

Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Sledge. I am the executive director of the Coalition for Education Equity, a statewide organization representing Alaska school districts, organizations, and individuals concerned about the quality and breadth of educational opportunities available to Alaska's children. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Formerly known as Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children, or CEAAC, our organization advocated for education reform at the legislative level while fighting the Kasayulie and Moore lawsuits, which were settled in 2011 and 2012 respectively. The Kasayulie vs State of Alaska lawsuit was filed in 1997 regarding the method of funding capital projects for education. At the time the lawsuit was filed, many of the physical facilities within plaintiff (REAA) school districts were in dire need of replacement and/or major maintenance, exhibiting widespread deterioration, physical dangers, structural deficiencies, inability to satisfy relevant code requirements, and a lack of sufficient instructional space.

We are concerned that we again find ourselves in the situation of seeing deterioration of school facilities creating unsafe or uncomfortable environments, environments that interfere with or impede the ability of students to learn, or, at the very least, increased costs for maintenance. We are also concerned that continued deferment of major maintenance will necessitate a larger number of school construction projects in the future, at great cost to our state.

Slide 3

This slide shows the number of projects and dollar amounts of the Major Maintenance priority lists over the past five years, including the current year list.

We can see that in this time frame the number of projects and the cost of these projects has steadily increased. Many of the projects on this list have remained on the list for many years, and in many cases the maintenance issues at those schools become worse over time as conditions deteriorate. Other major maintenance projects we know have either fallen off the list, for a variety of reasons, or are not on the list because school districts did not complete CIP applications. So, we know that the need across the state is larger than what is on this list.

This need does not correspond with the funding that has been provided for school major maintenance over the past several years.

Slide 4

Funding for School Major Maintenance

2017

Legislature passed \$3.5 million for school Major Maintenance in the FY 2018 Capital Budget

2018

We worked with the Legislature to pass HB 212, which allows the REAA Fund to be used for school major maintenance projects as well as school construction.

- The REAA Fund has been used twice since passage of HB 212 to fund REAA major maintenance projects:
 - o FY 2019 St. Mary's Campus Upgrades (\$3,449,928)
 - o FY 2021 St. Paul K-12 School Roof Replacement & Structural Repairs (\$1,896,395)

That year the Legislature passed \$24,203,372 for school Major Maintenance in the FY 2019 Capital Budget, which covered the top five maintenance projects on the priority list that year.

2019

\$2,484,000 was appropriated for specific school construction and major maintenance projects (NWABSD and ASD – Sand Lake Elementary safety lighting project). No funding was appropriated for the major maintenance grant program.

2020

No funding was appropriated for the major maintenance grant program.

2021

The Legislature passed \$21,642,300 for school major maintenance, as well as funding for a couple of individual school projects. The \$21,642,300 was vetoed.

CIP (Capital Improvement Project) Application Process

The CIP application process is thorough and is set up to ensure that school capital projects are needed, well planned and designed, and a good use of state funding. School districts submitting grant applications must have a six-year CIP plan on file with DEED, which outlines all current and future capital priorities. Applications themselves will require some form of facility or component condition survey, depending on the scope of the project. A facility condition survey would be needed for a major rehabilitation project. Additional assessments or documentation that will be needed for larger scale projects include planning, schematic design, and design development work. This work needs to be completed by an engineer or architect. Smaller projects can be assessed by a licensed contractor.

This process, again depending on the scope of the project, can cost between \$2-3000 up to \$75,000-\$100,000 to prepare for and submit the CIP application. Getting design teams to rural village schools for these assessments and to prepare cost estimates can be especially expensive. I spoke recently with a superintendent who had an engineering team visit two of the district's schools to prepare these surveys and plan and the cost was just under \$62,000. For another district, they were unable to get any contractor to travel to their schools at all to do this work and give them a bid. They were unable to submit a CIP application. Many school districts use outside assistance to help them put their grant application packets together, which can range from \$2500-10,000, depending on the number of projects.

In addition to this initial cost, there is an ongoing cost to reapply when projects are not funded. The application must be updated and the cost to resubmit can run around \$8,000 every two years.

For many of these school districts, these projects once completed will result in significant cost savings due to improved energy efficiency and reduced need for ongoing maintenance and repair. We continually ask our school districts to spend efficiently – funding these projects will help them do so.

I just want to stop here and acknowledge the wonderful staff at the Department of Education and Early Development. They provide extensive ongoing support to school districts throughout this process and I always hear about how helpful they are.

Impact of Projects Not Getting Funded

So, given what I've just shared about the costs of preparing for and submitting CIP applications, you can see that if a project doesn't get funded, there are ongoing costs for resubmitting year after year. This can add up to a significant amount of money for school districts over the years.

But there are also the costs involved with making do in the meantime – working with district maintenance staff or hired contractors to make fixes or repairs that are temporary and insufficient. The costs involved in taking these actions don't solve the problem and are sunk costs for school districts.

You can see the burgeoning need by looking at the major maintenance priority list. What is this like in reality for our school districts? I'd like to share with you just a few scenarios:

Our DDC Control system is off-line and has been for four years. The cost to the district is increased fuel usage, an inordinate amount of maintenance personnel time manually adjusting valves for rooms which are too hot/too cold, and poor ventilation since we discovered some of the air handlers went offline. This is also a health issue with poor air circulation in the buildings, especially in the time of COVID. We plan to use some of our second round of CARES Act funding to try to bring at least one school back online with a new system.

Our high school generator is too small and inefficient, and it is also located INSIDE our maintenance shop with inadequate exterior ventilation. Every time the power goes off our maintenance staff must evacuate the shop until the generator can be shut off as it pours fumes into the building.

Roof Repair requested 6 years ago. The need for this is that the roof is a hot roof and a light pitched roof, this allows the snow to build up and as it accumulates it melts at the roofing level then runs down to where the roof is the coldest and refreezes and build an ice dam that backs up further melt

water. When this happens the water's depth allows it to find its way under the roofing and into the inside of the building causing water damage to the insulation, sheetrock and wood framing and also allows for the formation of mold.

The H-Vac and ducting system have not been functioning properly for over 12 years and needs to be fixed by a professional. Because the duct work has gaps and has fallen in places it allows dirty air and dust from the crawl space to be introduced into the school. This also appears to be where mice are gaining access to the school building. All of this makes for unhealthy air quality, as well as heating inefficiency.

Slides 5 & 6

- 1.) This school built in 1979 and has never been renovated. The roof is so damaged from snow and ice during the winter that it continually leaks when the temperatures rise above freezing. Rain during the warmer seasons further aggravates the problem. The roof has 3-inch ribs, spaced 8 inches apart, and has over 12 "valleys" which trap precipitation. We have done everything in our capabilities to repair and stop the leaks. The design of the roof does not allow the water to flow down naturally. The snow must be shoveled off every winter by the maintenance crew, who have spent untold hours doing so. During the summer we spend many hours working on large portions of repairing those winter damages, summer after summer. The repairs only seem to last one season. Insulation has been added in the attic space; we thought we were losing heat through the roof causing the ice dams, but the added insulation made no change. The heavy amount of snow insulates it, then melts causing the leaks.
- 2.) The school's foundation is deteriorating very quickly. There is so much moisture in the soil underneath the school building and surrounding the school property, that the weight of the building is causing the entire school to sink several inches a year. That same moisture is causing dry rot and warping the building's supporting structure. Hours have been spent re-leveling and replacing the rotting foundation sections every year. It is a losing battle, as more and more moisture damage occurs each year. The leaking roof adds to the problem as the water flows down the wall and onto the foundation. With improper substrate being used (with the foundation) when the building was built, and the added water being placed on the foundation due to the leaking roof, the problem grows rapidly.

3.) The school building is located about 500 yards away from the Kuskokwim River. Due to the moisture associated with the river, we have large sections of the school's exterior walls bowing and causing the outside trim to pop off. The continued bowing has increased to the point of warping the window frame, causing window breakage.

4.) Also at this school, due to bowing of the building walls and pressure buildup from the sinking ground, the main power box often rips off the side of the school building when the winds blow.

The need for major maintenance for our school districts is real and it is significant. For many schools the need is urgent. For all school districts, the financial impact is substantial, and for REAA school districts, there are no real alternatives for obtaining funding for these needed projects. For small rural village schools, there are no options for moving to another location – there are no extra buildings available in those villages for educating our children. It is unimaginable to me that we are sending our educators and children into these conditions and expecting them to have a high-quality education experience.

I am deeply grateful to you all for your time today and for the time you give every day in service to our State. Thank you for giving your attention to this critical matter.