University of Alaska
Teacher Education Plan

University of Alaska Members and Staff

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I. OVERVIEW

Commitment and Purpose
This three-year plan builds on the ongoing efforts of the UA Education Units (UAS School of Education, UAF School of Education, UAA College of Education) to place more Alaskans into education positions. To effectively address this challenge, we must continue to engage Alaskans in the process. This includes policymakers, the current administration, state leaders, teachers, school boards, superintendents, university faculty, parents, community members, and our students. The Teacher Education Planning Group will expand its collaboration with K-12 education leaders to develop a workforce that accurately reflects the diverse student populations they serve. In developing this plan, we have been guided by a statement of shared commitment adopted in spring 2008 when the UA Education deans became part of the SW Educator Preparation Planning Group established by President Hamilton:

Teacher Education and Commitment to the State of Alaska
The University of Alaska is committed to meeting the workforce needs of Alaska; producing the best teachers and administrators for Alaska is the primary concern for the Teacher Education Planning Group. Meeting the needs of both rural and urban school districts is complex and lends itself to examination of the status of the teaching profession. The current situation is ominous and complicates the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers; low salaries, the high cost of living, schools in corrective action, new policies related to teacher certification, the retirement system, and more lucrative career opportunities elsewhere are all variables outside of the immediate control of teacher preparation. Yet these variables have profound impacts on recruitment of students into the profession of education. We are committed to continuing to meet the needs of Alaska’s schools and communities, while at the same time ensuring quality is not compromised by the quest for quantity. Innovative approaches and flexible programming will increase the supply of quality teachers for Alaska. These efforts will require alternative and additional resources, and ongoing collaboration.

The Need: More Alaska Prepared Teachers
The University of Alaska takes its role in producing a highly capable workforce for Alaska seriously. Public education is the foundation of all other workforce concerns and in an effort to address them, teacher preparation, educational research, and K-12 partnerships are among the top priorities for the university. However, with the boom of other industry sectors that offer higher salaries and enticing benefits, recruiting students to teach in areas they are needed most, both in terms of region and content area, has become increasingly difficult. In order to increase the supply of teachers, particularly in schools that require the most attention, Alaska will need to invest in educational research that informs policy; examine the working conditions of educators, including compensation, housing and
regulations; and work collaboratively to elevate the status of the profession. The Teacher Education Planning Group is committed to increasing recruitment and retention efforts, maintaining a high level of quality, and exploring more effective ways to provide broadly accessible, high quality educator preparation programs via flexible delivery methods.

**Intent**

The intent of the University of Alaska Teacher Education Plan is to produce more Alaska-prepared educators through increased awareness of the profession; expanded access to educator preparation programs; and academic and professional support to retain students as they move toward successful program completion. We must also increase the diversity of the teaching workforce by making teacher education more attractive to underrepresented populations. The Planning Group identified four priorities and accompanying strategies to guide this work over the next several years.

**The Context**

The UA Education deans have been meeting several times each year for the past half dozen years to coordinate the planning and implementation of UA educator preparation programs. In the spring of 2008, this informal workgroup was formalized as the Teacher Education Planning Group in connection with the University of Alaska system-wide budget and planning process. Because teacher education was identified as a top priority for state leaders both within and outside the University system, this group, from its inception, embraced the following guiding principles:

- Engage key constituents from the education community as part of the data collection process and as a means of determining the needs in and around the K-12 education system.

- Address the concerns of state and local policymakers, to include the Board of Regents, the State Legislature through SB241, “Alaska’s University for Alaska’s Schools”,[1] and the State Department of Education through analysis of data and development of the plan.

- Work collaboratively system-wide and with external groups to implement strategies over the next three years to address workforce needs in K-12 education for Alaska’s schools.

Over the past eighteen months, group members have invited colleagues to a series of meetings and have themselves participated in other groups’ professional meetings, such as the Alaska Association of School Administrators, to gather input for this plan.
II. PRIORITIES

1. Recruitment & Retention
It has become apparent that the Education Units need to focus more on recruiting students into high-demand jobs as early as intermediate grades to encourage them to become teachers, as evident in the request for SB241, Alaska’s University for Alaska’s Schools report to the legislature. A full-time recruitment coordinator in each Education Unit will help them coordinate recruitment activities with school districts, liaise with Arts and Sciences faculty, and offer on-campus support for education majors. While each campus needs to look at existing recruiting resources and engage their Enrollment and Student Services offices in this effort, they also need funding for staff positions and marketing materials, and technical support to develop a coordinated system-wide marketing effort using MAU-specific branding.

2. Program Access Through Multiple Delivery Methods
Serving students in rural areas where the need for teachers is greater due to less availability and higher teacher turnover is a priority for the State and the University. Providing access to education for these students will require an investment to build the technological infrastructure in rural areas and at the University to deliver courses and monitor internship students from a distance. The Education Units need hardware, software, travel, distance-placed faculty, technology support, and connectivity to ensure that students who want to stay in rural Alaska do not have to leave rural Alaska to earn a degree in education.

3. Educator Preparation Program Enhancement
The number of applicants for Alaska’s teaching and counseling positions has steadily declined over the past decade, even as business and industry call for more highly skilled high school graduates and districts seek larger pools of applicants with the professional expertise to produce such graduates. Among many needs the Planning Group will address, three are particularly acute now: more science and math teachers for secondary schools; examination of math and science preparation for elementary teachers; and more special educators. Many educator preparation programs—private, public, for-profit, non-profit, campus-based, distance-delivered, and virtual—are answering the call to prepare these educators; some have a demonstrated history of academic quality, some do not. The Board of Regents’ and President Hamilton’s public commitment to emphasize educator preparation over the next few years provides UA Education Units with a significant opportunity to increase the number of well-prepared educators available to Alaska’s school districts, and to demonstrate that at UA, academic rigor and program quality go hand-in-hand with creativity, innovation, and responsiveness to change. This Plan identifies Priorities and Strategies to seize that opportunity.
4. Education Research
Alaska has a significant need for more policy research, focused both on policymaking and on the link between policy and practice. A Center for Alaska Education Policy Research within the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) will help Alaska address the numerous challenges related to teacher recruitment, retention, high dropout rates, finance, and access to education in rural areas. This center would serve as the intellectual focal point for statewide education policy research in collaboration with the K-12 community, Education Units, and the State Department of Education and Early Development.

III. STRATEGIES

Strategy #1: Recruitment and Retention
The state needs to promote a better understanding among Alaskans about the career opportunities in education. By promoting education as a career, we can elevate the teaching profession and work together to support our educators. Further, Alaskans need information on how to access these opportunities as early as the intermediate grades.

Rationale:

The future of Alaska requires that every child has access to quality educators dedicated to individual student success. The education profession offers rewarding career opportunities, however the general public, policy makers, parents and students are not always fully aware of these opportunities and the rewards of the profession. Recruiting top students into the teaching profession is paramount to improving the Alaska education system.

Action Steps:

- Establish a formal Teacher Education Consortium that includes representatives from the Department of Education, school districts and industry representatives that meet on a regular, scheduled basis to engage in the recruitment & retention of educators.
- Conduct a multi-faceted public awareness campaign to market the education profession as a rewarding career.
- Develop effective strategies to recruit qualified candidates for Alaska teacher preparation programs, particularly from Alaska Native and other underrepresented populations.
Invest in educator preparation recruitment efforts by hiring outreach and retention coordinators at each of the Education Units to work with school district and communities to recruit and retain future teachers. (See UAFY11 Budget Request).

Coordinate with Future Educators of Alaska and other support clubs in the schools to develop a strong pipeline into Alaska teacher preparation programs.

Partners and Potential Partners:

- University of Alaska Southeast
- University of Alaska Fairbanks
- University of Alaska Anchorage
- University Public Relations
- Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
- Alaska Association of School Boards
- Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education
- Alaska Department of Labor
- School Districts
- NEA – Alaska
- School Counselors
- Alaska Teacher Placement
- Future Educators of Alaska
- Foundations and sponsors willing to underwrite a campaign

Evaluation:

- Implementation of a formal Educator Preparation Consortium
- Implementation of a statewide public awareness campaign that engages appropriate partners and includes specific steps to recruit educators from underrepresented populations.
- Measurement of recruitment initiative effectiveness through tracking student admissions, enrollments, and graduation data.
- Outreach and retention coordinators in each UA Education Unit to implement effective recruitment strategies and coordinate with partners
Strategy #2: Increase access to UA teacher preparation programs through multiple delivery methods

Education Units at the University of Alaska will continue to work collaboratively to provide flexibility in program offerings using a variety of delivery options, such as intensives, summer programs, site-based faculty, cohort models, and distance-delivered programs.

Rationale:

In an effort to create additional access to education programs, the Education Units will seek to meet the needs of traditional and non-traditional students, and students in rural areas who have access to the necessary tools for distance and online learning. Partnerships with school districts need to be created to offer cohort-specific training as another form of program delivery that will allow for more customized, service-oriented approaches to education.

Action Steps:

- Improve accessibility to educator preparation programs by developing delivery methods to meet the needs of students in Alaska’s diverse settings.
- Further develop existing faculty expertise to support multiple modes of delivery.

Partners and Potential Partners:

- University of Alaska Southeast
- University of Alaska Fairbanks
- University of Alaska Anchorage
- University of Alaska Office of Information Technology
- Department of Education & Early Development
- Department of Labor and Workforce Development
- Alaska School Districts

Evaluation:

- Number of education programs offered using modified delivery methods with the capacity to reach students in rural areas.
- Number of cohort programs, intensives, and other appropriate delivery methods expanded or implemented over three years.
- Engagement of Education Units’ faculty and administrators in investigating, developing expertise in, and adopting appropriate program delivery options.
Strategy #3: Educator Preparation Program Enhancement

The context of public education in Alaska and throughout the nation is changing rapidly as demands on schools and educators increase and the number of educator applicants decreases. UA has the faculty expertise and the institutional commitment to respond and through this plan identifies Priorities and Strategies to do so.

A. Special Education

Rationale:

According to data collected through statewide Supply and Demand studies and from partner districts directly, school administrators rank special education as their hardest positions to fill[3]. The Teacher Education Planning Group has worked collaboratively to implement a system-wide cross-MAU endorsement and degree program in special education.

Action Steps:

- Continue to seek funding for tenure-track special education faculty position at UAF.
- Collaborate across the three UA Education Units to offer the widest array of faculty expertise and special education emphasis areas consistent with State needs and current resources.
- Develop a coordinated statewide campaign to recruit, prepare, and graduate special educators for Alaska’s schools.

B. Math and Science

Rationale:

Science and mathematics are core areas under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In Alaska, math and science positions are the second “hardest to fill” positions identified by school districts.[4] Meeting the needs in these endorsement areas will require innovative recruitment strategies and engagement with colleagues in industry and Schools and Colleges of Math, Engineering, and Arts and Sciences to produce more science and math teachers.
Action Steps:

- Strengthen pathways for science and math teachers by working with Arts and Sciences and Engineering colleagues to recruit undergraduates in math and science content areas into teacher preparation programs.

- Establish teams of creative University faculty and business and industry partners to create teacher preparation pathways that will attract mid-career changers and others with math and science expertise.

- Assess science and math preparation in elementary education programs to ensure program completers have the necessary content and skills to meet district needs.

C. Ongoing educator program enhancement.

Rationale:

As specific areas of educator shortages in Alaska change, the education knowledge base grows, and technological developments permit new modes of effective teaching and learning, UA education programs need to continue to adapt and grow to meet these demands. UAA education staff and faculty have the will and the expertise but most programs operate at or near capacity.

SB241 and the University of Alaska's public commitment to emphasizing educator preparation over the next few years provides UA Education Units with a significant opportunity to demonstrate that academic rigor and program quality can—and do—go hand-in-hand with creativity, innovation, and responsiveness to change at UA. This Plan identifies Priorities and Strategies to do so.

Action Steps:

- Continue and strengthen ongoing UA long-range planning process for Teacher Education based on the priorities identified above.

- Support UA Education faculty in their research on effective teaching practice and current and emerging innovations in education as applied to the Alaskan context.

- Increase awareness of and access to career opportunities in education.

Partners and Potential Partners:

- University of Alaska Fairbanks
- University of Alaska Southeast
Evaluation:

- Successful recruitment of tenure-track special education faculty member at UAF.
- Particular emphasis on special education in overall UA educator recruitment campaign.
- Increase in number of educators who complete programs at UA Education Units and earn degrees and/or Alaska endorsements in special education.
- Increase in number of educators who complete programs at UA Education Units and earn degrees and/or Alaska endorsements in math and science.
- Evidence of creative partnerships to enhance educator preparation programs between UA Education Units and:
  - UA schools/colleges that prepare math and science students
  - Alaska school districts
  - Private sector entities
- Evidence of UA elementary program review processes with particular regard to math and science preparation of candidates.
- Evidence of UA support for research conducted by UA education faculty. Responsiveness of faculty, particularly with regard to research leading to UA education program enhancement.
Strategy #4: Educational Research

Public education is a complex endeavor with a critical mission. Educational research can provide policymakers, state leaders, and teacher education programs with reliable and valid policy research. The policy center would be charged with gathering, analyzing and disseminating information about current and emerging issues, trends and innovations in state education policy that is imperative in shaping state policy and programs to better meet today’s most critical education issues.

Rationale:

Alaska has taken an important step in establishing the Senate and House Education Committees to look at the issues that impact both K-12 and Higher Education. However, there remains a significant need for more policy research, both focused on policy making and on the links between policy and practice. An education policy center will provide valuable information to guide policymakers responsible for evaluating the potential impacts of legislative proposals. Additionally, a policy center will provide services to internal university departments and programs, the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, the K-12 community, and the general public.

Action Steps:

- Secure funding and partnerships to develop a thorough understanding of the workforce needs in Alaska; the trend data in both K-12 and higher education; best practices to support learning; and the implications of policy on the status of the profession by:
  a. creating an Alaska Education Policy Research Center at the University of Alaska Institute of Social and Economic Research (See the UAFY11 Budget Request); and
  b. funding research by UA education faculty on specific topics related to public education policy in Alaska.

Partners and Potential Partners:

- University of Alaska Fairbanks
- University of Alaska Southeast
- University of Alaska Anchorage
- Institute of Social of Economic Research
- Alaska Department of Education and Early Development
- Alaska Teacher Placement
- Alaska Department of Labor
- Education Northwest
- Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education
Evaluation:

- Establishment of an Alaska Education Policy Research Center.

- Establishment of a formal system to fund research by UA education faculty on specific topics related to public education policy in Alaska.


[2] The proposal to create the Policy Center within ISER was a majority, but not unanimous, opinion among the Teacher Preparation Planning Group. Madsen favored a model that would identify the policy research needs and fund current UA Education faculty members to conduct that research. All members agreed to wholeheartedly support all action tems that are ultimately adopted.
