

Ed Connector

State & Educational Challenges

Alaska and its people are as diverse as its climate and geography. A total of 53 districts serve Alaska's 132,000+ elementary and secondary students in both large urban cities and small isolated communities. About 20% of the state's population resides in small rural villages scattered across the state without access to roads, creating extreme unique needs from one community to the next, while significantly impacting **cost** and **quality** of education in rural areas across the state.

While Alaska students often score near the national average in elementary and secondary standardized tests (See [Alaska and NAEP](#): The Performance of Alaska Students on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress report), Alaska has one of the highest rates of student dropouts (See [High School Dropout and Completion Rates](#) in the United States: 2007 report) and the lowest rate of students attending college directly from high school (See [NCHEMS](#) Information Center). Currently, Alaska ranks 42nd in the nation in the percentage of [ninth graders who graduate from high school](#), and 50th in terms of the number of ninth graders who complete a bachelor's degree within ten years of their high school graduation. Alaska Native/American Indian students appear to be struggling the most. In Alaska, Caucasian students are 4.5 times more likely to be academically eligible for the [Alaska Performance Scholarship](#) than are Alaska Native/American Indian students.

Leadership & Assessment

While these patterns are alarming, they are neither irreversible nor inevitable. Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children ([CEEAC](#)) is working to address the unique challenges associated with the state's isolated distribution of learners and schools. As the only non-profit organization in Alaska focused on struggling schools, CEAAC has been working alongside Alaska's superintendents to identify and capture the wealth of success in school improvement tools and resources as evident around the state. The goal of this partnership is to ensure all districts have access to these promising practices and together can begin to reverse Alaska's student performance trends.

CEAAC's statewide school district needs assessment revealed a disparate knowledge of existing educational tools and research, an underutilization of support resources, and significant barriers keeping districts from using available resources. Examples include: lack of staff time to research and implement; cost; lack of regional context; and implementation readiness of staff and or districts.

Proposed Solution

CEAAC has now begun the planning of an interactive portal to enhance administrative capacity, increase collaboration and innovation, and expand the cultural relevance of student learning. Functionality, as requested by school district leadership, will guide the portal's design. Core elements include a:

- Centralized resource for researched and organized educational tools
- Mechanism for sharing material, curricula, and models
- Interface for virtual dialogue and interaction
- Centralized clearinghouse of relevant research and advocacy opportunities

Outcomes

Technology supported by a professional staff, can impact Alaskan student persistence and performance. By connecting district leadership to vetted school improvement, curriculum alignment, and up to date federal and state regulations, CEAAC will:

- ✓ Build a repository of Alaskan best practice tools and resources
- ✓ Expand administrative capacity of districts
- ✓ Grow collaboration and use of innovative strategies
- ✓ Create a "consortium" of stakeholders who regularly collaborate on educational solutions