

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

350 East Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, Alaska 99645 - 907-861-8683

Michael Bowles, District 1
Stephanie Nowers, District 2
Dee McKee, District 3
Maxwell Sumner, District 4
Bill Gamble, District 5
Dmitri Fonov, District 6
Ron Bernier, District 7



Thomas Bergey, District 1
Kendal Kruse, District 2
Kathryn McCollum, District 3
Andrew Shane, District 4
Brooks Pitcher, District 5
Ole Larson, District 6
Lorie Colee, District 7

MEETING MINUTES

ASSEMBLY CHAMBERS

350 EAST DAHLIA AVENUE, PALMER

JOINT ASSEMBLY/SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

6:00 PM

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2025

I. CALL TO ORDER

The Joint Assembly/School Board meeting was held on Tuesday, December 9, 2025, at the Borough Assembly Chambers, 350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, Alaska. The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Mayor Edna DeVries.

II. ASSEMBLY ROLL CALL

Present: 5 - Assemblymember Michael Bowles, Assemblymember Stephanie Nowers, Assemblymember Dee McKee, Assemblymember Maxwell Sumner, and Assemblymember Dmitri Fonov

Excused: 1 - Assemblymember Bill Gamble

Telephonic: 1 - Assemblymember Ron Bernier

SCHOOL BOARD ROLL CALL

Present: School Board Member Thomas Bergey, School Board Member Kendal Kruse, School Board President Kathy McCollum, School Board Member Ole Larson, and School Board Member Lorie Colee.

Excused: School Board Member Brooks Pitcher

Telephonic: School Board Member Andrew Shane (entered at 6:06 p.m.)

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved as presented without objection.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The pledge of allegiance was led by School Board President Kathy McCollum.

Mike Brown, Borough Manager, read the recent wind disaster declaration into the record. Spoke to the process of how disaster declarations work.

V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (Three Minutes Per Person.)

The following person spoke to the need for more diversity on State and Borough Board: Scott Lindlboom.

The following person spoke in support of civil discourse and spoke to negative comments made about her online: Jackie Goforth.

The following persons opined that the School Board should not have removed the land acknowledgement from School Board meetings: Niasasluq King and Kassacuar Agnes Beans.

The following person spoke to concerns regarding a school specific policy at Palmer High School that is preventing his son from walking with his graduating class and requested that the policy be rescinded: Jason Ortiz, speaking as a private citizen.

The following person spoke in support of reinstating the land acknowledgment at School Board meetings, in support of rescinding a policy that prevents a child from participating in their graduation, and in opposition to the Mayor cutting off public testimony of a speaker: Jessica Clayton.

VI. JOINT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A. Annual Budget, Preliminary Discussion; State Legislative Action Needed (MSB 2.12.075(A))

[25-189](#)

School District Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget

Mayor DeVries noted that School Board Member Ole Larson had to depart the meeting early and invited him to put his comments regarding the School District's preliminary budget into the record.

School Board Member Ole Larson read his comments regarding the preliminary budget into the record.

Katie Gardner, Deputy Superintendent for Business and Operations and Dr. Randy Traini, School District Superintendent, reported on the School District's preliminary Fiscal Year 2027 Budget.

VII. MAYOR, ASSEMBLY, SCHOOL BOARD, AND STAFF COMMENTS

School Board Member Shane spoke to the importance of having accurate and timely information moving forward so that both bodies can make informed decisions.

School Board Member Bergey emphasized the need to continue the dialogue between the bodies. Spoke to the potential consolidation of services, noting that if consolidation is feasible it must be done correctly and methodically. Commented on the pace at which government moves and encouraged the body to explore opportunities to share expenses. Stated that he is not comfortable shifting costs from one body to another. Wished everyone a safe drive home.

School Board Member Colee spoke to the platform she ran on during her election to the School Board. Thanked the public for providing testimony. Spoke to her appreciation for the Assembly and School Board working collaboratively in the best interests of children.

School Board Member Kruse spoke in appreciation of the hard work staff put into organizing the meeting. Stated that she values the Joint Assembly/School Board Committees and looks forward to continued collaboration for the benefit of residents, with a focus on funding education while keeping property taxes low.

Dr. Traini noted that funding is complex. Spoke in appreciation of the Assembly and School Board working together to address funding challenges.

School Board President McCollum expressed appreciation for the significant effort involved in preparing the budget and noted that the School Board has substantial work ahead. Thanked the Assembly and School Board for collaborating to remain fiscally responsible. Thanked Dr. Traini and Ms. Gardner for their work in reducing health insurance costs for the School District, resulting in more affordable options for employees. Stated that she is excited to explore the potential consolidation of health insurance between the Borough and the School District, noting that the School District's larger participant pool could benefit the Borough. Spoke to the importance of promoting local online learning through the Mat-Su Borough School District and expressed appreciation for Public Information Officer John Notestine's efforts in that area. Stated that she enjoys joint meetings.

Assemblymember Bernier thanked everyone for attending the meeting and asked whether it might be possible to offer some form of property tax credit.

Mr. Spiropoulos responded that the question was broad and asked Assemblymember Bernier to provide additional specificity.

Assemblymember Bernier clarified that he was referring to a potential property tax incentive connected to local online learning and student enrollment that might attract volunteers to school campuses and reduce budget impacts. Spoke to reasons he believes parents choose home school options. Said a prayer.

Assemblymember McKee referenced an old saying that you cannot solve problems by throwing money at them unless it is someone else's money. Spoke to the need to find viable funding solutions. Noted that the Assembly and School Board are aligned and that both bodies care deeply about children. Opined that the school-specific policy preventing a student from walking with his graduating class should be rescinded, noting that graduation is a significant milestone.

Assemblymember Nowers expressed appreciation for the dialogue and stated that the Assembly and School Board have historically worked well together and that she hopes this collaboration continues. Thanked the School District Administration for the work they do to address challenges. Spoke to the possibility of identifying creative uses for partially empty schools to benefit the community. Stated that she agrees with Assemblymember McKee that the policy preventing a student from walking with his graduating class is overly harsh and should be reconsidered. Spoke in support of reinstating the land acknowledgement at School Board meetings.

Assemblymember Bowles commended the School Board for its decision to discontinue land acknowledgements at School Board meetings. Spoke to his appreciation of the School District's standing as number one in education and emphasized the importance of well-educated students for the future. Noted that funding solutions exist and encouraged both bodies to continue working together to find them.

Assemblymember Fonov stated that audience participation was interesting and opined that there is often extensive discussion about finding solutions, but proposed ideas are frequently deferred. Asserted that graduation is a once-in-a-lifetime event and that the policy preventing a student from walking with his graduating class should be reconsidered. Shared his personal experience of being denied the opportunity to walk with his own class and the lasting impact it had. Requested that at the next meeting, the Manager provide the Assembly with detailed information on where Borough residents affected by windstorm damage can seek assistance. Thanked the

body for the meeting.

Mr. Brown stated that the Borough does not have municipal authority to provide individual assistance. Noted that the Borough's declaration is submitted to the State as part of that process. Explained that the declaration is effective for seven days but may be extended if necessary. Stated that no action is required by the Assembly should it need to be extended.

Mr. Spiropoulos reported that he presented at the Alaska Municipal League conference on the use of artificial intelligence and professional rules applicable to attorneys.

Mayor DeVries opined that the Borough is at the forefront in many areas. Encouraged the Assembly, School Board, and School District Administration to be thoughtful when considering the construction of additional schools. Spoke to having attended numerous grand openings and observed that many were for credit unions and banks. Noted that one credit union offered incentives to attract new members. Spoke to the need to attract students to the Borough's School District and to pursue creative funding solutions.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:49 p.m.