



NEW VISIONS: NEW HORIZONS

A Progress Report on Arts Education
in Six Alaskan Districts

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Introduction and Context

In 2009 the Alaska State Council on the Arts (ASCA) adopted a new initiative to *“work with targeted districts to establish and implement arts curriculum in order to research and develop model arts education programs in rural and urban Alaska.”*

Named the “New Visions” initiative in response to a 2008 Council study called *On Thin Ice*, this project set about to research what it would take to develop model arts programs. The seminal *On Thin Ice* research documented, among other things, that 73% of Alaskan districts had no arts curriculum, only six included the arts as a graduation requirement, 72 % had no budget allocation for the arts, and that less than 2% of the state’s teaching force was highly qualified in the arts. Though the Council and the National Endowment for the Arts had funded Artist in the Schools (AIS) residencies across Alaska for over thirty years the Council reasoned that the net effect of those arts experiences had not significantly impacted district policies or funding, teacher preparation programs, or on-going arts instruction for students. The Council launched New Visions to see what more could be done to affect instruction in the arts. They guaranteed an annual financial investment to target districts, along with on-going technical support and assistance. Districts were required to match the ASCA funds.

After three years, in 2012 the Council commissioned a report to review the impact to date in the three districts.

Entitled “NEW VISIONS, NEW HOPE” this publication gave specific examples of impact on Curriculum and Assessment, Professional Development, Leadership, Instruction, and Community Engagement.

In 2014 the Council then produced a five year update to the *On Thin Ice* study entitled *Venture for Alaska’s Youth*, to determine what had changed in the landscape of arts education across Alaska, and to see whether the Council’s amplified attention to the arts in Alaskan districts, notably the New Visions districts, had made any difference. Forty district administrators (75%) responded to the 2014 survey. These districts served 121,794, or 92% of all students, in both urban and rural settings.

	2009 survey	2014 survey
Arts Curriculum in place	11 districts	21 districts
Graduation Requirement	6	9
Highly Qualified Arts Teachers in Alaska		
Music	114	291
Visual Arts	138	164
Theater	20	35
Elementary Student Instruction (typically 30 minute classes)		
Music	19	22
Visual Arts	18	23
Alaska Native Cultural Arts	13	18
Secondary Student Instruction (typically 50 minute classes)		
Music	21	24
Visual Arts	20	23

This response rate was higher than that in 2008, when 32 districts, representing 89% of Alaska's students, responded to the online survey. The Council learned of significant differences, a number of them positive.

Fourteen districts (39% of respondents) reported that No Professional Development in the arts was offered in the previous year – a figure matching previous data. According to superintendents, the Greatest Need for professional development was in Arts Integration, where general classroom teachers learn skills and strategies to integrate the arts across the curriculum.

Compared to 2008, more Alaskan districts (24) were using district funds for arts education. Grants, Alaska Native organizations and business partners financially supported arts education, more so than five years previous,

suggesting to the Council a growing recognition in Alaskan communities of the value of arts education for all students.

In 2008, over half of the districts indicated that federal mandates resulting from the No Child Left Behind legislation were the biggest barrier to providing arts education. By 2014 that barrier had dissipated; schools and districts evidently adjusted to accountability demands on instructional time and the rigors of regular testing.

Using the comparative research and reports at hand, in September, 2014 the Council considered whether to continue, eliminate or expand the New Visions Network project. Armed with the latest data from the Ventures report – which indicated significant progress toward the overall ASCA goal for arts education—they voted to continue and expand the New Visions Network.



Alaskan administrators learning at 2017 Administrator Arts Academy.

“The work of Alaskan school districts to implement arts education as part of a strong, well-rounded education is an ongoing challenge. The examples from the New Visions districts 10 years into the program are inspiring, and a testament to long-term persistence in reaching the goal of access for all Alaskan students.”

– Andrea Noble-Pelant

New Visions Network Description

The goal of this project was, and continues to be to increase access, equity, and quality to arts learning for all K - 12 students in Alaska.

In 2009, with input from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development and using the criteria of geography, size, academic performance and leadership, three diverse districts were invited to participate: Bering Strait, Copper River and Kodiak. Sitka was added in 2013 (Year Five of the initiative) followed by North Slope in

2014, and Lower Kuskokwim in 2016. The Bristol Bay Borough School District will enter the Network in 2018, in the 10th year of the New Visions initiative. The following chart illustrates key characteristics and the diversity of New Visions districts.

The Network is supported using a sliding scale of ASCA funding, ranging from \$10,000 to \$2,500 over a district's continued membership in the Network. Each year districts meet or exceed the required 100% match of the ASCA funding. (eg., in 2009 the three initial districts

District	2017-18 Student Enrollment	# of school sites	Ethnicity	# of Teachers
Bering Strait	1,981	15	99% Inupiaq, Yup'ik, St. Lawrence Yup'ik	176
Copper River	441	5	50% Caucasian, 40% Alaska Native/Athabascan, 10% other	26
Kodiak	2,437	14	41% Caucasian, 26% Asian/Pacific Islander, 19% AN/Alutiiq, 14% other	151
Lower Kuskokwim	4,331	28	96% Alaska Native/Yup'ik, 4% other	293
North Slope	2,160	11	77% Alaska Native, 8% Asian/Pacific Islander, 15% other	160
Sitka	1,306	6	49% Caucasian, 31% AN/Tlingit, 9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 11% other	104
	12,656 10% of overall student population	79		910 11% of overall teacher count in Alaska

Data from DEED, 2018

spent \$524,357 “matching” the \$30,000 ASCA allocation) Overall, ASCA spent between \$20,000 - \$30,000 of its annual budget on this initiative, totaling roughly \$240,000 over nine years.

After conducting baseline surveys and needs assessments of staff and administrators, all New Visions districts developed visions and plans for what they hoped to accomplish over a five year timeframe. Implementation of district designed Arts Action Plans were followed by annual reports of progress toward goals. District representatives participated in monthly audio meetings, sharing new ideas, successes and challenges. An annual face-to-face meeting of district reps continues to be a highly valued component of the Network.

Seeing the positive impacts of their involvement with New Visions internally and cross districts, administrators of the three original districts remained staunchly committed to the Network after five years and agreed to reduce their annual ASCA allocations to \$2,500. They have now completed the 9th year of involvement and will continue as Network members.

Using a framework adapted from the Kennedy Center, the New Visions Arts Action Plans address five central components:

- Curriculum and Assessment
- Professional Development
- Leadership
- Instruction, including guest artist residencies
- Community Engagement

Each district tailored activities to their unique needs and realities in relation to these five components. The outcomes listed below indicate the relative effectiveness of their activities and help persuade Alaskans that the arts can and do play an important, sustainable role in enriching the education of Alaskan students in urban and rural schools, at all grade levels.

Over 12,000 Alaskan K-12 students receive arts instruction where they had not before.

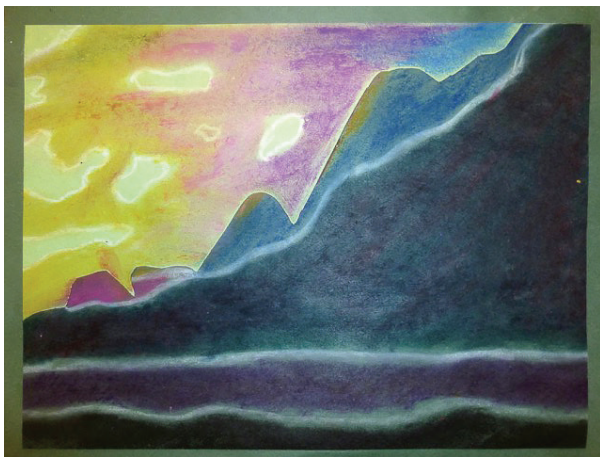


New Vision Districts

Bering Strait

- ▶ Adopted a Visual Arts curriculum in 2011 that includes Bering Sea artists for the first time, put it online and purchased Alaska designed Visual Art Kits to support the curriculum
 - ▶ Added 213 discrete arts classes to the list of all classes that can be offered
 - ▶ Offered optional, after school workshops for teachers with Artist in the Schools teaching artists
 - ▶ Hosted “Working Weekends” where teachers learned strategies to integrate the arts across the curriculum, featuring topics such as Music and Math, Science Illustration, Comics and Language Arts, and Digital Storytelling
 - ▶ Hired its first two highly qualified arts teachers in 2012. Based on the impact on student interest, attendance, motivation, and, to a degree, academic performance, three schools now have full time arts teachers, funded by school staffing appropriations.
 - ▶ Paired teaching artists with local teachers to deliver summer programs in 14 sites, for students who needed additional time to meet district standards. This strategy increased summer school enrollment and heightened student interest
 - ▶ Initiated a rotating, annual, Student Art Show where all community members were invited to view student work. In 2015 initiated an annual digitally curated online art show, and encouraged all community members from across the region to vote for entries
 - ▶ Developed and delivered two high school student Arts and Culture Expos and then a Youth Cultural Heritage and Leadership Expo, which included full day arts offerings with guest teaching artists and a culminating arts show and exhibition
 - ▶ Added site specific photos celebrating arts teachers and arts liaisons to district webpage
 - ▶ Reinvigorated the broadcasting studio located in the District Office- to teach Media Arts and production skills, and encourage digital stories from all sites, to be widely broadcast
 - ▶ Recruited 33 teachers to enroll in a UAF course “Core Practices in Place-based and Culture-based teaching, through the SILKAT Project
 - ▶ Produced 13 arts and culture units to date, and an orientation for colleagues who will use the units in the future
 - ▶ Displays student art in local/regional airplane hangers (Nome and Unalakleet)
- One significant challenge** –Training and supporting local and regional artists to co-teach in village schools, thereby recognizing and celebrating the status of traditional indigenous art forms

"Bering Strait School District has been a committed partner in New Visions from its inception. BSSD continues to "Reinvigorate the Arts" across the district as a direct result of the focus provided by the structure of New Visions and the supportive network of individuals, groups and systems. New Visions has and continues to be a vessel for housing conversation, collaboration and stakeholder involvement for the purpose of expanding access to high quality arts instruction for all students."



Copper River

- ▶ Adopted its first K – 12 integrated visual arts curriculum. Working on an integrated Drama curriculum closely linked to literacy development
 - ▶ Adopted a 1 credit Fine Arts Requirement
 - ▶ Provides hands-on arts learning in District in-services, led by local teachers
 - ▶ Routinely includes reports on arts activities at administrator and monthly school board meetings
 - ▶ Displays student artwork in District Office and Board of Education meeting room
 - ▶ Provides arts instruction for home school students
 - ▶ Engages new staff to teach classes in visual arts, theater, vocal music, percussion, elementary music, industrial design
 - ▶ Institutionalized Poetry Out Loud as an annual, signature feature and important part of the English/Language Arts curriculum. All secondary students participate in classroom activities and a district competition modeled on the annual state event in Juneau
 - ▶ Changed the district schedule so students take 4 week "basecamp" classes in core content (eg. Math, Language Arts) followed by 2 week "trek" credit classes, enabling arts instruction when it was not possible with a traditional schedule
 - ▶ Regularly includes student, school and community arts events and achievements in Copper River Valley News
- One significant challenge** – Shrinking student population as families move out of the Copper River Valley has meant a shrinking budget and reduced staffing

“Our years as a member of this Network have taken us from being a district with essentially no art in our schools and our curricular conversations, to a community where the arts are part of our schools, our academic offerings, and daily classroom experiences for students.

The collaborative nature of New Visions has resulted in regular, focused conversations about the arts, as well as collaboration with leaders and teachers from other New Visions and neighboring districts. As a small, road-system district that was virtually void of the arts less than a decade ago, it is tremendously exciting to have something to offer larger districts and those with more established arts-related programming.”

Kodiak

- ▶ Revised Visual Arts curriculum in 2013, to be standards based and include performance assessments
- ▶ Aligned science instructional plan and visual arts kits; trained teachers in the use of kits as part of science curriculum implementation
- ▶ Recognized as a national finalist for the Kennedy Center/Association of School Boards Award for Leadership in Arts Education (one of five districts nationally)
- ▶ Hosted several Teaching Artist Academies to train 20+ local artists to work in K – 8 schools, in collaboration with the Kodiak Arts Council
- ▶ Participates in the Kennedy Center Annual Partners in Education Meeting; includes visits to Alaska’s Senators
- ▶ Launched district-wide initiative to add the Arts to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) movement and has become an outspoken, public supporter of A+STEM in Alaska
- ▶ Over 50% of middle school students receive music instruction in band, orchestra or choir, and participate in an all-district spring musical performance
- ▶ Started a middle school jazz program
- ▶ Funds additional staff support, provides in-class modeling, training with Kennedy Center teaching artists each year and a course for teachers - Innovation through Arts Integration - offered through Kodiak College
- ▶ Increased opportunities and resources for teachers and students through the Munartet Project partnership with Kodiak College, Alutiiq Museum and Kodiak Arts Council
- ▶ Collaborates with the Kodiak Arts Council to host monthly Art Labs for teachers to introduce, model and practice varied art forms, thereby increasing their confidence

One significant challenge - Having leaders in the community and the district commit to long term, action; it requires patience, professional development and, most importantly time, to become sustainable.

"New Visions has had a HUGE impact. The whole board can respond to questions about the importance of the arts. The board/district sees the arts as a foundational building block for verbal and non-verbal thinking. The family of New Visions districts has been very important to KIBSD."

Lower Kuskokwim

- ▶ Re-invigorated past work on arts integration that was fueled by three major federal grants
- ▶ Formally added the arts in 2017 as a priority area of their adopted strategic planning process, which guides all district programs
- ▶ Adopted new language arts curriculum, including integrated lessons with arts and language arts
- ▶ Delivers visual arts instruction for students and credit classes for staff via technology
- ▶ Put system in place for District Office to order all art supplies for all sites
- ▶ Sponsors two Weekend Arts Retreats for select teachers each year
- ▶ Developed a stronger emphasis on STEAM and cultural arts in numerous district activities

- ▶ Offers Summer Media Arts Academy and credit course for 20 high school students, where they learn documentary and feature film production skills and contribute to the district library of student made films
- ▶ Hosts Annual Festival of Arts and Academics in Bethel, featuring student artwork and films
- ▶ Sponsored a five day Multicultural teacher institute in 2018, in partnership with the Alaska Arts Education Consortium and local partners
- ▶ Included arts in multi-year School Improvement Plans in sites where the administrator went to the 2018 Administrator Arts Academy

One significant challenge – Ensuring there is a full time staff member to coordinate all components of the District's Arts Action Plan

"The collaboration among New Vision's districts helped revitalize LKSD's focus on the arts. In one year the district re-instituted teacher professional development Arts Retreats, designated 21 arts liaison position, ones in each village school, and created an interactive arts website to showcase student art work. The District's increased commitment to the arts is a direct result of collaborative efforts with New Vision's partners."

New Visions: New Horizons

North Slope

- ▶ Ensured arts are integral to the District's Iñupiaq Framework, developed over the last ten years
- ▶ The Iñupiaq Learning Framework is the foundation of all district curriculum
- ▶ Focused on early childhood/preschool level and increased visual art and movement learning for young children; piloted Creative Curriculum materials and enhanced teacher practice through arts integration
- ▶ Raises funds for Barrow High School band to perform in Lower 48 each year
- ▶ Revised and enhanced Visual Arts kits to emphasize local, cultural place based themes
- ▶ Hosted an Iñupiaq Arts Institute for 20 teachers in Point Hope in 2016

One significant challenge – Persistent teacher turn-over, as many as 60 teachers annually - and lack of knowledge and interest in the arts generally, with staff.

"The people and students of the North Slope have a rich cultural and artistic heritage. Their artistic heritage reflects the interconnectedness of the Inupiaq culture, land and indigenous people. The New Visions Project provides a forum for the arts to connect students to these elements in our schools."

Sitka

- ▶ Developed and adopted Arts, Culture and Technology (ACT) Standards in 2014 to guide curriculum development and lesson planning, using a common lesson plan template
- ▶ Working on an online library of arts integrated lessons drafted by local teachers
- ▶ Supports an ACT Advisory Council to guide all arts planning and implementation
- ▶ Uses school teams to develop plans to suit distinct interests and needs
- ▶ Builds capacity of teachers to integrate the arts by providing two week Basic Arts Institutes (2013, 2016, 2017) and an Advanced Institute, in collaboration with the Alaska Arts Education Consortium
- ▶ Sponsored carefully designed Teaching Artist Academy and recruited local artists to participate
- ▶ Connected with STEAM movement through online conferencing, giving teachers practical tips, resources and ideas for arts integration and STEAM



► Committed to “going deeper” into school reform and meaningful instruction by intentionally uniting all district programs so that they go beyond “activities”, with the outcome of high quality instruction in every classroom, every day, with every student. The arts are a big part of this work.

One significant challenge – Working consistently and effectively with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska and local arts organizations to maximize resources and support within the community



“One of the most significant things about New Visions is that in the midst of all the noise in our educational landscape, about budgets, charters, vouchers, student testing, technology it has allowed us a breath of fresh air. We are breathing LIFE into lessons here. We can give teachers a vision of what arts integration really means, what it looks like throughout the school year because of the work we are doing.”

Common Strategies Used in New Visions Districts

Using technology to teach the arts: For example in Bering Strait School District dance classes were offered by a teaching artist in Anchorage, as was a painting class taught by a former BSSD student who is disabled and living in Anchorage. In Kodiak K - 8 music is taught to students in village schools via technology.

Weaving Arts and Cultures Together: For example in Sitka where trained para-professionals who are culture bearers teach drumming, beading and Northwest Coast design as part of instructional units. In the North Slope district storytelling is the cornerstone of the Inupiaq Framework which guides all curriculum and instruction.

Deepening Community Engagement: For example in Copper River School District where arts-related events are live streamed throughout the community. In Kodiak annual arts festivals attract community members from across the island.

Distributed Leadership with Districts: All districts identify school based Arts Liaisons who voice the strengths and challenges from each site as plans are implemented.

Artists in Residence: Four of the six New Visions districts apply for annual grants to fund Artist in the Schools residencies - one component of their Action Plans.

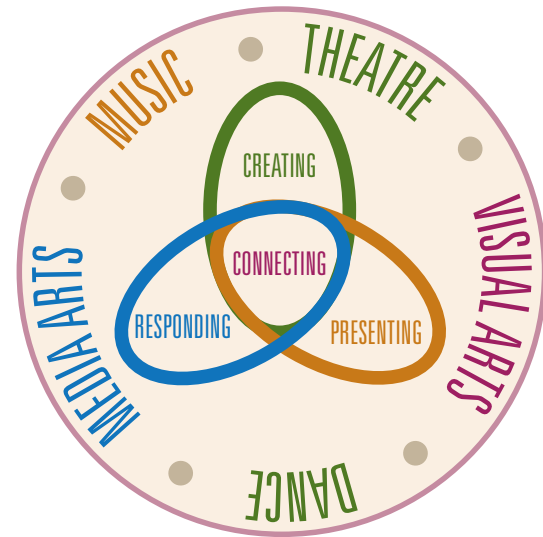


New Developments Affecting New Visions

Several actions at the state level affect New Visions districts as they work to increase access and quality of arts education for all students. Their work also directly impacts arts education across Alaska. Recent developments that significantly impacted arts education in Alaska hold promise for positive change and program expansion, including:

ALASKA ARTS STANDARDS: Adopted by the State Board of Education in 2016. They include content and performance standards, by grade range bands, in Music, Visual Arts, Dance, Theatre and Media Arts. The content standards are general, giving districts the latitude to further define specific skills and knowledge within the arts disciplines that reflect their community values, priorities and capacities. After State Board adoption, an implementation Blueprint was designed to help districts implement the Standards was broadly distributed and posted on DEED and ASCA websites.

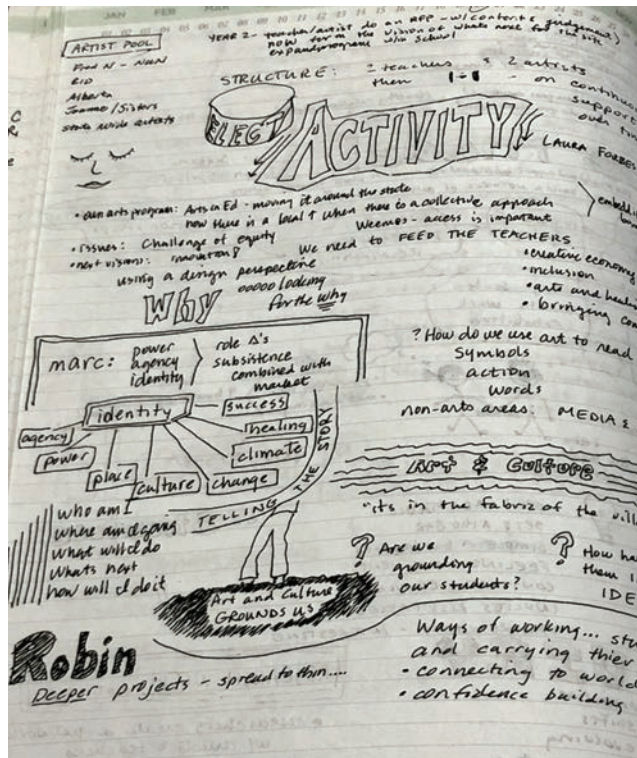
EVERY CHILD SUCCEEDS ACT – a new FEDERAL LAW: In 2015, Congress passed bipartisan legislation that ushered in a new era of federal K-12 education policy, with increased local control and state-level accountability, along with new opportunities for arts education. The Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandates that all American students have “equitable access to a well rounded education.” This was the first time the arts were listed as essential to a well rounded education in federal law, opening a door of opportunity for Alaskan districts to use federal funds for the arts.



ALASKA'S EDUCATION CHALLENGE: The Alaska State Board of Education launched the Alaska's Education Challenge in 2017, with the vision for “an excellent education for every student every day.” After gathering public input from 1,400 Alaskans in 109 communities Alaska's Education Challenge resulted in five priorities for Alaska's public education system: Improve Student Learning, Ensure Excellent Educators, Modernize the Education System, Inspire Tribal and Community Ownership, and Promote Safety and Well-being. New Visions districts took up the challenge and priority of Improving Student Learning; in 2017 they submitted examples of how the arts do just that – improve student learning.

New Visions: New Horizons

ADMINISTRATOR ARTS ACADEMY, 2017: Because most New Visions administrators have a limited background in the arts and are crucial to ensuring an increase in teaching and learning through the arts, they were invited to a 2 ½ day session in fall, 2017 funded through a Title II grant from the DEED. 45 administrators and University of Alaska faculty attended hands-on arts sessions, and briefings on the Alaska Arts Standards and status of arts integration in each district. 98% of participants indicated their knowledge about arts integration increased; 87% reported they feel more confident about increasing the arts in their schools and districts



Daily notes by a BSSD administrator during the 2017 Arts Academy.

“It is so easy, as an administrator, to be consumed with the daily management of the school, teacher observations, housing issues, personnel issues and problem solving for students. Taking the time to think about the big picture and the important role the arts play in character development, social emotional learning, and communication, is very essential.”

“It is rare to gather administrators together to specifically discuss the importance and impact of the arts. I feel that throughout the three days I had many impactful conversations with my colleagues, gained new insights and ideas to take back to my District, and felt a solidarity with stakeholders across Alaska.”



New Visions District Team leaders and members included

Bering Strait School District: Superintendents Jim Hickerson, Rob Picou, Brett Agenbroad, Bobby Bolen, Kim Sweeny, Greg Johnson, Ben Howard, John Weemes, Robin Child

Copper River School District: Superintendents Michael Johnson, Tammy Van Whye

Kodiak Island Borough School District: Superintendents Stewart McDonald, Larry LeDoux, Marilyn Davidson, Angie Chervenak, Joann Knight

Lower Kuskokwim School District: Superintendent Dan Walker, Carlton Kuhns, Julie McWilliams

North Slope Borough School District: Superintendents Peggy Cowan, Glenn Szymoniak, Stewart McDonald, Linda Saito, Brian Freeman, Jill Exe

Sitka School District: Superintendents Steve Bradshaw, Mary Wegner, Sarah Ferrency, Phil Burdick, Nancy Douglas, Jessica Christianson

Alaska State Council on the Arts
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Arts Education Directors Ruth Glenn, Laura Forbes

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