

Historical Overview of Education History in Alaska

Organization of Schools and Local Control

1884 – Organic Act – Responsibility for providing schooling given to the Office of the United States Secretary of Interior; four years later the task was specifically delegated to the Bureau of Education, a unit of Interior.

1800s – Federal government established day schools in Alaska villages and a limited number of vocational boarding schools.

Early 1900s – United States Congress granted authority to individual communities in Alaska to incorporate and establish schools, and maintain them through taxation.

1905 – Nelson Act – Provided for establishment of schools outside incorporated towns. Governor of Territory of Alaska made ex-officio superintendent. Thus a dual system of education in Alaska (federal and territorial, later state, begins).

1931 – Federal Bureau of Education extends educational services to more remote sections of Alaska and by this year assumes responsibility for formal education of most rural Native people.

In Alaska the passage of the Johnson O'Malley Act led to the beginning of negotiations between Alaska Territorial Department of Education and the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the transfer of federally-operated rural BIA elementary schools to the territory.

Only option open for high schools in small rural communities was to attend distant BIA boarding high schools, with the exception of a small number of church-affiliated boarding high schools, such as St. Mary's Mission.

1965 – Alaska State Department of Education, 1965-66 biennium report, declared need for special provisions to accommodate conditions in rural Alaska. Established the Division of State Operated Schools, responsibility for rural and on-base military schools, created governor's committee to explore merger of BIA and state schools.

1974 – Lawsuit was filed for not providing local high school facilities for predominantly Native communities, known at that time as the Molly Hootch case.

1975 – Pressure on legislature for more local control from Alaska Native people, State Operated Schools abolished, separate rural school districts called Regional Education Attendance Areas (REAs) established.

1976 – Governor of Alaska signed a consent decree related to Molly Hootch as an out-of-court settlement, and the state agreed that it would establish a high school program in every community in Alaska where there was an elementary school (with a minimum enrollment of 8 students) and one or more secondary students, unless the community specifically declined.

School Accountability

1991 – Reform movement known as Alaska 2000 moved forward by Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission, which includes developing student academic standards.

1992 – State Board of Education passes regulations that require local schools to provide students a working knowledge of English, mathematics, science, geography, history, skills for a healthy life, government and citizenship, fine arts, technology and world languages. Regulation takes effect June 1993.

1995 & 1996 – State Board adopts content standards in ten areas.

1997 – Law requiring secondary competency testing passes legislature and is signed; AS 14.03.075.

2000 – State Board adopts more detailed content standards in reading, writing, and mathematics.

2000 – Benchmark assessments given to students in grades 3, 6 and 8.

2004 – Students first held accountable for passing the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination to earn a diploma.

2005 – State Board adopts Grade Level Expectations, which define standards by grade level; new assessments called Standards Based Assessments given to students in grades 3-10 begin.

2006 – U.S. Department of Education approves Alaska’s assessment system under No Child Left Behind, determining the system is aligned to standards, and uses valid, reliable and fair tests to assess Alaska’s content standards.