

Alaska Education Plan

March 19, 2009

Introduction

Welcome to the Alaska Education Plan. Created by Alaskans from many walks of life, it is the state's first blueprint for public education. The plan provides the basis for accountability to the public.

The plan answers these fundamental questions: What is Alaska's vision for our schools and students? What are our goals? What attributes and skills do we want high school graduates to possess? What actions will allow us to meet these goals and make this vision a reality?

In short, the vision and goals in the Alaska Education Plan are our destination. The actions are the roadmap. Knowing where we want to go, we can determine if our expenditures of money and effort are efficiently and effectively getting us there.

The public, having a clear vision for our schools and students, can measure performance against these goals. The plan, which will periodically be reviewed and revised, encourages Alaskans to participate in the goal-setting process and own the results.

The Alaska Statewide Education Summit, held in November 2008 in Anchorage, initiated the effort to develop the Alaska Education Plan. Nearly 450 participants discussed education topics ranging from preschool to postsecondary, technology to finances, community partnerships to culture.

Two principles guided the summit's structure: focused conversations among those who gather in a common cause will produce a shared vision, and collective wisdom is generated when groups gather in discussion.

Participants met in eight groups, each group discussing a separate topic in education. Each group identified challenges, opportunities, goals and actions for its topic. A ninth group crafted vision and mission statements and graduation outcomes – a list of the desired skills and attributes that Alaska high school graduates should possess as a result of their public education.

The Alaska Education Plan organizes the results from all eight groups at the summit into three topics, in order to provide greater focus. They are World-Class Schools; Community, Culture, and Family; and Student Health and Safety. Other topics discussed at the summit -- such as finance, technology, early education, and partnerships – have been integrated throughout the three remaining topics.

Each topic in the plan includes a rationale for action, a goal, and broadly stated actions for each goal. Groups of Alaskans will continue to meet in 2009 to develop a detailed, prioritized action plan for each goal.

The Alaska Education Plan, related background documents, and its ongoing progress are featured on the web site of the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development at www.eed.state.ak.us/.

Vision

Vision: An Alaska education opens a world of possibilities.

- Our parents and students value and support learning
- Our communities support dreams and create opportunities
- Our schools inspire thinking and creativity
- Our graduates understand the past and build the future

Mission

Mission: Alaska's education system fosters creativity and curiosity, and embraces diversity. Alaska's students have the skills and knowledge to contribute to local, state, national and global communities by understanding the past and present, and they are prepared to create the future.

World-Class Students Graduation Outcomes

Possess a broad knowledge base

- Know and be able to discuss the critical bodies of knowledge in art, science, literature/language arts, history, geography, and health in addition to being skilled in reading, writing, and mathematics
- Apply content knowledge in meaningful and practical ways
- Use prior knowledge to acquire new knowledge, develop new skills, and expand understanding
- Understand issues from a variety of cultural perspectives
- Demonstrate proficiency in a second language

Communicate effectively

- Express ideas clearly, both verbally and in writing
- Communicate through listening and discussion with others
- Read, understand, and respond to written information
- Understand and respond to verbal information

Use technology skills

- Use a broad range of technologies to pursue interests, investigate and solve problems, and communicate and share ideas
- Be personally accountable for the ethical use of technology
- Use the Internet to explore questions; collect, critically evaluate, and select information sources; synthesize conclusions; and communicate the results

Think logically and critically

- Solve problems using questioning, reasoning, and analysis
- Acquire and manage information to understand and solve problems
- Understand and apply decision-making processes in a variety of settings
- Be able to select, analyze, and use information for specific purposes
- Explore, consider, and evaluate divergent viewpoints and ideas

Be healthy

- Apply the knowledge, habits, and attitudes that promote physical and mental health
- Participate in collaborative and responsible relationships
- Make informed and safe choices
- Set and achieve personal goals
- Connect with family and culture values

Recognize, value and use creativity

- Appreciate artistic expression
- Demonstrate creative thinking
- Show self-expression
- Honor traditional art forms

Be a responsible and ethical citizen and community member

- Understand and participate in the democratic process
- Demonstrate respect for people and cultures
- Demonstrate respect for the environment and evaluate the use of resources
- Take responsibility for personal actions and understand the impact those actions have on others
- Demonstrate an ability to approach problems from a global perspective
- Be an effective and responsible decision-maker who contributes to and volunteers in the community
- Adapt to a diverse and changing world

Be an enthusiastic learner

- Make a commitment to create quality work and strive for excellence
- Use a variety of learning strategies, personal skills, and time management skills to enhance learning
- Reflect on and evaluate learning for self-improvement
- Understand the relevance of learning a broad range of skills

World-Class Schools

Rationale for action

World-class schools are the ultimate goal for Alaska's public education system. All the other goals feed into this. These schools will nurture the students described in this plan's graduation objectives as world-class students.

There are many success stories in Alaska's schools, ranging from caring teachers helping struggling students, to the graduates who fill our work places, to creative programs by school districts to teach students independent living skills and the skills for jobs or postsecondary (after high school) education.

And yet there are many gaps in the education of Alaska's children. There are great differences in the academic preparation of children entering kindergarten. As they grow older, roughly a quarter of students are less than proficient in one or more of the fundamental skills of reading, writing and math. Several categories of students are less likely to do well in school -- ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, students from low-income families, and students who are learning English.

At least a third of Alaska students will leave school without a diploma. About 40 percent of recent Alaska high school graduates who attend the University of Alaska need remedial courses. Some Alaska high school graduates have completed their public education yet do not have a direction in life and are not prepared for a career, while well-paying, interesting jobs go unfilled. Additionally, some gifted and talented students are not challenged sufficiently by their school work.

World-class schools will have the support of families and communities. World-class schools will honor local cultures and integrate them into instruction.

World-class schools will have strong academic standards and high expectations for all students, yet these schools will support the varied needs and interests of each student, in academics, the arts and extracurricular activities. World-class schools will have the flexibility to provide alternative pathways to student success. They will offer career and technical courses, preparation and guidance.

World-class schools will attract, prepare and retain quality teachers and administrators. World-class schools will have appropriate facilities and technology. They will build partnerships with entities outside of the schools.

Goal

All students will graduate prepared for careers or postsecondary training and education.

Actions

1. Ensure that families, if they desire, can access in their community affordable, high-quality early care and learning programs for children from birth to age 5.
2. Define an education system, aligned from preschool to postsecondary, that ensures all students are prepared to transition to the next level of education, career, or life path of their choice.
3. Review the state's academic standards to determine alignment with world-class 21st century skills and Alaska's graduation outcomes.
4. Establish partnerships that enhance readiness for postsecondary education, career preparation, and life.
5. Develop a staff development infrastructure that is collaborative, need-based, research-proven, and provides opportunities for continuous growth for new and experienced teachers.
6. Ensure that public and private postsecondary institutions, business and industry, tribal organizations, and state agencies work collaboratively to develop and maintain a coherent educational plan designed to achieve Alaska's high education expectations.
7. Collaborate with Alaska's postsecondary institutions to ensure that education-related degree programs and staff development programs reflect research, best practices, Alaska's diverse cultures, and alignment to academic standards, and are sufficient in scale and scope to meet the public school work force needs.
8. Empower students by providing a learning environment that personalizes their education and engages them as active partners in their own learning through technology.
9. Ensure that teachers have the training to effectively use technology to support instruction.
10. Establish and maintain a statewide public telecommunications network that provides the opportunity for instruction, communication and distance education.
11. Ensure that the state foundation funding program is comprehensible to the public, sufficient to meet world-class performance expectations, responsive to the changing needs of Alaska's work force, and predictable enough to facilitate effective planning.

12. Provide consistent funding for school construction and major maintenance projects.
13. Engage with the community and local organizations to identify local work force skills needed for economic development.
14. Attract and retain quality teachers and administrators; provide quality professional development.
15. Teach work ethic and employability skills.

Community, Culture and Family

Rationale for action

Family engagement has emerged as a central focus in Alaska education. Viewing parents as the first and best teachers of their children goes beyond their role in early education. Engagement means involving families in every aspect of educational planning, implementation, and evaluation throughout their children's education.

Engagement means more than inviting parents to attend school functions or parent conferences or to join the PTA. Parent involvement must be more than asking parents to approve decisions about the school or their children that have already been made. Schools that make adjustments for parents with busy schedules, different backgrounds, and varying comfort levels with schools will enjoy more parental involvement. Relevant parent engagement is recognizing that the school serves the interests of parents.

When parents join with other community members and the school to determine behavioral expectations or learning goals for their children, they become partners in their children's education. Student achievement data can demonstrate how well a student is progressing toward the state's grade-level expectations, but only parent and student feedback can reveal how positive the learning climate is and how well the school is serving the community's valued interests.

Schools that support and celebrate school choice and family engagement must be committed to sharing information about program options, assessment data, and other information that is critical to evaluating what is best for children. Choice without knowledge has no meaning.

Goal

Schools will form strong partnerships with families and communities, and will respect and embrace local cultures.

Actions

1. Develop and implement strategies that encourage Alaskans to value and support education and lifelong learning.
2. Formulate a shared vision of community-based education that respects culture, school governance, and community ownership.
3. Implement a system of data collection and reporting of prekindergarten-postsecondary programming so parents, communities, and policy makers can make informed decisions.
4. Increase diversity in the teaching profession.

5. Apply Alaska's Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools.
6. Provide new and experienced educators with sufficient training and ongoing support to integrate and instruct within the context of a community's indigenous cultures.
7. Ensure that schools' instruction, organization, and operational procedures reflect and respond to student, family, and community values and needs.
8. Support opportunities for school choice, education alternatives, and distance-delivery options that are high quality, standards-based, and flexible to meet the individual needs of a child or family.
9. Provide support and resources for parents who choose to home school their children.
10. Create a sustainable infrastructure committed to developing and maintaining partnerships that enhance student success.
11. Develop and implement strategies to improve student attendance.

Student Health and Safety

Rationale for action

Creating healthy, safe schools requires healthy families and communities. Children who have a strong connection to family values, customs, and beliefs develop the confidence to reach for a star and the talent to grab one.

If children cannot rely on positive connections at home, they will settle for any substitute that satisfies this longing, including gang affiliation, harmful relationships, violence, and drug and alcohol abuse.

Schools must be proactive, focusing on the prevention of unsafe and unhealthy practices. Several ingredients are necessary to create a safe and healthy school environment. Schools will form partnerships with community entities to achieve these goals.

Schools must take rigorous action to ensure that schools are free from violence, drugs, disruptive behavior, and harassment. Schools must provide support and intervention services for parents and students, a broad range of activities, rigorous academic and vocational programs, and learning alternatives that meet the interests and learning needs of every child and family.

School staff must receive training and support to enforce school expectations. Students, parents, educators, and community members must teach and model a consistent set of values as the basis for every activity, program, lesson or expectation.

Schools should be models of healthy nutrition and physical activity, teaching students good habits. Approximately one in 10 Alaska children is obese. At least half of Alaska's children do not meet recommended levels of physical activity.

Goal

Students will have access to safe schools, where they develop healthy and safe practices for life.

Actions

1. Develop a comprehensive health and safety plan that uses the expertise of parents, communities, tribal organizations, social and civic organizations, state agencies, and school districts.

2. Implement health and wellness programs that improve students' sense of well-being and address substance abuse, suicide, sex education, bullying, Internet safety, mental and physical health, and personal safety.
3. Implement nutrition and physical education programs to ensure that students develop patterns of lifelong healthy behaviors.
4. Ensure that students, staff and community members are provided safe and secure schools.