

# EDUCATION ON THE KENAI PENINSULA



Volume 4

School Years 2009-2021

Superintendent John O'Brien  
Published June 2021

# Education on the Kenai Peninsula

SCHOOL YEARS 2009-2021

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# Education on the Kenai Peninsula

SCHOOL YEARS 2009-2021

## PREFACE

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District has 42 schools and at 25,600 square miles covers a land area roughly the size of West Virginia. Each community is unique in its diversity and culture, including four Alaska Native villages with no road access and four Russian village schools.

Every school day, more than 4,400 students are transported a total of nearly 7,741 miles on school buses throughout the district.

In 1984, the district published “Schooling on the Kenai Peninsula” as a written record of education on the Kenai beginning with the formation of the Kenai Borough and the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District in 1964.

In 2009, “Education on the Kenai Peninsula” continued the historical record from 1986 to 2009.

“Education on the Kenai Peninsula Vol 4.” will bring the record up to date through June of 2021. The district has worked hard to keep up with an ever-changing world. We have focused on building personalized learning to serve every type of learner. CTEC, technology, distance learning, college ready, Jump Start advancement (juniors).

The intent of this document is to highlight the district’s accomplishments of the past 10 years and the people that served to make them happen.

Written and Compiled by Superintendent John O’Brien  
June 2021



Section 1

Board of Education

## School Board Membership 2009-2021

Date	Name	Position
2009-2010	Joe Arness (Seat 3)	President
	Liz Downing* (Seat 8)	Vice President
	Edith Helen "Sunni" Hilts (Seat 9)	Clerk
	Sammy Crawford (Seat 1)	Treasurer
	Marty Anderson* (Seat 5)	
	Lynn Hohl (Seat 6)	
	Bill Holt (Seat 7)	
	Tim Navarre* (Seat 2)	
	Penny (Karen) Vadla (Seat 4)	
	Destini Riley	Student Representative
2010-2011	Joe Arness (Seat 3)	President
	Liz Downing (Seat 8)	Vice President
	Sammy Crawford* (Seat 1)	Clerk
	Edith Helen "Sunni" Hilts* (Seat 9)	Treasurer
	Marty Anderson (Seat 5)	
	Lynn Hohl* (Seat 6)	
	Bill Holt (Seat 7)	
	Tim Navarre (Seat 2)	
	Penny (Karen) Vadla (Seat 4)	
	Julie Rang	Student Representative
2011-2012	Joe Arness* (Seat 3)	President
	Liz Downing (Seat 8)	Vice President
	Penny (Karen) Vadla* (Seat 4)	Clerk
	Edith Helen "Sunni" Hilts* (Seat 9)	Treasurer
	Lynn Hohl* (Seat 6)	
	Marty Anderson (Seat 5)	
	Sammy Crawford* (Seat 1)	
	Bill Holt* (Seat 7)	
	Tim Navarre (Seat 2)	
Annaleah Ernst	Student Representative	
2012-2013	Joe Arness (Seat 3)	President
	Liz Downing* (Seat 8)	Vice President
	Penny (Karen) Vadla (Seat 4)	Clerk
	Edith Helen "Sunni" Hilts (Seat 9)	Treasurer
	Marty Anderson* (Seat 5)	
	Sammy Crawford (Seat 1)	
	Bill Holt (Seat 7)	
	Lynn Hohl (Seat 6)	
	Tim Navarre* (Seat 2)	
Hayden Beard	Student Representative	

## School Board Membership 2009-2021 (Continued)

Date	Name	Position
<b>2013-2014</b>	Joe Arness (District 3)	President
	Liz Downing (District 8)	Vice President
	Penny (Karen) Vadla (District 4)	Clerk
	Edith Helen "Sunni" Hilts* (District 9)	Treasurer
	Marty Anderson (District 5)	
	Dan Castimore* (District 1)	
	Bill Holt (District 7)	
	Lynn Hohl* (District 6)	
	Tim Navarre (District 2)	
	Evan Boyer	Student Representative
<b>2014-2015</b>	Joe Arness* (District 3)	President
	Edith Helen "Sunni" Hilts (District 9)	Vice President
	Penny (Karen) Vadla* (District 4)	Clerk
	Dan Castimore (District 1)	Treasurer
	Marty Anderson (District 5)	
	Liz Downing (District 8)	
	Bill Holt* (District 7)	
	Lynn Hohl (District 6)	
	Tim Navarre (District 2)	
	Maria Kulikov	Student Representative
<b>2015-2016</b>	Joe Arness (District 3)	President
	Bill Holt (District 7)	Vice President
	Penny (Karen) Vadla (District 4)	Clerk
	Tim Navarre* (District 2)	Treasurer
	Marty Anderson* (District 5)	
	Dan Castimore (District 1)	
	Liz Downing* (District 8) (Resigned Sept. 30, 2016; Mike Illg was appointed on Oct. 3, 2016)	
	Edith Helen "Sunni" Hilts (District 9) Resigned Dec. 15, 2015.	
	Zen (John) Kelly* was appointed on Feb. 1, 2016, elected Oct. 2016.	
	Lynn Hohl (District 6)	
Brian Dusek	Student Representative	
<b>2016-2017</b>	Joe Arness (District 3)	President
	Penny (Karen) Vadla (District 4)	Vice President
	Bill Holt (District 7)	Clerk
	Zen (John) Kelly* (District 9)	Treasurer
	Marty Anderson (District 5)	

## School Board Membership 2009-2021 (Continued)

Date	Name	Position
<b>2016-2017</b> Cont.	Dan Castimore* (District 1)	
	Mike Illg (District 8)	
	Tim Navarre (District 2)	
	Lynn Hohl* (District 6)	
	Brian Dusek	Student Representative
<b>2017-2018</b>	Penny (Karen) Vadla* (District 4)	President
	Zen (John) Kelly (District 9)	Vice President
	Dan Castimore (District 1)	Clerk
	Mike Illg (District 8) * one year term	Treasurer
	Marty Anderson (District 5)	
	Debbie Cary* (District 7)	
	Lynn Hohl (District 6)	
	Tim Navarre (District 2)	
	Jason Tauriainen* (District 3)	
	Calvin Mitzel	Student Representative
<b>2018-2019</b>	Penny (Karen) Vadla (District 4)	President
	Zen (John) Kelly (District 9)	Vice President
	Dan Castimore (District 1)	Clerk
	Mike Illg* (District 8)	Treasurer
	Greg Madden* (District 5)	
	Debbie Cary (District 7)	
	Lynn Hohl (District 6)	
	Matt Morse* (District 2)	
	Jason Tauriainen (District 3)	
	Tanis Lorring	Student Representative
<b>2019-2020</b>	Penny (Karen) Vadla (District 4)	President
	Zen (John) Kelly*(District 9)	Vice President
	Jason Tauriainen (District 3)	Clerk
	Mike Illg (District 8)	Treasurer
	Greg Madden* (District 5)	
	Debbie Cary (District 7)	
	Martha Fleming elected, did not take office (District 6) Virginia Morgan* was appointed Nov. 26, 2019 through Oct. 2020	
	Matt Morse*(District 2)	
	Patti Truesdell*(District 1)	
	Cameron Blackwell	Student Representative



## School Board Membership 2009-2021 (Continued)

Date	Name	Position
2020-2021	Zen (John) Kelly (District 9)	President
	Debbie Cary*(District 7)	Vice President
	Jason Tauriainen*(District 3)	Clerk
	Mike Illg (District 8)	Treasurer
	Greg Madden (District 5)	
	Virginia Morgan*(District 6) 2 year term	
	Matt Morse (District 2)	
	Patti Truesdell (District 1)	
	Penny (Karen) Vadla*(District 4)	
	Tegan Retzer	Student Representative

\* Year Elected



Section 2

Support Teams

**Superintendents**

Dr. Steve Atwater                      July 2009 through November 2014  
 Sean Dusek                                December 2014 through June 2019  
 John O'Brien                             July 2019 through June 2021

**Leadership Teams**

<b>2009-2010</b>	
Position	Name
Superintendent of Schools	Steve Atwater
Assistant Superintendent, Instruction	Sean Dusek
Assistant Superintendent, Administrative Services	Dave Jones
Director of Elementary Education & K-12 Curriculum	Doris Cannon
Director of Federal Programs & K-12 Schools	Norma Holmgaard
Director of Finance	Laurie Olson
Director of Human Resources	Tim Peterson
Director of Information Services	Jim White
Director of Planning & Operations	Dave Spence
Director of Pupil Services	Clayton Holland
Director of Secondary Education & K-12 Assessment	Tim Vlasak

<b>2010-2011</b>	
Position	Name
Superintendent of Schools	Steve Atwater
Assistant Superintendent, Instruction	Sean Dusek
Assistant Superintendent, Administrative Services	Dave Jones
Director of Elementary Education & K-12 Curriculum	Doris Cannon
Director of Federal Programs & K-12 Schools	Norma Holmgaard
Director of Finance	Laurie Olson
Director of Human Resources	Tim Peterson
Director of Information Services	Jim White
Director of Planning & Operations	Dave Spence
Director of Pupil Services	Clayton Holland
Director of Secondary Education & K-12 Assessment	Tim Vlasak

**Leadership Teams (Continued)**

<b>2011-2012</b>	
Position	Name
Superintendent of Schools	Steve Atwater
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Services	Sean Dusek
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Support	Dave Jones
Director of Finance	Laurie Olson
Director of Human Resources	Tim Peterson
Director of Information Services	Jim White
Director of Planning and Operations	Dave Spence
Director of Pupil Services	Clayton Holland
Director of Secondary Education & Student Activities	John O'Brien
Director of Elementary Education & K-12 Curriculum	Doris Cannon
Director of Assessment, Federal Programs, K-12 Schools	Tim Vlasak

<b>2012-2013</b>	
Position	Name
Superintendent of Schools	Steve Atwater
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Services	Sean Dusek
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Support	Dave Jones
Director of Finance	Laurie Olson
Director of Human Resources	Tim Peterson
Director of Information Services	Jim White
Director of Planning and Operations	Dave Tressler
Director of Pupil Services	Clayton Holland
Director of Secondary Education & Student Activities	John O'Brien
Director of Elementary Education & K-12 Curriculum	Doris Cannon
Director of Assessment, Federal Programs, K-12 Schools	Tim Vlasak

**Leadership Teams (Continued)**

<b>2013-2014</b>	
Position	Name
Superintendent of Schools	Steve Atwater
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Services	Sean Dusek
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Support	Dave Jones
Director of Finance	Laurie Olson
Director of Human Resources	Joann Riener
Director of Information Services	Jim White
Director of Planning and Operations	Dave Tressler
Director of Pupil Services	Clayton Holland
Director of Secondary Education & Student Activities	John O'Brien
Director of Elementary Education & Professional Development	Christine Ermold
Director of Assessment, Federal Programs, K-12 Schools	Tim Vlasak
Communications	Pegge Erkeneff

<b>2014-2015</b>	
Position	Name
Superintendent of Schools	Steve Atwater Sean Dusek (Dec.)
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Services	Sean Dusek
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Support	Dave Jones
Director of Finance	Laurie Olson
Director of Human Resources	Joann Riener
Director of Information Services	Jim White
Director of Planning and Operations	Julie Cisco
Director of Pupil Services	Clayton Holland
Director of Secondary Education & Student Activities	John O'Brien
Director of Elementary Education & Professional Development	Christine Ermold
Director of Assessment, Federal Programs, K-12 Schools	Tim Vlasak
Communications	Pegge Erkeneff

**Leadership Teams (Continued)**

<b>2015-2016</b>	
Position	Name
Superintendent of Schools	Sean Dusek
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Services	John O'Brien
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Support	Dave Jones
Director of Finance	Laurie Olson
Director of Human Resources & Professional Development	Christine Ermold
Director of Information Services	Eric Soderquist
Director of Planning and Operations	Julie Cisco
Director of Pupil Services	Clayton Holland
Director of Secondary Education & Student Activities	John Pothast
Director of Assessment, Federal Programs, K-12 Schools	Tim Vlasak
Communications	Pegge Erkeneff

<b>2016-2017</b>	
Position	Name
Superintendent of Schools	Sean Dusek
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Services	John O'Brien
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Support	Dave Jones
Director of Finance	Liz Hayes
Director of Human Resources & Professional Development	Christine Ermold
Director of Information Services	Eric Soderquist
Director of Planning and Operations	David May
Director of Pupil Services	Clayton Holland
Director of Secondary Education & Student Activities	John Pothast
Director of Assessment, Federal Programs, K-12 Schools	Tim Vlasak
Communications	Pegge Erkeneff

**Leadership Teams (Continued)**

<b>2017-2018</b>	
Position	Name
Superintendent of Schools	Sean Dusek
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Services	John O'Brien
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Support	Dave Jones
Director of Finance	Liz Hayes
Director of Human Resources & Professional Development	Christine Ermold
Director of Information Services	Eric Soderquist
Director of Planning and Operations	David May
Director of Pupil Services	Clayton Holland
Director of Elementary & Secondary Education	John Pothast
Director of Assessment, Federal Programs, K-12 Schools	Tim Vlasak
Communications	Pegge Erkeneff

<b>2018-2019</b>	
Position	Name
Superintendent of Schools	Sean Dusek
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Services	John O'Brien
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Support	Dave Jones
Director of Finance	Liz Hayes
Director of Human Resources & Professional Development	Christine Ermold
Director of Information Services	Eric Soderquist
Director of Planning and Operations	David May Kevin Lyon (May)
Director of Pupil Services	Clayton Holland
Director of Elementary & Secondary Education	John Pothast
Director of Assessment, Federal Programs, K-12 Schools	Tim Vlasak
Communications	Pegge Erkeneff



**Leadership Teams (Continued)**

<b>2019-2020</b>	
Position	Name
Superintendent of Schools	John O'Brien
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Services	Left vacant
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Support	Dave Jones
Director of Finance	Liz Hayes
Director of Human Resources	Nate Crabtree
Professional Learning and Federal Programs	Christine Ermold
Director of Information Services	Eric Soderquist
Director of Planning and Operations	Kevin Lyon
Director of Pupil Services	Clayton Holland
Director of Innovation & Strategic Planning	John Pothast
Director of Assessment, Federal Programs, K-12 Schools	Tim Vlasak
Communications	Pegge Erkeneff

<b>2020-2021</b>	
Position	Name
Superintendent of Schools	John O'Brien
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Services	Clayton Holland
Associate Superintendent, Instructional Support	Dave Jones
Director of Finance	Liz Hayes
Director of Human Resources	Nate Crabtree
Professional Learning and Federal Programs	Christine Ermold
Director of Information Services	Eric Soderquist
Director of Planning and Operations	Kevin Lyon
Director of Student Support Services	Amy Hagen
Director of Schools & Compliance	Tim Vlasak
Communications, Community & Government Relations	Pegge Erkeneff



Section 3

School Administrators

School Administrators  
 School Years 2009-10 through 2020-21  
 (Beginning of the Year)

Aurora Borealis Charter			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2016	Larry Nauta		
2016-2021	Cody McCanna		

Chapman			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2012	Sharon Trout		
2012-2019	Conrad Woodhead		
2019-2021	Josh Hinds		

Connections			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2015	Lee Young		
2015-2021	Rich Bartolowits		

Cooper Landing			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2011	Jim Dawson		
2011-2013	Christine Ermold		
2013-2015	Michael Hanson		
2015-2021	Doug Hayman		

Fireweed Academy			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2012-2015	Kiki Abrahamson		
2015-2021	Todd Hindman		

Homer Flex			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2015	Karen Wessel		
2015-2021	Chris Brown		

School Administrators 2009-2021 (Continued)

Homer High				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2013	Dennis Gee		2009-2010	David Larson
2013-2021	Doug Waclawski		2010-2013	Doug Waclawski
			2013-2019	Alison Mall

Homer Middle				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2010	Lisa Callahan			
2010-2014	David Larson			
2014-2021	Kari Dendurent			

Hope				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2011	Jim Dawson			
2011-2012	Monica Hinders			
2012-2016	Michael Hanson			
2016-2021	Doug Hayman			

Kachemak-Selo				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2010	Randy Creamer			
2010-2015	Andy Rothenberger			
2015-2018	Tim Whip			
2018-2021	Michael Wojciak			

Kaleidoscope School of Arts and Science				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2012	Mick Wykis			
2012-2018	Robin Dahlman			
2018-2021	Dawn Grimm			

Kalifornsky Beach Elementary				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2013	Melissa Linton		2009-2013	Jennifer Dowd
2013-2019	Nate Crabtree			
2019-2021	Janae Van Slyke		2019-2021	Elizabeth Kvamme

School Administrators 2009-2021 (Continued)

Kenai Alternative High			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2021	Loren Reese		

Kenai Central High			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2019	Alan Fields		2009-2014 Jim Beeson
2019-2021	Briana Randle		2014-2019 Briana Randle
			2019-2021 Will Chervenak

Kenai Middle			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2011	Paul Sorenson		2009-2011 Vaughn Dosko
2011-2021	Vaughn Dosko		2011-2021 Dan Beck

Marathon School			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
Melissa Linton	2017-2021		

McNeil Canyon Elementary			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2021	Pete Swanson		

Moose Pass			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2011	Jim Dawson		
2011-2015	Jason Bickling		
2015-2017	Andy Rothenberger		
2017-2021	Doug Hayman		

School Administrators 2009-2021 (Continued)

Mt. View Elementary			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2011	John Cook		2009-2011 Teri Diamond
2011-2014	Norma Holmgaard		2011-2012 Michael Hanson
2014-2021	Karl Kircher		2012-2014 Karl Kircher
			2014-2015 William Withrow
			2015-2017 John DeVolld
			2017-2019 Jenna Fabian

Nanwalek			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2012	Scott Handley		
2012-2018	Nancy Kleine		
2018-2021	Michael Crain		

Nikiski Middle/High			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2011	John O'Brien		2009-2012 Dan Carstens
2011-2021	Dan Carstens		2012-2019 Shane Bostic

Nikiski North Star Elementary			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2010	Lori Manion		
2010-2013	Lisa Callahan		
2013-2021	Margaret Gilman		

Nikolaevsk			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2021	Mike Sellers		

Ninilchik			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2011	Terry Martin		
2011-2021	Jeff Ambrosier		

School Administrators 2009-2021 (Continued)

Paul Banks Elementary			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2013	Benny Abraham		
2013-2021	Eric Pederson		

Port Graham			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2010	Sheryl Hingley		
2010-2011	Daniel Hill		
2011-2013	Sheryl Hingley		
2013-2018	Nancy Kleine		
2018-2019	Josh Hinds		
2019-2021	Michael Crain		

Razdolna			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2010	Doug Waclawski		
2010-2018	Tim Whip		
2018-2021	Greg Melvin		

Redoubt Elementary			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2015	John Pothast		2012-2013 Jen Dowd
2015-2021	William Withrow		

River City Academy			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2010	Greg Wilbanks		
2010-2021	Dawn Edwards-Smith		

Seward Elementary			
Years	Principal		Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2017	David Kingsland		
2017-2021	Alan Haskins		



School Administrators 2009-2021 (Continued)

Seward High				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2021	Trevan Walker			

Seward Middle				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2010	John Hersrud		209-2021	
2010-2015	Jason Bickling			
2015-2017	Andy Rothenberger			
2017-2019	Jenny Martin			
2019-2021	Trevan Walker			

Skyview High				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2015	Randy Neill		2009-2011	Curt Schmidt
			2011-2013	Johnnie Cotton
<i>This school closed in June 2014.</i>				

Skyview Middle				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2014-2021	Sarge Truesdell		2014-2015	Tony Graham
			2015-2021	Jill DuFloth
<i>This school opened the Fall of 2014 in the previous Skyview High School facility.</i>				

Soldotna Elementary				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2011	Carolyn Cannava			
2011-2016	Teri Diamond			
2016-2021	Austin Stevenson			

Soldotna High				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2015	Todd Syverson		2009-2014	Tony Graham
2015-2021	Tony Graham		2014-2020	Randy Neill
			2020-2021	Tabitha Blades

School Administrators 2009-2021 (Continued)

Soldotna Middle				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2011	Sharon Moock		2009-2011	Sarge Truesdell
2011-2014	Sarge Truesdell		2011-2014	Curt Schmidt
<i>This school was closed June 2014.</i>				

Soldotna Montessori				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2017	Mo Sanders			
2017-2021	John DeVolld			

Soldotna Prep				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2014-2019	Curt Schmidt			
<i>This school was opened the Fall of 2014 in the previous Soldotna Middle School facility</i>				
<i>This school was closed June 2019.</i>				

Sterling Elementary				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2013	Christine Ermold			
2013-2021	Denise Kelly			

Susan B. English				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2013	Sheryl Hingley		2019-2021	Jeff Ambrosier
2013-2014	Judy Standafer			
2014-2017	Alan Haskins			
2017-2019	Josh Hinds			

Tebughna				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2010	Donald Frashier			
2010-2015	Marilyn Johnson			
2015-2016	Richard Breske			
2016-2018	Pam Potter			
2018-2019	Michael Allen			
2019-2021	Pam Potter			

School Administrators 2009-2021 (Continued)

Tustumena Elementary				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2012	Bob VanDerwege			
2013-2021	Doug Hayman			

Voznesenka				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2011	Alex Trout			
2011-2021	Michael Wojciak			

West Homer Elementary				
Years	Principal		Years	Asst./Vice Principal
2009-2010	John Hurley			
2011-2016	Ray Marshall			
2016-2021	Eric Waltenbaugh			



Section 4

Steve Atwater 2009-2014

## Atwater years

Dr. Steve Atwater was hired as superintendent of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District for the 2009-10 school year. This was after successfully transitioning to the district in 2008-09 as the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction in KPBSD from his role as Superintendent from the Lake and Peninsula School District. His tenure as superintendent began the transition from Dr. Donna Peterson who held the superintendent's position for 10 years.

Dr. Atwater led the district toward a comprehensive instructional approach that included timely and accurate assessments to support collaborative efforts by school staff. The development of a long-term strategic plan was also supported these efforts through a focus on Academic Success, Organizational Excellence and Community/Family Engagement. The approach to strategic planning included refined quality processes that solicited a wide variety of input from all stakeholders. This approach was new to the district and allowed for a comprehensive plan that shifted the focus of instruction to the individual student in a research-based manner.

The district experienced great success and significant changes during Dr. Atwater's years. Dr. Atwater was recognized as the Alaska Superintendent of the Year in 2013 for all of his improvement efforts in KPBSD. AS the strategic plan was implemented, the district experienced growth in the graduation rate crossing the 80% mark for the first time. The district was able to implement early release days for students 6 times throughout the 2012-13 school year to provide the necessary time for staff to collaborate. This innovative practice allowed a systematic approach to collaborative practices to benefit overall student learning. The district also celebrated 50 years in existence that had grown to 44 schools serving 8,800 students.

Some other significant events in KPBSD included the reconfiguration of the Soldotna area secondary schools. Instead of 2 high schools serving the area, an innovative approach to supporting 9<sup>th</sup> graders was implemented through a "freshmen house" concept. Skyview was reconfigured to the area's middle school serving grades 7 and 8, the original Soldotna Middle school became the 9<sup>th</sup> grade school while Soldotna High School was reconfigured to serve grades 10-12. Additional academic opportunities were generated for the secondary students in the Soldotna area because of this reconfiguration.

After a focus on instruction and organizational excellence in KPBSD, Dr. Atwater retired in the fall of 2014. He provided a new perspective on improvement that benefited all schools in the district and he definitely left the district better than he found it.

Section 5

Sean Dusek 2014-2019

## Dusek years

Sean Dusek assumed the role of Superintendent of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District as an interim in the fall of 2014 and on a permanent basis starting in the fall of 2015. He held the role of Assistant Superintendent of Instruction during Dr. Atwater's tenure and held a number of positions in KPBSD throughout his entire career, which began at Skyview High School in 1993 as a math teacher. This background allowed Mr. Dusek to be well grounded in the history of KPBSD and to work with some of the most innovative leaders KPBSD has ever known.

Mr. Dusek was able to see the completion of Dr. Atwater's strategic plan that supported efforts in the next steps to move KPBSD into the world of personalization of student learning that promoted opportunities for students 24/7. Distance education, internships, concurrent credit and personalized learning were the hallmarks of this era that sets the stage for performance-based learning that is based on learning growth of the individual student, not seat-time in a classroom.

The district continued to experience success in a number of areas academically including significant gains in graduation rate. The district crossed the mid-80% range during this time, primarily due to improvements with Alaska Native students. This is a result of an effort to ensure achievement gaps were eliminated through designated oversight that promoted collaboration with key stakeholders and community organizations. An emphasis on bringing in and promoting outside cultural opportunities for all students also positively impacted the closing of student achievement gaps.

The strategic plan emphasized a rigorous curriculum, a relevant learning experience and a highly responsive learning environment to ensure those behind were supported and those ahead were challenged. The basis of the entire instructional model was that of high quality, positive student relationships with staff. Every student must have an adult advocate that cares about them as a person and can support them through their school-age challenges. Kids truly come first.

Some events that impacted the school district during this time were significant state budget issues, a very strong earthquake that impacted the Southcentral region, the hopes of a natural gas pipeline from the North Slope with a terminus on the Kenai Peninsula and a plethora of state awards for staff and students.

The budget issue has had the most significant impact on the district that has become a huge challenge. When the district experienced forward funding in the late 2000's programs were implemented that bore academic fruit over many years since. At this time, significant reductions are being made in KPBSD (starting at the district level) that has included school consolidation (with several more on the horizon), increased pupil-teacher ratios and a reduction in programs. While there are several challenges, the district has become more efficient through technology, better utilization of district staff, more community partnerships to allow for learning outside of the classroom and a view toward maximizing space in our existing schools.



Mr. Dusek was able to advance the concept of meeting the needs of the individual child that expanded learning opportunities beyond the classroom. The approach of relationships first has become a focal point at all of the schools and will drive improvements in the foreseeable future.



Section 6

John O'Brien 2019-2021

## O'Brien years

In March of 2019, after an unsuccessful superintendent search the school board asked Assistant Superintendent, Mr. John O'Brien to serve as the interim superintendent of the district for the 2019-2020 school year. With excellent people and students, the district continued to move forward under steady and capable leadership. At that time, Mr. O'Brien was the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction and had not applied for the superintendency. The Board of Education members were aware of Mr. O'Brien's intention to retire from Alaska. During the 2019-2020 school year the Board of Education was not yet ready to undertake another superintendent search, and offered Mr. O'Brien the invitation to remain on as superintendent for an additional year (2020-2021).

Education and the world were changing rapidly. The 2019-2020 school year quickly began with the worst wildfires in over a decade. The Sterling and Cooper Landing areas were particularly hard hit by these wildfires and impacted by severe smoke. At times, the entire corridor between Sterling and Cooper Landing were cut off. These severe wildfires would burn until snow fell in the Fall of 2019 disrupting travel for itinerant staff, athletics, and impacting outdoor activities including recess with poor air quality. In the Fall of 2019 at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour a strike was averted and a long and bitter labor standstill was finally settled with the ratification of new three year negotiated agreements that would run through June 30 , 2021.

Continued work and progress was made on realizing the goals set forth in the KPBSD five-year, 2017-2022 Strategic Plan. Personalizing the learning for students continues to be the top instructional priority along with transforming the educational landscape to ensure that KPBSD graduates are empowered to positively shape their futures. Guiding principles were established so that every KPBSD student will graduate prepared for their future. A strong, positive relationship with all students is the foundation of a quality education in KPBSD. A KPBSD diploma guarantees a student is ready for life, college, and career.

In January of 2020 hints of a deadly virus began making the news from the Chinese city of Wuhan. Early 2020 ushered in a global pandemic brought on by the COVID-19 virus. In March of 2020, Governor Mike Dunlevey closed all Alaska schools to in-person learning through an executive order, forcing schools statewide to pivot to online/remote learning in a matter of weeks. During this COVID-19 global pandemic millions of people perished and all facets of life and society around the globe, in the United States, and Alaska came to a standstill. Social distancing, quarantines, and mitigations became the necessary norm. During the worst periods of the pandemic, hospitals became inundated with patients as ICU wards and hospital rooms filled. Business, school, and religious organizations were all forced to close temporarily and/or significantly limit capacity. Medical experts, epidemiologists, researchers, and scientists raced to learn more about the COVID-19 virus and the development of a vaccine.

The pandemic continued on into the 2020-2021 school year. During this time KPBSD schools were challenged with sporadic closures forcing instruction to move to remote

learning for the entire second quarter of the school year. In the spring of 2021 as vaccines were made available numbers of cases significantly came down allowing schools to remain open until the close of the school year with little interruptions.

Emerging from this global pandemic, KPBSD stands ready to meet the challenges and continue to provide its students with a world-class education and to prepare them for their futures.



Section 6

Looking Forward

**CONCLUSION**

Looking forward, the next decade will be challenging and exciting. The Board of Education hired Assistant Superintendent Clayton Holland to take over as Superintendent of Schools starting July 1, 2021 for the 2021-2022 school year.