
Alaska's Future Workforce

Strategic Policies and Investment Blueprint



Alaska Workforce Investment Board

Introduction

Purpose

Alaska's Future Workforce Strategic Policies and Investment Blueprint is a framework for strengthening vocational and technical education and training statewide. The *Blueprint* has been developed in response to specific requirements of Senate Bill 289, which was adopted by the State Legislature this year and became effective July 1, 2000.

One of the key legislative intents of Senate Bill 289 was to improve the ability of the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) to efficiently and effectively serve as the state's primary planning and coordinating entity for vocational and technical education. Towards that end, AWIB was mandated to:

“facilitate the development of a statewide policy for a coordinated and effective technical and vocational education training system in this state and, to the extent authorized by federal and state law, plan and coordinate federal, state, and local efforts in technical and vocational education programs.”

Adopted by the AWIB on December 12, 2000, *Alaska's Future Workforce Strategic Policies and Investment Blueprint* will serve as the comprehensive guide for alignment of public policies and resource investments in Early Childhood Education — 12 and postsecondary vocational and technical education and training programs statewide.

Workforce Development Goals - State Unified Plan

Vocational and technical education and training is an integral part of Alaska's overall Workforce Investment System. The system is guided by the five-year *State Unified Plan, June 2000 to June 2005*, which addresses service provisions for a multitude of federally funded, state funded, and locally implemented programs for workforce development.

The *Blueprint* for vocational and technical education and training in Alaska is designed to promote the six primary goals for workforce development identified in the *State Unified Plan*:

Workforce Development Goals – *State Unified Plan*

- Strengthen the involvement of business, industry, and economic development to build Alaska's workforce.
- Ensure access to quality employment education, training and employment services statewide, particularly to rural areas and for the economically disadvantaged.
- Evaluate programs of the workforce investment system to optimize customer employability.
- Advocate for Alaska's human resource investment programs and promote continuous improvement.
- Promote the full integration of Alaskans with disabilities into all aspects of the workforce development system to put people with disabilities into good jobs.
- Strengthen the involvement and ability of Alaska's education system to develop Alaska's workforce.

Vocational and Technical Education and Training Challenges

Alaska is experiencing critical workforce, community and economic development challenges. This is evidenced by the combination in many regional economies of labor surpluses and the inability of businesses and industry to fill high-skill jobs with qualified Alaskans. Education and training programs available to address these challenges are too often seriously fragmented and underfunded. Immediate and decisive action is needed to align publicly supported education and training efforts with labor market needs, close skills gaps and position Alaskans for employment in good jobs statewide, especially in projected “hot occupations” with higher than average growth rates and estimated wages.

Mission and Guiding Principles for Vocational and Technical Education and Training

The mission of Alaska's vocational and technical education and training system is to provide a fully prepared, ready-to-work, qualified workforce that meets the needs of Alaska's businesses and industries. To successfully accomplish this mission, address current challenges, and promote Alaska's primary workforce development goals, this *Blueprint* calls for the realignment and strengthening of public service delivery and funding for vocational and technical education and training, consistent with six guiding principles:

Guiding Principles for Alaska’s Vocational and Technical Education & Training System

Needs Driven. System is labor market driven, and responsive to interrelated workforce, community and regional economic development needs.

Accessible. System is expanded to provide greater access and opportunity in both rural and urban Alaska.

Interconnected. System uses coordinated programs and service delivery to promote progressive, lifelong occupational learning, skill transferability, credential portability, and worker mobility.

Accountable. System delivers quality services that are aligned with and responsive to current and emerging needs of core constituents—students, job seekers, employers, families and communities.

Collaborative Governance. System promotes collaborative state and local policies and partnerships to ensure a close fit between education and training, labor market demands, and the needs of constituents regionally and statewide.

Sustainable. System is “built to last” and supported by increased funding and sustainable investment policies.

Strategic Policies and Investments to Achieve Overall Goals

The *Blueprint* outlines proposed strategic policies and investments related to each of the six primary system components and guiding principles for vocational and technical education and training in Alaska. These are directed to advance Alaska’s two primary goals for publicly supported vocational and technical education and training:

- development of a coherent, well-coordinated system to promote and sustain lifelong occupational learning for all Alaskans;
- sustained development of qualified workers in sufficient numbers to meet employers’ needs, regionally and statewide.

Alaska’s Future Workforce Strategic Policies and Investment Blueprint will serve as the comprehensive guide for alignment of public policies and resource investments in Early Childhood Education — 12 and postsecondary vocational and technical education and training programs statewide. As the state’s primary planning and coordinating entity for vocational and technical education, AWIB will be responsible to monitor performance and accountability. Monitoring efforts will be guided by core indicators and reporting requirements identified in the five-year *State Unified Plan* for workforce development, and by the six guiding principles addressed in this *Blueprint*.

COMPONENT 1: NEEDS DRIVEN

Guiding Principle

Alaska’s vocational and technical education and training system is labor market driven, and responsive to interrelated workforce, community and regional economic development needs.

- 1.A. Assess and quantify the need to add, revise or delete education and training programs, based on ongoing evaluation of Alaska and national industry trends, regional and statewide labor markets, and consultations with affected industries and businesses.
- 1.B. Align training investments with occupations appropriate to Alaska’s current and emerging labor markets, community and regional economic development needs.
- 1.C. Invest in vocational and technical education and training programs that are market-responsive and consistent with nationally recognized, industry-based skill standards and occupational certifications through expanded use of career pathways, business, labor and education partnerships, registered apprenticeships, and on-the-job training.

Career pathway — an integrated, multi-year sequence of career guidance, coursework, and work-based learning experiences that enables students to explore a variety of career choices and provides a context for learning (Source: U.S. Department of Education).

Business, labor and education partnerships — cooperative agreements between entities to share information, expertise, or provide services that benefit students and support system-building (Source: National School-to-Work Office). As used throughout the *Blueprint*, its synonyms include “business learning consortia”, “industry-led consortia”, and “business-led consortia”.

COMPONENT 2: ACCESSIBLE

Guiding Principle

Alaska’s vocational and technical education and training system is expanded to provide greater access and opportunity in both rural and urban Alaska.

- 2.A. Invest in programs and facilities that are prioritized by their ability to provide increased access, capacity and strength to the workforce development system, particularly for rural Alaska, Alaskans economically disadvantaged, and Alaskans with disabilities.
- 2.B. Expand access to short-term secondary and postsecondary training and registered apprenticeships through investments in interactive technology, distance delivery, intensive seminars and correspondence programs.
- 2.C. Strengthen business, labor and education partnerships to provide rural students, out-of-school youth and young adults with expanded training choices linked to current and emerging labor markets, *good jobs*, and community and regional economic development needs.

A *good job* is described as one that has adequate pay, benefits and career advancement opportunities that can sustain an individual and his or her family economically without reliance on public subsidy.

Source: Alaska Unified Plan - For State Unified Plans Submitted under Section 501 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, State of Alaska for the period of June 2000 to June 2005

COMPONENT 3: INTERCONNECTED

Guiding Principle

Alaska’s vocational and technical education and training system uses coordinated programs and service delivery to promote progressive, lifelong occupational learning, skill transferability, credential portability, and worker mobility.

- 3.A. Integrate applied learning into education and training from early childhood education through postsecondary levels and lifelong learning.

Applied learning — hands-on learning and student activities that directly relate to real world work and other life experiences.

- 3.B. Provide guidance, support and funding to assist every school district to develop career pathway programs that include high quality career guidance components and vocational and technical skills attainment that bridge secondary and postsecondary schools and the workplace.

- 3.C. Establish standards to align skill development, assessment and attainment levels with labor market needs, and achieve nationally recognized, industry-based skill standards and occupational certifications.

- 3.D. Ensure that the State’s Quality Schools Initiative and all State Standards for Alaska Students are fully integrated into career and technical education programs, to result in students passing the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination and being prepared for employment or further training and education leading to employment.

- 3.E. Establish an interconnected Early Childhood Education — 16 workforce investment information system.

- 3.F. Develop new business, labor and education partnerships to assist with planning, education, training and recruitment, and to help promote system alignment.

- 3.G. Provide information, technical assistance, resources and incentives to form or grow career and technical student and professional organizations.

- 3.H. Develop strategies to identify, promote and implement local and national Best Practices.

Best Practices — exemplary services, methods, processes or approaches that have high potential for successful application by other organizations and in different settings.

COMPONENT 4: ACCOUNTABLE

Guiding Principle

Alaska’s vocational and technical education and training system delivers quality services that are aligned with and responsive to the needs of core constituents—students, job seekers, employers, families and communities.

- 4.A. Align education and training investments to build a statewide system that provides opportunity for all youth and adults to equip themselves with academic, work readiness, employability, occupational, computer and technical skills.
- 4.B. Adopt nationally recognized, industry-based skill standards and occupational certifications, as well as program and instructor certification procedures, for secondary and postsecondary occupational education and training.
- 4.C. Complete development of secondary and postsecondary Career and Technical Education Program Standards for Alaska.
- 4.D. Address professional development issues including supply, licensure and skills upgrades to meet demand levels for vocational education instructors and counselors.
- 4.E. Apply *Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools*, as adopted by the State Board of Education and Early Development, in response to diverse cultural needs statewide.
- 4.F. Standardize terminology, coding and data to achieve timely evaluation of program performance and effectiveness.
- 4.G. Link public resource investments to standards-based program performance.
- 4.H. Evaluate system-wide performance and effectiveness using the following aggregate measurements:
 - Place participants in further education or training, employment or military service.
 - Increase the number of jobs held by Alaskans.
 - Reduce unemployment and welfare dependence by economic region.
 - Gain income for Alaskans.
 - Increase the supply of workers possessing nationally recognized, industry-based skill standards and occupational certifications for *good* jobs in demand.
 - Retain skilled workers in vital Alaska industries.

COMPONENT 5: COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

Guiding Principle

Alaska’s vocational and technical education and training system promotes collaborative state and local policies and partnerships to ensure a close fit between education and training, labor market demands, and the needs of constituents regionally and statewide.

- 5.A. Build cross membership, cooperative relations and systematic communications between the AWIB, State Board of Education and Early Development, University of Alaska Board of Regents, Local Workforce Investment Boards, Local Education Agencies, tribal governments, Denali Commission, and key federal and state funding agencies.

Key agencies include U.S. Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education.

- 5.B. Promote the alignment of education and training through direct planning by Local Workforce Investment Boards and Local Advisory Committees, Local Education Agencies and Local Vocational Advisory Committees, University Campus directors, and economic development organizations.
- 5.C. Strengthen and expand alignment and partnerships with the Alaska Native Coalition on Employment and Training (ANCET), Consortium for Alaska Native Higher Education (CANHE), and Alaska Native corporations and training organizations.
- 5.D. Promote the active collaboration of parents, career and technical student and professional organizations, educators and trainers, labor, businesses and industry in policy and investment planning, development, implementation and evaluation.
- 5.E. To the extent authorized by federal and state law, AWIB will plan and coordinate federal, state and local vocational and technical education and training efforts, evaluate performance, and advise the Governor and Legislature on workforce development investments.

COMPONENT 6: SUSTAINABLE

Guiding Principle

Alaska’s vocational and technical education and training system is “built to last” and supported by increased funding and sustainable investment policies.

- 6.A. Increase funding, align existing resources and establish multi-year funding streams to achieve sustainable commitment and support to meet current and emerging workforce development needs and demand levels.
- 6.B. Maximize the performance and effectiveness of current programs and assets by increasing investments in professional staff, modern equipment, facility upgrades, and the provision of technical assistance and capacity-building services.
- 6.C. Establish funding structures and incentives that promote collaboration and coordination between K-16 education and training providers, businesses and labor.
- 6.D. Establish funding sources and allocation methods for timely response to specific workforce development and training needs.
- 6.E. Follow a continuous improvement process to assess the effectiveness of investment policies and strategies.

Continuous improvement process — ongoing assessment and application of incremental and breakthrough improvements in products, services, or processes.

Recommendations

Alaska’s Future Workforce Strategic Policies and Investment Blueprint is designed to serve as the comprehensive guide for alignment of public policies and resource investments in Early Childhood Education — 12 and postsecondary vocational and technical education and training programs statewide.

The *Blueprint* has been developed with benefit of initial consultations and extensive feedback from diverse stakeholders statewide. Overall there has been strong, positive support for the strategic policies and investments addressed in the *Blueprint*. However, there is overriding concern that efforts to strengthen vocational and technical education and training will be seriously hampered unless two major constraints are addressed:

- insufficient funding in relation to workforce development needs and demand levels;
- lack of an integrated system for determining federal and state resource allocations across secondary and postsecondary vocational and technical education and training programs.

Resolution of these two fundamental issues will require continuing consultation between key stakeholders and the state administration and legislature that is beyond the scope of the *Blueprint*. In some instances, there is simply not enough money currently available to meet basic needs. In other instances, enabling legislation would be required.

Seven recommendations are presented here for the purposes of establishing a baseline for continuing policy discussions with the state administration and legislature, and to document public input received during the *Blueprint's* development.

Recommendation 1

Increase funding for vocational and technical education and training in the areas of but not limited to:

- Early Childhood Education through postsecondary programs
- adult basic education
- employability skills education
- career pathway programs that include high quality career guidance components
- secondary-postsecondary dual credit, credential and certificate-granting programs
- tech-prep programs
- registered apprenticeships
- start-up support for business, labor and education partnerships. Such partnerships work to determine local demand levels in high skill – high wage occupations and develop strategies to supply qualified local workers to meet that demand.

Recommendation 2

Establish, fund and staff an organization, under the AHRIC, that is responsible for providing professional development, technical assistance and capacity-building services for development or expansion of secondary and postsecondary vocational and technical education and training programs.

Recommendation 3

Under the AHRIC and in coordination with the University of Alaska Board of Regents and the State Board of Education and Early Development, establish an advisory state program and budget review process to promote alignment of secondary and postsecondary vocational and technical education and training.

Recommendation 4

Under the AHRIC, establish a state clearinghouse for information and activities related to vocational and technical education and training. In order to improve coordination and consistency with the overall policy direction of the Workforce Development System, the clearinghouse will also be available, on request, to provide advisory information or reviews for grant applications.

Recommendation 5

Amend the state procurement code to provide bidder preferences and financial incentives for contractors who invest in community employment and training programs.

Recommendation 6

Establish a review body that is available through the AHRIC to evaluate proposals, consistent with the Workforce Development System, for public investment in new post-secondary regional training centers. A regional training center is defined as an institution that provides integrated vocational and work readiness skills training at the postsecondary level to trainees who may originate from communities co-located within a broad geographic area of the state.

Evaluations will be based on the extent to which proposals meet six evaluation criteria:

Evaluation Criterion 1: Program operations are consistent with statewide training policies outlined in *Alaska's Future Workforce Strategic Policies and Investment Blueprint, State Unified Plan — June 2000 to June 2005, State Training and Employment Plan*, and the *Carl D. Perkins Plan*.

Evaluation Criterion 2: Curriculum leads progressively to, or results in, the attainment of nationally recognized, industry-based skill standards and occupational certifications.

Evaluation Criterion 3: Postsecondary programs meet all standards for authorization by the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education.

Evaluation Criterion 4: Sustainable demand is evidenced by (a) sufficient local or regional population base from which to draw a viable pool of trainees, and (b) direct correlation between the types of training to be offered and documented local and state labor market needs/employer partnerships.

Evaluation Criterion 5: Any proposed training facility or center will:
(a) serve multi-purpose facility needs and maximize use of existing infrastructure, (b) utilize a small permanent staff of certified instructors which can be supplemented by sharing staff with other programs, (c) be located in a community that can accommodate the full range of trainees' housing, transportation and other support needs, and (d) encourage alignment with secondary education entities.

Evaluation Criterion 6: On-going program and facility operations and maintenance are financially viable and sustainable as evidenced by concrete revenue streams.

Recommendation 7

Establish results-based performance measurements to evaluate the success of regional-serving alternative secondary schools that have both residential and vocational components. Use these results as a tool to indicate whether funding should be considered for other regional-serving alternative secondary schools that have both residential and vocational components.