

**CEAAC**  
**REGIONAL RESIDENTIAL LEARNING CENTER (RRLC) INITIATIVE**  
**REPORT BY JERRY COVEY**  
SEPTEMBER 2012

**OVERVIEW**

The RRLC Initiative was identified as a top priority and approved at the spring 2012 CEAAC meeting. The project is funded by CEAAC, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc., and Lower Kuskokwim and Alaska Gateway School Districts.

Work on the contract began in July and will continue through the remainder of the year and into the next legislative session. The project is focused on three specific outcomes.

1. To assist local school districts or a combination of districts that want to partner on the development of a RRLC.
2. To seek a change in state education regulations to provide residential stipend funding for RRLC programs that serve in-district students.
3. To increase the residential stipend for all residential programs.

**DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

The initial strategy was two-fold. It included assisting interested member districts with planning for a RRLC and simultaneously reaching out to Alaska Native leaders and Alaska Native organizations to build support for the program.

The second strategy of outreach has been modified to avoid creating unwarranted alarm over the perception by some that this is a move toward the re-establishment of the state boarding school program. As a result, my actions have been redirected to assisting school district administrators and RRLC advocates in their work with stakeholders, as they are in the best position to ensure accuracy of information regarding RRLCs and to engage parents, students, organizations, and local leaders in the dialogue and planning for a RRLC.

**RRLC VISITS/PRESENTATIONS**

**August 29: Governor's Rural Sub-Cabinet Advisory Group**

At the request of Gloria Oneill, President of CITC, Inc., I was invited to speak at the above referenced meeting. State agency participants included Commissioner Hanley, Commissioner Bell, Chris Simon (DEED), Mike Lesmann (Governor's office), and John Moller (Governor's rural advisor). Rural advisory representatives from all regions of the state were also present.

The presentation and discussion lasted 2.5 hours and explored the need, structure, finances, and impact RRLCs would have on educating rural high school students and Alaska Native students in large high schools. The group strongly endorsed the RRLC proposal and recommended that the Governor's Rural Sub-Cabinet support changes in education policy to support funding for the

program. Additionally, the group recommended that the residential stipend be increased to support actual education delivery costs.

### **August 31: Alaska Gateway School District**

AK Gateway School District hosted a lunch meeting for local leaders to provide them information about the RRLC concept and gather input regarding the viability of a RRLC for the school district.

#### **Meeting Notes**

Superintendent Poage welcomed the group and provided an overview of the purpose of the meeting.

Jerry Covey presented a slide show that explained the concept of residential programs at the district or regional level. The presentation included examples of school districts and nonprofit organizations working together to deliver such programs and made the case for state funding to support the programs.

Scott MacManus presented a brief overview of a conceptual model of residential delivery for Alaska Gateway School District. His presentation included a proposed curricular focus and included a brief overview of a residential dormitory located on school district property.

#### **Participant Comments** (approximately 15 local leaders attended the meeting)

- A residential school would take money from our village school and spend it at Tok, I'm against that.
- This meeting was not well advertised.
- I support this idea because it will keep our kids in our district versus them going away to boarding schools.
- Local people told me "don't go to the meeting, they want to take our kids away to boarding schools."
- The variable length of courses is a positive for us.
- Kids from the same village could come in together and stay together while at Tok High School.
- I support the district taking this presentation to the communities.
- Will this program meet the needs of high performing students as well as middle and low performing students? Not enough attention is given to the high performers in my community school.
- I support the idea because it keeps kids in our district and offers them education opportunities not available in small high schools.
- Let's get this going first for our own kids before we consider kids from other districts.
- I was really proud to hear a Doyon leader speak last year knowing that he was a graduate of Tok High School.
- Providing hands-on career and technical education would help many students.
- There was discussion about facility needs.

- Todd asked if there was enough interest from this group to support community meetings about the idea of a RRLC in Tok that would serve the district. Participants indicated they would support such meetings.

## **September 17: Lower Kuskokwim School District**

### **Overview**

Superintendent Gary Baldwin invited me to visit with district administrators and RANSEP students to learn more about LKSD's Rasmuson Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (RANSEP). This successful program was highlighted in the presentation to CEAAC members at the spring 2012 CEAAC meeting.

The visit included hearing directly from LKSD administrators about RANSEP on topics such as the strategies they used to design and implement RANSEP. It also provided me an opportunity to share information on the RRLC project.

### **Meeting Participants**

Gary Baldwin, Kurt Kuhne, Carlton Kuhns, Tad Lindley, Dan Walker, Janelle Vanasse, Jerry Covey

### **Comments**

- RANSEP is a hybrid program that keeps kids in the district and maintains the cultural connection.
- People for and against residential programs perpetuate the either/or argument when in fact RANSEP is not either/or – it's both.
- Everyone we met with regarding the development of this program wanted increased opportunities for kids.
- How to frame it – it's not a political compromise, it's finding the best of both systems.
- Kids in the RANSEP program play sports for their home team.
- Funding stays in the student's home school.
- Principals see the program as an investment.
- Get quotes from students and teachers.
- Kids that go away to statewide residential schools often wind up back here with no credit and find themselves behind their classmates.
- Rasmuson Foundation came to us and asked what they could do to help. The conversation with them included topics such as how can we deliver a quality education that provides outstanding academics and keeps our kids here, immersed in our local culture.
- How do we work around their desire to play sports for their village team?
- How do we ensure they graduate at home, provide programs with academic rigor, provide housing?
- The program has actually strengthened the curriculum and quality of classes at BRHS.
- Hub schools need numbers to increase their capacity and be efficient and effective.
- We need to get beyond the silo high school concept.

- Kids who go through RANSEP don't need developmental courses when they go to college.
- Our kids in RANSEP are not all academic high flyers.

### **Selected Quotes from RANSEP Students**

#### **Andrew Fairbanks from Newtok**

What does RANSEP mean to me? "It means that I have a chance to have a better future and a better life. When I hear about RANSEP I knew it was the best opportunity to get a better education and when you see an opportunity you either take it or let it slip away. I saw it and took it and here I am. When I first came to Bethel for school (BRHS), it was hard, but I wasn't alone. My friends were there for me and helped me with my work so what I liked about BRHS is that I get to learn new things and make new friends."

#### **Desiree Cleveland from Quinhagak**

What does RANSEP mean to me? "It means a lot to me to be in the RANSEP program. It gets me ready for college, being away from home, different classes, and you get to meet new friends. It's helping me reach my goal of becoming a doctor."

#### **Daniel Inman from Toksook Bay**

What does RANSEP mean to me? "Well if you had asked me that two years ago I would have said it was a fun diversion, but now it has become something so much more. RANSEP has become my education, no it's more than that, RANSEP is my life right now. If it wasn't for this program I don't think I would be in school right now. It has refueled my drive and motivation giving me a cause to finish my education and avoid the mistake of giving up. So I would have to say RANSEP means everything to me right now and I hope it remains the shining beacon it is."

#### **Alan Clark from Kipnuk**

"RANSEP is a great eye opener for any student who schooled in a village most of their lives. The challenges are a great way to wake yourself up from the stale classes of a village you have lived in for quite a long time now. The people are great too. If it weren't for the program I wouldn't have met all these unique individuals. And to live in Bethel for a semester, to see how the rural/urban environment shapes the inhabitants, is a very different experience. I am glad I was accepted to RANSEP."

**NEXT STEPS: SEPTEMBER – NEXT LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

1. Update the RRLC keynote presentation.
2. Continue to support local school district efforts to explore/develop a RRLC.
3. Present the RRLC keynote and have a question and answer session at the AFN Convention in October.
4. Explore opportunities to meet with interested CEAAC member school boards about RRLCs while they are in Anchorage for the AASB Conference.
5. Request an opportunity to present the RRLC keynote to the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development at their December 2012 meeting. The presentation will include an ask for the development of state regulations that provide residential stipend funding for district-based RRLCs.
6. Prepare draft legislation for submission to the legislature in January that raises the student stipend amount for all residential programs.
7. Prepare a final project report in mid-November that details interest in RRLCs and supports state regulatory and legislative changes as described above.

## **Regional Residential Learning Centers (RRLCs)**

### **Questions and Answers**

Updated September 21, 2012

While some students and families opt for statewide residential programs others do not. For parents and students who prefer education in their local district but desire improved education opportunities, CEAAC and Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc. are proposing the establishment of state policy that supports funding for district-based RRLCs.

The following question and answer sheet is intended to provide basic information about the establishment of RRLCs and to clarify that they will offer in-district learning opportunities for students attending small rural high schools.

#### ***1. What is a RRLC?***

It is a school program intended for students from small rural high schools that is located in a hub community with a large high school. RRLCs include housing for students.

#### ***2. What are the advantages of RRLCs?***

RRLCs offer the following advantages:

- a. They can offer advanced academics, fine arts, credit recovery, HSGQE preparation, language, culture, and workforce development courses to high school and junior high students.
- b. They can partner with employers, universities, tribal, nonprofit, and government entities to deliver programs small high schools cannot.
- c. They can operate year-round.
- d. The curriculum is determined locally to meet the needs of the students.
- e. They can serve displaced students by providing a stable learning environment.
- f. They may result in fewer students leaving their district to attend statewide residential schools.
- g. Students are able to stay in their district and maintain their cultural connections.

#### ***3. Who decides whether to have a RRLC?***

Students, parents, educators, and organizations would work with the local school district(s) to determine the programs to offer and then apply to the Alaska State Board of Education for program approval.

#### ***4. Is there a specific process to follow to establish a state-approved RRLC?***

Presently, there is not a process to seek approval for RRLCs.

CEAAC and Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc. are currently working with state policy makers to create the framework and funding stream that allows school districts

and organizations interested in RRLCs to develop a plan and seek approval from the Alaska State Board of Education to move forward with a RRLC.

**5. Who pays for the construction of residential facilities?**

Current district-owned residential facilities were initially constructed with private funds. Some residential programs recently received small-scale construction grants from the legislature to build residential facilities. School districts seeking capital project funding for residential facilities should contact their legislators.

**6. How would the operating costs for residential facilities be funded?**

The State of Alaska has a stipend program that supports residential costs for districts that have approved statewide residential programs. We are working with the state to extend the stipend program to include RRLCs.

High school residential programs are expensive to operate. In addition to residential funding, districts considering a RRLC will likely need other sources of revenue to sustain them. Current RRLCs rely on public and private-sector funding sources for their operations.

**7. Will RRLCs close small high schools?**

These programs are intended to augment the offerings of small rural high schools and may actually increase attendance as students decide to stay in their local district and enroll in a RRLC.

As long as minimum enrollments are maintained, decisions regarding small high schools would remain at the local level as they are now.

**8. How long would students be gone from their village high schools?**

That depends on local decision-making. Some current RRLCs offer short 1 to 4 week courses throughout the year, others offer semester long classes.

**9. What if parents don't want their kids to attend a RRLC?**

Decisions about requiring students to attend a RRLC are local.

**10. Will RRLC take money from our small high schools?**

Generally, the cost of delivering the curriculum is already figured into the costs of operating the school that would house the residential program. Specialty courses may result in additional fees.

**11. Is this a backdoor effort to recreate a state boarding school system or consolidate rural school districts?**

No. This is a grass roots effort to improve the quality of education available to students who attend small rural high schools.

**12. Can school districts and other organizations partner to establish a RRLC?**

Yes, we currently have examples of that in Alaska. The idea is to provide close-to-home delivery options for students.

**13. How can I learn more about RRLCs?**

Contact your district superintendent or organizational leaders and ask about RRLCs.

**14. How can I communicate my support for a RRLC?**

Contact your school district superintendent or organizational leadership and share your support in writing.

**15. Are any school districts or organizations currently operating residential programs other than the statewide residential high schools?**

Yes. Chugach School District operates a program called *Voyage To Excellence*, Lower Kuskokwim School District operates a program called *Rasmuson Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program*, and Bering Strait School District and Nome City Schools operate a program called *Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center*.