

CANDIDATE:
STEPHEN ATWATER

Stephen G. Atwater



Professional Experience

July 2009- Present. Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Soldotna, AK

Superintendent

Responsible for all functions of the school district

July 2008- June 2009. Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Soldotna, AK

Assistant Superintendent for Instruction

Responsible for instruction, discipline, professional development and pupil services

February 2001-June 2008. Lake & Peninsula School District King Salmon, AK

Superintendent

Responsible for all functions of the school district.

1997- 2001. Lake & Peninsula School District King Salmon, AK

Curriculum Coordinator

Responsible for curriculum, assessments, staff development

1992-97 Lake & Peninsula School District King Salmon, AK

Teacher

Sole secondary teacher and Head Teacher- responsible for school's immediate administrative duties at Pedro Bay and Pilot Point.

1990-92 Lower Yukon School District Emmonak, AK

Teacher

Secondary Generalist

Education

2005-2008 University of Alaska Fairbanks

Ph.D. Educational Leadership

2002-2003 University of Alaska Anchorage

Superintendent's Certificate.

1998-2000 University of Alaska Anchorage

Administrator Certificate (Alaska Type B Certificate)

1988-94 University of Alaska Fairbanks

M.Ed. Curriculum & Instruction

Teachers for Alaska Program to earn teaching certificate

1981-83 University of Pennsylvania Philadelphia, PA

BA Geology, Minor English

Stephen G. Atwater



1978-80 University of Washington Seattle, WA

Other

Commissioner Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission (4/2010-12/2013)

Publications

Atwater, S. (2010). Can We Live Without Federal Involvement? *The School Administrator*, 67, 37.

Courses Taught

Politics of Education, 2011 (University of Alaska Anchorage, MEd Program in Ed Leadership)

Professional Organizations

Alaska Association of School Administrators (Past President, Chair: Superintendent of the Year Committee)

American Association of School Administrators

Horace Mann League

ANCHORAGE SUPERINTENDENT APPLICATION

Name Steve Atwater

Phone Number

Email



Current position Superintendent

Current district/company Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Soldotna, AK

Current city and state Soldotna, AK

Questions

- List all certifications:

Superintendent Certificate- Alaska Type B (administrators certificate) Alaska
Type A (teachers certificate) Alaska

- How did you hear of this opportunity?

media

- If offered this opportunity, when could you start?

July 1, 2012

- Have you ever been removed/fired/asked to resign from a position? If yes, please explain

No

- Current or past ties to, or experience with, Anchorage or Alaska.

I first came to Alaska in 1981. I have been to Anchorage several times per year for a long time. I have more than 20 years experience in education in Alaska. I have family who reside in Anchorage. In sum, I have never lived there but I know it pretty well.

Dr. Steve Atwater's Application for Anchorage School District Superintendent Vacancy

1. Complete work history including salary history for the last ten years including current position.

Year	Position	Salary
2002-03	Superintendent, Lake and Peninsula School District	95,000
2003-04	Superintendent, Lake and Peninsula School District	98,000
2004-05	Superintendent, Lake and Peninsula School District	101,000
2005-06	Superintendent, Lake and Peninsula School District	104,000
2006-07	Superintendent, Lake and Peninsula School District	107,000
2007-08	Superintendent, Lake and Peninsula School District	110,000
2008-09	Asst. Supt. of Instruction, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District	110,000
2009-10	Superintendent, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District	129,000
2010-11	Superintendent, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District	132,125
2011-12	Superintendent, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District	140,328

2. Why are you interested in this position and how does it fit with your long-term career goals?

In 1990, when interviewing for my first teaching position, I was asked about my professional goals. I quickly responded that I aspired to be a superintendent. Although I did not end up working for that Alaskan district, eleven years later I was named superintendent of the Lake and Peninsula School District. After eight years in this position, my career objective to take on a more challenging leadership role led me to the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District where I have served as superintendent for the past three years. Despite being content in my current position, when I learned of the ASD superintendent vacancy I was immediately interested. Besides having several personal reasons for wanting to live in Anchorage (see question 4), I have two professional reasons for wanting to lead ASD.

The first is a professional responsibility that I feel to be the superintendent of the largest district in Alaska. I strongly feel that ASD should be led by someone who knows and understands Alaska and knows and understands education in this state. When I consider this job from these criteria, I feel that I am good match and hence, feel a professional responsibility to be Anchorage's next superintendent. Board President Guess' recent comments at our annual superintendent conference confirmed this sense of responsibility. I know that my experience of leading district level instructional improvements while maintaining good oversight of district functions gives me the credibility to be what is in many ways, the face of education in Alaska.

It is worth consideration that Alaska is so unique that to truly be able to have a superintendent able to hit the ground running will require someone who has the combined experience in both

successfully leading a rural Alaska district predominately comprised of native students as well as one of the top five largest Alaskan districts. I am that person.

My second reason for wanting to be ASD's next leader is because one of my career goals is to lead a large urban district. Although the challenge of being ASD's superintendent is enormous, I feel that I am at a good point in my career to take this on and am confident that I will have success. I feel that my career has prepared me for this next step. Further, I feel that my demonstrated experience leading districts successfully through systematic change places me in good standing to lead ASD to a new level.

In sum, I am interested in the ASD position because I feel that I am the right Alaskan to lead the state's largest district to a new level of excellence and because the position meets my long-term career goal.

3. From what you know about the district, what is the strongest draw to this position?

The Anchorage School District is attractive to me for several reasons. Foremost of these is that I believe that the district is well positioned for significant systemic change. Although ASD is one of the 100 largest districts in the country I believe that it is not so big that it cannot be recognized as world class. My research into ASD reveals a district that has done several things right, but has not yet created an overall systemic framework upon which sustained improvement can be built. Systemic change is a long-term endeavor that requires a staff with a strong moral purpose and good professional capacity. From what I can tell, the ASD staff has both of these traits, hence, my sense that the district is ready for systemic level improvement.

More specifically, the needed systemic change is in the area of instruction. From what I know, the district has been slow to embrace an instructional model and is only now implementing an intervention system that is such an important part of a strong instructional system. It is important to note that systemic instructional changes do not mean eliminating the school choices that ASD parents and students enjoy. It does mean that there is an instructional oversight to ensure a quality system that will meet the leaning needs of advanced students, ELL students or native students transitioning to ASD from rural Alaska. It is imperative then, that ASD is led by a superintendent who understands how to design a system that will meet the diverse learning needs of the ASD students.

The second reason why I am drawn to this position is because of the role that it plays on the state's education stage. I know that I will thrive in this aspect of the position and welcome the opportunity to participate and represent ASD in the myriad of state level obligations. Alaska is a small state that looks to Anchorage for leadership and guidance. I view this role as a bifurcated responsibility between competently leading the district and supporting all of Alaska's students in terms of advocacy and education leadership. This can be achieved through legislative advocacy and by hosting world class professional development opportunities for all districts. I feel that it is important to continue to support and promote the partnership between the urban and rural communities that is focused on quality education for all students. I have successfully operated in both worlds and feel that I can meet these expectations.

Finally, my draw to ASD is the opportunity to help the district become more technologically responsive. For the past several years I have worked to improve the learning environment for our students so that our teachers can more seamlessly integrate technology into instruction. After visiting with those who know ASD, I learned that the implementation of technology across the district is disjointed and in some cases misguided. As the district does more to prepare its students for life after graduation, it is critical that the district have a more unified approach toward implementing technology into instruction rather than one that is site dependent.

4. From what you know about Anchorage and the Alaska community, what is the strongest draw to living in Anchorage?

The following personal background provides some perspective to this response. I first came to Alaska in the summer of 1981 at the end of my sophomore year in college; I was here to find a job that would help me pay my tuition. I flew to Dutch Harbor and was soon working as a deckhand on a crab boat on the Bering Sea. Later that summer I worked as a crew member for a salmon operation and for the next 18 summers worked in the commercial salmon industry in False Pass and Bristol Bay. In 1990 I began teaching school to native children in villages in western and southwestern parts of our state. Throughout this time I regularly passed through Anchorage, but never considered the town a place where I wanted to live. After spending more than 20 years in rural Alaska, I took a job in Soldotna and was immediately pleased with the move and more importantly, realized that I was done with living off the road system. After a few years of living in Soldotna, I recognized that my family was constantly traveling to Anchorage to take advantage of its amenities and that at some point we would end up living there.

I am drawn to Anchorage because of its cultural diversity, and the rare combination of world class recreation, a thriving arts community and a strong business climate. I view all of these as important to a school district. Finally, my family has many relatives living in Anchorage. Being able to see a niece in 20 minutes instead of 3 hours will be a nice change.

5. What is your general philosophy to raising student achievement in K-12 education?

My general philosophy to raising student achievement is to avoid the lure of the quick, programmatic change and instead focus on improving the whole system. Through my experience as a district leader, I know that a slow, deliberate improvement effort will yield long term achievement gains while a programmatic fix will cause the improvement to be overly dependent on personnel and staff training and hence, more difficult to achieve and, or, sustain. Briefly, my philosophy to raising student achievement is based on structuring the school system within a tight-loose-tight paradigm.

When explaining this paradigm, I like to use the image of a square. One side of the square represents the first tight of this equation and can be thought of as that which is typically associated with process management. This tight side of the organization is how the district conducts its daily business and in the case of the Anchorage School District, might be called the Anchorage Way. While many of these processes are not immediate to the classroom, e.g., purchasing, they are an essential component of a high functioning school district. Paying close

attention to this tight side of the square allows a maximum amount of energy to be devoted to instruction.

The other side of the box is the second tight and is defined by the district's instructional outcomes. In sum, this is "the what" of instruction. These outcomes must be agreed upon by the teachers and stakeholders and need to be definitive. That is, a teacher does not have the leeway to skip a few of the outcomes so that for example, a unit on the civil war can run two weeks longer than planned. The outcomes cannot however, be so overwhelming that a teacher does not have the liberty to take advantage of a teachable moment. A necessary component of this is that the district's teacher and principal evaluation tools include a component that is tied to this tight side of the paradigm. I am proud of my district's efforts to develop such evaluation tools for both groups. My district's work in evaluation is viewed by many in the state to be the most tightly aligned with that which is being promoted at the national level.

The loose part of the equation can be thought of the area inside of the square. This is the instruction or how the "what" of the second tight is met. In this system teachers are provided and have input in the development of curriculum, assessments and resources, but are free to teach as they see fit. That is, the district should not mandate that certain pedagogical strategies are used. The district defines the "what," but not the "how." The exception to this is that for continuity, a primary resource that covers several grades needs to remain primary. The important outcome from this loose part of the paradigm is that the pedagogical autonomy will promote intrinsic motivation among the teachers. This is a key component of raising student achievement. A teacher who is provided the proper guidance but allowed the freedom to teach as they see fit will be far more motivated to meet the students' needs than will a teacher who is part of a restrictive environment that suppresses creativity and innovation.

A secondary component of raising student achievement is ensuring a high level of collaboration among teachers and staff. Research shows (Day and Allington, 2011) that the most effective teachers regularly have the opportunity for both formal and informal collegial interaction. Formal collaboration requires a disciplined approach (we use the model that Rick DuFour promotes) while the informal is a casual sharing of ideas that is akin to teachers "talking shop." Both are necessary for instructional reflection and improvement.

ASD has an enormous responsibility to prepare students for tomorrow. I feel that this tight-loose-tight paradigm coupled with collaboration will do just this.

6. Explain your experience with the following either in schools systems or large organizations

Leadership and management- I believe that my experience as superintendent in a small school district (14 schools, 450 students) and a moderate to large Alaska district (44 schools, 9,000 students) prepares me to lead a large organization such as the Anchorage School District. The job of superintendent is daunting, but I have learned that regardless of the district's size, there are certain commonalities of being the leader of an organization. In particular, I know that I have a good grasp of how to motivate a staff and how to follow a situational leadership style that inspires confidence. I am comfortable being in the public's eye but also, when necessary, happy

to take a back seat. I believe that my experience navigating the political nuances of the Kenai Borough and working with our governing assembly will serve me well in Anchorage. I also feel that it is important to note that during my ten years as superintendent I have worked well with my school boards. Last week's announcement that my board on the Kenai is the board of the year is partial evidence of this good working relationship.

Financial management – With more than 10 years of experience as a superintendent I am familiar with the financial oversight of an organization. Although much of this experience was with a relatively small budget when compared to ASD's, my experience with the Lake and Peninsula School District (\$13 million budget) forced me to be more intimate with the financial management of a district than I am today with the larger Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (\$152 million budget). I have a good understanding of the state's funding process and with the specifics of the required local contribution. I have had the good fortune to expand a budget and the misfortune to make cuts to a budget- we are in the midst of doing this right now. As with all leadership activities, I've learned that transparency and good communication are the keys to successful financial management.

Working with community groups in an effective manner- I view this area as one of my strengths and know that I do well with my outreach to the community. I have led umpteen community meetings in both small village gymnasiums and in very large gatherings at schools in my current district. I also make annual presentations to our four chambers of commerce and three rotaries. At the Lake and Peninsula School District I spent a full year working with the fourteen communities to implement a systemic reform. My training in the use of quality processes (through David Langford) has served me well in this leadership role. I have learned to be politically astute within the district's communities and understand the importance of building relationships with a variety of stakeholders.

Working with diverse groups in an effective manner-I believe that my experience working with various native groups on the Alaska Peninsula was good preparation for working with the diverse groups in Anchorage. Although the vast majority of the stakeholders on the Kenai are Caucasian, the level of social diversity is pronounced in our borough. Hence, I have experience working with social groups where poverty is the norm and with groups where nothing less than a college-prep curriculum is accepted.

Working with local and state communities I feel that this area is one of my strengths and that I have a lot of experience working at the state and local level. In sum, this is what I have been doing for the past ten years. At the state level, I have worked directly with legislators and with the Department of Education and Early Development. I understand the Alaskan political culture both locally and at the statewide level and also understand that many things in Alaska are political but politics in Alaska are personal. I am comfortable meeting legislators to advocate for our students' needs. I view this area as a strong positive for me with regard to consideration for this ASD superintendency.

7. What personal qualities do you possess that would make you a good fit for this position?

I believe that I have several personal qualities that help me to be an effective leader. Foremost of these is my social and emotional intelligence. I know that I am adept at getting along well with a variety of people. I know how to effectively interact and communicate with most social groups and am quick to assess and then positively react to a social situation. I have experience working closely with our teacher and support unions and regularly meet with parent groups and students to gain first hand knowledge of issues and concerns at this level. I also feel that my experience working in a variety of jobs in Alaska prior to beginning teaching helps me in this area.

The second personal skill that makes me a good fit for this position is that I have a quiet confidence. I am not a loud, full of bravado type of person but do inspire others to trust and have confidence in me. For example, I am comfortable testifying to a legislative committee, but am not the one who insists on being first to do so.

A third skill that nicely compliments my unassuming nature is that I am hard working. Since starting as a teacher more than twenty years ago, I have embraced my job as an educator as a lifestyle and not one that you leave at the end of the day. I believe that this sense of moral purpose is a critical component of being an effective leader. Finally, I am physically fit and have plenty of energy to get the job done.

8. Based upon the position profile, what aspects of the job do you feel will be the most challenging.

After reviewing the profile's ten criteria, and given what I know about ASD, I view number 4 (experience with diverse student and community populations) as the most challenging to me. My experience living as a minority and teaching and administering to Alaska Native children partially helps me to meet this challenge. But after walking around a mall in Anchorage or looking at the West High Choir at a luncheon, it is obvious that I am not up to speed on what it will take to be effective with all the ethnic groups in Anchorage. Of note is that my graduate work at UAF placed a strong emphasis on cross-cultural communication and education. I am confident I can support or create learning experiences that will bring all students forward. I know that my long commitment to reading education research and insistence on best practice will help me to meet this challenge.

9. What do you think your strengths and weaknesses are for this position? How would you compensate for this weakness?

Strengths: I have a good understanding and experience leading a small and mid-size school district, good understanding of all functions of leading and managing a school district, good experience working with different bargaining units, good experience working at the state level with the legislature and state department of education, excellent understanding of education in Alaska and the challenges faced by Alaska's schools, and finally, an excellent ability to motivate people to improve.

Weaknesses: As mentioned in my response to question 8, I have not worked with immigrant populations that have children who do not have beginning English skills. I worked with students

who are first language Yup'ik but not with students in the early stages of English language acquisition. I am thus at somewhat of a disadvantage in knowing how to effectively support instruction with students in this demographic. A second weakness is that I have not driven a boat this large. While I am confident that I will be able to do so, I know that the learning curve will be steep.

To compensate for these weaknesses will initially require me to rely on the school board and on other administrators in the district. My passing interactions with ASD Board Members has been positive and makes me confident that this needed support will be available. Over the past several years, I've met several ASD administrators and recognize that they will be supportive in this area as well.

10. What are your major accomplishments in education and or organizational management?

My accomplishments in education and organizational management are both large and small. The large accomplishments are with regard to leading systemic change efforts. The smaller accomplishments are working within the system, e.g., overhauling the curriculum development process and revamping our teacher evaluation process.

As mentioned previously, I led the Lake and Peninsula School District from a poorly performing, traditional school district to one that follows a performance-based model where student achievement is above average (for rural Alaska school districts). This was an enormous systemic shift that took several years to implement. It required a complete revision of curriculum as well as a change by all stakeholders in how they view education. I am proud that the roots and structure that were put in place for this system are still strong today, four years after I left. In my current position with the Kenai Peninsula School District (KPBSD), I am leading a more subtle systemic change that is based on a tight-loose-tight organizational structure (see question 5). Early in this process I commissioned a curriculum audit to help guide this change. Today, KPBSD is in a far better place than it was when I arrived. Student scores continue to inch up and the internal processes and policy changes that are now in place ensure the intended systemic impact. A critical part of this change was the development and implementation of new evaluations systems for our principals and teachers. The evaluation systems are far more comprehensive than our previous evaluation tools and will lead to an overall increase in student performance and staff accountability.

In sum, the pressure on principals and teachers to make regular improvements and increase test scores is enormous. My systemic approach to improvement efforts can relieve some of this pressure.

On a personal note the completion of my doctorate in 2008 while working full time was an accomplishment that I am proud of; I am glad that I do not have to repeat this.

References



CANDIDATE DATA DASH

CANDIDATE NAME _____ Stephen G. Atwater _____

SCHOOL NAME AND LOCATION _____ Kenai Peninsula Borough SD – Soldotna, AK _____

CANDIDATE POSITION AT THE SCHOOL/DISTRICT _____ Superintendent _____

DATA	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09
1. ELA/Reading Assess.	88%	90%	89%
2. Math Assess	80%	79%	77%
3. Promotion/Retention	N/A	N/A	N/A
4. AYP not met sub groups	Economically Disadvantaged Students w/Disabilities	Students w/Disabilities	Economically Disadvantaged Students w/Disabilities
5. ACT/SAT High School	N/A	N/A	N/A
6. Attendance Rate	N/A	N/A	N/A
7. Free/Reduced Lunch – number and percent	N/A	41%	30%
8. Demographics – numbers and percent	N/A	9,368	N/A
African American	N/A	94 1%	N/A
Alaskan Native/Native American	N/A	1124 12%	N/A
Asian	N/A	187 2%	N/A
Caucasian	N/A	7401 79%	N/A
Hispanic	N/A	281 3%	N/A
Multiracial	N/A	281 3%	N/A
Male	N/A	N/A	N/A
Female	N/A	N/A	N/A

COMMENTS: