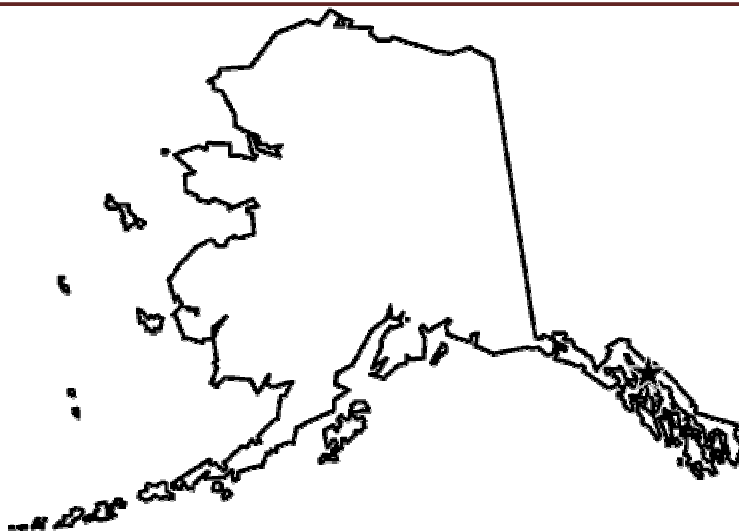


# ***IMPROVING ALASKA'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM***



## *Final Report of the Alaska Advisory Task Force on Higher Education & Career Readiness:*

*A Plan for Increasing the Number of Alaskans Prepared to Enter the Workforce or  
Postsecondary Programs of Study and Improving School Completion  
April 2011*

April 1, 2011

TO: Members of the 27<sup>th</sup> Alaska State Legislature

As required by Senate Bill 221 of 2010, the Alaska Advisory Task Force on Higher Education and Career Readiness (HECR) was created and is presenting the enclosed report. The Task Force began working in July 2010 and established the following goal:

*Every student in Alaska will complete high school with sufficient skills to enter the workforce, or a course of study at a postsecondary institution, without the need for remedial coursework in the core areas of reading, writing, and math by the end of fiscal year 2017.*

The Task Force believes the goal is attainable and critical to the future of Alaska's economic development. The report is a comprehensive analysis and presents recommendations adopted by the Task Force in an effort to aid the Governor, the Legislature, state agencies, and local school districts in considering strategies and benchmarks for reaching this ambitious goal.

I would like to express sincere gratitude to those who served on the Task Force and gave their time and extensive expertise to the process of reaching these recommendations. The members have been committed to their charge as evidenced by their participation in Task Force meetings. All members have worked diligently in contributing to this report and support the recommendations without reservation. The Task Force members are listed below alphabetically:

Mike Andrews, Executive Director, Alaska Works Partnership  
Barbara Angaiak, President, NEA-Alaska  
Don Bantz, President, Alaska Pacific University  
Diane Barrans, Executive Director, AK Commission on Postsecondary Education  
Steve Bradshaw, President, Alaska Council of School Administrators  
Heather Brakes, Legislative Director & Designee for Governor Sean Parnell  
Lolly Carpluk, Coordinator, UAF Alaska Native Teacher Preparation Project  
Representative Mike Chenault, Speaker - AK House of Representatives (Task Force Co-Chair)  
Peter Finn, Chair, AK Coalition of Student Leaders & Designee for UnivAK Student Regent  
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Dr. Keith Hamilton, President, Alaska Christian College  
Donald Handeland, Student Representative, AK State Board of Education & Early Development  
Mike Hanley, Commissioner, AK Dept. Education & Early Development  
Senator Charlie Huggins, Alaska State Senate  
Senator Linda Menard, Alaska State Senate  
Greg Owens, Math Faculty, UAF Dept. of Developmental Education  
Carl Rose, Executive Director, Alaska Association of School Boards

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Representative Paul Seaton, Alaska State House of Representatives  
Senator Gary Stevens, President, Alaska State Senate (Task Force Co-Chair)  
Fred Villa, UA Associate Vice President for Workforce Programs

The work of the Task Force would not be complete nor successful without the assistance of several other educational professional staff who followed our meetings, gave valuable input to the discussion, helped provide data to examine, or gave their time to share their programs or facilities with the Task Force. I would like to especially thank the following individuals for their contribution to the Task Force:

Wanetta Ayers, Division Director, Office of Economic Development, Alaska Dept. of Commerce, Community & Economic Development;  
Brenda Bautsch, Education Policy Specialist, National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL);  
Eddy Brakes, Manager, Tribal Child Support Unit, Central Council, Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska;  
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Stan Jones, President, Complete College America;

Crystal Kennedy, President, Association of Alaska School Boards;  
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Tim Lamkin, Legislative Aide, Office of Senator Gary Stevens;  
Erik McCormick, Director of Assessment, Accountability & Information Management, Alaska Dept. of Education & Early Development;  
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Dr. Doug Walrath, Director, Northwestern Alaska Career & Technical Center (NACTEC), Nome, Alaska.

The Task Force firmly believes the education level of our citizenry is inextricably tied to Alaska's economic development. Work toward the realization of the Task Force goal is critical and should be a top priority for our state. It is imperative that our state answer the call to action and provide the needed resources to implement the recommendations within this report if we are to provide our students with the tools and skills they need to sustain Alaska's economic development when they enter the workforce and meet the critical goal set by the Task Force.

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Senator Gary Stevens, President  
27<sup>th</sup> Alaska State Senate

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Representative Mike Chenault, Speaker  
27<sup>th</sup> Alaska State House of Representatives

Co-Chairs, Alaska Advisory Task Force on Higher Education & Career Readiness

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of the Advisory Task Force on Higher Education is to ensure every student in Alaska completes high school with sufficient skills to enter the workforce, or a course of study at a postsecondary institution, without the need for remedial coursework in the core areas of reading, writing, and math.

The University of Alaska reports that from 2005-2010, on average, 50.1% of all of first-time freshman enrolled system-wide required remedial coursework in English or math. It has been proven students are less likely to complete a degree when required to first complete preparatory courses. Alaska is not unique; this situation is occurring systemically across the United States. Students nationwide either are not completing high school with the basic skills necessary to enter the workforce or are increasingly underprepared to begin their postsecondary career path. The Advisory Task Force on Higher Education and Career Readiness was therefore established to advise the Legislature on matters pertaining to college and career readiness of students graduating from Alaska's public secondary and postsecondary schools.

The 20-member Task Force received testimony from around the state, and studied the recommendations of national and state experts. The Task Force also reviewed the state's current demographics, and best educational practices, and looked to other states for models of best practices. As a result, the Task Force developed four core recommendations to guide Alaska in undertaking a major shift in the state's current educational attainment.

#### The four core areas are:

1. Student Success
2. Career Path Guidance
3. Strengthening Schools
4. Predictable and Sustainable Funding

This report outlines the challenges, and the changes needed to ensure the amount of remediation is significantly reduced, and that students who enter postsecondary are successful in completing their programs of study. The report calls for the implementation of policies in fiscal years 2012 through 2017 that do not require legislation, as well as the enactment of legislation, where necessary, over the next five years.

According to Senate Bill 221 (2010), the Task Force will cease to exist July 1, 2011. At that time the Task Force's duties will be fulfilled and the goal of enacting the recommendations will fall to the Legislature, respective State of Alaska agencies, and other appropriate educational or stakeholder bodies in the state.

There is much work to be accomplished between the publication of this report and June 30, 2017. The cooperation of leaders in K-12 education, the Department of Workforce and Workforce Development, the Department of Education and Early Development, the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, and the University of Alaska, is essential in achieving the HECR Task Force's critical goals.

## INTRODUCTION

In May 2010, the Governor signed Senate 221 into law, which aside from establishing the Alaska Performance Scholarship program, also established the Advisory Task Force on Higher Education and Career Readiness (HECR) to consider ways to improve Alaska's education system by reducing the need for remediation and increasing the number of high school and postsecondary graduates. The Task Force was assembled and met 8 times, each over a 2-day period, first in Anchorage on July 22- 23, 2010, then in Fairbanks on September 1- 2, 2010, in Nome on October 4 - 5, 2010, in Sitka on November 8 - 9, 2010, in Anchorage on January 11-12, 2011, and in Juneau on March 10 - 11, 2011, on March 26, 2011, and March 30, 2011.

The duties of the Task Force were as follows:

- (1) compile research conducted in the state and nationally on reducing remediation, improving retention, and increasing college and postsecondary vocational or technical program graduation rates;
- (2) summarize data on
  - (a) types of testing used to determine college and career readiness;
  - (b) remediation rates;
  - (c) effectiveness of remediation for students entering college or postsecondary vocational or technical training programs with skill deficits;
  - (d) characteristics of programs that are most effective in addressing skill deficits;
- (3) create a definition of remediation to ensure consistency in reporting of remediation rates by postsecondary institutions in the state;
- (4) identify the contributing causes of a lack of college and career readiness of students who graduate from public secondary schools in the state and the course topics taken in college or postsecondary vocational or technical training programs for which students require remediation;
- (5) identify best practices examples of school systems, colleges, and postsecondary vocational or technical training programs that are succeeding in reducing the need for remedial education;
- (6) explore new approaches that may be effective in producing increased levels of college and career readiness;
- (7) determine the availability of broadband and Internet capabilities and the effect of the use of electronic, Internet, and virtual instruction on student learning and success in schools;
- (8) determine the role various types of postsecondary institutions may play in addressing the need for remediation;

- (9) review graduation rates of colleges, universities, and postsecondary vocational or technical training programs located in the state for the six years preceding the effective date of this section;
- (10) prepare for the legislature a set of written recommendations to improve remediation, retention, and graduation rates at colleges, universities, and postsecondary vocational or technical training programs in the state;
- (11) review completion rates for career skill certificate programs, disaggregated by program and postsecondary campus.
- (12) The task force shall submit the assessment and recommendations developed under 2(f) of this section in a report to the legislature not later than April 1, 2011.

During the Task Force's meetings, much time was spent identifying the contributing causes of lack of student college and career readiness, as well as exploring alternative strategies that may be effective in producing increased levels of college and career readiness. The Task Force heard from experts and organizers of best practices in school systems and postsecondary training programs that are succeeding in reducing the need for remedial education.

In an effort to keep some focus on specific areas to improve our educational system, the Task Force organized recommendations into four distinct focus areas as follows:

- 1. Student Success
- 2. Career Path Guidance
- 3. Strengthening Schools
- 4. Predictable and Sustainable Funding

Additional areas of concern that did not fall directly within these categories, nor the purview of the Task Force's duties, but yet were still identified as potential contributing causes to student successes or failures are summarized at the end of this report for information purposes.



### **I. Student Success**

Task Force members recognize the following themes within the policy area of student success to promote as a means to improve student success in schools:

- The value of career and technical educational training in our schools as a way to reinforce standard secondary curriculum in real-world, hands on practices;
- The success with which bridging programs are positively impacting students by boosting their confidence levels and giving them a taste of college life and expectations;
- The importance of alternative ways to engage struggling students through the use of theme-based, hands-on instructional learning;
- The need to raise the bar for school districts and students to pursue a robust core of academia orbiting around language arts, math, and science skills.

The Alaska Career and Technical Education plan, developed in 2010 by the Alaska Workforce Investment Board in conjunction with the Alaska Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, has been endorsed by the University of Alaska Board of Regents, the Alaska State Board of Education, and an array of schools and entities and organizations. The Alaska CTE plan addresses head on many of the problems identified by the Task Force. Plan strategies will improve student success starting in early grades along paths through secondary and higher education. CTE plan objectives aim at what students need to advance in school, graduate, be ready for work or postsecondary and college education and earn a degree. It carves our trail for supplying Alaska future workers with careers in Alaska's best jobs.

The Rural Alaska Honors Institute (RAHI) is a bridging program that assists students in rural Alaska in making the academic and social transition between high school and college. RAHI is for college-bound students who are willing to work hard and are dedicated to achieving good academic performance.

An independent study in 2006 by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) found that "*when just comparing minority students, RAHI rural Alaska Natives were nearly twice as likely to successfully complete a Bachelor's degree program than other rural Alaska Natives (19 percent versus 10 percent,  $p < .0001$ ).*" When including those RAHI students who attended universities outside of Alaska, the graduation rate for Alaska Native/American Indian students is even better. The AIR study looked only at former RAHI students attending college in the UA system. A 2008 study by the University of Alaska Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) indicates that as a population, only 6% of Alaska Native students complete their baccalaureate degrees. However, as of June 2010, nearly 28% of RAHI students have earned a baccalaureate degree. In other words, RAHI students are over 4 times more likely to finish their college program than students who do not participate in RAHI.

Other bridging programs like Upward Bound, Della Keats/U-Doc (WWAMI), Raven's Quest (Behavioral Health), Voyage to Excellence, the Alaska Native Heritage Center, and the Alaska Humanities Forum are all good examples of similar efforts designed to inspire students to do well in high school and pursue postsecondary work. However, they are often focused on attracting students to specific career fields. Other programs could be established or expanded to include emphases on a broader range of subjects to attract students of all callings, including



areas such as science, engineering, and career technical. Most importantly, these programs should be made more visible to parents and prospective students.

Engaging students in school demands that we integrate academic knowledge into culturally relevant coursework through theme based education. This is not limited to teaching culturally relevant material; it means using everyday life and professional circumstances to teach curriculum objectives. Introducing specialized summer academies for struggling students to be exposed to innovative, theme-based instruction could be a solution to help those students get back on track.

The Alaska Performance Scholarship program is patterned after successful scholarship programs in 22 other states aimed specifically at improving high school graduation rates, and preparing students for the workforce or postsecondary training. The key feature of the scholarship program is that it is merit-based. All students who participate will be required to complete a more rigorous high school curriculum consisting of four years of language arts, mathematics, and science, and three years of social studies. Alternative curriculum pathways are offered, but the goal remains to inspire student to set academic goals, work harder, and achieve greater success in school. The APS program is also designed to encourage schools to offer more curriculum course offerings.

The program rules also include a requirement for scholarships to be used only at postsecondary institutions in Alaska. Students who study and complete the programs in the state are proven to be more likely to remain here and contribute to Alaska's economy.

The goals of the APS program are consistent with and complementary to the mission of the HECR Task Force.

### STUDENT SUCCESS

Recommendations	Time Horizon	Rationale
I.A The Legislature should fund implementation of the Alaska Career & Technical Education (CTE) plan to improve statewide delivery of programs in career and technical training	2012-2017	The Alaska CTE plan addresses many of the problems identified by the Task Force. Plan strategies will improve student success starting in early grades along paths through secondary and higher education. CTE plan objectives aim at what students need to advance in school, graduate, be ready for work or postsecondary and college education and earn a degree.
I.B Schools, Districts and the University of Alaska should collaborate to either expand existing or create new bridging program similar to RAHI and reach deeper into the student pool to inspire students to perform better in high school and positively affect the perceptions of and preparations for attending postsecondary study.	2012-2017	RAHI students are over 4 times more likely to finish their college program than students who do not participate in RAHI.

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<p>I.C School districts should encourage voluntary summer academies and integrate academic knowledge into coursework through theme-based education. Alternative teaching materials should include culturally relevant material and everyday life and professional circumstances to teach curriculum objectives.</p>	<p>2013-2014</p>	<p>For example, students who live in a coastal fishing community can learn science, reading, and math in the context of fishing. This connects what is being taught in the classroom to their lives outside the classroom and the community, giving students a meaningful view of themselves and the things they're learning.</p>
<p>I.D The Task Force supports the objectives of the Alaska Performance Scholarship program relative to encouraging all students to challenge themselves academically and work hard in school.</p>	<p>2011-2017</p>	<p>A robust, rigorous curriculum coupled with the financial incentives of the new Alaska Performance Scholarship serves to challenge students into setting high goals, working harder, and achieving academic success. It also serves to encourage school districts to meet the demand for these more rigorous curricula by offering more courses aligned to it.</p>

### 2. Career Path Guidance

Task Force members recognize the following themes within the policy area of career path guidance as means to improve both advisor effectiveness and student success in schools:

- The importance of parental engagement serving as a student's primary and most prominent life coach;
- The value of making better efforts to inform the public, particularly parents and students, about the importance of finishing high school;
- The value of advisors who are well-trained in best practices of student engagement and fostering a campus career-prep culture;
- The value of academic or career coaches in fostering student ambition and goal setting from an early age and maintaining that support consistently throughout their school experience, including postsecondary.

If there is one thing the HECR Task Force might accomplish, it would be to instill the importance of parental engagement in a child's learning. No amount of money, legislation, policies, or programs can adequately substitute for a parent's ultimate responsibility to help their child learn.

Parental engagement means vastly different things to different parents. For some, it may mean simply getting their children to school on time, for others it means attending after-school sporting activities, and still others to regularly be in the classroom. While there may not be any particular right or wrong answer defining parental engagement, it's important for parents to understand that their children need their support in more ways than one.

It is clear to policy makers that the United States is losing its competitive edge in the world economy, and that our educational system needs to be improved to produce citizens better-trained to meet the changing demands of our workforce. Alaska is no exception. Efforts to better inform the public of the need to work harder in school can help parents and students realize the importance of high school completion.

Research shows that improving postsecondary enrollment and retention requires a postsecondary-going culture in high school, and is best approached no later than when students are in middle school. Providing adequate support and guidance to students early and consistently throughout their schooling is evidently the key. Advisors are in a unique position to cultivate a postsecondary-going culture as well as to provide the guidance and support necessary for students to realize their academic and career goals while in high school.

A formal assessment of the current system of school counseling was beyond the scope of the task force's responsibilities. However, based on testimony from stakeholders, it is assumed that many Alaska schools have active counselors in their schools. It is also assumed that the function of school counselors likely takes on many forms ranging from personal and social issues, to mental health services, testing administration, hall or cafeteria duty, or even substitute teaching. In these instances, though students are given much needed personalized attention about their circumstances, there is significantly less time available to counselors to specifically target academic planning and postsecondary transition activities. Work should be done to identify

ways to increase counselors' capacity to provide students academic and career guidance in middle and secondary schools.

**CAREER PATH GUIDANCE**

Recommendations	Time Horizon	Rationale
2.A School districts should improve and increase the role of counselors for students by maintaining consistent academic, career and technical, and cross-cultural screening counseling throughout at least their secondary schooling.	2012-2017	Counselors are a unique position to cultivate a postsecondary-going culture as well as to provide the guidance and support necessary for students to realize their academic and career goals.
2.B The University of Alaska Board of Regents needs to ensure that academic advisors are serving all degree-seeking students at every campus, and that campus advising services are organized in a way that best serves the needs of students throughout their academic training.	2012-2017	Advising services are offered but not are not mandated throughout the UA system. A 2008 report by ISER included a series of interviews from UAA graduates from every decade since the 1970's. The graduates reported facing remarkably similar challenges at UAA across several decades.
2.C The Governor or the Department of Education and Early Development should launch a public awareness campaign about the importance of finishing high school and preparing for adult life.	2011-2013	Parents and students must be better informed about the value of performing well in and finishing high school.
2.D The Task Force encourages the Alaska PTA in its efforts to better inform parents of the responsibility of parental involvement in their child's educational development, including such areas as homework, attendance, discipline, after-school activities., volunteerism, and planning for higher education opportunities for students.	2011-2017	Research has consistently shown that a fundamental key to student success is the presence of at least one caring adult, <i>outside the classroom</i> , to help guide and support them in the learning process. The burden of student learning cannot, or at least should not, fall entirely on the shoulders of the classroom teacher. After-school and home activities are an important part of following through with classroom curriculum.

### 3. Strengthening Schools

Task Force members recognize the following themes to promote as means of strengthening schools:

- The value of data collection and sharing among state educational agencies for purposes of making informed policy decisions;
- The importance of statewide, inter-agency support, communication, and collaboration to focus their collective efforts to improve student outcomes in schools and over students' entire educational careers;
- The value of making objective assessments of students' existing academic skill level and adjusting their behaviors toward academic achievement;
- The need to design programs that address the challenges associated with the expansive nature of Alaska's network of schools and the delivery needs of its student population in remote areas of the state;
- The value of teacher professional development and significance of linking cultural relevance to teacher training for improved student success in our state;
- The need to reexamine the methodologies used for remedial education.

Alaska is one of only a few states that cannot readily respond to basic education productivity questions such as which programs and interventions are most effective. Without coordinated longitudinal reporting to document outcomes as students progress (or fail to progress) through and beyond Alaska's education system, Alaska cannot know that state education spending results in any specific benefit, much less understand the return on investment or be able to determine what cost efficiencies may be possible. The only way to improve policymaking decisions in this regard is through the combined and synchronized efforts of stakeholder institutions to develop and maintain a statewide system of longitudinal data gathering and reporting.

The issues of local control, cultural and language integration, identity and place-based educational strategies must have a place in our educational system. A core part of Alaska Native peoples' existence is based upon their connection to the land and all that it encompasses. The mantra coined during the negotiations and eventual passing of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) sums it up quite well, "take our land, take our life." The relationship with the land brings relevancy and meaning to education. Indigenous scholar Gregory Cajete (2000) states, "the more humans know about themselves, that is their connection with everything around them – the greater the celebration of life, the greater the comfort of knowing and the greater the joy of being." An education that creates bridges between the Indigenous and Eurocentric views contributes to healing and building of a consciousness that allows for a more humanistic worldview.

**STRENGTHENING SCHOOLS**

Recommendations	Time Horizon	Rationale
3.A The Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, the Department of Education and Early Development, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the University of Alaska should develop and deploy a "proof of concept" SLDS prototype over the coming fiscal year FY12 .	2011-2013	Without statewide longitudinal data reporting, Alaska's policy leaders cannot know if the dollars Alaska spends on education and workforce development are actually resulting in progress towards state higher education and career readiness goals.
3.B Require more and better lines of communication directly between the Alaska Legislature, the State Board of Education and Early Development, the Alaska Workforce Investment Board, the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, and the University of Alaska Board of Regents, including reporting requirements using shared student data.	2012-2017	These state entities share a vested interest in promoting an efficient, effective, and integrated system of education and training programs so that all Alaskans have the skills necessary to Alaska's economy. It is imperative they communicate and collaborate effectively to reach and maintain that goal. Additionally, these entities should have the capacity to be accountable to Alaska's public.
3.C The University of Alaska Board of Regents and the state Board of Education are encouraged to collaborate in the use of skills assessment tools for students to gain a realistic appraisal of their existing skill level early-on so they can prepare for college- level work while still in high school.	2012-2017	Standardized tests such as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), the SAT, the ACT, WorkKeys, or ACCUPLACER, are assessment tools widely used by postsecondary institutions nationwide to help students identify their academic strengths and needs to assist in planning an appropriate schedule of coursework. Further, when a student enters college, that coursework is no longer free of charge. If we encourage students to make an assessment earlier, they can recognize their needs and take the appropriate coursework in high school, when it is still free for them.

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3.D School Districts identify and the Legislature funds alternative ways of achieving adequate internet connectivity for effective distance delivery of curriculum prior to the realization of improved broadband installation across the State.	2011-2013	Private industry is actively working to substantially improve broadband capabilities across Alaska. Meanwhile the Connect Alaska project is engaged in detailed mapping of broadband in the state. So, while we wait for industry to bring improved connectivity to market, the state should support alternative methods to efficiently deliver distance education.
3.E The Legislature should fully fund and encourage the continuing work of the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project, and any similar program(s) in the state, for teachers seeking professional development to improve their classroom instructional skills.	2012-2017	The ASMP has demonstrated success in improving quality and effectiveness of new teachers entering the workforce.
3.F The Alaska Statewide Teacher Mentor Project should work to provide greater mentoring opportunities for incoming Alaska minority educators and provide improved Alaska cultural relevance, via recognized Alaska cultural leaders, to its mentoring curriculum for all incoming teachers.	2012-2017	Alaska Native educators and Elders have been involved for many years in incorporating an Indigenous perspective into formal education. They have developed culture- based curriculum, cultural orientation and culturally focused professional development workshops. The ASMP should embrace more teacher mentoring in this area.
3.G Either by statute or regulation, the state should expand alternative routes for teacher certification, particularly to increase the number and quality of Alaskan minority teachers as well as content experts in technical fields.	2012-2014	There is concern that respected individuals who are recognized experts in their field and effective instructors in the content area, are precluded from qualifying as a credentialed teacher due to lack of formal credentials.



<p>3.H The University of Alaska Board of Regents should review their current models of providing developmental education, analyze what programs work best, what alternatives and emerging pedagogies show promise, and what best practices are being utilized in other states. The review should consider the cost of developmental programs, including the efficacy of incentives to effectively move developmental students into standard curricula.</p>	<p>2012-2013</p>	<p>Students who enter developmental studies face additional challenges in completing their degree program. Students should only need to take coursework in the specific area a placement exam identifies as a deficiency in lieu of an entire course. Students should be allowed to take remediation and regular courses simultaneously.</p>
<p>3.I The Department should review the examination system for teacher certification to confirm its effectiveness for screening good teachers, and to confirm it has Alaska cultural relevance and sensitivity.</p>	<p>2012-2013</p>	<p>Teachers training in the postsecondary system for 4-6 years are struggling to pass the PRAXIS exams. Therefore, it would seem the standards tested by PRAXIS are not being taught by the University. If no correlation between success on PRAXIS and subsequent success as a classroom teacher can be shown, it should be eliminated and other alternative methods for licensure should be created. We must either lower (or remove) the standard, or maintain it and prepare teachers-in-training accordingly.</p>

### **4. Predictable and Sustainable Funding:**

Task Force members recognize the following themes within the policy area of predictable and sustainable funding to promote as means of improving student retention and graduation rates in schools:

- The long-term value of investments in Pre- K and early literacy programs;
- The long-term value of investments in new teaching pedagogies;
- Incentives to keep students in college and graduating on schedule;
- Long-term sustainable financial aid funding mechanisms for students.

Children who receive quality early education arrive at school ready to learn and perform better in school. They are less likely to need expensive special education interventions, and they are more likely to graduate from high school and to successfully enter the workforce. Research is clear that when students enter kindergarten, 40% of them on average are one to three years behind grade level, and too many of them stay behind throughout their school careers. Alaska can invest a relatively small amount in early childhood and innovative K- 12 programs, or a vastly greater amount in remediation at the college level. Today's third-grader can't wait for, and our public treasury cannot afford, a remediation response that doesn't begin until the 13th grade

The best practices in teaching and learning involve learning communities, collaborative team-based learning, interdisciplinary knowledge, student engagement, personalized student/faculty interaction, high levels of academic challenge, responsiveness to digital-era learners, curriculum with hands-on experience in the real world, relevance, and rigor; honoring multiple ways of knowing, and multiple intelligences

Yet, the primary method of instruction--at both the secondary and postsecondary levels--often ignores the best practices in teaching and learning that engage students.

Richard Arum's work documenting "limited learning in colleges" is a vivid reminder of the need at the college level to create learning environments that foster deep learning, embodied learning, the kind that remains within you. Literally it means growing the neurons in your brain, firing their synapses like fireworks exploding, and creating new neural networks in the body/mind neural networks being the repository of knowledge and experience. We know that the single most important factor in learning is the existing network of neurons in the learner's brain. The premise is that deep learning, not just workforce education, is the end game of the postsecondary education experience. Deep learning spawns the creativity, innovation, and knowledge it will take for Alaskans to compete in the global economy and steward Alaska's economy, and its human and natural resources. The Task Force recognizes the need to encourage finding new ways to engage students and exploring new instructional pedagogies.

Students currently in the system, both those requiring remedial work and those that don't, are struggling to pay for it, regardless of their academic performance. Alaska's ranks dead last in the nation for students from low-income families attending postsecondary institution, and last in providing needs-based financial aid.

Need for student non-loan financial aid programs to be funded in a reliable and predictable fashion to ensure Alaska students can rely on the availability of aid for the purpose of education planning. Alaska's non-loan financial aid for higher education has received only minimal and varying levels of annual funding over the past three decades. The result is that financial aid becomes a small reward for behavior the student is already undertaking. We will only be able to influence students' behavior if we can assure them in advance of postsecondary education enrollment that funding will be available for college or career training.

#### **PREDICTABLE & SUSTAINABLE FUNDING**

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Time Horizon</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
<b>4.A</b> The Legislature should establish a grant funding process for community-based, voluntary Pre-K education and early literacy programs in the state.	2012-	Early learning, particularly preparedness to enter Kindergarten and proficiency at the 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade, has been identified as essential for laying the foundation of student success.
<b>4.B</b> The Legislature should create and fund an Emerging Pedagogies Fund.	2012	Grants could be awarded to support projects serving as an incubator of creativity and innovation for teaching and learning aimed at professional development of secondary and post secondary faculty.
<b>4.C</b> The Legislature should fully fund in a reliable and predictable manner both the merit-based scholarship and needs-based grants to allow students to financially plan for their postsecondary training goals.	2011-2017	Non-loan financial aid has been identified as a key motivator preventing student from dropping out of college. However, such programs cannot change student outcomes unless students can be assured that the programs will be available throughout their higher education careers.

### CONCLUSION

Alaska will not be able to build a healthy and diverse economy without changes that improve productivity in the education system. The time for change is now. It is time for a plan of action.

In recent years Alaska has made progress in addressing its educational and workforce pipeline with actions such as:

- Court intervention on behalf of K-12 students
- Responsible legislative reaction to the court recommendations
- Reinvigorated interest in higher education by the executive branch
- Other on-going legislative actions designed to improve education

However, we can no longer afford to take a position of non-effort, passivity, or denial regarding the critical importance of the educational level of our citizens.

The goal of this Task Force is to ensure every Alaskan student completes high school with sufficient skills to enter the workforce, or a course of study at a postsecondary institution, without the need for remedial coursework in the core areas of reading, writing, and math by the end of fiscal year 2017.

The proposed recommendations in this report are based upon intensive, thoughtful study by Alaska's leaders in K-12, higher education, state agencies, the Alaska legislature, and various constituent groups.

At the end of WWII, the U.S. made a bold decision to invest in the future of the nation by investing in education. This investment led the nation into prosperity. Alaska's greatest generation is at the schoolhouse door waiting for their opportunity to prosper Alaska and compete in a global economy.

The Advisory Task Force on Higher Education and Career Readiness requests respective stakeholders to enact measures implementing the recommendations proposed in this report and to provide full funding necessary to make the plan a success.

Finally, to ensure a monitoring mechanism is in place, the Task Force requests the Department of Education and Early Development to provide benchmark assessments on the progress of the recommendations contained in this report, to be submitted to the Alaska Legislature beginning on June 30, 2012 and continuing annually at the end of each fiscal year through 2017.

### Additional Policy Areas Potentially Impacting Student Retention, Remediation, and Graduation Rates

There were several issues discussed by the Task Force that were identified as potential contributing causes of a lack of preparedness to enter the workforce or postsecondary study, or in dropping out of college before finishing their program of study. Below are a few of the policy areas considered and are provided below for the public's information and future review.

- Increase the length of the statewide minimum school term, and corresponding in-service professional development opportunities for teachers.
- Consider later start times for high school students to reflect the growing body of evidence of how sleep deprivation and hormonal changes in teens affect their capacity to learn and be successful in school.
- Consider a graduation requirement for students to take some form of online, digital coursework.
- Repeal AS 14.17.520, the requirement of a minimum 70% district-wide operating budget expenditure on classroom instruction.
- Carefully analyze and weigh the differential student costs at branch or extended campuses in comparison to attending main campuses. Should tuition and fees be substantially reduced for students attending the smaller campuses?
- Consider using modern classroom (or cyber-room) teaching practices; including for example, replacing traditional textbooks with electronic books, and providing the option for students to view classroom lectures remotely, via the internet.
- There were a number of findings in the recent Fisher Report (2011) and MacTaggart Report (2008) worth pursuing to improve the University of Alaska system both regionally and as a whole. The University of Alaska Board of Regents should carefully consider external reviews, such as the Fisher Report (2011) and the MacTaggart Report (2008), to assist in identifying changes that will create financial and programmatic efficiencies, improve quality, support collaboration between campuses, and foster student success at the University of Alaska.
- Consider the impact of fully funding school nutrition programs on student success.
- Consolidate the number of school districts to reduce administrative costs and to realize economies of scale.
- Adjust compulsory school age.
- Repeal the exit exam.
- Increase the school day in session.
- Increase the number of accredited secondary schools in the state.
- Restore some form of loan forgiveness for graduating in a timely manner and working in the state after graduation.

Additional Resources

Please refer to the HECR Task Force website for a thorough collection of resources and suggested reading on the issues covered in this report: [www.HECR.aksenate.org](http://www.HECR.aksenate.org)