Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education

Alaska Student Loan Corporation

UPDATE

COLLEGE & CAREER PLANNING • FINANCIAL AID • CONSUMER PROTECTION
Promoting Higher Education & Training for Alaska

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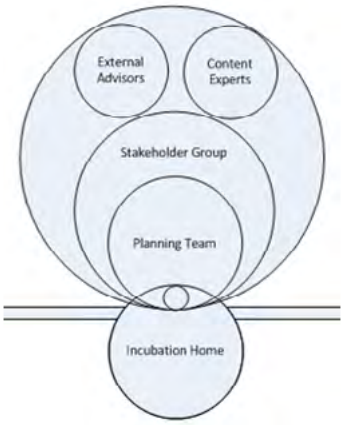
CINDEE BROWN-MILLS
Assistant Director of Financial Aid

KRYSTAL GARRISON
Training & Development Specialist



Network activities will be aligned to four areas identified as major challenges: 1) the absence of strong academic expectations in which students aspire to, and plan for, education beyond high school; 2) preparation for postsecondary and career success; 3) postsecondary education financing; and, 4) scaling services to meet Alaskans' needs.

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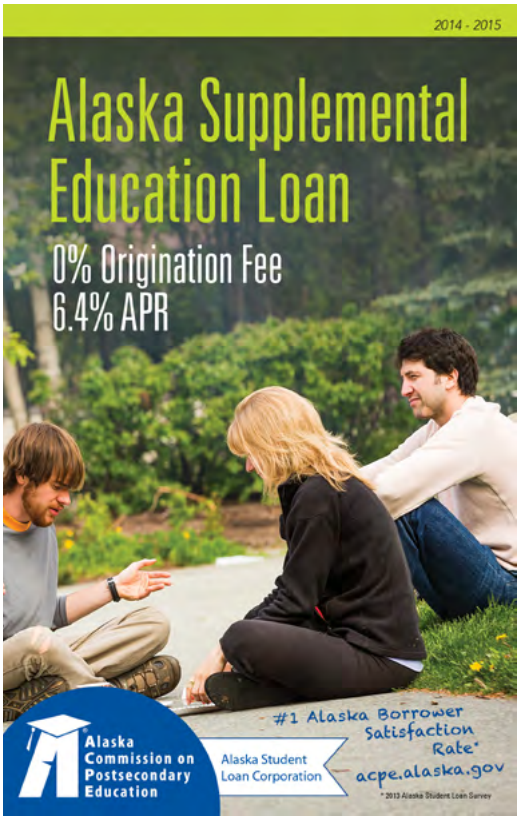
ALASKA LOAN AND GRANT PROGRAMS

TAKE AIM AT ON TIME GRADUATION GOAL

Helped by input from postsecondary education administrators and students statewide, the Commission is making changes to the Alaska Education Loan and Alaska Education Grant (AEG). The changes result from statutory modifications approved this year in SB195, a bill sponsored by Senator Anna MacKinnon (Fairclough), which allows the Alaska Student Loan Corporation to set favorable terms for borrowers. The loan and grant programs changes are aimed at incenting success-related student behaviors that deliver significant benefits through on-time degree completion.

The passage of Senate Bill 195 (SB195) last April authorized significant changes to the AEG and loan program that are being further detailed in program rules. Given the potential for public impacts, ACPE invited more than fifty postsecondary education administrators from Alaska institutions and career/technical schools to participate in a September seminar to discuss proposed regulations.



ALASKA EDUCATION LOANS

Recognizing the steep upward trend in the price of college going and the almost twenty years since Alaska Education Loan maximums were last adjusted, the 2014 legislation raised borrowing limits. It also tied the highest loan amounts to student enrollment of at least 15 credits per semester. Program administrators expect these changes to be beneficial for two reasons: students will be better able to cover unmet college costs with the use of Alaska's education loans exclusively - without the need to seek out multiple lending sources – and, they will have an incentive to accelerate their progress to a credential and on-time graduation.

Other changes to the Alaska Education Loan include capping the amount students may borrow when only attending half-time. "Limiting the amount half-time students can borrow ensures we can minimize the debt load for those who are statistically least likely to get a degree—the new limit keeps them from incurring too much debt that they will be obligated to pay back", said Ben Shier,

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For more information on current state loan programs visit: acpe.alaska.gov

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THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT STUDENTS AND THEIR SCHOOLS CAN KNOW EARLIER IN THE YEAR IF THEY ARE GRANT-ELIGIBLE.

STEPHANIE BUTLER, ACPE DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

Quality Assurance Officer with ACPE. Shier referred to studies which have shown that students who enroll half-time make slow progress toward graduation, and are at high risk for never completing their degree.

Several loan changes were implemented immediately in fall 2014, including:

- 0% loan origination fee (reduced from 5%)
- Clarified Family Education Loan (FEL) residency requirements
- Funding source change for Teacher Education Loans--any future new loans will be funded with general fund appropriations

ALASKA EDUCATION GRANT

The Alaska Education Grant terms have also been revamped to better align with Alaska's need to: incent students with financial need to pursue higher education, and encourage full-time and continuing enrollment--the actions which substantially increase degree completion.

AEG awarding protocols will target students who:

- have substantial financial need;
- are continuing grant recipients;
- enroll at least full-time; and,
- complete the FAFSA early each year

Under the new design, institutions will receive notice earlier in the year of which students qualify for the AEG. This will allow them to include the grant in the student's financial aid packaging. Using the Alaska Student Aid Portal (ASAP) awarded students will need to promptly confirm their intent to use the grant for the coming year. Unacknowledged awards will be cancelled and the funds will be made available to award another student eligible under the grant priorities. "The bottom line is that students and their schools can know earlier in the year if they are grant-eligible. This will make them better informed and able to plan for pursuing their education and training goals while also incenting them to stay on track year to year to increase their opportunity to receive grant assistant in getting their credential," said Stephanie Butler, ACPE Director of Operations.

AEG changes will take effect in the 2015-16 academic year. ●

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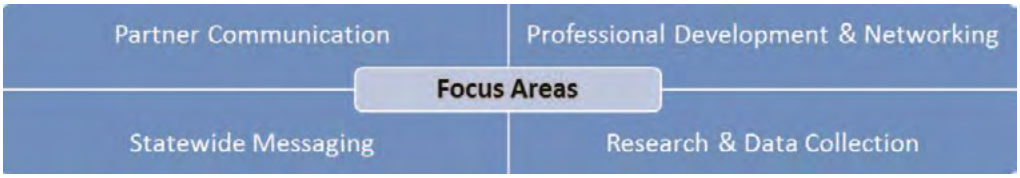
THE NETWORK

INCREASING ALASKANS' POSTSECONDARY ACCESS AND COMPLETION



A diverse group of leaders from across Alaska are coming together and exploring ways to facilitate partnership, communication, and advocacy to positively influence the growth of a college-going culture in Alaska. The Alaska Postsecondary Access and Completion Network (The Network) is a concept proposed at the Alaska College Access and Success Summit in November 2013. The Network is being championed by summit attendees who are committed to common goals around student access and success and who are actively engaged in organizational design and implementation to move the initiative forward.

ACPE is the Network's incubation site and the effort is funded from Alaska's Federal College Access Challenge Grant, with consultative support from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

Planning team participants agree that a well-designed statewide network will build and strengthen partnerships to act collectively to improve postsecondary outcomes for all Alaskans. The Network's mission is to increase the percentage of all Alaskans who complete postsecondary education, particularly in occupations relevant to building a robust state economy.

Network activities will be aligned to four areas identified as major challenges: 1) the absence of strong academic expectations in which students aspire to, and plan, for education beyond high school; 2) preparation for postsecondary and career success; 3) postsecondary education financing; and, 4) scaling services to meet Alaskans' needs.

The Network's overarching goal is to foster a statewide environment that results in increasing the percent of Alaskans with credentials and degrees, from 47% to 65% by 2025. The Network plans to reach this goal by reducing duplication of effort, and creating synergy among service providers, by supporting professional development for higher education mentors and providers, strengthening public messaging, and conducting and/or disseminating relevant information and research.

Through planning team meetings the Network is identifying next steps. The group will continue to work towards raising the education and training bar for all Alaskan students, while setting realistic and relevant goals and outlining strategies to accomplish those goals. ●

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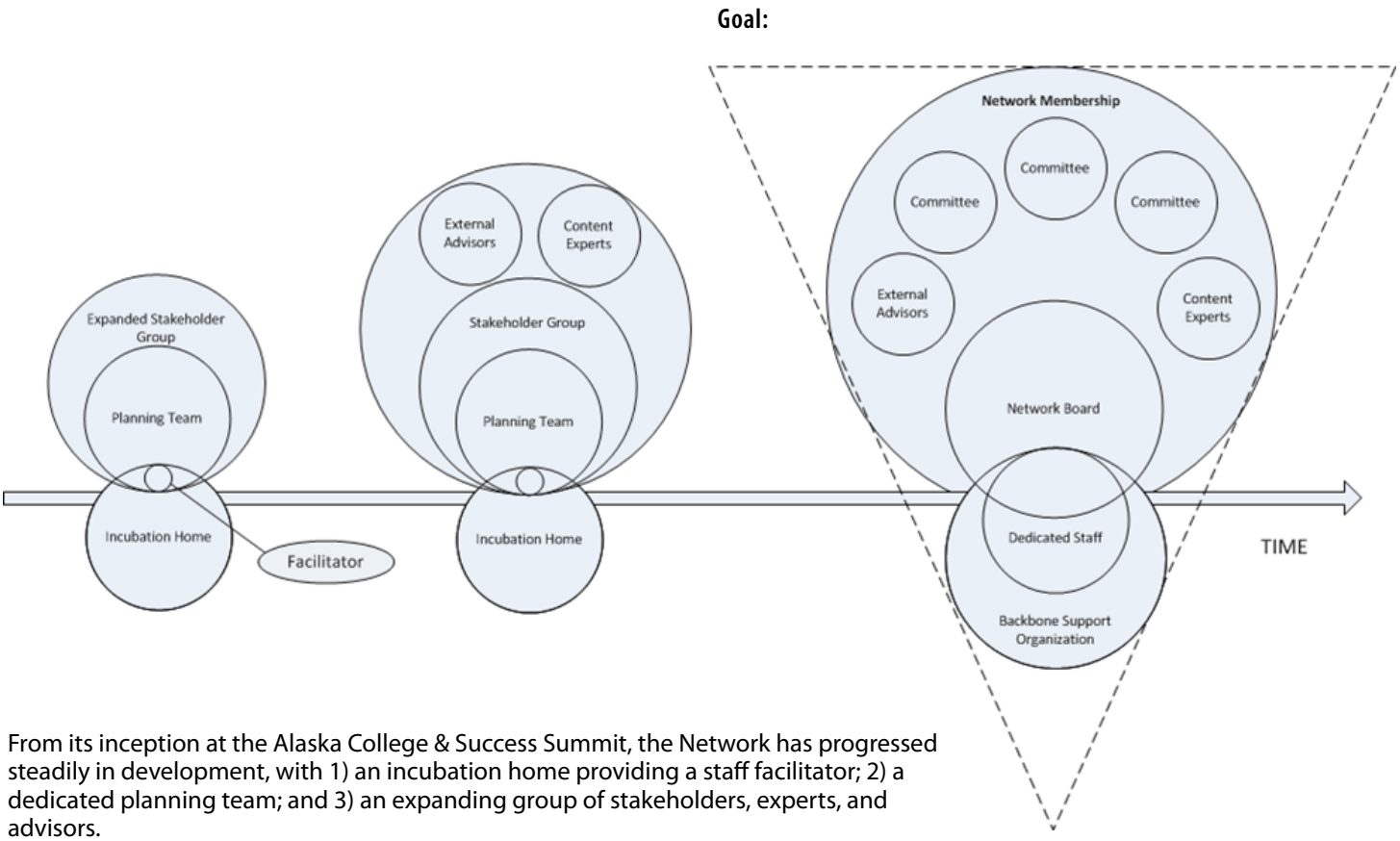
STRUCTURE: AN EXPANDING CIRCLE OF STAKEHOLDERS



From its inception at the Alaska College & Success Summit, the Network has progressed steadily in development, with 1) an incubation home providing a staff facilitator; 2) a dedicated planning team; and 3) an expanding group of stakeholders, experts, and advisors.

Information on The Network's development can be found at acpe.alaska.gov/Access

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With the new release, the AKCIS Administration tool's interface has been redesigned for simpler navigation and use.

AKCIS

FALL SOFTWARE RELEASE

ACPE is pleased to announce the latest release of the Alaska Career Information System (AKCIS) with improved benefits for students, parents, teachers and administrators.

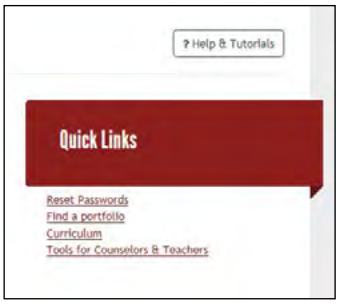
The new printable Personal Learning & Career Plan (PLCP) summary has been welcomed by students and teachers. Completed by the student online, the document captures students' goals, education, work history, and career planning activity all in one place. This means students can easily identify deficits and areas they can strengthen with additional activities, such as community service or volunteer work. The PLCP ensures students will be more prepared to complete scholarship and college or training applications; more deliberate and intentional in their choices; and more aware of how their education relates to their future employment.

In addition to helping the students see the "big picture," the PLCP report can be printed and used as a resource for teachers and counselors when they meet with students and parents. This enhancement supports the State of Alaska CTE Plan, Strategy 1.1, which is to ensure every student has a PLCP. The PLCP printable document completes the circle of information allowing students, families, and educators to keep up with each student's progress and identify areas of planning that need more attention.

Educators and advisors have always had access to a plethora of useful features through the administration tools, but may have been frustrated by navigation complexity.

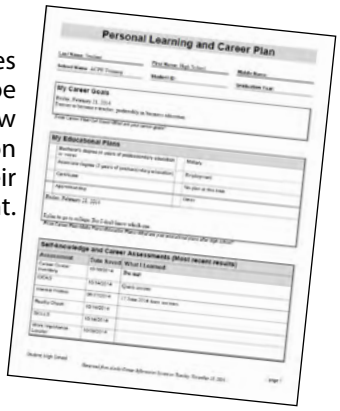
With the new release, the AKCIS Administration tools' interface has been redesigned for simpler navigation and use.

A new dashboard has been added for quick access to: key reports, password resetting, tools for counselors and teachers, curriculum, and tutorials. The friendlier new look, similar to the student view, separates tasks by common themes. Teachers and counselors can see the individual and common interests of their classes. The increased use of staff accounts will help educators share this tool outside of the advisory and CTE realm. These updates were implemented in mid-September 2014. ●



Updated AKCIS banner provides quick access to: key reports, password resetting, tools for counselors and teachers, curriculum, and tutorials.

The PLCP ensures students will be more aware of how their education relates to their future employment.



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ANSWERS – UNDER CONSTRUCTION

A SOURCE FOR ALASKA OUTCOMES INFORMATION

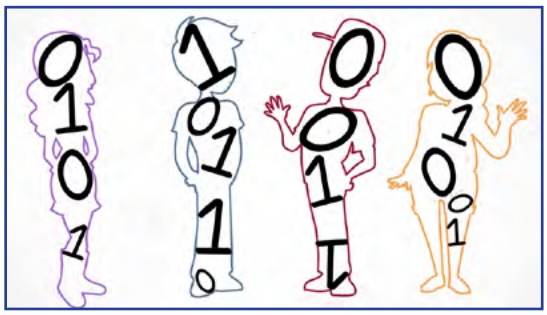
ANSWERS, Alaska's new P-20W SLDS (early learning through workforce State Longitudinal Data System) is on track for timely implementation mid-2015. ANSWERS creates a secure longitudinal data system that links existing deidentified information from K-12, college and career training and workforce/industry together to better understand the education-to-workforce continuum in Alaska.

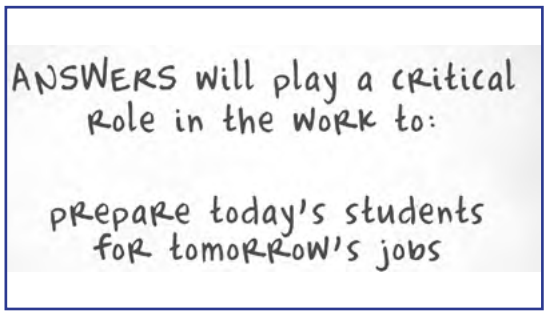
In June 2014, Alaska received positive feedback from its funding entity, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), during a site visit to ascertain progress on the $4M SLDS grant project. Observers noted the success of Alaska's project approach and progress, specifically in terms of stakeholder engagement, governance and the strong relationship among the partner organizations, and sustainability post-grant. At implementation, ANSWERS will provide a variety of information by creating relevant reports, dashboards, and other products designed to provide the right information to the right people, in the right formats to help refine decision and policy-making.

The new two minute video What is ANSWERS? provides a high-level overview of ANSWERS through a story following students through their education and career choices.

ANSWERS is a collaboration of ACPE, the University of Alaska, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, and Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development. Visit at www.acpe.alaska.gov/ANSWERS for more information, including the ANSWERS video, the project schedule, and ANSWERS FAQs. ●

Screen shots from the ANSWERS explained video.





Click here to watch the two minute video What is ANSWERS?

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ALASKA STUDENT AID PORTAL (ASAP) TRANSFORMATION

While the AEG changes described on p. 3 are in the implementation process, ACPE is also creating a new Alaska Student Aid Portal (ASAP) management system. ASAP is used by students and schools to access AEG and Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS) online information, and used by ACPE to administer the financial aid.

Not only will the new system enhance ACPE's administrative tools, it will allow financial aid administrators at postsecondary education institutions to more easily see which of their students are AEG or APS eligible. It will also ease the school enrollment certification process.

Students will continue to have secure and easy access to their eligibility and funding status as well as a means to update their information in real time. And soon, they will be able to log in to a site with a friendlier look and feel. "Adapting to the new system will take a bit of time" said Stephanie Butler, ACPE Director of Operations, "but these changes will be very positive for everyone involved." ACPE plans to convert to the new system in spring 2015. Butler expects it to be complete in time to process applications for the 2015-2016 school year.

RECIPROCITY ALTERNATIVE BENEFITS ALASKA INSTITUTIONS—SARA UPDATE

ACPE is pleased to announce three Alaska institutions have applied and been approved for participation in the multi-state State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). SARA is a national initiative that establishes uniform standards for offering interstate postsecondary distance education. As the Alaska portal agency for SARA, ACPE is responsible for approving applications from Alaska institutions seeking to participate. The three institutions approved are University of Alaska Fairbanks, University of Alaska Southeast, and Charter College Anchorage. These institutions are now able to offer distance education to residents of other SARA member states without going through each individual state's approval process.

All accredited, degree-granting institutions that have their principal campus or central administrative unit domiciled in Alaska have been invited to participate in SARA.

To participate in SARA, all accredited, degree-granting institutions should contact Joann Rieselbach, School Relations Manager at: (907)465-6678 joann.rieselbach@alaska.gov or Kierke Kussart, IA Program Coordinator at: (907)465-6741 kierke.kussart@alaska.gov

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Cindee Brown-Mills

Assistant Director of Financial Aid

Cindee Brown-Mills joined the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education in 2013 as the Assistant Director of Financial Aid. Previously Cindee worked for the City & Borough of Juneau, where she served seven years as the Administrative Manager and Public Information Officer for the Juneau Police Department.

As the lead of ACPE's Financial Aid Servicing Team, Cindee describes herself as a creative leader who strives to include front line staff in finding efficiencies and making processes easier for customers. Her passion is to provide excellent customer service to both internal and external customers. Asked about her most gratifying experience at ACPE Cindee says "Unequivocally, the people! ACPE has exceptional people who are passionate about the services they provide. I am amazed, almost daily, at how thoughtful people are toward both customers and coworkers. I am honored to work with people who strive to make such a positive impact on the people of Alaska."

Cindee Brown-Mills holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Industrial Design and a Master of Business Administration (MBA). She enjoys singing and gardening, and is a military veteran having served four years in the US Navy.

KRYSTAL GARRISON

Training & Development Specialist

Krystal Garrison began work with the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education in 2013, serving as a college and career guide for the Alaska College Advising Corps (ACAC). Working with students of Seward High School, Krystal helped pilot the ACAC distance program, which now serves more than 25 schools in rural and urban Alaskan communities.

In March 2014 Krystal was promoted to the role of Training and Development Specialist for the Alaska Career Information System (AKCIS). In her new position, Krystal trains counselors and educators on how to utilize AKCIS to build Personal Learning and Career Plans, assist in career exploration, and help prepare students for postsecondary education. Combining her background in digital communications and her passion for education, Krystal enjoys creating new training opportunities and promoting education across Alaska.

Krystal holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism and Public Communications and is currently pursuing a master's degree in Organizational Management. She was a recent recipient of the ACPE Professional Development Scholarship, receiving awards for both the Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 semesters. For fun, Krystal enjoys photography, fishing, playing outside and working on her tiny cabin in Talkeetna.

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IMPORTANT DATES:

Commission Meetings

Thursday, January 8, 2015 - Anchorage
Friday, April 13, 2015 - Juneau
Thursday, July 23, 2015 - Anchorage
Wednesday, October 21, 2015 - Anchorage

THE ALASKA COMMISSION ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, FUNDED BY THE ALASKA STUDENT LOAN CORPORATION, PROMOTES ACCESS TO AND SUCCESS IN EDUCATION AND CAREER TRAINING BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL.
THE COMMISSION PROVIDES:

- programs creating early awareness of the importance of preparing for higher education success
- education planning tools and resources
- advocacy and support for postsecondary participation in Alaska
- financial aid for college and career training
- education consumer protection through institutional authorization and complaint investigation

ACPE.alaska.gov

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