

Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee Field Hearing
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Through my experience as a local teacher from my own community, and over the years as director of Future Educators of Alaska, I have focused my attention on three things: increasing the number of Alaska Native/local teachers and administrators in Alaska schools, "ownership" of education and empowering communities through education, and the need for career pathways and workforce development.

As a student in a rural school, you often see teachers coming and going year after year. Often, and many Alaskan students have experienced this, teachers will leave mid-school year. The reasons we are all familiar with: culture shock, lack of accommodations, difference in communication, and distance from family and cities. With less than 5% of the teaching workforce being Alaska Native, and over 90% of students in rural schools being Alaska Native, there is a strong need for more Alaska Native teachers, para professionals, principals, superintendents. Funding needs to be aimed at this goal. Education needs to be seen as a career pathway. When I was a student, I viewed either teaching or tribal work as my career goals because that way I could live and work in my community.

"Ownership" of education means local level control. This is not, as our definition stands, having a board for school districts. It is not local school boards. Instead, it is community planning as it relates to what their children - the whole child - should know while going to school. It relates to their culture, their local skills, their traditions. I believe that this planning and implementation process will directly affect, in a positive manner, student test scores, students' desires to live and learn in their own communities, and community revitalization as a whole. Our communities are in need of this - many of our schools are facing school closure, and the school and education can play a role in making positive change.

Career pathways should be a strong focus for our rural Alaska schools. We need to ask ourselves - Where do students REALLY see themselves after high school? When they're in elementary school, perhaps they say *dentist* or *police officer*, but when they reach high school, is this dream still possible? Do they want to work at the city or tribal offices? What are the career pathways? Who is talking to them? I don't see this being a focus, and I believe it should be. Realistically, students need to know what jobs are available in the cities and what's available in the villages. They need access to resources, scholarships, jobs, programs - we need access and communication of resources.

FINALLY - I want to stress the importance of student count and the impact it has on communities. I didn't preface this earlier, but I think it's everything we need to focus on. We need to look at the student count and formula funding. What are the benefits of waiting until October to do the student count? We get MOST all of our students back from boarding schools after Christmas. Funding should follow the student wherever they are.