25

February:

AASB Legislative Fly-in – February 6-9

AASA National Conference – Phoenix, Arizona -
February 11-13

AAESP/AASSP Legislative Fly-in February -
TBD

ACSA Legislative Reception – February 21

ASA Legislative Fly-in – February 20-23

NASSP National Conference –Orlando Florida -
February 25-27

ASTE Annual Conference – February 20-23,
Anchorage

March:

AASB Legislative Fly-in – March 19-22

State Board of Education Meeting – March 24-
25, Juneau

ATP Job Fair –March 18-19, Anchorage

April:

Alaska Legislature Adjourns – April 17

June:

State Board of Education Meeting – June 15-
17, Juneau

July:

NAESP National Conference - July 6-8, Nation-
al Harbor, MD

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The Alaska Council of School Administrators is grateful for the sponsorship and financial support of the businesses that provide goods and services to public schools across Alaska.

