

The Future of K-12 Education in Anchorage: REPORT ON COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Prepared by Viewpoint Learning

June 6-7, 2012



Overview

- Introduction
- Key findings
- Implications for action





Four choices

- Participants in the Mayor's Education Summit in November 2011 developed four different choices on possible priorities for education reform in Anchorage:
 - 1. World class leadership: invest in teachers and principals**
 - 2. Make the Anchorage community a true partner in K-12 education**
 - 3. Set great expectations for student success**
 - 4. Expand choice and opportunity for all**

Community Conversations

- 3-hour sessions held around municipality
- Participants took the four choices developed during the November summit as their starting point



- **Discussion #1:** What should K-12 education in Anchorage look like in 5 years?
- **Discussion #2:** What steps should we take to create a world-class education for all Anchorage students?

Participants



- 370+ participants
- About 40% of participants said they worked in education
 - Surprisingly few differences in how educators and others view the issues: the two groups have strikingly similar views and priorities

FINDINGS:

Common ground across all sessions





FINDINGS:

What's education for?

How important are each of the following as goals for public education in Anchorage?

% saying this is
"most Important"

Teaching every student the basics of reading, writing and math

73

Developing skills in problems solving and critical thinking

66

Providing students with the skills or technical education they need to get good jobs

51

Ensuring that teachers and principals are highly qualified

49

Teaching skills of cooperation and working with others

48

Ensuring that young people are well-rounded citizens with exposure to arts, humanities and sciences

40

Preparing young people for participation in democracy

36

Preparing students for college

22

Findings: ASD is falling short



- But Anchorage School District is not doing very well at meeting achieving these standards
 - 64% give ASD a grade of C or below

FINDINGS:

Set higher standards

- Dismay at the “proficiency gap”
 - Alaska students score low on national tests compared to students in other states
 - “Proficient” on SBA a much lower bar than “proficient” on national measures like NAEP
- Raise the bar—implement a rigorous curriculum for all kids
 - “Rigorous” ≠ college prep: not all students are cut out for college (73% agree)
 - Strong call for more and better vocational and career education
 - All students should be college-or career-ready on graduation



FINDINGS:

Set higher standards



- Adopt Common Core standards
- Benchmark Alaska State tests to NAEP
- Adopt “formative assessment” testing approaches
 - Tests are used to help shape each student’s instruction, rather than only measuring how well a student has mastered material after the fact

FINDINGS:

Good teaching and more of it

- Hire good teachers and give them lots of support
 - 88% agreed that hiring and rewarding high quality teachers and principals is the best way to improve schools
- Support = professional development, mentoring, teacher education, as well as fair compensation



FINDINGS:

Good teaching and more of it



- Give teachers more autonomy and flexibility in the classroom...
- ... and hold them accountable for results
 - Struggling teachers should get additional support to help them improve
 - Those who do not improve should face dismissal

Findings: Community involvement

- More community involvement is essential



- 93% agreed that schools need help of the entire community
- Mobilize community organizations, businesses, local agencies

FINDINGS:

Community involvement

- BUT participants struggled to find concrete and effective ways of bringing this about
 - Parent resource centers at local schools
 - School-business partnerships (providing internships, mentoring, especially for high school students)
- 59% agreed that increasing community involvement won't do much good if we don't also take steps to improve schools.



FINDINGS:

Expanding school choice



- Develop more choice and variety within ASD
 - More options for kids who are not college-bound
 - Expand alternative programs (e.g. Chugach Optional)
- Little appetite for vouchers or independent charter schools
 - Opposition widespread among both educators and others
 - Strongly supported by a committed minority

FINDINGS:

Expanding school choice

- ASD should focus on making all schools high quality (67% agree) rather than focusing on increasing choice through more alternative and charter schools (27% agree)
- Transportation a major hurdle

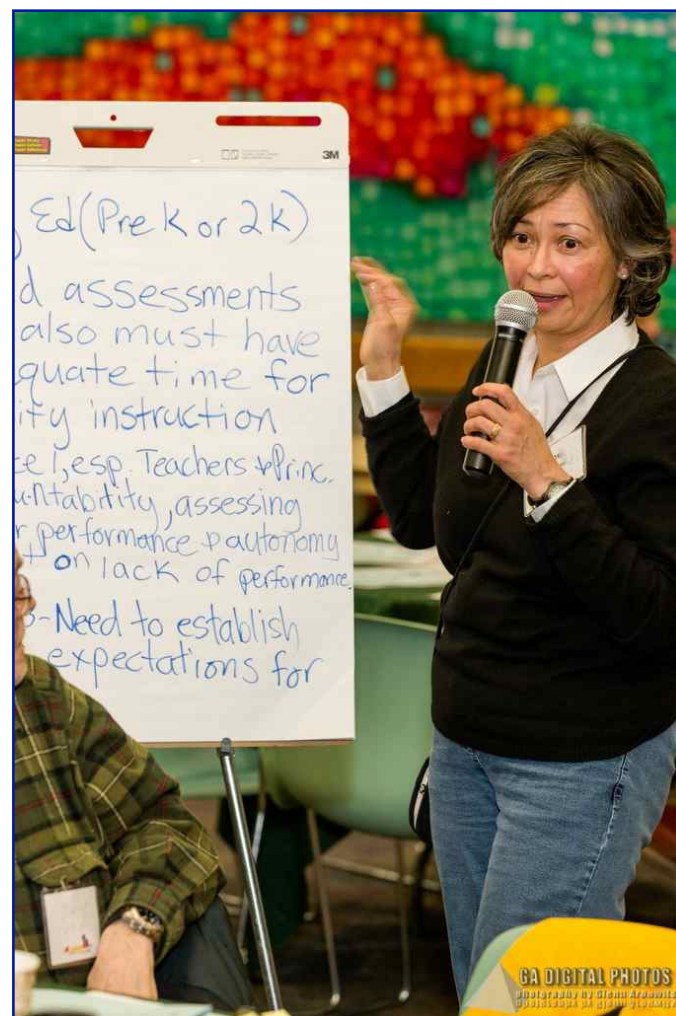


FINDINGS:

Other key points

Participants in all sessions consistently raised points not included in their materials:

- Strong support for more early childhood/Pre-K programs
- Support for a longer and more flexible school day and school year
- Learn from other models (Japan, Singapore, Finland, Canada)
- Administration needs to listen to the public
- Need to broaden this conversation and get more of Anchorage involved —especially low income families and people of color



FINDINGS:

Educators vs. non-educators



- Educators and non-educators had similar views on almost every point
- But there were a few differences....



FINDINGS: Educators vs. non-educators

Priorities for improving outcomes



How important are each of the following in making sure all students have access to a world-class education?

EDUCATORS	NON-EDUCATORS
1. Rely less on high-stakes tests and more on on-going assessments of student progress	1. Make it easier to retrain or remove ineffective teachers
2. Improve teacher training in colleges and in-school training for new teachers	2. Set high standards and give teachers more flexibility in how to reach them
3. Set high standards and give teachers more flexibility in how to reach them	3. Reward teachers who are more effective or take on difficult assignments
4. Make it easier to retrain or remove ineffective teachers	4. Rely less on high-stakes tests and more on on-going assessments of student progress
5. Reward teachers who are more effective or take on difficult assignments	5. Improve teacher training in colleges and in-school training for new teachers



FINDINGS: Educators vs. non-educators

Priorities for improving outcomes



How important are each of the following in making sure all students have access to a world-class education?

EDUCATORS	NON-EDUCATORS
6. Adopt national standards and train teachers and principals in meeting those standards	6. Adopt national standards and train teachers and principals in meeting those standards
7. Create parent resource centers to provide classes and programs for students	7. Increase school-business partnerships
8. Increase school-business partnerships	8. Create parent resource centers to provide classes and programs for students
9. Provide vouchers that parents can use to help pay for private schools	9. Provide vouchers that parents can use to help pay for private schools
10. Make it easier to start independent charter schools	10. Make it easier to start independent charter schools

FINDINGS: Educators vs. non-educators

Merit pay the biggest difference

Which comes closer to your point of view?

	EDUCATORS % agree	NON- EDUCATORS % agree
Teachers should be financially rewarded when their students do well; they make a difference in whether their students succeed	28	54
It's not fair to pay more to teachers whose students do well when so many things that affect student learning are beyond a teacher's control	65	36

- Everyone supported evaluations that help teachers improve their performance; split was over whether these should affect teachers' pay

FINDINGS: Effect of dialogue

- 88% said the materials were helpful
- 86% said participating in the Community Conversation had affected their thinking about the issues
- Surprise at civility of the conversation, amount of common ground shared



IMPLICATIONS



- Start with common ground
 - Raise standards
 - Give all students access to a rigorous, high-quality curriculum
 - Increase technical and vocational programs
 - Emphasize good teaching and more of it
 - Enhance school choice within the district

IMPLICATIONS

- Two big gaps are a powerful starting point
 - Performance gap between Alaska students and the rest of the nation
 - Gap between what counts as “proficiency” on state tests (like SBA) and national measures (like NAEP)



Implications (cont'd)

- Address mistrust
 - Make sure all stakeholders are at the table—especially underrepresented communities
 - Make sure the process is respectful, responsive, and inclusive



IMPLICATIONS (CONT'D)

- Scale up the conversation to build awareness, solicit community input and build ownership and support

