

Education

The Walker-Mallott Education transition team consisted of geographically and ethnically diverse Alaskans representing the perspectives of business, K-12, early learning, rural Alaska, university, technical and career training, and parents. We came together to provide guidance and perspective to the administration on priorities for public education. Through consensus discussion and voting, the priority issues and elements for success were determined. Possible achievable actions, and barriers to achieving priorities were listed by smaller work groups formed within and discussed by the entire transition team.

The transition team for education was co-chaired by Mary Pete and Bob Williams. Transition team members in alphabetical order are Alyse Galvin, Andrew Halcro, Abbe Hensley, Spike Jorgensen, Kurt Kuhne, Patricia McNeil, Tony Nakazawa, Evon Peter, Don Rearden, Elsa Sargento, Polly Schaeffer, and Arthur Yang.

Priority Issues

1. Lack of alignment across all departments and between stakeholders towards ensuring effective education and effective, meaningful professional development.
2. Lack of culturally-based curriculum in the school.
3. Data should be used to implement educational policy, in particular, models that are working.
4. Students need enough quality teachers supported by adequate and predictable funding
5. Disconnect between K-12 and postsecondary education.

Other Issues Considered

- Parental disconnect from child's education and school.
- Emphasis on assessment as opposed to learning.

1. Lack of alignment across all departments and between stakeholders towards ensuring effective education and effective meaningful professional development

Stakeholders

- Alaska Department of Education & Early Childhood Development (DEED)
- Policymakers
- Other state departments with an educational program or funding mechanism
- Teachers
- Principals
- University of Alaska system
- Superintendents
- Elders
- Students
- Parents

- Community members
- Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council
- Diverse community leaders

Success Elements Considered to be Agreeable to Most Alaskans

- Early childhood resources and programs are integrated to serve children and families so that children enter kindergarten ready to succeed (currently Department of Education (DEED) & Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)).
- The efforts of DEED, the university, and schools are integrated so every teacher and support personnel are highly qualified and effective in their area of certification.
- The Alaska standards set by DEED are fully developed by the university, implemented by the schools and school districts with appropriate support and monitoring.
- DEED, the University and schools work cooperatively to support highly effective teachers with the best possible curriculum and teaching practices.
- Appropriate commissioners meeting regularly as a Children’s Cabinet.

Possible Actions to Success on Agreed Success Elements

- The Governor establishes an Office of Early Learning that integrates with DEED and DHSS early learning programs and resources, with leadership from Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council, to enhance the return on investment of a strong, effective early childhood education.
- The Governor establishes a Children’s Cabinet that uses data to make funding and programming decisions to improve coordination and the return on investment of a high quality public education system.
- Develop a system of accountability wherein these groups report back to the Governor what actions and what results (with trend lines) that have been achieved as they relate to goals that improve the public education system.
- Establish a program to develop enthusiasm and a support structure to develop Alaska-grown teachers that represent the diversity of Alaska. The program should be similar to how the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP) has developed engineers.
- Incentivize programs that train local people for local teaching jobs.
- DEED, University and districts work cooperatively to build, implement and support a comprehensive, highly diverse, research proven curriculum that meets high standards and is effectively implemented in Alaska classrooms Pre-K through 14.
- Learn from the success of other high-achieving countries that have made remarkable progress in improving their public education systems.

Barriers to Further Success

- The status quo has inertia.
- Cost.
- Understanding of leaders - political and educational.
- Assumption that existence of best practices is matched with the political and structural will to implement best practices.

- We develop Alaska standards - never complete or support them at a level to build the child or make meaningful changes in the classroom.
- Ensuring that education in the classroom respects and values the cultural heritage of our students is often missing.

Actions to Address Barriers

- Provide information to the Governor and DEED leadership on the value and benefits of more integrated resources in programs.
- Ensure the new Office of Early Learning or a coordination of Alaska education programs reports to the Governor the actions taken and results achieved with trend lines.
- Integrate and ensure coherence among the work of DEED, the University, and districts. Integrate Alaska Cultural Standards and Family Engagement Plan endorsed by the State Board of Education into the current Alaska Standards and ensure the integrated plan is effectively implemented.
- Develop supports to ensure that principals are strong instructional leaders.
- Develop teacher and principal preparation programs and curricula that ensure Alaska children experience success.
- Excellent teachers must be valued and kept in the classroom. Poor teachers must be removed and replaced with effective teachers.
- The Governor is provided adequate rationale for organizing a Children’s Cabinet with specific tasks and responsibilities that increase student success. The Children’s Cabinet should report to the Governor on actions taken and achieved results.
- Determine real need for preparing and supporting teachers from Alaska Native and other cultures in communities, and ensure this information is appropriately incorporated into teacher preparation programs.

2. Lack of culturally-based curriculum in the school

Stakeholders

- DEED
- Students
- Parents
- Community members
- Educators
- Administrators in each district
- Elders / Culture Bearers

Success Elements Considered to be Agreeable to Most Alaskans

- Students are excited about learning.
- Community, parents, elders are involved.
- Higher graduation rates.
- Lower suicide rates.
- Maintaining cultural identity as well as excelling academically.

- Cultural values are validated across cultures.
- Alaska cultural standards will be implemented across the state.
- Existing culturally based curriculum will be taught.

Possible Actions to Success on Agreed Success Elements

- Encourage educators to take their students into the outdoors to learn.
- Create and implement place-based curriculum.
- Offer Alaska Native languages.
- Integrate the Alaska Cultural Standards with the Alaska Standards.
- Identify cultural resources currently available and share them (use curriculum already established).
- Support the creation of Alaskan teaching materials by Alaskans (history, math, science, literature).
- Involve local communities in curriculum development.
- Celebrate Alaska's diversity.

Barriers to Further Success

- Stakeholders have no voice.
- Paternalistic system of western education.
- Focus on standardized tests.
- Lack of understanding and respect of cultural knowledge and values including science, language.
- Historical trauma.
- Oppressive system.
- Resistance and fear of cultural inclusion.
- Cultural genocide.

Actions to Address Barriers

- Commissioner of Education will be an Alaska Native.
- Hiring more teachers, administrators, and support staff that reflect Alaska Native Culture as well as other cultures.
- Reduce the number of standardized tests and have the Alaska state test include a cultural component that values place.
- Integrate and implement the Alaska Cultural Standards into Alaska Standards.
- Embrace and celebrate diversity.
- Teach Alaska Native languages in rural Alaska that meet requirements for the Alaska Performance Scholarship.

3. Data should be used to implement educational policy, in particular models that are working

Stakeholders

- DEED
- School Boards
- Business community
- Community members
- Students
- Parents

Success Elements Considered to be Agreeable to Most Alaskans

- All agency sharing and data use will foster a comprehensive and locally responsive approach to address education and the Alaska community.
- Student input data as well as outcome data will be used to shape and improve appropriate educational programming and assessment.
- Data will be relevant, understandable and easily accessible to the public.

Possible Actions to Success on Agreed Success Elements

- Administrative directive to create an inter-agency task force to determine relevant data that serves beneficial outcomes for all agencies aimed at systemic reforms to affect educational success.
- Utilize data and success models to generate a set of educational reform options which will be applied in a multi-agency approach at the community level, driven by local schools, school districts, and community partners.
- DEED will provide the public with comprehensive education data in a format that is easy to understand and find.
- Build partnerships with families
 - Two-way communication (in ways the family can understand)
 - Shared decision-making
 - Encourage and help parents to support and monitor student progress at home
 - Families should be warmly welcomed in schools in observable ways. Parent-school interactions and the physical setup of classrooms/activities should be welcoming to parents.
 - Build partnerships that speak for every child.
 - Community and families are encouraged to share together and engage in bringing more opportunities for all children

Barriers to Further Success

- Protective/territorial departments are reluctant to share relevant data that is linked with education outcomes.
- Lack of action from policymakers, school board and community partners to collaborate on education reforms using community data to guide efforts.

- Current education data is presented in a manner that is hard to understand and is too complex.
- DEED website needs improvement and a conceptual redesign.

Actions to Address Barriers

- Directive of Governor for all agencies to create channels of communication to identify relevant data within their departments and to share that information with the public, school districts, and community partners to improve local education.
- DEED should be oriented to incentivize, support, and help facilitate community initiatives that incorporate relevant data to assist local school reform.
- DEED shall develop an annual report of local education outcomes contrasted with related community factors, based on shared comprehensive inter-agency data. The report shall be easily accessible and easy to understand.

4. Students need enough quality teachers supported by adequate and predictable funding

Stakeholders

- DEED
- Policymakers
- School Boards
- Community members
- Students
- Parents
- Legislators
- Governor

Success Elements Considered to be Agreeable to Most Alaskans

- It is visible that the public supports and values public education.
- Efficient allocation of educational resources.
- High rates of attracting and retaining quality teachers.
- Class size follows evidence based best practices.
- Districts know three years out (forward), their allocation, with flexibility where there are changes in actual student count.
- Students will consistently thrive in high quality, safe, engaged learning communities.
- Data will demonstrate an improvement in learning skills and a readiness for the next level of learning.

Possible Actions to Success on Agreed Success Elements

- Articulate and communicate a message that shows the value of a return on investment with a strong public education system.

- Bring the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) and wages to a competitive level that will attract and retain quality teachers.
- Share return on investment evidence and research with stakeholders and the public.
- Proposed 3 years of adequate and predictable cost of education increases to state funding for school districts so that inflation does not erode or limit quality.
 - Focused on best practices, class size, quality teachers, retention of effective teachers, and high quality professional development.
- Build a system of accountability wherein funds not used for teaching and learning within the fiscal year are returned to the state (beyond an allowable 10%).
- Teacher preparation, certification and professional development programs must result in highly effective teaching that meet Alaska standards and are observable in classrooms.

Barriers to Further Success

- Lack of prioritizing education due to a lack of understanding or appreciation for the return on investment of public education. The big picture of how quality education will save the state dollars in other areas:
 - Department of Corrections
 - Strong early learning programs save remedial funding in K-12
 - Strong Vocational Technical education develops a strong and desirable workforce that strengthens our economy with Alaska-based jobs
- Lack of capacity or understanding to effectively quantify the cost/benefits associated with high teacher turnover.
- Lack of political will to address multi-year budgeting for an education that includes cost of education increases w
- There is a mindset that every department has to spend every dollar in order to justify its budget, and this results in rushed and inefficient spending.
- Teacher preparation, professional development, hiring and retaining top quality teachers require an investment and commitment that is often lacking.
- Professional development and teacher preparation often do not connect to direct improvements in teaching effectiveness.
- Maintaining “best practices” of class size costs money.
- The timing of when budgets are made is inefficient, resulting in costs or transfers that result in inadequate or misplaced teaching coverage.
- Principals (instructional leaders) are not held accountable
 - To ensure quality teachers are supportive and retained.
 - To use good evaluation standards to improve or remove teachers when appropriate.

Actions to Address Barriers

- Governor should challenge the Children’s Cabinet to use resources to determine, through data, the return on investment laying out a vision for a high-quality education system.
- Grow conversations in communities that make connections between funding and quality (seeded by data).

- Develop a policy that recaptures funds that are currently used for inefficient end of year spending (with flexibility not to penalize future budgets).
- Dramatically increase the number of nationally board-certified teachers that will be highly skilled in effective teaching and partnering with parents and communities for student success.
- Dramatically increase the number of highly effective Alaska teachers and administrators that represent the diversity of Alaska (similar to the ANSEP model but for educators instead of engineers).
- State funding for professional development needs to be directly and meaningfully connected to teaching effectiveness.
- Change how we fund schools based on numbers of students (example: 3 year average or previous year instead of November count).
- Build a system of learning with accountability to ensure districts are evaluating their principals as they appropriately hire, retain and develop, evaluate and/or dismiss teachers.
- Implement cultural standards and a family engagement plan that welcomes and respects families and the cultural heritage of students.

5. Disconnect between K-12 and post secondary education

Stakeholders

- University of Alaska system
- State Board of Education
- School Boards
- Business community
- Students
- Parents
- Community members
- K-12 leadership
- School leadership

Success Elements Considered to be Agreeable to Most Alaskans

- Transition is seamless.
- Higher retention rates/higher graduation rates.
- Teachers will be better prepared to meet the diverse needs of students.
- Students would have the resources to move forward.
 - Comprehensive early childhood programs would be available for all children.
- Personal learning career plans (PLCP) would be consistently implemented throughout the state.

Possible Actions to Success on Agreed Success Elements

- The State Board of Education and the Board of Regents need to meet together to focus on improving the coordination between K-12 and the University so students and teachers are prepared to be successful
- Every student will have the resources to move forward if the school will help the students to develop a utilized Personal Learning Career Plan (PLCP)
- Alaska State Board ensures that all districts focus on teaching and learning while being informed by data and best practices and reports.
- Meaningful and understandable reports that convey student learning and success or challenges in transitions should be communicated to DEED and the public

Barriers to Further Success

- Possible resistance to expanding courses that receive dual credit in high school and the university.
- Lack of communication between University and K-12 that can lead to blaming up and blaming down. The lack of communication can result in students having bumpy or disastrous transitions between high school and college.
- Lack of useful data or the sharing of useful data about K-12 and University of Alaska transitions so we are limited to anecdotes or self-serving perceptions.
- K-12 not preparing enough students for success at the university level.
- Students from different cultural backgrounds often feel unwelcomed and unsupported.
- Schools and universities are often resistant to taking on and increasing their work to meet persistent challenges.

Actions to Address Barriers

- University should be more visible at the K-12 school.
- Create a commission/task force of representatives from K-12 and the university to improve transitions for students through improved instruction at the high school and university level.
- K-12 and university committee to create and ensure a quality data-sharing program.
- University and K-12 need to meet more often to clearly identify desired student skills and how progress is being made.
- Postsecondary education needs to improve support programs for students of different cultural backgrounds.
- University should do more outreach to diverse community leaders of different cultural backgrounds to build trust and capacity
- Training, discussion and collaboration between teachers/counselors and students about factors *and strategies for smooth high school to post-secondary transitions.*

Next Steps

- Represent work of group to the Walker–Mallott administration
- Education transition team checks in to monitor progress of implementing ideas brought forward

- A Governor's report or discussion on these ideas.
- University of Alaska (University of Alaska-Fairbanks, University of Alaska-Anchorage, University of Alaska-Southeast) provide evidence on the effectiveness of their teacher preparation programs.