Frequently Asked Questions
Alaska's Learning Network

AKLN
Alaska's Learning Network
Making Education More Accessible

1) Describe the mission.

Alaska's Learning Network: *Making Education More Accessible*

Alaska's Learning Network (AKLN) improves student achievement through online learning and professional development opportunities by providing:

- <u>Distance courses</u> for students that are taught and supported by highly qualified Alaska teachers,
- <u>Professional development</u> coaching including on-site and off-site support and training.
- <u>Resources</u> for Alaskan educators
- Coalition of all 54 Alaska School Districts managed by the AKLN Advisory Board (made up of superintendents)

Distance courses:

Alaska's Learning Network continues to develop courses for high school students statewide, responding to the needs of districts and specifically targeting courses that meet requirements for the Alaska Performance Scholarship. In the 2012-2013 school year, AKLN will offer 21 courses developed by Alaskan educators and sponsored by Alaskan school districts.

Professional Development:

The mission of the Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN) is to improve student achievement by providing researched-based distance learning and face-to-face professional development programs for Alaska's teachers and school administrators.
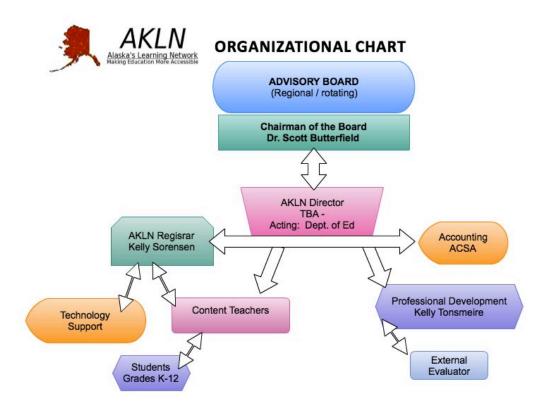
Resources:

Alaska's Learning Network resource database provides quality model learning objects available 24/7 for free, to all Alaskan educators. All 54 Alaskan districts have free access to the Alaska Digital Sandbox. Objects created by Alaskans for Alaskans can receive the "Made in Alaska" logo. All objects are under the "Creative Commons" license for open sharing, downloading, editing, and adapting to personalize instruction.

2) Describe the organizational structure (administrators, educators, and staff with hierarchy of decision-making process).

Originally started with a 1-year ARRA (American Recovery & Reinvestment Act) through NCLB (No Child Left Behind) Title II-D (Education Technology) grant, a competitive RFP (Request for Proposals) was issued to Chatham School District, one of 54 total public school districts in Alaska. During that first year, a Director was hired, an Advisory Board was formed and way to offer distance courses was organized. This infrastructure allowed for continued efforts to receive funding from the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (EED), districts, and grants to collaborate efforts in brokering services between districts. AKLN (Alaska's Learning Network) is not a separate virtual school.   It is set up as a way for all the districts to coordinate efforts without giving up their students either to another school or any of their base-student allocation. This infrastructure is guided by recommendations from the Board to move forward with activities, as funding allows. Now, in the third year of AKLN, funding has been at a

minimum, with the Director's position to be filled on July 1, 2013, and EED managing the coalition for the interim.

AKLN is housed at the Alaska Council of School Administrators, the overarching structure for all of Alaska's superintendents. AKLN's full-time registrar is an Alaskan teacher, and ensures successful registration and coordination between districts, as well as supports teachers who are piloting AKLN courses. Professional Development is offered, both face-to-face and online through the Alaska Staff Development Network. Training has included a cohort of teachers to pilot courses, webinars for current teachers who want to integrate more blended learning in their existing classes, and future efforts to support teachers and administrators.

3) **Describe the role the State of Alaska plays in regulating AKLN, including ways that your mission is made easier or harder than a brick-and-mortar school would be to run.**

The State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (EED) has provided funding and support for AKLN. Prior to the rfp issued, EED ran a series of four, face-to-face gatherings of all the districts to receive input and ideas for solving Alaska's need for coordinated distance education. The rfp was based on the ideas presented by this group of up to 60 participants. The initial intent was to have one district address the collaboration. It was a larger issue than anticipated, and AKLN has morphed into a statewide collaboration with 15 board members helping guide and direct the activities. EED continues to coordinate the efforts, overseeing the one full-time AKLN employee (registrar) as well as communicating regularly with board members, teachers, schools, and districts.

This collaboration is much tougher than just opening up a virtual or brick-and-mortar school. It would be easier to have a smaller focus, but it would not allow for all to participate. AKLN's

focus is on brokering services between districts, and helping to provide guidance and leadership towards quality and policies that enable innovation.

A side effect of the AKLN course pilots has been that the face-to-face students in the AKLN teachers' courses mixed with the online students has provided a very successful blended learning experience for all students. The brick-and-mortar students are benefiting from additional students to interact, discuss, and give different perspectives, as well as a structured curriculum. The online students benefit from additional students, as well as a highly qualified Alaskan teacher and a course that they would not otherwise have had access to.

AKLN is using the new Alaska State Standards in Math and Language Arts, as well as other Alaska state standards; all of which are aligned to the Common Core. EED has provided the leadership in updating the standards and creating tools for use by all stakeholders statewide.

EED is continuing to explore blended learning environments and how to best support districts. Research on this includes the following:

- iNACOL: International Association for K-12 Online Learning (http://www.inacol.org/)
- Digital Learning Now (http://digitallearningnow.com)
- Innosight Institute (http://www.innosightinstitute.org/)
- Keeping Pace (http://kpk12.com/)

4) *Describe the scope of the courses offered.*

The following courses are currently being created for inclusion in the 2013-2014 school year:

ENG 8: American Literature	**Larissa Wright**	**Anchorage**
ENG 9: World Literature: Many Voices, One Experience	Erik Johnson	Anchorage
MATH 7: Algebra I	Christina Hum	Fairbanks
MATH 8: Geometry / Trigonometry	Samatha Wuttig	Fairbanks
SCI 7: Earth Science	Darren Kellerby	Anchorage
SS 7: World History	Nicole Crosby	Anchorage
SS 8: American History	Adam Robinson	Anchorage

The following courses are currently being piloted in the 2012-2013 school year:

Course Name	*Instructor*	*District*
ENG 1 : Literacy and Comprehension 1	E2020	Ketchikan
ENG 2: Literacy and Comprehension 2	E2020	Ketchikan
ENG 3: Composition	Emily Davis	Kake
ENG 4: World Literature	Chad Gerlach	Copper River
ENG 5: American Literature	E2020	Ketchikan
ENG 6: British Literature	E2020	Ketchikan
ENG 7: Advanced Composition	E2020	Ketchikan
MATH 1: Pre-Algebra	Eric Hart	Chatham
MATH 2: Algebra 1	E2020	Ketchikan
MATH 3: Algebra 2	E2020	Ketchikan
MATH 4: Geometry	E2020	Ketchikan
MATH 5: Financial Math	E2020	Ketchikan

MATH 6: Precalculus (Math 107) – dual credit	Doug Carroll	Cordova
SCI 1: Earth Science	E2020	Ketchikan
SCI 2: Physical Science	Joe Marley	Yukon Koyukuk
SCI 3: Biology	March Proch	Copper River
SCI 4: Marine Biology	Jeff Szarzi	Kenai
SCI 5: Chemistry	Lisa Thomas	Annette Island
SCI 6: Environmental Science: Geospacial Technologies	Denyse Hurst	Kenai
SS 1: US History	E2020	Ketchikan
SS 2: World History	E2020	Ketchikan
SS 3: Geography	E2020	Ketchikan
SS 4: Economics	E2020	Ketchikan
SS 5: US Government and Politics	Michele Galla	Wrangell
SS 6: Alaska Studies (fall semester)	Rene' Martin	Haines
SS 7: Alaska Studies (spring semester)	Rene' Martin	Haines
CTE 1: CIOS 105 Computer Literacy – dual credit (fall semester)	Sam McPhetres	Haines
CTE 2: CIOS 105 Computer Literacy – dual credit (spring)	Sam McPhetres	Haines
CTE 3 : Survey of Emerging Technologies	Tracie Weisz	Alaska Gateway
CTE 4: Strategies for Academic Success	E2020	Ketchikan
CTE 5: Career planning & Development	E2020	Ketchikan
FA 1: Creative Writing & Sitka Fine Arts Camp	Hillary Seeland	Sitka
FA 2 : Digital Arts 1	E2020	Ketchikan
FA 3 :Digital Arts 2	E2020	Ketchikan
FA 4 : Image Design & Editing	E2020	Ketchikan
FA 5 : Game Design	E2020	Ketchikan
FA 6 : Audio Engineering	E2020	Ketchikan
ELE 1: Health	E2020	Ketchikan
ELE 2: SAT Virtual Tour	E2020	Ketchikan
ELE 3: ACT Virtual Tutor	E2020	Ketchikan
WL 1: French I	E2020	Ketchikan
WL 2: French II	E2020	Ketchikan
WL 3: Spanish I	E2020	Ketchikan
WL 4: Spanish II	E2020	Ketchikan

Courses purchased from E2020 are coordinated through the Ketchikan School District in Alaska. This completes offerings needed for all students to qualify for the Alaska Performance Scholarship, as well as courses identified as needed by the AKLN board.

Courses sponsored other districts are being developed by Alaskan teachers, with the support and guidance of AKLN. Full descriptions are attached.

All courses use the "Backwards by Design" structure. Courses begin with the standards that will be mastered in the course. Alaska State Standards are aligned to the Common Core. Once the standards are identified, rubrics are written that clarify expectations for mastery. The standards are then grouped into modules, with lessons presented as a 'hook', direct instruction, practice

and application, then checking for understanding. You'll see these broken out for all AKLN courses in the following example:

- Introduction (hook)
- Research (learning the concepts)
- Activities (applying the concepts into real-world examples)
- Assessments (rubrics showing advanced / proficient / developing / emerging)
- Check list (before moving on… did you do everything – have you mastered the material)

Example rubrics are attached. Students begin at emerging, and then progress through developing, as they practice the concepts. Proficient is required to show mastery anytime/anywhere. Students may choose to go beyond mastery and help teach others, to receive advanced. Students submit work in a variety of ways.

Once piloted and revised, all Alaskan-created courses are placed in the Alaska Digital Sandbox for access by all teachers in Alaska. Alaskan teachers can download, revise, use, adapt one lesson, one module, or whole courses at no cost. If a school still would like to register students in the course, for any reason including the need of a highly qualified teacher, they can still enroll through AKLN. The cost for enrollment is $150/student per semester. This fee passes through the coordinated efforts statewide through AKLN to the district sponsoring the course, to off-set teacher costs, etc.

All courses are asynchronous (available anytime/anywhere to meet the scheduling needs of a variety of districts and students), with the exception of Math 107 – College Precalculus. This is offered synchronously (live) with limited enrollment. Alaska has local control of education, with districts able to set their own schedules, curriculum and address issues at a local level. The challenge for AKLN is that districts begin and end their school year up to a month apart from each other. AKLN has addressed this challenge by making the first month of every course an introduction into the platform, practicing student and teacher introductions, and setting the stage for the classroom environment. It is critical that students communicate immediately with their online instructor, as well as feel safe and supported. AKLN requires an "Enrollment Agreement" (see attached) that shows the partnership between the online instructor, the school where the student is physically, the student and the parents. Many rural Alaskan students are shy at first, and are much more successful if they can talk with someone they know. Success rate for AKLN courses last year was 85%. The 15% who did not complete either moved out of state, out of district, or withdrew early, due to the rigor of the courses.

5) Describe the student body, demographics, ages served.

AKLN serves all students in Alaska. In the courses offered last year, the demographics were as follows:

AKLN Fall 2011

Enrolled	% of total	
77	51%	White
3	2%	Asian
60	40%	Alaska Native
11	7%	Mixed

TOTAL ENROLLED   **151**

AKLN Spring 2012

Enrolled	% of total	
22	61%	White
1	3%	Asian
13	36%	Alaska Native

TOTAL ENROLLED   **36**

6) Describe the sources of your curriculum, whether or not you create your own classes or do you purchase a curriculum from a professional organization.

AKLN creates their own courses, as much as funding allows, and then purchases the rest, through districts. The first year of courses offered (2011-2012), AKLN developed one course, CIOS 105 (Computer Literacy 105) dual credit. This was identified as needed for 16 career pathways at the University of Alaska. Students received a semester of high school and 3 credits from the University. This course began with the National Education Technology Standards for Students (NETS*S). A rubric was built, and then Next Gen Assessments from Wisconsin was contracted to create an assessment that used critical thinking, and drilled down to specific standards, offering at least four different opportunities for mastery. When students finished the pre-assessment, both they and the teacher knew which standard(s) were already proficient. At that point, students are given two choices: 1) sit out that module and receive credit at proficient; or 2) continue with their peers (most choose this option) and receive advanced for helping teach others. The competency-based concept lets students know they are honored for what they already know and can do, and assure them that this course is going to help them address their own needs. All the other 21 courses were purchased from K12 Online through Wrangell School District.

In Year Two, AKLN worked with iNACOL (International Association for K-12 Online Learning) to develop specific standards and rubrics for Alaska's Online Courses (see excel spreadsheet). This includes some 'non-negotiables' that are true for all courses, as well as the ideal elements to strive for, but are not required. All pilot courses begin with this rubric, and then are checked along with way, with a final measure in the spring, after revisions have been made, before placing in the Alaska Digital Sandbox.

The iNACOL consultant, Brent Bakken, traveled up to Anchorage, Alaska to work with AKLN staff, EED, the University of Alaska and school districts. He came with ideas from other states on how they combined some standards, and found some that were either not in there that needed to be addressed, or most often standards that were similar, and combined them into one document.

AKLN also formed a formal agreement with the University of Alaska – Center for Distance Education. UofA has been creating and offering distance education statewide for almost 100 years. Their course designers are experts in finding resources for highly interactive activities, as well as helped provide guidance and support for AKLN's teachers developing & piloting new courses.   AKLN teachers selected were identified by their superintendents. AKLN then worked with each teacher, individually and in groups, to help them begin to build their course, and learn how to be effective online teachers. AKLN provided a student management system (SchoolTown), if their district did not already have something in place, as well as supported the teacher throughout the development and pilot of the course.

All AKLN teachers are employed by their local district, and provide instruction and guidance in the online course, in addition to the face-to-face students. AKLN provides coordination of registration, with limits of no more than 20 combined face-to-face and online students per course. AKLN teachers work in partnership with the On-Site Student Supervisor, to be sure the student gets support from all sides, and then recommends a grade that the local school, who has the final say in assigning.

Acronyms and Resources:

AKLN	Alaska's Learning Network	www.aklearn.net
EED	Alaska Department of Education & Early Development	http://eed.state.ak.us
ADS	Alaska Digital Sandbox (online repository for education objects)	www.alaskadigitalsandbox.org
ACSA	Alaska Council of School Administrators	http://www.alaskaacsa.org/
ASDN	Alaska Staff Development Network	www.asdn.org
ARRA	American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009	http://www.recovery.gov/About/Pages/The_Act.aspx
iNACOL	International Association for K-12 Online Learning	http://www.inacol.org/
UofA	University of Alaska	http://elearning.uaf.edu/
NCLB	No Child Left Behind	http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml
ESEA	Reauthorizing the Elementary & Secondary Education Act	http://www.ed.gov/esea