

CEAAC Three-Year Plan: Executive Summary and Table of Contents

Adopted April 12, 2012

INTRODUCTION / 1

This plan is intended to guide CEAAC as we transition from our history of focusing on two lawsuits into a future with inspiring new goals that will appeal to a broader base of support. The planning horizon is from the present to July 2015.

ONGOING/CONTINUATION INITIATIVES / 2

Kasayulie / 2

Implementing the Kasayulie settlement and spreading its benefits fairly will require intensive political effort over the next year. Goals include receiving full funding, providing benefits to small non-REAA districts, and applying mechanism funds to major maintenance projects.

Moore / 3

Implementing the Moore settlement will require intensive administrative effort over the next year. Politically, our highest goal will be to make the Moore programs permanent.

Organizational Development / 4

CEAAC must increase and broaden membership, decrease dues, and plan for succession of staff.

MAJOR NEW INITIATIVES / 5

Regional Residential Learning Centers / 5

Define and build support for residential centers in rural hubs that can offer programs beyond the capacity of village high schools, without further eroding support for those schools. Timeline: 2013

Education Research and Support Institute / 6

Create an institute for applied education research which can help districts understand problems and can provide technical support to solve them, flexibly expanding local capacity. Timeline: 2014.

Double UA Teacher Production / 7

Lead improvements at the University of Alaska to increase production of teachers and principals and to assure that graduates fit the needs of Alaska's school districts. Timeline: 2015.

AREAS OF SUPPORT / 8

CEAAC's agenda includes the following additional items, to be pursued through collaboration and by assisting other entities, or by using political opportunities that arise: Establish an at-risk factor in state funding formula; enhance rural technology, connectivity and distance learning; capture federal aid; expand pre-k and other Moore initiatives.

CEAAC Three-Year Plan

Adopted by the CEAAC Board of Directors April 12, 2012

Introduction

Since our founding more than 15 years ago, CEAAC has focused on using litigation to improve support for rural schools by the State of Alaska. In the last six months, settlement of both the Moore and the Kasayulie litigation have brought the organization to a new phase of its existence, with new opportunities and challenges.

Opportunities:

- Capacity freed up from litigation can be mobilized to address issues beyond the legal arena;
- Potential to attract supporters who previously avoided the conflict of litigation;
- Position of authority in the Moore settlement provides a new, more equal relationship with the Department of Education;
- Ability to choose new initiatives that will inspire new energy and support;
- Financial stability and ability to reduce the cost of membership with the reduction of legal costs and repayment by the State of Alaska of \$500,000 in Kasayulie expenses.

Challenges:

- Need to follow through on settlements to achieve success in the face of powerful opposition and difficult, long-term problems;
- Resistance and institutional inertia that make real educational advance difficult and time-consuming;
- Potential loss of direction without the focus of litigation;
- Sense of let-down that settlements did not solve all problems;
- Passing of leadership with Jorgensen and Trickey leaving center stage.

Purpose

This document is intended to guide CEAAC for three years, from the present, spring 2012, to July 2015. It provides a blueprint for CEAAC's program in order to direct our efforts and to communicate with potential members and outside constituencies who want to know about us and our priorities. Major new initiatives are prioritized and scheduled with milestones. Areas for support with less emphasis are listed as part of the legislative and public policy agenda depending on opportunities that arise.

Process

In February and March of 2012 CEAAC Executive Director Charles Wohlforth conducted a series of telephone calls and conference calls with 14 out of 22 CEAAC members. He produced an agenda of ideas drawn from the Moore and Kasayulie cases and settlements, with other issues nominated by members and others in the Alaska education community. Small-group and one-on-one discussions elicited responses from members to form a picture of which initiatives would be most practical to achieve, beneficial for districts, and significant in improving education of Alaska students. (Notes are available upon request.) Wohlforth then compiled these responses into this draft plan, to be presented to the full CEAAC board April 12, 2012.

In addition, the small-group discussions covered the issues of CEAAC's mission statement, branding, and a potential change of name. These issues have been deferred or discarded. CEAAC can move forward more aggressively by adopting explicit goals rather than spending time on a mission statement. Moreover, the membership felt that CEAAC's reputation has already become positive with our legal settlements. Finally, regarding a new name, reasons in favor of a change seemed to be outweighed by the potential costs and loss of name recognition.

Ongoing/Continuation Initiatives

Kasayulie

CEAAC settled the Kasayulie litigation after 14 years in the fall of 2011. The settlement requires the state to construct five schools over three years and to repay CEAAC \$500,000 in legal fees. In addition, the settlement recognizes the constitutional necessity of a mechanism to provide automatic funding to rural school construction, which passed the legislature in 2010 as SB 237, and is now in statute at AS 14.11.025 and 14.11.030 (called the "Hoffman Mechanism" after CEAAC's legislative champion, Senator Lyman Hoffman).

Two major tasks remain to implement the aims of the Kasayulie settlement, requiring extensive legislative effort and communication.

Tasks

1. **Maintain separation of the Hoffman Mechanism and the funding of the five schools.** In the FY13 budget, the Parnell Administration attempted to allocate mechanism funds to the Emmonak School it had agreed to fund separately in the settlement. While that problem appears to have been corrected by the legislature, CEAAC will advocate for a proper funding source in the Governor's budgets in the succeeding two years. Accelerating funding of the five schools into two years instead of three would be CEAAC's preferred solution.
2. **Seek legislation to make the Hoffman Mechanism available to more schools** and to assure that Mechanism funds are fully expended for rural schools. These efforts will address the problem explained above, but also have merit independently. The changes are as follows:

- **Expand the Hoffman Mechanism** to be applicable to non-REAA, single-site districts with fewer than 300 students. In particular, CEAAC seeks to obtain funding for a replacement school for St. Mary's, which is not included in the mechanism as currently drafted. Generally, fairness and good public policy demand that the funds go to schools that are identically situated to the REAA schools except for the fact that they are within incorporated communities.
- **Spend Hoffman Mechanism funds on the CIP Major Maintenance List.** Allocating funds to this list will benefit more districts faster. Moreover, many projects on the Major Maintenance List could as easily be on the New Construction List, as there seems to be no clear rationale of why projects are placed on one list or the other.

Timeline

- Summer-fall 2012: Work with legislators to communicate our goals. Meet with Governor Parnell to request support.
- April 2013: Obtain passage.

Moore

CEAAC settled the Moore litigation with the State of Alaska in January, 2012, with an agreement that calls for expenditure of \$18 for four programs designed to address root causes of low achievement in underperforming schools. The funds are expected to last three years, requiring CEAAC to aggressively pursue continuation funding while also working to make the programs successful in their initial years. The structure of the settlement provides CEAAC with considerable influence over the expenditure of the funds, which also creates responsibility to see the work done effectively.

Tasks

1. Set up implementation structure. CEAAC and the Department of Education should rapidly set up the Moore Collaborative Committee, define its program, and hire necessary staff.
2. Design grant programs and pre-written grants and get documents to districts in time for programs to start in the fall.
3. Process, approve and disburse grant funds in time for fall 2012.
4. Design the two-year-kindergarten program with input from districts to be ready to begin operations in all applicable schools in the fall of 2013.
5. Monitor and record success of the programs and communicate success to the public and policy makers.
6. Work with the legislature, the governor and the public to make the programs permanent.

Timeline

- April 2012: Set up Moore Collaborative Committee and staff.
- June 2012: Grant programs in place.

- August 2012: First round grants approved.
- September 2012: Two-year-kindergarten program details complete.
- October 2012: Prepare legislation to make programs permanent.
- January 2013: HSGQE remediation expenditures begin.
- March 2013: Two-year-kindergarten district programs approved.
- April 2013 (or before April 2015): Permanent funding of Moore programs approved.
- August 2013: Students arrive in two-year-kindergarten programs.

Organizational Development

In 2011-12, CEAAC increased from 18 to 22 member school districts, and lowered the cost of membership by an average of more than 50%. However, dues costs remain a primary reason for new districts choosing not to join CEAAC. Increased membership and lowered dues can strengthen the organization. CEAAC pursued an initiative to obtain grant funding for our core activities and found little interest from foundations. Further pursuit of grants should be for discrete initiatives supported by granting organizations and accounted for separately from CEAAC's base budget.

Tasks

1. Continue to hold down costs and recruit new school district members, with a goal of dues reduction by 25% and a total of 26 members.
2. Recruit five dues-paying non-school members, such as Native, professional and community organizations sharing CEAAC's goals.
3. Manage Kasayulie legal fee reimbursement as a permanent legal defense fund and emergency account, as well as funding a separate Spike Jorgensen Scholarship endowment. Invest these funds with an extended time horizon.
4. Establish criteria, rules and process for awarding of the Jorgensen Scholarship.
5. Seek grants when working with partners who need CEAAC support for initiatives of their own choosing; do not pursue grants for core activities.
6. Develop additional contract personnel who can support and potentially act as successors to the executive director and political director.

Timeline

- April 2012: Jorgensen Scholarship guidelines and annual budget approved.
- August 2012: Kasayulie settlement investment fund created and allocated.
- October 2012: Deputy contract personnel retained for executive director and political director.
- July 2013: 26 school district members on roster, dues reduced 25% from 11-12 level; five new non-district members.

Major New Initiatives

Regional Residential Learning Centers

Small village high schools offer important opportunities for students to study while staying at home with family and community, but these schools usually lack the resources to offer a comprehensive curriculum for high achievement, career and technical education, or college preparation. Fifty-seven high schools in Alaska have 10 or fewer students. To get the education they need, many students leave for boarding schools, taking them away from home and further weakening the village schools. CEAAC supports development of a hybrid solution that would allow students to attend Regional Residential Learning Centers, relatively near home, for varying lengths of time, while still remaining enrolled in their village schools.

Several districts are already experimenting with this concept. Others are interested in pursuing it or partnering with other districts to offer the option. CEAAC consultant Jerry Covey has studied the issue and produced a report supporting further study, titled *Saving Alaska's Small Off-The-Road System High Schools* (attached).

At the same time, some CEAAC members have expressed trepidation about the concept. CEAAC's support should be developed through an in-depth study process that takes concerns into account. Key concerns that must be addressed include:

- Any regional concept would have to augment rather than detract from existing village schools. Funding would be additive and students would still be counted at their home schools and able to spend substantial time at home with families.
- A learning center statute would have to be flexible to address differences in Alaska's regions and the different situations of small and large districts. Participation would be optional for districts and parents.
- Whether as a model or for full implementation, the concept requires solid, sustainable funding. CEAAC does not support short-term projects that end without lasting benefit for students.

Tasks

1. Retain Jerry Covey with CEAAC core funds and grant support to develop and study the regional learning center concept with each of Alaska's regions, producing a report that clarifies district needs, program parameters, and funding, and which addresses stakeholder aspirations and concerns.
2. Present the Covey report to the Alaska Federation of Natives and request statewide support.
3. Obtain legislation to implement the concept, including a new funding stream for districts that have already pioneered building regional centers.

Timeline

- May 2012: Jerry Covey on board with grant and CEAAC support, begins work on report.

- September 2012: CEAAC adopts Covey report.
- October 2012: Covey report to AFN.
- November 2012: Legislation drafted, work with legislators and administration.
- April 2013: Legislation and funding approved.
- August 2014: Center or centers begin accepting students.

Education Research and Support Institute

Alaska needs a centralized source of applied education research that can act as a professional service desk for districts. An institute could study district issues and recommend solutions, develop or align curriculum for individual districts, research grants and assist with applying for funds, assist with culturally relevant standards and materials, study and review professional standards, and identify broadly needed reforms. For larger districts, the research function could help to identify needs and to plan improvements. For smaller districts, the service function would provide capacity to comply with high-level administrative tasks and to access funding sources requiring complex processes.

Several institutions in Alaska have a piece of the mandate for this institute, but none is fulfilling district needs, and work tends to be uncoordinated and poorly communicated. The new UAA Center for Alaska Education Policy Research is a step in the right direction, but is too small and is focused on broad policy research and not fine-grained district priorities. The DEED could perform a supportive function for districts, but has become more focused on compliance and lacks capacity to provide adequate assistance. Various districts and parts of the UA system have taken on other discrete pieces or projects as well.

A primary challenge of this effort would be to identify existing resources and organizational mandates and develop a clearly defined concept for CEAAC's goal. Initially, CEAAC members would have to study their own needs.

Tasks

1. Gather information on existing assets. Network with researchers and others who could contribute to this vision.
2. Convene CEAAC members and other potential users to identify and prioritize gaps and needs that a new institution could fulfill.
3. Create a collaborative working group of stakeholders, including researchers and research users, to design a new institute.
4. Draft legislation and a budget.
5. Legislative passage and funding.

Timeline

- September 2012: Provide CEAAC members with a report of existing resources and responses to researcher networking efforts.

- April 2013: Complete concept report on the institute for CEAAC board adoption.
- October 2013: Stakeholders adopt CEAAC concept to advance to legislation, if necessary.
- April 2014: Funding and legislative mandate for institute.
- January 2015: Institute in operation.

Double UA Teacher Production

Teacher quality is a cornerstone of school success.

Alaska produces only a third of the new teachers needed annually. Principals also are in short supply. Research indicates that teachers from within Alaska stay longer. They also have a better chance of being prepared for the environments and cultures in which they will work. Some districts struggle to find qualified applicants. Even districts that are currently satisfied with the pool of applicants available to them can benefit, however, as a greater production of teachers in Alaska will improve the overall quality of applicants by raising the level of competition. As the national economy improves, this need will grow as the demand for teachers increases. Similar considerations apply for hiring administrators.

In addition, teacher education in Alaska can be improved by focusing on the needs of the districts which are the ultimate clients of the University's schools of education. Some districts report new teachers with deficits in cultural understanding, subject matter mastery, and practical experience. These needs, and others, can best be addressed by creating a system of stakeholder ownership that will bring information on needs and outcomes from the hiring districts to university administrators and professors.

Tasks

1. Gather evidence and statistics about the problem from districts and published sources.
2. Study the successful initiative to increase the output of trained nurses from UAA and the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program.
3. Work with UA to identify opportunities and limitations and begin collaboration.
4. Mobilize community groups and other supporters as part of an initiative with multiple goals (including reducing Alaska brain-drain and producing more Alaska Native teachers).
5. Obtain support of the regents and legislature, including funding.

Timeline

- October 2012: Report to board on the problem and path to change.
- January 2013: Relationships in place with University to address the issue.
- July 2013: Firm plan and proposal in place.
- July 2014: Complete year of outreach and gathering of support.
- April 2015: Legislative and regents support approved.
- July 2015: Program starts. First graduates expected spring 2019.

Areas of Support

CEAAC has more goals than the capacity to pursue them. However, some priorities can be achieved by exploiting opportunities that present themselves, or by leveraging other relationships and ongoing attention where needed. The following priorities will remain important agenda items for CEAAC in our legislative program and other forums where we have influence.

At-risk funding factor in state formula

CEAAC believes state formula funding for education should recognize the higher cost of teaching at-risk students. An at-risk factor would benefit rural and urban districts alike, providing resources for whatever needs they identify for their struggling students. Students eligible for the factor would be identified by socioeconomic and language disadvantages, with research targeting those indicators correlating with low achievement. In the current political environment, however, we do not plan to advocate for a formula rewrite; instead, we would bring this idea forward in the context of a rewrite when that was already happening for reasons beyond our control.

Technology, connectivity and distance learning

Some districts are critically handicapped by slow or expensive Internet connections. Others have usable connections but depend on the Alaska Learning Network for the coordinated content they need; meanwhile, AKLN is threatened by legislative budget cutters. Where a school has a good connection and content, students may still lack technology or Internet connections at home, reducing their ability to do homework or become fully computer literate. CEAAC supports the investments necessary to resolve all these issues and will lend a hand where possible. However, other groups have prioritized technology in education, so we do not need to take a leadership role.

Federal aid

CEAAC supports districts' efforts to keep more federal aid. In Southeast Alaska, districts are threatened by loss of funds from the USDA's Secure Rural Schools Act. Statewide, schools are denied their share of federal impact aid provided in lieu of property taxes, as the State of Alaska absorbs those funds. Individual districts have addressed these issues. CEAAC will support them where we can be helpful, facilitate information sharing, and use our influence in contacting state and federal leaders.

Expand pre-k and other Moore initiatives

In responding to the orders of the court, the Moore settlement could only focus on only the lowest-performing schools. However, the solutions are applicable to all schools. Our primary goal in the near term must be on continuation of the Moore programs as a permanent part of the budget. However, we also support expansion of state supported pre-k for all children as a part of the school system. We also support Best Beginnings and Parents-As-Children. In addition, teacher retention grants and HSGQE funding should be provided to all schools in Alaska. During the 2012 legislative session CEAAC is barred from advocating for expanding these programs, but we will address them in future sessions.