

Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center

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To: Senate Finance Committee

RE: HB278: Residential Schools Reimbursement

The Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center (NACTEC) is appreciative of the diverse array of critically important education issues House Bill 278 is intended to address for the purposes of improving K-12 education across Alaska. This written testimony is a request of the Senate Finance Committee to ensure that Sec. 13 AS 13.16.200(b) remains intact, as initially proposed in the HB278A Omnibus Education Bill. This section addresses reimbursement costs for residential programs. Without variable term residential programs of the NACTEC model, or Chugach School District's *Voyage to Excellence* program, the majority of rural students would be without engaging vocational training programs. These programs tend to be of greatest value in our rural communities, and are also those programs that prevent many students from dropping out.

There is rich story emerging with variable term residential programs in Alaska. Over the past decade NACTEC has served over 3000 students from 50+ rural communities. 89% of trainees have come from the 15 villages of the Bering Strait School District (BSSD). Following the variability of NACTEC start-up years and coinciding with a steadily increasing NACTEC annual enrollment, graduation rates began a steady 5-year climb in BSSD in FY09. Prior to NACTEC in the region, graduation rates bounced around with little rhyme or reason, and as is the case in many of our rural districts graduation rates most often remained below 50%. *More students dropped out than graduated nearly every year!* That is no longer the case. Last year 78% of BSSD's graduates attended one or more NACTEC high school training programs. Between FY08 and FY13 BSSD graduation rates nearly doubled, from 32% to 61%! Each year, as more students are served, graduation rates continue to climb. Students cite the relevancy of hands-on learning as instrumental to this success.

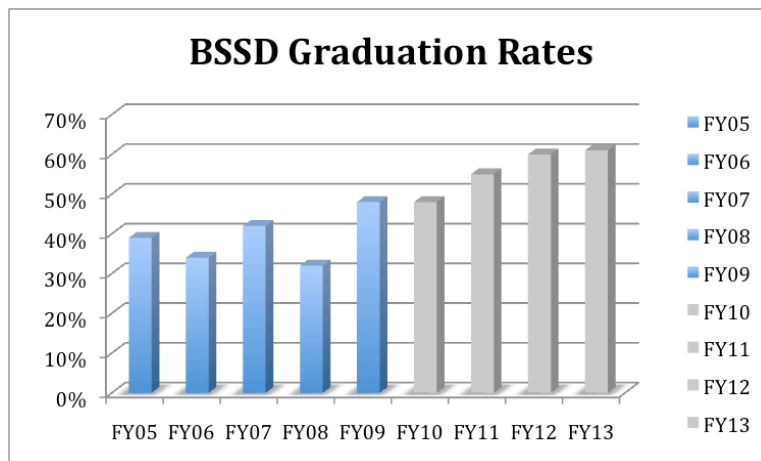
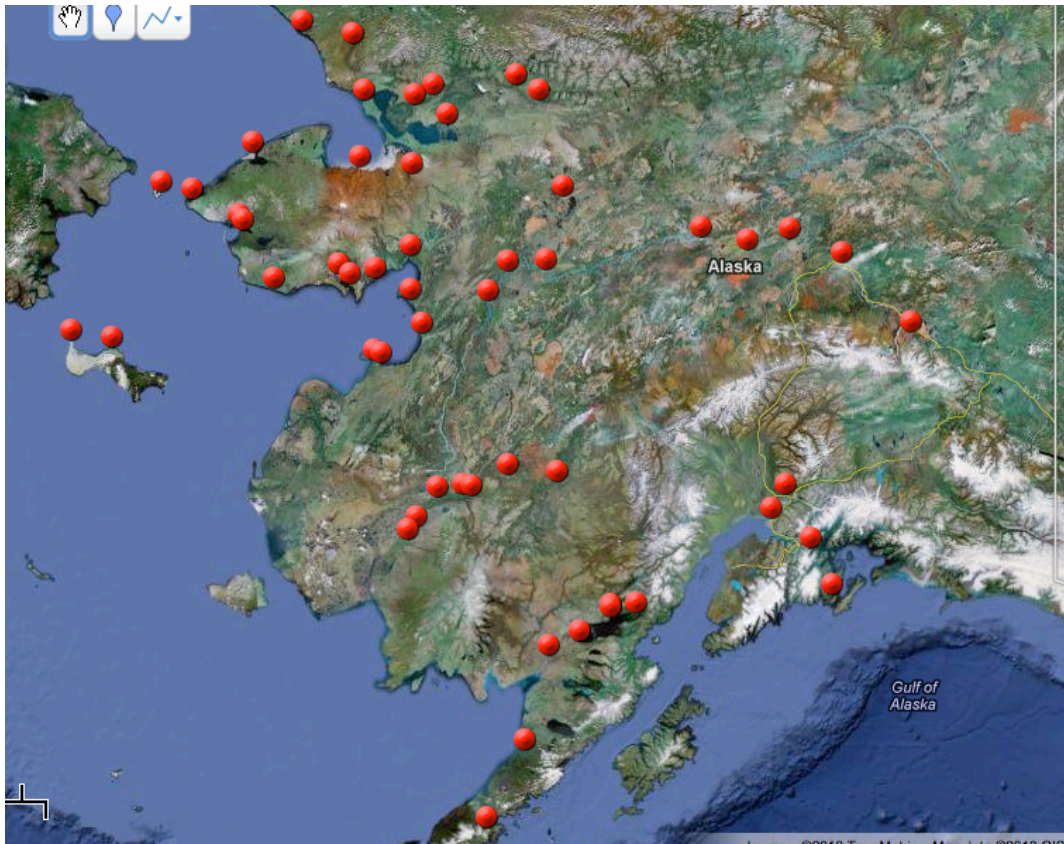


Chart 1. Bering Strait School District Graduation Rates/Fluctuation During NACTEC Operational Years

Due to transportation, energy, and fuel costs it will never be a reality to deliver anything more than very limited vocational training in our most remote communities. However, service in regional hubs is not only a proven reality, it is also one that serves students well as a stepping stone to post-secondary success. Students learn to overcome homesickness, while completing short-duration training programs. The challenge of delivering such training programs is that the costs of housing, transportation, and training students continues to increase at a significant rate. Escalating energy costs and travel costs are major determinants of our ability to serve the maximum number of students annually. If more than 50% of our students continue to drop out annually, the long-term costs to the state in comparison to reimbursement costs of residential programs become trivial.



In just ten years students from 50+ rural villages have been served at NACTEC. As depicted in the map above, there is tremendous potential to meet the needs of student populations who've previously been disadvantaged to vocational training; programs that are keeping kids engaged in the educational process. As such, I urge the Senate Finance Committee to support the increased reimbursement costs of residential programs that are improving the lives of students across the state.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Walrath, NACTEC Director