



Education in Alaska – by Sarah Palin

I envision a world class educational system founded upon the principles of safety, quality, social responsibility, parental involvement and fiscal accountability.

Education is a service the state is mandated to provide. I strongly believe in providing an adequate level of funding to ensure high quality public schools. However, it will take more than money alone to pave the way toward better schools – it's also going to take commitment and collaboration with all school districts and REAA's to raise student performance and achievement. School districts must be held accountable at all times for the manner in which they expend public money.

1. Let's Fix PERS/TRS

In order to get more money into our classrooms, funding will have to be provided to address the \$7 billion unfunded liability of PERS/TRS. In next year's budget, there will be a request for \$500 million of budget surplus funds from the new PPT revenues to deposit directly into PERS/TRS. There will also have to be funding above the Base Student Allowance (BSA) to assist districts with higher employer contribution rates.

This problem began under the mismanagement that occurred during the administration of Governor Knowles. School districts and REAA's are currently faced with employer contribution rates that rob funds away from classrooms. I will help districts with this problem.

2. Let's Fully Fund and Forward Fund Education

I support adequate and full funding for education, as well as for pupil transportation and municipal school debt reimbursements. Again, increases will be necessary to address higher contribution rates for PERS/TRS. There must also be recognition for increases in costs for energy, utilities, insurance, and salaries. We cannot go back to the days of simply ignoring inflation.

A centerpiece of my fiscal plan is to forward fund K-12. After making payments to bring down the liability to PERS/TRS, any remaining budget surplus funds will be used to forward fund education. School districts and municipal governments will be able to do a better job of planning their budgets for upcoming years if they know in advance the level of funding they can expect from Juneau.

3. Schools of Choice

My administration will support existing programs that already offer alternative school options available throughout the state, including charter schools, rural boarding schools, home school options, ABC schools, correspondence schools, and vocational/technical, and magnet schools. There are many successes out there that we can look to as models. My administration will support and expand existing programs that successfully offer new approaches to ensure an appropriate education for every child in Alaska.

4. Expand Vocational Training Opportunities

Alaska's youth have tremendous career opportunities in the skilled trades if they have adequate training. I will charge the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) with drawing upon its considerable expertise to develop a pilot program aimed at increasing awareness of vocational career opportunities for our younger students through a partnership with industries facing worker shortages.

5. Safety in our Schools

Safety is the most basic requirement of a functioning education system and a civilized society. Recent events underscore the need for improved safety in our schools. If teachers and children are not safe, they cannot teach or learn; it affects all of us. We must address it with sincere effort.

I support grant programs through the Department of Education that will make sure all schools have the tools and the resources to ensure day-to-day safety as well as emergency response plans. An example of an effective and safe school is [Kodiak's KIDSS Program](#). In this school parents and community give input into the development of a school safety program. They are engaged in the ownership of the program and take responsibility for the prevention of violence.

6. Teacher's Salaries & Benefits

SB141 must be revisited. Competitive salaries and benefits are necessary in order to attract and retain quality educators. My administration will work with the Legislature to find the best possible retirement plan – which will likely be a hybrid of defined benefits and defined contributions.

7. Pre-K

The State should target early education programs to specific at-risk groups that truly need them. These groups will benefit from access to high-quality programs currently out of their reach. We must find a way for these children to obtain a safe and positive environment in their early years.

Today, social and economic pressures sometimes encourage both parents to return to work outside the home. The State Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) in my administration will publish useful educational material for parents about children in their early years. The DEED has made some headway with their new research on developmental stages and guidelines. (May 2006 - http://www.eed.state.ak.us/news/elg_toc.pdf) We can do better by revitalizing this information with an appreciation of parental involvement and providing a larger database of information in website format. When the parent acts upon good information about how to inspire and guide their children towards success, every child has a better chance to succeed.

Here are the Guiding Principles

Alignment is the unity of purpose which brings parents, children, teachers, public administration and businesses together towards a common goal of quality education. Alignment towards the common goal is built upon the values of respect for one another, our unique cultures and traditions, and our individual personal values.

Here is how Alignment fits together:

- Parents understand the importance of their involvement with and their responsibility for their child's education.
- Children attend class ready to learn.
- Teachers are allowed to teach without distraction.
- Administrations sustain an environment where performance and options are valued.
- Business will help define the outcomes needed for employment.
- Diverse ethnic, cultural and religious values will be respected in the environment of education

- **Parents are the first educators.**

When we talk about parents in a child's education: it's about love! It is best for a child to be brought up in a close and loving family. Particularly when a child is young, there are positive effects of eye contact, appropriate touch, and focused attention on the brain of the child. Whether a parent stays at home, or comes home and spends quality nurturing time with their child, they are truly the most important force in a child's life. A parent is so key to a child's education that, in the end, the responsibility for the student's educational outcome falls to the parents, family, and the children themselves.

- **Teachers are responsible for providing a rich classroom environment.**

It's about teaching! Teachers are heroes to our children. I will support advanced professional training opportunities for our good teachers, including teacher mentoring. Teachers should be allowed to be creative with their curriculum, within a safe environment with a group of students' intent on learning.

- **Administration is responsible to their community for costs, safety, and choice.**

It's about service! The administration of schools starts with the principal and extends through the district all the way to the State Department Education and Early Development. Ideally, the purpose of administration is to ensure that our schools offer such choices to parents, students and teachers to achieve Alignment. Choice in public education is a relatively new idea, but is already widely implemented. We see from our experience that innovation such as charter schools, homeschools, correspondence, Montessorri, ABC schools and various other alternative schools have a broad appeal to parents, students, teachers and administrators. There is still room to grow our choices to serve more families.

- **Business will help provide the requirements for employment.**

It's about jobs! The private sector will be integrated into the education system. I am looking for a dramatic change in this area in particular. Employers know what is needed for the workplace. They can provide curriculum and expectations for students to ensure they have all the skills that will invest them in success later in life. Business should be a primary partner in training those who need work-site education.

Schools of Choice

There are many examples of educational success. There are highly performing traditional elementary schools like O'Malley Elementary in [S1]Anchorage. Many[S2] other successful alternative school options are available throughout the state. My administration will support those programs already in existence, and encourage the development of new non-traditional programs to ensure an appropriate education for every child in Alaska.

- **ABC schools.** ABC classrooms align the parents to the needs of the students. This is positive, because there is a lot expected of these students. While parents are an integral part of the student experience, students bear the lion's share of the effort. ABC students have nightly homework, back to basics curriculum, patriotism, ethics and citizenship training. Each of these is a key ingredient to providing a child a consistent education that meets the values of their parents while keeping them challenged in class.
- **Rural Boarding Schools.** This is an option that is currently being put together in communities like Galena and Nenana. The state's history with boarding schools has not been perfect, this is now becoming an option that can be used while remaining sensitive to family bonds and cultural awareness. I believe there are ways we can make boarding schools work successfully for parents in rural areas who want their children to have good opportunities.
- **Home School.** I support and respect the rights of independent homeschoolers and those who partner with local and state-wide school districts. There must be equity in treatment of all homeschoolers in all programs across the state. The use of privately-purchased, faith-based materials should not be a reason for withholding funding.
- **Charter Schools.** Charter Schools, since 1996, have become [S3]innovative and parent directed options, and I encourage charter schools that make good use of our public funds.
- **Workforce Readiness for Students.** Alaska's youth have tremendous career opportunities in the skilled trades if they have adequate training. I will charge the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) with drawing upon its considerable expertise to develop a pilot program aimed at increasing awareness of vocational career opportunities for our younger students through a partnership with industries facing worker shortages.

The pilot will be industry-focused and include a streamlined and efficient administrative process to encourage industry participation. It will consider children's safety first and be designed with exciting field trips and industry-based learning activities.

- **Alternative Schools for Students in Trouble.** Alternative schools reconnect troubled students with success so that they can find their personal American dream and then achieve it. I recognize that alternative schools help take children off the streets and prepare them for entry into the job force or further education.

Good Character, Values, and Ethics

I believe we need to respect families and provide greater access to curricula and programs that teach ethics and character. The ABC method is a local program that depends strongly on these principles. Programs such as ABC have core principles of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and good citizenship.