

# Anchorage's Education Revolution



community  
partner

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Some call it the 90% by 2020 Community Partnership. Some call it an education revolution. Whatever the nomenclature, Anchorage is using cutting-edge practices to improve cradle to career education outcomes.

Since the Education Issue of the Advancing Anchorage MAG exactly one year ago, top leaders from business, education, community and philanthropy have raised the bar on how the community of Anchorage will achieve better student outcomes, and strengthen the civic infrastructure so necessary for a healthy community and economy.

For some time, Anchorage has been focused on one student outcome – the high school graduation rate. In the last year, that rate increased from 72% to 76%, from a dismal 59% less than a decade ago. Which goes to show — that a community with all hands collaborating on deck can sail further, faster.

But the Anchorage community is not content to be on track to meet a 90% by 2020 graduation rate goal. In the last year, the 90% by 2020 partnership adopted cradle to career outcomes, with an ultimate focus on workforce readiness. The partnership also upped the ante by using data more rigorously to drive collaborative action and accountability.

Rather than looking outward and telling others what to do, these leaders are looking inward to challenge their own organizations to deeply and truly collaborate with one another, with deep shared commitment to improving these particular outcomes:

- + percent of kindergarteners who enter school ready
- + percent of 3rd graders who are proficient

and better in reading

- + percent of 8th graders who are proficient or better in math
- + percent of 9th graders who are on-track to graduate
- + percent of high school students graduating on time – ready to be successful
- + percent of students accessing and completing postsecondary training or college

The Anchorage School District is a key partner. The Destination 2020 goals for 90% proficiency in reading, writing and math align directly with this work. However, there is recognition that many ingredients for student success are found outside schools. For this reason, engaging businesses and community-based organizations as work partners is critical and necessary.

One key is strategically involving the partners with the most experience in data-driven processes. The 90% by 2020 partnership operates with data-driven principles very familiar to the business community: a laser focus on clear, measurable results; reliance on local data, along with research and expert opinion to guide decisions and action; and of a commitment to continuous improvement – define, measure, analyze, implement, control.

In recent months, a treasure trove of local data and national research has been assembled to guide the work. Three outcomes and indicators along the cradle to career pipeline have been prioritized. Networks of partners committed to these principles have formed to develop action plans around the priority areas of Ready for Kindergarten and 8th grade math. A third network is forming around ensuring our future workforce is ready.

The networks include practitioners from multiple sectors including schools, non profits, public agencies and more. They are using local data to identify specific geographic areas and student populations to focus their work on for the most impact. And they are examin-

ing program results to find the bright spots so “practices that work” can be spread through the network, to increase the percentages.

Over 40 Anchorage leaders, many of them from key corporations, have signed on to actively support this approach. Their role is to provide the opportunities that will make this possible and remove the barriers that can thwart this level of collaboration.

Tom Barrett, President and CEO of Alyeska Pipeline, recently stepped to the plate in support of 90% by 2020. He offered an Alyeska employee’s time to participate in the Ready for Kindergarten network, in a very targeted way — to provide industry expertise in systems change and data-informed continuous improvement. This level of expertise is something few in the early childhood arena have experienced. And this is invaluable.

Nelson Carpluk is that employee. He is a business analyst, originally from Mountain Village, which is northwest of Bethel on the Lower Yukon River.

“At Alyeska, I work with a lot of data, making sense of it and using it to guide our planning and budgeting,” he said. “I’m able to bring a different set of eyes to the process of making sure kids have the best chance possible, from the very start. That really hit home for me.”

Anchorage Chamber of Commerce President Andrew Halcro has said that, “Community cannot expect lawmakers to solve the public education challenge. Instead, through collective impact efforts, we can strengthen education, thus advancing Anchorage and advancing business.”

By harnessing the strength of all of Anchorage’s assets in a coordinated way, we can make a real difference — first, for our children, and ultimately, for our whole community.

*If your business is interested in more information, call June Sobocinski, Vice President Education Impact at United Way of Anchorage, 907-263-3824*