



Mark Begich for Governor

INVESTING IN ALASKA'S FUTURE

A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FROM EARLY EDUCATION ALL THE WAY TO CAREER PLACEMENT

Despite our challenges, there is no reason Alaska can't have the best education system in the country. We have some of the best teachers, but high healthcare costs and the State's inability to budget on time mean too many of these teachers get pink slips and seek opportunities outside the state. Our university system could be one of the best with opportunities to support world-class research and ensure our growing industries can fill job openings with well-trained Alaskans. Instead, years of punishing budget cuts mean we are losing great researchers and some of our most-needed programs - like nursing - have unacceptably long waitlists. To grow, train, and attract the next generation of great Alaskans, we need a great education system. An investment in our education system is the most important thing we can do to build a better future.

STABLE, LONG-TERM EDUCATION FUNDING

My "Invest in Alaska" fiscal plan would provide stable, long-term education funding that would be constitutionally guaranteed. That means we don't have to pink-slip teachers year after year and can allow school administrators to plan for the future. It also means that the Legislature can't use the education system as a negotiating tool or political bargaining chip. Providing certainty to schools, parents, and kids means a better education system for everyone. We must ensure education funding increases with inflation and real costs, so schools are getting the necessary funding, resources, and support from the State Department of Education and Early Development.

GIVE KIDS A CHANCE AT SUCCESS FROM THE START

90% of brain development happens by age five, which means birth to age five are the most important years to invest in a child's development. For every \$1 we invest in high quality early childhood education, the State gets back \$7 in reduced public services, increased economic activity, and spending less on incarceration. That is an investment worth making.

- **Childcare:** Alaska's families spend almost \$200 million a year on childcare for kids under the age of six. Early learning and childcare also support some 7,700 jobs statewide. Childcare businesses support local economies and allow parents to return to the labor market. Despite this, a 2014 survey found that 46% of parents found it difficult to obtain childcare. We need greater access to affordable, high quality childcare from birth to kindergarten - childcare that prepares our kids for success in school and beyond. Streamline licensing requirements for childcare centers: We all want to ensure the highest quality care is available for Alaska's kids, but overly burdensome red tape is making it harder for childcare centers to operate. As Governor, I will create a cabinet level advisory group to determine how to reduce regulatory hurdles for childcare while ensuring kids' health and safety.
- **Pre-K Available for all Alaskans:** We have a great early education program, one that shows real, sustained results, but it's available to too few Alaskans. Access to high quality, affordable early childhood education is essential to raise the next generation of great Alaskans. I propose developing a plan to include making Pre-K available to all of Alaska's four year olds by rolling them into the Base Student Allocation, ensuring Pre-K for all Alaskans without diminishing the current needs of K-12 education.

SET RURAL SCHOOLS UP FOR SUCCESS

Schools in rural Alaska have tremendous challenges. They lack economies of scale, have energy costs as much as 10x higher per student than those paid in the railbelt, and can struggle to keep teachers year on year, costing a school district on average \$20,000 to recruit and train new teachers. All of this adds up to greater costs and less money spent in the classroom.

- **Train more teachers from rural communities and make sure they have professional development opportunities:** There are no simple solutions to reversing the teacher shortage in Alaska, but as governor I would support restoring the statewide teacher mentor program and empowering local school districts and education associations to form their own mentoring and support programs for new educators. Addressing the high cost of energy and healthcare will also bring some relief to rural school districts.
- **Share resources for greater cost savings:** One way to overcome the challenge of small school sizes is to share administrative resources. The State already has a grant program designed to provide up to \$100,000 for school districts who share resources to save money. Unfortunately, the grant program has never been funded. School administrations, already short staffed, don't have the resources to seek out opportunities for shared resources. Funding the grant program would encourage the use of shared services and create more opportunities for saving.
- **Give the Department of Education the resources to support struggling schools:** For small rural schools, the Department of Education and Early Development often has to step in to provide services that a larger district would have in house. Deep cuts to DEED mean they often don't have the bandwidth to provide assistance on a school-by-school level, even when small interventions could have big impacts, including providing a shared energy manager to assist schools in improving energy efficiency and seeking funding opportunities for energy upgrades.

SUPPORT TEACHERS & EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS SO OUR SCHOOLS CAN FOCUS ON STUDENTS

Too many years of annual pink slips mean we are losing great, young educators to out of state and we aren't able to train enough new teachers to fill classrooms. The State has a constitutional responsibility to fully fund our education system. That is why my Invest in Alaska plan would finally put a stop to using our kids as a bargaining chip and make it clear that education is a priority.

- **Focus On Teacher Retention:** We need to recognize that we are in a competition with 49 other states when it comes to recruiting and retaining the best and brightest teachers available. The first step is to treat—and pay—our teachers like the highly-trained professionals they are, and to provide them with a retirement plan they can count on. That also goes for school counselors, nurses, librarians, and all the hard-working education support professionals who work in our schools.
- **Provide Competitive Retirement Benefits:** By leaving our educators without a retirement plan they can count on, the State of Alaska is essentially encouraging them to move to another state where they can plan for their futures. In effect, Alaska is spending millions of dollars each year training teachers and education professionals for other states with more secure retirement plans. As Governor, I would ensure that the Department of Administration provides the Legislature with the actuarial analysis necessary so we can provide current defined contribution employees a choice between a cost-neutral defined benefit retirement plan and a defined contribution plan. This would allow employees to choose what works best for them. We won't be able to reverse current trends until we have addressed the uncertainty that exists in education funding and bolstered our retirement system.
- **Address High Health Care Costs:** As governor, I would work with public school educators to address the high cost of health care. The cost of living in Alaska varies widely from community to community, particularly in rural Alaska, where recruitment and retention are already issues. That is why I do not support a state run and controlled health care authority. As Governor, I would work with public school educators to address the high cost of health care, not take away their ability to bargain for the health insurance coverage that works best at a local level.
- **Restore Adequate Personnel:** Successful schools need fully staffed teams of personnel including counselors, librarians, and others. Our teachers and students rely on school personnel for overall student success and to provide critical services to students.
- **Give New Teachers The Support They Need For Success:** New teachers, both those new to the state and new to the profession, may lack supports to successfully transition into the classroom. Other states have used a teacher residency program, similar to those used to train doctors, giving them the tools they need to run a classroom. Federal programs under Title II, Part A under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act allow the State to form partnerships between school districts, universities, and nonprofits to support peer mentorships and support new teacher residency programs. As Governor, I will support programs like this and look for other similar types of innovation to provide teacher support.

- **Provide Necessary Resources:** Education budgets aren't keeping up with increasing costs of healthcare, energy, or inflation. School districts have been cut severely and we see that class sizes are going up, teachers are using their own income for supplies, and each school counselor serves as many as 700 students in some school districts, if those positions still exist. We must ensure education funding increases with inflation and real costs, so schools are getting the necessary funding, resources, and support from the State Department of Education and Early Development.
- **Veto Unfunded Mandates:** Unfunded mandates from the State mean teachers working even more hours with even less resources to accomplish their goals. We cannot simply pile on expectations and demands to our teachers while failing to provide adequate resources. That is why, as Governor, I would veto any unfunded mandates placed on our schools.

TRAIN ALASKANS FOR JOBS THROUGH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Higher education opportunities for Alaskans need to prepare kids for jobs of the future. Our education system needs to be better aligned with the private sector so that we are preparing great employees for the jobs that are available. Too often our schools and universities are reflexively responding to changes in industry. The healthcare field is a perfect example: We know healthcare is growing and the need for trained nurses is staggering, yet recent applicants to the nursing program have waited as long as two years. Better coordination and advanced planning mean we can fill jobs with Alaskans first rather than frantically filling positions with those from outside. I also believe we should look for opportunities to coordinate with industries and provide grants for tuition offsets in the most needed fields.

- **Expand Apprenticeship:** Apprenticeship programs are essential, especially for the 2/3 of Americans without a bachelor's degree. They offer a pathway to great jobs and are a ladder to the middle class. While Alaska has many apprenticeship programs, our too-high unemployment rate makes it clear we have more to do. Apprenticeship programs are already eligible to receive tax-deductible donations through the Alaska Education Tax Credit, but expanding this program and increasing its visibility will make it easier to attract new programs and apprentices. Pre-apprenticeship and high school youth apprenticeship also help young people interested in apprenticeship.
- **Create A Policy For Dual Enrollment Programs:** Dual enrollment programs, offered starting in high school, integrate classroom learning with technical, job-specific skills to prepare students for high-skill careers in industries such as information technology, health science, and construction. While preparing kids for good jobs, they also boost high school graduation rates by linking high school to real world job skills more directly.

REENERGIZE ALASKA'S UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Alaska's university system is home to great programs and world-class research, but devastating cuts have left our programs struggling to keep up. Over the last five years, budget cuts of \$145 million resulted in laying off 900 employees and cutting 50 programs across the state. This also means most University of Alaska students saw a 10% tuition hike over the last two years. Any great state needs a

great university system, one that can draw new talent. Alaskans need to know they can receive a top-notch education right here at home, but we can't make that happen without a real commitment from the State government – and next Governor.

- **Allow Each University To Focus On Priorities, And Improve Transferability:** Each community has its own unique culture, needs, and strengths. Our universities are no different. We should allow each university to focus on its own identity and improve the ability of students to take classes, either in person or through distance learning at any of our schools. The University of Alaska Fairbanks, for example, has world class Arctic research, including the International Arctic Research Center and the Alaska Center for Energy and Power.
- **Improve Tech Transfer:** For every dollar we invest in the University system, we see \$4 in economic benefit. Our universities should be engines driving small business development and kicking out new patents and inventions. All universities could be doing better. The University of Montana, a university one-third the size of the UA system has twice as many patents and patents pending. Meanwhile, in 2017, the University of Alaska system brought in \$150 million in research grants. While we have great researchers who are awarded competitive grants, we are not doing enough to support commercializing their research.
- **Alaska Performance Scholarship Fund:** The Performance Scholarship Fund provides approximately \$10 million in scholarships to two to three thousand high performing Alaska students each year. It's an important tool to keep our best and brightest at schools here in Alaska. Recent attempts to raid the fund are short sighted. I would fight to maintain the Performance Scholarship Fund and other programs that make higher education attainable in Alaska.
- **Use Outcome Data To Guide Students And Make Programs Better:** While Alaska collects a great deal of data on programs and outcomes, that information is rarely available and accessible to students, parents, and guidance counselors as they make post-secondary education decisions. As a public-facing tool, this data set should be available and usable for students, parents, and organizations that assist with college access efforts, but also policy makers and the private sector as they work together to fill expected future employment gaps.