

Community Engagement



An Alaska Initiative that is Working

Summary of an Evaluation of the Alaska Initiative
for Community Engagement 2005-2008 by the
American Institutes for Research®



Engaging Communities to Help Youth Succeed



IN 2001, THE ASSOCIATION OF ALASKA SCHOOL BOARDS received funding through the No Child Left Behind Act's Alaska Native Education Program to provide technical assistance and support to communities across Alaska to engage adults in promoting the academic progress and overall well-being of young people. The result was the Initiative for Community Engagement—Alaska ICE.

A nationally recognized research firm recently completed a longitudinal evaluation¹ of the effectiveness of Alaska ICE to determine whether:

- ◆ the environment for youth has changed in schools and communities supported by Alaska ICE,
- ◆ adult support for youth has changed, and
- ◆ youth outcomes improved in the areas of academic engagement and achievement, social and emotional learning, and risk behaviors.

The evaluation covered 2005-2008 and assessed impacts and changes in a group of 15 school districts supported by Alaska ICE, and delved more deeply into three districts and their communities to document changes and impacts: Pribilofs, Dillingham and Anchorage.



KEY FINDINGS

Evaluators found that communities, schools and organizations supported by Alaska ICE:

- ◆ showed particularly positive results for Alaska Native students:
 - *substantial increases in academic achievement on statewide assessments*
 - *higher expectations, more respectful climate, and improved peer climate at school*
 - *reduced risk behaviors at school*
- ◆ showed substantial improvements in adult-youth relationships and adult involvement with youth
- ◆ adopted strength-based, asset-building policies and practices that supported youth
- ◆ developed sustainable community and organizational networks and coalitions as successful vehicles for change
- ◆ significantly reduced youth risk behaviors



¹ American Institutes for Research, *Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement Summative Report*, 2009.

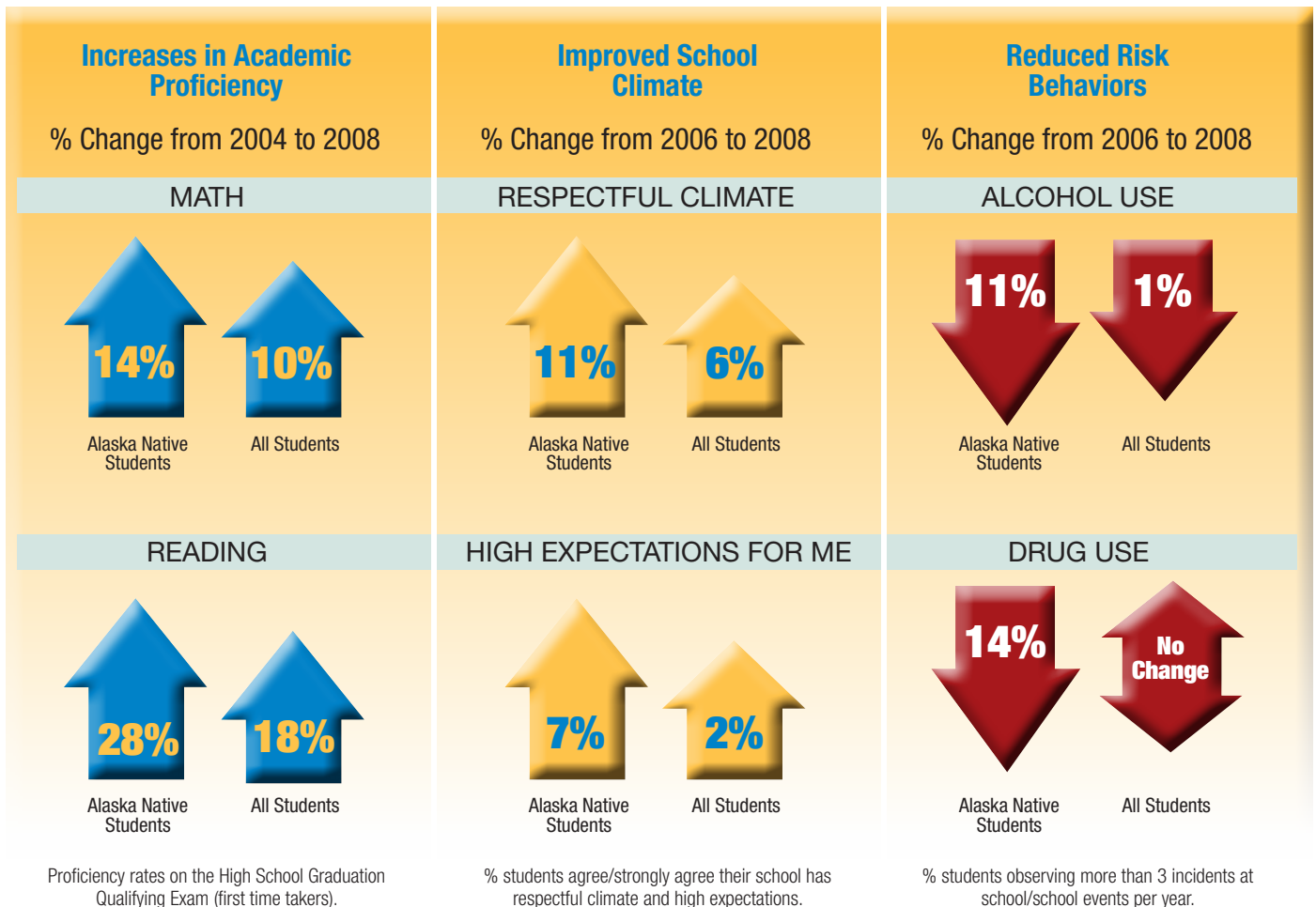
Positive Outcomes in 15 School Districts

AASB PARTNERS WITH SCHOOL DISTRICTS to support school improvement through its Quality Schools/Quality Students (QS2) initiative. Alaska ICE works with these districts and their communities to increase community engagement to support student success.

Fifteen QS2 districts² were evaluated for evidence of change in the environment for youth, for adult support for youth, and for youth outcomes.

The Results

Alaska Native students in particular showed positive gains in academic and school climate measures and significant reductions in risk behaviors.



² Quality Schools/Quality Students (QS2) districts in this analysis included: Alaska Gateway, Chatham, Delta-Greely, Dillingham, Ketchikan Gateway, Kodiak Island, Lower Kuskokwim (7 communities), Petersburg, Pribilof, Sitka, Southeast Island, Unalaska, Wrangell, Yukon Flats, and Yupiit.

Academic Gains and Healthy Support for Youth



“Since becoming a QS2 partner, student achievement has continued to improve. Both schools have made AYP for the past 6 years; this can be directly attributed to students feeling empowered and cared about. We have reached out to organizations and community collaborations have increased. Students see how they are supported by the community and that they should give back by volunteering, working with Elders, and participating in community clean-up efforts.”

— Jamie Stacks, Superintendent, Pribilofs

THE PRIBILOF SCHOOL DISTRICT, consisting of two small Aleut communities (St. Paul, population 430 and St. George, less than 100) on two remote islands in the Bering Sea, became a QS2/ICE partner in 2003. Their initial goals were to:

- ◆ improve student achievement,
- ◆ improve the “overall wellness” of the communities, and
- ◆ build “a bridge between the schools and the communities.”

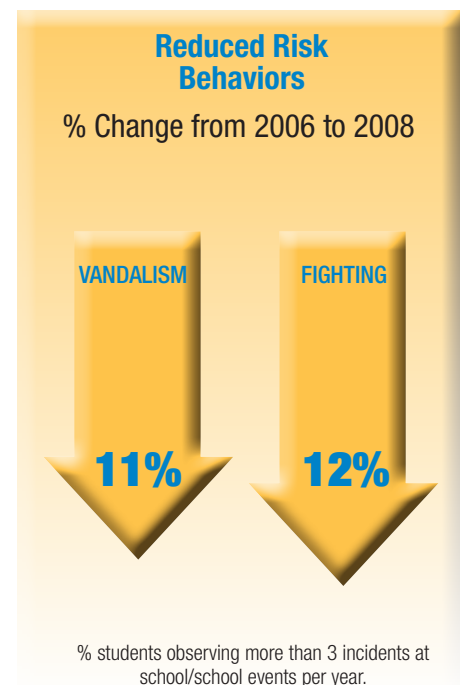
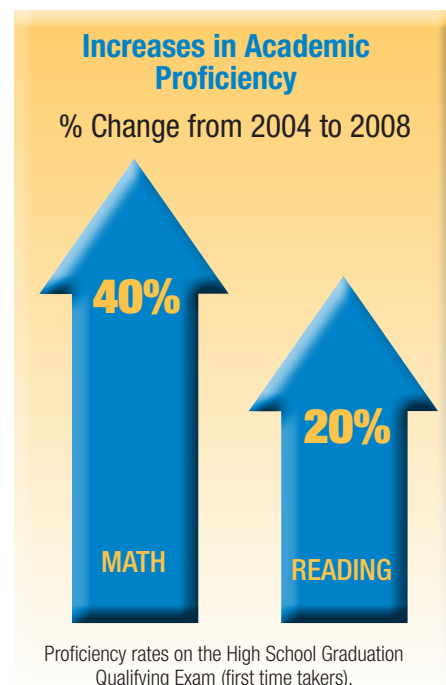
Community engagement in the Pribilofs focused on these areas in the

schools, community, and with tribal and other community partners. Recent district efforts targeted improving peer climate and social emotional learning.

The Results

Evaluation results found substantial improvements in reading and math proficiency, school and peer climate, social emotional learning, parent and community involvement in school, community collaborations, and adult support for and involvement with youth (which showed increases across every one of ten indicators).

Pribilof students also report decreases in risk behavior.



Increased Community Collaboration, Reduced Risk Behaviors

DILLINGHAM is a small regional hub community of 2,500 in southwestern Alaska; 69% are Alaska Native (Yup'ik). Dillingham became a QS2/ICE partner to address concerns about substance abuse, delinquent behavior, poor adult-youth relationships, and low academic performance.

Dillingham launched its community engagement efforts in 2005 with a community-wide assets awareness campaign. Alaska ICE was the catalyst that helped form partnerships within Dillingham to support youth. Collaborative efforts led to coordinated community efforts to:

- ◆ promote the assets message,
- ◆ provide more opportunities for youth in positive activities,

- ◆ address youth issues and risk behaviors in a supportive manner, and
- ◆ create a climate of respect and support for all youth.

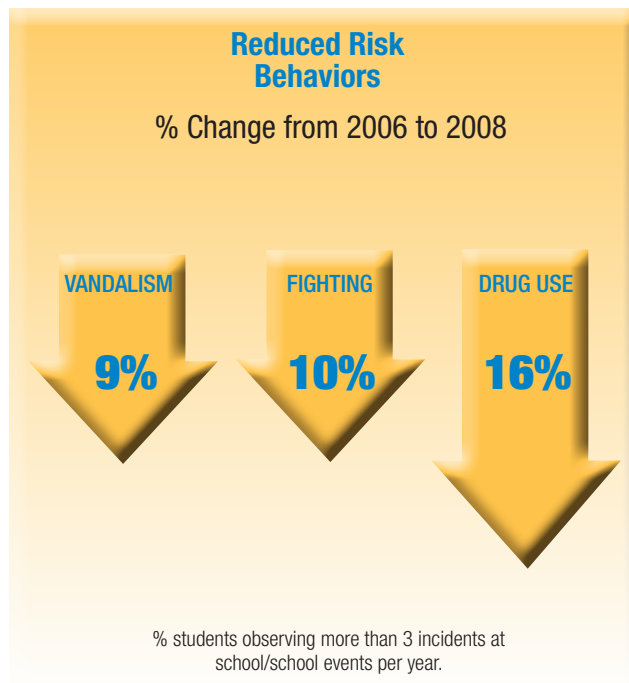
The Results

In 2008, Dillingham students reported higher levels of positive school climate and caring adults at school, substantial reductions in risk behaviors, and consistent increases in social emotional learning. More students had help with homework outside of school (95%), and, since 2004, the dropout rate decreased by almost half to 8%. Community members reported more positive activities for youth and community collaboration, and more alignment around strength-based approaches to dealing with youth issues.



[Community engagement has] made a really good impact on connecting Native and non-Native students and teachers, and fostering healthy relationships. In the last three years, the partnership between the tribal council and the school has been strengthened.

— Dillingham Community Member



Anchorage Success Story

Systemic Changes in Youth Support Network



ANCHORAGE IS ALASKA'S LARGEST CITY. Since 2001, Alaska ICE has provided support to Anchorage schools and the community to change the environments surrounding youth.

The Results

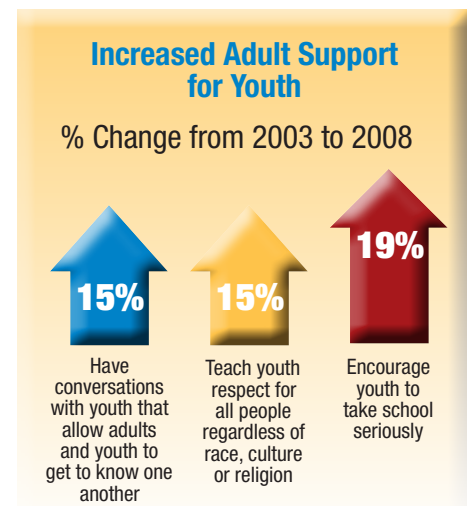
Collaborative efforts, many supported by Alaska ICE, of the school district, Anchorage Youth Development Coalition, United Way, social service organizations, and many others have led to lasting systemic change.

Anchorage School District (ASD) adopted the Developmental Assets® framework in 1996. In 2001 Alaska ICE began providing financial support to further institutionalize the assets framework in Anchorage schools. This sustained funding has helped slowly shift the adult focus within ASD to a resiliency approach.

Two notable changes in ASD policies and practices identified by evaluators are:

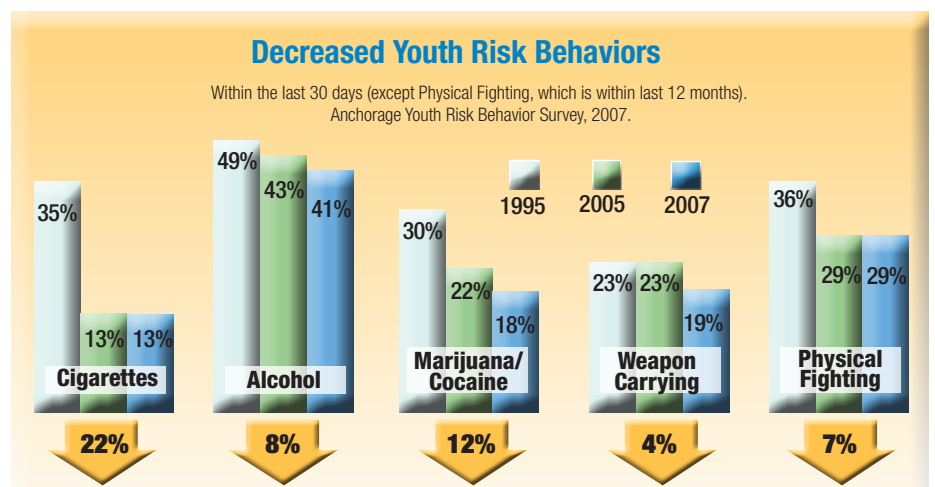
- ◆ Adoption of the assets framework, language, and approach and its dissemination throughout the district over time
- ◆ Development and adoption of social emotional/employability standards and ongoing integration into the curriculum

Community members from organizations across Anchorage reported the adoption of shared policies and practices to support positive youth development. Between 2003 and 2008, adults reported significant increases in adult involvement with and support for youth on every measure.



Percent of Anchorage adults who answered "often" or "very often" to the question "How often do adults in your community do the following?"

There have been sizable declines in all areas of youth risk behaviors in Anchorage from 1995 to 2007 as reported by Anchorage high school students on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.



Within the last 30 days (except Physical Fighting, which is within 12 months). Anchorage Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2007.

“Alaska ICE funding was crucial for virtually every developmental assets initiative going on in this community.”

— Anchorage Community Member

“The sustained nature of ICE funding has helped supply funding to continue to infuse the developmental assets approach into almost every aspect of the way ASD does business.”

— ASD Staff Member

OVERALL, THE AIR EVALUATION FOUND evidence of significant positive change in all three areas examined:

- ✓ *More positive environment for youth in schools and communities*
- ✓ *Increased levels of adult support for and involvement with youth*
- ✓ *Improved youth outcomes, especially for Alaska Native students*

Districts and communities with strong commitment and active engagement over time showed the most positive results.



Lessons Learned about Best Practices in Community Engagement

- ◆ Successful community engagement takes time.
- ◆ Assess readiness, build local capacity.
- ◆ Develop relationships with key people in all community sectors.
- ◆ Identify clear local goals at the beginning, adapt over time. Use data.
- ◆ Build awareness, move toward action and sustainability.
- ◆ Focus on what individuals can do.
- ◆ Collaboration leads to sustainable change.
- ◆ Increase youth voice in developing, implementing local efforts.
- ◆ A committed, effective local advocate is key.
- ◆ System-level change is possible, but takes nurturing. Focus on measurable steps along the way.
- ◆ Recognize and celebrate success.

“Changing the environment for youth—the support they receive from teachers and other adults in their lives—will prove to be a far more effective approach to increasing youth assets and improving youth outcomes than the more common “fix the kids” approach.”

— AIR Report





Everyone Has a Role in Youth Success

Here's What You Can Do:

Families

can play, talk, read, and explore with their children.

Neighbors

can learn youths' names and be interested and friendly.

Teachers

can make learning engaging and relevant, and have high expectations for all students.

Schools

can create a positive climate for students and families and involve all families.

Community organizations

can provide positive and meaningful opportunities for young people.

Employers

can encourage school success for teen employees.

Every adult

can be a good role model.

Every young person

can support younger children and contribute positively to their community.

Every community

can hold itself accountable for creating a healthy environment in which every child can succeed.

The Association of Alaska School Boards' Initiative for Community Engagement (Alaska ICE) provides 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.



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