

2025 Official Candidate Statement

City & Borough of Juneau, Alaska

Melissa Cullum

Candidate: Board of Education



Name as it appears on the ballot:	Melissa Cullum
Office Sought:	Board of Education
Email Address:	cullum4schoolboard@gmail.com
Website:	melissacullumforschoolboard.com
Length of Residency in Juneau:	17 years
Communities lived in:	Houston, TX 1975-2004 Angoon, AK 2004-2008 Juneau, AK 2008-present
Volunteer:	Chatham School Board Regional Board Member 2008-2011 GSC volunteer 2015-2025 JSC president 2022-present
Special interests:	Enjoying the outdoors, learning new things and and spending time with the people I love are just a few of life's wonders that keep me coming back for more.

Biographical Information: Before moving to Alaska over 20 years ago, I taught adult ESL classes while earning my degree in creative writing from the University of Houston. The joy I got from working with others inspired me to pursue a career in education. Shortly after graduation I took my first teaching job as a middle school language arts teacher I. It was here that I learned what it meant to be a teacher, the importance of making connections and meeting the students where they were so I could guide them where they needed to be. I worked at EO Smith Education Center for 5 years under the guidance of two phenomenal mentors who fully embodied what it meant to be an educator. However, my love for teaching and travel were at a crossroads so I left the classroom to go to Spain to earn my TEFL certification so that I would be able to teach and explore the world at the same time.

During my search for jobs I stumbled upon a position for a high school language arts teacher in Angoon, AK. Although there wasn't a language barrier, transplanting two big city people into rural Alaska came with a steep learning curve. I quickly learned life in the village meant taking on a lot of extra roles; and it was no different in the school. Instead of teaching one subject I taught everything from middle school and high school language arts, journalism and debate to art classes, mentored colleagues and even coached volleyball. It was in Angoon that my oldest was born before the family moved to Juneau a year later.

When we arrived in Juneau my husband took a job at the State and I was a stay at home mom who freelanced as a writer once everyone was asleep. As my children got closer to school age we thought we'd homeschool to see how we liked it. It turned out to be a good fit for our family and I was even able to offer writing classes to other homeschool students for several years. Now that my first is off to college and my youngest is entering high school I don't spend as much time as I used to teaching and am excited about transitioning that time to continue to still make a difference in education by serving on the Juneau School Board.

Position Statement: The current state of our schools is concerning. Teacher morale is low, high school students are left wandering instead of enrolled in a class, middle school students are repeating classes they've already taken and elementary students aren't getting access to the same resources as other students. Staffing cuts and the consolidation have increased class sizes, limited class access while increasing the amount of work teachers are expected to manage.

Between flat funding from the State and treating education like a business we are starting to see the toll it is taking on our teachers and students. There is a national teacher shortage, and Alaska is particularly hard hit in this area, our public education system as a state is among the lowest in the nation, and test scores are not improving.

Basically when it comes to educating our students, we could do better.

My experience in the classroom helps me to better understand the struggles teachers face with the ever growing demand for increased performance and limited resources and what it takes to motivate students to want to learn. My experience on a school board member has shown me how well a school board can function and what can be achieved. My experience as a homeschool family has highlighted much needed changes in the way our schools operate that would greatly benefit all students. My experience as a community member dealing with the district and school board highlighted the frustration many have expressed about their concerns falling on deaf ears.

As a board member I will be able to look at each issue from multiple perspective so the whole student, not just the bottom line, is considered in all board matters. I want to look at creative ways to get around our funding issues, improve the quality of education all students receive and bridge the communication gap between our stakeholders: teachers, parents, community and the board. I look forward to being part of the 5-year strategic plan that outlines the direction the school district will take in the upcoming years.