**030525ES\_DataFindings 01:55 FEATURE Schwing/ Gonzales**

**INTRO:**

There are 128 open schools in **rural** Alaska and the state owns just under half of them. Reporter Emily Schwing dug through data and found decades of neglect and lacking accountability that’s put students, teachers and staff at risk.

**OUTRO**: Emily Schwing reports for KYUK. Support for this reporting comes from ProPublica and the USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism’s 2024 National Fellowship.

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Most school districts in Alaska have access to money that doesn't come from the state, but rural school districts are different.

“We do not have any local contributions. We do not have a tax base. Most of our family members, our community members, they live a subsistence lifestyle.” (00:12)

Madeline Aguillard is the Superintendent of nine schools scattered across 12,000 square miles in Alaska’s Interior. It’s roughly the size of Maryland. Her district relies on the state to help pay for everything from textbooks to sewer lines.

“The state does have an obligation to provide a public education. ~~…~~  and I would hope that providing that education would also mean assistance with providing the physical space.” (00:20)

Since 1998, Alaska has only funded about 14% of nearly 1800 project proposal from rural school districts.

The result? Exposed electrical wiring and malfunctioning fire alarms. In one case, the school’s pipes froze and broke, so for most of the last school year, kids rode a four-wheeler, known as “the bathroom bus,” home twice a day to relieve themselves.

“I think the evidence speaks for itself,” (00:02)

Bryce Edgmon, an Alaska Native, is Speaker of the Alaska State House of Representatives.

“These bright young children show up every morning to go to school in a building that’s not fit for even anything but being ready to be demolished.” (00:10)

Regulations say the state is responsible for major maintenance and construction for buildings it owns. Alaska’s Education Commissioner Deena Bishop says it’s not that simple.

“~~S~~o that the funding for those projects comes from the state of Alaska. It's the legislature that would provide funding.” ( 00:20)

This year, requests for investments in school infrastructure statewide come close to $800 million and a budget deficit looms as lawmakers in Juneau debate over how to balance a budget and fund education.