

# ALASBO News Link...



February 2017

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*ALASBO News Link*  
is published for the members of the Alaska  
Association of School Business Officials  
and its affiliate members.

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the above address.*

## **President's Message**

*Holly Holman, Unalaska City School District*

Once again, the ALASBO annual conference was a huge success! I'm always thankful to come back to my district with new information, as there is so much to learn at the conference, no matter how many years I have worked in school business. I want to sincerely thank all the presenters that put in so many hours preparing their excellent presentations. I am so impressed at the wealth of knowledge in our membership, and how willing everyone is to give back to ALASBO and spend time preparing and presenting at the conference. I know it is not always easy to present to one's peers!

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Thanks also to our vendors and other partners that give their time presenting and supporting our conference with the vendor booths and other sponsorships. Thank you for filling out the annual conference survey! This is invaluable information that is tabulated and used to plan for next year's conference. Your input is valued and will be used during Summer Leadership when next year's conference is being developed.

Thank you to all board members, past and present, for **Stepping up the Challenge** – Mark Vink's theme for the 2016 conference! Our 2016 board members were Mark Vink, Robin Mullins, Cassee Olin, Carl Horn, Edith Hildebrand, Karen Quitslund, Judy Hankla, Melissa Bell, Nichole Wood, Jenny Myhand (Krystian Roehl latter part of the year) and Holly Holman. Our committee members and committee chairs deserve a big thank you also: Karen Quitslund – Audit; Dave Jones – Legislative; Robin Mullins – Nominations and Professional Development; Laurie Olson – Bylaws; Yodean Armour – Services; and Amy Lujan – Sponsorships. A heartfelt thank you to our Executive Director, Amy Lujan, for everything she does, not only during the conference, but all year long! And last but not least, thank you to each and every one of our ALASBO members for your dedication to your jobs and Alaska's Youth!

The first event on the 2017 ALASBO Calendar was the **ASBO Executive Leadership Forum** on February 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup>, held in Miami this year. Amy Lujan, Cassee Olin, Tammy White and I attended this intensive two and a half day program entitled Response-Ready Leadership. I attended last year for the first time and was very impressed with the program! Cassee, Amy and I participated in the Strategic Governance workshop held on Thursday. Then on Friday and Saturday we had excellent presentations by leading management trainers. See below in this newsletter and future editions for articles about the contents of these sessions!

The next event on the 2017 calendar to consider attending is our **Legislative Fly-In**, which will be held April 8-11. This will be the second year that ALASBO and ACSA have had a joint fly-in. There will be several events that will be held jointly, as well as ALASBO's traditional visits to many legislators on our own, so please consider attending this important event. With the fiscal crisis upon us, it is more important than ever to pull together to make our voices heard with our legislators.

**Summer Leadership** will be held in Sitka, July 21-23! Please plan on attending this important event where planning for the 2017 ALASBO conference will begin. A leadership activity will also be held. This is open to all members, and if you are a first-time attendee, you can apply for a Swarner grant to support your costs. Our sponsors pay for the lodging and meals for all the attendees, so the transportation is the only item you need to cover.

The **ASBO International Annual Conference** will be held in Denver, September 22-25. This gathering of school business officials from around the world is an event not to miss! The professional development opportunities are vast, and the networking is unbeatable. The Freeman grant is available to support attendance this conference, sponsored by CORE. The simple application is available on our website and is due by February 28:

<http://www.alasbo.org/grants-scholarships/>

Finally, our year is capped off with our annual conference held in December! Our conference this year will be held December 3-6, 2017. The theme of the 2017 conference is **ALASBO - Pulling Together for Alaska's Youth**. That's what our ALASBO family has always done – pull together! I am so impressed by every one of you and am inspired by the way the people that make up this organization pull together and never forget the bottom line – the youth that we serve.



*Our first-ever Ugly Holiday Sweater contest was a highlight of this year's annual conference!*

**Plan to attend the Legislative Fly-In:**

April 8-11, 2017 in Juneau

More info and registration here:

<https://www.regonline.com/ACSAFlyin17>

## Executive Director's Message

Amy Lujan, Executive Director

President Holly Holman has provided an enthusiastic update of our past and future events! I hope you will be able to participate.

Here in Juneau, we're so aware that the **Legislature** is in session! Be sure to check out the on-going dialogue and great resources – on legislative activity and other topics in Ed Connector, if you haven't already ([www.edconnector.org](http://www.edconnector.org)). Lora Jorgensen has been doing a great job posting new items, as well as other users.

Thanks so much to everyone for responding quickly to requests for information to provide to legislators. We need to be part of the dialogue as policy and funding decisions are made. Please make plans to attend the **Legislative Fly-In**, April 8-11. The link for additional info and registration is on page 2 of this newsletter and on the Events page of our website.

Also, I want to draw your attention to the **resources on our website**, particularly the presentations from our December conference. Check out Resources-Information Library. You can also do a search on our site when you're investigating a topic – click on the spyglass! Under Resources-Links, you'll find sites others have found useful. I especially recommend the Pennsylvania ASBO Electronic Resource Center, another searchable database of thousands of documents used by school districts across the country: <http://pasboerc.org>. Don't spend time re-inventing the wheel!

If you have questions about any ALASBO program, please do not hesitate to contact me at [alasbo@gci.net](mailto:alasbo@gci.net), or 907-723-7415. You'll also find useful information at: [www.alasbo.org](http://www.alasbo.org).

### Guess WHO...

...was featured in the January ASBO International online newsletter and on their website??? Our own President Holly Holman! You can read the profile on [www.asbointl.org](http://www.asbointl.org), under Membership-Member Spotlight. Click on Holly's name on the left side of the page.

## Kim Johnson Named ALASBO School Business Official of the Year

Congratulation to Kim Johnson, Business Manager at Delta/Greely School District who was named the Alaska School Business Official of the Year at ALASBO's December 2016 annual conference in Anchorage. Candidates for this prestigious award are nominated by their colleagues within the Alaska school business profession. Annually, a panel of previous recipients selects a deserving individual from the nominees submitted based upon their recognized outstanding service, innovative plan design and implementation, and the use of exemplary business practices within school business management.

The award has been sponsored for the past eighteen years by Penair. The recipient receives roundtrip travel certificates, a check for \$500 and an engraved plaque.



THE SPIRIT OF ALASKA

Kim Johnson's superintendent and board president praised her character and ethical standing. Her sound financial management has enabled the district to improve its financial position, while improving services to employees and increasing public understanding of the district's finances. She sets high expectations for herself and others and is also active as a community volunteer.

Congratulations, Kim on this well deserved honor! **We are also pleased that Kim has accepted an appointment to serve as ALASBO Treasurer.**

Nominations for the 2017 SBO of the Year award will be accepted next fall with an October 31 deadline. Nominations are accepted from ALASBO members, immediate supervisors and local board of education members. Application forms are available on our website, [www.alasbo.org](http://www.alasbo.org), under Resources-Awards.

## Why are Internal Controls So Important?

Alicia Campbell, Matsu School District

The practice of observing internal controls is a fundamental part of any successful Business Department. Internal controls in your school district should be designed to:

- Prevent error and fraud
- Detect error that may have already happened, but before the error is posted to the financials
- Create a segregation of duties to ensure that more than one person is required to complete financial processes
- Reduce risks to your organization

Internal controls are all of the policies and processes that your organization puts in place in order to insure that the financial data provided is accurate and reliable. These policies and processes should be in written form, reviewed, and updated periodically. They should also be on hand so that employees can review them as references. Written internal controls should detail:

- Which employees are to perform which procedures
- Clear segregation of duties
- Procedure detail as intended to be performed
- Timing of when tasks should be completed
- The design and purpose of the procedures, to increase employee understanding of controls in place

Internal controls should help you, not hinder you. The controls help departments stay organized, reduce errors, and prevent fraud. They are also used as tools when assessing job responsibilities. When new employees are hired, written internal controls provide clear direction about procedures and expectations of processes.

Many times, internal control documents map process by transaction cycle. Examples of internal control documents include the process and procedures for:

- Bank Reconciliations
- Purchase Orders
- Cash Disbursement
- Journal Entry
- Time and Effort

I found that it is very helpful to update internal control documents in the early spring, long before the auditors arrive to do field work. The

auditors will be expecting updated documents. Starting the review process in the early spring will allow ample time for all persons involved to review and discuss changes, and then to have document updated to final draft form. I have also found it helpful to have internal control documents in a common format, with common software, so that updating year to year will be less time intensive.



As an example for the benefit of internal controls, I have an experience to share. Our district's cash handling internal control document details the processes and procedures that we use every day to account for revenue receiving in the Accounting Department. Documented as one of the first cash handling steps, one specific person in the Accounting Department is responsible for date stamping revenue received, and then documenting the receipt of the funds. There are other cash handling procedures that involve other employees, but this specific procedure outlines my example and the value of everyday of internal control practices.

In a discussion about donations received, it was brought to someone's attention that two donation checks had been given to the Accounting Department, both in a manner that wasn't consistent with the regular procedures of all revenue being given to one specific person for receipting/documenting. The Accounting Department could easily identify one of the donations received, but couldn't easily identify that the second check had been received. Because the check was not documented as being received (one of the first steps in the internal control document), Accounting knew that the check did not make it to other Accounting desks that are responsible for the additional cash handling steps. This is because we follow the same processes every day. We could easily rule out all desks, but one. It was discovered that this person left the check in the copy machine.

Following the same processes everyday minimizes errors. If the checks had been submitted to Accounting using the correct process, there would not have been time wasted looking for the check. However, because we do have cash handling procedures in place, it was easy to identify where the check was located.

Resources for internal control best practices can

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be found on the internet. I have found the following sites useful:

- ASBO's Global Network Website - <http://network.asbointl.org/asbointl/home>
- ALASBO Improvement Model- <http://www.alasbo.org/2016/02/13/alasbo-improvement-model-aim/>
- Government Finance Officers Association - <http://www.gfoa.org/>

For small districts with 1-3 person business offices, request the Iowa ASBO Manual on Segregation of Duties for Internal Controls. ALASBO Executive Director can provide this document via email to our members, though we've been asked not to post it on our website. Contact Amy: [alasbo@gci.net](mailto:alasbo@gci.net). This manual is full of excellent suggestions for small districts.

Remember, there is always room for improvement! When weaknesses in internal controls are identified, institute additional controls to strengthen them.

## ALASBO



### Member Spotlight

*Judy Erikson, Haines Borough School District*

#### **Tell us about your school district**

We have an award winning K-12 school district (Nat'l Blue Ribbon Elem 14-15, AK Award HS 14-15, Title I Distinguished Elem 12-13) with a well-trained and dedicated staff who are committed to helping our kids be successful in school and in life. We have a community and a borough that values education and they are fiscally supportive.

#### **How long have you been in school business?**

A total of fifteen years, including my seven years as an elected school board member plus my eight years as the district Business Manager.

#### **How did you get into this business?**

When the previous Business Manager retired, I was the Board Treasurer and the

Business/General Manager of our local public radio station. I applied for the job, as I was local and had experienced with fund accounting and administering state and federal grants as well as lobbying the legislature for funding. I went from a \$400K budget to a \$4M budget and faced a steep learning curve.

#### **What do you like best about your job?**

Knowing that what you do makes a positive difference in the lives of children. Seeing how an exceptional food service program makes not only your district kids ready to learn but helps to ensure a healthy staff and community as well. Recognizing that a clean and healthy environment is important, and that making decisions that are good for children is generally good for the rest of the community.

#### **What advice do you have for those new to school business?**

Join ALASBO for sure to get connected to others in your field, to grow professionally and to be reminded that what you do for your district makes a difference.

#### **How have you benefited from membership in ALASBO?**

Being from a small district, I wear several hats and I have been able to learn all aspects of school business by attending the ALASBO and a few ASBO conferences as well as participating in the SFO webinars. I firmly believe that the US Secretary of Education should have to be an ASBO member!

#### **What do you like to do for fun?**

I enjoy working on household projects, volunteering for my favorite organization hiking and enjoying the stunning scenery that surrounds Haines. I never tire of a beautiful sunrise or sunset with an eagle soaring overhead.

#### **If you could visit any place in the world, where would you go and why?**

I want to visit Ireland and Norway. I am exploring my ancestry and have a diary from the 1860's that tells the story of my family coming to America and what they endured along the way. I want to visit the castles and churches they built.

#### **Tell us something about yourself that most people don't know?**

I am a pool shark and I love classic cars. I enjoy restoring my 1965 Thunderbird that I learned to drive in.

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### What is your proudest accomplishment?

I guess it would be running a successful school bond campaign that led to a \$14 million dollar new elementary school and a remodeled high school. Being involved from concept to completion was an incredible experience that has helped me in numerous ways. I consider myself a lifelong advocate for public education. Personally, raising three beautiful, competent and successful daughters tops the list!



Kodiak staff celebrated recognition for their P-Card program. Would you like to earn cash for your district? Get started at: <http://illinois-pcard.com>

**Send us your pictures** – anytime you're traveling around the district, take a photo for the ALASBO annual meeting slideshow!

Send them to:  
yodean.armour@klawockschool.com

## Mission Focus in the Workplace

Kim Ratz, edited by Amy Lujan

**Editor's note:** Presenter, trainer and former Alaskan educator Kim Ratz was the keynote speaker at the ALASBO conference about 15 years ago. Kim wrote an article in his November newsletter titled "Life After the Election" which generated the most comments he's ever had. He followed up with an article called "Can You Agree to Disagree". The theme of the article is keeping your work team focused on the big picture of your organization's mission, goals and professionalism.

Kim asks, "Can we keep trust at the level needed to work through challenges we face together? Can your organization succeed in its

mission if people decide not to communicate or cooperate with others simply because they disagree on one thing, even if it's a significant difference?" Below is some of the advice Kim has to offer.

The bad news: you can't change anybody. Even holding a staff meeting to announce a new policy or procedure mandating cooperation and communication among people who disagree is not a guarantee it will work. "You can lead a horse to water ..."

The good news: Leaders can "set the table" for people to choose to interact in certain ways, and not interact in ways that are detrimental to the team, once they see the "WIIFM" (What's In It For Me?) to do so. People need to be reminded that their choices/actions have natural and/or unintended consequences, and the importance of mission, outcomes and each person's role and responsibility towards those ends. You need to incentivize/motivate them to choose to do their best, even in times of differing perspectives and conflict.

For example, many leaders are intentional about acknowledging the differences among people on a team, affirming that everyone has opinions, beliefs and perspectives, and that it's everyone's right to have your own opinions. These leaders are also intentional when they express the expectation that people will be a professional when at work, that people should expect to encounter differences ranging from the small, trivial or insignificant to large, complicated and profoundly emotional, and that professionals are expected to keep their focus on mission achievement and to work through challenges and divergent opinions.

And they show this in action by **listening** to others, "mirroring" or paraphrasing comments so people know they've been heard. This validates the other person's right to have their opinion/perspective, and to share it. This in turn helps you better understand where they are coming from, and then you can decide how you want to proceed from there. Most importantly, by doing this you demonstrate how to **not** close the door to further discussion or other possibilities right from the outset because of your own refusal or inability to deal with a perspective other than your own.

These leaders also provide training to help their team members be competent and confident in how to use critical interpersonal skills, such as

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giving and receiving feedback, flexing your own style when interacting with someone using a different communication style, dealing with angry people, and conflict resolution.

Listening is one of many specific skills I cover in my presentations because I think it's increasingly important in today's world. Listening doesn't mean just not talking while the other person is talking, while you're thinking about what you're going to say next. It means putting other thoughts and prejudices aside and really focusing to hear what the person is saying, trying to not let your own "filters" lead you to misunderstand what you are hearing. This is really hard to do sometimes, and requires a constant and concerted effort.



The next thing a good listener does is to "mirror" or paraphrase what you heard to check

for accuracy, and demonstrate that you're trying to understand what they're saying. Mirroring is a great method, because you repeat word-for-word what you heard; paraphrasing works to summarize longer statements. Both start with the phrase: "What I heard you say is: \_\_\_\_." Both methods help minimize the chance your filters amended what you heard, because if you're altering what they said they'll tell you. And if you can acknowledge accurately what they said (and that is not the same as agreeing), they will at least appreciate that you listened. It's actually quite refreshing how well this works when people feel like you're actually listening to them, not trying to one-up or put-down. And – it's also your best chance that they will listen to you, and possibly be influenced by what they hear ...

Because if you don't do these things, don't be surprised that the conversation feels "stuck" at the beginning; if you don't think someone hears you it's just harder to keep talking. And how can you expect them to listen like this to you if you don't do it first.

Please don't wait for your team to be paralyzed in disagreement (or worse), and for your level and quality of service to be diminished! Have the courageous conversations, express the expectations, set your group norms, do the capacity building and training in interpersonal and communication skills, and give people the

permission and power to work through the disagreements, be part of a high-performing team, and achieve your mission! And along the way, maybe you'll help infuse some much-needed civility so that more people are more able to have more conversations about the things that are important in life, even when we see things differently, and we can create more solutions than stress ...



## Unique Training During ASBO's Executive Leadership Forum

*Amy Lujan, Executive Director*

As ALASBO's Executive Director, I have had the privilege of attending numerous ASBO meetings. ASBO's February Executive Leadership Forum (ELF) has become my favorite meeting of the year, due to the unique and diverse training opportunities provided since the leadership meeting was reformatted in 2010.



*Holly Holman, Amy Lujan and Cassee Olin participated in ASBO's Strategic Governance training*

This year, President Holly Holman, President Elect Cassee Olin and I once again attended the Strategic Governance pre-conference session, which is a helpful session for us to "get our heads together" regarding the upcoming year leading ALASBO. This was followed by the

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main conference sessions on Friday and Saturday, which were all top-quality and unique, as I've come to expect. ALASBO Honorary Member Tammy White joined us for the main conference.

I'd like to focus this article on our Saturday morning training with Afterburner, a consultant group of former military leaders who specialize in Flawless Execution tools. I was skeptical at first about how tools used by fighter pilots could translate to school business, but I found their approach and patience with helping us apply these concepts to our issues to be fascinating.

The Afterburner approach involves four stages to Flawless Execution: PLAN – BRIEF - EXECUTE – DEBRIEF. The entire process should be open and safe for expression of ideas and consensus building, rather than seeking artificial harmony.

**PLAN** - We spent the most time on this crucial stage, which involves six subparts:

- 1) **Determine the Mission Objective**, which should be clear, measurable and achievable. It is important to keep a focus on the Mission Objective throughout the process. It was recommended that we limit the scope of a single Mission Objective. For example, rather than trying to modernize all district buildings, focus planning on the buildings one at a time.
- 2) **Identify Threats** – These are the obstacles to success, which may be internal and external, as well as controllable and uncontrollable.
- 3) **Identify Available and Required Resources** – These may include people, funding and systems, to name a few, and they will help mitigate threats. Match the threats identified in subpart 2 to the resources in subpart 3.
- 4) **Evaluate Lessons Learned** – This step involves consideration of past experiences, both within your team and from outside groups. For example, school business leaders would want to ask their ALASBO and ASBO peers about similar projects they've completed successfully and lessons learned.
- 5) **Develop a Course of Action** – Using the information gathered in the previous steps, team brainstorming is used to develop a

detailed plan, identifying who-what-when. At this point, it is recommended that a "Red Team" come in to provide non-judgmental suggestions, in the format: "Have you thought about X." Use of the Red Team was modeled during the training, and it was a new idea for me. Next, the detailed Course of Action is finalized.

- 6) **Plan for Contingencies** – As a final step in the planning process, the team must consider what could go wrong, particularly from uncontrollable threats. If the plan starts to derail, what are the trigger points that will lead to specific responses? What if lightning strikes the dog that ate my homework? The response to certain triggers may include cancelling the mission altogether. Detailed preparation during subparts 5 and 6 will allow greater flexibility during the Execution stage.

**BRIEF** – During this stage, the Mission Objective and details of the plan are reviewed with all participants who have roles and responsibilities. This includes specific action steps and the plan for contingencies. Dates for "X-Gap" meetings to review progress during the Execute stage should be set, as well as a tentative date for the Debrief meeting.

**EXECUTE** – We spent the least time on this stage, and the Afterburner team had more to offer here that would have been covered in a



longer session. Once concept I found useful is the idea of minimizing **Task Saturation**. Clearly, virtually all of us struggle with managing our workload, balancing between focusing on

a single project and keeping multiple "balls in the air". We risk either responding to every stimulus in our cluttered media environment and making little progress on our main project, or becoming overly "channeled" on one priority, losing site of other important indicators. The danger of over-channelization was vividly illustrated by the example of Eastern flight #401 from the 1970's, where pilots focused on a burned-out dashboard light and lost track of the fact that autopilot had accidentally been turned off and they were about to crash into the ground; many lives were lost!

The Afterburner team suggests dealing with

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Task Saturation and focus by consciously identifying a primary project for a given work period, but also identifying other key indicators to keep an eye on. The illustration of this concept was given of a pilot focusing on a dashboard, which includes one large indicator gage and several smaller ones. The school business official, as the pilot, is focusing on the large gage, which is the primary mission (project) of the day. However, the smaller gages might relate to other key priorities that must be addressed, such as checking email periodically for the latest feedback on another key project, allocating time to respond to messages,



scheduling tasks, and even addressing personal needs like checking on a sick child at home. It's important to be deliberate about the use of time, our most critical and restricted asset when dealing with Task Saturation!

**DEBRIEF** – This is probably the most frequently skipped part of the planning and execution process. Most training participants were surprised to learn that elite flying groups, such as the Blue Angels consider the Debrief one of the most important processes! Consider that Blue Angel pilots perform high-risk maneuvers in the air daily, in training and in hundreds of shows annually. The Debrief after each training or show provides an opportunity to talk honestly about what went right and what went wrong, with the goal being to move the team toward future flawless (and super-safe!) execution of maneuvers in the air. Names and ranks are left at the door, and the focus of the discussion is on applying lessons learned to the future. The leader promotes an honest debrief by modeling vulnerability.

During the training, we each applied the planning process to a project we're working on. With the ALASBO team's help, I developed a plan I've been working on with our vendors and Board to change our vendor trade-show, which may result in a one-day vendor trade show in December 2017 and other changes based on participant feedback. The Mission Objective we identified: optimize our trade show to provide improved professional development opportunities and increase member participation in all parts of our conference. I'll be continuing to develop this plan over the course of the year, hopefully resulting in Flawless Execution!

**Congrats to our Newest Honorary Member: December retiree...ALASBO 2015 President...ALASBO 2016 School Business Official of the Year – Laurie Olson!**

## ALASBO 2017 Liaison and Mentor Assignments

*Liaison/Mentor match-up's are a two-way street; contact your match today!*

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**Upcoming Events**

- *Legislative Fly-In: April 8-11, Juneau*
- *ALASBO Leadership: July 21-23, Sitka*

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**Caleb Rehfeld, School Finance Acctg Spec**

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