

World-Class Schools, World-Class Students: Teaching & Learning

Guiding Questions:

- What do we expect all graduates to know and be able to do?
 - What core content should all students know?
 - What outcomes should all students demonstrate?
- What should learning environments look like to prepare students for a future in our ever-changing world?
- What do turn-around schools and districts look like?
- What is the role of governance in improving instructional practices to increase student achievement?

Framework of Thought

Alaskans have wonderful ideas to improve education, and there are excellent educational programs in the state. Wonderful ideas and programs, if not systematic, are just that: ideas and isolated programs. We must find ways to systematically change the instructional practices in schools and districts to improve student achievement, increase the graduation rate, and prepare every student for a successful life when they leave Alaska schools.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, in 2005 the state's graduation rate was 64.1 percent, compared to a national graduation rate of 74.1 percent. Only a handful of states had a lower graduation rate in that year. According to the study "Making Alaska More Competitive," based on data from 2004 at NCES, of 50 9th-graders 31 will graduate from high school, 14 will go on to college, 9 will still be enrolled their sophomore year, and 3 will graduate from college within six years.

How to address this challenge is embedded in many aspects of our communities, schools and post-secondary programs. A shared understanding by all Alaskans of the expectations of what each student should know and be able to do is an essential component to ensure success. Making sure that the skills and knowledge students have prepare them for the next step in their life is important. Finally, a system of standards, assessment and accountability only works well if we have a method to determine if everyone has the skills and if we hold the system accountable to ensure the essential skills and knowledge are taught.

Schools today look much the same as they did many years ago; however, through school choice and schooling options, correspondence schools, and schools within schools, Alaskans have experimented with different learning environments for teaching and learning. What our schools look like to prepare people for the future may be very

different than what schools looked like years ago, or continue to look like today. An important part of thinking about schools, teaching and learning is to free the mind from what people envision of a school based on their own experience, and think about the future and what being well-prepared for that future might require we know, do and experience. This is not to say that what we have experienced in our schooling is not exactly what is needed, but we must be open to considering new and different ways to prepare our future generation.

If each student is to be prepared for the future, we may need to “turn-around” and redesign our current schools and districts. According to research done by Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, there are key factors in meeting the school turn-around challenge.

Those key factors include:

- Changing conditions to allow the dismantling of common barriers to reform;
- Building capacity for effective turn-around both inside the schools and among outside partners; and
- Clustering for support to avoid trying to turn-around in ones and twos, creating a network of schools and districts with similar needs to allow for effective and efficient support.

Alaskans need to think about what turn-around schools and districts will look like in our state, and consider what elements would be required for success.

Many of the actions taken to date to change schools have focused on program reform: a new curriculum, new instructional approaches, and family partnerships. The Mass Insight study highlights the need for more systematic reform that includes human resource management, governance, and budget control -- issue can spark more controversy.

This work group will examine topics including: content standards and standards-based learning, graduation outcomes, time and learning, school and district improvement, special populations, alternative education and school choice, student centered learning, parental engagement, state and federal accountability, and reinventing high school education.

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