



ALASKA NATIVE SCIENCE & ENGINEERING PROGRAM  
3211 Providence Drive, ANSEP 200D1 • Anchorage, AK 99508-4614  
[www.ansep.net](http://www.ansep.net)

December 2, 2013

Senator Gary Stevens  
305 Center Ave. Suite 1  
Kodiak AK, 99615

Re: Alaska's New Math and English Language Arts Standards

Dear Senator Stevens;

We are in the midst of an education crisis. The system is failing. Nearly 40% of Alaska Native students do not finish high school on time. The University of Alaska requires 50% of its incoming freshmen to take remedial math and/or English. Only one-third of Alaskan students score at the proficient level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. This is not a new problem. People have been working hard on fixing these deficiencies for 50 years with little improvement. The problem is that the money in the system is not always spent in a manner that leads to success. We lack an effective quality control system in K12. As a result, students are being denied access to education and the associated economic opportunities. We are paying for failure.

With ANSEP we have taken a different approach. We go back to the basics and raise the bar. ANSEP focuses on preparing students academically and socially with the tools they need for success in college and beyond. We start in middle school and offer a string of linked components that continue through high school, into college, graduate school and the professions. ANSEP students at every level are successful at rates far exceeding national and state numbers.

Alaska's New Math and English Language Arts Standards will raise the bar for all of Alaska's students. We know that students rise up to our expectations. The new standards have the potential to improve the rates of academic success for every student in our state. It is simply unacceptable that students should arrive at our campuses unprepared for college classes. Remediation is expensive. We pay once while children are in the K12 system and then pay again when they show up at the university. Our responsibility to Alaska's children and to our state demands we get it right the first time and eliminate the need for remediation.

I believe the new standards are a step in the right direction.

Please call me at (907) 529-4918 if you need any additional information.

Very Truly Yours,

Herb Ilisaurri Schroeder, PhD  
Vice Provost for ANSEP and Founder  
Professor of Engineering



Presidential Award for  
Excellence in Science, Mathematics, and  
Engineering Mentoring



Reginald Jones Founder's  
Award



Alaska Federation of Natives Denali Award



Top 25 Innovations in  
American Government 2012

**From:** heitz\_cara <[heitz\\_cara@asdk12.org](mailto:heitz_cara@asdk12.org)>

**Date:** December 16, 2013 at 8:13:17 PM AKST

**To:** "[Senator.Gary.Stevens@akleg.gov](mailto:Senator.Gary.Stevens@akleg.gov)" <[Senator.Gary.Stevens@akleg.gov](mailto:Senator.Gary.Stevens@akleg.gov)>,  
"[Representative.Lynn.Gattis@akleg.gov](mailto:Representative.Lynn.Gattis@akleg.gov)" <[Representative.Lynn.Gattis@akleg.gov](mailto:Representative.Lynn.Gattis@akleg.gov)>

**Subject:** A letter in support of Alaska Education Standards

Dear Senator Stevens and Representative Gattis:

My name is Cara Heitz and I am the 2012 Alaska Teacher of the Year and currently the Advanced Health Career Pathways teacher at King Career Center in the Anchorage School District. There has been much discussion recently over the value of our state educational standards. I am writing today to express my support for Alaska's Academic Standards and the important role they play in classrooms across our great state.

I feel we are headed in the right direction by developing more rigorous and relevant standards for both our students and our profession. In a changing global economy, we must ensure that all our students are academically prepared to compete for future jobs. Our new standards have set higher expectations for our students to achieve greater success. They reflect the 21st century skills that will better prepare our students to be college and career ready.

As a high school CTE teacher I am tasked with preparing my students to be college and career ready for the health care field. Because the standards emphasize skill sets, rather than just content, it is easier for students to make connections between the curriculum and their individual career goals. The content becomes more relevant when they understand that everything that happens in the classroom is directly related to their future. Skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving apply to all career pathways and will serve our students well as our future workforce.

I think there has been a misconception created by equating standards with standardization. Our state education standards are not a one-size-fits-all curriculum. They are achievement expectations for our students that reflect the knowledge and skills they need to be successful graduates. They act as a guide for educators in progressing our students to this success. All professions, be they doctors, lawyers, engineers, or sales associates, have standards that they follow and are judged upon. Education is no different. If we want to truly professionalize teaching and continually improve education, standards are a necessary part of the process.

Thank you for your consideration of my viewpoint on this matter. I believe it is an important issue, and would like to see legislative support for new Alaska Academic Standards as we raise the bar for Alaska's youth and their future.

Sincerely,

Cara Heitz  
2012 Alaska Teacher of the Year

P.O. Box 90791  
 Anchorage, AK 99509-0791  
[www.CEAAC.net](http://www.CEAAC.net)  
 907-242-2151  
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## Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children

December 18, 2013

Senator Gary Stevens  
 305 Center Ave. Suite 1  
 Kodiak AK, 99615  
[Senator.Gary.Stevens@akleg.gov](mailto:Senator.Gary.Stevens@akleg.gov)

Dear Chairman Stevens

The path to education reform in Alaska has been indirect and progress has been halting. Our organization has fought for years to improve educational opportunities in Alaska's rural communities with great difficulty. But in recent years, a more cooperative and productive atmosphere has prevailed, with leadership from an Alaska Department of Education and Early Childhood Development that is focused on results, collaborative relationships, and clear, consistent expectations. The recently adopted Alaska standards are an important part of that improved picture.

CEAAC is a coalition of about half of Alaska's school districts, primarily in rural Alaska but also including the Anchorage School District. We have advocated for almost 20 years for equity and excellence in educational opportunities for struggling schools and at-risk students, especially in rural communities. Although our constitutional lawsuits are in the past and we currently work cooperatively with the State of Alaska, our commitment remains strong to the goal of an excellent education for every Alaskan student, regardless of his or her culture or home community.

No one would look to CEAAC for easy praise of the Department of Education, nor would we be expected to heap unearned support on a mandate such as the revised standards. But CEAAC believes in Commissioner Mike Hanley and our members have worked hard to adopt the new standards and adapt district curriculum to the elevated expectations they represent. While we might not agree with everything the department is doing, nor with every aspect of the standards or assessment regime, we see these programs as good faith efforts at educational

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Charles Wohlforth  
 Executive Director

Alaska Gateway School District

Aleutian Region School District

Aleutians East Borough School  
 District

Anchorage School District

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Chatham School District

Cook Inlet Tribal Council

Hoonah City Schools

Iditarod Area School District

Kake City School District

Kashunamiut School District

Kuspuk School District

Lower Kuskokwim School  
 District

Lower Yukon School District

NEA-Alaska

Nenana City School District

Northwest Arctic Borough  
 School District

Southeast Island School District

Saint Mary's City School District

Tanana Chiefs Conference

Yukon Flats School District

Yukon-Koyukuk School District

Yupit School District

improvement. They show the kind of consistent leadership that is needed to build a successful system of education in Alaska.

Consistency is a key to improvement in education. School districts all over Alaska have dug into the hard work of aligning curriculum to the new standards in the expectation they will be in place for many years to come. We all know it will take time for measurable results to come from this effort, but the leadership represented by this work points in the right direction, and newly elevated educational standards provide a noble goal for our students. To deviate from these plans now would cause an enormous waste of effort, and a great loss of potential for our administrators, faculties and students. We would lose the benefit of the work and funds already invested, and the opportunity to excel within this new framework.

Please accept CEAAC's support for the standards and for Commissioner Hanley's work to provide consistent goals for Alaska's schools, teachers and students.

Sincerely,



Charles Wohlforth  
Executive Director

cc:

Governor Sean Parnell

Commissioner Mike Hanley

CEAAC Government Relations Director Tom Begich

Dr. Robert Thomason, Superintendent  
Petersburg School District  
P.O. Box 289  
Petersburg, AK 99833



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*Imagine. Believe. Achieve.*

December 19, 2013

Senator Gary Stevens  
305 Center Ave. Suite 1  
Kodiak AK, 99615

Re: Alaska Core Standards

Dear Senator Stevens:

Petersburg School District, through parent support, focused staff effort, and hard work by students has consistently performed at high academic levels. Graduates make a point of telling us they felt completely prepared for the rigors of college, vocational school, or the military. The staff and Board of Education of Petersburg School District are pleased that the newly adopted Alaska Core Standards "raise the academic bar another notch".

Notably, in the debate surrounding the national Common Core Standards, Alaska did not adopt the national Common Core Standards. Adopting states agreed to accept the standards in their entirety and not change them in the future. Alaska did not want to be bound by these restrictions. Interestingly, the Fordham Institute gave Alaska's *previous* standards an "F" in language arts and a "D" in math. Standards have been in place a long time but the construct and rigor of the standards did not match the graduation needs of the students.

In June 2012, after a two-year in-state process, the State Board of Education and Early Development approved the new Alaska Standards in English language arts and mathematics for students from kindergarten through high school. Alaska's public schools now have higher expectations in English and math achievement for students. It has always been the goal of Petersburg School District to graduate students who were academically ready to enter jobs, the military, college, university, or career-training programs.

As a 42-year veteran in education as a teacher, principal, and superintendent I have had the opportunity to experience several reform movements over the years. Focusing on what to teach, when to teach it, and ensuring depth and rigor is long overdue. As an example, under the new Alaska Standards students will focus on fewer math topics in a year but learn them in depth. Gone is the "spiral" approach where students learned a piece of a topic and then build on these pieces by going back and spiraling back through content in successive years. This approach covered a lot of material but did not ensure depth of learning.

Thank you for your efforts at better understanding the Alaska Core Standards and the positive impact they will have on the students of Alaska when properly implemented and supported.

Sincerely,

Robert Thomason  
Superintendent

cc: Petersburg School District Board of Education  
Mr. Mike Hanley, Department of Education and Early Development Commissioner

# Tanana Chiefs Conference

Chief Peter John Tribal Building

122 First Avenue, Suite 600

Fairbanks, Alaska 99701-4897

(907) 452-8251 Fax: (907) 459-3850

## SUBREGIONS

December 23, 2013

### UPPER

#### KUSKOKWIM

McGrath  
Medfra  
Nikolai  
Takovna  
Telida

The Honorable Gary Stevens  
State Capitol Room 429  
Juneau, AK 99801

### LOWER YUKON

Anvik  
Grayling  
Holy Cross  
Shageluk

Re: Support of Alaska English and Math Standards

Dear Senator Gary Stevens,

### UPPER TANANA

Dot Lake  
Eagle  
Healy Lake  
Northway  
Tanacross  
Tetlin  
Tok

On behalf of Tanana Chiefs Conference, we are in support of the Alaska English and Math Standards. The implementation of the new state standards have a narrower and more focused approach to meeting educators' objectives. This will raise the bar for our students, which will increase our expectation of them so they are readily able to compete with other students nationwide.

### YUKON FLATS

Arctic Village  
Beaver  
Birch Creek  
Canyon Village  
Chalkyitsik  
Circle  
Fort Yukon  
Venetie

The new assessments coming in 2015 will help the state identify which schools are at risk and need support. These assessments will become the baseline for a new goal: understanding which students need support to become academically ready for careers and post secondary education. These assessments will also give students in our rural area schools a faster tool for implementing the standardized tests as well as a quicker system in looking over the scores of the tests.

### YUKON

#### KOYUKUK

Galena  
Huslia  
Kaitag  
Koyukuk  
Nulato  
Ruby

This can in turn have a positive effect in school districts that operate rural schools because they will in turn, use their own individualized tests to meet the unique needs of rural students. For example, the MAPS testing software creates a baseline as well for students and identifies which level they are at. This helps them move forward from their individual baselines to give students specific feedback on what they need to do in order to advance to the next level.

### YUKON TANANA

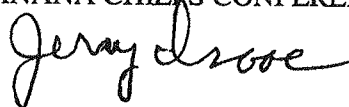
Alatna  
Allakaket  
Evansville  
Fairbanks  
Hughes  
Lake  
Minchumina  
Manley Hot  
Springs  
Minto  
Nenana  
Rampart  
Stevens Village  
Tanana

We are also happy to see the cultural curriculum within the state standards and hope that these help localize education for our students' individual needs and for the overall equal rights and education for the students who want to live in their hometown and learn their culture within their communities.

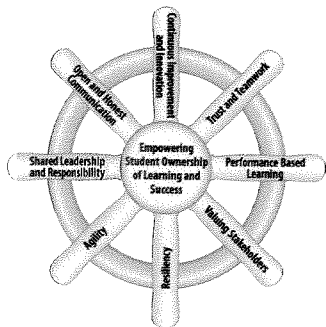
Thank you for your consideration of this request, and thank you for your demonstrated commitment to providing educational opportunity for *all* Alaskans.

Sincerely,

TANANA CHIEFS CONFERENCE



Jerry Isaac, President/Chairman



# Chugach School District

SL6

9312 Vanguard Drive, Suite 100

Anchorage, AK 99507-5355

(907) 522-7400 Phone

(907) 522-3399 Fax

[chugachschools.com](http://chugachschools.com)

12-31-13

Honorable Senator Gary Stevens  
305 Center Ave. Suite 1  
Kodiak AK, 99615

Dear Honorable Senator Stevens,

I am writing to provide testimony in support of the Alaskan English Language Arts and Mathematics Academic Standards. As an early adopter of holistic learning standards, the Chugach School District has learned first-hand the value in the process of engaging local communities and businesses in developing and improving learning standards. While we value local control, we simultaneously value state and federal resources and guidance. Alaska's new academic standards are just that, a reliable resource upon which we benchmark our local standards to ensure we've addressed all pertinent learning concepts. We fully understand that to do what is best for all students, we cannot exclusively depend upon local standards, or state standards. It cannot be one or the other. It requires a healthy mix of local, state, and federal input and resources to create a high functioning system that works for all students.

The role that local control plays in creating a culture of school pride and traditions of success is indispensable. Creating a clear roadmap of success for students is an essential component in meeting our constitutional educational obligations, while also simply being the right thing to do for each student. The Chugach School District continues to rely upon community and business input in our regular standards updating process. Yet we rely increasingly upon state and federal resources, such as the new Alaska Academic Standards. These improved standards are encouraging to our teachers, students, and business partners.

Specific improvements we've noted with the new Alaska Academic Standards include:

- A shift from content learning for exams, toward learning skill and knowledge necessary for success in eventual careers
- Increased integration of content areas is encouraged, which increases relevancy
- An increased focus upon learning processes, which facilitates independent learning
- Extended standards from 10<sup>th</sup> grade to 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- Deeper thematic learning unit instructional delivery is promoted



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Tatitlek Community School  
(907) 325-2252

Chenega Bay Community School  
(907) 573-5123

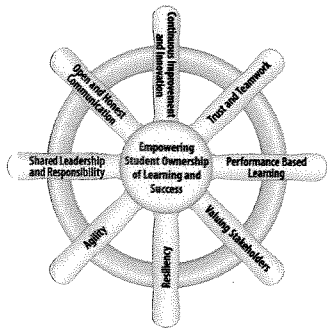
Valdez FOCUS  
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Voyage to  
Excellence  
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# Chugach School District

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- Improved coherence and consistency from grade to grade level
- Consistent language and expectations for students from any school in the state. This minimizes lost instructional time for students transitioning between schools, by allowing for a timely and accurate diagnoses each student's knowledge and skill level. Additionally, it provides for more efficient and effective career development experiences with our many business partners.

Alaska's public education system affects all Alaskans. The new Alaska Academic Standards are a step in the direction of avoiding a future overall less employable workforce. As an example, nearly 4,000 students did not graduate from Alaska's high schools in 2009. The lost lifetime earning in Alaska for that class of dropouts alone, totals more than \$1 billion. Alaska would have saved more than \$57 million in health care costs over the course of the lifetimes of each class of dropouts had they earned their diplomas. Alaska's economy would see a combination of savings and revenue of approximately \$19 million in reduced crime spending and increased earnings each year if the male high school graduation rate increased by just five percent. We applaud the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development efforts to avoid these negative ramifications. Adopting the new Alaska Academic Standards is one important step towards the realization of the high functioning public education system that our students, businesses, and our state economy need.

I thank you for this opportunity to provide our input regarding the Alaskan English Language Arts and Mathematics Academic Standards. Please contact me should you require further information.

Sincerely,

Bob Crumley, Ph.D.  
Superintendent  
Chugach School District



Whittier Community School  
(907) 472-2575

Tatitlek Community School  
(907) 325-2252

Chenega Bay Community School  
(907) 573-5123

Valdez FOCUS  
Homeschool  
(907) 835-5528

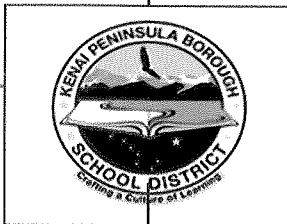
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## KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

### Office of Superintendent

Dr. Steve Atwater, Superintendent of Schools  
 148 North Binkley Street Soldotna, Alaska 99669-7553  
 Phone (907) 714-8888 Fax (907) 262-9132

Date: January 4, 2014

To: Senator Gary Stevens

Re: Comment on Alaska Content Standards

I am writing on behalf of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) to support the changes made to 4 AAC 04.140, 150, 180, new standards in English language arts and mathematics for public school students. I provided supporting comment for the adoption of these standards in May 2012 and 20 months later, continue to support them; I am convinced that they are the appropriate basis of instruction in language arts and math for Alaska's students.

When I first came to Alaska 33 years ago, I was immediately struck by the fierce individualism of the state's residents and by a relative indifference to how things are done in other parts of our country. I admire this approach toward life and appreciate the benefit of "going it alone." In many ways, this is what defines us as Alaskans. There are times however, when the relatively small capacity of Alaska limits our state's ability to do everything that we can for our population. I recognize that in education, this limitation is more pronounced today than it has been in the past. I strongly feel that Alaska's education system must be in sync with the good things that are happening across the country. It is for this reason that I support implementing our state standards that are closely aligned to the Common Core State Standards.

One of the KPBSD School Board goals this year is to benchmark some of our country's high performing school districts as a way to glean effective practices that can in turn, be implemented at KPBSD. I spent time in the Washington DC area visiting two such districts. I learned that they are embracing the Common Core and are not looking back. Administration from the two districts stressed the importance of the new standards in preparing their students for tomorrow. One of my sisters lives in Maryland and has three children in the local public schools. She recognizes that the transition to the Common Core is difficult, but sees that her children are gaining critical skills and are being challenged by the rigor of the standards. In Montgomery County Maryland, 60% of its 8<sup>th</sup> grade students pass Algebra I. In my district, this is true for only 20%. I share this with you not to say that we need to be like Maryland, but to offer some perspective for why we need to look beyond Alaska to keep up. We can no longer "go it alone" and expect our students to compete with graduates from the rest of the country. My district based its recent revision of its language arts and math curricula on the state standards. Kenai teachers are now basing their instruction on these standards.

After reviewing the relatively poor Alaska student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, on the ASVAB (the military entrance exam) and on the number of students needing remediation at the University of Alaska, it is clear that Alaska's K-12

academic bar needs to be raised. The new Alaska Standards do this and make the much needed shift of focusing instruction on higher order thinking skills that include reading carefully and analytically, supporting ideas in writing, applying math concepts to solve real world problems and going deeper into a content area rather than following our more traditional broad approach.

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The development and adoption process for the Alaska Standards was sound. Several KPBSD teachers worked on their development. It is important to note that the public comment period for the new standards was five months as opposed to the more usual three. In sum, the standards while closely aligned to the Common Core, were developed locally and not, as some might suggest, snuck through the back door.

In closing, I commend the Department of Education and Early Development for putting the new standards in place. I feel that to move away from the standards would be a mistake for Alaska. Not only would such a move relegate our state to an educational backwater, it would be deeply discouraging to my teachers who are diligently working to embrace them. There is no question that the new standards are more challenging and will take some time to become the norm. In a perfect world, we would transition to the standards over a longer period of time. For now, I encourage Alaska to stay the course; it will lead to a far better place than where we are today.

I commend you for holding this hearing and would be privileged to provide additional comment.