

Determining Areas in Which to Focus Educational Research: Results of ACPE's 2010 Research Survey

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Executive Summary

In August 2010, the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education conducted an online survey to gain insights into the research areas deemed most important in the areas of education and education outcomes in Alaska. A request to participate in the survey was emailed to 166 stakeholders from a variety of Alaska organizations that have interests in the effectiveness and outcomes of our state's education systems¹. Recipients were requested to forward the survey link to other potentially interested parties, and a total of 229 responses to the survey were received.

Five possible areas to research were identified in the survey, each with three specific research questions:

1. Measuring students' "success" -- however one might like to define the term -- after they leave an Alaska secondary education program;
2. Identifying where students decide to pursue their education or their career after they leave secondary education in Alaska;
3. Collecting and analyzing information on the "success" of educational programs and interventions;
4. Determining why certain students do not achieve their full potential or even drop out of the educational system; and
5. Determining what information students need / desire to make informed decisions regarding postsecondary education and careers.

The survey identified that respondents were most interested in determining why students do not achieve their full potential (research topic 4), followed by researching the success of various educational programs and interventions. The area of least interest was tracking where Alaska students pursue postsecondary education or their career after leaving the secondary school system.

Additional open-ended questions allowed the survey participants to explain and provide feedback on the questions and their responses. Selected responses have been included in this report.

Because the respondents to the survey were not randomly sampled but rather were asked to participate based on their association with groups involved in Alaska education programs, these results are not without bias and do not necessarily reflect the views of the majority of Alaskans.

¹ Examples of the groups solicited include organizations representing teaching professionals and school administrators, various government agencies at both the state and local levels, private and public postsecondary institutions providing degrees and certifications, Native organizations, advisory committees for education programs, and public and private research entities.

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DATA COLLECTION OVERVIEW

Starting August 2nd, 2010, the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education began collecting information via an online survey to help determine the types of questions that are important to the educational community and interested parties in Alaska.

Emails were distributed to various individuals and agencies, asking that each participate in the survey and also forward the invitation to others who might want to participate. Examples of agencies contacted include various associations involved in K-20 education, professional organizations, private and public postsecondary education providers, various boards and commissions with either educational or workforce components to their charters, Native Regional Corporations, various State agencies, and members of the State Legislature.

When the survey closed on September 19th, we had received 239 responses. Sixteen of the responses were deleted, either because the respondent answered the survey twice² or because the answers did not appear to represent a serious response to the survey questions.³

DATA COLLECTED

The primary focus of the survey was to help ACPE determine what types of research projects to pursue. By dividing the questions into five categories or "goals," we were able to judge the importance of each. The goals included:

6. Measuring students' "success" -- however one might like to define the term -- after they leave an Alaska secondary education program;
7. Identifying where students decide to pursue their education or their career after they leave secondary education in Alaska;
8. Collecting and analyzing information on the "success" of educational programs and interventions;
9. Determining why certain students do not achieve their full potential or even drop out of the educational system; and
10. Determining what information students need / desire to make informed decisions regarding postsecondary education and careers.

The survey included 20 questions which asked responders to rank on a scale of 1 to 5 the importance of the five goals, plus three additional questions related to each goal. It also included

² In most cases, the respondent had answered a few survey questions, then prematurely exited the survey. When this occurred, the survey answers for the respondent were merged into a single response, and the other response deleted.

³ In these cases, respondents left no contact information and answered only a few of the survey questions, or answered all questions with a minimum or maximum value.

six open-ended options for responders to suggest other questions that might be more appropriate to these goals and to suggest other areas for study.

Each goal would require ACPE to pursue somewhat different research efforts. For example, addressing the first goal would require us to collect data from the departments of Labor & Workforce Development (wages and unemployment use), Corrections (incarcerations), Health & Social Services (public assistance records) and postsecondary educational institutions (students pursuing postsecondary education and degrees awarded.) To address the fourth goal, our efforts would be much more focused on collecting socioeconomic, demographic and risk factor data on Alaska students, with much of that effort focused on students still in elementary and secondary schools.

By identifying the questions that are most important to the survey responders, we are better able to identify what information we need to collect to answer the questions in a measurable and meaningful manner. With limited resources available, we want to make sure our research efforts are collecting the information required to answer the questions most important to the data users.

RESPONSE ANALYSIS

As noted, many of the questions required a 1 to 5 ranking of importance from the responders. Different groups had different average scores across all of the categories. For example, the average of all scores from teachers and counselors was 4.066, while the average score for administrators was 4.167. For comparison purposes among the groups, we adjusted the scores so that each group's overall average score equaled zero⁴. By doing this, we are better able to determine the relative importance of items to each of the groups.

Table 1 provides a graphical representation of the importance of the various goals and questions for the various groups of responders. Green highlighted cells indicate that the goal or question was more important to that group, while red cells indicate less important ones.

For all responders to the survey, the most important goal was #4, determining why certain students do not achieve their full potential or even drop out of the educational system. Responders scored this goal 11.9% higher than their average scores. The most important single question in the survey was related to that goal, asking are there other (non-socio-economic or demographic) barriers affecting students' ability to continue their education?

At the other end of the spectrum was goal #2, identifying where students decide to pursue their education or their career after they leave secondary education in Alaska. This goal fell 9.4% below the average score for all responders, and was associated with the lowest scoring question

⁴ To adjust the scores, the average of all scores for the group under consideration was divided into the question under consideration for that group, and then we subtracted 1 from these results. By example, we divided the average score for all administrators for Goal 1, or 4.303, by 4.167 to get 1.0619. We then subtracted 1 to get 0.0619, meaning that the administrators' score for Goal 1 was 6.19% above the average for all administrators' scores. More complex approaches to normalize data exist, but do not work well with "convenience samples" and when the observations do not fit a normal distribution.

in the survey. Responders found little benefit in determining whether students decided to pursue their postsecondary education outside of Alaska.

In research terms, none of the goals' scores were *statistically* significantly different from the others, meaning that we cannot say with 90% confidence that responders actually found goal #4 to be more important than goal #2.⁵ Part of the reason is because there were only about 200 responders for each of the questions being asked. More significant was that even within the same groups of responders, there were some whose responses differed from the other members of that group.

For example, for goal #4, the highest ranked goal in the survey, there were 194 responders who rated its importance. One-hundred forty-two of the responders rated it a top priority, with a score of 5, and 34 gave it a score of 4. Still, two responders gave it a score of 1, and this throws a degree of *statistical* doubt into the calculations on whether this goal was actually more important to administrators than any of the other goals. (By comparison, for the lowest rated goal #2, there were 200 responders. Only 66 responders rated it as a top priority, while 7 rated this as a lowest priority for continued research. Using *statistical* measures, we cannot say that there was a difference in these responses, or that goal 4 was more important to survey responders than was goal 2.)

SOLICITATIONS FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

After ranking the three example questions associated with each goal⁶, survey responders were asked if there were other, possibly more appropriate, questions to ask to more fully understand each of the five goals.

It became obvious that the intent of the questions was not consistently understood by survey respondents – the example questions were not ones that would be asked of students, they were rather examples of questions that the educational community might want to consider and identify whether we should expend resources pursuing their answers. Still, survey responders provided lots of very useful information and insights for more in-depth consideration.

GOAL 1: Measuring students' "success" after they leave an Alaska secondary education program.

In this case, “success” is a nebulous term, difficult to quantify and therefore to measure. Still, it seems like many in the educational community deem it to be at least a somewhat important criterion for continuing research efforts, in a virtual tie with goal number 5 for third place in the

⁵ In general, when surveys use “convenience sampling,” which this survey used, it is not appropriate to calculate statistical significance and confidence intervals. Since responders are not pulled from a *random population*, they may have a bias that affects the survey results. This isn't unexpected, especially when conducting a survey about education that included mostly members of the education community. Without being able to measure confidence intervals, readers will have to determine for themselves if survey responses to the goals and questions indicated differences in their importance.

⁶ See Appendix A for a list of these questions with the respective goals.

rankings. (Goal 5 was determining what information students need / desire to make informed decisions regarding postsecondary education and careers.)

Responders recognized the need to use more qualitative measures of success.

“Qualitative research exploring how students feel about their own success in life might be an interesting research stance to take. Maybe a mixed methods study on this topic would be best so you could provide a fuller picture of what the success of the student truly is- and why they did (or didn't) achieve that success.” (Administrator, K-12 educational institution, no regional focus identified)

“(We need) a measure of the "soft-skills" youth have achieved upon completion of secondary education.” (Occupation not provided, non-educational organization, rural)

“(Some) students pursue a bachelor of arts in philosophy and end up happily working in banking or running a small business. So - we need to ask whether students feel prepared by their education for the workplace, which is different than asking whether a particular job is linked to a particular degree. We definitely can look at social indicators like incarceration and public assistance, but also we should be asking about whether students are prepared and able to make choices that they want, whether it is work or further education, or living a subsistence lifestyle.” (Teacher or counselor, postsecondary institution, statewide)

“I think it would be helpful to define the parameters of success this survey assumes, as success can be very subjective. To one person, success may be completing a doctorate, while for another, success may be simply finishing high school, and becoming a whaling captain, gaining knowledge outside of the classroom.” (Occupation not provided, postsecondary institution, no regional focus identified)

Still, several responders suggested more quantifiable measures that could be pursued.

“Did the student who attends postsecondary training/college have to take any remedial courses? If so, what areas, and tie it back to the high school so a substantive discussion can be had about how to resolve this challenge.” (Administrator, government agency, statewide)

“Has the student maintained employment? (Have they kept their job?)” (Teacher or counselor, non-educational organization, rural)

And still others suggested that we look to third parties to measure the success of a student.

“I feel that you need to survey their employers to see if the student is actually successful. The student may see themselves successful; however, the employer may identify major skill gaps. I truly believe that you should measure the effectiveness of the institution in delivering programs the "region" and "employers" need as an important measure. Is the

institution meeting the needs of the region. If not, what prevents it?” (Administrator, vocational / technical institution, no regional focus identified)

Finally, at least a couple of responders questioned one of the suggested metrics for measuring students’ “success,” and pointed out that it may take many years before we can actually measure success.

“Don't think reliance on public assistance as a negative outcome - particularly since it is considered a safety net and way to gain access to education. Eliminate that on the list!” (Occupation not provided, non-educational organization, no regional focus identified)

“There are some insidious assumptions regarding reliance on public assistance. It may be a matter of necessity, depending on the available options for maintaining a livelihood. Ideally, responses to these questions should be assessed over a decade, not on a short-term basis.” (Teacher or counselor, postsecondary institution, urban)

GOAL 2: Identifying where students decide to pursue their education or their career after they leave secondary education in Alaska?

There are several databases, one unique to Alaska, that with some amount of effort allow matching of students to their place of residence and work histories. By using Alaska wage records, we can see which students continue to work in the state after their secondary education ends. And, through cooperative agreements between the states and the U.S. Department of Labor, we could determine if former students are working in states other than Alaska.

Similarly, the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend provides a tangible incentive for residents to inform the state that they are residing here, allowing us to track even those former students who are self employed or not drawing a wage, and the National Student Clearinghouse allows us to identify most students continuing their educational pursuits, either in Alaska or in another state.

Interestingly, the ability to do any of the above was the least valuable goal for survey responders, and tracking where students pursued their postsecondary education was the lowest ranked question in the survey. One responder summed it up this way:

“If we are to prepare for any option after leaving high school, students can experience success wherever they end up. I think if the goal is to have a workforce prepared to lead Alaska into the future we must realize that many students who grow-up only in Alaska want to experience something different outside of Alaska. Often they find there are more opportunities in Alaska, and they return like my two kids did to find more work opportunities available. We will always have jobs in Alaska to be filled, and if a qualified young person can fill the job, that’s fine. If Alaska's young people are better prepared than others, that should be our hope, but some will still want to leave the state for a variety of reasons.” (Occupation not provided, K-12 educational institution, no regional focus identified)

While another was more succinct:

“The Alaska part does not matter to me.” (Occupation not provided, K-12 educational institution, no regional focus identified)

Not all were as dismissive of this goal, however.

“Of course I want more detail - WHY did they do any of the above? And tracked over a longer period of time - like 10 yrs or so. They may have started here at UA for the first two years for financial reasons, then finished elsewhere because AK doesn't have the specialty they need (e.g., a veterinarian school). Or graduated, took a job outside for a couple of years then returned to AK with those additional connections and experience. Or they start school here, stop out to earn money or deal with family issues, then come back. Just tracking the first time full time freshmen doesn't get at the majority of the story IMO and not the most interesting part either. Often those who go on for school full time immediately are the ones who don't know what else to do. Those who struggle to balance all life's demands so they can attend school are the ones who REALLY want to be here and know why.” (Administrator, postsecondary institution, statewide)

“When are you asking the questions? The next year after they graduate? Five years out? I don't think you can measure the "success of school" immediately upon graduating from high school--that would be a pretty short term goal, but a very real one for many students who may be the first generation to finish.” (Teacher or counselor, no organization identified, no regional focus identified)

Still, while their numbers are small, even responders identified with postsecondary institutions listed this as their lowest ranked goal.

GOAL 3: Having information on the "success" of educational programs and interventions.

As a goal, this was the second most important one in the survey. However, none of its associated questions were ranked above average by survey responders. (See Table 1 and note that each question had a negative score associated with it.) Again, the problems of attempting to quantify otherwise qualitative intents was noted by respondents.

“It is important to have evidence of a program's success, but in our quest for evidence it seems we are often drawn to quantifiable outcomes. The dilemma is that quantifiable outcomes may not always be best aligned with the program goals or with the young person's needs.” (Administrator, K-12 educational institution, urban)

“I think what constitutes a "positive outcome" or the "benefits of a program" can be very far reaching and very hard to measure. If someone decides they don't want to pursue something after experiencing it through training is that a success or failure? Figuring out what you don't want to do has value.” (Occupation not provided, non-educational organization, no regional focus identified)

Some responders suggest that educational programs and special interventions may take scarce funding away from other programs.

“I often think we go to great expense to provide interventions for a few, when this money would be better spent on supporting a far larger group of good kids who have great potential and have nothing.” (Occupation not provided, K-12 educational institution, no regional focus identified)

“Once defined, it is important that program cost/benefits are measured. Too often, no follow-up is done, and a program exists ‘just because’.” (Teacher or counselor, K-12 educational institution, rural)

“If there are not positive outcomes for program participants compared to non-participants, get rid of the program. This should be a priority, and I know how difficult it is to get rid of even ineffective programs. They seem to have grandfather rights. If you save a kid through intervention, cost becomes moot; however, the reality is that there are only so many dollars and many priorities for those dollars. Perhaps spending more on parental training or teaching parenting skills in school might get a jump start on intervention. We teach no youngster child development or parenting skills, and yet they all become parents. Many of their role models are less than pristine.” (Administrator, K-12 educational institution, no regional focus identified)

Still, some were supportive of attempting to measure the success of educational programs and interventions.

“There are other ways of measuring success for programs, such as pre- and post-tests, or finding some sort of valid benchmarks to measure student progress against. We have a huge problem in this state with the kinds of “scientific” research called for in federally funded initiatives due to our geographic distances and small communities.” (Teacher or counselor, postsecondary institution, statewide)

“Can we match participants to the programs or interventions that benefit them the most? Can we replicate the characteristics of the most effective programs and interventions as needed across the state? How do we measure the cost/benefit ratio without longitudinal data?” (Occupation not provided, K-12 educational institution, rural)

GOAL 4: Determining why certain students do not achieve their full potential or even drop out of the educational system.

This goal had the highest scores of any in our survey, with responders ranking this goal nearly 12% higher than the average for all goals. One question associated with this goal stood out as being most important to responders: *Are there other (non-socioeconomic) barriers affecting students’ ability to continue their education?* This was the highest ranked single question on the entire survey.

I'd rather ask "What does the data show in terms of correlations between socioeconomic status (SES) and demographics and student success? And then ask, what are the programs that are successful regardless of students' SES, demographics etc? Because, frankly, we should be able to educate just about everyone, and we need to recognize that there are more challenges for students who are less resourced, but that this does not mean that students aren't capable of learning under the right conditions.

Okay, that said, we need to look at barriers that range from cost to access - we don't have many programs for students not living in urban areas - and also cultural issues on the part of the institutions - to what extent are our institutions unfriendly to non-traditional, non-mainstream students? (Teacher or counselor, postsecondary institution, statewide)

Some responders suggested that instead of surveying students who did not achieve their full potential, we should study those students who were seemingly very successful and determine if there was something about them and their history that led to their success.

Is it possible to work backwards to analyze common success factors among people from different socio-economic backgrounds? (Administrator, postsecondary institution, no regional focus identified)

Ask the question the other way, which students - whose demographics would indicate these challenges - are successful, and then pursue them to find out why. (Administrator, government agency, statewide)

While a good idea, we need to remember that this approach forces us to define success and the achievement of "full potential," so we might ignore populations that consider themselves to be successful yet fall outside of our traditional definitions of "success."

"The way the question is stated is bothersome. It assumes that a person must continue their formal education beyond secondary school to achieve their full potential. I would phrase it like this: What are the barriers to continuing formal education (college, apprenticeships, vocational training, etc) after secondary school? Financial, family, seeing the value of the education, lack of preparation for post-secondary, etc. etc." (Administrator, postsecondary institution, statewide)

"Who's notion of 'full potential' is being used? Have students and communities been consulted on this front?.... Do we need to provide different kinds of support for students often referred to as non-traditional, or even challenge our sense of who the traditional Alaska student in higher education/training is?" (Occupation not provided, K-12 educational institution, rural)

Many survey responders focused on issues students face at home.

"There are several families who do not value education or who are out most of the night and then fail to get their kids up for school. Some students are out all night and are

frequently seen hanging out around the school between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. three and four times per week. One student told me yesterday that her parents got drunk and were getting sick and she finally got up and went to sleep at her grandmother's house. What happens to students who have no place to go to escape?..... Our school calls every student's home when he/she doesn't arrive for school in the morning. However, some parents do not answer the phone when we call or hang up on us once they know it is the school. Student attendance is one of the biggest issues in the village schools. We have students who are absent over 100 days of school annually. If one factors in the amount of tardy time to these students, you could add another 20 to 30 days of time they are not in school.” (Administrator, K-12 educational institution, rural)

“What expectations do parents have for their children. If parents dropped out, there may not be the expectation that the children will stay in school!” (Teacher or counselor, no organization identified, no regional focus identified)

And, many others asked about more societal and cultural issues that can hinder a student's educational progress.

“What about substance abuse issues ... substance abuse crosses all socioeconomic lines.” (Administrator, K-12 educational institution, no regional focus identified)

“How many years did the educator stay at the school? How many AK Native teachers are in your school? I think a huge hindrance is the teacher turnover in the rural and remote parts of our state. A big push to train and have more local highly trained AK Native teachers for villages that have a connection to the community would boost successes!” (Administrator, government agency, no regional focus identified)

GOAL 5: Determining what information students need / desire to make informed decisions regarding postsecondary education and careers.

This goal was virtually tied with goal 1, measuring students' "success" after they leave an Alaska secondary education program. Unlike goal 1, however, responses were much more focused on a single topic area: counseling, with a lot of emphasis on the benefits of career counseling at an early age.

“Career counseling should be K-12, helping students make a connection between school based skills and work based skills. Career exploration should start in middle school, and all students should have a realistic career plan starting in 9th grade. They should make progress on their career plan, and graduate prepared for the career they identify early in their school career. Often career counseling is available, but starts too late in informing students of career opportunities.” (Occupation not provided, K-12 educational institution, no regional focus identified)

“You know, they say that students begin deciding what they want to be by 3rd grade. We should provide more ideas to them at a younger age.” (Administrator, government agency, no regional focus identified)

Several responders felt that career information resources were good and had improved over the years, but simply having better information available wasn't sufficient to make sure that students were informed. One responder summed up the situation with this comment:

"I have taught in AK high schools for over 30 years. The career counseling, awareness programs, internships, visits by college reps, college fairs, apprenticeships etc. have only gotten better and better. Plus, the online services and information available are so far superior of what was available just a few years ago that "lack" of information is not the issue. "Processing" the information and being able to analyze, plan, consider the options is the critical area in which schools and students often fall short. Questions which are more specific about this process should be considered." (Teacher or counselor, K-12 educational institution, rural)

Many responders noted the lack of opportunities for students to work with career counselors.

"I know that for our district the issue is not whether or not we want to provide the career counseling services but can we afford to provide them. Funding for these specific, yet critically important, positions is key to student success." (Administrator, K-12 educational institution, rural)

"I think part of the issue here is that there are schools that do not have counseling available, or very limited counseling related to career awareness." (Occupation not provided, non-educational organization, no regional focus identified)

"How many minutes per year does a student spend with a career counselor? Is career counseling available, or only academic, or drug counseling?" (Administrator, K-12 educational institution, statewide)

What is the quality of career counseling in Alaska? How does the quality of career counseling in Alaska differ based on location? How can we improve the quality of career counseling in Alaska? (Occupation not provided, K-12 educational institution, statewide)

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND "FOOD FOR THOUGHT"

Responders provided additional questions for us to consider in researching education in Alaska, suggestions on how to make better use of the information and resources already available to the educational community, and in some cases observations about the approaches they believed might be taken to improving education in the state.

"As with most things, it seems we need to do much better at connecting the right people to the right resources. Would you consider a project like a huge clearinghouse of where to get what you need for student/youth related activities? We need to link all resources like these to students and their families: Jobs, applying for jobs, schooling, scholarships, loans, vocational training, hardship resources (food, housing), re-entry issues, future

planning (counseling, Explore, Reality check, etc.)” (Administrator, government agency, statewide)

“How frequently do the Board of Regents and the State Boards meet for combined meetings in order to discuss P-20 Education in Alaska? Do district personnel serve on university committees that determine general education requirements? Do university faculty serve on EED and district committees engaged in discussions about h.s. graduation requirements? Do middle and high school faculty meet with university faculty responsible for teaching developmental education courses to consider alignment and expectations?” (Administrator, postsecondary institution, statewide)

What programs outside of public education provide services to overcome the barriers to post-secondary training and employment? Are these programs effective? Why, or why not? Does inadequate funding contribute to the ineffectiveness of some programs? (Administrator, K-12 educational institution, rural)

As I noted earlier, we need to look hard at which schools and districts are preparing students for the workplace and college and which are not. We also need to ask what particularly successful schools and districts are doing, and how we can learn from them. (Teacher or counselor, postsecondary institution, statewide)

What correlations are there between specific professional development programs for teachers and outcomes for students? (Administrator, K-12 educational institution, no regional focus identified)

Have you looked at the requirements of universities in their education departments? For example, a BS or BA in "something" plus a 5th year to receive certification in either elementary or secondary education. Too many teachers are coming into the profession with abysmal general educations. (Teacher or counselor, K-12 educational institution, urban)

“What are STUDENT'S perceptions of assets acquired and barriers encountered as they move through the education continuum to accomplish their career goals?” (Teacher or counselor, government agency, statewide)

In general, I think several surveys need to be developed: one - toward students and potential students; one - for staff within educational institutions; and one for individuals employed in fields assisting students; basically asking what the barriers are to student success; and what concrete steps can be taken to ameliorate the barriers. (Administrator, non-educational organization, no regional focus identified)

Measure institutional effectiveness - not just the program. Survey industry for effectiveness of the students. (Administrator, vocational / technical institution, no regional focus identified)

In rural, remote Alaska sites where education seems to be in conflict with the traditional cultural values that reside there, what if the educational system were turned upside down and let the Alaska native residents design and create their own educational system utilizing their way of life to educate their children instead of forcing the westernized educational system upon them? (Occupation not provided, K-12 educational institution, rural)

What about curriculum for helping participants manage SUCCESS? I have found that many youth are afraid of success and often find ways to avoid living up to the expectations of being successful. (Teacher or counselor, non-educational organization, rural)

“Key for me is what are HS grads doing 10 years after graduating. I feel that too much emphasis is placed on what they do the year following graduation. The more telling story is what they are doing when things begin to settle down for them- this 10 years out is the telling time for me for most people 2 years out may or may not tell you something.” (Administrator, K-12 educational institution, no regional focus identified)

And two comments to end this section:

“My experience has led me to believe that people have good intentions - they discuss - argue - debate - and come up with worthwhile plans which never seem to make it to their targeted audience - esp. to those students who are struggling.” (Administrator, K-12 educational institution, rural)

“This issue needs a champion who will see it through the legislative process and provide for the coordination of the many poorly funded resources. We need to have a life plan for every person leaving high school, graduate or not. Every youth should know their next step and be empowered to take it. If that means college great! If it means something else then how do we help?” (Occupation not provided, government agency, no regional focus identified)

SUMMARY

The main goal of our survey was to determine which areas were the ones most critical for continued research on the effects of education in Alaska, and how to improve that research. It seems clear that survey responders see efforts to better understand why students fail to reach their full potential, and identifying these issues early in a child’s educational continuum, as being very important. In particular, determining the non-socioeconomic barriers that limit students’ achievement was the highest priority of any single question presented in the survey.

Determining the successfulness of various educational programs and interventions was also important to responders, though the questions provided as examples to measure success were deemed inadequate. Finally, the attempt to track where secondary students decided to pursue either a career or their postsecondary education was not important to survey responders.

A second goal of our survey was to identify *quantitative* questions we could ask in order to address otherwise *qualitative* issues, and sources of information to use in these efforts. Usually, responders suggested very legitimate questions, though they were often still qualitative in nature. Many responders suggested questions that had not yet been considered for further study, and there were additional suggestions for sources of data that will prove useful to our extended research efforts.⁷

Just because survey responders suggested questions that were still qualitative in nature does not mean the questions are not good ones. In fact, many responders pointed out that the outcomes we would like to track are often times not quantifiable, yet they are still important in determining the worth of a program or its benefits to students and the economy or the state. Focusing some of our research efforts towards more qualitative-based surveys and data collection could help answer these questions. Responders suggested that in many cases, it was best to ask students directly about certain topics, such as where they were most likely to turn for information on postsecondary education and employment opportunities, or how helpful they found their school's career and postsecondary education counseling services. These are the types of questions that are impossible to answer by matching administrative records, but such surveys do require significant effort in order to draw valid conclusions.

Finally, there were several suggestions to look at qualities of successful students and see what may have led to their success. This would require access to historical information for those data elements that can change over time, as well as additional surveys of these successful students in order to determine what factors they felt were most important to their ultimate success.

⁷ In order to collect and link back to an individual student some of the suggested data for us to analyze, we need to have in place data sharing agreements with the agencies providing the data, and make sure that the confidentiality of students' data is maintained. ACPE is continuing its efforts to create a statewide longitudinal data system, or SLDS, in order to make such data collection, sharing, analysis and reporting easier.

APPENDIX A. Survey goals and associated questions:

GOAL 1: Measuring students' "success" after they leave an Alaska secondary education program.

1. Did Alaska students attend college or other postsecondary training? If so, did they complete their education?
2. Did Alaska students enter the workforce? If so, were they employed in jobs that were linked to their educational pursuits?
3. Did Alaska students avoid negative outcomes in their lives, such as incarceration or reliance on public assistance?

GOAL 2: Identifying where students decide to pursue their education or their career after they leave secondary education in Alaska.

1. If they went to school, did they go to school in Alaska?
2. If they went to an out-of-state postsecondary institution, did they return to Alaska?
3. If they entered the workforce after leaving secondary education, did they pursue a career in Alaska?

GOAL 3: Having information on the "success" of educational programs and interventions.

1. Are there positive outcomes for program participants compared to non-participants?
2. Do the benefits of a program or intervention outweigh the costs of providing it?
3. Do some programs or interventions benefit one group of Alaska students more than others?

GOAL 4: Determining why certain students do not achieve their full potential or even drop out of the educational system.

1. Are there socio-economic or demographic factors limiting Alaska students' success?
2. Are there other barriers affecting students' ability to continue their education?
3. Does the cost of pursuing postsecondary education decrease the likelihood of an Alaskan continuing their education, and do current financial aid programs work to minimize this problem?

GOAL 5: Determining what information students need / desire to make informed decisions regarding postsecondary education and careers.

1. Do Alaska students know about the programs that can assist them in their pursuit of postsecondary education or training?
2. Does career counseling benefit Alaska students?
3. Are Alaska students aware of, and being provided access to, the range of career counseling services available to them?

TABLE 1.

GOAL 1: Measuring students' "success" after they leave an Alaska secondary education program.

GOAL 2: Identifying where students decide to pursue their education or their career after they leave secondary education in Alaska.

GOAL 3: Having information on the "success" of educational programs and interventions.

GOAL 4: Determining why certain students do not achieve their full potential or even drop out of the educational system.

GOAL 5: Determining what information students need / desire to make informed decisions regarding postsecondary education and careers.

		Did Alaska students avoid negative outcomes in their lives, such as incarceration or reliance on public assistance?	Did Alaska students enter the workforce? If so, were they employed in jobs that were linked to their educational pursuits?	Did Alaska students attend college or other postsecondary training? If so, did they complete their education?	OVERALL GOAL	If they entered the workforce after leaving secondary education, did they pursue a career in Alaska?	If they went to an out-of-state postsecondary institution, did they return to Alaska?	If they went to school, did they go to school in Alaska?	OVERALL GOAL	Are there positive outcomes for program participants compared to non-participants?	Do the benefits of a program or intervention outweigh the costs of providing it?	Do some programs or interventions benefit one group of Alaska students more than others?	OVERALL GOAL	Are there socio-economic or demographic factors limiting Alaska students' success?	Are there other barriers affecting students' ability to continue their education?	Does the cost of pursuing postsecondary education decrease the likelihood of an Alaskan continuing their education, and do current financial aid programs work to minimize this problem?	OVERALL GOAL	Do Alaska students know about the programs that can assist them in their pursuit of postsecondary education or training?	Does career counseling benefit Alaska students?	Are Alaska students aware of, and being provided access to, the range of career counseling services available to them?	
NORMED DATA - Conditional formatting across all questions for each group.																					
Responses																					
ALL	208	3.2%	3.1%	2.2%	-1.1%	-9.4%	-15.2%	-4.5%	-5.4%	5.9%	-0.1%	-2.4%	-4.0%	11.9%	0.3%	6.1%	1.1%	2.8%	2.5%	2.2%	0.8%
Teacher/Counselor	44	6.2%	1.7%	5.2%	4.5%	-9.1%	-15.6%	-8.5%	-9.1%	8.8%	-0.4%	-2.2%	-7.0%	14.8%	2.7%	3.9%	0.2%	2.7%	0.2%	3.3%	-2.3%
Admin	102	3.3%	5.5%	2.7%	-2.8%	-9.5%	-14.8%	-5.6%	-5.3%	5.0%	1.2%	-2.5%	-3.2%	9.8%	-0.1%	6.2%	0.9%	2.3%	2.2%	3.2%	1.5%
Urban	45	2.0%	6.2%	5.1%	-5.4%	-7.5%	-11.8%	-5.9%	-7.6%	7.3%	-2.6%	0.1%	-3.7%	11.2%	4.7%	6.4%	2.3%	1.0%	1.0%	-0.2%	-2.4%
Rural	48	3.9%	5.3%	5.3%	5.3%	-13.2%	-17.6%	-6.5%	-6.0%	9.3%	6.1%	-0.2%	-4.4%	9.0%	1.3%	5.5%	-3.4%	0.0%	1.0%	0.4%	-1.2%
Statewide	32	5.6%	3.3%	2.5%	-6.6%	-6.0%	-9.1%	-4.4%	-3.6%	6.1%	-1.9%	-0.3%	-2.8%	7.4%	-7.6%	0.4%	-0.4%	8.2%	5.1%	4.5%	-0.4%
Govt	22	5.3%	0.9%	-0.2%	-3.4%	-10.2%	-10.2%	0.0%	-1.1%	1.5%	-3.4%	-3.4%	-3.4%	11.4%	-6.8%	2.3%	2.3%	6.9%	1.2%	5.7%	4.6%
K-12 Ed	91	2.7%	4.2%	4.5%	1.1%	-12.0%	-15.9%	-5.7%	-7.3%	7.8%	1.1%	-0.8%	-3.5%	11.9%	0.7%	5.3%	-0.4%	2.4%	1.8%	1.6%	0.5%
Non-ed Org	26	-4.3%	1.2%	-3.4%	1.4%	-6.3%	-19.8%	1.6%	-0.4%	7.2%	-4.4%	-7.3%	-4.4%	15.0%	0.5%	10.1%	0.5%	-0.4%	6.3%	4.3%	2.4%
PS Ed	35	4.1%	6.1%	4.7%	-8.1%	-0.3%	-1.2%	-1.9%	-1.2%	4.4%	-0.5%	-6.7%	-3.9%	4.7%	0.4%	7.1%	0.4%	1.6%	0.9%	-3.2%	-7.4%
Voc/Tech	8	14.1%	-5.4%	7.6%	-5.4%	-18.0%	-32.9%	-18.0%	-21.7%	0.6%	4.4%	-8.7%	-4.3%	17.4%	4.4%	4.4%	4.4%	21.7%	13.0%	13.0%	9.6%
Numbers of responders assigning various scores:	Total	208	207	205	205	200	202	199	200	194	197	197	197	192	194	195	194	192	195	194	191
	1	5	3	3	7	7	14	8	9	1	3	5	4	2	4	1	1	2	3	2	1
	2	8	7	11	11	18	33	15	16	1	3	8	8	1	9	-	5	4	2	1	10
	3	19	18	18	33	56	45	35	33	20	31	37	45	11	29	26	38	30	31	38	36
	4	66	79	73	55	53	53	58	64	69	84	68	69	34	60	59	60	60	64	59	49
	5	110	100	100	99	66	57	83	78	103	76	79	71	144	92	109	90	96	95	94	95