

# **Time for action for educational success**

**by Carole C. Huntington**

One of the responsibilities of the Association of Alaska School Boards presidency is involvement on the national level with the National School Boards Association. I attended the president's retreat in Colorado Springs where 49 state presidents were in attendance. It was a wonderful opportunity to share with and to listen to school board members and also to hear excellent speakers from the business community. The smallness of the group also allowed opportunity for individual dialogue with the speakers. This meeting, more than any other, had a profound impact on me.

We may say "Oh, Alaska doesn't have the problems of the lower 48" but given time, they usually catch up with us. And I believe that, while in Alaska some of the problems aren't as extreme,

we do share many. It's also ironic, and I'm going to say something controversial, with so many issues facing our schools that we spend too much time haggling with or about the so called "right wing extremist" (extremist defined as 'my way or no way') when a coalition of forces is needed to address today's problems. They are too urgent to spend any more time arguing. We need to set aside our differences and agree to heal our communities or we're throwing out the baby with the bath water. Our children and our families are important - we all know that - it's time to reaffirm it - act on it.

Numerous alarming statistics were given by Kati Haycock, Children's Defense Fund, who asked us why are we a nation that puts more effort into protecting animals when our children's spirit, rich or poor, are so impoverished. She asked us not to accept excuses

that parents don't care, that poor children can't master higher content and that minority children can't make it in college, but to change the mentality. Coordinated services do not educate children, classroom instruction does! If we want gains in student achievement we must embrace clear high standards for all children and back it with teacher development and expertise at the building level. Education is the first and last line of defense for our children. We need to renew the belief that education is everybody's job.

School boards must take the leadership and offer a message of hope. Because of lost respect for education we must focus advocacy around student issues first. Change is going to hurt but it will be good for us to look collectively at the long range effect.

I write this with a lot of sweat

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off my brow and with hope. For hope is in the recognition of our problems. It was never brought home to me so clearly that public education is one of our most basic fundamental rights and how I appreciate that right. Alaska can be a role model for effective change. We owe it to our children!

It also became obvious that problems affecting Native Americans need constant advocacy as there are so many other issues that also need the attention of our governing bodies.