

# **WHY RURAL ALASKA NEEDS MORE VARIABLE-LENGTH AND IN-DISTRICT RESIDENTIAL LEARNING CENTERS (RLCs) AND WHY THEY DESERVE RESIDENTIAL STIPEND FUNDING**

## **TALKING POINTS BY JERRY COVEY**

### **THE NEED**

1. Alaska has over 100 small remote rural high schools that are mostly off-the-road-system and spread throughout the state.
2. With some exceptions, small remote rural high schools are the lowest performing high schools in Alaska.
3. The lowest-performing schools are generally located in rural multi-site school districts that have several small high schools spread over a very large geographic area.
4. Because of their size and limited capacity, these schools are unable to deliver programs students need to prepare for work, training, or college.
5. A sampling of school-district graduation rates shows that urban and on-the-road-system high schools graduate roughly 75% of their students while small remote rural schools graduate about 55% of their students.
6. Lack of educational opportunity is the largest single factor impacting the success of students in small remote rural high schools.

### **THE OPPORTUNITY**

1. RLCs work. Students attending them graduate at a much higher rate than students who don't and are better prepared for entry into college, the workforce, or the military.
2. Existing RLC programs – delivered by Chugach School District, Lower Kuskokwim School District, and a partnership between Nome and Bering Strait School Districts – provide variable length programs that result in higher graduation and success rates for students who participate in them.
3. RLCs fill an opportunity gap by providing cost-effective learning opportunities that small schools are unable to deliver.
4. School districts and partner organizations can locate RLCs in hub communities that serve many villages and provide a bridge to academic, social, cultural, and career and technical education (CTE) opportunities.

5. RLCs connect students with external resources and provide opportunities such as job shadowing and apprenticeships and access to post-secondary technical centers, college campuses, and on-campus college classes.
6. RLCs deliver variable-length programs ranging from two weeks to semester programs and offer a wide variety of learning opportunities.
7. Students remain enrolled in their village school and education dollars stay in the school district.
8. RLCs are local programs developed with input from students, parents, employers, and cultural leaders that prepare students for greater success.
9. School districts and partner organizations wanting to establish an RLC would be required to develop an application to the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) and meet the same rigorous requirements as districts that operate statewide residential high schools.
10. Students are able to participate in activities in the RLC and graduate from their village school.
11. RLCs provide greater access to classes taught by highly qualified teachers.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

1. Change to AS 14.16. 200 to allow school districts delivering in-district variable length residential programs to become eligible for student stipend funding and to support local partnerships between school districts and community organizations to provide supportive residential experiences for students.
2. Change education regulations to provide stipend funding for in-district residential programs that can meet the rigorous standards set forth by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.