

ALASKA CAN! 65% by 2025

Southeast Alaska Postsecondary Access and Completion Strategy

The Alaska Postsecondary Access and Completion Network, in close coordination with state educators, industries, and other education professionals, aims to realize a statewide vision rooted in a set of regional action plans. In each region, a plan specific to a regional vision, goals, objectives, timeline, and evaluation measures will support and complement statewide efforts. Southeast Alaska is one of six regions for which plans are being developed.

The Southeast Alaska Postsecondary Access and Completion Strategy will be an active component of the Network's statewide commitment to "create synergy across Alaska" on postsecondary access and completion. The Network adopted the following statewide vision and goals to guide this effort.

Network Statewide Vision

Alaska's economy will be driven by Alaskans, with relevant credentials to attain individual and collective economic independence.

GOALS

1. Engage key players who influence postsecondary attendance, persistence, and completion of programs.
2. Foster a statewide partnership to positively affect postsecondary participation and completion.

In partnership with community members throughout Southeast, the Southeast Network Steering Committee has developed the following vision. This vision guided action plan development and will continue to support plan implementation.

Southeast Network Vision

A strong partnership between regional industries and educational services is supported by adequate and secure source(s) of State and local funding. This partnership supports an education system that serves Pre-K through postsecondary students and supplies a diverse, multi-skilled workforce for Southeast. Students who participate in Southeast's education system will enjoy a place-based education that offers clear career pathways and lifelong learning.

Students will graduate into a vibrant regional economy, with relevant job and career opportunities and family wages, and a high quality of life that makes it possible to work and live in the region. The region will benefit from the economic development spurred by this dynamic and responsive education system, local hire will be valued, and industry will be motivated to invest in employee success.

Plan Organization

This plan begins with a brief overview of the regional employment and education landscape considered in plan formation. This overview is followed by a matrix that describes the goals, problem statements, and strategy areas associated with each element. A table with action items follows the matrix, identifying actions to be taken to affect change in each element and outlining priorities, potential support organizations and individuals, and evaluation measures for the actions.

The Southeast Network Steering Committee will continue to oversee this action plan as the plan is implemented and augmented through 2025 and to report on evaluation measures to understand how the plan is supporting Network goals.

Regional Overview and Baseline Data

Population

According to the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Southeast Alaska represents 10 percent of Alaska's population, with 73,812 people in 2016. The population is projected to grow by 3 percent by 2025 to 76,272. Juneau represents 44 percent (32,739) of that population, with Ketchikan at 19 percent (13,758), Sitka 12 percent (8,920), and POW-Hyder 9 percent (6,440). All other Southeast communities combined total less than a quarter of the region's population, with 18,395 people.

While the regional population is projected to increase slightly, the working age population in Southeast is expected to decrease by 6.5 percent by 2025. During the same period, the population of retirement age (65 years old and older) is expected to increase by a third.

Educational Attainment

High school graduation rates are over 90 percent across the region, ranging from 92 percent in POW-Hyder to 99 percent in Skagway. One-quarter (27 percent) of adults have a high school degree, 7 percent an AA, and 31 percent a BA. Twenty-eight percent have attended some college but have not attained a degree.

Significant disparities exist in educational attainment across the region, both by type of degree and by race/ethnicity. Rates of attainment for AA or other degrees, for the population 25 to 64, are highest in Juneau (at 42 percent) and lowest in POW-Hyder and Yakutat (21 percent each). Attainment of BA or higher for white Southeast residents is higher than non-white, at 37 versus 17 percent respectively. The percent who have completed some

college though not a degree is similar between races. Attainment of less than a high school degree is 13 percent for non-whites and 4 percent for whites.

Employment

Approximately 33,000 workers are employed in the region. Top sectors by number of workers include trade/transportation/utilities (20 percent), local government (20 percent), state government (16 percent), education and health services (11 percent), and leisure and hospitality (9 percent). State government is higher proportionally in Southeast than any other region, while Educational and Health Services employment is lower. The Southeast unemployment rate is 6.1 percent, the second-lowest in the state after Anchorage/Mat-Su (5.9 percent).

Issues affecting the regional economy include:

- State government: Further contraction expected.
- Mining: Existing mines provide economic stability, with new prospects in Haines and Prince of Wales.
- Health care: Juneau and Sitka are regional hubs.
- Maritime industrial support: Sitka and Ketchikan facilities serve AMHS and private interests.
- Seafood: Harvesters and processors are among the larger employers.
- Tourism/Hospitality: Significant economic driver, with continued modest growth anticipated.

Regional Educational Strengths

At the Network-sponsored one-day conference on regional workforce education and training in Juneau on August 1, 2017, participants described four inter-related strengths of the Southeast education system: a unique location and educational experience, high levels of accessibility and personal connections, experiential learning opportunities, and a robust K-12 system.

UNIQUE LOCATION/EXPERIENCE

Southeast Alaska provides a unique landscape for learning. The environment offers place-based education opportunities and recreational activities attractive to students.

PERSONAL CONNECTIONS/ACCESSIBILITY OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND FACULTY

The small class sizes and communities in the UAS system provide ready access to faculty and campuses. Distance learning options make education opportunities available to most remote locations (though the nature of distance education can also present barriers). Also, for a university, UAS is relatively affordable to access, and financial aid opportunities (such as the Alaska Performance Scholarship) are available.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Connections between K-12, university, and training programs and industry/other Southeast institutions offers a wealth of experiential learning opportunities for all age groups. These opportunities not only allow students to gain “real world” experience, but they also facilitate peer-to-peer cohorts.

K-12 SYSTEM

Overall, Southeast enjoys a relatively strong K-12 system. Strengths within that system include:

- Local government investment
- High graduation rates
- Strong CTE programs
- Dual enrollment opportunities
- Experiential learning
- Industry support/partnerships
- Indigenous language revitalization/culturally-responsive education
- Strong districts/teachers
- Strong special education
- Unique extracurricular opportunities
- Boarding schools for Alaska Native students

Regional Educational Barriers

Barriers to improved education in Southeast include delivery, cultural relevance, equity, and flexibility. Issues may be amplified in smaller communities.

DELIVERY BARRIERS

Logistical and technological complications impede access to education opportunities in some remote areas in the region.

CULTURAL RELEVANCE

A culture of distrust in the education system has been identified for some in the region. Others may not see the need for postsecondary education/training because of lucrative jobs available in the region that do not require postsecondary education or training, particularly in natural resource-related fields. A history of cultural trauma also pervades the region. Some of the cultural history has led to inequitable delivery and access to education.

EQUITY

While UAS is relatively affordable as a university, it is expensive by community college standards and therefore not affordable for some. Also, the cost of living in the region is high. An uncertain funding environment at the university also may discourage investment in an education at the university for some.

FLEXIBILITY

Many careers in Southeast Alaska are seasonal and do not align with traditional education schedules. Also, many returning students encounter difficulties with incorporating credit for previous education into current education pursuits.

Southeast Postsecondary Action and Completion Strategy

The plan is organized into seven elements of postsecondary education critical to meeting regional postsecondary access and completion goals: Affordability, Education-Industry Collaboration, Technology and Communication, Preparation for Postsecondary Education and the Workforce, Culturally-Relevant Education, Postsecondary Completion, and Postsecondary Education Mid-Career. The following goals, problem/need statements, and strategic focus areas guided development of specific actions to improve postsecondary progress in the region.

Goals, Problem Statements, and Focus Areas by Postsecondary Education Element

Element of Postsecondary Education	Goal	Problem/Need Statements	Strategic Focus Areas
Affordability	Improve access to postsecondary education by reducing cost barriers.	The cost of postsecondary education is a barrier for many residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness
Industry-Education Collaboration	Develop a dynamic and efficient collaboration between Southeast businesses and industries and the education system.	There is a need for better alignment between industry workforce and training needs in the region and education offerings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Investment • Employee Education • Advisory Groups • Career Pipelines
Technology and Communication	Improve access to postsecondary education through improved technology and communication.	<p>Technology needed to access postsecondary options is not equally accessible to all residents, limiting the ability of some to participate.</p> <p>There is a need for communication about the variety of educational options and resources available.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access • Targeted Marketing • Training • Use • High Speed
Preparation for Postsecondary Education and the Workforce	Prepare students for the workforce through postsecondary education	<p>Fundamental development occurs during Pre-K that impacts learning and academic/social-emotional success over a lifetime.</p> <p>Adequate preparation in K-12 is necessary in academic subjects and basic life skills for entering the workforce, with postsecondary education as a step in the process.</p> <p>Gaps remain in student understanding of the postsecondary education process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-K • K-12 • Early Advising • “Soft” Skills • Resources
Culturally-Relevant Education	Incorporate local cultures/practices into education delivery.	Cultural history, ideals, attitudes, and perceptions regarding current education systems need to be recognized and incorporated into how education is delivered, what is offered, and how it is evaluated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Educators • Culturally-Responsive Education Training
Postsecondary Completion	Provide practical and attractive means for individuals to complete postsecondary education.	Alaska has one of the highest rates of working-age adults with some postsecondary education and no degree/certificate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Advising • Career Counseling • Consistent, Quality Educators • Applied Education
Postsecondary Education Mid-Career	Address barriers to adults and mid-career professionals completion of postsecondary training/education.	Increasing participation in education related to mid-career advancement requires flexibility in class scheduling and delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted Marketing • Flexible Schedules • Family • Technology Training • Reverse Mentorship

The following Action Matrix identifies actions to be taken in each of the seven elements of postsecondary education. Actions within each section are organized by priority:

- Immediate (I): starting immediately for the current legislative session.
- Year One (Y): focus on this action item from the time of plan adoption through the next annual Network statewide conference.
- Long-Term: focus on this action item after the next Network statewide conference.

A point person on the Southeast Network Steering Committee is assigned to each Immediate and Year One action. The point person will keep track of progress on assigned action items in coordination with other partners and individuals who are interested in working on the action. Action item tracking will include establishment of:

1. Attainable mid-term action steps.
2. Timeline.
3. Additional partners to be recruited for action item implementation.
4. Metrics to measure success in mid-term action step progress.
5. Resources needed to support action step implementation and metrics, and how to obtain these resources.

Action Matrix

Preparation for Postsecondary Education and the Workforce

Short-term

- I Advocate for K-12 education funding as a workforce development strategy.
- I Provide career advisement to increase student understanding about workforce needs and opportunities and postsecondary process.
- Y Provide career awareness and exploration for elementary and middle school students and career and technical education and training for high school students, including mentorship.

Long-term

Develop, fund, and expand on programs that focus on fundamental development that occurs in Pre-K that impacts learning and academic/social-emotional success over a lifetime.

Incorporate basic life skill lessons into Pre-K, elementary and secondary school, such as financial literacy and study skills.

Postsecondary Completion

Short-term

- I Enhance student advising through career counseling on how and why to finish training and education programs and more frequent counselor check-ins. Include better advertising of scholarship opportunities.
- I Ensure advising for non-traditional students addresses cost-effectiveness and fastest routes to completion.
- I Accommodate child care needs.
- Y Encourage dual enrollment for high school students.
- Y Ensure UA degree requirements are the same across AK regions.

Long-term

- Update education programs to accommodate the new, portable generation of workers.
- Establish smaller education levels with tuition incentives for higher completion.
- Research and promote skills that lead to employment.
- Establish educator/employer partnerships to provide an employment incentive to graduate (discounted tuition).

Affordability

Short-term

- I Advocate for a State fiscal plan that includes an increased investment in postsecondary education.
- Y Develop and distribute a centralized list of employee tuition reimbursement programs in Southeast.
- Y Develop and distribute a list of postsecondary education funding resources with requirements to obtain each resource.

Long-term

- Develop a centralized scholarship application for multiple funding sources.
- Develop Tech Prep opportunities for high schoolers.
- Create a public media campaign to stay in state, communicate the financial benefits of doing so.
- Publish materials to encourage employers and other sponsors of funding resources to enter information into the AK Career Education System (AKCIS).

Postsecondary Education Mid-Career

Short-term

Y Develop reverse mentorship programs to help transition mid-career professionals into current postsecondary technology and overcome technology barriers.

Y Develop flexible methods for completing coursework, such as iPads that can be used while working to gain postsecondary credit.

Long-term

Develop targeted marketing campaigns to increase awareness of mid-career education opportunities and how they meet industry needs.

Develop postsecondary options not scheduled around the semester system to fit better with mid-career schedules.

Develop education and training programs to address barriers to mid-career education associated with cost of living, technology learning curve, child care, and finances.

Provide more credit for prior learning experiences.

Culturally Relevant Education

Short-term

I Reinstate SE Native Education Consortium.

Y Explore an indigenous language requirement and change term for Alaska Native language from “foreign” to “world.”

Y Expand Alaska Native representation on Boards and other decision-making bodies relevant to education, and industry collaboration.

Y Establish a dedicated school board seat for tribal representation and do the same at the policy level for other education-related governing bodies.

Y Update library collections for research and curriculum to reflect culturally relevant authors and topics.

Long-term

Develop a formal partnership with tribes, ANCs, and the university to create a guardian/watchman program.

Develop local postsecondary programs that emphasize place-based education.

Increase education on cultural trauma. Develop and enhance programs to acknowledge and address related perceptions and realities within the education system.

Encourage training and hiring of educators from within communities to connect with residents and increase the likelihood of educators remaining in communities.

Explore creation of a tribal college.

Develop more diversity at higher levels of administration in businesses and universities.

Technology and Communication

Short-term

Y Conduct an inventory of internet access in Southeast, including an inventory of free wi-fi in communities and potential for expansion.

Y Identify access issues in rural communities and address to make it easier for residents to participate in education.

Y Ensure all demographics are trained in technology necessary to access postsecondary options.

Long-term

Develop peer-to-peer programs and public outreach campaigns to encourage use of technology to access postsecondary opportunities.

Communicate the variety of educational options and resources available to Southeast residents through public relations and marketing.

Address gaps in student and family understanding of the postsecondary education process and provide advising early.

Education-Industry Collaboration

Short-term

Conduct a survey of employers in the region to understand:

- I
 - Entry credentials required of workers in Southeast specifically.
 - Employee education benefits.
 - What credentials employers are looking for and need in their workforce.
 - What education programs are currently in place to meet industry needs.

I Expand workshops on interviewing skills, resume writing, and other workforce skills to job fair events for people throughout Southeast.

Y Utilize State Education and Early Development data to identify dual enrollment programs that work across the state and country and implement in Southeast.

Long-term

Enhance career exploration opportunities for high school students and young adults, as well as younger students. Bring industry into classrooms in applied ways.

Identify barriers for individuals in obtaining certifications and work to remove.

Identify funding sources for other Alaska Middle Colleges and assess applicability for such a model in Southeast.

Promote positive and productive relationships between employees and employers through supervisory management training.

Conduct asset mapping of school districts, universities, and employers to identify successful partnerships.

