



Alaska Department of Education & Early Development Strategic Plan

Meeting  
**Alaska's  
Education  
Challenge**  
Together

*Together, we will meet Alaska's education challenge by honoring our heritage, innovating for the future, and prioritizing for today's fiscal challenges*



# OUR MISSION

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**An excellent education  
for every student  
every day.**

A group of diverse children, including a young boy in a grey hoodie and a young girl in a blue jacket, are looking intently at something held in their hands. The background is blurred, showing other children and an adult. The scene is outdoors, possibly during a field activity or science lesson.

## OUR VISION

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**All students will succeed in their  
education and work, shape  
worthwhile and satisfying lives  
for themselves, exemplify the best  
values of society, and be effective  
in improving the character and  
quality of the world about them.**

**Alaska Statute 14.03.015**

# POSITIVE TRAJECTORIES

**Support ALL students to read at grade level by the end of third grade**

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**Increase career, technical, and culturally relevant education to meet student and workforce needs**

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**Close the achievement gap by ensuring equitable educational rigor and resources**

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**Prepare, attract, and retain effective education professionals**

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**Improve the safety and well-being of students through school partnerships with families, communities, and tribes**

# A Shared Commitment

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Alaska, in many ways, is still a frontier. We have opportunities that no other state in our country can claim. Our uniqueness is a strength, as it has been for many generations. This is not just true with resource development, natural beauty, and culture, but also with the opportunity to transform our education system into a relevant, high-achieving, and family-friendly network of learning opportunities.

A quality education system was not an afterthought in Alaska, it has always been foundational. Centuries before Alaska became a state, Alaska's indigenous people taught culture, science, language, and other elements of rich traditional knowledge. The framers of the Alaska Constitution were also clear that education was a cornerstone of statehood.

Whether it be a 1,000-mile trek on a dogsled or a 20,000-foot climb up one of the world's tallest mountains, Alaskans have a long history of facing even the most ardent challenges with determination. Clearly, educating our students is a challenge we must face. The fact is, even though many of our students are getting a good education, historically Alaska has some of the largest achievement gaps in the country. Compared to other states in America, Alaska ranks at or near the bottom in reading and math scores. We must be dissatisfied with these numbers.

This document is a call to action. Thousands of Alaskans have stepped up to answer this call and have demonstrated through Alaska's Education Challenge that they are unwilling to accept our current results. Parents, students, educators, policymakers, tribal leaders, partner organizations, and local school boards have worked together to create a shared plan for improving our system of public education. This document outlines the three primary components of that plan.

- 1. Public Commitments - An invitation to all Alaskans to support a thriving and successful public education system**
- 2. Positive Trajectories - Measurable targets that will hold us accountable to our students**
- 3. Prioritized Strategies - A menu of options for districts, schools, and families to drive improvement**

With this document we are calling on all Alaskans to meet the educational challenges of our state together. A better education system built on our values and successes will not be possible without the involvement of all Alaskans. Each community must want a great school enough to invest the hard work and take the action necessary to make it happen. We will never legislate, regulate, spend, cut, blame, promise, excuse, or wish our way to great schools. We must have the character and commitment needed to share a vision and work together to support it. I am confident The Last Frontier has what it takes to pioneer a new kind of public education system for the 21st century.

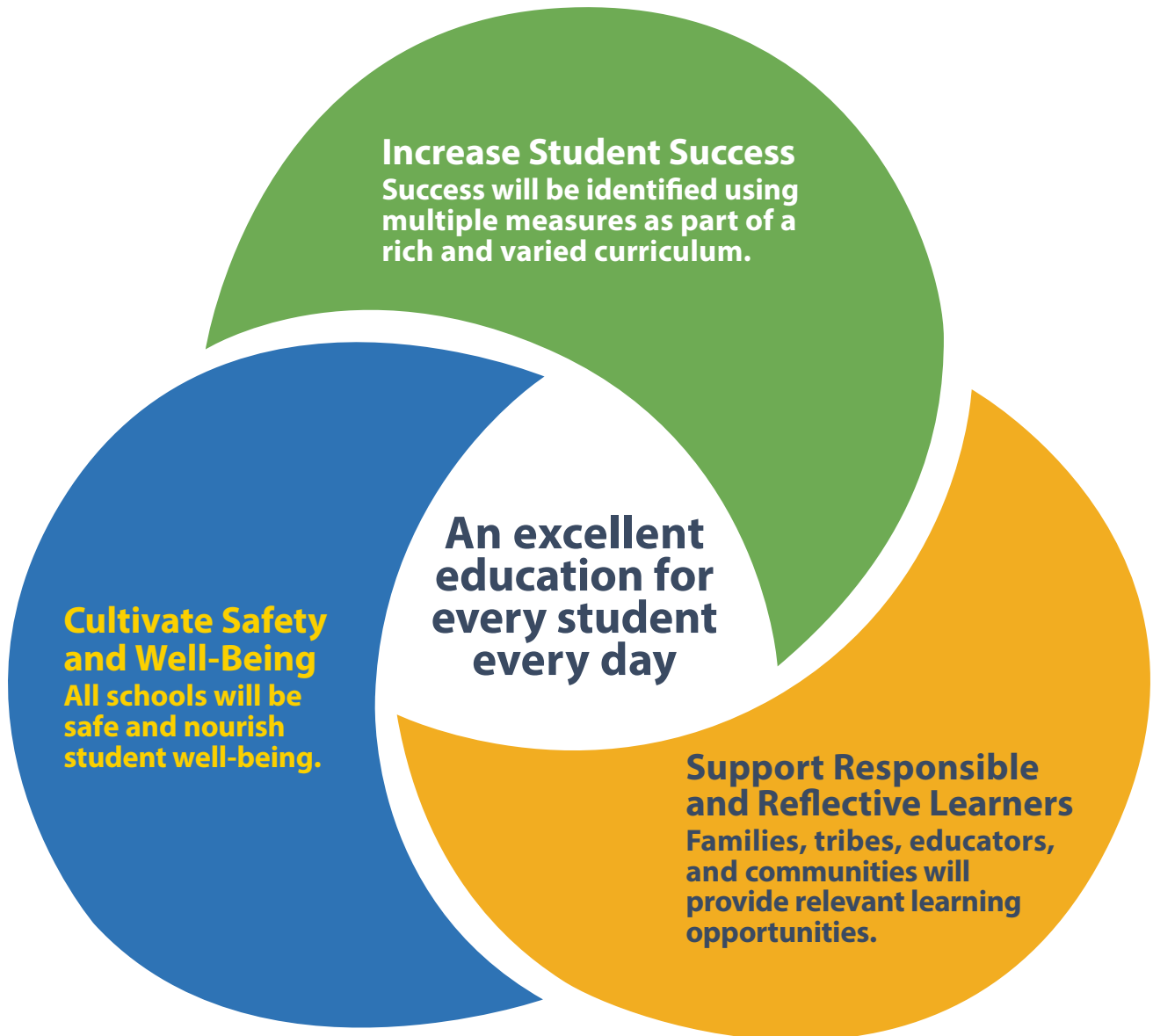
Alaskans should only be satisfied when every student has the opportunity to receive an excellent education every day.



Dr. Michael Johnson  
Commissioner

December 7, 2017

# Public Commitments





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**Children who read well at an early age are more likely than their peers to experience later academic success.**

*Photo courtesy of the Department of Education & Early Development.*

# Support ALL students to read at grade level by the end of third grade

Research suggests that school readiness at an early age is one critical strategy for improving future student outcomes and closing racial/ethnic and socioeconomic achievement gaps. Children with an early basic knowledge of reading are more likely than their peers to experience later academic success, attain higher levels of education, and secure employment. When reading ability is lacking, it is an early indicator that the student will be at risk of not making yearly progress toward successful graduation. Reading well in the early grades is particularly important for students with high levels of socioeconomic risk, such as poverty and high mobility.



**37%**  
of third-graders read at  
or above grade level

Source: 2018 PEAKS grade 3 ELA statewide results (<https://education.alaska.gov/assessment-results/Statewide/StatewideResults?schoolYear=2017-2018&isScience=False>)

## Prioritized Strategies

*These are examples of strategies that DEED, school districts, and individuals will use to meet the trajectories.*

How can we achieve the goal of supporting all students to read at grade level by the end of third grade?

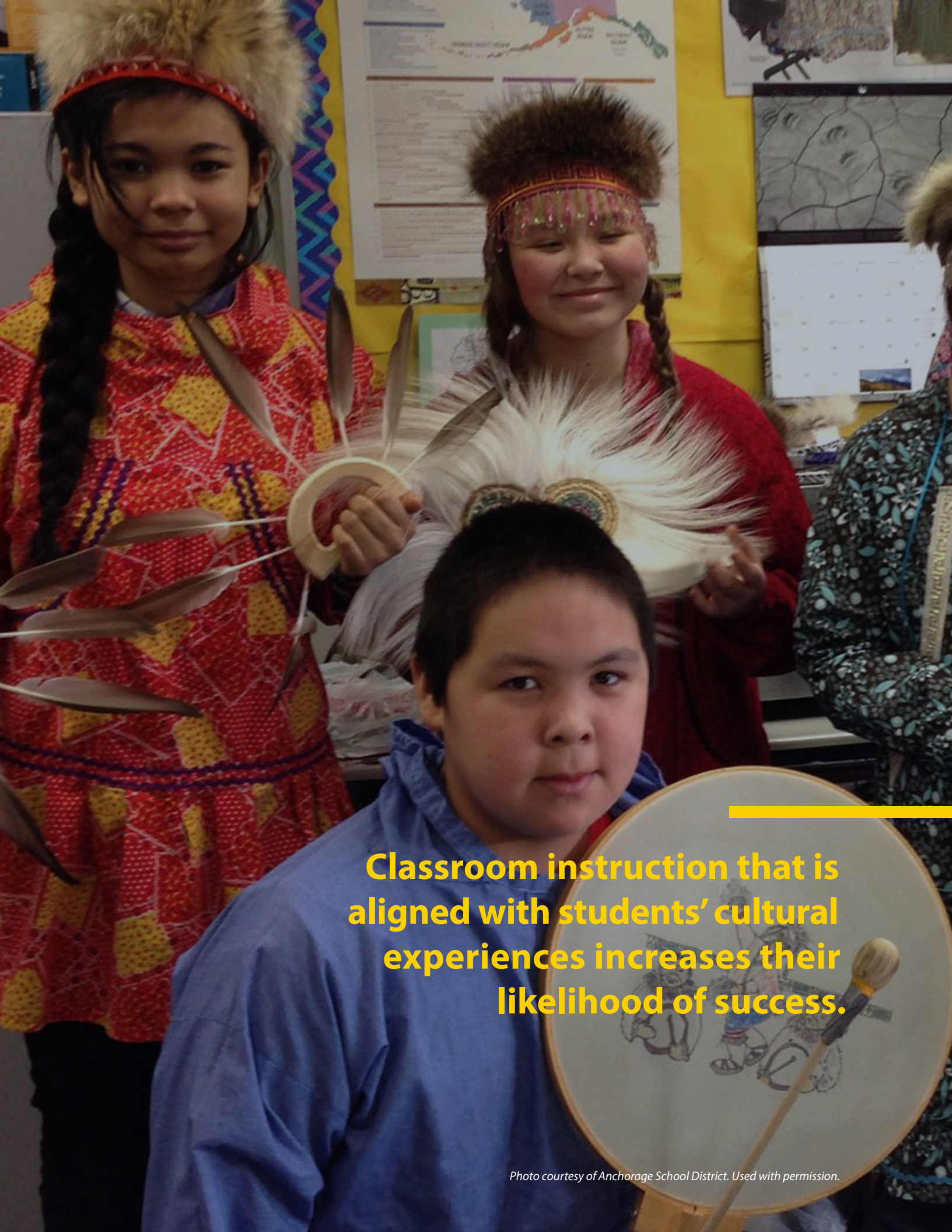
- Prioritize early reading in all elementary schools, including K–12 schools
- Adopt and implement effective reading programs and materials
- Incentivize districts to adopt and implement effective curriculum and teaching strategies
- Adopt 60- or 90-minute reading blocks in grades K–3 in all districts
- Encourage district review of different K–3 models, including movement through individual grades
- Create and disseminate materials for parents and community members on how they can support the development of their children’s reading skills
- Provide consistent, ongoing professional development for educators and community members on the effective use of adopted reading curricula
- Implement effective early screeners in K-3
- Train teachers on state standards and on how to align instruction to these standards
- Assist school leaders in using data and classroom walkthroughs to ensure implementation of aligned curricula
- Use valid and reliable formative assessments to monitor students’ progress
- Identify and implement effective interventions for struggling readers
- Inform and train educators, parents, and community members on how to understand reading data and on how it can be used to support students in their reading skills attainment
- Establish voluntary district reporting to the state on K–3 reading measures



# What Progress Looks Like By 2025

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- ✓ **K–3 reading measures submitted to the department will show positive trends**
- ✓ **The number of students in grades 3–5 who are proficient on the statewide English language arts assessment will double**
- ✓ **The number of students in grades 3–5 who are proficient on the statewide math assessment will double, since research suggests that reading ability is one of the best predictors of strong math skills**
- ✓ **Student absenteeism rates will be reduced by at least 20 percent**

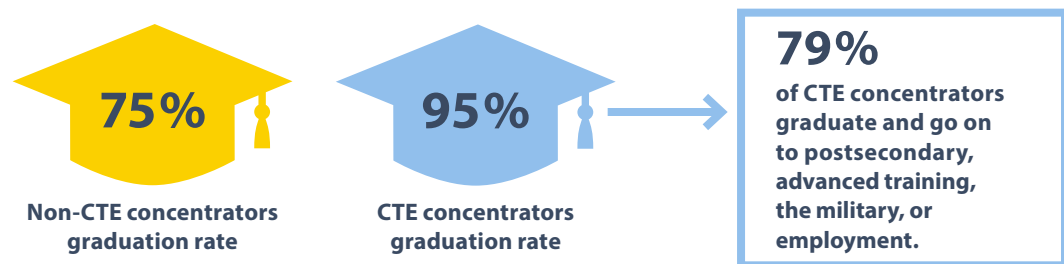


**Classroom instruction that is aligned with students' cultural experiences increases their likelihood of success.**

# Increase career, technical, and culturally relevant education to meet student and workforce needs

Many Alaska superintendents have a success story to share about a student who benefitted from a career and technical education (CTE) program. CTE offers an opportunity to provide students of all ages with career choices that meet local business needs and a chance to lead a productive life in one's own community.

There is evidence that classroom instruction that is aligned with students' cultural experiences increases their likelihood of success. Finding ways to engage students, with place-based learning, CTE, or STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) courses that incorporate local culture and industry, is critical in making learning more relevant for students, teachers, and the community.



*Source: 2016-17 graduation data compiled by the Department of Education & Early Development. A CTE concentrator is defined as a student who has completed at least two high school credits of CTE study, including at least one credit of content-specific, progressively rigorous study. The non-CTE graduation rate is a subset of the overall four-year state graduation rate minus CTE concentrator graduates; therefore, this number will differ from the overall statewide graduation rate for the same time period.*

## Prioritized Strategies

*These are examples of strategies that DEED, school districts, and individuals will use to meet the trajectories.*

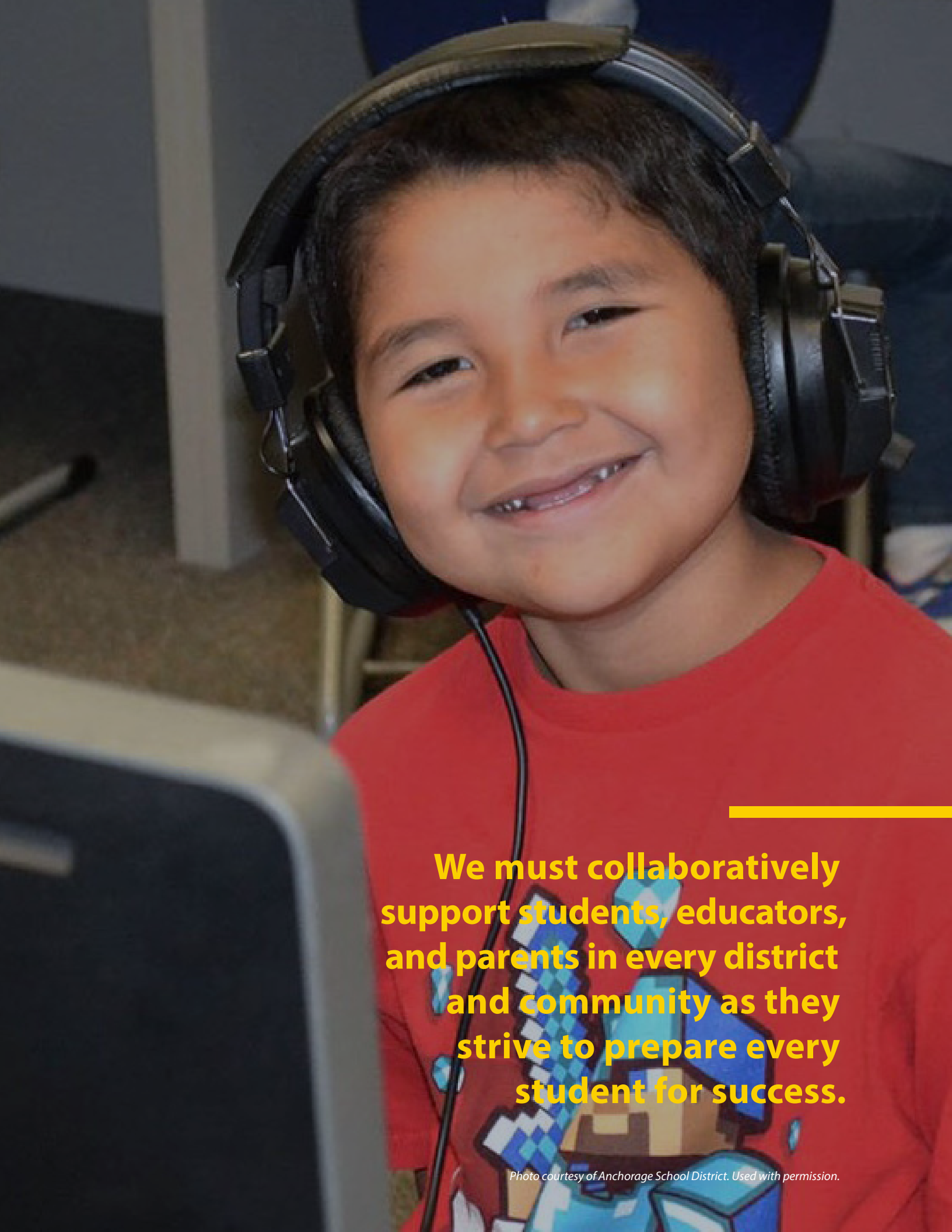
How can we achieve the goal of increasing career, technical, and culturally relevant education to meet student and workforce needs?

- Expand high-quality CTE courses and programs of study
- Foster collaboration between districts to create innovative and relevant experiences for students
- Establish partnerships among local industry, districts, and the state
- Increase awareness of the positive benefits of CTE for student engagement and academic success
- Create opportunities for local talent to engage with students
- Promote dialogue among local and state partners to increase opportunities for students
- Advance CTE educator professional development through partnerships and collaboration
- Encourage community involvement in CTE program development
- Support district exploration of diverse high school models such as distance delivery education in high school and access to off-site opportunities such as regional high schools, career and technical schools, and supported intern programs
- Provide industry more opportunities for input in career pathway curriculum

# What Progress Looks Like By 2025

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- ✓ **The number of students who, upon graduation, have earned dual credit, obtained an industry certification, or completed Advanced Placement coursework will increase by at least 15 percent**
- ✓ **The overall four-year graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent**
- ✓ **The overall five-year graduation rate will increase to at least 93 percent**
- ✓ **The number of students participating in CTE programs of study will increase by at least 20 percent**



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**We must collaboratively support students, educators, and parents in every district and community as they strive to prepare every student for success.**

*Photo courtesy of Anchorage School District. Used with permission.*

# Close the achievement gap by ensuring equitable educational rigor and resources

All means all. Our mission is to provide an excellent education for every student every day. This means that we refuse to accept the achievement gaps that currently exist. An equitable education system means every Alaska family has access to high-quality, rigorous, culturally relevant learning experiences and the resources needed for an excellent education, regardless of inequities in the system. Using a variety of culturally appropriate methods and multiple measures to track progress and identify needs, we will close the achievement gaps. This will require the commitment of all Alaskans. Tribal compacting and/or chartering are examples of the kind of commitment and family ownership of education that will help ensure that all Alaska students receive an excellent education every day.



**Alaska has achievement gaps between student groups, such as a 54 point gap in average grade 4 reading scores.**

Source: 2017 Alaska NAEP grade 4 reading results by race/ethnicity ([https://education.alaska.gov/tls/assessments/naep/NAEP2017GR4RD\\_snapshot.pdf](https://education.alaska.gov/tls/assessments/naep/NAEP2017GR4RD_snapshot.pdf))

## Prioritized Strategies

*These are examples of strategies that DEED, school districts, and individuals will use to meet the trajectories.*

How can we close the achievement gap by ensuring equitable educational rigor and resources for all students?

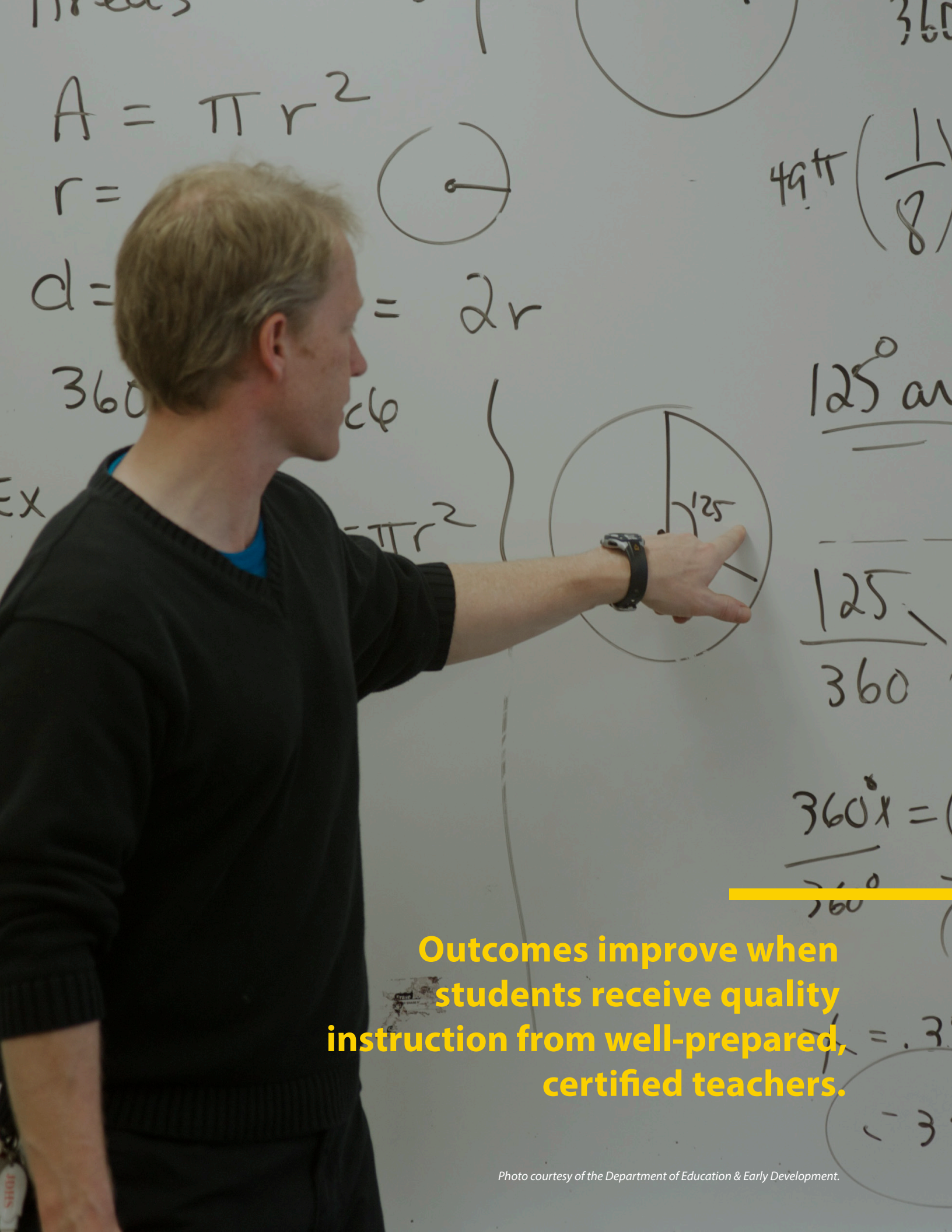
- Provide evidence-based strategies and resources for teachers on implementing standards-aligned and student-centered instruction and curricula for preschool through grade 12
- Institute instructional models that promote deeper hands-on learning (for example, CTE/STEM)
- Implement supportive strategies that boost attendance for all students
- Provide flexibility in school calendars, the traditional school structure, and the length of the school year
- Facilitate access to high-quality instructional materials and learning experiences for all students, preschool through postsecondary
- Expand the use of culturally appropriate methods, technologies, and measures for identifying success, mitigating underperformance, and accelerating student learning
- Engage in regular consultation with stakeholders who represent the full range of cultures, languages, geographical locations, resources, abilities, interests, and goals of our students
- Establish legislation for a tribal compacting and/or charting compact that outlines the authority, accountability, and fiscal responsibility of the tribal entities and the State of Alaska to carry out agreed-upon educational services for K–12 students
- Align school improvement, accountability, and standards
- Align instruction, curriculum, standards, student success expectations, and assessments
- Reconsider current education funding connected to seat time; redefine instruction and hour
- Promote cross-district partnerships and sharing of resources, such as courses, materials, professional development, guidance documents, and forms
- Fund correspondence students at the same level as non-correspondence students



# What Progress Looks Like By 2025

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- ✓ **The current performance gaps in English language arts and math for all student subgroups will be reduced by at least 45 percent**
- ✓ **The current gaps in graduation rates for all student subgroups will be reduced by at least 50 percent**
- ✓ **The proficiency rate for English learner students will increase to at least 65 percent**
- ✓ **The number of students in each subgroup who are required to take remedial classes upon entering college will be reduced by at least 50 percent**



**Outcomes improve when students receive quality instruction from well-prepared, certified teachers.**

# Prepare, attract, and retain effective education professionals

National research suggests that outcomes improve when students receive quality instruction from well-prepared teachers, and that teacher turnover negatively affects student outcomes. Therefore, well-prepared and committed teachers are key to improving education outcomes. In Alaska, rural districts with high teacher turnover rates often graduate fewer than half of their students, and their students have significantly lower reading proficiency.

With fewer individuals entering Alaska teacher preparation programs and applying for teaching jobs, most of our teachers still come from out of state. Our state can learn from the workforce development approaches of public and private industries that focus on developing local talent and intentionally recruiting, training, supporting, and retaining their workforce. By adopting effective human capital development strategies, we can ensure that every student has access to effective educators.



**Nearly two-thirds of all new teachers hired in Alaska each year come from out of state**

*Source: Data provided by the Department of Education & Early Development.*

## Prioritized Strategies

*These are examples of strategies that DEED, school districts, and individuals will use to meet the trajectories.*

How can we better prepare, attract, and retain effective education professionals?

- Increase the number of districts offering an Educators Rising program
- Support Alaska's educator preparation programs through accreditation and partnerships
- Provide induction programs for educators new to Alaska and/or the profession
- Reimagine Alaska studies and multicultural curriculum requirements through the lens of cultural literacy
- Add supports for new and veteran administrators
- Develop micro-credentialing opportunities for educators in high-impact areas such as cultural literacy, trauma-informed instruction, STEM, Alaska's English language arts and math standards, and text analysis
- Emphasize support and professional growth through district educator evaluation systems
- Continue to recognize and utilize Alaska's master educators (for example: National Board-Certified Educators)
- Create an Educator Preparation Standards Board for licensing

# What Progress Looks Like By 2025

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- ✓ **90 percent of new teachers in Alaska will have completed their teacher preparation program through an Alaska university**
- ✓ **90 percent of educators new to Alaska or the profession will be actively engaged in a cohort-based induction program that includes training around culturally responsive and trauma-informed instruction and the regular support of a mentor, teacher leader, or master teacher**
- ✓ **All Alaska school districts will experience less than 15 percent turnover of educators each year**

*Note: Turnover rates include teachers who have moved to another school within their district or to another district.*



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**Children who come to school healthy and safe are better able to learn.**

*Photo courtesy of Anchorage School District. Used with permission.*

# Improve the safety and well-being of students through school partnerships with families, communities, and tribes

Alaskans have no greater shared responsibility than to create the conditions that enable our children to be happy and healthy and to achieve their fullest potential. We know that student safety and well-being are essential for success in learning.

Research and practical experience both suggest that children who are safe and well are better able to learn, make friends, and set ambitious goals for their future. Research also indicates that schools that are warm and inviting, build meaningful relationships with every student, address students' physical and mental health needs, and enjoy broad community support see more student success than schools without these assets. Together, through partnerships with families, communities, and tribes, we can all improve the safety and well-being of Alaska's students and create a brighter future.



*Source: 2016-17 school year K-12 student suspension data compiled by the Department of Education & Early Development. A review of the data suggests that most of these suspensions and expulsions were for nonviolent and non-safety-related incidents.*

## Prioritized Strategies

*These are examples of strategies that DEED, school districts, and individuals will use to meet the trajectories.*

How can we improve the safety and well-being of students?

- Create sustainable and positive school climates that are safe, supportive, and engaging for all students, staff, and communities
- Provide supports for schools, communities, and families that are responsive to the needs of children who have experienced serious hardships in their lives
- Increase health- and safety-focused partnerships between schools and their communities
- Increase access to nursing and counseling services
- Increase awareness of, and provide supports for, the mental and physical health needs of children in our schools
- Provide and encourage training for schools on best practices to improve school climate
- Provide supports for all public schools to keep students and staff members safe
- Increase and promote partnerships between schools and community and tribal nursing/health and counseling services
- Increase and support partnerships between schools and law enforcement agencies



# What Progress Looks Like By 2025

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- ✓ **The number of students who report on the 2025 Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey that they did not go to school on one or more of the last 30 days because they felt unsafe will decrease by 35 percent**
- ✓ **The number of students suspended from school for nonviolent and non-safety-related incidents in a given school year will decrease by at least 15 percent**

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## Partner With Us

Thousands of Alaskans have provided input, worked collaboratively, and shared their support for meeting Alaska's Education Challenge.

We will achieve success for our students by working together and focusing our efforts on meeting their needs.

You can make a difference for Alaska's students by supporting Alaska's Education Challenge.

**Get involved! To learn more, visit [education.alaska.gov/akedchallenge](https://education.alaska.gov/akedchallenge)**