

**IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES
AND POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS IN ALASKA
AND NATIONWIDE: WHAT CAN THE FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT DO?**

FIELD HEARING
OF THE
**COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS**
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

ON

EXAMINING IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES AND POST-
SECONDARY SUCCESS IN ALASKA AND NATIONWIDE FOCUSING ON
WHAT CAN THE GOVERNMENT DO?

NOVEMBER 15, 2008 (ANCHORAGE, AK)

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**IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION
RATES AND POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS IN
ALASKA AND NATIONWIDE: WHAT CAN THE
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DO?**

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2008

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS,
Anchorage, AK.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m. in the School Board Meeting Room, Anchorage School District Education Center, 5530 East Northern Lights Boulevard, Anchorage, AK, Hon. Lisa Murkowski, presiding.

Present: Senator Murkowski.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR MURKOWSKI

Senator MURKOWSKI. Good morning. I want to thank our panel of witnesses who have joined us. I appreciate it a great deal. I want to thank Carol Comeau. I know Carol is right over here. Carol is our host this morning here at the Anchorage School District. Superintendent Comeau, I want to thank you for your leadership on so many issues. We appreciate the opportunity to be here in the room and setting up the video conference for us here today.

I want to introduce Karen McCarthy, on my staff. Many of you may have known her when she was in Juneau, working as a legislative aide on education issues. She's now in my office in Washington, DC. I know that she has a great network, and I think you're probably all on her e-mail list. If you are not, you're probably one of a very few in this State, as far as educators, so you need to get on Karen's list. I appreciate all of Karen's work in helping us this morning.

The title of the hearing this morning is "Improving High School Graduation Rates and Postsecondary Success in Alaska and Nationwide: What Can the Federal Government Do?" This is an ambitious hearing. Those of you who have looked at the agenda, the list of speakers, I think you will agree that this is ambitious. I think we also recognize that if we are going to work effectively together to address a very, very complex problem facing Alaska and the Nation, it needs to be ambitious, it needs to be aggressive, and that's what we are doing here this morning.

We had an opportunity, just a few moments ago, to have a press conference with some of the members of the panel here and talk just a little bit about the statistics. We know the statistics. Those of you that are here in the room this morning, whether it's to speak

as witnesses or to listen, we know the statistics that we are facing here. Those who have a college degree clearly will earn more than those who have a high school diploma. Those with a diploma earn far more than high school dropouts. High school dropouts are more likely to live in poverty, need public assistance, go to prison, get divorced, be unhealthy, even die earlier than their peers that are in school. We also know that Alaska needs more healthcare workers, teachers, engineers, welders, electricians, a host of other high-skill jobs. But, when we look at Alaska, Alaska is really the Nation's poster-child, if you will, for not getting 9th graders the education that they need to get the good-paying jobs in a 21st-century competitive and global economy.

I don't like to talk about statistics, when we're speaking with children, because I think that that gets us away from the focus of the human side. I think we need to appreciate our statistics, just briefly.

In Alaska, only 6 percent—6 percent—will earn a postsecondary credential within 10 years—those who start in 9th grade. This is a report from the Alaska Commission of Postsecondary Education. In pretty simple terms, "Of 100 Alaskan 9th-graders, only six will earn a college degree within 6 years." So, 38 of these 100 will drop out of high school, 34 will finish high school, but not enroll in college, and then, of the 66 who enroll in college, 10 drop out of the first year and never return, another 12 will remain in college, but not complete a degree after 6 years. Only 6 will earn a degree within 6 years. The bottom line is that 38 percent of today's 9th graders will have no high school diploma, and 56 percent of them will have no college degree 6 years later. Now, think about that, a hundred.

The statistic—and I mentioned this in the press conference today—a report by the Education Trust states that the United States is the only industrialized Nation in the world in which today's young people are less likely to have completed high school than their parents.

It takes you back to an appreciation of how huge this problem is for us, not only here in the State of Alaska, where our graduation rate is 65.57 percent, as opposed to the U.S. average, which is 76 percent. But, put it in the bigger picture of what this means for us as a nation in a competitive world. If we don't have educated, skilled young people going into the workplace, how can we possibly be competitive?

Back in Washington, DC, right now, we're really keyed in to the economic issues that are facing our Nation and how we're going to provide for a level of stability within our economy. But, if we can't educate—if we can't make sure that we have young people that are prepared for that workforce, for those job opportunities, how can we be competitive in a global marketplace?

There was a comment that was made in an article out of the *Wall Street Journal* a couple of weeks ago, and it's a pretty tough statement. But, they're talking about the economic impact of what the graduation rate really means. A statement made by the president and CEO of America's Promise, and the need to depend on our workers to fuel our economy and our future growth, the next generation of workers is not prepared for the 21st-century global economy. She calls the dropouts "our next class of nonperforming as-

sets.” This is what we’re facing, and this is what we’re doing here this morning.

We know that there are so many different reasons why our students drop out of school. It’s not an event, as somebody has said in their testimony, it’s a process. It starts so very early, in many cases. Toddlers, whose brains develop without ever seeing a book. We’ve got 4th-graders who can’t read, 8th-graders who can’t do basic math, 11th-graders who are so far behind in school that they don’t see the relevance of what they’re supposed to be doing and how education connects with their everyday lives. Kids who dream of being carpenters, but aren’t getting the classes that they need or the apprenticeships that they need. We’ve got students who dream of being scientists, but they can’t access advanced math or science classes. Then, we know of so many stories where our young people are dealing with emotional troubles, violence in their communities and in their homes, pregnancy, alcoholism, drugs, all these barriers to education.

Today what we’re going to be doing is discussing what the State and the Federal Government and the districts and labor and the community and the school boards can do for our kids, from birth all the way on up, to make sure that they’ve got access to age-appropriate books, mentors, rigorous curriculum, tutoring, the early apprenticeship training, and the services to help youth cope with the challenges.

I have asked 10 very distinguished folks to focus on how we can move forward, how the Federal Government can help. I appreciate the time that they have taken, on a Saturday morning, to join us.

I would ask that, as I make the introductions of you all—and I’m going to abbreviate them, but please know that in the comments that are submitted for the records, your background statements are magnificent—and I don’t say that, tongue in cheek; I appreciate what you bring to the discussion and to the table here this morning.

We’re joined this morning by Dr. Jay Smink. Dr. Smink is joining us by video conference. He’s been the executive director of the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University since 1998. He’s a professor of education at the College of Health, Education, and Human Development, and he is recognized as a national leader and authority on dropout prevention. He’s provided counsel to State education agencies and local school districts, including some of our districts here in Alaska, to develop and implement dropout prevention programs. I appreciate the fact that he’s taking time today to be with us. He’s attending the National Dropout Prevention Network Conference, and so, the wonders of video conference allow him to join us.

We are also joined by Mr. Larry LeDoux. Larry is the commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development. He came on in July of this year, and, before that, was superintendent out at Kodiak.

General Hamilton, Mark Hamilton, is the president of the university. A pleasure to have him here this morning. He was appointed the 12th president of the university back in 1998, has an incredible background, not only in education, but in the military, and I so appreciate his leadership on education issues.

Dr. Shirley Holloway is testifying today as president and CEO of the Avant-Garde Learning Foundation. She founded this in 2005 to help the communities and the schools prepare our youth better for a successful future. She's been an educator since 1971, and she is a true leader in so many, many areas.

Carl Rose is with us this morning as the highly respected executive director of the Association of Alaska School Boards. I think most of your adult life has been spent on educating—or advocating for education for our youth in our public schools, and we so appreciate your leadership.

We're also joined by Elizabeth Winkler. She is a finance assistant at Nine Star Education and Employment Services here in Anchorage. This is a nonprofit that is dedicated to developing Alaska's workforce through literacy training and job readiness.

I want to acknowledge and especially thank Elizabeth for agreeing to testify before the committee today and to give us the benefit of her experience. Elizabeth is one of those whom we're talking about today. She dropped out of high school before the end of the 10th grade, got her GED at Nine Star, and is now a working parent of, I understand, a 1-year-old daughter. She was enrolled in classes at both UAA and the University of Phoenix, and she is intending to re-enroll later at UAA. I appreciate your willingness to provide some real good background, and thank you for being here.

Greg Cashen is the executive director of the Alaska Workforce Investment Board. He's testifying today on behalf of the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Department commissioner. We appreciate your leadership in so many different areas, Greg, and what you can help us with on the efforts related to job training.

Mr. Mike Andrews is the director of Alaska Works Partnership. This is a nonprofit organization established by Alaska's construction unions to increase the numbers of Alaskans who are employed in the construction industry, working with apprentice outreach, pipeline construction training, and so many different areas as they relate to job training programs, and we thank you for you being here today.

We also have Tina Michels-Hansen. Tina is the elementary and middle school program manager for Cook Inlet Tribal Council. This is the regional nonprofit council. Tina is the mother of five children, and a military wife, and very focused on the issues as they relate to our Alaska Natives and their educational opportunities. We appreciate you being here, Tina.

Finally, at this end we have Tom Morgan, who serves as the State director of Communities in Schools of Alaska, focusing on brokering existing resources to help our young people stay in school, graduate, and succeed in life. Tom has been doing a great job with CIS, and I appreciate your leadership and joining us here today.

I do want to note that we have received written testimony from, not only the panel in front of us, but we have received statements from Abbe Hensley, of Best Beginnings; Beverly Grinage, president of Ilisagvik College, up north; Doug North, president of Alaska Pacific University; Debbie Bogart, from Anchorage's Promise; Steve Atwater, of the Alaska Association of School Administrators; and

Lamont Albertson, executive director of The People's Learning Center.

I would invite those who would like to present testimony, written testimony—the record will remain open until November 29.

I do wish that we had more time to hear, just, the commentary from others, but this is the nature of the hearings that we have in front of us.

I would ask each of you, as we proceed through the testimony, if you can try to limit your comments to 5 minutes. Your full written statement is included as part of the record, but I think it would be helpful, for purposes of our discussion, if we can keep to our time limits so that we can have the opportunity for greater dialogue and questioning at the end.

With that, I would like to start with Dr. Smink, and then proceed, beginning with you, Commissioner LeDoux, and going down the line.

I'm hopeful that everyone in the back is able to hear. If you're not, please let us know, up front.

Again, with that, Dr. Smink, if you would like to lead off, I appreciate you being with us, live and in color, and welcome.

**STATEMENT OF JAY SMINK, ED.D., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
NATIONAL DROPOUT PREVENTION CENTER, CLEMSON, SC**

Mr. SMINK. Thank you, Senator Murkowski and honored guests. We are really pleased to be with you. We are honored to be a part of this field hearing on this critical issue of high school graduation. It truly is critical.

Let me, probably, do something to start off that's not normally a part of most testimonies. If you can hear and see this, this is an antique school bell that was probably used by a teacher in the Lower 48, of around 1920, 1930. The question that I have, rhetorically, is, Do you think there was a dropout issue at that time? Was it more serious then, or less serious, than now? We can answer that, perhaps, later, as we have questions. What I'm attempting to do is make the point that there were dropouts then, there still are now, and it's more serious now. That's the intent of your field hearing.

Thank you very much for having us be present and allowing us to share some of the findings and experiences that we have gained since 1986, when the National Dropout Prevention Center was first initiated at Clemson University. I was the director, from the beginning of the real programs, in 1988.

What we're going to be doing is sharing with you some of our experiences, some of our observations that we've learned from across the Nation, because we have the opportunity, not only now, to work with Alaska, but, at any given time, we're in approximately 15 to 16 different States with active research and/or demonstration projects. It gives us a vast opportunity to see what's happening across the Nation. I'm sure that's probably one of the reasons why you invited us to be with you, and we appreciate that.

One of the things that I like to start off with—not only this testimony, but others—is the notion that most laypeople feel that the dropout issue is one of local schools, and they should be asked to solve it, when, in fact, we know, yes, it is. It is the students that

drop out mostly between the grade levels of 8, 9, or 10, and it's usually around age 16, 17, or 18. What we really know is, that's an event, and the dropout issue, as you said earlier, is not an event. It really is a long process of disengagement in school. The evidence—the research evidence clearly says it could, and does, start as early as preschool and school readiness, all the way up to the ultimate decision for a student to drop out of school, leave school.

That's the point we want to start with. We feel comfortable, working with a lot of State agencies and school districts, that we have a perspective that perhaps may be a little broader than some of your other expert witnesses today, and hopefully this will fit in and confirm some of their experiences that they share with you as a result of the Alaska experience.

One of the things that we like to promote is the notion that policymakers, whether they be at the Federal or State level, that they grasp the issue of, What are the root causes of dropouts, and, more importantly, what are the program interventions that have been proven to be most effective over the years? That's our specialty. Yes, we do know the research, but yes, more importantly, we know the interventions that have had an impact over the last two decades. That's one of the things that we want to share with you in our brief moment, but it is also in our written testimony.

Now, one of the things, though, to set the stage, whenever we're working with any particular group, is to note—and I'm sure the other expert witnesses will make the point—that graduation rates vary across all the States. They even vary across all local districts. We're not prepared today, although we could, but we're not prepared today to share that particular set of statistics with you; they're well known.

What we do want to do is point out where some of these variations are more prominent. And one of the three areas that I'm sure you're aware of, but we'd like to emphasize the point that the data is particularly severe with groups—if you disaggregate the data, with groups in the area of race and ethnicity, particularly in the area of African-American students or Hispanic students, or, in your case, Alaska Natives, or, in the Lower 48, the American Indians. These particular segments of our school populations are very serious.

In the area of students with disabilities, also is an area that is generally not looked at seriously. There's a large number of students with disabilities who are also dropping out of our schools. The other area that is very evident in the research is—regardless of segments of population, it's the area of the impact that poverty has on this particular issue. It cannot be ignored, and we try to make that point.

One of the things that we like to share with you as a result of our Center being in Alaska for the last 2 years is, we have had a prominent number of—six of our senior people in Alaska working with local schools for a total of approximately 90 days, so we have a fair amount of activities that we've looked at and we understand about the Alaska situation. True in Alaska and true elsewhere are some certain factors that are very prominent. It's that the local socioeconomic condition obviously contributes to it. Cultural dif-

ferences contribute to kids dropping out of school. School readiness is critical. Poor reading skills are very critical. So is the lack of serious dropout prevention planning, whether it be at the State or local level; a lesser degree of looking at career development and workforce readiness, and the notion of accountability.

Now, No Child Left Behind is forcing that issue of making us look at accountability a little bit more. We welcome that. We also welcome what the Secretary recently released, about 2 weeks ago, on a permanent or a more likeable definition for "school dropouts," and particularly with the rates that will be comparable across all States.

One of the things that we want to end with is the notion of providing some suggestions to you and your committee. The emphasis points that we would like to make is to continue to build accountability with data-driven decisions, both at the State level, but also at the local level, and also, obviously, at the Federal level, with the legislation that's there.

The other notion that we would like to bring to your attention is that State Departments of Education, regardless of their intent, need a lot of technical assistance, so that they can, in turn, provide a lot of technical assistance to local school districts. We offer for your consideration a culmination of almost two decades of research where we have taken a look at, What are the intervention strategies that appear to be the most effective? Since 1990 when we first published our list of the most effective strategies, to, in 2001 and in 2004, we published two publications that take those 15 strategies that have the most impact, whether it be at elementary, middle, or high school, or even at the recovery stage. We invite you to take a look at that in more depth, because we think that's our focus. Not just looking at the data, but looking at, What are the intervention strategies?

And, particularly, we'd like to call your attention—in Alaska, one of our 15 strategies, for example, is professional development. You have one of the leading forces in your State, the Alaska Staff Development Network, that is doing that, statewide. We wanted to acknowledge that, that is one of your homegrown programs that is providing significant staff development for teachers, counselors, administrators, and also community leaders who are providing services to youth.

The other notion that we would like to leave with you and your committee as you study these testimonies more in-depth is to ask you to avoid the fix-it-fast mentality. Too many times, our legislators, whether they be at the Federal level or at the State level, tend to want to develop a piece of legislation to fix it fast. It'll be a single issue, it'll be a single funding period, for maybe up to 3 years, and it'll focus on one particular group. What we really advise and suggest that you consider as you put activities together, and new legislation, is that you look at several issues, particularly the issue of equity in access for all students, but particularly in your case, the Native Alaskans. Now, this is particularly critical there, but also across the Nation it's critical.

One of the things that we find when we talk to students who have dropped out is, they've never developed a relationship with anyone. Some of the embedded programs that we have seen as we

analyze those in those 15 strategies, we continue to see the need for a home-school liaison. We continue to see the notion for graduation coaches. A lot of States—the one we're in right now, Atlanta, has been a leader—I mean, the State of Georgia.

We're in Atlanta right now, in Georgia. They have been a leader in developing graduation coaches. Other States are following the same. We think it's important to have career counseling. We also think it's important to have advisory groups. We also think it's important for schools to be full-service centers, not just academic centers. All of these build relationships between adults or peers, but with the students who are in need of it most.

In summary, as I conclude the statements, the dropout issue, as many research reports—and I'm sure you have read them, including the *Wall Street Journal* you referred to—is at a crisis stage. We need to act, and we need to act now. The good news, however, is that we do know a lot about the issue, not only in statistics, but, more importantly, in the intervention strategies. We feel, as a group—not only our center, but as a group across the Nation—we feel, very strongly, that we do know the successful strategies and the successful interventions that will help our school-based, as well as community-based, programs. That's important. We urge you, at the Federal level and State level, to understand that also, that there are answers available and they are there.

One of the reasons why perhaps they are not used is because they are put in force in an abbreviated way, perhaps in a 3-, maybe even a less than 3-year focus, and so, we would urge you, in any research area or any demonstration area, that you begin to think from a long-term commitment, but also, more importantly, that you think about sustaining them, not particularly from the Federal level or the State level, but, more importantly, from the local level. They must promise a sustained application of those interventions beyond the seed-money funding. That's really important.

I'm encouraged about what I've seen, the last two decades, about how State Departments of Education and local education agencies have grasped this whole notion of accountability, and the importance. However, there are still very many school districts across the Nation, and mostly in rural settings—and obviously Alaska fits into that particular category—that may not have the resources, may not have the leadership to grasp the notion of accountability; more importantly, to grasp the notion of, What should we do, from an intervention standpoint?

I would urge you, at the Federal level or your other colleagues there in the State—who are the State level—to develop legislation that provides opportunities, first, for research at the Federal level—I think the Federal level can do research best on this issue—but at the State level, they need to be able to promote interventions that work and provide professional development activities to the local districts. That would probably be our ultimate summary statement and recommendation, not only to the Federal level, but to the local level.

And the last comment would be that the notion of sustainability across all levels is particularly critical, particularly from the notion of sustainability for school and community leaders. This is not a school issue, which most laypeople think; it is really a school and

community issue, because when youngsters drop out of school, they drop out into the community also and get into trouble, and then you have ripple effects in law enforcement, etc, etc.

The notion of collaborative projects between the school and the community cannot be overemphasized. I would close with making that point, to look at interventions that work and look at the sustainability and look at the notion of collaboration, because it is not just a school issue, it is a school and community issue.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Smink follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAY SMINK, ED.D.

Thank you Senator Lisa Murkowski and honored guests at the field hearing of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, for the opportunity to address the dropout issue and offer suggestions based on more than two decades of focused dropout prevention activities across this great Nation. I am Jay Smink, Executive Director of the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) at Clemson University, Clemson, SC, and I am honored to participate in this field hearing.

UNDERSTANDING THE DROPOUT ISSUE NATIONALLY

Most laypeople and many policymakers have the impression that the school dropout issue is first the school's problem to solve and next that the problem is primarily focused in our high schools. True, most students do leave school between the 8th and 10th grades. However, a recent research report from NDPC/N indicates that dropping out of school is not really that isolated life-changing event occurring at age 17 or in the 9th grade (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007). Research has shown that dropping out of school is often the result of a long process of disengagement that may begin before a child enters school. In fact, dropping out is often described as a process, not an event, with factors building and compounding over time. These factors have been clearly defined and are evident in four different research domains including the student, family, school, and community. Respectively, several examples of student factors are poor attendance and low achievement levels in reading. Contributing factors from the family are high mobility patterns or children not living with both natural parents. School factors include grade retention policies or large class sizes with high-risk students. And community factors include the collective community involvement and support provided to the schools. Also, how the community values the need for the high school diploma as the starting point for a better quality of life is extremely important. In fact, both of these community factors contribute to the competitive business environment for the community.

Policymakers have a huge responsibility to thoroughly understand all the root causes and multiple facets of the dropout issue before they begin to consider legislation and regulations for local schools. They must also know about the range of potential interventions available to school and community leaders. However, it is most important to understand several basic principles as they design legislation with the expectation that favorable change will happen in schools and graduation rates will increase.

Any proposed legislation should stress that State and local program planners begin all dropout prevention efforts based on the use of reliable and accurate data. Decisions need to have a sound research base with the flexibility at the local level to accommodate unique situations and build new school improvement plans on existing strengths. Accountability and evaluation structures along with equity issues must be part of all legislation.

Increased graduation rates are expected from any new legislation but so are other accomplishments such as increased attendance and academic achievement levels, improved behavior patterns, and increased civic involvement by every student. These accomplishments should be rewarded, but any proposed legislation must provide for those school districts with lesser accomplishments to be given additional assistance and every opportunity to succeed before any dramatic change is instituted.

EXAMINING THE DATA

Graduation rates vary widely across States, from a 60 percent rate in South Carolina to an 88 percent rate in Nebraska (USDOE, NCE Statistics, 2008). However, much of the variation has been attributed to the differing interpretations of what

constitutes a “dropout.” Thus, it has been difficult to make accurate comparisons that allow for meaningful interpretation and analysis. As a result of broad public consensus that there is a need for a uniform definition and formula to calculate high school graduation rates, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings released a proviso as recently as October 28, 2008, that provides new rules for States regarding graduation rates. The new regulations require that all States will use the same formula to calculate how many students graduate from high school on time and how many drop out. The final regulations define the “4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate” as the number of students who graduate in 4 years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who entered high school 4 years earlier, adjusted for transfers, students who emigrate and deceased students? (Spellings, 2008).

Regardless of the variations in actual numbers, the data relating to school dropout and high school graduation are sobering, particularly among minority students. The most recent statistics reported by the U.S. Department of Education estimate that over a half million students drop out of school each year, which is enough to fill 12,207 school buses (USDOE, 2008). These data have remained relatively flat for the past 30 years, even as spending on education has increased significantly (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007). As noted above, graduation rates for students of color, students with disabilities, and those who live in poverty are significantly higher than for white students who live in middle to high family income homes. These characteristics are more specifically described below.

Race/Ethnicity

Past data have shown a strong association between race/ethnicity and the likelihood of dropping out of school. In particular, cohort studies of national longitudinal data for American high school students, such as the High School and Beyond study and the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, both sponsored by NCES, show that Blacks and Hispanics were at greater risk of dropping out than Whites. Furthermore, American Indian and Alaska Native students have a dropout rate twice the national average—the highest dropout rate of any U.S. ethnic or racial group.

Students With Disabilities

The most recent special education dropout data indicate that the highest special education dropout rate reported for the 2006–07 school year was 33.6 percent (NDPC–SD, 2008). However, it is important to note that the definition of “dropout” and the data sources currently used by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) differs from the definition used by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD), significantly compromising the capacity to make accurate comparisons of special education and general education dropout numbers. This exacerbates efforts to chart the necessary and highly important progress of students with disabilities in relation to their peers without disabilities (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002). Even so, available data reveal that dropout rates vary substantially among the various categories of disability. For instance, the dropout rate for students identified with an emotional disturbance is approximately 51.4 percent, while the rate for those with hearing or orthopedic impairments is approximately 15 percent (NDPC–SD, 2008).

Impact of Poverty

High school students living in low-income families are six times as likely as their peers from high-income families to drop out of high school. About 10.7 percent of students from low-income families (bottom quintile) dropped out of high school; by comparison, 5.4 percent of middle-income students dropped out, as did 1.7 percent of students from high-income families (USDOE, 2004). In the absence of additional measures, family income serves as a good indicator for other social and economic factors that are likely to be related to a student’s decision to stay in school or to drop out. Clearly, dropout and graduation rate data described above indicate that dropout is a national issue that has serious implications for our national security, our economic development, and general quality of life for all Americans.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH ALASKA’S HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE

Through a research-based Program Assessment and Review (PAR) process, the National Dropout Prevention Center has become intimately involved with the discovery of Alaskan dropout etiology in the major cities of Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Juneau, as well as smaller cities such as Sitka and Ketchikan, focusing specifically on the issue of dropout among Alaskan Natives. Additionally, the NDPC/N is working in several other small, rural villages to address dropout among the Eskimo and

Native Alaskan population through a recently federally funded project termed: Rural Alaska Mentoring Project (RAMP) that involves the training and use of peer-to-peer mentors via a Web-based mentoring program, as well as face-to-face adult mentoring to specifically address dropout. As a result of the extensive work throughout the State, the NDPC/N has data to suggest the following issues are highly associated with dropout in Alaska, particularly among Eskimos and Alaskan Natives.

- **Factors associated with low socioeconomic conditions.** These factors include drug and alcohol abuse; lack of support at home, manifested through low expectations built on a history of poor academic engagement and performance by parents and grandparents; a highly transient population; poor health conditions; high unemployment; high incidences of incarceration; and single-parent homes. In the Alaska Staff Development Network's (ASDN) statewide needs assessment, Alaska's 53 school districts identified dropout prevention as one of the top priorities.

- **Factors associated with cultural differences.** Educators and community members may exhibit attitudes and behaviors that include subtle and inadvertent insensitivity towards those with different cultural backgrounds and experiences. In addition, significant inequity exists in terms of equal access to resources, quality of instruction, and building infrastructure.

- **Factors associated with school readiness.** The lack of State funding for a mandated early childhood/kindergarten program has resulted in incidences of 30-40 percent of students starting school with limited understanding of numeracy and literacy. Furthermore, the statewide school system as a whole has demonstrated a limited capacity to adequately address the needs of students who are behind their peers. This is particularly evident at the secondary level, where limited opportunities for credit recovery are in place for students who get behind in credits. Individual and focus group interviews with students have provided data to suggest this is a leading contributor to the dropout problem, particularly for Native Alaskan students.

- **Factors associated with poor reading skills.** There is a lack of a systemic reading initiative in any of the school districts observed to date, particularly at the secondary level. Secondary teachers report that low reading levels of students are at the heart of poor academic performance, low self-esteem, and ultimate dropout.

- **Factors associated with dropout prevention planning.** There is not a coordinated and systemic dropout prevention plan in place by the State that incorporates a high level of accountability and progress monitoring. This is a major hurdle for the State, due to the site-based management infrastructure in place and the challenges of a wide range of geographic, demographic, and cultural issues that are unique to the State of Alaska.

- **Factors associated with career development and workforce readiness.** Alaska has an inadequate Career and Technical Education (CTE) model in place that is poorly funded and not emphasized as a legitimate dropout prevention strategy. Career development opportunities at the secondary level are predominantly career exploration, at best, with limited State funding to support up-to-date technology and resources.

- **Factors associated with accountability.** The collection, analysis, and use of data for decisionmaking are problematic across the State. There is not a statewide data system in place that requires similar hardware and software applications, and mandates a specific set of data elements for input. The results are statewide systems of data warehouses that are not integrated and limits the capacity of the Department of Education personnel to collect, analyze, and compare adequately.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

Policy and program suggestions are offered by NDPC/N to many different groups throughout the year. Our approach in response to these requests is usually very prescriptive depending on the needs of the State, school district, or community group. However, the suggested solutions offered below reflect a much broader portrait appropriate for policymakers at different levels including several suggestions for program planners.

1. Build Accountability and Data-Driven Decision-Making Capacity

At the Federal Level

- Continue to define and refine data sets to be collected and a uniform definition of dropout, graduation, etc.
- Assist State Education Agencies (SEAs) to help them manage a more robust accountability system, which, in turn, should assist the Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to stay focused on accountability at the local level.

- Develop a stronger support structure at the SEA level vs. LEA level, in order to provide for a knowledge base of predictive data and program interventions that is consistent and equitably applied.

At the State Level

- Develop a statewide data management system that is mandated to be compatible at each LEA or school site.
- Make use of the Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS) currently being piloted in three school districts in the State by the NDPC/N.
- Examine the data and impact of State policies designed to reduce dropout. Some policies may actually be inadvertently pushing students out.

At the Local Level

- Use longitudinal, student-level data to get an accurate read of graduation and dropout rates.
- Use data to identify incoming students with histories of academic problems, truancy, behavioral problems, and retentions.
- Review student-level data to identify students at risk of dropping out before key academic transitions.
- Monitor students' sense of engagement and belonging in school.
- Collect and document accurate information on student withdrawals.

2. Develop a Statewide, Systemic Dropout Prevention Plan

- Consider the National Dropout Prevention Center's *15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention* as a foundation for the development of a dropout prevention plan. For example, the Mississippi Department of Education developed a planning framework using the 15 strategies and requires every local school district to assess current programs and develop new interventions in each of the strategies. Also, the Arizona Department of Education is using the 15 strategies as a framework to list the successful dropout prevention programs currently operating in local districts.
- Utilize the components of the *Dropout Prevention Practice Guide* recently released by the Institute of Education Sciences in any statewide dropout prevention plan.
- Provide incentives for the accomplishment of benchmarks, as well as technical assistance and resource support for low-performing LEAs and schools.
- The Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN) has partnered with NDPC/N and the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Tribes of Alaska in a 3-year USDOE Alaska Native Education grant project designed to increase the high school graduation rate of Alaska Native students in Juneau, Ketchikan, and Sitka. The impact of this project should be examined closely for strategies that prove to be effective, with consideration being given for wider statewide implantation.

3. Avoid "Fix It Fast" Thinking and Funding at the State and Federal Levels

- Realize that the school dropout issue cannot be "fixed" with the passing of a single piece of legislation, or with a single project or program, or within a fixed time frame of usually 1 to 3 years.
- Consider a "multiple-pathway" approach to high school graduation that has the required components of rigor and relevancy, yet incorporates "value-added assessment" policies and practices—for instance, a wider variety of alternative schools and programs such as virtual learning opportunities, work-based programs, career academies, and early/middle college programs.
- Provide funding for research and demonstration projects that are 5–7 years in length vs. 1–3, in order to allow for full program implementation and more accurate assessment of outcomes. It often takes a year or more to get necessary components of a grant in place before interventions are actually implemented at the local level.
- Strengthen staff development opportunities and resources, particularly for remote areas of the State. The Alaska Staff Development Network headquartered in Juneau is a great resource already in place, and is considered by the NDPC/N to be one of the most effective state-level staff development programs in the Nation. Its impact is especially felt in the many remote areas of Alaska, where travel in and out for staff development purposes is problematic and economically challenging. The ASDN has served over 2,500 educators through its Web-based system, and just within the past year, 235 Alaskan educators from 73 schools participated in eight 2-hour webinars sponsored by ASDN. ASDN also conducted statewide Dropout Prevention Symposia in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and Kenai.

4. More Vigorously Address the Issue of Equity and Access for Native Alaskans

- The issue of dropout among Native Alaskans is admittedly complicated and fraught with historical precedence and highly charged emotions. As such, the solutions must be wide-ranging, creative, and respectful of differing cultural values and expectations. The sense of “hopelessness” that is pervasive throughout the Native community is a result of real and perceived historic policies and practices, as well as the long-term impact of poverty. It appears that the Native community is looking for a stronger voice at the State and Federal levels to address the problems associated with school success.
- The need for consistent and active relationships is particularly relevant to dropout among all student populations, and especially for the Native Alaskan student. Therefore, the following suggestions are worthy of endorsement and support as vital components in any Federal or State legislation.
 - Assign a home-school liaison at every school.
 - Assign Graduation Coaches for all secondary schools. It should be noted that Fairbanks Northstar Borough School District is funding a program to put Dropout Prevention Specialists in all schools K–12.
 - Implement a Career Counselor program that is based on the new model of CTE that shifts the focus from requiring students to choose either an academic pathway or a CTE pathway. A CTE pathway is one in which students combine CTE course taking with academic course taking within a CTE program of study.
 - Develop a strong “Advisory” program at all schools that incorporates the involvement of parents and local support agencies.
 - Consider establishing “full service centers” at local schools that essentially creates a “one-stop” center for all Federal, State, and local services. An exemplary model is a local initiative in Dayton, OH, entitled FAST FORWARD.

SUMMARY

The dropout issue in America is at a crisis stage and requires the immediate attention of policymakers at all levels of government, not only to propose Federal or State legislation to address the issue, but to foster an environment for all facets of our society to realize just how serious the underperformance of our students—our future leaders—is related to the economic competitiveness of the Nation. The good news is that the research-based information about effective strategies and program interventions available to policymakers and practitioners is sound and offers a great deal of promise and hope for State and local leaders to forge ahead with comprehensive plans to increase graduation rates. Also, all proposed Federal legislation must preserve the value of State leadership in the education systems yet provide for the creativity of local districts to develop sound and comprehensive dropout prevention programs that reflect the uniqueness of their students and communities served by the schools.

Thus, all legislation must reflect a full range of strategies and programs addressing the issues ranging from school readiness of our children to the needs of our struggling students who elected to leave school before graduation and yet are willing to return for another opportunity to earn a diploma. Perhaps more than any other suggestion to end this testimony is that we must end the “fix it, fund it, and forget it” mentality and realize that the dropout issue is a long developmental process for most students. Yet, the dropout crisis can be corrected with a sustained effort at all governmental levels and with the total commitments from all school and community leaders working collaboratively.

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Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Dr. Smink. Appreciate your leadership on this issue and the time that you've given us this morning.

With that, Commissioner LeDoux, I want to congratulate you on the summit that you had convened, these past 2 days. I understand there was good discussion and good outcomes, and we're pleased to be the Federal follow-on to that very successful summit.

Your comments this morning? Welcome.

STATEMENT OF LARRY LeDOUX, COMMISSIONER, ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT, JUNEAU, AK

Mr. LeDOUX. Thank you, Senator Murkowski and honored guests.

Governor Palin made it very clear to me when I—

Senator MURKOWSKI. Can you push your microphone, just, your direction? There you go.

Mr. LeDOUX [continuing]. Thank you.

Governor Palin made it very clear to me when I accepted this position that one of my chief responsibilities was to ensure that every child in Alaska would find success. The solutions to low graduation rates will come from the students themselves, their parents, the schools, and their communities. The answers will also come from looking at students' early childhoods and their entire school career. Students leave school as teenagers, but every educator will tell you they become disengaged from school much earlier in their lives.

The greatest danger is believing that success is easy or can be solved by simple solutions that address one need. Kids fail to graduate based on a number of reasons, and the road to failure—and success—starts very early, usually before they enter school.

In some cases, students leave school because they must earn money and take care of themselves or their siblings, or they become pregnant, or parents themselves, or they live with families that move a lot and their education has been fractured, or they have mental health problems, behavior problems, or learning disabilities that have not been fully addressed by their schools or their families.

Some leave because the pace of learning in schools has not changed and the requirements of a modern society require that students graduate with rigor and flexibility and have many, many options.

In an attempt to craft a broad initiative to increase the success of students and accountability for the use of resources, over 450 Alaskan leaders, parents, students, business and industry leaders, early childhood professionals, legislators, university professors, and executives from support agencies in our communities came together

to build an Alaska education plan. It's the start of a beginning. It will continue through revision, refinement, and, most importantly, implementation.

During 2 days of the summit, we defined 40 goals, with many actions on each goal, and we will be working, the next few months, to develop action plans to implement so that we can make change as early as possible.

While there is much work to be done, some insights of this plan and our discussions can be shared today. I will go through them quickly. As you've heard before, graduation is an outcome of doing many things right. It's not just one thing, it's many. The reasons kids drop out, as you've heard, are not simple, and they're complex, and they must be responded to in a complex manner.

There must be a coherent system of education support from birth to work. Early childhood programs, K-12 programs, public and private education or postsecondary programs, and workforce development must be a part of the solution.

Early learning is critical. If kids do not enter school with the proper oral fluency and some of the social and behavioral skills to learn, they fall behind. We know that there's a direct correlation between a child's reading ability and their graduation from high school.

Students must have the opportunity to explore their talents. Students must have access to quality educators. Students must be fully prepared to engage in postsecondary training and college and vocational careers.

Alaska will need to help implement a comprehensive early—these are some of the conclusions, since I have 1 minute.

Senator MURKOWSKI. We'll let you continue. We're not going to cut you off.

Mr. LEDOUX. OK, thank you.

Attention to the importance of family and culture must be a foundation to any plan. Many of our students are failing because our instructional programs and our goals and objectives are not delivered in a manner that is consistent with our indigenous way of learning and thinking. We need to change that.

Education technology must be integrated into the educational framework—not technology into education, but education into technology. Kids are learning in real time, and we're still teaching in seat time.

School finances and support must be stabilized to facilitate effective management and educational programming. Students must feel socially and physically safe so that they can develop the confidence necessary to take risks in learning.

Alaska's schools must develop effective partnerships to train students and provide the basis for increased learning opportunities.

How can the Federal Government help us? We're going to need help developing a comprehensive early-learning environment for our kids. Alaska has unique geographical challenges. It's going to be expensive, it's going to be difficult, and we're going to need support to do that, but it's critical to the success of kids, that we implement an early education program.

We're going to need funds to help restructure high schools. Basic needs will always trump innovation. Administrators, superintend-

ents and principals have great ideas, and they know what to do, but they need support to provide innovative programs.

The Alaska Native Equity Act has provided funds for Alaska Native organizations and schools to tremendously increase the success of students in Alaska. Those kinds of funds need to be available to all schools so that the innovative programs can be delivered. Right now, there's not enough money to implement those plans. Flexibility in NCLB regulations—NCLB helped us not leave children behind, but we need a flexible program that will meet the needs of our State. Currently, it does not.

Finally, we need a career and technical education program in Alaska. The Federal Government used to be the leader in providing funds and support to develop career and technical education in Alaska and around the country. For the last 20 years, they have not increased support in Carl Perkins, and it has become so complicated that many of our districts refuse to accept the money because the regulations are so extreme that they can't implement the program.

Finally, again, I would say we congratulate you for all of your support, for postsecondary education, the support that you do give. We believe that, as our plan is implemented, we will meet the needs of all of our students and increase graduation.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. LeDoux follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LARRY LEDOUX

Alaska graduates approximately two-thirds of its high school students. We graduate about half of our Alaska Native students, and about 40 percent of our students who experience disabilities.

Those statistics do not mean that one-third of our students have dropped out. Among the non-graduates in any given year are students who will remain in school and eventually receive a diploma, or who have left high school for home school and must be counted as non-graduates, or who have completed their credits but have not passed all three portions of Alaska's exit exam. Furthermore, a small percentage of our students, about 1 percent, take an alternate assessment and are not on track for a diploma.

Scholars can quibble about the best method to calculate graduation rates, but this is what it boils down to: Every year, several thousand Alaska students walk away from high school without a diploma.

America is a place for second chances. If we want to encourage students to attain their diploma, we should not stigmatize them with the label "dropout." There are many reasons students leave school without a diploma—in some cases, we might make the same decision if we were in their shoes—and our goal should be to assist these youths, not to judge them.

In fact, some non-graduates will earn a GED certificate and go on to acquire a vocational certificate or a college degree. Other youths return to school and give it a second try. Whatever techniques we use to increase the graduation rate will be based on respecting students as individuals and as valued members of our society.

Of course, many students who leave high school without a diploma do not attain further credentials. They are less likely to use their talents to the fullest, less likely to hold well-paying jobs, and more likely to need social services, more likely to be jailed, and more likely to have children who do not graduate from high school. The lost opportunities for themselves and our society are tremendous. This is particularly true in an economy in which adults have to be prepared to hold many jobs in their lifetime or to compete for jobs that can be filled globally.

Alaska's low graduation rate is a very serious problem.

We live in communities in which well-paying jobs, from nurses to police officers, go begging while talented young people are unemployed or underemployed because they did not attain their diploma. Where does this disconnect come from? Why aren't more of our students well-prepared for employment, postsecondary training or college during their free public education?

The solutions to low graduation rates will come from the students themselves, their parents, the schools, and the broader society. The answers also will come from looking at students' early childhoods and their entire school career. Students leave school as teenagers, but every educator will tell you they become disengaged from school much earlier in their lives.

Broadly stated, we believe that more students will graduate:

1. If their parents are involved in their education and provide a nurturing home life; children who have a strong connection to family values, customs and beliefs develop the confidence to "reach for the stars" and the talent to grab a star.
2. If very young students are well-prepared to succeed at school;
3. If high school courses interest students because they are relevant to their current lives, the needs of a world-competitive workforce, and their future plans;
4. And if schools are geared toward removing any barriers that hold back students.

More precisely, schools have seen greater success graduating students when they:

- Increase academic rigor and expectations, and hold students accountable;
- Focus on bringing every child to proficiency in reading by the end of third grade;
- Identify and remediate academic or behavioral problems early in elementary school;
- Improve academic rigor, learning experiences, and counseling in the middle grades;
- Offer significant counseling time, graduation plans/coaches, and career majors in high school so that students' time in high school is seen by them as useful to them;
- Provide a broad-based leadership activity and athletic program that teaches risk-taking, teamwork, dedication, and other work-related skills;
- Offer sufficient remediation and credit-recovery options in high school so there is always another chance to do better;
- Let some students enroll in college courses or "early college high schools" so advanced students aren't bored;
- Pay more attention to high school freshmen so they don't fall behind in their credits;
- Understand how to address the needs of students with disabilities, and develop and implement viable transition plans that facilitates skill development;
- Make parents the partners in their children's education;
- Assess students in ways that show teachers, parents and students their skill levels;
- Are located in communities with widespread pre-school programs.

Additionally, in Alaska, schools will graduate more students when they offer courses that are relevant to all cultures.

Let me discuss the issues in greater detail.

We do not have 21st century schools. We still define learning by the amount of time students spend in class, and we do not take into account the ways that youths learn in real time. Our schools must use technology to redefine how students learn and problem-solve.

The successful schools in the 21st century will be defined by a new set of "three R's": the relationships they establish between educators, students, parents and communities; the relevance of school to students' lives and eventual careers; and academic rigor.

We must look at more than K-12 education. Alaska needs a pre-kindergarten-to-grade-20 commission to determine the learning needs of children from their early years into careers. Very young children who are not orally fluent have a hard time reading well by third grade, and they often never catch up. We need an educational path with seamless transitions between pre-school, K-12, and postsecondary training and college, all the way into careers. The success at the end of the system is determined at the beginning.

When students grow up, they will need to be flexible in their careers and in life. But our schools are not flexible. To treat all students the same is to treat them inequitably. Twenty-first century schools must meet the needs of students or we will continue to lose them. Schools must wrap themselves around the needs of an individual child instead of expecting the children to wrap themselves around a single school.

Commendably, No Child Left Behind has spurred higher achievement in reading, writing and math and a greater concern for all students. Many of our own suggestions above are based on the notion that students who are doing well academically

are more likely to graduate. But in itself NCLB and improved academics are not the solution to the graduation crisis. NCLB is one facet of the diamond of success. First of all, principals will tell you that some students who leave without diplomas are proficient students. Many have passed Alaska's exit exam.

Academic competence alone does not guarantee that students will stay through 12th grade. Some early leavers are bored, unstimulated intellectually by a system not perceived as relevant to their needs. We need to get them through high school quicker and into college or occupational training sooner in their lives. One promising option is early college high school, which offers students a 5-year program that results in a high school diploma and an associate's degree. Another valuable option for combating student disengagement, and one that has receded in recent years under budget pressures, is career and technical training, ranging from wood and auto shops and cooking courses to computer and health sciences courses. Career and technical programs that prepare students for jobs are critical.

Unfortunately, Federal regulations for Carl Perkins vocational funds have become so burdensome and the grants so small that small Alaska school districts no longer apply for the grants. The grants literally cost more to administer than the dollar value of the grant. We are now seeing middle-sized school districts refraining from applying for vocational grants. We recommend more Federal funds for career and technical education with fewer strings attached.

As schools concentrate on the NCLB-assessed subjects, there is less time for the arts, sciences, social studies and vocations. Schools must better understand how to embed reading, writing and math into a much richer curriculum based on the arts, sciences, social studies and vocations. More students will remain in school when we meet their individual needs. Such a school offers a broad range of activities, rigorous academic and vocational programs, and flexible learning options. Furthermore, students will be better able to succeed in jobs and college if they have learned more than what we assess for. They must be capable of creative, ethical and critical thinking, as well. Students have deeper needs than solving an algebra problem or writing a grammatically correct sentence.

To further address students' individual needs, we must encourage the creation of alternate approaches, programs and schools for students who are at risk of not graduating. These students may be homeless, or be parents themselves and in need of jobs, or be far behind in credits. Precisely because these schools serve students who have not been successful, they generally do not have high graduation rates. Yet it is commendable that the students continue to plug away and that their district continues to serve them. Every student who graduates from these programs makes them worthwhile regardless of the programs' overall graduation rate. Even students who gain one or two more semesters but do not graduate are better off than if they did not return to school at all. NCLB expects all schools to meet the same targets for graduation rates or face specified mandatory consequences. These consequences may throw alternative schools into turmoil and not be in the best interest of the students. Alternative schools may need to be held accountable differently than regular schools.

The curriculum in Alaska's schools should be rigorous and reflect the learning styles, value and meaning of Alaska's indigenous peoples. Native languages and cultures must be honored and included in the curriculum. The curriculum must be delivered in the context of a child's learning. Shared bottom-up decisionmaking must be nurtured so that school and community values reflect each other.

Surveys of American Indians and Alaska Natives who left school early reveal the same concerns that many students have, but the cultural dissonance between the schools and the Native community may heighten these issues. Students spoke of not feeling that the teachers cared about them; not getting enough academic help; lack of parental encouragement; not seeing school as important for what they want to do in life; and not seeing school as important to their cultural identity.

Schools need to find more ways for all parents to be meaningfully engaged in their children's education. When parents join with other community members and the school to determine behavioral expectations and learning goals, they become partners in the children's education. In Native villages, where the schools experience significant staff turnover, it is especially important to have community ownership of the schools.

Some students leave school because they do not feel safe there. They may be harassed or subject to violence or the presence of illegal drugs. Students who feel a sense of belonging at school are more likely to graduate. It is the duty of schools to make every student safe and welcome. Unfortunately, violence exists apart from school, as well. Some students are distracted at school and perform poorly because they experience violence at home or in the community. Schools, families and communities have a role to play in a thorough effort to reduce fear and violence. It may

be desirable to encourage the creation of regional boarding schools for some students who are homeless or who face violence at home.

Some students start school already behind and never catch up. Children who participate in good-quality early-childhood programs have an edge over their peers in kindergarten and beyond. Alaska needs the widespread availability of early care and learning and of family support and parental education.

In some cases students leave school because they must earn money and take care of themselves or their siblings; or they are pregnant or parents themselves; or they live with families that move a lot and their education has been fractured; or they have mental health problems, behavior problems or learning disabilities that have not been adequately treated, if at all. Schools will need to identify those issues as a matter of course and partner with social service agencies to alleviate them.

The new NCLB regulations regarding graduation rates will not be helpful, although we hasten to point out that we do not argue against the urgency of the issue. Nor do we excuse the achievement gap that reveals itself in varying graduation rates among subgroups of students. One hundred percent graduation is our highest priority.

We are concerned that the regulations may judge some or all schools by a strict 4-year graduation rate, which is likely to trim a few points off our graduation rates. States would need Federal approval to use other than a 4-year rate for accountability. We believe it is fair to give schools credit for all of their graduates regardless of how long it takes students to reach the goal. Education is not a race.

The regulations will judge schools by the graduation rate for each subgroup of students, given a minimum number of students in the subgroup. Very few schools can meet even a 50 percent graduation rate for students with disabilities, for example. We do not believe the current graduation rates for all of our subgroups are good enough. But setting artificially high targets will not improve the graduation rates. Within a few years of the disaggregation provisions taking effect, nearly all sizable schools will be in restructuring status for the graduation rate alone. But the restructuring mandates of NCLB might not be the best remedy. Interventions should be thoughtful and based on specific data.

We have sketched out above the sorts of solutions that will help. They are not easy or swift solutions. In summary, schools in the 21st century must be refashioned to serve the needs of their students, not only academic or career needs, but emotional and social needs.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

What follows is information about Alaska's graduation and dropout rates. Here are definitions necessary for understanding the data.

A **dropout** is a student who was enrolled in the district sometime during the school year and whose enrollment terminated. Dropouts do not include graduates, transfers to public or private schools, or transfers to state-approved or district-approved education programs (such as home-school correspondence programs). Students with absences due to suspension, illness or medical conditions are not reported as dropouts. Students who leave school to be home-schooled and are not affiliated with a district program are counted as dropouts. Students who leave a district and enroll in a new district but do not ask for a transcript from their original district are counted as dropouts.

The **dropout rate** is an annual rate. It does not refer to a cohort of students. The dropout rate is computed by dividing the number of dropouts in the current school year by the number of students in grades 7 through 12 on October 1 of the current school year. Note that the denominator includes all of the 7th-graders and 8th-graders, although few middle-school students drop out and become part of the numerator. The dropout rate for only grades 9 through 12, therefore, will be higher than the rate reported for grades 7 through 12. **School year** is defined as the 12-month period beginning on July 1 and ending June 30.

From school year 2002–2003 to the current school year, Alaska used the same definition of the **graduation rate**. The numerator is the number of graduates receiving a regular diploma before June 30, regardless of how many years the student was enrolled. In other words, it is not a strict 4-year rate. It credits schools for all of their graduates.

The denominator is the number of graduates, plus the number of dropouts in grade 9, 3 years before, plus the number of unduplicated dropouts in grade 10, 2 years before, plus the number of unduplicated dropouts in grade 11, 1 year before, plus the number of unduplicated dropouts in grade 12 in the current year, plus the number of grade 12 students who are continuing in high school after the current year.

Students who complete the credit requirements of the State and their district but who do not pass all three portions of the State exit exam are counted as if they were dropouts. Each year, approximately 250 to 350 students are in that position. Some of them will eventually pass the exit exam and receive a regular diploma.

The graduation data includes the phrase "**LEP students.**" It refers to students with limited English proficiency.

Preliminary Graduation Rate by Subgroup

2007-2008	2008 High School Graduates	2008 Grade 12 Continuing Students	2008 Grade 12 Dropouts	2008 Grade 11 Dropouts	2008 Grade 10 Dropouts	2008 Grade 9 Dropouts	2008 Graduation Rate [In percent]
AK Native/Amer. Indian	1,508	464	351	281	278	284	47.6
Asian/Pacific Islander	568	111	63	59	29	37	65.5
Black	257	86	43	50	32	27	51.9
Hispanic	386	68	60	35	20	27	64.8
Mixed Ethnicity	362	107	49	46	17	281	42.0
White	4,715	713	397	354	334	5	72.3
Students w/Disabilities	532	391	125	114	104	59	40.2
Students w/o Disabilities	7,264	1158	838	711	604	602	65.0
LEP Students	612	276	136	125	98	97	45.5
Economically Disadvantaged	1823	650	318	284	241	138	52.8

2007-2008 Race/Ethnic Group	Enrollment Totals by Grade*						Dropout Rate by Ethnicity		Dropout Rate as a Percentage of Total Dropouts			
	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total 7-12	7-12 (in percent)	Dropouts Count 7-12	Dropouts 7-12 (in percent)		
AK Native/Amer. Indian	2,226	2,312	2,768	2,530	2,320	2,213	14,369	23.2	1,228	8.5	1,228	37.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	712	705	727	747	768	764	4,423	7.2	213	4.8	213	6.5
Black	364	348	400	373	419	390	2,294	3.7	162	7.1	162	4.9
Hispanic	541	526	591	562	510	536	3,266	5.3	179	5.5	179	5.5
Mixed Ethnicity	550	501	531	507	491	494	3,074	5.0	188	6.1	188	5.7
White	5,428	5,561	5,703	5,920	6,092	5,693	34,397	55.6	1,313	3.8	1,313	40.0
Statewide Totals	9,821	9,953	10,720	10,639	10,600	10,090	61,823		3,283	5.3	3,283	

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Commissioner. I appreciate your comments.

We will next go to the president of the University of Alaska, Mr. Mark Hamilton.

Thank you, Mark.

STATEMENT OF MARK HAMILTON, PRESIDENT, UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA, FAIRBANKS, AK

Mr. HAMILTON. Thank you, Senator Murkowski.

I've tried to chop out everything that's already been said, so I'll flip through and see if I can add something good.

First of all, let me just say this. Thank you so much for not sitting in Washington, DC, because, even as brilliant as you are, the chances of your deciding precisely what has to be done all by yourself is not possible. You know that, and that's why you're here, and I'm grateful that you've come to listen to us.

Let me start with some good news. There's great news here in Alaska about lots of programs. This year, the University of Alaska attracted 63 percent of college-bound students. That's up from 44 percent, about 8 years ago. That's almost a 50-percent increase. We're still dead last. Now, statistics that show where you are, are important. Statistics that show where you're going are important. I just shared that with you. It means we've got to try harder, we've got to work harder to get those youngsters there.

Of course, when you're attracting high school graduates, you understand the pool that you're dealing with. At that stage of the game, it seems to me, and to the Board of Regents, for whom I work, that you'd better get involved in the pool, you'd better get involved very, very deeply and quickly, in doing everything you can to affect the continuum of education, which means that, as a university president, I've got to believe, sincerely believe, that if a 3rd-grader can't read or a 6th-grader can't do math, it's my problem. It's my problem as an Alaskan, it's my problem as the university president.

When I look at the high school graduation rates, you can't feel any tremendous pride, but I look, as well, at college graduation rates, and find we're not 8th from the bottom, we're absolutely last in baccalaureate graduates in 6 years. I'll be honest with you, when I hear that statistic, I want to be defensive and say,

"Wait a minute. Come on, we're an open-admission institution, we allow anyone to come in. We are also the community college in Alaska, so a huge percentage of my young students have no intention of getting a baccalaureate degree in 4 years, 6 years, 10 years, or 12 years."

OK. And after I get defensive, I say, "The only thing that matters is the product." To have that work-ready product, to have that baccalaureate product, to have that certificate, to have that 2-year associate-degree product to go and work in the Alaskan workforce. While, frankly, being last doesn't concern me, not doing as much as we can for this State bothers me a great deal, and we will continue our efforts and diminish our defensiveness about something.

Our very first testifier today did mention something I thought was terribly important. He talked about the need to do something quick, not necessarily for a short period of time. There was a story

I told at the summit that I do dearly love, and I'm going to share it with you.

Louis XIV, when he was designing the Garden of Versailles, looked out at the reflection pool, and said, "I want this pool to be lined with 50-foot maples." And the gardener said, "My Liege, that'll take 150 years." He said, "Oh, in that case, plant them today."

[Laughter.]

I encourage you to plant this today.

It's strikingly obvious to all of us that the difficulties here begin very, very early. And in that regard, it seems to me the university's got to be involved very, very early.

This is not a relay race, where K hands off to middle school, hands off to high school, hands off—it's more like a dogsled race. We have different leaders and different wheel-dogs, but, at every stage of the journey, all of us have to be pulling in the same direction.

There are some things that can be done. Money isn't the answer to everything, but it helps in a number of areas.

Financial aid, in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act, we need to get that moving and have that available for Alaskans. Increases to Pell Grant. Maybe a more user-friendly FAFSA application. And very, very important, we have three other specific—very specified, thorough programs that need attention: Alaska Native Education Equity Act, the Alaska Native Serving Institution Program, and Future Teachers of America.

Let me just give you another piece of—I said, outside at the press conference, that we're not helpless, we just need help. There has been, in the last 10 years, a 108-percent increase of Alaskan Natives receiving baccalaureates at the University of Alaska. I'm very proud of that, until I realize how much more there is to do.

Let me close with a statement I find myself making in venues large and small, within the university and outside of it. Like so many Alaskans, I was not born here, but I will die here. I'm committed to this university, the State of Alaska, the people of Alaska, to make the education landscape better than when I got here. I do this for all of Alaska's children, including my own.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hamilton follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARK HAMILTON

Senator Murkowski, guests, and distinguished leaders, thank you for your time and for the opportunity to testify before you today. As president of the University of Alaska, I am deeply concerned with the success of students at all educational levels—K-12 and postsecondary. In many ways the educational success of our students is a bell-weather for how well prepared the State of Alaska will be able to meet the economic challenges of the future.

My purpose before you today is three-fold—one, to help define the problems associated with Alaska's high school and/or postsecondary drop-out rate; two, to suggest solutions; and three, to describe how the Federal Government can help.

DEFINING THE PROBLEMS

First, some good news: the University of Alaska now attracts 63 percent of our State's college-bound high school graduates. This was unheard of a dozen years ago, when only 44 percent chose to stay inside Alaska for vocational and career training, community college or a university education. Back then, the majority of our college-bound high school graduates opted for schools "Outside." That meant Alaska lost out

on keeping its own talent while Alaska businesses had to import workers, driving up costs.

The increase to 63 percent indicates we are moving in the right direction, however the important part of that metric is described by the words *high school graduates*. Realize that there is a cohort of students out there whom, for innumerable reasons, are not completing their secondary education. It is that cohort that we turn our collective attention to through this hearing and our future efforts. Let me be clear: we are not simply looking to produce more high school graduates to look better statistically, we should be producing more high school graduates because in doing so we set in motion a cascade of positive events that would go something like this:

- Graduating from high school leads to;
- Attendance in a postsecondary program in the State which leads to;
- Working in the State;
- This in turn helps the State meet its future workforce and economic challenges.

This is a future we must commit to.

But let's not deceive ourselves. The challenge before us is great. Nationally, we rank eighth from the bottom for high school graduation. Less than a third of those graduates continue to postsecondary education, here or elsewhere. It is from that small pool, that the University of Alaska draws the 63 percent.

This must change. Alaska is not in danger of falling behind. *We are behind* and the distance we must make-up grows each day, month and year that we fail to act.

As we look to the future, I can tell you the university is fully committed to increasing the retention of not only our own university students but to helping our colleagues in K-12 find success in retaining their students as well. The commitment to work with K-12 on this, and other, issues is reinforced by the strong leadership of our Regents, three of whom have their teaching credential and a strong foundation in the K-12 system.

K-12 is not alone in their struggle to produce graduates. Alaska finds itself in the unenviable position of *last* place when it comes to producing baccalaureate graduates in 6 years. The next closest State, Nevada, is 16 percentage points above Alaska. No doubt we have our work cut out for us.

SOLUTIONS

Where to begin? Perhaps the question is not where but rather *when* to begin? To that I say, early, as early as possible.

In Alaska and across the country we need to promote a culture that values learning—that continuous learning is a quality of life issue and not simply a means to an end. When we look at the students who are deficient in the skills necessary to succeed in K-12 it is strikingly obvious that the challenge began at an early age for many of them. The answer is not to delay their learning and put up additional humiliating hurdles in their academic memory, but to engage them at an earlier and earlier age when they are developmentally absorbing the educational tenets they can rely on and will need for future success. Reaching Alaska's youth early with productive enrichment opportunities will help these students enter education and be successful from grade school through high school graduation and consequently will help them to be successful in their postsecondary careers as well.

Let me continue on this theme of culture. Our statistics indicate Alaska does not have a culture that fully values education. We don't even have a culture that values a high school diploma at the same level that other States enjoy.

Perhaps this is because our past provided plentiful jobs in construction, oil, fishing, mining, timber and other blue-collar sectors. Those jobs are still out there, but many of them are changing. Technology used across all sectors requires more training, not less.

A recent report for the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) offers five recommendations:

- Create a statewide college-going culture;
- Establish kindergarten through college partnerships;
- Establish peer mentoring programs;
- Build up financial aid awareness and opportunity; and
- Focus attention on college access by creating a governor's K-16 council.

The university supports the recommendations of ACPE. The university, in partnership with ACPE, starts its outreach efforts in second grade, with a colorful book called "I Know I Can." In sixth grade, we send a fun poster to every child, noting what they have to do to be successful after high school. In ninth grade, we reinforce that message with a colorful brochure, packed with tips and advice. We've pumped up financial aid informational campaigns. We offer bridging programs, to rural

youth especially. And we're now offering high schools e-transcripts, so their graduates can submit transcripts to the university campus of their choice online.

Partnerships such as this are critical if we are to substantially change the college going culture in the State. There are great people at the State and within our UA system whose job involves partnerships with K-12, and the other State agencies such as DOL, Health, and EED. These partnerships have gone far beyond MOA's and a hand-shake and include:

- Work on affordability (with the Alaska Commissions on Postsecondary Education);
- The Alaska Mentor Project;
- K12 Outreach (Alaska Teacher Placement, Future Teachers of Alaska, Preparing Indigenous Teachers and Administrations for Alaska Schools—called PITAAS); and
- Alaska Workforce programs.

We will continue to work and collaborate with all stakeholders who have a vested interest in helping students find success in their educational pathways.

Together we must do a better job of adequately preparing our young people for college *and* work. We must encourage more of them to not only finish high school, but do very well in high school. They must reach beyond the “exit exam,” which is a floor, not a ceiling. At the university, we must do more to support our students who come to us, with better academic and financial aid counseling. To this let me add comments that my colleague Doug North, President at Alaska Pacific University sent me recently for his recommendations for improving High School Graduation and Post-Secondary success. Dr. North believes we must:

- Reduce class sizes;
- De-emphasize testing except as a diagnostic;
- Emphasize stand-and-deliver forms of education;
- Increase project-based and other creative teaching strategies to engage and enhances student curiosity and learning;
- Reverse the ethic, especially among males, that it is not cool to be smart or achieve academically;
- Increase both challenge and support of students; and
- Measure school success in part by how many students want to, and love to, go to their schools.

I agree with his points and would only add that his recommendation regarding reaching males is poignant and one that we all should be concerned with as the number of males that seek postsecondary education continues to decline in Alaska. Perhaps the tattered argument, “not everybody's college material” is partly to blame. I suggest let's get rid of that term. The term “college” means far more than 4-year degrees, especially in Alaska. A good portion of what the University of Alaska provides is vocational and career education, typical of a community college. These include 1- and 2-year programs, plus certificates that can be earned within months.

We must make success in K12 and postsecondary a top priority for our State. The Nation's Secretary of Labor has predicted two-thirds of all new jobs in the next 10 years will require some level of training and education beyond high school, or considerable on-the-job training. Talk to employers. They're hard-pressed to find qualified people to hire from within our State.

Finally, the university is so committed to our partnership and support of K12 we have made K12 Outreach our top budget priority for fiscal year 2010. Last year we requested funding from the State for some of these things we believe would positively impact student success, but didn't get it. That's hard to understand, when you know Alaska's rather alarming statistics. We're trying again this year.

How the Federal Government Can Help

Just as I am convinced that earlier is key to reaching Alaska's youth, I am equally convinced that unfunded mandates are not effective. Unfunded mandates often force good people and even better programs to cease, as institutions reorganize around the mandate. What is needed is both sound policy and adequate funding.

Senator Murkowski, I would like you and the Senate committee to look at establishing a program and funding stream through the No Child Left Behind Act—to encourage and assist postsecondary institutions across the country, to do what we are embarking on at the University of Alaska: reaching out and into the K-12 environment. The Federal Government can set the stage and promote the mindset that the issues with K-12, should be owned by every tier in the educational system.

States with significant challenges in rural areas, low college attendance rates and low graduation rates could be targeted under such a Federal effort to ensure resources are steered toward those States that most need them. Activities such as

partnerships with State Departments of Education, school districts, summer bridging programs, middle college programs, career awareness, special education teacher training and early testing, assessment and placement. The goal of such efforts would be to introduce more K12 students to postsecondary education and the value of a higher education. Such Federal support, if conducted on a national scale, could have tremendous benefits on both the retention of K12 students and the success of postsecondary students in States needing the most help.

No discussion on what impacts the success of postsecondary students can go very far without mention of financial aid, specifically, needs-based financial aid. The reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act holds much promise for students in Alaska and across the Nation. Increases to the PELL grant and a more user-friendly FAFSA application process should help a student's ability to afford an education. However, in Alaska, efforts at a State needs-based aid program have not been widely supported. The exception is ACPE's Alaska Advantage Grant—which is for the most part self-funded. Any effort our congressional delegation can apply toward helping the State develop and fund a needs-based aid program—or enhance and more adequately fund the ACPE Alaska Advantage Grant program—would help postsecondary students succeed.

I would be remiss not to mention three other Federal programs that need continued funding in the future. Those are the Alaska Native Education Equity Act, the Alaska Native Serving Institution programs and Future Teachers of America.

In closing, money alone will not ensure success. It will take commitment and action by concerned educators, parents, business and civic organizations. Perhaps most importantly our elected leaders must provide policy and funding that will enable success in all levels of education in this great State.

Let me close with a statement I find myself making in venues large and small, within UA and outside of it: I was not born here—but I will die here. I am committed to this university, the State of Alaska and the people of Alaska to make the education landscape better than when I arrived here. I do this for all Alaska's children including my own.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, President Hamilton. I appreciate you pointing out that we do have some successes, but, even with those successes, we're starting down so low, so far, that it requires us to even work harder. But, we don't forget to celebrate those successes that we have, so I appreciate your comments.

Dr. Shirley Holloway, thank you.

**STATEMENT OF SHIRLEY J. HOLLOWAY, PRESIDENT/CEO,
AVANT-GARDE LEARNING FOUNDATION, ANCHORAGE, AK**

Ms. HOLLOWAY. Thank you, Senator Murkowski.

Really, it's a privilege to be here today. I'm going to keep this very brief, because you do have my written comments.

I told these gentlemen to my right that I would just say "Ditto." I'm saying "ditto" to the fact that it's absolutely essential that we have an early learning system that supports families and parents long before the children come to our schoolhouses.

I'm so glad that Abbe Hensley submitted her written testimony. The efforts that she is leading in this State are critical to our future success. It starts there.

I hope that the Federal Government could be a partner in helping us to learn how to go about that in the best practices, because we're talking about how we support children early on, before they ever come to school, and families early on, so that they're prepared and eager and ready to learn when they come to that first kindergarten class. Hopefully we can have a preschool program in this State, like other States have, that really help prepare youngsters to be ready for school, and schools get ready for them. I want to emphasize that so much.

The other thing, we have been supporting some research with ISER, and we have that ready. We called it "Connecting a Dis-

jointed System: A First Look at Aligning Education in Alaska.” It’s our first effort at looking at those transitions from home to school, from early K–3 to the intermediate level, and then from the intermediate level to middle school, and middle school to high school, and high school to work or postsecondary. The data is sketchy, but it’s a first start. It’s online at the ISER Web site. People can add data that they have.

I have to tell you that one of the gems you have is that lady sitting next to you. She sends us research. She helps in so many ways. And I just want to say to Karen how much I appreciate her and what a jewel she is to all of us here in Alaska.

Finally, I’d like us to take a look at what other States are doing, in terms of putting the system together. I’m not sure that a P–20 or a P–16 task-force commission is the answer. Other States have been doing it and looking at it, and I think that it’s time for us to do that.

We have to get out of the silos. That was the strength of the education conference, is that people were talking to other people. I heard one of the superintendents say that it was so refreshing to sit and talk to a medical person about some community issues, and get some new perspective. I’m thinking about, across many, many disciplines, coming together and looking at the whole system, from preschool, or birth, through whatever.

Just to give you an idea, when we looked at this, the areas of mutual interest were really fun:

Early learning and K–12: expanding access to early learning for all children; creating linkages between early learning and K–12; improving school readiness; promoting meaningful assessments; building relationships between families and schools.

The early learning postsecondary areas of mutual interest: enhancing preparation and professional development of early learning professionals; researching and disseminating strategies for developmentally appropriate learning; creating finance models for systems with universal access.

K–12/postsecondary areas of mutual interest: upgrading teacher preparation; professional development; aligning high school exit, college entrance, and course-placement exams; phasing out remedial education for recent high school graduates; improving college readiness and college success; recalibrating grades 11 through 14—the need for a different perspective on education for students late in their high school careers is being recognized; why not provide a variety of learning options, such as internships or apprenticeship programs or early enrollment in college, technical training and certificate programs; sharing academic performance data.

Some of the States are doing some very exciting things. A good example is, in California, CSU has an early assessment program of juniors in high school, including 11th-grade testing prep opportunities for those kids who want to go on to college.

Oregon has a P–20 finance model. The Oregon Business Council examined the State’s P–20 budgets as if they were one document, and found areas of disparity in funding and areas where funding could be better coordinated to support students.

In Indiana, Indiana's 21st Century Scholars Program targets low-income 8th-grade students who—they sign a pledge to earn a C average or higher throughout high school.

These are just some ideas. I think it's time that we sit down, across those silos, across those systems, and that we align it so young people can see a pathway, can find out how they can get from where they are to where they want to be.

I guess I would close with the idea that—I've given you several ideas in my written statement—but, we all need to work in conjunction with one another. The old reality of Alaska public education needs to make way for the new realities of the 21st century. Clear communications and better articulation between educational partners, a clear set of high expectations for all, along with the necessary tools to help students reach those expectations, is what is required now.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Holloway follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SHIRLEY J. HOLLOWAY

The Avant-Garde Learning Foundation is a nonprofit 501(C)(3) organization founded in January 2005 by Dr. Shirley J. Holloway. The foundation is dedicated to improving teaching and learning in Alaska, with a particular emphasis on rural Alaska. Avant-Garde is currently working in schools and communities in 11 Alaska districts including Aleutians East, Anchorage, Bristol Bay, Galena, Kenai, Kodiak, Lake and Peninsula, Lower Kuskokwim, Nome, North Slope and Northwest Arctic. The foundation, through Federal funding for the 2008–2009 school year is providing online learning tools through Skills Alaska that address diagnostic and remedial issues for students from elementary to high school. The foundation also provides an online student repatriation program for high school students to a small number of students through a program called Advanced Academics. In addition, Avant-Garde is working with five school districts to improve student performance in science and math through a relationship with the National Science Resource Center and the National Geographic's Jason Project. This particular professional development effort is funded by Shell Oil, as are several other Avant-Garde projects.

From January to May of this year, Avant-Garde gathered 30 Alaskan educators and community leaders in a design team process that created a performance-based teacher education program primarily for Alaskan Natives living in rural Alaska. The design team was funded by Shell and in October Avant-Garde received funding for the first cohort of prospective teachers in the program. That cohort will begin its coursework in January 2009.

Perhaps most pertinent to this committee's work is an Alignment Study commissioned by Avant-Garde and conducted by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Alaska Anchorage. The purpose of the Alignment Study was to investigate how well integrated the expectations are between the K–12 education system and the postsecondary education system in Alaska. As an initial study, the current document raises many pertinent questions about how well connected the two systems are regarding course work, pedagogy, curricula and assessments. Perhaps the larger question is one of expectations, both of what is asked of high school students, as well as those asked of entering college freshmen.

The Alignment Study points to several important areas that beg to be addressed, some of which need to be examined closely in order to better understand the scope of the problem. Overall, there appears to be a lack of alignment between home and early childhood education, between elementary and middle school, between middle school and high school and between high school and postsecondary. The study does suggest that the greatest alignment gap exists between high school and postsecondary education. Sixty percent of Alaska's recent high school graduates take developmental classes in college. Seventy-six percent of recent Alaska Native high school graduates take developmental classes. These are courses designed for remediation in mathematics and English language skills, which leaves open the question as to why high school graduates are not already proficient in these areas. Why do so many of our graduates come unprepared for entry-level college coursework? What are the academic expectations of postsecondary institutions?

Outside the purview of the Alignment Study lie the troubling number of high school dropouts and the relatively low graduation rate for Alaska's high school sen-

iors. Even more troubling is the high number of Alaska Native dropouts and low percentage of high school graduates. For instance, the 2006 graduation rate for Alaska Natives from the Anchorage School District was 42.72 percent. The graduation rate slid to 31.63 percent in 2008. Thousands of Alaska's students do not complete their high school education or they do so through the GED, which is administered by the Alaska Department of Labor and for which good numbers are not readily available. Statewide for the 2007 school year, 3,434 students were officially listed as dropouts.

The Alignment Study speaks to the efficacy of quality pre-school education. Research in the past few years has indicated that the most crucial time in life in terms of brain development and readiness to learn occurs in early childhood. Quality early childhood learning opportunities both at home and in a more formalized school setting have been shown to result in higher rates of high school graduation; higher rates of enrollment in postsecondary institutions; lower rates of grade retention; fewer special education placements; fewer number of dropouts, arrests, teenage pregnancies and welfare recipients; and higher employment rates as teens and young adults. Alaska is 1 of only 12 States that currently is not funding early childhood learning programs for students before they enter kindergarten. Early childhood education in Alaska is defined as Head Start, private schools, and child care environments.

Overall, the alignment question in Alaska needs to be directly addressed. The need for quality early childhood education with programs geared to the specific needs of those children is great. Well-trained and qualified early childhood teachers working in rich learning environments with world-class materials is a must. Studies clearly show that preparedness for entry into school is a key to later academic and career success. Student preparedness for postsecondary education is also critical. The data indicate an urgent need for better high school education with an emphasis on those skills necessary for college and career success. The Alaskan K-12 system and our postsecondary institutions must work together to create greater opportunities for our high school graduates. Too many of our young people are either dropping out of school or arriving at their next destination ill-prepared for the challenges they face. This is an academic emergency that will not solve itself. It will require a true investment in dollars, political will and intensification of effort on the part of parents, students, educators and policymakers.

The Federal Government's role in taking steps toward addressing these needs should be one of providing financial and technical assistance to districts and schools in Alaska specifically toward creating quality pre-school learning environments and in helping districts and postsecondary institutions work more seamlessly together on issues of common interest concerning student achievement. Without Federal assistance and support, the State of Alaska will continue to struggle in its efforts to create and maintain an educational system second to none. Only through a concerted and purposeful partnership between all entities involved will these urgent issues be answered and the needs of our children be met.

What follows is the first six pages of the Alignment Study conducted by ISER on behalf of the Avant-Garde Learning Foundation that speak to the issues already mentioned in greater detail.

"By alignment we mean integrating the expectations of one education system into the other and connecting course work, pedagogy, curricula, and assessments." (Venezia, Finney, Callan, *Ch 3, Common Ground in Minding the Gap*; Hoffman, Vargas, Venezia, Miller eds 2007)

Too many Alaskan students leave formal education unprepared for their next steps. Too many drop out of high school; too few high school graduates go on to postsecondary education, and too few of those who enter postsecondary education graduate in a timely manner. Among young people who choose to enter the work world directly from high school (or after dropping out) employers report that many lack the reading, writing and math skills necessary, even at entry level, in many of today's careers.

Alaska is not alone in these problems, and many States have begun to address these issues by looking at how students progress through the entire education system, from pre-school through college, graduate study, or career training. Ideally, the system should be aligned—as a child or young person completes each step, they are adequately prepared for the next. In practice, this is often not the case, as parents and students may receive inconsistent (or no) information on what knowledge and skills are needed to be ready for the next step, and to what extent the student has that knowledge and skills.

This memo reviews the efforts and experiences of other States' alignment efforts and provides a first look at how these issues play out in Alaska. Our initial questions centered on Alaska high school students' readiness for college or work. We

added a look at early childhood education and school readiness in response to the literature on the value of investment in early childhood education. Although alignment issues can and do arise within educational institutions—for example, whether middle schools prepare students to succeed in high school, or whether university general education requirements provide adequate grounding for major coursework—the challenges are greater between institutions. Early Childhood, K–12 and higher education institutions may have no systematic communication links, and may face incentives that at best ignore and at worst impede efforts to align course work, pedagogy, curricula, and assessments. Information in this memo focuses on two points where students cross into a new educational system: entry into school from home or pre-school, and the transition from high school to college or work.

RESEARCH AND OTHER STATES' EXPERIENCE

States across the United States have begun examining how they can align education from preschool through postsecondary. Their goals are to help young children begin school prepared to learn, increase high school graduation rates, smooth the transition between high school and higher education, reduce the number of students entering college who need remedial coursework, and increase the number of students graduating from college in a timely manner. States are also concerned with addressing U.S. economic needs as an increasing number of jobs in our global economy require skills and training beyond high school. Finally, States are concerned with the impacts on democracy of a citizenry that is not leaving high school prepared for the workforce or for higher education. This section reviews the relevant research and discusses these State efforts.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND SCHOOL READINESS

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through Age 27 documents the costs and benefits of providing comprehensive quality early childhood education. Parks (2000) and the High Scope Educational Research Foundation (2008) summarize the findings, showing academic and social benefits of early childhood education that extend well beyond childhood into adulthood. Van de Water, G. & Rainwater, T. (n.d.) detail the economics:

“The High/Scope Perry Preschool studies show a return on investment of \$7.16 per \$1 invested (longitudinal follow up over a two-and-one-half decade shows a return of \$88,433 on a preschool investment of \$12,356).”

In 1996 Fulton found that students who participate in ECE have: (1) higher rates of high school graduation; (2) higher rates of enrollment in postsecondary institutions; (3) lower rates of grade retention; (4) fewer special education placements; (5) fewer numbers of dropouts, arrests, teenage pregnancies and welfare recipients; and (6) higher employment rates as teens and young adults.

Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) also demonstrate the importance of entering school ready to learn in order for students to experience academic success later. These authors include findings from neurobiological, behavioral, and social sciences to show the importance of young children's early life experiences, beginning in the womb through entering kindergarten, in influencing their future academic and social outcomes.

These authors state:

“It is the strong conviction of this committee that the Nation has not capitalized sufficiently on the knowledge that has been gained from nearly half a century of considerable public investment in research on children from birth to age 5.”

The authors conclude that “what is left to discuss is not whether early childhood experiences influence children's futures but what to do about this fact.” They make several recommendations to support early childhood development and later success in life:

- Funding research on par with current funding devoted to math and language arts on helping young children develop curiosity, perseverance, cooperation, empathy, and other critical cognitive and social skills;
- Fund early childhood initiatives that demonstrate promise in both raising academic achievement and in reducing the inequalities with which children begin kindergarten;
- Investing in mental health needs of young children;
- Creating more varied policy approaches for giving parents choice about and access to early childhood care options, including staying at home to raise their children;

- Spend significant resources, on par with those spent to prevent crime, stop smoking, and reduce teenage pregnancy to address “detrimental environmental effects including toxins and violence in the home,” among others;
- Increase teacher qualification and compensation with early childhood funding; and
- Comprehensively re-address Nation’s policies regarding childcare and income support with specific goal of improving early childhood conditions.

Thompson, Tullis, Franke, and Halfon, (2005) authored a document based on UCLA’s work with the First Five Ventura County Strategic Planning, Funding, and Evaluation that is an evidence-based guide linking related early childhood strategies with successful school readiness outcomes. The document includes a comprehensive literature review. Strategies recommended include supporting parents in areas of mental health, breastfeeding, and parenting skills; and supporting children inside and outside the early childhood classroom.

Burkham and Lee (2005) analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Education’s Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS–K). Their analysis examined young children’s school readiness upon entering kindergarten. Their findings included a clear difference in kindergarten entry test scores SES: “Before even entering kindergarten, the average cognitive scores of children in the highest SES group are 60 percent above the scores of the lowest SES group” and that lower-SES children “begin school at kindergarten in systematically lower-quality elementary schools than their more advantaged counterparts.” They also found that race and ethnicity are linked to SES status. Burkham and Lee also concluded that, while the impacts of race and SES on cognitive skills are larger, that family structure and educational expectations are associated with SES, race/ethnicity, and with test scores of young children. These authors also include in their report methods for reducing the inequality with which children start kindergarten, such as making center-based preschool programs before kindergarten available and reducing inequality of school resources.

Echoing recommendations of other researchers, the Education Commission of the States “(2008) recommends policies that focus on creating healthy environments (biological and societal) for brain development. These include focusing on improving environments for abused and neglected children and providing early intervention for children with developmental delays.”

HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

According to research, 90 percent of high school students today report wanting to attend college. But many of these students either are not graduating from high school or are graduating unprepared to begin college level coursework after being admitted into a postsecondary institution. Many students graduate from high school without a clear understanding of college academic readiness standards. Many States’ high school exit exams end at 10th grade level work and do not reflect academic standards for college level placement courses, sending students a confusing message about college readiness.

Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, and Venezia (2006) report,

“The more difficult challenge for students is becoming prepared academically for college coursework. Once students enter college, about half of them learn that they are not prepared for college-level courses. Forty percent of students at 4-year institutions and 63 percent at 2-year colleges take remedial education. Additionally, high school students face an incredibly complex system of placement tests and college admissions requirements. These authors report data from *Measuring Up 2004*, the State-by-State report card on higher education, showing that when students do reach college, a significant problem is completing a degree in a timely manner.”

ALIGNMENT AS A NECESSARY COMPONENT OF ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

As States begin to address the problems above, their efforts must be comprehensive and must include collaboration between P–16/20 entities. As Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, and Venezia (2006) state,

“Reforms that focus either on K–12 schools or on colleges and universities are likely to perpetuate some of the key barriers to improving educational achievement for students.”

These authors reviewed P–16/20 policies of four States and made the following recommendations for States considering alignment:

- create a statewide student data system;
- create accountability in the P–16/20 education system;

- align coursework and assessments between high schools and postsecondary institutions;
- create statewide finance systems for an aligned education system.

According to Van de Water and Rainwater (n.d.), among the major goals of a P-16 system are:

- Expanding access to early learning for children ages 3 to 5, and improving their readiness for kindergarten.
- Smoothing student transitions from one level of learning to the next.
- Closing the achievement gap between white and minority student.
- Upgrading teacher education and professional development.
- Strengthening relationships between families and schools.
- Creating a wider range of learning experiences and opportunities for students in the final 2 years of high school.
- Improving college readiness and college success.

Instead of separate committees addressing Pre-K, K-12, and HE issues, P-16/20 work creates opportunity for State legislatures to streamline policymaking and funding decisions for P-16/20. State K-12 and HE Boards of Education as well as political and business leaders have opportunity to work collaboratively. States are finding it crucial that governors and other high level officials either initiate or fully support the State's P-16/20 efforts.

Venezia (2006) cautions that,

“Convening a commission and holding cross-system discussions may be helpful, but these steps alone will not create meaningful K-16 reform. To be lasting and effective, the deliberations must be anchored in policy and finance reform and must reflect each State's culture and history.”

P-16/20 researchers also point out the importance of these councils having specific tasks to keep them focused and moving forward and so they don't get mired in discussion without action.

Building a P-16 System Recommendations from Van de Water, G. and Rainwater, T. (n.d.):

- May begin with point of entry issue to focus and to avoid overwhelming (i.e. teacher prep).
- Or work on legislation to address multiple issues at all three levels simultaneously.
- Need team of governor, legislators, community members, business leaders.
- Find areas of mutual interest across all levels (see next section).
- Work to build seamless system of all three levels into one, building on these mutual areas of interest.

What States are doing: (synthesis from articles on ECS Web site and on States' Web sites; see accompanying Excel spreadsheet for detailed state-by-state foci, goals, successes, and “how it works”)

- P-16 or P-20 councils composed of State officials, business reps examining these issues.
- Research to analyze issues.
- Legal statements (mission statements, etc.) language revision around student learning and standards.
- Student data gathering and tracking P-16/20 Teacher prep and cert programs evaluations and redesigns, including K-12 standards in curriculum.
- Pay incentives for mentoring Pay incentives for National Board Certification.
- Focusing on Early Childhood for K-12 school readiness.
- Aligning HS grad requirements with higher education admission requirements, with a focus on preparing students for entry into college-level coursework, NOT remedial coursework.
- Streamlining college admissions exams and requirements.

Specific State Examples (see Excel spreadsheet for more information and more examples).

• **California.**—CSU Early Assessment Program in CA for juniors in HS: includes 11th grade testing, prep opportunities for HS juniors, and PD for teachers; community colleges not on board so statewide impact will be limited because many HS students enroll in community colleges.

• **Oregon.**—Oregon's P-20 Finance Model: The Oregon Business Council examined the State's P-20 budgets as if they were one document and found areas of disparity in funding and areas where funding could be better coordinated to support students. (For more info see Appendix in Callan, P., Finney, J., Kirst, M., Usdan, M. & Venezia, A. (2006). *Claiming common ground: State policymaking for improv-*

ing college readiness and success. National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. San Jose, CA.)

- **Indiana.**—Indiana’s 21st Century Scholars Program targets low-income 8th grade students. Students who sign a pledge to earn a C average or higher throughout high school, to remain drug and alcohol free, and to enroll in an Indiana postsecondary institution within 2 years of graduating high school will receive up to 100 percent of tuition costs for college.

- **Georgia.**—Georgia’s HOPE Scholarship Program promises paid college tuition to Georgia public postsecondary institutions to any student who maintains a B average or better throughout high school.

- **Several States** (see Excel for specific info).—These States are creating small (typically not more than 400 students) early college high schools that provide academic guidance and paid tuition to high school students to complete their first 2 years of college coursework while still in high school and earning their high school diploma.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to address these issues, we make the following recommendations and believe the Federal Government needs to be a partner in helping make them possible:

1. Establish a voluntary system of early childhood education opportunities in Alaska. Too many of our children arrive at school unprepared to meet the challenges they face. The research is clear that quality early childhood education makes a distinguishable difference in future academic achievement, especially for those young people who come from economically disadvantaged homes.

2. The Federal Government, working in conjunction with researchers, educators, parents and policymakers, should establish national standards for mathematics and language arts. Currently, each State establishes its own standards, devises its own assessments, and establishes its own “cut” scores for examinations, and they are inevitably at variance from State to State. A comprehensive set of standards would make it possible for mobile students to face the same expectations no matter where they are, and the crazy-quilt nature of state-by-state standards, which causes much needless confusion, would be replaced by comprehensible and uniform national standards.

3. Extend standards into the first 2 years of postsecondary education. The need for greater alignment between P-12 and postsecondary could be addressed in part by a continuation of established standards in mathematics, language arts and science into college and university settings for the first 2 years.

4. Create a P-20 task force or council that will ensure a seamless educational system that will support student achievement from early childhood through graduate school as well as early childhood through entering the workforce. The council must be structured and based on the cautions that we have learned from other States that have initiated this journey, as stated by Venezia,

“Convening a commission and holding cross system discussions may be helpful, but these steps alone will not create meaningful K-16 reform. To be lasting and effective, the deliberations must be anchored in policy and finance reform and must reflect each States’ culture and history.”

One of the key elements made possible by such an alignment is a commitment to a new way to conduct teacher education. What is called for is a partnership between schools and higher education that will forge a stronger commitment to shared responsibility for curriculum, meeting standards and teacher preparation.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Shirley. I appreciate your comments and your leadership within Avant-Garde and so many other areas.

Next, we will turn to Mr. Carl Rose, Executive Director of the Alaska Association of School Boards.

Welcome.

STATEMENT OF CARL ROSE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATION OF ALASKA SCHOOL BOARDS, JUNEAU, AK

Mr. ROSE. Thank you, Senator, and welcome home.

I have sent in written testimony, and it appears that much of what we are going to share today is going to overlap, so I’m trying

to keep my comments to just a few observations. I think I'm in agreement with much of what's being said.

I think we can acknowledge that the dropout is not the root of the problem, it's simply a result of the process, as Dr. Smink had mentioned earlier.

In Alaska, we need look no further than the 3rd-grade benchmark to identify young people who are testing at or beyond grade level to determine their ability to cope with an increasing complex curriculum. Those students who test below grade level are at risk, simply because they are not prepared to deal with an acceleration of curriculum. To put it another way, students at grade level will have the benefit of enjoying an educational system. Those who test below grade level will experience a remedial system, one that too often devalues their unique qualities and gifts, and replaces them with labels, negative reinforcement, and disapproval.

One hears, with some frequency from our professionals in our schools, and they have stated, many times, "You can identify kids coming to kindergarten who will not make it in school." I don't believe this, entirely; however, if there's a shred of truth to it, why would a teacher or a system not intervene with needed supports and assistance at the point of identification? Why would a system wait until the 3rd-grade benchmark to verify what we knew was possible as many as 3 years earlier? Why would we, as Alaskan leaders and community members, not take action earlier to ensure that children enter school ready to learn?

Sadly, by the time young people drop out of school, many have endured years of struggle, disappointment, and disengagement.

When we move to the solutions, I think we mentioned earlier—Dr. Smink mentioned earlier, the need for collaboration, and, during our comments at the press availability—this is a shared responsibility. I think that we need to share the responsibility for successful development of our communities' young people. This is a community issue.

I'm heartened to see an increased focus across growing numbers of disciplines on a strength-based approach to positive youth development. I appreciate the fact that you asked us to comment specifically on the Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement. Much of what we do, and much of what we find, is that we have quite a bit of influence during the time that we have kids in school. We can also have—when I say "we," I mean our communities and our citizens—a tremendous influence on the environment in which our kids come from and go home to. It's really simple, in the fact that, for many of us, it had never occurred, of the small things that we can do in a young person's life that has a positive—a reinforcing effect on how young people feel about themselves and the challenges that they face.

We put together a book, "Helping Kids Succeed." You've seen this book. For many of us in Alaska, these books are in schools, doctors' offices, public clinics, parenting classes, in homes, airport waiting rooms, and businesses. They're all over the place. They simply point out what Alaskans have said they want for their kids, and how they might be engaged to make that a reality.

From that book came the Initiative for Community Engagement. Community engagement is an intentional act or actions by groups

and individuals, working together to create a healthy environment for supporting the growth and development of young people.

This initiative has had a profound impact in many of our communities. The intent was not just to engage communities; the intent was to improve student achievement and engagement.

What we've done at the association is, we've put together some efforts. One was the "QS2," Quality School, Quality Students. Through this effort, what we tried to do was create an initiative that would go into a community, we'd talk about what the aspirations were in that community for their young people, and take advantage of the resources that they had available to take a look at issues of governance and leadership in aligning curriculum, to State standards, as well as identifying resources. But, we found out real quick that doing that in isolation in the school needed another component, so we included the Initiative for Community Engagement with this effort to address student achievement.

It wasn't really a surprise; we thought that's what would happen. We find that, in our schools and in our communities, when they're working together and they understand the impact that they can have, students' academic improvement shows up. We have the facts.

We are engaged right now with a survey that we use for School Climate and Connectedness. It's a survey that we put out in a number of schools across the State. It simply helps gauge how people feel about their schools. We're asking staff and we're asking students, "Just exactly how do you feel about your schools? Do you feel like you're connected? Do you feel like people care about you, personally? Do you feel safe?" What happens is, as a result of this survey, we find out, firsthand from students and staff in schools, how people feel about the school. By having this kind of data, we can see the kind of things that we can do very easily to improve that connectedness and climate. The data is coming back and showing us that there's a decrease in conduct problems, there's a decrease in emotional distress, there's improvement in attitude, improvement in social and emotional skills, improvement in school and classroom behavior. This is good news. These are the things that we do for ourselves, simply by being aware of our environment.

As we move to Federal support and you ask what the Federal Government can do, these initiatives, like this Initiative for Community Engagement, we need to help people understand the tremendous influence they could have at the community level, and to be more collaborative in our approach. Schools appear to be—and it's been our experience—they're not very welcoming places for the general public, and specifically for parents. The reasons why are, many parents have had bad experiences in schools. We can intentionally change that. I think we are.

As we get to the Federal Government, I don't think that the Federal Government can do some of these things, but I think it can support the efforts of the people who can. The three recommendations I'd have with you is to continue the long-term funding for the Alaska Native Education Equity Program included in No Child Left Behind. I think that this is a critical component, because, in many of our school districts that we work with, the lion's share of the

population are Native, and the improvements that we're showing show that the Native populations in these school districts are achieving at a higher rate than the general populace that are not engaged in these programs. We've had that information, and we've made those things available to you every year. The 2007 report is out.

The next issue would be to target intervention and support toward children most at risk of starting school behind. As I shared with you earlier, many of our young people who are coming to school, for an assortment of reasons, are not prepared to take advantage of this system that we've built. We have a wonderful system of education, K-12 through university. A tremendous investment has been made, and I think that an assumption has been made that, "We will build this system and they will come." Unfortunately, many of our people, at very young ages and throughout the stages of their advancement through our school system, are not getting the benefit of what we had intended. So often our intentions and our behavior sometimes result in outcomes that were unintended.

I think we need to focus on some of those things, and I think we need to focus early and often. If we can help, before kids come to school, with those people who are at risk; if we can reinforce, with early intervention, early, when issues are identified, with some support; if we can provide encouragement, both at home and in school, for kids to understand—I believe, if kids understood the statistics of what lay ahead of them if they partake, or if they do not—if they had that kind of information, I think it would affect their decisions.

Last, I think you want to hold steadfast to the idea put forward by No Child Left Behind. I know it's difficult, but I don't believe that No Child Left Behind was put in place to sanction our schools; it was put in place because many of those subgroups—you're looking right into the eyes of our dropout problem. When you take a look at the issues of ethnicity, English-language proficiency, disability, and socioeconomics, the kids who fall in those categories are part of the problem, and they don't see a future for themselves.

Before I go into my conclusion, I would ask that you give me a little bit of leeway. This is not something that comes easy for me, but I will share this with you. I was born and raised in Hawaii. I'm half Hawaiian, a quarter Chinese. The area that I grew up, in Kihei, was where migrant workers were, in the Filipino camps and the Chinese camps, in the sugar industry. The language we spoke there was pidgin English. It's a conglomeration of English, Hawaiian, Chinese, and Filipino. English proficiency was nonexistent for the people I grew up with.

I am dyslexic. I have learned to decode, down through the years. I do have a disability. It was identified very early.

I was a stutterer. There was a teacher who came to our schools and—an itinerant teacher, every Wednesday, and I was sent there in the afternoon.

I came from a socially/economic-challenged family.

I was in all four subgroups.

I will share with you that I was a blue-chip athlete, and I was identified early; and therefore, they gave me the support I needed,

and I was able to finish, not only elementary—I was sent away to Honolulu for my secondary schooling. I went through the service, went back and attended the University of Washington and got my degree and moved to Alaska.

My point is not me. My point is that if there was support for one person, like me, who was a member of all four subgroups, we can do this for all of them. We ought to be. That's the point.

You know, I don't single myself out to tell my story. This is the story of the subgroups. That's why No Child Left Behind is here, and we cannot retreat from those kids who need us most.

With that, I think I'll close my testimony by simply saying we have partners across the State who are engaged in community engagement. This is long-term stuff. Some of the communities we go into, we have to start a very basic level of capacity-building. Once they find out that it can have an impact on their kids and their futures, they're willing to go all-in to help.

We have many, many success stories, and my intention here today was to share with you that there's great hope in Alaska. Thank you, President Hamilton, for bringing that up. But, I remind you that hope is not a strategy. We have to do some things, with all intent of making improvements. I think this is not our problem, as schools; it's our problem, as citizens of the State of Alaska.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts. Thank you.

[Applause.]

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rose follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CARL ROSE

Thank you, Senator Murkowski, for holding this field hearing and for this opportunity to provide written testimony to the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. I appreciate your bringing us together to focus on what we can and must do not only to reduce the number of dropouts, but to ensure that ALL our young people graduate with the skills, knowledge, and opportunity to succeed in the 21st century. There is nothing more important to Alaska's, and the Nation's, long-term success. I especially welcome your invitation to discuss AASB's Initiative for Community Engagement.

THE PROBLEM

We have all seen the statistics about dropout rates and the staggering costs to society when we fail, not only in dollars, but in human terms. A new study by The Education Trust indicates that today's high school students are less likely than their parents to graduate from high school.¹ The United States is the only industrialized Nation where that is the case.

Nationally, high school dropouts:

- comprise 75 percent of State prison inmates²
- comprise an overwhelming proportion of Medicaid recipients and a substantial proportion of welfare recipients³
- are disproportionately minority, poor, come from fatherless homes, and have disabilities⁴

¹The Education Trust, *Counting on Graduation*, 2008. <http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/6CA84103-BB12-4754-8675-17B18A8582AC/0/CountingonGraduation1008.pdf>.

²Education Commission of the States, "The Progress of Education Reform 2007," July 2007, p. 2 quote from Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006.

³Ibid., p. 2 quote from Center for Benefit-Cost Studies, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2007.

⁴Alaska Dept. of Education and Early Development, "High School Dropouts: The Silent Epidemic," Dropout Prevention State Guidance Team Meeting, April 18, 2008.

- made significantly less in wages in 2002 than in the early 1970s (in constant 2002 dollars): males \$35,087 (1971) and \$23,903 (2002); females \$19,888 (1972) and \$17,114 (2002)⁵

- commit more crimes than graduates (one economist estimated increasing graduation rates by only 1 percent would produce 100,000 fewer crimes per year, with an associated cost savings to society of \$1.4 billion per year)⁶

In Alaska, in the 2006–2007 school year⁷:

- 3,434 (5.5 percent) 7–12th grade students dropped out;
- 1,299 (38 percent) were Alaska Native (25 percent of Alaska’s school population is Alaska Native);
- 1,274 (37 percent) were classified as “economically disadvantaged”;
- 1,850 (54 percent) were male; and
- the graduation rate was 63 percent (70 percent nationally).

But those are abstract numbers. In human terms, these are the young people who live in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our communities; they are going to be parents of the next generation of Alaskans. Each child who doesn’t reach his or her full potential is a tremendous loss to our State.

What these dropout statistics reflect is that too many young people cannot envision a successful future for themselves when they consider their past experience in school and home environments; they can’t see the immediate and future path to success. They fail to see viable options for themselves and get very little encouragement and support to pursue and complete their high school diploma.

I think we can all acknowledge that dropping out is not the root problem. It is simply the end result of a process over time of students disengaging from school and often, but not always, failing academically and floundering socially and emotionally.

In Alaska, we need look no further than the third grade benchmark to identify the young people who are testing at or beyond grade level to determine their ability to cope with an increasingly complex curriculum. Those students who test below grade level are at risk simply because they are not prepared for an accelerating curriculum. Put another way, students at grade level in the third grade will have the benefit of our educational system. Those who test below grade level will experience a remedial system, one that too often devalues their unique qualities and gifts, and replaces them with labels, negative reinforcement and disapproval.

To address the dropout rates, we need to address school readiness and healthy development for the children who are most at risk:

- Before entering kindergarten, the average cognitive scores of pre-school age children in the highest socioeconomic group are 60 percent above average scores of children in the lowest socioeconomic group.

- At age 4 years, children who live below the poverty line are 18 months below what is normal for their age group; by age 10 that gap is still present. For children living in the poorest families, the gap is even larger.

- By the time children from middle-income families with well-educated parents are in third grade, they know about 12,000 words. Third grade children from low-income families with undereducated parents who don’t talk to them very much have vocabularies of around 4,000 words, one-third as many words as their middle-income peers.⁸

- Thirty-two percent of young children are affected by one risk factor (e.g., low income, low maternal education, or single-parent status), and 16 percent are in families with two or more socio-demographic risks.⁹

One hears with some frequency that professionals in our schools have stated: “You can identify the kids entering kindergarten who will not make it in school.” I do not believe this entirely, however, if there is a shred of truth to it, why would that

⁵Nelson, A. *Closing the Gap: Keeping Students in School*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Infobrief, Summer 2006.

⁶Moretti, E. “Does education reduce participation in criminal activities?” Paper presented at symposium on the social costs of an inadequate education, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY, Sept. 2005 (See http://devweb.tc.columbia.edu/manager/symposium/Files/74_Moretti_Symp.pdf).

⁷Alaska Dept. of Education and Early Development, “High School Dropouts: The Silent Epidemic,” Dropout Prevention State Guidance Team Meeting, April 18, 2008, Alaska Dropout Numbers and Related Statistics.

⁸Quoted from other sources in: Klein, L. and Knitzer, J. “Promoting Effective Early Learning: What Every Policymaker and Educator Should Know,” National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, January, 2007. (www.nccp.org/publications/pub_695.html).

⁹Raver, C. and Knitzer, J. “Ready to Enter: What Research Tells Policymakers About Strategies to Promote Social and Emotional School Readiness Among Three- and Four-Year-Old Children,” National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, July 2002.

teacher and the system not intervene with needed supports and assistance at the point of identification? Why would a system wait until the third grade benchmark to verify what we knew was a possibility as many as 3 years earlier? Why would we, as Alaskan leaders and community members, not take action earlier to ensure that all children enter school ready to learn?

Sadly, by the time young people drop out of school, many have endured years of struggle, disappointment, and disengagement.

THE SOLUTIONS

The solutions mostly lie way upstream from the final step of leaving school. And they must involve all of us—students, families, educators, schools, school boards, businesses, community organizations, health and social service providers, public policymakers, and everyone of us—each of us has both an individual role and a professional role to play. WE need to take a shared responsibility for the successful development of our community’s young people . . . there is no THEY to whom we can point as being responsible. It has to be WE, and it has to involve changing how our institutions work together, how our communities support young people, and how each of us behaves in our daily lives as community members, parents, and role models.

It will take institutional and individual action to change the environment for our young people into one where they are and feel supported, where they feel valued and respected, where some young children don’t start school behind their peers.

I think we know what the solutions are. We know they need to include the continuum from early childhood to post-graduate; families, schools and communities; education, health, social services and workforce development.

Each of us whom you have invited here today has a responsibility for a particular part of this continuum, and if we align our efforts, we will all see greater impact on the success of our young people.

I believe we need to focus our efforts all along this continuum—not just on preventing problems, but more on providing the skills, knowledge, supports and opportunities that our kids need to succeed. As Karen Pitman of the Forum for Youth Investment says: “Problem-free is not fully prepared, and fully prepared is not fully engaged.”

Our goal must be fully engaged and fully prepared youth who can thrive in our fluid 21st century environment. Our goal should be broad and holistic; it goes beyond passing benchmark tests, or avoiding risk behaviors. It must be the healthy development of each and every young person so they have the academic and workforce skills, and the healthy life skills needed to succeed and thrive. And this means we must have high expectations for all our young people, and we must enlist entire communities in support of them.

I am heartened to see an increased focus across a growing number of disciplines on a strength-based approach to positive youth development. It is what lies at the foundation of AASB’s Initiative for Community Engagement, or Alaska ICE.

ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITIES

I know you have seen this little book, *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style*, and you will find it all over Alaska . . . in schools, in doctors’ offices and public health clinics, in parenting classes, in homes, in airport waiting rooms, in businesses. It was literally created in 1998 “by and for Alaskans” through a series of community visits, where everyday Alaskans described what they wanted for their kids, and they very eloquently described what kids need from adults in order to succeed. These can be called “assets” or protective factors, resiliency, traditional Native values . . . they have many names but the principles are the same. How are assets built in children and youth? Through positive relationships with caring adults. What kids need is the time, attention, respect, encouragement, support, and high expectations of the adults around them in their families, their schools, and their communities.

Born out of this little book was a far-reaching initiative that set out to change the environment for Alaska’s young people, and to enlist all Alaskans in building healthy communities that provide what kids need to succeed. Alaska ICE is a statewide initiative of AASB that encourages and supports youth success through a statewide network of partners and local community initiatives. Federal support of this initiative through the Alaska Native Education Program in No Child Left Behind has enabled us to work with school districts, communities, organizations, and individuals throughout the State to promote the shared responsibility that each and every one of us has to help kids succeed.

Community engagement is the intentional action of groups and individuals working together to create healthy environments that support the growth and education of children and youth.

Our Alaska ICE initiative has many strands and facets; I will provide you with a copy of our 2007 Progress Report that reflects how those many partnerships and collaborations create a web of support for Alaska's young people. Community engagement will look a little different in every community as people and organizations tailor it to their priorities and goals.

A few snapshots from Alaska ICE's community partners, made possible because of our funding support through NCLB's Alaska Native Education Program, show how the simple principles of asset-building, healthy and supportive youth-adult relationships, and intentional community engagement can flourish in every community.

- Parenting classes in Yup'ik and English in Lower Kuskokwim School District, through a partnership with the tribe.
- Community-school art projects that build supportive youth-adult and school-community partnerships in Yukon Flats villages.
- Weekly asset messages developed by youth and adults and delivered in English and Russian by teens over the community radio station in Delta, and youth-adult community choir and theatre productions.
- Student-produced TV shows addressing substance abuse issues in Unalaska, and targeted efforts to improve school and community climate.
- Schools that are more welcoming to parents and community members in the Pribilofs, and collaborative school, tribe and community efforts to build culturally responsive social and emotional learning skills and positive peer climate among students.

As part of our overall efforts to effectively engage adults in positively supporting young people in Alaska's communities, we also put significant focus on improving the school environment by helping schools apply these same principles. Today I want to focus in on creating school environments where all children can succeed.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

Over the last 5 years, AASB has aligned our school improvement initiative (Quality Schools/Quality Students, or QS2) and our community engagement initiative (Alaska ICE). Begun as separate initiatives, it became apparent that to make the greatest impact on academic achievement, we needed to target both efforts towards assisting school districts and communities in improving supports for youth in both environments.

Through QS2, we assist school districts in improving their leadership and governance capacity, aligning their curricula with State standards, and targeting resources effectively towards identified priorities. Through Alaska ICE, we engage individuals, families, schools, organizations, businesses, faith communities, and young people themselves in building sustainable community networks to support, encourage, and provide meaningful opportunities to our young people that will prepare them to thrive in the 21st century.

When young people feel connected to school and have support from family, teachers, and other caring adults, academic achievement improves and risk behaviors decrease.¹⁰ When students have strong social-emotional learning skills,¹¹ they do better in school and life. There is a growing body of national research to support this, and we now have data to show this in Alaska. AASB has developed a student and staff survey to gauge student and staff perceptions of climate and connectedness, and an increasing number of schools are participating, including 242 schools in 33 districts in 2008, comprising over 30,000 students and almost 5,000 staff.

Districts that have worked with AASB on community engagement and school improvement have shown:

- greater academic achievement as measured by Standards Based Assessment (SBA) proficiency gains than the statewide average;

¹⁰This national research cuts across various disciplines, including education, psychology, public health, behavioral health, juvenile justice, neuroscience, etc. (Blum, *The Case for School Connectedness*, Educational Leadership, April 2005; Freudenberg & Ruglis, *Reframing School Dropout as a Public Health Issue*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oct. 2007; Wilkenfeld, Moore and Lippman, *Neighborhood Support and Children's Connectedness*, Child Trends Fact Sheet, Feb. 2008.

¹¹Wand, Haertel, and Walberg found that social and emotional factors were among the most influential factors on student learning, based on evidence from 561 educational researchers and 91 meta-analyses (1997).

- even greater proficiency gains by Native students in those districts, and greater gains than Native students statewide;
- persistent improvements in student ratings for school climate and student connectedness over the last 3 years across all aspects of climate and connectedness; and
- improved overall staff ratings of school climate across most subscales.

Other key findings of AASB's School Climate and Connectedness Survey include:

- Key factors of school climate and connectedness are related to student performance on Alaska's SBAs: high expectations, school safety, parent and community involvement, and social-emotional learning were found to have significant positive relationships with scores on reading, writing and mathematics.
- Staff ratings for school climate were consistently and strongly related to student performance in reading, writing and mathematics' SBAs.
- There have been significant negative relationships between student risk behaviors and school climate and connectedness ratings each year: the more students reported that there was a positive climate at their school and that they felt connected to school, the lower the number of incidents of delinquent behavior and drug and alcohol use they reported seeing among peers at school or school events.
- Students who reported that they had someone available outside of school to help them with homework and students who had an adult who knew what they did with their free time gave consistently higher ratings for connectedness to school and more favorable ratings of their school climate than did students without outside support and supervision.

As more districts participate in the survey and use the results to improve school climate and increase student connectedness, we are seeing growing interest in the area of social and emotional learning, and how schools, after-school programs, and families can work together to promote social and emotional development. A 2008 meta-analysis of over 700 studies of family, school and community interventions found a broad range of benefits for students¹²:

- 9 percent decrease in conduct problems (e.g., classroom misbehavior, aggression);
- 10 percent decrease in emotional distress (e.g., anxiety, depression);
- 9 percent improvement in attitudes about self, others, and school;
- 23 percent improvement in social and emotional skills;
- 9 percent improvement in school and classroom behavior; and
- 11 percent improvement in achievement test scores.

A growing number of Alaska school districts are focusing on improving students' social and emotional learning as an effective way to improve student success. The Anchorage School District is viewed as being at the leading edge of this national effort, and AASB is assisting a number of other Alaska districts.

FEDERAL SUPPORT

It is clear that lowering high school dropout rates is necessary, and that it will only be accomplished if we align our various efforts to support children and families more effectively. We need to actively enlist families, schools and our communities to ensure that some children don't start out behind, and that if they do, we have effective ways to very quickly close that early gap so they can all get the benefit of our education system. We need to ensure our schools offer engaging, rigorous, and relevant curricula, provide safe, caring environments where students feel connected, have high expectations for all students, and provide the appropriate supports that will enable students to meet those expectations. We need to make sure that our communities provide a positive environment where young people feel valued and have meaningful opportunities for involvement.

Through initiatives like Alaska ICE we need to help people understand the important role we each can play in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our schools, in our businesses, in our communities. We need to encourage adults to feel and then act on a shared responsibility for creating the kind of supportive environment that young people need. Every one of us has opportunities in our daily lives to interact with young people, and what both common sense and research tell us is that the cumulative impact of those small interactions is profound. We can each decide to be intentional in those interactions, and use them to engage positively with kids, to be interested in them and what they think, and to give them opportunities to be a valuable part of our communities.

¹² Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning Research Brief: *Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Student Benefits: Implications for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Core Elements*, 2008.

The Federal Government can't do these things. But there are many ways that it can support the people who can do these things:

- **Continue long-term funding for the Alaska Native Education Equity Program in NCLB.** AASB's Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement is an example of how Federal funding can be used effectively to spark the initiative and capacity in each of our communities to actively work together to better support young people. The Alaska Native Education Equity funding targets Alaska Native student achievement, dropout reduction, and school readiness. There is improvement, but significant disparities persist.

- **Target early intervention and support towards the children most at risk of starting school behind.** This should include intentional, sustained strategies (statewide, district-wide, and community-wide) that start at an early age, include families, and continue into preschool and early elementary school. When we do that in an intentional and coordinated way, we will vastly simplify the other steps we can and should take to improve schools to meet the needs of older students.

- **Hold steadfastly to the ideal put forward in NCLB that all children should get the best education we can give them.** As we go forward with improvements in NCLB, we should retain accountability for all the subgroups that we know are lagging behind. If we focus our attention on supporting these children, and preparing all children for school, we will address the root causes of the dropout problem.

CONCLUSION

AASB is working with partners across Alaska to change the environment in which children and youth live. Engaging individuals, organizations and communities is long-term work and sometimes requires starting at a basic level of capacity-building. The great thing is that when people understand how their personal, everyday actions, however small, can positively impact a young person, they are very willing to do it over the long term. And those small actions, repeated across the State, will help build healthy communities and in turn healthy young people.

We know a lot about what we need to do. We need to gather the collective will and commitment to do it before another generation of our children drift off to under-achieving lives.

Senator Murkowski, thank you for your time. I know I am preaching to the choir here. I want to thank you for your strong and sustained support for Alaska's children, for education, and for our community engagement initiative. I invite you to call on me and the Association of Alaska School Boards to assist in this effort in whatever way would be helpful.

For more information about the Association of Alaska School Boards' Initiative for Community Engagement (Alaska ICE), visit: www.alaskaice.org.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, I thank you. I thank you for your thoughts and for your personal story. I think you're absolutely right; if we can provide for a person, as you have identified, in all of these categories, where—you know, the odds were against you, and—look at where you are today, serving us. We appreciate it.

Next, we'll hear from Elizabeth Winkler, who is also here today to share her personal story.

Elizabeth, we thank you for being here with us this morning.

STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH WINKLER, FINANCE ASSISTANT, NINE STAR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, ANCHORAGE, AK

Ms. WINKLER. Thank you, Senator Murkowski, for allowing me to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of those that are in similar situations as myself.

I see many high school dropouts walk through Nine Star's door. They're trying to do what I've done: complete their high school education and attempt to move on to bigger and better things. What I mean by that is, they want to get a better-paying job and/or further their education.

There are many barriers that youth have to endure while they're finishing school. One major barrier is peer pressure. Youth are easily distracted by their peers. Youth are also going through puberty, which causes a lot of confusion; and then, youth have a lot of built-up emotions because of their confusion. Youth make bad choices because of these pressures and distractions. These barriers ultimately affect youths' education.

I know, because I've experienced this. As soon as I got into middle school, I started to experience peer pressure. My friends were way more important than my education. I also had a lot of built-up anger because of the way my life was going. I let this anger out through the bad choices that I made.

I made it to high school on time and had an even more difficult time. I truly didn't care about the world around me, and I allowed the barriers in my life to affect me to a point where I couldn't focus on my education. I gave up. Six days before 10th grade ended, I decided to drop out of school. I told my mom exactly what was going on, and she supported my decision.

The 2 years that followed, I got into a correspondence school that I did fairly well in. The school got shut down, due to funding reasons, so I had to find another correspondence school. I did. It was an online school, but that didn't work for me, either. I told my mother that I wanted to get my GED and move on to college. Once again, she supported my decision. I just wanted to finish my high school education so that I can move on to college and make something of myself.

In 2005, I finished all of my GED tests within a month and a half, and received my diploma that December. For me, it was one of the greatest achievements in my life. Now it was time to move on to college.

Excuse me, this is a bit emotional for me.

I started taking classes at the University of Anchorage in 2006, and finished my first semester of my freshman year. I started classes in my second semester, and, within a month's time, withdrew from my classes because of life situations that took an emotional toll on me. My nephew passed away, January 3, 2007, and, after his death, I was depressed. On March 14, 2007, I found out that I was pregnant. I stayed out of school because I didn't want to go through any more hardships. I was also put on financial suspension.

In January 2008, I started going to an online school, the University of Phoenix. I was doing extremely well with my classes; however, in May 2008, I found out I was pregnant again and started doing poorly in classes. Eventually, I got dropped from one of the classes and failed two others. After the classes ended, I received my grades, and the school told me that I could not attend the college again until I dealt with my financial suspension.

I paid UAA the money that was due to them, and I am in the process of paying University of Phoenix. I'm also working on getting back into UAA.

It's my goal to stay in college and work on my degrees that I want to obtain so that I can better my and my family's situation.

The barriers that I will have while I'm going to school include finding childcare for the time that I'm in school and being able to keep focused so that I can do really well in my classes.

I want to become successful in life, and that means having a college education and being able to offer the world more than what the next person can, and that's knowledge and wisdom that I hold because of my personal life experiences and college education.

I'm not a perfect person and accept the fact that some of my strengths need to be developed further. I'm a very detailed and organized person; for the most part, I'm always on time. I am patient and willing to wait for someone, if needed. I'm an understanding person, always willing to provide words of encouragement. If I do not understand something, then I will inquire about what's at hand. I'm a good communicator. I'm also down-to-earth. I'm known for my integrity.

I'm also a stubborn, hard-headed, and persistent person.

That means that I learn life the hard way. No matter how difficult these life experiences have been, I have the strength to always walk forward in life and take the experience as a hard lesson learned. An experience that is understood can empower one to change, and, in return, that experience will provide wisdom and knowledge. Such an experience was my extended effort to earn my GED diploma. Such an experience was my initial work in finance as a trainee. Some things seemed clear to me from the start, some things I had to repeat many times in order for me to understand some of the reasons of the how and why of the way these things were done. Such an opportunity—such an experience was assuming site management responsibilities from my company. Such a thing was my occasional supervision of other company staff. My greatest lessons have come in caring for my child, whose importance to me is beyond measure.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Winkler follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH WINKLER

I see many high school dropouts walk through Nine Star's door. They're trying to do what I've done—complete their high school education and attempt to move on to bigger and better things. What I mean by that is they want to get a better paying job and/or further their education.

There are many barriers that youth have to endure while they're finishing school. One major barrier is peer pressure. Youth are easily distracted by their peers. Youth are also going through puberty which causes a lot of confusion and then youth have a lot of built-up emotions, because of their confusion. Youth make bad choices because of these pressures and distractions. These barriers ultimately affect youth's education.

I know, because I've experienced this. As soon as I got into middle school, I started to experience peer pressure. My friends were way more important than my education. I also had a lot of built-up anger; because of the way my life was going. I let this anger out through the bad choices that I made.

I made it to high school on time and had an even more difficult time. I truly didn't care about the world around me and I allowed the barriers in my life to affect me to a point where I couldn't focus on my education. I gave up. Six days before tenth grade ended I decided to drop out of school. Most of my teachers felt it was necessary for me to sit in the principal's office for the entire class period because of how disruptive I was. I told my mom exactly what was going on and she supported my decision.

The 2 years that followed, I got into a correspondence school that I did fairly well in. The school got shut down due to funding reasons, so I had to find another correspondence school. I did. It was an online school, but that didn't work for me ei-

ther. I told my mother that I wanted to get my GED and move on to college. Once again, she supported my decision. I just wanted to finish my high school education so that I could move on to college and make something of myself. In 2005, I finished all of my GED tests within a month and a half and received my diploma that December. For me, it was one of the greatest achievements in my life. Now it was time to move on to college.

I started taking classes at the University of Anchorage in September 2006, and finished my first semester of my freshman year. I started classes in my second semester, and within a month's time withdrew from classes, because of life situations that took an emotional toll on me. My nephew passed away January 3, 2007 and after his death I was depressed. On March 14, 2007 I found out that I was pregnant. I stayed out of school, because I didn't want to go through ANY more hardships. I was also put on financial suspension.

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I paid UAA the money that was due to them, and in the process of paying University of Phoenix. I'm also working on getting back into UAA. It's my goal to stay in college and work on my degrees that I want to obtain so that I can better mine and my family's situation.

The barriers that I will have while I'm going to school include finding childcare for the time that I am in school, and being able to keep focused so that I can do really well in my classes. I want to become successful in life and that means having a college education and being able to offer the world more than what the next person can and that's knowledge and wisdom that I hold because of my personal life experiences and college education.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Elizabeth. Your story—your certain determination, I think, will serve as a role model for others. As you raise your child, I think that she will look to you for the determination—you call it “stubbornness.” It's whatever causes you to move forward positively—

Ms. WINKLER. Right.

Senator MURKOWSKI [continuing]. And you're clearly doing that. So, we—

Ms. WINKLER. Thank you.

Senator MURKOWSKI [continuing]. Thank you for that. Thank you for your testimony.

Next, we'll go to Mr. Greg Cashen, who is the executive director of Alaska Workforce Investment Board.

**STATEMENT OF GREG CASHEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ALASKA WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD, ANCHORAGE, AK**

Mr. CASHEN. Thank you, Senator Murkowski, for inviting the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to testify before this committee.

The programs we are adopting to engage high school students and young adults are best illustrated in the experiences of a student named Zach.

Instead of dropping out of his Juneau-Douglas High School, Zach found a metals class, where he learned to weld.

He took another shop class, then another. With the guidance of the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Zach discovered school through apprenticeship. After graduating, last May, Zach is on his way to becoming a certified plumber and pipe fitter.

One of the reasons the United States emerged as the economic superpower of the 20th century was a quality workforce. As a State and as a Nation, we have veered off that course. But, the tide is turning, and we can succeed by working together, building strong partnerships with industry, labor, and education.

Our efforts are focused on replacing an aging workforce and providing skilled workers to build a gas line and other significant economic development projects on the horizon.

Apprenticeship as a pathway to a career or higher education is one of the most effective methods of delivering a trained workforce. If we embrace this model of partnership with business and industry, we will improve Alaska hire and give hope to our most valuable asset: our youth.

We have 25 newly trained apprenticeship specialists in the Department of Labor, located statewide in the job centers throughout the State, who are reaching out to high-demand industries in Alaska that are well-suited to apprenticeship, ranging from healthcare to mining, transportation to forestry, and manufacturing to oil and gas industries.

The Youth First Initiative prepares youth and young workers up to age 24 to be job-ready. Youth First's statewide career guides, including eight who travel throughout rural Alaska schools throughout the regions, work with youth and young adults to create interest and provide support in learning about the job market, researching occupations, and applying for jobs and training programs. The guides establish a working relationship with the school, Native organizations, community service organizations, and employers in their communities.

Another Alaska Youth First program provides teacher externships in three target industries of healthcare, construction, and resource development.

A partnership with industry created the Alaska Construction Academy. More than 2,300 middle and high school students, along with 320 adults, are learning how to build new skills, such as carpentry, plumbing, and drywall finishing. Begun as a pilot program in Anchorage to attract and train youth and adults to, first, jobs in the Alaska construction industry, the academies are now in the Kenai Peninsula, Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan and Mat-Su. Satellite academies will be created statewide, as needed.

The Denali Commission is a vital partner in extending the Denali Training Fund to youth workforce preparation programs in rural Alaska. Last summer, 32 high school students attended the Galena and Kotzebue Summer Health Career Academy and earned six credits at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, and received an emergency trauma technician training certificate.

The department is beginning to coordinate the efforts of the regional training centers in Alaska, including the department's AVTEC Center in Seward, to deliver services more efficiently, helping to address the highest rates of unemployment that exist in rural Alaska, where many of the centers are located.

Beginning January 1, education tax credits will be extended to include secondary vocational programs and state-operated vocational and technical schools in Alaska.

Our Workforce Investment Board is the primary policymaking board for workforce development in Alaska. The Workforce Investment Board is leading a State initiative to create career pathways in vocational education programs, working with business and education consortia to establish and implement standards for Alaska's training programs.

The department will continue to work toward increasing awareness of job-training opportunities to create tomorrow's workforce. That includes paying attention to today's students by expanding career and technical education, in partnership with the Department of Education and Early Development, which is part of our AGIA (Alaska Gasline Inducement Act) training plan.

Much of the successes the Department has achieved would not have occurred without the support of our Federal Government and the active engagement of our congressional delegation. Many of our new state-funded initiatives were initiated, thanks to the U.S. Department of Labor's Federal Workforce Innovation Grants.

Senator, much work remains to be done, and we hope to continue our dialogue with you and the rest of our congressional delegation as the Department seeks continued support for Alaska's Workforce Development Initiatives.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Cashen follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GREG CASHEN

Senator Murkowski, thank you for allowing the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development to testify before this committee today.

The programs we are adopting to engage high school students and young adults in career training, and to assist them in persisting until they earn a diploma, certificate, or degree are illustrated by the experiences of Zach.

Early in his high school career, Zach was bored with his traditional classes and considering dropping out. But a brush with vocational education in his Juneau high school intervened.

Instead of hitting the streets, Zach found a metal class where he learned to weld. He learned to build a tool box and soon went on to other projects. He took other "shop" classes and, with the guidance of an Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development staffer, Zach discovered apprenticeship. After graduating last May, Zach is now on his way to becoming a certified plumber and pipefitter. Through a school-to-apprentice program he earned 500 hours credit—about 3 months of work—for his high school shop classes.

The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development is working to provide alternatives to the thousands of students like Zach who reach a crossroad and decide to leave school.

One of the reasons the United States emerged as the economic superpower of the 20th century was a quality workforce. As a State and as a Nation, we have veered from that course. But the tide is turning and our success will depend on all of us working together—in Alaska that means building strong partnerships between the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, industry, labor and education—to build a future with a trained workforce.

Although the partnerships vary in scope, and the objectives and goals vary based on who is involved, the outcomes benefit all of Alaska.

Alaska is focusing on training to replace an aging workforce and provide skilled workers to build a gasline and other significant development projects on the horizon.

We are taking a vision of creating a broad-based registered apprenticeship program that helps produce an Alaska workforce consistently trained at the highest levels—and beginning to make it a reality. Apprenticeship, as a pathway to a career or higher education, is one of the most effective methods of delivering a trained workforce. If we as a State embrace this model of partnership with business and industry, we will be on the pathway to improving Alaska Hire and giving hope to our most valuable asset—our youth.

In school-to-apprentice programs, high school students receive up to 500 hours (about 3 months) of credit when they are enrolled in a registered apprentice program. Apprentices can also earn up to 38 credits through the University of Alaska System toward a degree.

The department is reaching out to other high demand industries in Alaska—ranging from healthcare to mining, transportation to forestry, and manufacturing to oil and gas. These industries are well-suited to the apprenticeship movement.

Registered apprenticeship programs will develop a skilled, competitive, diverse and sought-after workforce—and help provide a world class, industry-driven, post-secondary education system.

The department now has 25 newly trained Apprenticeship Specialists, located statewide in our Alaska Job Centers, who link with career guides in Alaska secondary schools. They are helping provide a full line of resources such as the Alaska Career Ready program, employer incentives and assessments for apprentices.

The Alaska Youth First Initiative, operated by Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development with State General Funds, is a strategic effort to prepare youth and young adults up to age 24 to be job ready. This is a great example of how we can put people to work when government, industry and education create unique partnerships to accomplish our mutual goal—achieving workforce excellence.

Youth First provides career guides across the State, including eight that travel to rural communities and schools throughout their regions. Career Guides work with youth and young adults to create interest and provide support in learning about the job market, researching occupations, and applying for jobs and training programs in high demand industries.

The guides are successful because they establish a working relationship with the schools, Native organizations, community service agencies and employers in their communities. Career Guides help youth register for the online systems AKCIS and ALEXsys. They also assist with the application process for apprenticeship programs, employment, job shadows, internships, vocational training programs and more.

Career guides at the Alaska Department of Labor's Youth Hiring Center in Anchorage invited 71 seniors in good standing to a late spring hiring event that is part of the Job Club. The Club is a partnership with the department's career guides, members of the construction industry, the Anchorage Home Builders Association and the Associated Builders and Contractors Inc. To be in good standing, seniors have to sign up to join the club and they are required to attend two employability workshops that includes resume writing and other job-seeker skills, and register in Labor's ALEXsys—Alaska's Job Bank online.

Of the 71 students, 47 are now working in construction-related positions, 7 are going into the military in construction-related fields such as combat engineer and welder, 3 are in registered apprenticeship programs, 3 are continuing their education at university and AVTEC, and 4 are working in other fields. Career guides worked with the remaining students to place them in construction industry jobs when they turned 18.

Another Youth First program provides teacher externships—a program in which our teachers are finding there's a lot to learn about what skills our students will need to be a successful part of Alaska's workforce. Overall, 49 teachers completed externships in three target industries including healthcare, construction and resource development—with an impact on more than 2,000 students.

A partnership with industry created the Alaska Construction Academy. More than 2,300 middle and high school students, along with 320 adults, are learning how to build new skills—such as carpentry, plumbing, electrical, welding and drywall finishing. Begun as a pilot program in Anchorage to attract and train young people and adults to find jobs in the Alaska construction industry, the academies are now in the Kenai Peninsula, Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan and Mat-Su. Additional academies will be created throughout the rest of the State. Graduates will help fill the 1,000 construction jobs that are needed annually.

Significantly, the Denali Commission has become a vital partner in extending the Denali Training Fund to youth workforce preparation programs in rural Alaska. Last summer, 32 high-school students attended the Galena and Kotzebue Summer Health Career Academy. Through the joint program with the department's Denali Training Fund Youth Program, they earned six credits at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and received an Emergency Trauma Technician Training Certificate. Additional partners in this program were the U.S. Department of Labor, the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development and the Tanana Chiefs Conference.

We are partnering with other State agencies, for example creating the Alaska Career Ready program with the Department of Education and Early Development. The program is available to employers, students and workers to help assess and prepare

them for jobs. Employers can send current or prospective employees to any Alaska Job Center to take an assessment that provides a snapshot of current skills. After taking the assessment, students and workers can attain certification.

The department is beginning to coordinate the efforts of the Regional Training Centers in Alaska, including the department's Alaska Vocational Technical Center (AVTEC) so they can deliver services more efficiently, helping to address the highest rates of unemployment that exist in rural Alaska, where many of the centers are located.

Beginning January 1, education tax credits, which cover contributions up to \$150,000, will be extended to include secondary school vocational programs and state-operated vocational and technical schools in Alaska. The credit had been only for contributions to 2- and 4-year colleges and universities. The credit can now be used against additional taxes: insurance, corporate income, oil and producer, oil and gas property, mining license, fisheries business or fishery resource landing. However, not all vocational and technical schools in Alaska are state-operated, thus they are not eligible to benefit from this program.

Our Workforce Investment Board is the primary policymaking board for workforce development in Alaska. Citizens from all across Alaska serve on the board, representing many different organizations and industries. AWIB is leading a State initiative to create career pathways in vocational education programs, working with business and education consortia to establish and implement standards for Alaska training programs.

The department will continue to work toward increasing awareness of job and training opportunities—creating tomorrow's workforce. That includes paying attention to today's students by expanding career and technical education—which is part of our AGIA training plan—in partnership with the Department of Education and Early Development.

Much of the successes the department has achieved would not have occurred without the support of the Federal Government and the active engagement of our congressional delegation to secure funds for workforce development targeting our youth. Many of our new state-funded initiatives were initiated thanks to the U.S. Department of Labor's Federal workforce innovation grants.

Much work remains to be done and we hope to continue our dialogue with you and the rest of our congressional delegation as the department seeks continued support for Alaska's workforce development initiatives.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Greg.

Let's, next, go to Mr. Michael Andrews, who is with the Alaska Works Partnership.

Mr. Andrews.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL ANDREWS, DIRECTOR, ALASKA
WORKS PARTNERSHIP, INC., ANCHORAGE, AK**

Mr. ANDREWS. Thank you, Senator Murkowski. It's a pleasure to be here today, particularly with this distinguished panel and on this very, very critical topic.

I've been asked to bring testimony specifically regarding the experiences of Alaska's union training programs in the K-12 and postsecondary education systems, and to offer some recommendations from these experiences to help improve the high school completion rate and advance Alaska's youth into and through post-secondary technical training or college.

Alaska's trade unions have more than 50 years of experience working directly with schools to attract students to trade apprenticeship. Many years ago, educators, trade unions, employers, and the Federal Government agreed that completing high school should be the basic requirement for even applying to an apprenticeship program. Today, there are more than 800 employers in the union construction training industry system who are anxiously waiting for new graduates to enter their apprenticeship programs.

The high school dropout rate significantly impacts the construction industry. Alaska's high schools are the main supply of new ap-

prentices. Fewer high school graduates means fewer new workers ready to learn trade skills. As a result, apprenticeship programs today are competing harder than ever with other industries, post-secondary technical schools, colleges, universities, and the military for those graduates.

We have a pipeline to build, a natural-gas pipeline to build, and we need high school graduates who can learn those skills to do that work.

The good news is that unions and their apprenticeship programs, industry associations, school districts, the University of Alaska, and others are finding many new ways to encourage students to stay in school and go into pathways that include postsecondary degrees and certifications.

I'd like to just mention two important career initiatives that I did submit as part of my written testimony. Greg Cashen mentioned the Alaska Construction Academies. These have been very successful models, in terms of getting community partnerships with school districts and industry and others to attract, as he mentioned, over 2,300 students right now, into elective programs after school, because of their great interest in the construction industry and getting ready for the pipeline.

Another, of course, that was mentioned, was the Denali Commission and their Rural Youth Initiatives. Every year, we're offered the opportunity to provide rural construction academies at regional learning centers for students in the Bethel, King Salmon, and St. Mary's/Nome delta areas, for example. This year we concentrated on developing youth as pipeline welders' helpers, so they can follow a pathway into trade apprenticeship, learn some basic skills, so they can go to work on the North Slope.

Just last week, we graduated 121 apprentices in our annual pipeline construction program. They're on their way to the North Slope, because the jobs are—there's many, many jobs in demand up there now. We know there's great pathways for rural and urban students to get engaged.

I'd like to just quickly move to what I think are some suggestions that may be helpful to you and your committee.

Now, one thing—and I believe the research came from the National Center for Dropout Prevention—was that it came to me that there is a great wealth of research out there that points out that in States or in school districts where there are strong vocational education career technical programs, where students can take two or more classes, let's say, in health or in construction or other areas—they're going to have higher high school completion rates than their counterparts who don't take vocational education. In fact, there's research that shows, in some school districts where there are strong vocational career and technical education programs, that their graduation completion rates have risen 10 percent. If we look at Alaska, at 65-or-so percent, the national rate at 75 percent, it's always been my view that we could go from the bottom to the top in short order if we really got back into concentrating more on offering career and technical education inside the high schools. It would improve math scores, it would improve science scores, it would help students move on to postsecondary education and advance through college. There's nothing new under

the sun. I think we need to go back and look at some of those ways, because students learn differently, and they—a lot of times, the shop class, so to speak, is one of the reasons they would go to school and stay in school.

My recommendation is also that—it was mentioned earlier—the Carl Perkins Act is great, but it's burdensome, it's meager, it doesn't really meet the needs in Alaska for many school districts. We get calls from small school districts who are basically saying, "We're ignoring our \$15,000 Carl Perkins grant, and we'd like to work with you and the Denali Commission on something more substantive." I mean, I've been to school districts where the only vocational education is basically office technology online. There needs to be more done.

I would suggest that possibly something new that would offer dedicated, flexible funding for high schools who have partnerships with industry, postsecondary, and college for career paths, and are vital careers that are needed for our national and our State economy. Again, something not quite Carl Perkins, but something that others can really use.

I would also make a pitch that we do need to help the U.S. Department of Labor expand apprenticeship and school to apprenticeship and other initiatives. I served for 2 years on the Federal Committee for Registered Apprenticeship, years ago, and there were basically no resources, there was no power, because it was just an advisory group. We strongly encouraged the Department to try to find more resources so that every State could create initiatives that reached deeper into the schools and prepared students earlier for some of the vital careers needed in the trades and technical occupations.

I really appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today and offer what I can.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Andrews follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHAEL ANDREWS

The Honorable Senator Murkowski & committee members, I have been asked to bring testimony specifically regarding the experiences of Alaska Union training programs in K-12 and postsecondary education, and to offer some recommendations from these experiences to help improve the high school completion rate and advance Alaska's youth into and through postsecondary technical training or college.

Alaska Works Partnership, Inc. was formed in 1997 as a not-for-profit by Alaska's Construction Trade Unions and their Joint Administered Apprenticeship and Training Trusts, commonly referred to as JATC's. Alaska Works was created to attract and prepare Alaskan's for jobs and careers in construction. Our more than 10 years of experience of reaching out to schools and students, employers and industry associations, Alaska Native organizations and others to build that workforce do provide some insights for increasing the retention of Alaskans students in life-long learning from K-16.

Alaska's trade unions have more than 50 years of experience working in schools to attract students to trade apprenticeship and career training. Once a student completes high school they have met the 1st requirement for applying to these coveted and highly competitive positions.

Alaska's trade union apprenticeship programs, collectively, are the States largest private-funded industry training partnership in Alaska. Over the past decade, union members and employers have invested more than \$60 million in training Alaskans. This year their apprenticeship programs will invest more than \$10 million for industry training. No other industry has invested as much or worked as long to develop sustainable partnerships with secondary and postsecondary education in Alaska.

There are 31 Joint Administered Apprenticeship and Training Trusts operating in the State and they teach over 20 specific construction crafts and trade skills. There are more than 800 employers contributing funds to the system for every hour a union member works. JATCs own and operate 14 fully staffed trade schools where course-related instruction takes place and are building one new training center a year for the past 5 years to meet the ever growing needs of their programs.

Their combined capital assets in facilities and training equipment are estimated at over \$30 million. Today they train more than 2,000 registered apprentices, which is more than 80 percent of active apprentices registered in the State. These schools turn out more than 95 percent of the Alaska journeymen certified by the U.S. Department of Labor and have for many decades.

The high school drop-out rate significantly impacts the construction industry, particularly as it continues to aggressively recruit new workers to meet growing job demand, to replace retiring skilled workers, and to replace trades workers advancing into supervisory and management positions. Adding to the skills gap, currently 80 percent of those employed in Alaska's construction industry are non-residents who come here to earn the high wages. We'd like to see more of Alaska's high school graduates get those jobs.

The drop-out challenge strikes at the very core of a strong construction industry because Alaska's high schools are the main provider of workers for the supply chain.

Many years ago educators and trade unions and the Federal Government agreed that completing high school should be a basic requirement for applying to a Joint-Administered apprenticeship program. Educators, unions and employers agreed setting graduation as the bar would keep more young people in school and better prepare them for success after school.

The reduced supply of talent ready to learn a trade skill means the construction industry must compete harder with other industries, postsecondary technical institutions, colleges and universities, and the military for future workers. Supplying a new construction workforce to meet increasing job demand to build Alaska and build the Alaska Natural Gas Pipeline is a daunting challenge. But we are finding new ways to turn that around and keep kids in school by getting them into vocational training. I am providing two documents to the committee which help further explain what I mean about those new methods.

I am confident today that through the great relationships established by and between labor and education at all levels, particularly with the university of Alaska and School Districts, we can make a difference. These new initiatives and expanding industry education and labor partnerships have only been possible through investments by the Federal and State government, which is explained in the documents I have provided.

One thing is evident. Students need education that is relevant, flexible and career-oriented. We need to start vocational and career education activities earlier in the education process. Students de-select careers at an early age. They need to have some career awareness and career activities to keep them informed about the jobs educators are preparing them for.

We need to bring more applied math and technical reading into every classroom. We did in the old days through vocational education and co-operative learning. This will improve math and science scores and help students who learn in different ways get the knowledge they need to advance. For many, it will become a reason they go to school.

We need to offer public secondary and postsecondary schools flexible and dedicated long-term funding specifically for career and technical training in conjunction with industry partners. Somewhat like Carl Perkins but not as cumbersome, costly to the schools, or meager from the source. These should be grants that align secondary and postsecondary credit with industry certificates and college degrees, and put students in jobs and careers vital to the regional economies.

I commend to the committee, the Alaska Construction Academies, as explained in one document before you, the partnerships and results of working with Alaska's high schools as one program that can bring insights for success in other areas.

I hope my comments have been helpful. I look forward to the opportunity to participate with the panel in this important discussion. And I thank you for providing me an opportunity to testify.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mike.

Let's, next, go to Tina Michels-Hansen, at Cook Inlet Tribal Council.

Welcome.

**STATEMENT OF TINA MICHELS-HANSEN, ELEMENTARY AND
MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM MANAGER, COOK INLET TRIBAL
COUNCIL, ANCHORAGE, AK**

Ms. MICHELS-HANSEN. Good morning, Senator. Thank you for the opportunity for me to be here on behalf of Cook Inlet Tribal Council. It's an honor to be here with you all.

My grandparents are Bill Hoogendorn, a retired Dutch gold miner, and Lena Iutok, an Inupiat elder of Nome, AK, which is the same place that I was born and raised. I'm here today to share my personal and professional thoughts on the state of improvements for Native education within our State.

I am a product of both small and rural schools and a small college. I have come to value the need for community-based education.

As Native people, we have an inherent sense of community. It does, after all, take a village to raise a child. Yet, our children today are faced with mainstream pressure to live in only one world, rather than two, a world of glamour and glitz that promises everything based on looks and what a person owns, rather than what they do, know, or do for others.

Communities don't fight back against this pressure. They, too, are trapped in trying to keep up with the Joneses. Here, we see students losing their connection to their roots, that which defines their sense of self and their value in their community.

We've all seen the data. Our schools and communities are failing our Native students at frightening rates. Kids would rather drop out than feel like failures or be disengaged at school. As long as they have material items, they still feel like they can be a success. This is not a Native or a tribe's problem, this is a community problem, rural or urban, and it's everyone's problem to resolve.

When I grew up, I was among the top of my class, academically. I was athletic, involved in church, arts, cultural activities, and student government of a school of 200. Overnight, due to circumstances beyond my teenage control, my understanding of place and sense of self would change forever. I had to move to Fairbanks for my senior year of high school. There my school had nearly 2,000 students. My comfort zone of school and notions of success were now replaced by this frightening institution of learning, where I was no longer a person with a name, but a number. I remember thinking, "How is it possible for a student to even feel invisible? Don't teachers see me?" In fact, they never did.

For 3 months, I didn't even know where my locker was. I attended only two classes, and didn't care that it was 40-below outside. I was willing to brave the cold and endure frostbite than feel like I was invisible.

After one semester, I couldn't handle it any more and returned home. Though this experience was brief, it has stayed with me for all of these years.

I then spent 2 years failing at UAA, with no support; Again, feeling invisible and having experienced prejudice for the first time in my life.

The story does not end with me. There are kids every day who walk into our schools, who feel invisible, like I did. No one should ever have to feel so dispirited. Our schools have become institutions that are underfunded, classes are overcrowded with maniacal

focus on high-stakes testing and led by often ill-prepared teachers, many who lack thorough multicultural training or who feel they simply do not have enough time to be compassionate. They have become factories, and their products lack many of the basic skills for today's markets and industries, factories that are often unapproachable by parents, factories that communities passively accept.

I believe that the faults of our schools today do not solely lie with one person or entity; rather, the fault is all of ours. We all are failing our kids, and we should be ashamed of ourselves.

Those students who experience successes are not celebrated adequately by the community and are often overshadowed by thousands. They, too, need to be embraced and supported for their continued success, not sent out to sea like a lonesome fish, and simply forgotten. We need to ask our successful students, What is it that worked for them?

I also believe it is possible for communities to be involved in creating great places to learn. I've seen it happen when all stakeholders unite with intention and respect. It takes a plan, people willing to put their necks out on the line, tireless efforts to outreach to the community, continuous self-reflection, sharing best practices, building partnerships with all stakeholders and key partners, nurturing them, day after day after day, raising the bar, but staying rooted in community values—compassion, patience—and, of course, sustainable funding. It can happen, it should happen. We cannot afford to wait any longer.

Very quickly, my time at CITC has been enriched by the opportunities to work with many brilliant and compassionate people. Thanks to the Alaska Native Educational Equity funding, we can partner daily with Anchorage School District, UAA's ANSEP Program—the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program—and other various people and entities. Building and nurturing assets within our Native youth is the foundation for which our department is built upon. We intentionalize our efforts to create safe, positive, culturally focused learning environments for nearly 1,000 Native students across 10 local K–12 schools. It is in these classrooms where students have the opportunities to reconnect with their roots, reaffirm their sense of self as a young Native person, and experience successes, both great and small.

For some of our students, they have been consistently supported by a program, and they're college-bound and eager. Others, their greatest achievement for the day may be that they made it to school. Despite their peaks and valleys, we value every single one of them equally.

We have urban-raised students and rural-raised students, with very different life experiences, yet one common identity. Often it's when the kids work together that the magic happens. They mentor one another in ways that few textbooks could grasp. We have smaller class sizes and stronger student-to-teacher ratios. We meet the students where they are academically when they walk through our classroom doors, utilize culturally relevant materials and methodology, strive to instill a love of lifelong learning by providing experiential learning opportunities for students, alternative ways of assessing them, include deliberate efforts to provide youth with the

transition skills they need to navigate life and school, tirelessly encourage and provide opportunities for parental involvement, keep traditional Alaska Native values central, encourage stewardship, maintain high standards, topped with patience and a whole lot of compassion.

Our mission has been to work in partnership with our people to help them achieve their endless potential—not a handout; rather, a hand-up. It's about reciprocity. We invest in our Native people so they, too, can continue to invest in future generations. At CITC, we partner with Anchorage School District in a way that is often enviable to Lower 48 tribal entities. Our partnership is strong, yet we are grant-driven.

CITC tries to do what we can for our Native students, but there is only so much even we can do. Creating successful schools and successful students is possible, but it's not just one person's responsibility, again. It's—or one neighborhood's responsibility, or one tribal entity's responsibility—it's a community responsibility.

Mine is only one Native perspective, but I am humbled by the opportunity to share my story and my thoughts with you today. We look forward, at CITC, to continue to work with others as a community to make our communities and schools be the deserving places for our kids, where kids can grow up to be strong, capable, caring, optimistic, and prepared for their futures.

I also need to mention that the other day, Dr. Walter Sobilov celebrated his 100th birthday, and I think it's absolutely important to mention that he is a tremendous example to us all, that it is possible to exist and live in two very different cultural worlds, but it takes a community of people to encourage you and to support you, and that it is possible.

Quyana.

[Applause.]

[The prepared statement of Ms. Michels-Hansen follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TINA MICHELS-HANSEN

Good morning, Senator Murkowski. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today, as it is an honor. As stated, my name is Tina Michels-Hansen. My grandparents are Bill Hoogendorn, a retired Dutch gold miner, and Lena Iutok, an Inupiat elder, of Nome, AK—the same place I was born and raised. I am here today to share both my personal and professional thoughts on the state of, and improvements for, Native education in Alaska.

A product of both small and rural schools and college, I have come to value the need for community-based education. As Native people, there we have an inherent sense of community, it does after all take a village to raise a child. Yet our children today are faced with mainstream pressure to live in only one world, rather than two. A world of glamour and glitz that promises everything based on looks and what a person owns, rather than what they know or do for others. Communities don't fight back against this pressure, they too are trapped in trying to keep up with the Joneses. Here we see students losing their connection to their roots . . . that which defines their sense of "self," and value in their communities.

We have all seen the data. Our schools and communities are failing our Native students at frightening rates. Kids would rather drop out than feel like failures or be disengaged at school. As long as they have material items they still feel like they can be a success. This is not a "Native" or a tribe's problem, this is a community problem, rural or urban, and it's everyone's problem to resolve.

When I grew up I was among the top in my class academically. I was athletic, involved in church, art, cultural activities and student government in a school of 200. Overnight, due to circumstances beyond my teenage control, my understanding of "place" and sense of "self" would change me forever. I had to move to Fairbanks my senior year of high school.

In Fairbanks, my high school had nearly 2,000 students. My comfort zone of school and notions of success were now replaced by this frightening institution of learning where I was no longer a person with a name, but a number. I remember thinking, "how is it possible for a student to feel invisible? Don't teachers see me?" But they didn't.

For 3 months I didn't even know where my locker was. I attended only two classes and didn't care that it was -40° outside, I was willing to brave the cold and endure frostbite than feel like I was invisible. After one semester I couldn't handle it anymore and returned home. Though this experience was brief, it has stayed with me all these years. I then spent 2 years failing at UAA with no support. Again, feeling invisible and having experienced prejudice for the first time in my life.

This story doesn't end with me, there are kids every day who walk into our schools who feel invisible like I did. No one should ever have to feel so dispirited. Our schools have become institutions that are underfunded; classes are overcrowded; with a maniacal focus on high stakes testing; and led by often ill-prepared teachers, many who lack thorough multicultural training, or feel they don't have enough time to be compassionate. They have become factories and their products lack many of the basic skills for today's markets and industries. Factories that are often unapproachable by parents. Factories that communities passively accept.

I believe that the faults of our schools today do not solely lay with one person or entity, rather the fault is all of ours. We all are failing our kids and we should be ashamed. Those students who are experiencing success are not celebrated adequately by the community and are often overshadowed by the thousands. They too need to be embraced and supported for continued success, not sent out to sea on their own like fish and simply forgotten about. We need to ask our successful students, What is it that worked for them?

I also believe that it is possible for communities to be involved in creating great places to learn. I've seen it happen when all stakeholders unite with intention and respect. It takes a plan, people willing to put their necks out on the line, tireless efforts to outreach to the community, continuous self-reflection, sharing best practices, building partnerships with all stakeholders and key partners, nurturing them day after day, raising the bar but staying rooted in community values, compassion, patience, and of course sustainable funding. It can happen, it should happen, and we cannot afford to wait any longer.

My time at CITC has been enriched by the opportunities to work with many brilliant and compassionate educators. Thanks to the Alaska Native Educational Equity funding, daily we partner with the Anchorage School District (ASD), UAA's Alaska Native Science & Engineering Program (ANSEP), and other various people and entities. Building and nurturing ASSETS within our Native youth is the foundation of which our department is built upon.

We intentionalize our efforts to create safe, positive, and culturally focused learning environments for our nearly 1,000 Native students across 10 K-12 local schools. It is in these classrooms where students have the opportunities to reconnect with their roots, reaffirm their sense of "self," as a young Native person, and experience successes both great and small. For some of our students they have been consistently supported by our program and are college bound and eager—others, their greatest achievement for the day may be that they made it to school. Despite their peaks and valleys, we value every one of them equally.

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We have smaller class sizes and stronger student-to-teacher ratios. We meet the students where they are academically when they walk through our classroom doors; utilize culturally relevant materials and methodology; strive to instill a love of life long learning by providing experiential learning opportunities for students and alternative ways of assessing student success; include deliberate efforts to provide youth with the transition skills needed to navigate school and life; tirelessly encourage and provide opportunities for parental involvement; keep traditional Alaskan Native values central; encourage stewardship; maintain high standards, topped with patience and a whole lot of compassion.

Our mission has been to work in partnership with Our people to help them achieve their endless potential. Not a hand out, rather a hand up. It's about reciprocity. We invest in Our Native people so they too can continue to invest in future generations. At CITC we partner with the Anchorage School District in a way that is often enviable to lower 48 tribal entities. Our partnership is strong, yet we are grant-driven.

CITC tries to do what we can for our Native students but there is only so much even we can do. Creating successful school and successful students is possible, but

it's not just one person's responsibility, one neighborhood's responsibility, or one tribal entities' responsibility, it's a community responsibility.

I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to recognize Dr. Walter Soboleff who recently celebrated his 100th birthday. He is a wonderful example that Native students/people can exist in two very different cultural worlds and be successful, but it takes encouragement and community.

Mine is only one Native perspective. Yet I am humbled by the opportunity to share my story and my thoughts with you today. I look forward to working with others, as does CITC, as a community, to make our communities and schools be the deserving places for our kids—where kids can grow up to be strong, capable, caring, optimistic and prepared for their futures.

Quyana.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Tina. Your comments are most eloquent, most appreciated, not only for your personal perspective, but for reminding us that we do have some successes to look to, and we must always be asking, What is it that makes us successful? Your story was most appreciated, and your testimony very much appreciated.

Our final participant on the panel today is Mr. Tom Morgan, who is the State director of Communities in Schools.

**STATEMENT OF TOM MORGAN, STATE DIRECTOR,
COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS OF ALASKA, INC., ANCHORAGE, AK**

Mr. MORGAN. Thank you, Senator.

I have prepared remarks, as well, which, if you know me, is a good idea; it'll keep us on time and on schedule.

[Laughter.]

I feel like I should really toss these away, because I started to say that—how honored I was to be with you, and I mean that; but, my goodness, I'm humbled to be here, because we're truly blessed to have good people doing good things to help us attack what really is an epidemic in the dropouts. I thank you, but I will continue with the prepared remarks.

[Laughter.]

Again, Karen McCarthy, I want to thank you for your help. You told me not to single you out, but I didn't listen to you, because you make this happen, and I know that the Senator appreciates what you do, and makes your job easier; and for that, we thank you.

Senator Murkowski, it's with great respect that I recognize your outstanding leadership, not only to the Nation, but to our great State of Alaska. Thank you for being here.

I'm truly pleased to be here today to represent Communities in Schools of Alaska and our role of making a positive difference in the dropout epidemic.

I know that you all share the concern about the dropout crisis, a topic that touches all Alaskans, particularly Alaska Native students, at a disproportionately higher rate.

CIS offers an integrated student support delivery system that provides schools and prevention services and individual students with case management individual services. Like glue, we mobilize and connect resources with schools, better enabling students to stick with it and stay in school.

As a statewide network in dropout prevention, we are committed to success through collaboration. Let me say that again. We are

committed to success through collaboration. That's the only way we're going to get this job done.

Now, how do we know that we are helping kids learn, stay in school, and prepare for life? We evaluate our efforts by tracking indicators of student success: attendance, stay-in-school rates, improved academic performance, and improved behavior.

Since our inception, we have worked with thousands of students at risk of dropping out. The majority of those students have stayed in school and improved their attendance, behavior, and academic achievement.

Preliminary results from the Communities in Schools' National Evaluation initiative, an independent third-party evaluation, indicated that the CIS model does make a positive difference in decreasing the dropout rate, increasing the graduation rate, and improving student achievement. These results are based on the in-depth analysis of 1,766 CIS schools and comparative analysis of outcomes from more than 1,200 CIS and non-CIS comparison schools over a 3-year period. That's the last time I'll throw numbers at you.

We are not another social service agency. We broker and mobilize, in an effective and coordinated way, existing—say again—existing community services through the schools, saving valuable dollars while improving efficiencies of delivery of services to children and youth.

Just in the 2007–2008 school year, in just five affiliates—Anchorage, Bethel, Juneau, Mat-Su, and Nome—our minimum leverage services and resources were estimated in excess of \$1.5 million. In-kind contributions and revenue from other sources, just in the past year, were approximately \$900,000. The amount of dollars to support is very small when compared to the successful outcomes it provides and the resources we're able to leverage.

Through school-based affiliate programs and statewide initiatives, CIS Alaska is creating a network of social services, businesses, community resources, and volunteers that work together to break down barriers, to ensure that even the most vulnerable of our children have access to these basic and core needs.

Our statewide initiatives create opportunities in conjunction with Department of Labor, an active distance learning career exploration program targeted at rural youth, and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library and Early Literacy Program for Children Birth to Five are being well received.

Our dream, our call to action, is to formulate support to implement the CIS model and provide a dropout prevention specialist, a resource specialist perhaps, a graduation coach, a CIS coordinator—it doesn't matter, the name—the challenge is to get that resource person in every school in Alaska, where its children's needs can be met to help keep them in school and teachers are free to teach.

We believe youth do not drop out of school necessarily because of the school. We believe, and research supports, youth drop out due to pressures outside of the school. Educators cannot and should not be expected to have knowledge of the many community resources available to help them and help those students stay in school. That is where CIS comes in. As one principal told me, "You

allow me and my teachers to teach. We need to clone the CIS coordinator.”

As stated earlier, like glue, we mobilize and connect resources with schools, better enabling students to stick with it and stay in school.

Support by the Federal and the State government will allow us to expand our existing sites and offer the opportunity for many more communities, especially rural communities, the ability to experience the positive outcomes that we can provide for you.

We have a program that has proven success in preventing dropouts. For every dollar invested through building collaboration, brokering services, and leveraging community assets, CIS of Alaska adds value to build return on investment.

The paid political announcement: For a more in-depth look, please check our Web site at CISAlaska.org.

In closing, Senator Murkowski, you know, dollar for dollar, CIS of Alaska offers the right investment in our children’s future. We look forward to partnering with you, doing what we do best: connecting the dots, coordinating and leveraging the existing resources to keep youth in school, and preparing them to succeed in life.

Thank you, again, for allowing me to be here today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Morgan follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TOM MORGAN

Good morning Senator Murkowski and staff. I am honored to be here today on behalf of Alaska’s young people. It is with great respect, Senator Murkowski, that I extend my deep appreciation of and support for your outstanding leadership to our great State, and our Nation.

I. STATEMENT OF NEED/DROPOUT PROBLEM DEFINITION

I am truly pleased to be here today to represent Communities In Schools (CIS) of Alaska and our role in making a positive difference in the dropout epidemic. National research has shown that students who do not finish high school earn less, pay less tax, rely more on public health, are more involved in the justice system, and are more likely to use the welfare system. I know that you all share the concern about the dropout crisis, a topic that touches all Alaskans, particularly Alaska Native students at a disproportionately higher rate.

II. OUR SOLUTION/OUR MODEL & RESULTS

CIS of Alaska strives to work closely with school districts around the State to address the alarmingly high rate of high school dropouts. We offer an integrated student support delivery system; providing schools with prevention services and individual students with case management and intervention services. Like glue, we mobilize and connect resources with schools, better enabling students to “stick with it” and stay in school. As a statewide network in dropout prevention, we are committed to success through collaboration.

How do we know that we are helping kids learn, stay in school, and prepare for life? We evaluate our efforts by tracking indicators of student success like: attendance and stay-in-school rates, improved academic performance and improved behavior to determine the impact of our programs. Since our inception, we have worked with thousands of students at risk to dropping out; the majority of those students have stayed in school and improved their attendance, behavior and academic achievement. In the last 3 years, Communities In Schools has helped to put developmentally appropriate books directly in the hands of thousands of children and families across the State. (For a more in-depth look at CIS of Alaska programs and initiatives, please visit www.cisalaska.org)

III. PROGRAM SPECIFIC INFORMATION

CIS of Alaska is part of the nationwide network of Communities in Schools. Nationally, CIS is the largest provider of integrated student services in the country

and has an opportunity to both serve 1.2 million students with high quality services, as well as make the policy case for including integrated student services as a fundamental part of the solution to lowering dropout rates and improving graduation rates in America. Preliminary results from the Communities In Schools National Evaluation initiative (an independent, third-party evaluation) indicated that the CIS model does make a positive difference in:

- **decreasing the dropout rate,**
- **increasing the graduation rate** (*specifically, the “on-time” graduation rate, meaning within the traditional 4-year schedule*) and,
- **improving student achievement** [Generally speaking, the more “high implementing” the school site (meaning incorporating all aspects of the CIS model in a mid to high degree at the school site), the higher the outcomes.]

These results are based on an in-depth analysis of 1,766 CIS schools and comparative analysis of outcomes for more than 1,200 CIS and non-CIS comparison schools over a 3-year period. The CIS National Evaluation concludes that:

- Among dropout prevention programs using scientifically based evidence, the CIS Model is one of a very few in the United States proven to keep students in school and is the *only* dropout prevention program in the Nation with scientifically based evidence to prove that it increases graduation rates.
- When implemented with high fidelity, the CIS Model results in a higher percentage of students reaching proficiency in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math.
- Effective implementation of the CIS Model correlates more strongly with positive school-level outcomes (i.e., dropout and graduation rates, achievement, etc.) than does the uncoordinated provision of service alone, resulting in notable improvements of school-level outcomes in the context of the CIS Model.

The CIS National Evaluation is being conducted by ICF International, known for its high standards of rigor and comprehensive research designs. (Source: “CIS National Evaluation Policy—Communities In Schools and the Model of Integrated Student Services: A Proven Solution to America’s Dropout Epidemic.” For further information on this report, view it on the Web site at www.cisalaska.org, under What We Do/Results.)

Organized in 2003 to serve at-risk students in rural Alaska, CIS of Alaska is founded on the recognition that most students who drop out of school are dealing with a variety of obstacles that present barriers to their education, and that only a few of these are school-related. Most stem from overarching family and community issues like poverty, alcohol and drugs and violence. We recognize that numerous public and private services already exist in our communities to help children and their families overcome these obstacles. However, given the difficulty of deciphering the maze of resources available, and, the time and transportation necessary to reach them, services are nearly inaccessible for those children and families who need them most.

We are not another social service agency. We broker and mobilize in an effective and coordinated way, EXISTING community services through the schools. Through school-based affiliate programs and statewide initiatives, CIS of Alaska is creating a network of social services, businesses, community resources and volunteers that work together to break down barriers to ensure even the most vulnerable of our children have access to these basics and core needs.

CIS of Alaska also provides a cutting-edge, distance learning Career Exploration Opportunities (CEO) program (aligned with State Educational Standards), targeted at rural high school students. CEO is a blended learning program, combining videoconferencing and Internet connectivity. Alaskan business executives interact with students face to face via the videoconference twice each month, providing students with information regarding careers and preparation beyond their communities. Students are focused on the 16 High Needs Alaskan Career Clusters including resource development (oil industry), construction trades, technology, health service and others. They learn about opportunities, career preparation and application/interviewing skills. Students are also responsible for job shadows, career projects and presentations and developing leadership skills.

Additionally, CIS of Alaska works in a coordinated effort with Best Beginnings and partners with the Dollywood Foundation to facilitate replication of Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library to interested communities statewide. [Best Beginnings has evolved from the Alaska Ready to Read; Ready to Learn Task Force.] As you may know, the Imagination Library Program is an early literacy program that puts quality, age-appropriate books directly in the hands of our children ages birth to five and their families across the State.

With CIS of Alaska sites in Bethel, Anchorage, Mat-Su, Nome, and Juneau, we are making remarkable progress in positively affecting the high school dropout rate. With greater support, evidence demonstrates that this success can be implemented across the State.

Consider the following specific examples of our programs and results.

Last year, the CIS of Alaska network served 5,279 children/youth.

- CIS of Bethel is working with the District Court, the community of Bethel and its neighboring villages to address tremendous issues with underage drinking.

- CIS-Juneau has been operating a very successful care coordinator program that provides at-risk students with needed services to help them stay in school. Since the inception of the program 2003/2004, we served over 500 students through 2007/2008. Ninety percent of our students are Alaska Native. Of those students, less than 5 percent dropped out of school. The program works!

- CIS of Mat-Su referred to the *Mat-Su Day School's Alternative to Suspension (ATS)* program. Last year, 31 students were referred to CIS/Mat-Su Day School's Alternative to Suspension (ATS) program due to long-term suspension or expulsions—of those, 27 students enrolled. Of the suspended or expelled students who enrolled, only 2 dropped out. This group of 27 is at very high risk of dropping out of school. We were successful in helping them continue their education and worked to transition them back to their boundary school.

- Reading is fundamental. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, an early prevention program to combat illiteracy, started with a pilot program in Nome. The Nome elementary principal stated that children were reporting to Kindergarten unprepared, especially in the area of reading. The program quickly spread to Juneau who has signed up over 600 children where there are 2,000 additional children eligible but lack of funds has slowed signups. Wainwright, Wrangell, Ketchikan and Fairbanks also have active IL programs with Mat-Su, Mt. View, Petersburg and Girdwood poised to come on line. Statewide, almost 4,000 children birth to five are enrolled, including the First Family's newest addition, Trig Palin. A recent survey (in Juneau) saw the number of parents reading to their children jump from 50 percent to 75 percent in 1 year! The Imagination Library is a proven effective program that helps children start school ready to learn.

The Imagination Library has been adopted by Best Beginnings as a component of their early learning program, and CIS of Alaska is excited to be working in alignment with Best Beginning to expand the great work accomplished to date. Tennessee has implemented a statewide Imagination Library initiative through their Governor's Books from Birth Foundation. Results are showing clear improvements in the average scores of pre-K and kindergarten children whom are enrolled in the Imagination Library, including increases in reading skills, speaking skills, thinking skills, and social skills, as compared to the non-enrolled children. Based on results to date, the belief is as more children are enrolled in the Imagination Library at the *earliest possible opportunity* (ideally at birth), the abilities gained from participating in the program, already apparent in their 2007 findings, will be ever more noticeable. (*Source: Impact of Tennessee's Imagination Library on Pre-K and Kindergarten Students from a Fall 2007 Survey of Teachers Administered by the Tennessee Board of Regents.*)

For as little as \$30/year per child, we could be making remarkable progress in engaging our families to better prepare our children to be ready to learn and be successful in school.

- CEO (Career Exploration Opportunities) has grown this year to 8 different school districts and 12 school sites across the State and has served nearly 400 students (predominantly rural youth) since coming under the umbrella of CIS of Alaska in 2006.

Communities In Schools of Alaska is focused on the priorities of the Federal and State Government: Education, Literacy, Graduation, and Career Readiness. CIS of Alaska is making a difference.

IV. HOW THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CAN HELP

Our dream, our call to action, is to formulate support to implement the CIS model and provide a "drop-out prevention specialist" in every school in Alaska; whereas, children's needs can be met to help keep them in school and teachers are free to teach and children are present, in a viable State to learn, are motivated to stay in school through graduation, and are ready to pursue the immense career opportunities Alaska has to offer them.

CIS brokers existing services and resources, saving valuable dollars while improving efficiencies of delivery of services to children and youth. While we do not yet have numbers for the present year, during the 2007/2008 year, in just five sites, our

minimum leveraged services and resources estimated \$1,476,459. In-kind contributions in revenue from other sources (last year) were approximately \$882,000. The amount of dollars for support is very small when compared to the successful outcomes it provides and the resources we are able to leverage!

Support by the Federal (and State) Government will allow us to expand our existing sites and offer the opportunity for many more communities, especially rural communities, the ability to experience the positive outcomes we can provide for youth.

We have a program that has proven success in preventing dropouts. For every dollar invested, through building collaboration, brokering services and leveraging community assets, CIS of Alaska adds value to build return on investment.

Dollar for dollar, CIS of Alaska offers the right investment in our children's future. We look forward to partnering with you, doing what we do best; connecting the dots, coordinating and leveraging existing resources to keep youth in school and prepare them to succeed in life.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Tom. Appreciate your leadership there.

Well, we are scheduled to wrap things up, believe it or not, at noon, and it's almost a quarter of, and we haven't even gotten to the discussion. I'm prepared to stay here all afternoon. I don't know about the rest of you. I don't know, Carol, how long we have the building for, but for those of you who were going to stick to a schedule, you can move on out when you need to. I would like to go over our time, if that is acceptable with our panelists here. I apologize that we ran late, but I didn't want to cut any of you off. I think the information that we're gathering here today is important, and I appreciate the opportunity to listen to you.

I'd like to note that we have with us this morning Senator Bettye Davis, who has been, long, a leader in education policy in the Legislature. I think I also saw Peggy Wilson in the back, Representative Wilson, from Wrangell. I'd invite both of you to join me up here at the dais, if you'd like. You get a better view of what's going on. If you wanted an opportunity to ask any questions, I'm certainly eager to have my colleagues up here. I don't know whether Representative Seaton is here also. He was—I know he was at the summit yesterday. Again, I'll extend that offer. If you're comfortable in your chairs—I don't see any takers, but thank you for being here.

[Laughter.]

I've got tons of questions that I want to ask, and I'm just not even certain where we would begin. I think what I'm going to do is direct a question to you, Dr. Smink. I know that your schedule doesn't necessarily allow you to be with us all afternoon, so after you field my question, if you need to sign off, we certainly understand that. It's a question that I will make available to the rest of you, as well.

You've recommended to the State that we review, at the State level, certain policies that may inadvertently be pushing our students out of schools. Can you identify any specific policies that you feel may actually be counterproductive? Are there counterproductive policies that we need to change at the Federal level—for instance, within the NCLB statutes? We mentioned some of the successes, and you always want to highlight the successes, but, on the other hand, if we have policies in place that are not helping us, are not helping our students, we need to look to eliminate them. Can you identify anything in that area?

Mr. SMINK. Well, there are a few. One of the areas is in the area of accountability. One of the areas of most difficulty for all of us is to have some universal accounting. Now, hopefully, what Secretary Spellings did a few weeks ago will help us put it in the proper direction. However, within that announcement, she did offer some variability for additional years, whether it be the summer or whether it be an additional 1 year, or a case could be made for—by any State—for adding, not only the fifth year, perhaps the sixth year. If that's allowable—and I'm not so sure whether it should or shouldn't be—it almost puts us back to where we were, years ago, where you had this waiver going away from a 4-year graduation rate. We also know that some youngsters will not graduate in 4 years; they may need the summer, they may need the fifth year. That's going to be a tough decision for us for the foreseeable future.

Another area, particularly at the State level, is the notion of accountability among the LEAs, among the local education agencies. Even if there were a Federal statute, and even if there were a State statute, local school districts may not have the resources for proper accounting. That's very difficult, and particularly in the area of expulsions or suspensions or even attendance and tardy. Now, they're very critical issues that a State may have a regulation on, or a local school board may have a regulation on, and they tend to, quote, "push kids out of school."

The area that probably bothers local folks more than anything are the different variables on grading. There may be some local provisions that, if you make a 60, or whatever grading policies there is, you're going to fail that course. That's very difficult to get universal use, whether it be in a State or even at the Federal Government.

These are just among some of the very issues that are very critical to local administrators on, How do they put together the plan that has some accountability with equal standards, not only across each State, but across even every district as—How do they maneuver that?

There was one other area that I think Dr. Cashen and I talked about. I'm going to let him share it with you for a moment, because we think it fits into this category also.

Mr. CASHEN. Are we down here, Jay? Is this—

Mr. SMINK. Well, it's the notion of zero tolerances. This has been an issue of, How does the school handle zero tolerance? Whether it comes out of Federal legislation or State legislation or local policies, where is that defining notion between, When do you expel or suspend a student on the notion of either drugs or weapons? I appreciate the notion of zero tolerance; but, if you do ask a student to leave school, suspended or expulsion, what do you do for them? That's an issue that is extremely important, because if you do nothing for that youngster, that person is clearly going to be a dropout and clearly going to get in the law enforcement and every other social agency for the rest of their life.

I'm not suggesting that we don't have a zero tolerance policy, but what I'm suggesting, that, when that student is asked to leave school, that there be some provision for their continued education once they leave the official educational environment.

There's some that local school folks, as well as State agencies are wrestling with on a continual time.

The other area, particularly—and this is at the Federal level and at the State level—is the area of students with disabilities. The Federal agencies—and you well know this—define “students with disabilities” in 13 different categories, and the dropout rates are rather significant, but they're not universal among all 13 categories. Some students need more assistance to stay in school than others.

What we've learned from this—students with disabilities, and particularly from the Office—what's called OSEP, the Office of Special Education Programs, at the Federal level, their package of—and their group of centers, of which there are approximately 50 different technical education centers with different responsibilities, from dropout prevention to all aspects that serve students with disabilities—that's a wonderful model. One of the things that we can probably take some learnings from is to look how the OSEP, Office of Special Education Programs, and U.S. Department of Education, has packaged this array of technical assistance centers to serve students with disabilities. Perhaps we need something similar to that with our regular students, because if we don't serve the regular students, they're going to be dropping out, too. I think that's a model we may want to take a look at.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Let me ask you, Commissioner LeDoux, Are there any State policies or any policies that we have that you feel are pushing our kids out, that are counterproductive?

Mr. LEDOUX. Well, most policies are based on the local-control school district. I think, particularly with discipline and maintaining safe environments, even some academic attendance policies can be used to invite students to leave. There is no typical student anymore. They don't look a certain way, a certain ethnicity or language. Successful schools are able to wrap the program around the needs of the child. When they don't do that, when they look at the student, and they apply the discipline without looking to the needs of the student, then you could lose them.

To treat all children the same is to treat them unfairly. I think anytime we use any policy or procedure without looking at the individual needs of the student, we essentially dis-invite them.

On the other hand, some things can't be allowed in the regular school. You can't tolerate harassment and violence against other students. There are alternatives for those students, that can allow them to be successful. They don't have to be thrown away, because, again, there are no throw-away students.

I think that, as long as we're flexible, we look at the individual needs of students, and we hold them accountable for their actions—they go together—they can be successful.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Let me ask about the—just, the situation with the silos. There were several of you that—I know, Dr. Holloway, you certainly mentioned it, and—just, a recognition that in order to deal with the student as a whole person, and education as kind of the full spectrum. It's not something that—you have elementary, middle school, high school, college, vocational education, that there has to be a continuity there, there has to be an align-

ment, and our need to kind of break out of these silos in order to better address the problems that we're facing.

Are we making progress? I'm going to pose it to you, Dr. Holloway, kind of speaking from the earlier years, and then—and you, President Hamilton, because you've got the other end of that spectrum. What can we be doing better to deal with the fact that we have a regime or a structure that has typically not allowed for a continuation or better alignment is—"alignment" is the terms that you used.

Dr. Holloway.

Ms. HOLLOWAY. Well, I think the last 2 days were a good start, where we put so many different people together to talk with one another. I think we're going to have to do something more systemic, and that is to formalize some group of folks, P through 20, and begin the conversation. One of the pieces of research that we looked at really cautioned us, in terms of how to do that. It could become a very productive group, but it could be, also, a place just where people come and gnaw on the same issues over and over again. The recommendations are pretty strong that you need to start looking at policy and that you need to look at financial structures across those silos. When you do that, these kinds of conversations will help to break down some of those barriers.

The other thing is that you need to look at the alignment of what we expect young people to know and be able to do. There is this huge gap between what young people know and can do when they leave high school and when they enter the workforce or whether they enter the postsecondary programs. All we need to do is look at the developmental courses. Sixty percent of our youngsters who enter college here take developmental courses, which means they were not prepared to take college courses. We can fix that through working together on the alignment. What is it that we are not preparing them to know and be able to do? Only through conversations with postsecondary people who teach those courses and secondary people who teach those courses are we going to be able to close that gap.

Mr. HAMILTON. Well, Shirley is absolutely right. It's one of the reasons that I've said I always have difficulty with this metric that says K through 16, K through 20, or whatever. Unless every piece of it is involved in every piece of it—this is why it's not a relay race. Everybody's got to be pulling together across the entire board.

Let me just mention one thing, because so often we actually define a little fork in the road and we start talking about voc-tech. Let me pick on the Zach story for a moment, because I don't want this misunderstood.

Here's my problem with the Zach story that you'll recall. To be accepted as an apprentice in the pipefitters union, Zach had to have a math resume that's about one math class short of what is required to enter as an engineering major at the university.

My point here is this—because I celebrate Zach and his accomplishments, and I don't say that Zach should have come to the university—what I say is, if we don't understand this, we make voc-tech seem somehow to be less of a scholastic achievement. Fact: If Zach were not a good student, he would not be in the union.

Voc-tech is not an alternative to scholastic achievement, it's another outcome of scholastic achievement.

I tell people all the time—this is an important thing to understand—77 percent of the jobs in America do not require a 4-year degree. Well, why would a college president tell you that? It's because a huge percentage of the 77 percent, about two-thirds of them, according to a national figure, whose name I can't recall at the moment—about two-thirds of those jobs not requiring a 4-year degree require some postsecondary education. Much of it is union. We work very closely with the union. But, I'll tell you, it isn't just going to college. We have a course at the university—of course, understand, we do embrace the community-college mission here; we're all one here. OK? We have a course that's called "Math for the Trades." OK? These are individuals who have graduated from high school, who do not currently have the math skills necessary to enter into the trades. All of us, at every level—at the 4-year college level, at the community college level, at the union apprenticeship level—need the same level, or very, very closely the same level, of academic achievement. It's just a very important thing.

Always, we make that, "Well, you can go to the university, you can go to voc-tech." Well, if you trace it back down the pipeline, the skills are going to be very, very similar. There are some people who don't want to get a 4-year degree, but that—see, here's the horrible phrase. We've got to get this out of our vocabulary. "College isn't for everyone." Stop it. We just need to stop that, dead. Because—forget about the word "college." It scares people sometimes and—postsecondary education is for nearly anyone. I mean, I'll just tell you, unless your goal in life is to be the head fry guy at McDonald's you're going to take some postsecondary education, to include, if, God bless you, you take—unions are a very, very technical, very difficult position, and I think we have missed, in America, this, kind of, generational gap. It was only one generation ago. Alaska is full of them, of great, vibrant individuals who came up here, got a tremendous job, made a good paycheck, absolutely fabulous achievement. But, their child can't do it with the same academic skill set that their parent was able to do it. We're miss—"Aw, come on, you know, Dad did a great job and, you know, college isn't for everyone." I'll guarantee you, Zach made a choice, because he had a choice. If he went into the pipefitters apprenticeship program—that is a smart young man with a whole lot of math background who could have done anything he wanted. And he did.

Senator MURKOWSKI. You raise an excellent point here about the need for rigor within the academic curriculum. If we kind of let our kids go down a track and say, "Well, you're not meant for college"—and I agree with you, we need to rephrase that—it's not to suggest, then, that you can have a career in the trades and blow off, basically, your academic credentials. You've got to have those skill sets. And talking with those that are bringing together these in the apprenticeship programs, you do have the ability to kind of pick and choose between some young people that are able to make it because of the background that they have received in school, and then others, they just don't have what it takes to make it through. If we're letting them believe that, "Well, if you're not on the college track, that you can go and get a job building our gas line," that's not

being fair to them, because they—and this is where I think we need to make sure that our young people understand that, when you make that decision 6 days before completing your 10th-grade year, what that means to you as an individual and your options, moving forward. I'm not so sure that we're being as honest and as open as we need to be with them.

Carl.

Mr. ROSE. Senator, I want to go back a little ways to your first question that you asked of Dr. Smink.

How many of us would entrust our 16-year-olds to make life-changing decisions? We have a mandatory-attendance law that says you have to be in school until you're 16. What is the message that that sends? They are prepared now to face the world, at age 16? I think we need to re-look at that. That's one of those inadvertent laws that pretty much give people the option to say, "At age 16, I can make a choice." Many of them will make a bad choice.

Two additional years of school could be the difference between whether they graduate or not. If it's not mandatory—you know, right now we don't have the wherewithal to enforce truancy laws at 16. When you say "16," you say, "It's OK." The State says, "It's OK for you to leave school." I don't think it's OK. I think we need to take a look at that.

Another issue that we touched on is this collaboration across the spectrum. P through 20, for example. There's a lot of turf here, there's a lot of governance issues, there are going to be finance issues, there are going to be a lot of things that people say why you can't. The issue right now is, Why should we be looking at some sort of an effort that would coordinate?

If you looked it up—at some sort of a council that would provide some kind of oversight, and you take some of the most influential people in your State and talk about what kids need from the very beginning through their entire career, to take a look at the gaps that may be there, and to make recommendations to school boards or the Board of Regents or whoever the governing bodies may be, I think there's some value there, because right now when we talk about silos, we operate independently, and what we need to do is take a look at—I mean, we're not here to operate our systems independently, we're actually here for the students that we serve.

So often when you take a look at the statutes that we have to comply with, it's very easy for people to become distracted. We start to look at our work and some of the pressures that we face and the financial commitments that are made, and all of a sudden we're not thinking about kids anymore, we're thinking about our individual jobs, what we need to do to comply inside of our silos, and the people who really are not served are the students that we're all designed to serve.

I think we need to consider—if we can't do this for ourselves, we should be working toward some sort of an overseeing council that would bring these issues to the appropriate decisionmaking bodies so we can deal with them.

Last, one of the comments that came up, for young people, the lack of reinforcement of the options that are available to them, coming not just from schools, but from their parents and when you take kids who come from families or communities that are socially

and economically challenged, they don't get the same kind of reinforcement that kids who come from educated parents, middle-class families, get.

All of us have to take a look at what kind of options are available, because I do believe, even if you're a fry cook at McDonald's, you will receive some instruction on quality control.

[Laughter.]

All of us are going to receive some additional instruction, in whatever job that you take.

I would encourage us to take a look at these things. Some of the things that we say and do in statutes—nobody intends for kids to leave school at 16. Well, why would you have a statute that said it was OK?

Senator MURKOWSKI. It's a message that is sent. When you talk about, just, the whole issue of relevance—"Why should I—why should I be—why should I stay in school? I've hit 16, you know, I've passed the high school exit exam, I've got other things that are distracting me, I'm not challenged"—we need to really look at the relevancy aspect of it.

In this *Wall Street Journal* article that I mentioned earlier, the reason the article struck me was because it was entitled "Mayors Go Door to Door," personally encouraging students to stay in the game for their own good and for the sake of the city. The U.S. Conference of Mayors was focusing on what's going on with the dropout rate throughout the United States. It was mayors in Houston, in Texas, Atlanta, Milwaukee, and Kansas City. I mean, they're literally going to the students' homes and doing a one-on-one intervention.

You talk about, well, how can we be that community support, how can we make sure that, when you're making a decision, that you think, at 16 or 17, that you've had enough—how can we be intervening, how can we get these counselors in the school to do this intervention that we need to do?

That's one aspect of the spectrum. My focus is just about everything that I do, whether it's healthcare or education, it's all about prevention, and it goes back to what we're doing early on, when you've got toddlers, when you've got kids that are, in 5th-grade, de-selecting their career choices. Let's talk a little bit about this issue of relevance and how we are better connecting with our young people.

Throwing it out to you guys. Recognizing that we're well over our time limit already.

Commissioner.

Mr. LEDOUX. Well, I would say—some have said that the new three R's are relevance, rigor, and relationships in schools. A lot of times, as we said before, kids leave school for a number of personal or family reasons, but many times the playground for them to explore their interests has gotten very small in school. There's not very many electives, there's very few career educational opportunities for them. The arts have been decreased in many areas so that the resources can move toward remediation so that they can meet the test score—because they're judged on their test score, not on the quality of what kids learn and what they're able to actually do. They're not completely coherent.

The education program has to be relevant to the young people. They have to see that it has meaning with regard to where they're going and what they want to do. They don't know what they want to do, usually. They find that out through experiences, by talking to people, by having a relevant program for them to engage in. As I said earlier, many schools still award credit based on minimum competency, not really what they can do and how they can apply it. Some of the movements in standards-based education are demanding that kids perform; and if they can perform, they don't have to sit in the seat that long.

I think we also need a very rigorous program that will demand excellence from students. We heard from the university earlier that they're very concerned that the entering freshmen do not have the math skills to pick the professions that they need. America and Alaska are losing our scientists and our mathematicians and our engineers, because we've actually never—until the study that was being carried out by Avant-Garde, we really haven't looked at what we expect our high school students to look like when they graduate and what the college wants them to look like. We're now actually aligning those. We need the rigor. Young people can tell the difference between something that is—where they're held accountable and where they're not.

I also would say that schools have to develop relationships to kids. Kids have to feel a part of something bigger. They'll pay any price to belong or be connected, and schools have to be places where kids can explore their talents, where they feel safe, where they're connected. This is where counselors are important, and teachers who actually take the time to work with kids.

I might point out, though, that all three of these areas of modern school—rigor, relevance, and relationships—are severely challenged in rural Alaska. We have teachers that are responsible for teaching multiple-discipline classes in a single school site. While they work hard and they do a great job, kids would benefit from a teacher who has a major in math or science or history or social studies.

Another area is the relevance. For many Alaska Native children, the curriculum is not related to how they learn or their knowledge base or their indigenous way of looking how information is passed on, so it's hard for them to connect with the relevance, and it's hard for them to have the playground, if you will, to explore their interests. They don't get an opportunity.

Relationships are severely compromised sometimes because we have so many teachers coming and going in rural Alaska, that, just when the young people and their parents start developing meaningful relationships, the teacher leaves and another teacher comes in and they have to develop new relationships.

As Alaska, we must find a way to increase our relevance, rigor, and relationships in all of our schools, particularly—

Senator MURKOWSKI. Let me ask you, Tina and Elizabeth—I mean, Tina, you spoke about literally feeling invisible. When you're invisible in a school, there is no relationship, and it makes you wonder or question the relevance of your being there. Elizabeth, you mentioned that, with other things going on, it just didn't feel like you needed to be there, so the relevance was lacking. So, how—if you care to comment on that aspect of it.

Tina.

Ms. MICHELS-HANSEN. I'm just taking some notes here as other people are speaking. In a couple of things that come to mind is, we prepare ourselves, at CITC, right about this time of year, to see an influx of students come into the Anchorage area. I mean, it's been in the news, we've all heard about it. We've all either known somebody or heard of somebody who has moved into town, for a variety of reasons. I can tell you that one of the challenges with—when working with our students and their families, to help them keep the notion of education as central in their lives, and that it's just as valuable as their personal security is, they are—when you look at, you know, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, they are functioning right now at the basic level of survival. A lot of people have made the choice to move based on economics. If they are simply focused on—I shouldn't say "simply," but if their primary focus, on a daily basis, is consumed and just, "Where am I going to stay? Where's my next paycheck going to come from? How can I afford to keep the lights on and the heat on, let alone feed my child?" you know, the idea of going to school and participating actively is really low in their list of priorities. That's the reality that we face, not just in Nome or Kwethluk or Anchorage or, you know, Klawock. It's across the entire State. It's a tragedy that's happening to our people.

Another thing that I think we need to add, that I really don't hear much mention to, and we absolutely cannot turn a blind eye to it, is that we do have those high-functioning students out there. We have wonderful Alaska Native students who are participating in high-level math classes, pre-calculus. They're looking at trade, they're looking at high advanced biology classes. It's through small partnerships, like ANSEP at UAA, that we're able to build that. But, they have the sense of community, they know that it takes multiple people, multiple entities, and tons and tons of energy to make education relevant to our students.

There's a story, though, that—and I'll make it very brief—that I want to keep in the back of your minds. The notion of prejudice is still very much alive, and it's very much alive not just for our Native students, but for our Hmong students, our African-American students. We lack, as a State, as far as our education system is concerned, in my personal opinion, a strong sense of valuing diversity. Our teachers are ill-prepared, when they come into the schools, to have a good, solid background in multicultural training and education, understanding. They have to complete a couple of credits. Well, that doesn't make it thorough, and it doesn't make it personal for them.

We had a young girl—her parents called us the other day and said, "You know, my daughter's not in your class, but I really could use your help." This girl was enrolled in a pre-calculus class, and her test scores proved that that's where she belonged. She's a very motivated individual. She was on the right track for accomplishing the goals that she wanted in life. She entered into her classroom on day one, there were eight students in that class. The teacher looked at her, recognized she's the only person of color in the room, only minority within the room, pulled her out into the hallway and said, "I'm sorry, but there must be some mistake. You can't be in

here.” What message does that send to that child, to her peers, to her parents, to her larger community, if our teachers, our professional educators, do not understand and do not accept diversity? Yet, they are persisting with the notions of prejudice.

I didn’t know what prejudice was until I came to college, because I grew up in a small-knit community, where everybody knew that I was part Inupiat, even though I didn’t look like it. We were all related. Well, I came here, and the answer was, “How could you be Native? You’re too white to be Native. You’re too gussuk.” It’s not the color of your skin, it’s the values that you hold inside, it’s the relevance of things in life that make you who you are. We need to, not just as schools, but as every single stakeholder involved in education, prioritize the diversity, prioritize the diverse needs, and wrap around together to raise our kids up.

Mr. SMINK. Senator, may I add to the question about relationships?

Senator MURKOWSKI. Oh, I’m looking for you, Jay.

[Laughter.]

Yes, go ahead.

Mr. SMINK. OK.

If you recall, near the end of my verbal comments and in the written testimony, we highlighted the value of home school liaison, graduation coaches, career counselors, etc. That was in direct response to the need for relationships that students who drop out tend not to have. These were solutions and strategies that we’re seeing across the Nation.

Let me reinforce that with one other notion, and that is, there is currently, in numerous States, the mandate for having an individual graduation plan which every—for example, South Carolina is just one of several States that are doing this—and every 8th-grade student must build, before they enter 9th grade, an individual graduation plan that says, “I will select one of these 16 career clusters, and it will be my guideline for my course selections from grades 9 through 12.”

Now, more importantly there, they are beginning to not only look at career technical education, that individual graduation plan must be discussed and signed by the student, the counselor, and a parent, or both parents. That’s building a relationship between all three that is important. In some cases, they’ll even invite in a business entity that may serve as an intern opportunity later in the high school career.

There are even some school districts—for example, St. Paul, Minnesota—that has carried this notion of a 4-year graduation plan to 6 years, where the student will build not only the 4-year graduation plan for high school, but look beyond high school for the next 2 years, whether it be a community college or the first 2 years of a 4-year college. I think this speaks to relevancy in a little bit different way, but it reinforces the notion also of collaboration.

Thank you.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Yes, I appreciate that input.

Elizabeth, would that have made a difference for you? You’re just about getting through 10th grade, if you had had some kind of a plan—

Ms. WINKLER. I believe that if I did have a plan, similar to what Dr. Smink was talking about, that I would have been more focused and understand that education is important. My father went to college, my mom was a civilian in the Air Force, but there wasn't very much talk of how important education was and what it could or couldn't do for you. I had a lot of misunderstandings about that as I was growing up, and simply didn't care.

Where I come from—I'm around a lot of troubled youth that don't know where they're going in life, what they want to do, or how are they going to get there. Plans like that would, I believe, would really help, a lot of youth, a lot.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Dr. Holloway.

Ms. HOLLOWAY. Well, I'd like to address the commissioner's "rigor," because, as you may recall in our written testimony, we stepped on probably something that would be one of those holy grails, Commissioner LeDoux. We suggested that we might look at national standards for reading, writing, and math. The reason is that we have every State spending lots and lots of money developing standards, developing assessments, and each State decides how good is good enough. Is there really a difference in how well we want a student to read in Kaktovik or the student in Biloxi? I mean, I really think, you know, who is benefiting from all of this are the testing companies. They're making out like bandits. That's money that could be spent on all of the things that we're talking about here, in terms of school improvement. I know the local control argument, but I'm only talking about those essential skills that every student needs in order to be a successful learner.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Let me ask a question, probably to you, Greg or Mike, in talking about the career training—the career and technical education aspect of it and the barriers, I think, that we have effective career training opportunities. You've mentioned—several people have mentioned Carl Perkins and the fact that, in many cases, people aren't even bothering, because it's just as difficult as it is, and it's basically costing you more to apply for it than you actually are able to receive. What other barriers do we have out there, when it comes to the career and technical education?

I'd also like you to comment—Lamont Albertson, from The People's Learning Center, in his testimony, written testimony that he'd submitted, had suggested to me that expanding regional training centers would be a big part of addressing the high school dropout rate in some parts of rural Alaska. Can you speak to that as a suggestion, as well?

Mr. ANDREWS. Thank you.

In terms of the, let's say, barriers for career and technical education, things have changed over the years now. There is a blur between academic and career and technical education training. That's why I say it needs to be integrated back into the high schools, because more and more—there's more and more need for students to understand technology and science and math and other areas as it applies to work, and students are eager to learn that.

It also takes more dollars to do that, because you need modern equipment, you need instructors who are up to date with industry standards and also academic standards. There needs to be a real strong commitment from the State or from the local education com-

munity. Let's say, for example, out in Mat-Su, where they bonded and created a state-of-the-art career and technical education high school. It's fabulous. I think we need one in every community, if we could, in the State, but that would take an awful lot of money and a lot of resources.

We need more instructors—and that's why partnerships are working, because they're bringing in folks from industry to work with students after school over in the classroom, and just more and more of that effort.

In terms of Perkins—and I'm no expert in Perkins; we've operated a few Perkins grants, etc; they're well-intended. Years ago, you could do a lot more with them, now they're very, very restrictive, and they're such an administrative burden and a reporting burden that that's why I'm hearing smaller school districts are opting out or joining with other school districts to try to get something that's meaningful and sustainable for schools, particularly in rural Alaska. I've been in former vocational education shops in rural Alaska that are now warehouses or offices. So, we need to sort of look at that.

The other issue of expanding regional training centers in my view—people need a place to learn these new skills closer to home, so we have learned over many years of working with regional learning centers, that it's more cost-effective, it's more relevant for local folks to learn in their region, and you can do very good, intensive work, and—what you need is something that follows up behind that, like a job or continuing education, connection to a degree program with a university, such as with health, out at Yuut, etc.

Each one of those, from my experience—and I've worked with most of them for a long period of time—is that they all are sort of different animals, they're different entities themselves. Some have great partnerships with school districts, some, based on the nature of their funding, may not necessarily have a great relationship with the school district, or there may be other, let's say, turf barriers or—particularly fighting for resources, because it is so tough to put together a building that's open and available for people, to keep the lights on and—there also are not any standards, that I know of, and I've been encouraging the Alaska Workforce Investment Board and the Department of Labor to look at this, that there needs to be some standards to say, What really is a regional learning center, what is a regional training center? Because there are some things that you have to have in a learning environment to make sure students are getting the information well enough to apply outside of school.

I think that regional learning centers are becoming more and more relevant to the State, but I think that we still have difficulty defining them, and we don't have standards across them. I would encourage each one of them to be a center of excellence; for instance, where they could do construction truck driving and pipeline welding, or they could do health or other areas, so people from around the State, particularly rural students looking for those challenges, would go there.

We also would like to point out that—in my trips to Galena, Mount Edgecombe, Sitka, and Chugach school districts—we have fabulous statewide high school programs out there that maybe peo-

ple don't know enough about. These students are high achievers, they do really well in those settings, and they choose to go to these places to learn. I'm just amazed, every time I stop by and talk to those students—high quality. So, they know what they want.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Yes, they are good.

Greg, do you want to add—

Mr. CASHEN. Senator Murkowski, I was just going to mention, in a followup to Mike's discussion on regional training centers, the Department of Labor has been meeting with the regional training centers for about the last year and a half as part of our AGIA training plan, and there are strategic elements within the training plan that do address regional training programs and regional training centers. The one thing that we need, of course, is additional funding. That was part of our appropriation request last special session, to fund our AGIA training plan, which regional training centers were a part of.

I agree with Mike, we need to ensure that we don't have redundant programs somewhat throughout the State, and more of the centers-of-excellence model, focusing on certain programs that each school can conduct efficiently, like diesel mechanics or commercial drivers licenses or welding or electrical work, carpentry, etc. But, we are working with Mr. Albertson and Yuut, as well as SAVEC and Alaska Technical Center and Galena and AVTEC, as well. Thank you.

Senator MURKOWSKI. We are well over our time here today, but I want to make sure that everybody feels like they've had an opportunity to say that one thing that's just been burning inside you and I haven't asked you the question or I skipped over you. Tom hasn't had an opportunity on the hot seat at all to talk about some of the wrap-around services. You don't have to add anything as, kind of, your final wrap-up, but I give you this opportunity.

Tom, I'll start with you first to see if you've got any.

Mr. MORGAN. Thank you, Senator. Time is such a valuable commodity, I'm sitting here, and I'm thinking, "Gee, what could I possibly say that would add to what has already been put forward." I'd be remiss if I didn't also acknowledge and say thank you to Senator Bettye Davis for all that she has done for this State and certainly for education. Senator, thank you for that.

I'd also be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that a couple of hard-working volunteers are making time to be here today, and that's a couple of my board members, Bobby Olsen and Sue Hennessy.

Seated directly behind me is the superintendent from Mat-Su, Dr. George Troxel, and Lucy Hope, the director of student support services, one of our affiliate sites. They get it. Maybe that's the glue I was talking about. They get what Communities in Schools can do.

I'm actually emboldened by the comments today, because I walked in here thinking, "OK, we just came off a 2-day education summit. What else can we say to build upon that?" I'm thinking, you know, and I'm getting raspy-voiced because we've been saying a lot over the last 2 days, and a lot of good things, but I really believe more strongly now—and Dr. Smink has said it, too—Communities in Schools, agencies like ours, models like ours, they work. As the two folks here have said, we can't allow people to drop

through the cracks, we can't allow invisible students there. We have the resources at our fingertips to bring to bear and help these folks. We can do that. We can't rely, and we should not rely, just on the education system to make that happen. They're busy doing a lot of other things that we've asked them to do. As a taxpayer, that's what we're asking that they do.

We can do more with less with the existing resources. Give us an opportunity to do that. Today is one of those opportunities.

Thank you.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Who else wants to add their final thoughts into the mix?

President——

Mr. SMINK. Senator——

Senator MURKOWSKI [continuing]. Hamilton.

Mr. SMINK [continuing]. Senator, whenever you're finished there, I'd like to add one example of some of the things that we've been doing. You can go on with your other guests there and save me for later, whatever your timing is.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Dr. Hamilton.

Mr. HAMILTON. Just one quick note, that we didn't mention that is a real obstacle in dealing with all of these issues that we've discussed, is this notion of equity. I mean, there are circumstances that exist in Alaska that are extraordinarily difficult to overcome. Larry mentioned the importance of having a teacher with a degree in the discipline taught. That would quite literally result, in several cases of Alaska, of having more teachers than students. Clearly, it's not going to ever be done.

I think maybe one of the biggest ones, and maybe there is a Federal piece of this, it's this huge and growing bandwidth disparity. In Alaska, the famous "last mile" is 500 kilometers long. Until we can get connected and be able to maybe distribute or redistribute existing materials, existing experts, and really take advantage of what bandwidth can ultimately do, that gap will just simply continue to grow. Maybe it's possible to do something in this extraordinary circumstance. We have to modify some existing E-Rate things and the like. I mean, for instance, the university can't use E-Rate. I understand that. I understand why that's a good one-size-fits-all. When the last mile is 500 kilometers long, maybe we ought to take another look at that. We could reach people in existing bandwidth that we're not allowed to in this.

Senator MURKOWSKI. It's an excellent point, one that I've had an opportunity, speaking with folks up north at Ilisagvik College, recognizing what that could do for them and their ability to provide for greater levels of communication and teaching.

Let's go to Dr. Smink, and then we'll come back to you, Dr. Holloway.

Mr. SMINK. Thank you, Senator.

We completed, 2 years ago—the National Dropout Prevention Center, in collaboration with Communities in Schools headquarters—we completed a year-long significant study on the risk factors that we know are found with students and with families, that—in fact, there were 25 of those risk factors of why youngsters drop out of school. The good news, we can define those, and we

know that. We can design intervention programs to address those. And we do that, also.

Let me share with you an experience that I had yesterday illustrating the point that community involvement and collaboration is extremely important.

Knowing that information, I was in the meeting yesterday with hospital administrators, and we posed the problem to them, as, "How can you be a better collaborator with educators on addressing this issue of dropouts? How can you make people more aware of the issue? How can you gain parental support, etc.?" Again, the question was addressed to hospital administrators. Now, what I want to share with you is some of their ideas, which reinforces the notion that collaboration, beyond the school walls with just school staff, is important.

They offered—what an opportunity for a new mother, usually in a hospital, to provide that new mother with a package of materials that would help that mother and parent be better.

For example, we know kids drop out of school because of nutrition. What a wonderful time to give them some information about nutrition, that new mother, and what they need to do with the baby.

We know that kids drop out of school because of drug abuse and because of shaken-baby syndrome and others. What a wonderful opportunity to give that new mother some information about, "Please stay off drugs, as a mother."

Also, we know it's important that a youngster be read to, even before they get to first or second grade. Literally being read to during the first 36 months of their life. What an opportunity to tell that mother about the value of that, and give that mother some reading materials.

I could go on with health prevention. I could on with ways that a mother—a new mother, or a father, could give support to that youngster.

What I'm trying to illustrate is that community collaboration for awareness and increasing the level of education, value in education, is important.

Furthermore, the administrators reminded me of a school, that I was familiar with, where the superintendent of a county school district sends one of their staff-persons to every new mother and gives a mother a package of information, much like I just said, including a certificate for a seat in the graduating class 18 years down the line. Doesn't that send a very powerful message to that mother? That illustrates the notion of community collaboration with groups that are not normally in our array of relationships as educators.

I simply close with that to let you know that, yes, kids do drop out of school, but they drop into the community, and the community has to be a part of jointly understanding it, but also jointly putting together interventions that work with our youngsters who are struggling to stay in school.

Again, I'm going to close by just thanking you for the opportunity to be with you today, and I welcome being with you more as you pursue this particular committee or other activities at the Federal level or at the State of Alaska level.

Thank you very much.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Dr. Smink, and we look forward to working with you. Both my office, most certainly, and, I'm sure, many who are in the room here will be seeking your advice and counsel.

I think it's a great reminder—you're dropping out of school, but you're dropping into the community. Talk about responsibility. That's a keeper that we can use repeatedly.

Dr. Holloway.

Ms. HOLLOWAY. Well, I want to thank President Hamilton for bringing the technology issue up, because many of the innovations that we're a part of really are using technology to make it happen. It's really critical to some of the exciting things that we're able to do. One of them has to do with the virtual high school and how, through a virtual high school program, you can have them drop back in.

The virtual high school doesn't have to be done by the school, it can be done in a community center, it can be done in the Boys and Girls Club, it can be done in lots of places. We have lots of examples of bringing young people back in to prepare themselves for work or additional training.

So, I think that this piece is so critical. Our teacher initiative, our Alaska Native Teacher Initiative, is all being delivered by distance. Having the high-quality technology is critical to the success of that program.

So, thank you very much. It's been a wonderful day. I've learned a lot from all of you, and some wonderful ideas that I hope we can continue to talk about in our P-20 council.

If I may, Senator Murkowski, I'd like to introduce Don Shackelford. He's sitting behind me. He's my colleague in Avant-Garde, and does a lot of work. We're just pleased to have been part of this.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, thank you, we appreciate it.

Welcome to you, Dr. Shackelford.

Commissioner.

Mr. LEDOUX. Thank you, Senator Murkowski.

I just want to say thank you to all the many wonderful educators, teachers, and principals, who are heroes every day across Alaska. Many kids are graduating because of superhuman efforts in time and compassion and hard work.

While, many times, when we focus on what needs to be done—and we should, we should always go looking for the ones who are lost—but, we have so many wonderful assets in Alaska that are producing outstanding graduates who are successful all over the country, who are leading—I believe you're a graduate of an Alaska institution, as am I and many in this room, and I am proud to be an Alaskan educator. I think we are up to the challenge.

When those people came by, the last 2 days, to try to build a plan, they left behind their interests, the organizations they worked for, they rolled up their sleeves and were committed to, not only respond to the challenges that we see right now, but to look to the future to see the challenges that our kids are going to have to face, and to predict what we're going to do. They paid their own

way there, they put themselves up. It reflects incredible interest in the kids and the success of Alaska.

As we talk about all the challenges, I just want to recognize that we are where we are because really great people are working hard all across Alaska—not just teachers; communities, politicians, leaders throughout the State. I'm proud to be an Alaskan, and I'm proud to be an educator.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, we thank you all. It was wonderful.

Yesterday, I got off the airplane and went over to the Dena'ina center just as you all were breaking, and I kind of figured I would be looking at some draggin' individuals after 2 days of a real intense conference. What I saw were smiles and a level of energy and enthusiasm and, you know, "We've got work to do, but we're going out there and we're going to make it happen." I think that's certainly a reflection on those of you who kind of led the agenda with a positive outlook as to how we confront our challenges and view them as opportunities. These kids that we're all working for, this is what should be getting us all up in the morning and getting us energized.

I think it's so important for us to recognize that it's not just the teachers, the administrators, those within the schools. Each and every one of us has responsibility for the children that we encounter, whether it's somebody's kid that you know at work, somebody in your church, the families that we have around us, or the kids that we have around us. We should all be looking to see what we can do to provide for that level of encouragement, to make sure that no child feels like they are invisible within their school or within their community. To just accept responsibility for my own children is not sufficient, it's not right. That's what we're all doing here together.

Now, I didn't want to do any closings here, but I wanted to make sure that anybody that had a final opportunity to speak up has their final chance.

Mr. MORGAN. Yes. Senator, I have an alibi. I learned that in the Army ranks—thank you, General Hamilton—that when you forget something, you just say, "I have an alibi." So, I have one.

[Laughter.]

Dr. Smink reminded me about hospitals and other groups and roles that can be played. One of the programs we got involved in, going statewide here, and hopefully we can go statewide with it, is the Dolly Parton Imagination Library Program. It's one of those programs that doesn't try to be more than it is. It says that putting books in the hands of children at an early age, birth to 5, is a good thing. If we do that, that's when they're sponges, they're going to really learn, and it has all kinds of add-on types of pluses.

We started pilot programs in Nome and also Juneau, Fairbanks, and just—in Juneau, for instance, Bartlett Memorial Hospital actually has signed on, and they foot the bill, sign up every child born that wishes—their parents wish—to be enrolled in the Imagination Library Program from day one of their birth to age 5.

There are other agencies standing by, ready to do that. Lucy, I mentioned earlier, is working with a hospital out in Mat-Su. It's just a matter of having enough time in the days.

Again, it's another way that other entities, other agencies, other resources can come to bear to help in the overall process, and that is to provide good opportunities for our youth.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to be here.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you.

I want to thank you all. You have overextended. We greatly appreciate that. I appreciate you taking your time on a Saturday. I think we all recognize the importance of what it is that we are doing, the work that we have in front of us.

We are going to be working, back in Washington, DC, as we go into a new Congress, to try to focus on this dropout piece and how we can better address it. We need your input, we need your help. So, on this Saturday afternoon, I'm giving you all assignments. You've got homework. I need you to work with us as you develop some of the ideas, at the very local level, at the State level, within all aspects of what it is that we do. Let's really be partnering on this. Let's not just talk about breaking down the silos, let's be working together.

When I extended the invitation, to our legislators that are here, to be part of this—I mean, we've got to kind of put aside everybody's hats and titles and areas of jurisdiction if we're really going to be providing for a full alignment for these kids. They don't care whether it's a Federal issue or a State or whether it's something that happens within the private community. All they know is whether or not they are feeling loved and respected and feel like they have a sense of self-worth and something that they can contribute. So, it's our job to kind of put it all together. Let's be really working on this. Help us with this, back East, and we will help you with it here in the North. So, we'll keep working.

I appreciate, so much, the passion that you all clearly have for our greatest resource, which are our kids. So, we'll be working together.

And, with that, we stand adjourned.

[Additional material follows.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LAMONT ALBERTSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, YUUT
ELITNAURVIAT—PEOPLE'S LEARNING CENTER, BETHEL, AK

Here's basically what worked for us in Aniak in years gone by and what will work throughout rural Alaska. Note that I do not distinguish between native and white students. If the Caucasian students in urban areas were exposed to the same stultifying NCLB curriculum as our rural high school students, the dropout ratio would be no different, regardless of race. There is a fundamental inequality of educational opportunity in rural Alaska as contrasted with what exists in urban Alaskan communities.

Depending on the parameters of your research, it can be argued that the rural/urban effort by the State is equal but even that argument is reduced quickly to a comparison of apples and oranges to the informed observer.

The most critical element in keeping our rural students in school through high school graduation is an appropriate curriculum which should include a broad swath of vocational, hands-on type courses open to both female and male students. Those courses should be available to the academically oriented student as well as those interested in focusing on the vocational crafts. And those vocational crafts should not be just for the construction trades. They should include broad health career and home trade training as well.

Second, principals need to be conditioned to expect students to stay in school and not buy into this growing tendency on the part of rural educators to accept a high dropout rate as being an acceptable norm. Principals, school district personnel, and rural university campus staffs need to work in concert with their community and tribal councils to establish common goals fashioned to discourage student dropout. The role of the individual principal should not be underestimated in its influence on whether students stay in school or choose to dropout.

Counselors should be used extensively to channel our students to an appropriate career choice. School districts should have full-time activity coordinators planning robust activities such as basketball, wrestling, X-country skiing, NYO, academic rodeos or even outside the school competitive engagements in subsistence activities. Students will not dropout when the show at school surpasses anything in town or the region for entertainment.

To summarize, (1) curriculums have to be broadened both in their offerings and to whom they are open to, (2) principals, regional educational leaders and community leaders expectations have to be changed from the current acceptance of our dropout rates; principals should be working with families of/and potential drops on an individual basis (3) full-time counselors and activity coordinators need to be used to make our total school programs enticing, irresistible.

These changes will cost money and require a recommitment, perhaps a rechanneling and configuration of the allocation of resources. But if reducing the dropout rate is our goal, these suggestions are proven. They have worked in the past and will still work if we will but put our resources where our stated intentions are. It has to be emphasized that funding to school districts has to be increased to appropriately broaden the curriculum.

If broad, wholesale curriculum changes cannot be made in individual community schools, then we need to seriously consider using our new Rural Training Centers (RTCs) as vocational magnet schools. These institutions could actually prepare our students for the world of work and at the same time in concert with their respective school districts and our rural University campuses, address academic and developmental education needs.

They could provide the necessary counseling and, most importantly, RTC's could be operated in conjunction with State of Alaska, DOL JOBS centers.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STEVE ATWATER, PH.D., PRESIDENT, ALASKA ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Chairwoman Murkowski, as president of the Alaska Association of School Administrators (AASA), I respectfully submit this written testimony in response to your hearing on what the Federal Government can do to improve the high school graduation rate and postsecondary success in Alaska and nationwide. I feel that it is fair to state that all of Alaska's school districts are working hard to improve their graduation rates and are devoting more attention than ever before to help their students have success after leaving school. Thank you for considering this testimony; I know that Federal support plays a significant role in helping our districts' improvement efforts.

Recent research on why students are not graduating from high school found that students are likely to stay in school when they feel that they are a part of the school community, understand that what they are learning is relevant and are challenged intellectually.¹ I use these three elements as the basis for the following recommendations for how Federal support can improve graduation rates and student success after school.

ESTABLISHING SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Working to help students feel that they are a part of a school community includes a strong parental presence in the school and providing students with a variety of learning opportunities. While the engagement of parents in the schooling process is a local concern, I feel that Federal support of early childhood education can help to ensure that students are exposed to a comprehensive curriculum. For the past several years, the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) has studied their incoming kindergarten students' school readiness skills and then used this data to predict their future academic success. The district has learned that many of their students who enter school with low skills are never able to catch up and are by default, in jeopardy of not graduating. This situation is of course, not unique to LKSD; it exists in many of Alaska's school districts where there is a high level of poverty. Schools with students who fall into this category are forced into the predicament of offering this group a seemingly endless array of interventions, e.g., 2 hours/day of reading instruction. The downside of this is that school for these young children lacks much of what is important to early learning. In sum, when teaching the basics consumes the school day, there is little or no time for instruction in the arts. As a way to help avoid this scenario, the Federal Government can work to improve student readiness for school by increasing the funding for Head Start programs and by requiring that Head Start align its learning goals with those of the local school district. With more funding, Head Start can recruit a more qualified staff and offer more training opportunities for its employees. An improved Head Start Program would better prepare more of Alaska's and the country's impoverished children for school. This would help schools to avoid the limitations of the catch-up conundrum and in turn, contribute to establishing a positive school community that is an important part of helping students to stay in school.

Recommendation 1: Support early childhood learning through increased funding for Head Start and/or other grants for preschool.

RELEVANT LEARNING

While I know that all of AASA's members embrace the need for schools to be held accountable, I also know that few agree that the current practice of determining school quality on an annual test in math and language arts is appropriate. Due to the pressure for positive test results, many high schools are limiting course offerings in content areas with a real-life application, e.g., Career and Technical Education (CTE), to instead focus on language arts and math. The consequence of this approach is that students may deem school that is lacking in these courses to be irrelevant to their lives. It is ironic then, that a school's well-intentioned effort to make AYP may indirectly contribute to a lower graduation rate. A solution for how to maintain school accountability and also improve graduation rates is to allow and then encourage States to redefine their accountability plans to include assessments that test the application of work readiness skills. Alaska's Career Ready Certificate is an example of one such assessment that would serve this purpose. This broadening of academic focus could well help students to maintain their interest in school. A State's accountability plan with a tiered assessment system that measures academic basic skills for elementary students and applied skills for secondary students would cause schools to expand their curriculum offerings and thus help to address this oft-cited problem of school not being connected to real life.

Recommendation 2: With the reauthorization of NCLB, allow States, as part of their accountability plan, to include an assessment of work readiness skills.

Schools across Alaska are at varying stages of offering Career and Technical Education (CTE). As we plan for how best to prepare our students for a highly technical world of the future, it is imperative that we do more in the area of CTE. The Federal Government can help districts to expand their offerings and in some cases rethink what CTE can be, by increasing the Carl Perkins funding and relaxing some

¹ Stanley, K.R. and Plucker, J.A. (2008). Improving High School Graduation Rates. *Education Policy Brief, Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, 7 (6), 1-11.*

of the Act's compliance requirements. At present, most of the small districts in Alaska qualify for such a small amount of Perkins funds, that their impact is minimal.

Recommendation 3: Increase Carl Perkins funds to help schools provide applied learning opportunities.

INTELLECTUAL CHALLENGE

When examining traits of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District's dropouts, the district's administration was surprised to discover that many of this group scored at the proficient or advanced level on the State's required assessments. The cited research found this to be common among many of the Nation's dropouts. One can infer that these capable students are dropping out because they are disenfranchised with school and not because school is academically too difficult. The traditional way of accommodating such students is to offer an alternative or optional program places an emphasis on collaboration and projects. The Federal Government can help districts establish such programs through grants that provide the needed start-up money. Federal support should also be made available to support innovative programs that are helping students graduate and to then go on to college. Project Grad is one such program that deserves Federal money; it is having success with Kenai Peninsula Borough School District's students.

Recommendation 4: Offer Federal support for innovative alternative programs that follow a rigorous curriculum.

For the past several years all of us in education have heard that our high school graduates are not prepared for postsecondary schooling or for the world of work. Many of the remedies for this problem include implementing national standards with high quality assessments and making work readiness training a mandatory part of high school. Although these proposed solutions would likely raise the level of academic achievement and lead to more success for the entering workforce, they may not help the students who are at risk of not graduating. I believe that a way to both increase graduation rates and ensure greater postsecondary success is for schools to employ a more strategic use of technology. While the use of technology for school administration has blossomed in the past 10 years, I don't believe that the technological component of instruction has followed suit. That is, much of the use of this medium is little more than an electronic transfer of written information and not, as is needed in the world of work, a way to creatively solve problems. The Federal Government, with private industry as a partner, should offer schools a clear roadmap and support for how to train staff so that they are better able to teach problem solving with technology skills. With Federal guidance and continued strong fiscal support through the Schools and Libraries Program and other Federal funds, schools can realize this needed instructional improvement.

Recommendation 5: Ensure that the Schools and Libraries Program funding is not reduced and provide grant monies for training teachers in how to provide instruction that utilizes innovative problem solving.

In closing, I want to thank you for your past and on-going commitment to improving the education of our Nation's students. The members of the Alaska Association of School Administrators welcome the opportunity to work with you in pursuit of the goals of increasing graduation rates and improving postsecondary success.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DIANE BARRANS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALASKA COMMISSION ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input relative to what the Federal Government can do to improve high school graduation rates and postsecondary success in Alaska.

As you are aware, the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) is Alaska's State higher education agency, charged with increasing Alaskans' access to the benefits of higher education. To meet that mission, ACPE provides our State's citizens with AlaskAdvantage Programs, a suite of programs and services that provide:

- Outreach to underserved populations, and early awareness of and preparation for higher education;
 - Financial aid for postsecondary education and training;
 - Advocacy for Alaska colleges and postsecondary career education opportunities;
- and
- Education consumer protection through institutional authorization and consumer complaint investigation.

The Alaska Student Loan Corporation (ASLC), a public corporation and instrumentality of the State of Alaska, finances these core programs and services which comprise the AlaskAdvantage Programs. By leveraging the receipts and income of this State enterprise agency in this way, Alaskans benefit from ACPE's services and programs without appropriations from the State General Fund.

Through participation in the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP), ASLC is able to further leverage its programs with Federal lender payments to offer Alaska's students the lowest cost financial aid packages in the Nation. In the 7 years since joining FFELP in 2001, ASLC has provided Alaska borrowers with over \$21 million in cumulative education loan cost savings. Additionally, program economies of scale leveraged through FFELP participation allow ASLC to fund the AlaskAdvantage Education Grant program, which annually provides over 500 needy Alaska students with grants of up to \$2,000.

Along with financial aid, ACPE offers outreach and early awareness programs and services intended to increase Alaskans' awareness of the importance of academic preparation and financial planning to ensure both access and success in postsecondary education. ACPE seeks to provide every *State* resident with informational tools to understand that postsecondary education is vitally important and possible for all Alaskans—regardless of their economic or social status.

Most recently, when Alaska was faced with the loss of its Career Information System (AKCIS), ACPE was able to leverage ASLC resources to make this vital tool available to all Alaskans at no charge, including all teachers, counselors, and student mentors in Alaska. AKCIS is an interactive, Alaska-centric Web-based tool that "connects the dots" between academic preparation, higher education, and career success.

There remains, however, much more to be done. Alaska has the lowest college-going rate among its youth of any State in the Nation; a high-school dropout rate of 48 percent, and the second highest unemployment rate in the Nation among its high-school dropouts. Of even greater concern, the fastest growing population segments in Alaska are those with the lowest family income, lowest graduation and highest unemployment rates. Unless we take efficient, effective, and timely action, the demands on Alaska's social service and public facilities will take a tremendous toll on our State support infrastructure, especially during this time of nationwide economic retraction.

To address this issue, ACPE commissioned a study by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), and identified a three-pronged, cost-efficient strategy leveraging existing programs to create new partnerships and expand program reach. However, erosion of partnerships with Federal programs puts these opportunities at risk.

The most important thing the Federal Government can do to improve high school graduation rates and postsecondary success in Alaska is to thoughtfully support state-focused programs such as FFELP that leverage Federal/non-Federal partnerships in ways that expand our joint reach without expanding our individual costs. Legislation and programs that recognize the value-added services of non-profit/state agency FFELP participation provide clear positives for our shared State citizen customers, allowing us to customize Federal program benefits to make them Alaska-centric and specific to our Alaska students' unique needs.

I urge Congress to develop and support State-Federal partnerships which are inherently state-centric and flexible to ensure knowledge of local cultures and issues inform the design and delivery of services, but which are also accountable for demonstrating both efficiencies and effectiveness. State-Federal partnerships leverage the efficiency of national initiatives and apply that national agenda and model in ways that increase effectiveness by adapting delivery to the specific needs of each State's varied and diverse target populations. Specifically, Congress should provide assistance, relative to the current liquidity crisis, for state-based FFELP lenders, such as ASLC, that are committed to originating and servicing customers' loans throughout their lifecycle. This form of commitment to the students and borrowers we serve means that we may not sell these loans under the U.S. Department of Education's purchase program or any other.

On behalf of the members and staff of the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, I offer our thanks to Senator Murkowski for her efforts to address this critical State and national challenge.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DEBBIE BOGART, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ANCHORAGE'S PROMISE

We believe that the issues surrounding High School Graduation Rates and Postsecondary Success in Alaska and Nationwide can not be successfully identified or

addressed without first understanding the historical influences, cultural diversity and economic differences that impact the State of Alaska. These differences are deeply embedded within our communities and impacted by the services that our young people must receive in order to affect their ability to successfully engage socially, emotionally and academically.

Children and youth who attend school hungry, without adequate health care, or the support of a caring adult are significantly more at-risk of failure. Research completed by America's Promise Alliance, *Every Child, Every Promise*, shows a strong correlation between children who experience what the Alliance calls the "Five Promises" and their ability to become successful adults. These *Five Promises* are caring adults, safe places, a healthy start, effective education, and opportunities to help others. Research shows that the more support youth have, both inside and outside the classroom, the more likely they are to stay in school. "We must invest in the whole child, and that means finding solutions that involve the family, the school, and the community." (*Grad Nation Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle The Dropout Crisis*, 2008.)

Investing in the whole child and providing support inside and outside the classroom requires that as a state Alaskans be allocated fiscal support, given dedicated staff time and guidance in strategic planning to develop a detailed understanding of why our students are dropping out. This includes building an even stronger alliance among educators, community-based program services, and postsecondary education to convey to our communities that the dropout crisis is a real and significant problem, one that affects the whole community, but it is solvable with sufficient community effort and foresight and is dramatically impacted through the support youth receive both inside and outside the classroom.

The Alliance for Excellent Education reports that:

- Approximately **4,100** students did not graduate from Alaska's high schools in 2007.
- If Alaska's high schools graduated all students ready for college, the State would save almost **\$672 thousand** a year in community college remediation costs and lost earnings.
- The lost lifetime earnings in Alaska for that class of dropouts alone are more than **\$1.1 billion**.
- Alaska would save more than **\$57.2 million** in health care costs over the lifetimes of each class of dropouts had they earned their diplomas.
- Alaska's economy would see a combination of crime-related savings and additional revenue of about **\$19 million** each year if the male high school graduation rate increased by just 5 percent. (February 2008)

Research is strong, to meet the needs of our young people, we can no longer work independently to address the issues that are surmounting and rapidly growing beyond the point of being out of control. As a nation and as a state, we must work together to identify and address the needs of our young people. We must work together to provide strong supports both inside and outside the classroom.

Our ability to identify solutions and build successful partnerships between schools and community services can be accomplished through strong alliances, and with an adoption of a collective mission, one that is directed towards addressing the needs of the whole child.

As an organization whose mission is to build on the collective power of local and State partners to align services for youth people, fulfilling *the Five Promises*, we are recommending that through Federal support, the following three focus areas could impact the lives of Alaska's young people and make a substantial difference in improving high school graduation rates and postsecondary success. These recommendations are substantiated through national research and through the collaborative work that our organization has been involved in locally and across the State of Alaska.

Addressing the current level of Medicaid and SCHIP funding that Alaska receives. Moving forward not only in adopting new legislation, but increasing funding that would provide additional support to our State, providing medical coverage for children who desperately need health care. Currently, Alaska has approximately 18,000 children who are uninsured and another 22,227 who receive services through the State Children's Health Insurance Program (Denali KidCare). Across the Nation, 47 million Americans lack health insurance, 9 million are children. (Center on Budget and Policy, 2008). While healthcare coverage is a nationwide issue, it is an issue that impacts the success of each young person, and their ability to thrive and remain healthy. Without preventative care and health care coverage, Alaska's youth are at risk of failure physically, mentally and emotionally.

Uninsured children are much less likely to receive treatment for easily curable conditions that can affect long-term health as well as performance in school.

“From 2006 to 2007, the number of America’s children that live in poverty grew by nearly half a million. Indeed in 2007, the child poverty rate reached a level, 18 percent, not seen in this country for more than a decade. Furthermore, the number of children who live just above the poverty line (between 100 percent and 125 percent of the Federal Poverty Level) also grew by about 100,000 children from 2006 to 2007. All told, last year more than 13.3 million children in America were living in poverty with an additional 4.3 million living just above the poverty line.” (First Focus, 2008).

Within the State of Alaska, 182,788 children, 11 percent, live in poor families with an average income of \$21,200. Thirty-seven percent (21,484) of Alaskan children under the age of 6 live in low-income families and thirteen percent (7,712) live in poor families. Fifty-three percent (29,464) of low-income families and seventy-eight percent of poor families are headed by single parents. Seventy-three percent (6,322) of children whose parents do not have a high school degree live in low-income families, while 36 percent are among poor families. (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2008)

Current legislation and levels of funding both at the Federal level and within our State must be addressed. Additionally, access to health care, expansion of provider services, reimbursement of costs to the provider and out-of-pocket expenses expected by caregivers must become transparent and fluid to allow for greater coverage and access to health care for Alaska’s children.

Increasing the number of safe places our children and youth can access before and after school, during vacations and holidays. Addressing and solving issues that limited the amount of time local schools are open and available for community use, especially for children and youth. Every school day, when the last bell rings students are released back into the community. A far greater number of students are returning to homes without parent supervision, exploring unsafe places and engaging in activities that are poor choices.

Research provided through the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, David J. Shernoff and Deborah Lowe Vandell State, “We found that there were significant differences in the use of time and the quality of experience when students were at the programs compared to when they were elsewhere after school. While attending the programs, program youth reported spending a higher percentage of time in organized sports, academic and arts enrichment activities, and completing homework than when they were elsewhere. Students in other settings reported spending a good deal of time watching TV and eating or snacking after school. Students in programs rarely reported engaging in these activities. Students in other settings also reported being alone or in “self-care” a substantial percentage of the time. Not once did a student report being alone when at a program. (Youth Engagement and Quality of Experience in Afterschool Programs, Fall 2008). Engaging students in quality programs and services during the out-of-school time can have an even greater impact on the level of success socially as well as academically.

In Alaska there are 633 licensed providers with 17,189 slots available for children birth to age 12. (Child Care Connection, 2008). Unfortunately, annual fees for full time infant/toddler care are \$9,480, an increase from \$1,780 since 2005. (Alaska Department of Public Assistance; Child Care Assistance, 2008) In comparison, the annual cost of college tuition for a full-time resident student in Alaska is \$4,530 (University of Alaska Anchorage Web site, 2008). For a family of four with an annual income of \$21,200, the cost of licensed day care will most likely require a caregiver or parent to stay at home, use an extended family member for support or even rely on an older sibling to provide care before and after school so that one parent family members can work when children are not in school.

Afterschool programs provided by Campfire, Boys and Girls Clubs, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and faith-based community partners have increased the number of quality programs and services available for many of our school age children. However, there is still a great need for more options that are affordable and provide quality care. Through the support of local education, corporate, non-profit and government partners we can address this need and provide integrated support and opportunities for our youth to succeed.

In 1953, with the help of Michigan State University, a model we in Alaska and across the Nation fondly called “Community schools” quickly became the focal point for delivering a wide range of neighborhood services. Well coordinated and community active models evolved, that included providing opportunity for the entire community, not just the school and its after-hours recreation programs, to become a part of providing services for children, youth and families. This model was first brought to the attention of the Mott Foundation through a local educator, an indi-

vidual who saw a need, at a time when—economically—support for social programs, recreational services and extended education opportunities were not provided or even thought of. Often called the “Founder of Community Education,” Frank Manley was devoted to improving the quality of life for young people and adults through academic and recreational programs in schools.

As an early change agent, Mr. Manley’s work has continued to impact communities and citizen involvement. Utilizing public schools as a hub, community schools bring together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities—before, during and after school, 7 days a week. These partners work to achieve these results:

- Children are ready to learn when they enter school and every day thereafter.
- All students learn and achieve to high standards.
- Young people are well prepared for adult roles in the workplace, as parents and as citizens.
- Families and neighborhoods are safe, supportive and engaged.
- Parents and community members are involved with the school and their own life-long learning.

This past year, a Federal Act provided a limited number of grants to local partnerships, composed of local school districts and community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and other public/private entities, for purposes of coordinating at least three services at a school site, providing an exciting opportunity for those communities who received funding. Through expanded fiscal support, matched by both Federal and State dollars, communities across Alaska can work together to develop full service community schools that provide early childhood programs; literacy/reading programs for youth and families; parenting education activities; community service/service learning; job training/career counseling services; nutrition services; primary health and dental care; and mental health preventive and treatment services.

Supporting legislation and increasing funding within No Child Left Behind increases meaningful opportunities for elementary, middle school, high school and college-age youth that enables them to link and partner within their communities through service-learning and community volunteer opportunities. Service-learning is a philosophy, a pedagogy, and a model for community development that is used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and content standards. It is a strategy that can be adopted within the classroom and in community-based programs such as Campfire, Boys and Girls Clubs, Communities In School and through the 21st Century Community Learning Center programs. August 25, 2008—The National Youth Leadership Council released service-learning standards that came from a nationwide effort involving input from key stakeholder groups, including teachers, service-learning specialists, policymakers, administrators, and students. They are based on a body of research from the service-learning, education and youth development fields. They offer educators, schools, and community organizations a guide to ensure that service-learning can achieve the academic and civic engagement outcomes that this powerful teaching method promises. The K–12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice include eight standards that ensure high-quality service-learning experiences for all involved—teachers, students and include; meaningful service, link to curriculum, reflection, diversity, youth voice, partnerships, progress monitoring and duration and intensity.

Identify and define actions within language that can be interpreted and understood by all who are involved. The result of this will enable each community to rally around the issues that impact student success and will develop an understanding of the dimensions of the dropout challenges in our State. To develop an effective plan, one that will combat the high school dropout rates and prepare youth for advanced learning in and after high school requires strong partnerships, those that can make a lasting change.

For example, the Five Promises are the framework that align with the 40 Development Assets and provide a common language that often connects with organizational goals and mission statements found in most organizations that provide services for children and youth. Safe places, caring adults, healthy future, effective education and opportunities to serve are easily understood and can be aligned collaboratively to build coalitions and partnerships.

We can turn the trend if we remember that our communities are complex and diverse in social and economic representation, inclusive of different languages and level of education. Improving High School Graduation Rates and Postsecondary Success in Alaska and Nationwide requires the involvement of those who care about young people and are committed to helping make a lasting change.

Daily in our work with community partners, youth, educators and families, Anchorage's Promise understands the value of working within a collaborative environment to strengthen the power of the Five Promises for Alaska's children. Through the involvement and commitment of community partners we collectively provide opportunity each year for over 30,000 youth to become engaged in volunteer service and leadership opportunities that have enriched their own life and have provided valuable results within their own communities.

Annually, through the support of community partners, our organization has worked to provide an opportunity for the Five Promises to come alive during an event called KidsDay. A time when children are valued by all, are given an opportunity to explore and learn about positive choices and are engaged with at least one caring adult in exploring creative and fun activities. On this day as a community, Anchorage comes together to wrap support and services around children and young people. We believe valuing our children within our homes, community and schools is essential in building a foundation within which our young people can thrive and succeed as they grow and become mature, productive and caring adults.

"We must invest in the whole child, and that means finding solutions that involve the family, the school, and the community." (*Grad Nation Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle The Dropout Crisis*, 2008.)

As a nation, and as a state that values children, within our communities and in our homes we must work together to identify ways that we can improve, intensify, expand or significantly integrate existing efforts to provide the support that youth must have, both inside and outside the classroom that will encourage each student to stay in school and succeed in high school and postsecondary education.

ABOUT ANCHORAGE'S PROMISE

Anchorage's Promise, an affiliate organization of America's Promise, is a part of a national alliance made up of nonprofit groups, corporations, community leaders, charitable foundations, faith-based organizations and individuals. Through increasing awareness, advocating for children and engaging in local initiatives, we use the strength of our partnerships and our association with America's Promise, to more effectively and strategically bring the power of the Five Promises to Alaska's children—enabling them to have the resources they need to lead happier, healthier, more productive lives and build a stronger future. Founded in 2003, Anchorage's Promise has emerged as the largest and most effective mobilizer of youth-led activities in Alaska. Annually, Anchorage's Promise with support from partners touched the lives of 30,000 young people and their families throughout the State of Alaska.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE COOK INLET TRIBAL COUNCIL, INC.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Through the reauthorization process of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Congress has the opportunity and responsibility to expand upon existing models that lead to increased Alaska Native, American Indian, and *overall* student achievement.

2. The Alaska Native Educational Equity, Support, and Assistance Act (NCLB, Title VII, Part C) addresses the holistic educational needs of Alaska's first peoples, throughout the continuum from early childhood to postsecondary education. Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) has discerned through examination of Alaska's state-wide Adequate Yearly Progress data that when Alaska Native students are thriving in school, *all* students are thriving.

3. Through the funding provided by Alaska Native Educational Equity, Support, and Assistance Act, within the framework of NCLB, CITC demonstrates that a successful educational program integrates the following core elements:

- Rigorous curricula and high academic expectations,
- Innovative public-private partnerships,
- Positive youth development,
- Family/community involvement in education, and
- Culturally responsive practices.

Alaska's Vision of Success for its Native Students

In 2006, First Alaskans Institute (FAI) interviewed 45 Alaska Native leaders, legislators, state officials, school district staff, and community members to produce a report on *Alaska Native Student Vitality* that reflects the perspectives of Alaska's diverse educational stakeholders. In this report, FAI defined a successful Native student as **"one who can set and achieve goals because he knows his own worth and value, understands his responsibility to his community, and is prepared to pursue whatever life path he chooses."** CITC exhorts Congress to

reflect upon this vision of success for students across the Nation as it reauthorizes NCLB and charts the future of education in America.

THE CHALLENGE

The data is unassailable: far too many of our youth are dropping out of school, and even more youth leave our K–12 educational system ill-equipped to make meaningful life choices regarding their postsecondary education opportunities, their future careers, and their personal well-being. As Senator Murkowski noted on her Web site, this “limit[s] Alaska’s ability to develop its economy and limit[s] our Nation’s ability to compete on the world stage.”

Congress has already articulated the challenge and set forward some of the key ingredients needed for achieving success, as follows:

NCLB, TITLE VII, PART C, SEC. 7302. FINDINGS.

Congress finds and declares the following:

1. *The attainment of educational success is critical to the betterment of the conditions, long-term well-being, and preservation of the culture of Alaska Natives.*

2. *It is the policy of the Federal Government to encourage the maximum participation by Alaska Natives in the planning and the management of Alaska Native education programs.*

3. *Alaska Native children enter and exit school with serious educational handicaps.*

4. *The educational achievement of Alaska Native children is far below national norms. Native performance on standardized tests is low, Native student dropout rates are high, and Natives are significantly underrepresented among holders of baccalaureate degrees in the State of Alaska. As a result, Native students are being denied their opportunity to become full participants in society by grade school and high school educations that are condemning an entire generation to an underclass status and a life of limited choices.*

5. *The programs authorized in this part, combined with expanded Head Start, infant learning, and early childhood education programs, and parent education programs, are essential if educational handicaps are to be overcome.*

6. *The sheer magnitude of the geographic barriers to be overcome in delivering educational services in rural Alaska and Alaska villages should be addressed through the development and implementation of innovative, model programs in a variety of areas.*

7. *Native children should be afforded the opportunity to begin their formal education on a par with their non-Native peers. The Federal Government should lend support to efforts developed by and undertaken within the Alaska Native community to improve educational opportunity for all students.*

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

CITC is a tribal social service nonprofit organization in Anchorage, AK that works in partnership with the community to provide opportunities for Native people to fulfill their endless potential in four core areas: K–12 education; workforce development and employment; child welfare and family services; and recovery from addictions.

While CITC recognizes the tumultuous history of Native education in Alaska, and the residual apprehension or mistrust of schools that it may engender in our people, we also want to emphasize that **education is a traditional value that our Native community holds in high regard; we know that education is the key to our people’s success both now and into the future.** CITC is partnering with the U.S. Department of Education, the Anchorage School District, our students and families, and our community to ensure that our Native students receive a quality education that prepares and empowers them to set and achieve their life goals.

At CITC we believe that in order to achieve the desired academic outcomes and goals of NCLB, our schools must provide all students with educational opportunities that holistically strengthen and support youth as our most valued resources to be nurtured and developed—rather than using the dominant, deficit-based framework of viewing our students and their achievement as *problems to be solved*. **While all of CITC’s educational services target dropout prevention, we directly address this challenge through the concept of developing lifelong cultural, social, emotional, and academic success in our students.**

CITC respectfully submits these comments through the lens of our educational services, which we have found to be effective for Native students and, by extrapolation and as demonstrated by research, effective for all students.

CITC provides strengths-based, core content classes and supportive services to over 1,000 K–12 Native students and their families across the Anchorage School District. Our external evaluations indicate that **the longer students are involved in CITC’s educational services, the better their performance in school.** “Among the [Alaska Native/American Indian] students in [CITC’s educational services], less absences, higher GPA, higher Standardized Base Assessment test scores in reading and writing, and greater rates of graduation were related to more frequent participation in the program . . . With regard to changes in actual SBA test scores, students in the [CITC] Program improved markedly in their reading and math test scores, and these improvements were substantially greater for CITC than for non-CITC [Native] students.” (Excerpts September 22, 2007 letter from CITC external evaluator, Spero M. Manson, Ph.D; Professor and Head of American Indian and Alaska Native Programs; School of Medicine; University of Colorado Denver.)

CITC recommends that all early childhood, K–12, and postsecondary educational systems be firmly rooted in and accountable to the following core concepts:

- **Innovative Public-Private Partnerships**
- **Rigorous Curricula and High Expectations of Students**
- **Positive Youth Development**
- **Family and Community Involvement in Education**
- **Culturally Responsive Practices in the Classroom**

Innovative Public-Private Partnerships

The education of our youth is a shared responsibility that extends beyond our school systems’ purview; every community member has a role to play in contributing to the success of our youth. Now more than ever, we as a community must ensure that we are effectively leveraging our resources and aligning our educational and social services to best meet the needs of our people. Through CITC’s unique **partnership with the Anchorage School District (ASD), we have created a successful model for widespread community collaboration in Native education that can be replicated across Alaska and nationwide.** This collaborative relationship is designed to produce positive educational and social outcomes for youth while being mutually beneficial to all parties involved.

With **funding from the U.S. Department of Education (ED)**, CITC supplements the educational services offered within ASD by providing teams of CITC staff working in 10 ASD public schools. These schools are identified by ASD and CITC based upon high numbers of Native student enrollment and Native student achievement. CITC works with ASD leadership to establish a “school within a school” model for Native students in each location.

The CITC education teams are composed of:

- **Certified Teachers** are “highly qualified” per NCLB, and teach core content classes (in Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Physical Education) for Native students in ASD. These teachers are trained in Native traditions and learning styles, and they integrate Native culture into the content and the methodology of their classes.

- **Assistant Teachers** provide individualized instruction and tutoring, homework assistance, small group instruction, after school activities, family activities and communication, curricula development, field trip coordination, and other associated educational duties. The Assistant Teacher position is a stepping stone for aspiring teachers to develop their classroom skills within a supportive environment.

- **Family Advocates** serve as a culturally responsive bridge of ongoing communication between home and school, helping families to advocate for their child’s needs. They also refer students and families to other community resources.

- Academic Counselors assist students to stay on track for graduation from high school through individualized education, career, and life planning.

Overall, ED provides funding for CITC to hire 51 full-time educational professionals to ensure that Native students’ academic and social-emotional needs are met within the 10 ASD schools in which CITC has a presence. While CITC currently receives competitive grant funding from the ED Office of Indian Education and the ED Office of Safe and Drug-free Schools, **the majority of CITC’s educational funding (76 percent) is awarded through the Alaska Native Educational Equity Act. CITC relies on this funding stream to serve our students. We cannot overstate the importance of this funding to both CITC and to the entire State of Alaska.**

Beyond our foundational tripartite partnership amongst CITC, ASD, and ED, CITC cultivates numerous other partnerships that contribute to student success, such as:

- Within CITC, all departments collaborate to provide wrap-around services and opportunities for students and their families in employment and training, recovery, and child/family welfare;
- CITC partners with the University of Alaska Anchorage's highly lauded Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP) to provide ongoing high-end math and science tutoring to CITC youth, and to smooth the pathway for Native students to pursue postsecondary education and careers in science, technology, engineering, and math;
- CITC works with the Alaska Native Heritage Center to provide cultural trainings for staff and special events for students and/or the community at large;
- CITC students produce multimedia public service announcements and documentaries for public events and other social service entities, including: Covenant House's Candlelight Vigil for Homeless Youth, Alaska Native/American Indian Heritage Month, Anchorage Youth Court, Alaska Native/American Indian Aids Awareness, among others;
- CITC students work with Koahnic Broadcast Corporation to produce public radio pieces for distribution nationwide through *National Native News*; CITC students produce a live, weekly radio show on the University of Alaska Anchorage's radio station, KRUA; and CITC staff members regularly serve as featured guest panelists on the nationally syndicated *Native America Calling*; and
- CITC's educational services partners with numerous other individuals and social service organizations across Alaska and the Nation to ensure that we are collectively identifying, responding to, and meeting the needs of our youth and their families.

In addition to our ongoing outreach and sharing within the Anchorage community, over the past year **CITC has been invited and/or selected to present our innovative educational partnerships at the following local and national educational events:**

- Bilingual Multicultural Education and Equity Conference in Anchorage, AK;
- Office of Indian Education *Partnerships for Indian Education: Students—Schools—Family—Community* Annual Conference in Rapid City, SD;
- Office of Indian Education Annual Grantee Meeting in Washington, DC;
- National Indian Education Association Annual Conference in Seattle, WA; and
- White House *Compassion in Action Roundtable* in Washington, DC.

Rigorous Curricula and High Expectations of Students

Educational leaders set the tone within schools, and teachers set the tone within classrooms for expectations regarding student achievement. **All educators must fully believe and embrace the core concept that all students can learn;** however, unintentional biases and/or cultural misunderstandings can lead to low expectations for student achievement, especially for Native students. **When students feel respected and supported in the classroom, they are willing and capable of rising to and exceeding the academic expectations that are set for them.** As a result, educators must intentionally examine and re-think the common and inaccurate presupposition that Native students will not fare as well in class as their non-Native counterparts because *that's what the data has tended to demonstrate*.

Academic rigor is key not only to our students' performance on standardized tests for Adequate Yearly Progress, but also to their ability to become critical thinkers and contributing members of their communities. **All of CITC's core content classes follow established curricula and meet or exceed district and State standards.** CITC is proud to offer both basic and *advanced* math, science, and language arts classes, and we strive to cultivate intellectual curiosity and commitment to citizenship within a global context in all our students.

Positive Youth Development

Often referred to as "soft skills," **positive youth development and the social-emotional learning that it brings about are the foundational skills for students' success in school and in life.** The Search Institute is a leader in advocating for the power of positive youth development and its impact on student achievement and well-being. The Search Institute created a research-based framework of developmental assets, which are "positive factors in young people, families, communities, schools, and other settings that have been found to be important in promoting young people's healthy development. Search Institute's framework organizes 40 assets into eight categories: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity" (<http://www.search-institute.org/research/insights-evidence>). More information about developmental assets is available at www.search-institute.org/assets.

In their October 2003 publication *Insights & Evidence—Promoting Healthy Children, Youth, and Communities*, the Search Institute stated “New studies suggest that developmental assets play a significant role in students’ academic achievement across a wide range of students. In fact, **developmental assets appear to have as much or more influence on student achievement as other demographic factors and school reform strategies.** Thus, building developmental assets has great promise as a strategy for boosting student achievement.” (Quoted words are bolded by CITC.)

CITC builds positive youth development through developmental assets into all of its educational services. CITC education staff engages in regular professional development focused on positive youth development. Staff implements positive youth development strategies in our classes, and they inspire our students to create cultural analogies about positive youth development. Student analogies include the feathers on an eagle representing the developmental assets and the strengths students need to soar to success; the fibers of a basket representing a community uniting to support youth; and traditional subsistence fishing as a metaphor for the community identifying the inherent abilities and assets of students. CITC staff have participated in and presented at numerous Search Institute national conferences, sharing our culturally based approaches to utilizing the developmental assets framework as a means for improving student achievement and enhancing family involvement in education.

CITC is grateful to the Association of Alaska School Boards for their exemplary work in creating the assets-based publication *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style*. Also funded by the Alaska Native Educational Equity Act, AASB’s Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement (Alaska ICE) has provided all Alaskans with information, tools and assistance to work together and engage in the shared responsibility of preparing Alaska’s children and youth for the future. CITC’s educational services have been enriched by the work that Alaska ICE has done to incorporate place-based and culture-based knowledge into the Search Institute’s developmental assets framework, making it readily accessible and relevant to our Native students and families.

CITC also commends ASD for recognizing the critical need for accountability to positive youth development by adopting district-wide Social-Emotional Learning Standards and Benchmarks. ASD defines Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as “the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors. It is the process through which students enhance their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving in order to achieve important life tasks. Within the school setting, SEL can best be accomplished through a layered approach of skills lessons, infusion into the curricula and classroom practices, and an environment of safety, respect, and caring which models SEL values.” (http://www.asdk12.org/depts/SDFS/SEL/SEL_Standards.pdf) CITC uses ASD SEL standards in all of our classes.

Family and Community Involvement in Education

As research indicates, **family involvement in education is a strong predictor for student success in school.** CITC recognizes that parents and family members are our young people’s first and most important teachers—we *need* our families to help us with our educational services. When educators hear the term “family involvement,” they often think of the activities that can be done to involve parents in the school rather than involving schools with families. Throughout the school year, CITC provides meaningful outreach from the schools and opportunity for family involvement in our educational services:

- Each CITC school has a full-time Family Advocate dedicated to ensuring individualized opportunities for family involvement to the degree the family is able;
- Families receive regular communication (phone calls, home visits, mailings) from Family Advocates—and are able to call our staff anytime;
- Families are welcome in CITC classes to share their knowledge and experiences with students, and can just visit the classroom whenever they like;
- Families are encouraged to attend field trips and special events with students;
- Families are invited to monthly CITC cultural and academic family gatherings, trainings, potlucks, guest speakers, and pow wows;
- CITC welcomes family input and feedback from our families about our educational services at any time, and holds family focus groups twice yearly to learn how to improve our services; and
- CITC encourages and assists (through transportation services and incentives) families to attend important school events, such as registration and parent-teacher conferences.

Culturally Responsive Practices in the Classroom

Nationwide research as well as the Alaska Native/American Indian community have identified the need for improved cultural competence as a primary means to mitigating and alleviating the academic underachievement of Native students. CITC classes actively integrate Native culture in curricula, our classroom expectations are grounded in traditional Native values, and our teaching methodology reflects Native ways of teaching and learning. We provide students with a cultural sense of belonging within our core content classes.

CITC helps to resolve issues in cross-cultural education documented by the *Alaska Native Education Study: A Statewide Study of Alaska Native Values and Opinions Regarding Education in Alaska* (First Alaskan's Foundation, 2001). Key findings in the report are as follows:

- *Barriers to Native students' academic success in Alaska (Section 1, p. 3–4):*
 - Curriculum, learning materials and teaching styles do not relate to Native culture.
 - Ignorance of Native culture among teachers and other school staff.
- *Role of Language and Culture (Section 1, p. 4):* Currently, “classroom education is generally inconsistent with Native culture and a rural lifestyle. To close the divide between Western education and Alaska Native culture, experts and parents alike suggest that ‘Native ways of knowing’ will improve Native student’s success.”
- *Improving Education for Alaska Native Children (Section 4, p. 19):* Alaska Natives value education and want schools to be more relevant for Alaska Native students, as illustrated by their ranking of the following contributing factors: (1) parent involvement, (2) better teachers, (3) more Native teachers, (4) Native culture classes, (5) increased academic challenges, and (6) communication with teachers.

The Northwest Regional Laboratory (February 2003) study, *A Review of the Research Literature on the Influences of Culturally Based Education on the Academic Performance of Native American Students*, supports the role of family and culture in education and includes the following findings:

- *Introduction (Section 1, p. 4):* Jerome Bruner (a pioneer in cognitive development) states that “. . . culture shapes mind . . . it provides us with the tool kit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conceptions of ourselves and our powers” (Bruner, 1991).
- *Definitions of Culturally Based Education Interventions (Section 2, p. 7):* Culturally based education programs have six critical elements:
 1. Recognition and use of Native American languages.
 2. Pedagogy that stresses traditional cultural characteristics, and adult-child interactions.
 3. Pedagogy in which teaching strategies are congruent with the traditional culture and ways of knowing and learning.
 4. Curriculum that is based on traditional culture and that recognizes the importance of Native spirituality.
 5. Strong Native community participation (including parents, elders and other community resources) in educating children and in the planning and operation of school activities.
 6. Knowledge and practice of the social and political mores of the community.

These key Native education studies combined with findings from CITC’s education programs, inform the building blocks for CITC’s academic enhancement and drop-out prevention efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONGRESS

Echoing Alaska’s vision of success for its Native students, CITC and its Native community want Native students and *all* students to set and achieve goals because they know their own worth and value, understand their responsibility to his community, and are prepared to pursue whatever life path they choose. In order to do so, CITC submits the following recommendations:

First and foremost, CITC exhorts the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee and Congress at large to continue to support and to further strengthen the Alaska Native Educational Equity Act language within NCLB. The funds provided through NCLB Title VII, Part C are important to CITC and to *all* of Alaska. Alaska’s educational system perpetually faces funding challenges, which are compounded by the increasing energy crisis that Alaska faces. Approximately 80 percent of Alaska’s communities are remote/rural and lie off of the “road system,” meaning that they rely upon petroleum products for heating, electricity, and transportation—as a result, many rural school districts

are struggling to keep their doors open. **These funds allow for an intentional focus on educational innovation and excellence beyond the operating costs of schools; they fill the gaps in Alaska's educational systems, with 54 current grantees providing critical educational services ranging from early childhood through postsecondary education.** If these funds were continued and increased, Alaska could experience even greater student success and achievement. We remind Congress of the importance of the purpose of this funding through Congress' own language:

NCLB, TITLE VII, PART C, SEC. 7303. PURPOSES.

The purposes of this part are as follows:

1. *To recognize the unique educational needs of Alaska Natives.*
2. *To authorize the development of supplemental educational programs to benefit Alaska Natives.*
3. *To supplement existing programs and authorities in the area of education to further the purposes of this part.*
4. *To provide direction and guidance to appropriate Federal, State and local agencies to focus resources, including resources made available under this part, on meeting the educational needs of Alaska Natives.*

Second, CITC also recommends that Congress increase the support of and direct accountability to the aforementioned key areas of educational systems (Innovative Public-Private Partnerships, Rigorous Curricula and High Expectations of Students, Positive Youth Development, Family and Community Involvement in Education, and Culturally Responsive Practices in the Classroom), requiring educational systems nationwide to demonstrate their proficiency in these areas as part of their NCLB reporting requirements. This broad-ranging accountability is also essential at the State, district, school, and classroom levels to ensure that teachers are utilizing individualized, culturally relevant, differentiated instruction and multiple forms of assessment to more accurately gauge and support holistic student achievement.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BEVERLY PATKOTAK GRINAGE, PRESIDENT,
ILISAGVIK COLLEGE, BARROW, AK

Today, Native American college graduation rates are the lowest of any racial or ethnic group in America. As president of the only Alaska Native-controlled College in Alaska, and the only recognized tribal college in the State, I would like to provide the committee with a rural Alaska Native perspective on this issue. Everyone involved in education in Alaska is numbingly familiar with the dismal educational statistics of rural Alaska, especially among Alaska Natives.

“ . . . the Education Department data show that Native American students are less likely than other students to be enrolled in or to graduate from college,” (*inside highered.com/news/2005/08/26/indian*).

The same report shows Native Americans with a Bachelor's degree comprising the lowest of all ethnic or racial groups at 15 percent, as compared to the national average of 45 percent. Native American faculty members make up less than 1 percent of the total in higher education facilities.

Alaska Natives and Native Americans are being left behind. One of the ways to improve postsecondary success in Native Americans both in Alaska and nationwide is through tribal colleges. According to Paul Boyer, in *Native American Colleges*, “Research, site visits, accreditation reports, and government audits all confirm their effectiveness. . . . Their impacts are real. . . . More than any single institution, they are changing lives and offering real hope for Native American communities.” A 2007 report from the Institute for Higher Education Policy supported these findings about tribal colleges by stating, “They are the driving force for economic and social development in Native American communities.”

Dr. Gerald Gipp stated that with over 27,000 students enrolled today in 36 tribal colleges across the United States and one in Canada, other tribal nations have shown great interest in joining this movement. (*Tribal College Journal*, Fall/Winter issue 2005). In 2006, Ilisagvik College took great pride in achieving recognition by the Bureau of Indian Affairs as the only tribally controlled college in Alaska.

Nearly 40 years after the first tribal college was established, the challenges faced by Native American communities continue to be immense.

The challenges faced by the Inupiat of the North Slope and Ilisagvik College are nearly identical to those faced by Native Americans through the country. And the forces that gave rise to tribal colleges throughout the United States are identical to that which created Ilisagvik College. Local leaders saw the need for a regional postsecondary institution where the emphasis was on culturally appropriate instruc-

tional programs that would strengthen Inupiat language, culture, values and traditions.

“The precursors to Ilisagvik College—Inupiat University, the North Slope Higher Education Center, the Arctic Sivunmun Ilisagvik College—and Ilisagvik College were all created to serve the residents of the North Slope Borough who did not have access to the higher education provided by the University of Alaska and others like it.” (Dr. Edna MacLean, former Ilisagvik College president). She said the hope was that Inupiat people would come to the college for geographical, linguistic and cultural reasons, as well as the fact that they simply did not have ready access to the State university system in Alaska.

Long-time Inupiat leader Oliver Leavitt stated in a December 2006 meeting that Ilisagvik was created for the 70 percent of Inupiat who could not leave home for a variety of reasons to get a college education. Leavitt was on the NSB Assembly when it approved the creation of Ilisagvik in 1995.

Former Mayor George N. Ahmaogak, Sr. explained that he fostered the establishment of the college because it was his moral responsibility to do so. He also felt compassion for people who desperately needed the training and education Ilisagvik could provide in order to obtain employment near to their homes and culture.

TCU's were patterned after the community college model, because they most closely matched the needs of tribal members. This does not mean that the TCU's look and act like mainstream (non-Indian) community colleges. Their first loyalty is to their tribal members and nations. They pass on Native culture and values, and their mission is to rebuild tribal nations and create stronger nations. (Boyer). Boyer went on to say that in many ways, TCU's do follow the model of community colleges. Like community colleges, TCU's also have a policy of open admission; they provide jobs training; they are local, thus providing easy access; their programs are relevant to the workforce needs of local employers; and many provide basic skills upgrades in their missions. (Capturing the Dream).

Like other tribal colleges, Ilisagvik provides a wide range of support services to its students. These services range from tutoring, student advocates who contact every student regularly, pre-college math and English courses, student transport services, a full-time cultural resources specialist and a dorm parent. This approach is supported by research from other tribal colleges. “Success often depends on the institution's ability and commitment to provide access to those who aspire to enter college; provide financial, social, and academic support while the students are enrolled; and help provide opportunities to those who have finished their degrees,” (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2007).

Tribal Colleges and Universities are the most poorly funded institutions of higher education in the country. But despite this, tribal colleges create community-based miracles every day. They also developed their own data system for maintaining accountability to Federal agencies, their communities, and their students. Although Alaska Natives and Native Americans lag far behind all other ethnic minorities in college graduation rates, tribal colleges currently serve 27,000 students whose presence in an institute of higher education is the best hope to change the current dismal statistics.

The most critical issue facing us is the need to secure full funding for our operations. Establishing forward funding is also a priority. Tribal colleges are the ONLY schools funded by the Department of Interior that are not forward funded, and this means that our institutions must endure extensive funding delays each fiscal year due to the often late congressional passage of the appropriations bill and a very slow administrative process. Even if we were funded immediately at the start of the fiscal year, we still would not receive funding until a month or more after the school year begins. We are asking for a one-time investment of only about \$45–\$50 million. This would have an impact for years to come, and would be tremendously beneficial to all tribal colleges and Native Americans.

We need support for remedial/developmental education programs, student support services, high school/college bridge programs, facilities, and preservation/revitalization of Native Language programs. In all of these areas and more, we need programs specifically funded and designed for Tribal Colleges. This country as a whole cannot move ahead unless all its members move ahead also. And without support for these programs, our residents are definitely being left behind.

We also need your commitment to work with the Tribal Colleges and AIHEC in re-writing and implementing the Executive Order on Tribal Colleges and Universities.

We need funding and assistance with our distance delivery education technology. Distant delivery education technology is a major avenue for bringing

education to even the remotest of sites in a cost-efficient manner. We have seven outlying villages on the North Slope that depend on this technology and some go without Internet access for up to 4 months at a time. This disruption in service greatly hampers our ability to educate and train our people.

The need for local Alaska Native teachers is reaching a desperate level. This is a problem we are currently working on without support from the Federal or State governments. Out of the 196 certified teachers employed in our schools on the North Slope, only three (3) are Inupiaq. Our children need teachers who understand them and their lives and culture. They need teachers who will be there year after year, integrated into the very fabric of the community and not teachers who come and go on a yearly basis. If our children are to succeed in life, they must start this success in the very earliest years of their education. We need Alaska Native teachers instructing Alaska Native students.

Tribal Colleges are an integral part of the Nation's higher education system and have demonstrated marked success in educating Native Americans. With Iisagvik College achieving Tribal College status, Alaskan Natives are now being served by a tribal college as well. Tribal colleges have been consistently under-funded. This means their financial soundness remains tenuous at best. Although new colleges achieve tribal college recognition from time to time, as Iisagvik did in 2006, appropriations do not recognize this expansion with additional funds. Thus appropriations for the existing colleges become more and more stretched to meet an ever-expanding roster of tribal colleges. There is a need for a major infusion of operating funds for all these institutions, including Iisagvik.

We are the best hope for the future of Native Americans in this Nation. We need more than your moral support and good intentions. We need your financial support in an ongoing, steady and immediate fashion so that we can continue to serve one of the most underserved ethnic groups in our Nation today.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DENISE GREENE-WILKINSON, BOARD MEMBER, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Chairwoman Murkowski and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share recommendations regarding high school improvement and postsecondary success. My name is Denise Greene-Wilkinson, and I am the principal of Polaris K-12 School in Anchorage, AK, where I have served for 14 years. Today, I am appearing on behalf of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, where I serve as a member of the NASSP Board of Directors, as well as, a member of the Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals. In existence since 1916, NASSP is the national voice for middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and aspiring school leaders from across the United States and more than 45 countries around the world. Our mission is to promote excellence in middle level and high school leadership.

IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

Many reports have been issued in the past few years that reveal deep problems with the achievement levels of U.S. high school students as well as low graduation and college attendance rates for low-income and minority students. More often than not, these low rates can be traced back to the large numbers of students entering high school reading below grade level. In addition, the vast majority of high schools have a climate of anonymity where little focus is placed on identifying the personal learning needs of individual students and using such information to foster improved teaching and learning.

Improving education for all students is paramount to strengthening our democracy and preparing our Nation to compete in today's global marketplace. To that end, it is quite necessary for the Federal Government to play an ongoing active and supportive role in improving the Nation's schools by encouraging reform and providing adequate resources to supplement improvement efforts at the State and local levels. The role of the Federal Government in education should be one of partnership with the States and local school districts to improve the overall quality of the Nation's schools and to ensure equal opportunity for all students.

Congress has an opportunity right now to provide middle level and high schools with the resources they need to ensure that every student graduates with the skills necessary for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. Positive proposals to amend current law include the Striving Readers Act, the Graduation Promise Act, and the Success in the Middle Act.

STRIVING READERS

NASSP urges Congress to authorize and expand the Striving Readers program for students in grades 4–12. This vital program will help ensure that the 6–8 million students reading below grade level receive the literacy interventions they need to earn a high school diploma.

Nationwide, 29 percent of eighth-grade students read “below basic” on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. These students, who are in the bottom quarter of achievement, are 20 times more likely to drop out than students at the top. That should come as no surprise. Low literacy prevents students from succeeding in high school in all subjects. And the National Center for Education Statistics found that 53 percent of undergraduates require a remedial reading or writing course. In addition, the National Association of Manufacturers reported that businesses spend more than \$60 billion each year on remedial reading, writing, and mathematics for new employees.

The Striving Readers Act (S. 958) would create a formula grant program for States based on poverty levels according to the U.S. Census. States would develop statewide literacy plans, and districts applying for the grants would use funds to create schoolwide adolescent literacy plans that met the needs of all students, including students with special needs and English language learners; provide professional development for teachers in core academic subjects; train school leaders to administer adolescent literacy plans; and collect, analyze, and report literacy data.

The goals of Striving Readers are very much in line with *Creating a Culture of Literacy: a Guide for Middle and High School Principals*, which NASSP released in 2005. This guide was written for principals to use as they team with staff members to improve their students’ literacy skills by assessing student strengths and weaknesses, identifying professional development needs, employing effective literacy strategies across all content areas, and establishing intervention programs.

Senator Jeff Sessions (R–AL) and Senator Patty Murray (D–WA) have been true leaders in adolescent literacy, and NASSP would like to thank them for their hard work in ensuring that the Striving Readers program has a permanent place in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

GRADUATION PROMISE FUND

NASSP is a national leader in high school reform and in 2004, created a framework upon which to improve our Nation’s high schools called *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*. The handbook offers successful research-based practices, real-life examples of high schools at various stages of reform, a step-by-step approach to lead change, obstacles to avoid, and resources from which to draw. NASSP offers *Breaking Ranks* for all high school principals, regardless of school size, geographical location, or where they are in the school improvement process.

High schools have historically been the forgotten stepchild of school reform efforts and, for far too long, have not received an adequate share of funding and other resources from the Federal Government. But successful high school reform requires real strategies and significant resources for implementing systemic improvement and raising individual student and schoolwide performance levels. This is why NASSP supports the Graduation Promise Act (S. 1185), which would support the development of statewide systems of differentiated high school improvement that focuses research and evidence-based intervention on the lowest performing high schools, and improves the capacity of the high schools to decrease dropout rates and increase student achievement. The bill would also provide competitive grants to States to identify statewide obstacles hindering students from graduating, and provide incentives for States to increase graduation rates.

SUCCESS IN THE MIDDLE ACT

Although much attention has been focused on high school reform, NASSP urges Congress to also address the more than 2,000 middle level schools that feed into the Nation’s “dropout factories”—those high schools graduating fewer than 60 percent of their students. High school reform will never succeed in a vacuum, and many of these middle level schools are in need of the same comprehensive whole-school reform that is offered to high schools under the Graduation Promise Act.

The future success of ESEA rests largely on the shoulders of middle level leaders, teachers, and students. Students in grades 5 through 8 represent 57 percent (14 million) of the Nation’s annual test takers under ESEA, but middle level schools are not receiving adequate Federal funding and support to help these students succeed. We recognize that the majority of districts choose to funnel their title I funds into

early childhood and elementary programs, and while we fully support continuing the drive to help students succeed in these grades, the needs of struggling students in our lowest-performing middle schools must not be ignored. If title I funds were distributed on the basis of student populations, middle level schools (representing 23 percent of the Nation's student population) would receive approximately \$2.92 billion of the current title I allocation. Yet, of the \$12.7 billion appropriated in fiscal year 2005 for title I, only 10 percent is allocated to middle schools.

Therefore, I strongly urge the committee to support the Success in the Middle Act (S. 2227), which was introduced last year by President-Elect Barack Obama. Under the bill, States are required to implement a middle school improvement plan that describes what students are required to know and do to successfully complete the middle grades and make the transition to succeed in an academically rigorous high school. School districts would receive grants to help them invest in proven intervention strategies, including professional development and coaching for school leaders, teachers, and other school personnel; and student supports such as personal academic plans, intensive reading and math interventions, and extended learning time.

NASSP believes the comprehensive middle level policy articulated in S. 2227 is necessary to address the realities that only 11 percent of eighth-grade students are on track to succeed in first-year college English, algebra, biology and social science courses (ACT, 2007), fewer than one-third can read and write proficiently, and only 30 percent perform at the proficient level in math (NAEP, 2005). Enacting the Success in the Middle Act hand-in-hand with the Graduation Promise Act would strengthen ESEA by providing the support necessary to turn around our Nation's lowest-performing middle *and* high schools and give our struggling students the help they need from pre-school through graduation.

GRADUATION RATES

As you know, the U.S. Department of Education released final title I regulations on October 28 that would require all States to report a national uniform graduation rate that defines the "4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate" as the number of students who graduate in 4 years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for that graduating class. The regulations would allow States to propose an extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate that includes students who graduate in 4 years or more with a regular high school diploma. Any States that choose to report an extended-year graduation rate would be required to submit to the department a description of how it will use an extended-year rate along with its 4-year rate to determine whether its schools and districts make adequate yearly progress.

NASSP has long advocated for a uniform formula to counter the confusion and inconsistencies in current graduation-rate calculations that make it impossible to compare State performance and blur any views of a nationwide graduation rate. However, we do have concerns that States may not choose to report an extended-year graduation rate or include the extended-year rate in the accountability system. Because not all students enter the 9th grade reading and writing at grade level, NASSP recommends that the graduation rate be extended to within at least 5 years of entering high school. We also feel very strongly that identified special-needs students who complete high school with a state-approved exit document should have until age 21, inclusive, to be counted as graduates as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Designating a 4-year timeframe within which students must exit and graduate from high school goes against what we know about student learning, especially for English language learners, and timelines designated by IDEA. In fact, we should be moving in the opposite direction by allowing students additional time to graduate if they require it without penalizing the school, or less time if they have reached proficiency.

Student performance should be measured by mastery of subject competency rather than by seat time. States that have implemented end-of-course assessments are on the right track and should be encouraged to continue these efforts. And ESEA should reward students who graduate in fewer than 4 years—which could encourage excellence—rather than simply acknowledge minimum proficiency, and the recognition of high-performing students could help schools that are nearing the target of 100 percent proficiency.

Ultimately, individualized and personalized instruction for each student must be our goal. NASSP has been a leader in advocating for such positive reform strategies through its practitioner-focused publications *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* and *Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform*.

PREPARING ALL STUDENTS FOR POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

In 2009, the NASSP Board of Directors will consider a position statement expressing our support for challenging graduation requirements and providing recommendations for Federal, State, and local policymakers to help schools ensure that all students meet those high standards.

The national conversation about graduation and dropout rates has all but ignored the individuals who obtain their high school diplomas but are not prepared to succeed in postsecondary education or the workforce. Those students are the near dropouts who earned enough credits to graduate, but have backgrounds similar to the 1.2 million students whom high schools “lose” annually. Data from the National Education Longitudinal Study indicates that only 21 percent of graduates from the lowest-income families are adequately prepared for postsecondary education, compared to 54 percent of graduates from middle- and high-income families.

In the absence of national standards—which NASSP supports—many States are already taking the initiative to improve academic content standards and raise graduation requirements for all students. The American Diploma Project, launched by the nonprofit education reform organization Achieve, helps States align their standards “with the real-world expectations of employers and postsecondary faculty in the increasingly competitive global marketplace.” Since 2005, 22 States have aligned their high school standards to meet those goals and an additional 10 States plan to do so by the end of the 2008–2009 school year.

But raising academic standards alone is not enough to ensure that all students, especially low-income and minority students, will graduate from high school and succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce. Supports must be in place to help schools ensure that all students achieve this goal.

NASSP recommends the Federal Government offer incentives for States and districts to develop graduation requirements that allow students to choose from multiple pathways to graduation, including career and technical education courses that are aligned with higher standards, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, dual-enrollment programs, and early college high schools. The Federal Government should also ensure that students have access to academic supports that will help them stay on track toward graduation. These supports could include counseling services that provide information and assistance about the requirements for high school graduation, college admission, and career success; targeted and tiered interventions for middle level and high school students who are falling behind; online learning opportunities; extended learning; job shadowing, internships, and community service; and in-school and community-based social supports, such as counselors, social workers, and mental health services.

Madame Chairwoman, this concludes my formal remarks. As the committee and Congress move forward on the reauthorization of ESEA, NASSP stands ready to work with you to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills to help them succeed in postsecondary education and the workplace.

Thank you again for this opportunity.

ALASKA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY,
ANCHORAGE, AK 99508,
October 30, 2008.

U.S. Senate,
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee.

DEAR MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE: I am very pleased that the committee is holding a field hearing here in Anchorage on November 15 on the important subject of improving High School Graduation and Postsecondary Success for Alaska students as well as all our Nation’s students.

I have prepared a list of recommendations that University of Alaska President Mark Hamilton may include in his presentation, and I would like them entered into the record of the hearing as well.

Dr. Douglas M. North, President of Alaska Pacific University, submits the following list of recommendations for improving High School Graduation and Postsecondary Success for Alaska students as well as all our Nation’s students:

1. Reduce class sizes allowing for more individualized attention.
2. De-emphasize standardized testing and use tests primarily as a diagnostic exercise to determine the learning needs of the individual student.
3. Emphasize stand-and-deliver forms of education where the students have to present work they have done to their peers as well as the teacher.

4. Increase project-based education and other creative teaching strategies to engage and enhance student curiosity and learning.
5. Reverse the ethic, especially among school-age males, that it is not cool to be smart or achieve academically.
6. Increase both challenge and support of students through more positively oriented individual conferences with teachers.
7. Measure school success in part by how many students want to, and love to, go to their schools.

Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to share these recommendations that have come from my 42 years as a postsecondary educator.

With sincere good wishes,

DR. DOUGLAS M. NORTH,
President, Alaska Pacific University.

BEST BEGINNINGS,
ANCHORAGE, AK 99501,
November 5, 2008.

Hon. LISA MURKOWSKI,
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee,
U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC 20510.

Subject: Improving High School Graduation Rates and Postsecondary Success in Alaska and Nationwide—What can the Federal Government Do?

DEAR SENATOR MURKOWSKI: Best Beginnings is a public-private partnership that emerged from growing concern among Alaskans that we aren't doing nearly enough to prepare children for school and life. Best Beginnings is mobilizing existing resources and organizations to build a statewide early learning system that Alaska so desperately needs. One of our most important roles is to engage, convene, and mobilize the myriad organizations with an interest in early learning. Best Beginnings is pursuing solutions to meet this challenge. Our efforts are in three areas.

Because parents are a child's first and most important teachers, Best Beginnings promotes early learning and literacy, family literacy, and education at home.

Because so many young children spend time in care away from home, Best Beginnings is a catalyst for making high quality child care and early learning programs affordable and accessible for all families that want them.

And because preparing children to succeed in school has such important implications for the whole State, Best Beginnings is promoting a cultural shift in Alaskans' attitudes. We will know this cultural shift has taken root when Alaskans insist on the investments to finance and sustain early learning.

THE PROBLEM

Alaska's children are being left behind. Too many Alaska children—about 40 percent—enter school unprepared to succeed. When children are not prepared for school, they rarely catch up later. Children who start school unprepared are less likely to finish high school, go to college, have the skills to get good jobs, and contribute to a thriving economy.

Lack of readiness contributes to low scores on standardized tests, poor performance on high school graduation qualifying exams, and high school dropout rates that are among the highest in the Nation.

Studies have shown that when infants and young children are given *appropriate, positive* learning experiences, they develop the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in school. A child's readiness for school is a strong indicator of how he or she will fare in life, generally. For this reason, economists say that investments in early learning yield huge returns to society as a whole. Quality early learning results in productive citizens, healthy families, and greater contributions to society.

We know what success will look like:

- Parents and extended families are fully engaged in children's learning right from birth;
- Built-in incentives for more and better programs and services;
- Appropriate pay for early childhood professionals;
- An early childhood infrastructure built on established standards; and
- High quality early learning programs that are affordable and accessible to all Alaskans who want them.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN EARLY LEARNING INTEGRAL TO ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Early education should be an integral component of America's economic recovery. Indeed, the current economic challenge makes public investment in early education even *more* critical. As a nation, we cannot afford to pass up the dividends that accrue from investing in high quality early education.

Decades of research on high-quality voluntary early childhood education have shown that a Federal investment in the early years now—not when we're in the black—would yield the following short- and long-term benefits:

- More 3- and 4-year-old children—still in the most critical stage of brain development in their lives—can attend programs that prepare them for school and for life;
- Family pocketbooks receive much-needed relief;
- States see a reduction in costly expenses for special education, remediation, criminal justice, and social services; and
- Our future workforce gains the foundational skills they will need to compete in the 21st century global economy.

Ensuring that children enter school ready to learn and succeed is fundamentally sound fiscal policy. Human capital is as important as any other form of capital we invest in as a society. To assure a strong economy, it is imperative to increase support for proven human capital strategies as much *because* of our current financial crisis as despite it.

SPECIFIC STEPS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CAN TAKE

- Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)/NCLB should include Pre-K in sections that provide Federal funding for school and teacher training. Congress should:

- Create a Federal incentive grant program to support and improve State Pre-K programs;
- Include high-quality Pre-K programs as an allowable instructional intervention available to States and local education agencies identified for improvement in title I;
- Include Pre-K teachers in academic training and professional development; and
- Help States include Pre-K in their longitudinal data systems designed to measure students' progress from Pre-K through college.

- Head Start and Child Care.—The 2007 reauthorization of Head Start adapted this landmark education program to serve the present needs of low-income children. As the Department of Health and Human Services prepares to implement the refurbished Head Start law, we recommend:

- The departments of Education and Health and Human Services share in responsibility to oversee coordination between Federal and State programs that support Pre-K and child care;
- Congress provide new funds for Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant to compensate for years of underfunding; and
- Provide funding for State Advisory Councils, as envisioned under the 2007 reauthorization.

- Rural Needs.—To ensure that every child has access to high-quality early learning experiences, we recommend Congress provide funding to support the growth of quality programs in rural areas, including home visiting programs.

Thank you for your attention to these vitally important issues.

Sincerely,

ABBE HENSLEY,
Executive Director.

[Whereupon, at 2:42 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

