

The Future of K-12 Education in Anchorage

Report on Community Conversations for the Mayor's Education Summit

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The Future of K–12 Education in Anchorage: Report on Community Conversations

PREPARED BY VIEWPOINT LEARNING



Anchorage Mayor Dan Sullivan has launched an initiative to improve education performance for all students in Anchorage public schools. Conducted with the involvement and support of the Superintendent and the school board, the project aims to raise the achievement bar so that Anchorage high school graduates are competitive in the international workplace.

This ongoing effort began with a two-day summit in November 2011. Over two days of intense dialogue, more than 100 Anchorage civic and community leaders created a set of four potential choices for education reform for the public to consider:

1. World Class Leadership: Invest in Teachers and Principals
2. Make the Anchorage Community a True Partner in K–12 Education
3. Set Great Expectations for Student Success
4. Expand Choice and Opportunity for All

In February 2012, more than 350 Anchorage residents met to consider these choices in a series of structured Community Conversations. In these facilitated meetings, which were open to all interested members of the public, residents took these choices as their starting point. Over three hours they adapted and changed the choices to develop a common ground vision of their priorities for improving education in Anchorage and the steps they hoped would help move towards that goal.

As participants from many walks of life discussed their priorities, they discovered a great deal of common ground when it comes to making Anchorage’s schools truly world class and competitive.

Many of those who took part in the discussions worked in education, allowing us to shed light on major similarities and differences between how educators and non-educators view these issues. On examining participants’ responses, we were surprised to find that educators and other participants had strikingly similar views on almost every issue.

FINDINGS

The following findings represent the common ground conclusions across all the Community Conversations:

- **The status quo is not an option.** Most felt the current system is not meeting kids’ needs, and they were especially shocked at how low Alaska ranked compared to other states and internationally. Across the board, people saw the need for change, and they were open to bold action to make that change happen.
- **Set higher standards.** Across the board participants agreed strongly that Anchorage needs to set the bar high. All kids need access to a rigorous, high-quality curriculum that prepares them for college or for a skilled, well-paying job. There was strong support for adopting the Common Core standards, a set of K–12 curriculum standards, internationally benchmarked, that have been adopted by 45 US states.
- **More and better vocational education.** But people did not feel that education or curriculum should be one-size-fits all. They felt that some students are simply not cut out for college and that these kids need much better options than the current system affords them. In addition to the traditional college prep courses, participants wanted to see rigorous, challenging vocational and career training that would give kids who are not college bound the skills they need to succeed.

- **Good teaching and more of it.** People felt it was paramount to hire high-quality teachers and give them lots of support. This included good pay, but even more important, it meant professional development, mentoring and other support, especially for teachers in the first few years of their career. There was also strong support for holding teachers to very high standards, while giving them more flexibility and autonomy in how to meet those standards.
- **Community involvement.** People felt it was extremely important to get parents and other members of the community more involved in K–12 education, for example through parent resource centers or business partnerships. But they struggled to find concrete and effective ways of bringing that about.
- **School choice, but only within the district.** There was strong support for making more alternative and optional programs available, but participants felt this should happen within the ASD. There was little appetite for vouchers or independent charter schools or other schooling options that are not part of the district.
- **Additional steps to consider.** In all the dialogues participants arrived at other recommendations not included in their materials. In particular they expressed strong support for more early childhood/Pre-K resources, and for adopting a longer and more flexible school day and year to allow for more classroom time.
- **Educators and non-educators are more similar than different.** The dialogues showed that educators and others had overwhelmingly similar views on most of the issues under discussion. Both groups share a deep commitment to kids, to helping them learn and preparing them to succeed, and both groups agreed by and large about the best ways to achieve that future. There were a few differences, most notably:
 - **Merit pay.** Non-educators generally supported linking teachers' salary to student outcomes; educators tended to oppose it. However, all participants agreed on the importance of using assessments to help students learn and teachers improve their skills, as well as the importance of making it easier to retrain and if necessary remove ineffective teachers.
 - **Specific priorities for improving education.** Both educators and non-educators had the same top five priorities for giving students access to a world-class education, but they put them in different rank order. Educators tended to prioritize steps that would address specific challenges they face in the classroom; non-educators tended to prioritize steps that would affect the quality of the teaching corps as a whole.
- **Scale up the conversation.** The Community Conversations reached a few hundred people but that will not be enough for the ongoing work of change. Widespread, ongoing outreach is needed at every stage of the process to build awareness, solicit community input and build public ownership and support for the changes that will be made.
- **Address mistrust.** Mistrust can be addressed by making sure all stakeholders are at the table. In particular more effort must be made to include low-income and minority residents, who were underrepresented at the Community Conversations. It is also important to get meaningful input from all stakeholders and set up an effective feedback loop where ongoing community input helps shape the project moving forward.
- **Build a constituency for change.** At the Mayor's Summit In November Kati Haycock, President of the Education Trust, pointed to the need for public involvement in initiating and sustaining major change:

What we've learned from experience around the country is that good leaders in school systems need outside pressure in order to move change further, faster. So don't hold back! Organize to support education, but demand quality education. That's the best thing you can do to give the leaders in your system the leverage they need to do the hard work of change.

With their energy and commitment, participants in the Community Conversations represent exactly this kind of potential constituency for change. They can be powerful advocates for the work of reform in their communities, with the school district, and with other leaders at the state and local level.

These Community Conversations have been an important step in the ongoing process of education reform in Anchorage. They show a public committed to the goal and ready to engage in the hard work of creating an education system that gives all students in Anchorage access to a world-class education. The common ground they defined provides a promising basis on which to build.



INTRODUCTION

Anchorage Mayor Dan Sullivan has launched an initiative to improve education performance for all students in Anchorage public schools. The goal is to raise the achievement bar so that Anchorage high school graduates are competitive in the international workplace. Conducted with the involvement and support of the Superintendent and the school board, this ongoing effort began with a two-day summit in November 2011, in which more than 100 civic and community leaders from a wide range of backgrounds and sectors explored significant innovations, challenging ideas, and reforms from other places in the US and abroad. Summit participants listened to and discussed presentations from experts around the country; over two days of intense dialogue, they created a set of four potential choices or approaches to education reform for the public to consider. Each of these choices emphasized different priorities for reform:

1. World Class Leadership: Invest in Teachers and Principals
2. Make the Anchorage Community a True Partner in K–12 Education
3. Set Great Expectations for Student Success
4. Expand Choice and Opportunity for All

(Complete text of the four choices appears on page 4.)

The public considered these choices in a series of Community Conversations conducted by Viewpoint Learning in February 2012. In a series of 3-hour conversations held around the municipality, residents developed a common ground vision of their priorities for improving education in Anchorage and the steps they hoped would help move towards that goal.¹ In these conversations the four choices were a starting point only – participants were encouraged to change or combine them as they saw fit.



Anchorage Mayor Dan Sullivan

1. Community Conversations were held at the Bayshore Club House; Eagle River Lion's Club; Spenard Recreation Center; Alaska Native Heritage Center; Campbell Creek Science Center; and the Anchorage Senior and Activity Center. The meetings were open to all interested residents, and they were publicized through newspaper and radio ads, announcements sent to schools, libraries and community organizations, and email blasts. They were held on weekday evenings and weekend mornings to accommodate as many interested residents as possible.

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Each community conversation was a structured and professionally facilitated three-hour dialogue. (More information on the project and process can be found in Appendix A.) More than 350 Anchorage residents attended these meetings and discussed their priorities for improving education for all children in the municipality. The results of the November Summit and the Community Conversations will help inform the recommendations that emerge from an upcoming summit in June, in which civic and community leaders, along with some participants from the Community Conversations, will discuss the findings and develop action plans and ways forward.

Educators and Non-Educators: similar views

Many of those who took part in the discussions (about 40% of participants) said they worked in education. This raised the question of whether having so many educators taking part would affect the results of the dialogue; it also gave us a unique opportunity to understand the major similarities and differences between how educators and non-educators view these issues.

On examining participants' responses, we were surprised to find that educators and other participants had strikingly similar views on almost every issue. There were very few points on which opinions diverged sharply: for the most part educators and others had very similar perspectives about how Anchorage should improve educational outcomes for students. In part this reflected common ground they shared before they entered the room. It was also the result of dialogue: as people talked with each other and had the opportunity to hear each other's viewpoints and experiences, they were able to discover more common ground.

"The majority of participants were ASD employees. I thought I would have many different points of view from them but found we share many of the same thoughts."²

The results of the community conversations were documented in a number of ways, and the analysis that follows is based on: the conclusions participants recorded on flip charts as they worked together in their small groups; responses on the questionnaire that each participant completed at the end of the session; flip charts from the plenary sessions in which facilitators recorded the common ground across the small groups; and notes taken by facilitators and observers at each session.

In the following analysis, unless indicated otherwise, educators and non-educators had very similar responses. Wherever educators and non-educators differed significantly, those differences are noted and discussed. (Quantitative data appears in Appendix B.)

FOUR CHOICES

1. World-Class Leadership: Invest in Teachers and Principals

Focus resources on recruiting, training, assessing and rewarding top quality teachers and principals. Provide increased autonomy for experienced teachers and principals. Increase support for new and struggling teachers and make it easier to dismiss ineffective teachers and principals.

2. Make the Anchorage Community a True Partner in K–12 Education

Get all of Anchorage involved in making a world-class K–12 system a top priority. Create programs that increase parental involvement, business partnerships and ongoing formal community dialogue about the role of schools, curriculum and student outcomes.

3. Set Great Expectations for Student Success

Raise the expectations for ALL students to match rigorous national and international standards. Adopt the high-level national curriculum that most other states have adopted and give teachers the tools and training they need to ensure each Anchorage student is college- or career-ready upon graduation.

4. Expand Choice and Opportunity for All

Increase school choice and educational opportunities through public and private alternatives. Schools offer a wide variety of educational options as they specialize, diversify curriculum and compete for students, and the district increases access to alternative schools and programs by providing transportation.

2. These comments are taken from participants' written responses to the two open-ended questions on the questionnaire: "What was the most surprising or important thing you heard in today's session?" and "Were there any aspects of the issue that were not raised in tonight's discussion?" Comments have been lightly edited for clarity.

KEY FINDINGS

The following common ground emerged repeatedly across all of the Community Conversations:

What’s education for?

When people were asked to assess the importance of different goals for Anchorage’s education system, participant priorities fell into three major groupings (See Table 1):³

- Two priorities clearly outstripped all the rest: strong majorities identified “teaching every student the basics” and “developing critical thinking skills” as most important.
- Another group of goals was rated “most important” by about half of all participants: giving students the skills they need to get good jobs, teaching cooperation and the ability to work with others, and ensuring that teachers and principals are qualified.
- Finally, three goals were less likely to be rated “most important.” These were: “ensuring that young people are well-rounded,” “preparing young people for participation in democracy,” and “preparing students for college.”



That only 22% of participants identified college prep as one of the most important goals for K–12 education may reflect the fact that Alaska offers better job prospects for high school graduates than most places in the US. Many participants said that some kids are simply not cut out for college and that the Anchorage School District (ASD) needs to do more to make sure that all students graduate ready to succeed, regardless of their college or career path. This means that all students should have a mastery of the basics, be able to think critically, be able to work with others and be prepared to be (as several participants said in the course of the discussion) “life-long learners.” In every dialogue participants also called for more and better vocational and career education.

Most people felt ASD isn’t doing especially well at achieving these goals. 64% gave ASD a grade of C or below. Educators gave the district only slightly higher grades than non-educators: on average, educators gave the district a C, non-educators gave the district a C-minus.

Table 1

Q: How important are each of the following as goals for public education in Anchorage?	
	% saying "most important"*
Teaching every student the basics of reading, writing and math	73
Developing skills in problem solving and critical thinking	66
Providing students with the skills or technical education they need to get good jobs	51
Ensuring that teachers and principals are highly qualified	49
Teaching skills of cooperation and working with others	48
Ensuring that young people are well-rounded citizens, with exposure to arts, humanities & sciences	40
Preparing young people for participation in democracy	36
Preparing students for college	22

*Participants were free to identify multiple items as “most important”

3. Several questions on the final survey asked participants to rate specific goals or steps as “most important,” “very important,” “somewhat important” or “not very important.” They were free to identify multiple items as “most important.” On every question except vouchers and charter schools, strong majorities of participants felt the goals were “most important” or “very important”. At the same time they realized that in an era of limited resources it would not possible to do everything: they would have to set some priorities. In this analysis we focus on how many participants said a given step was “most” important because this gives the clearest view of those priorities.

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How to fix it?

Each of the four choices outlined a different set of priorities for improving outcomes in Anchorage. At the end of each session, participants were asked to rate each of the four choices on a scale of 1–10 (10 being best):

Rating the choices (in order of preference)

Choice	Average rating
Choice 3: Set great expectations for student success	8.6
Choice 1: World class leadership—Invest in teachers and principals	8.5
Choice 2: Make the Anchorage community a true partner in K–12 education	7.7
Choice 4: Expand choice and opportunity for all	7.0

Participants were asked to rate each scenario independently on a scale of 1–10, 10 being best.

These ratings were quite consistent across sessions, with Choices 3 and 1 always scoring highest and Choice 4 almost always ranked lowest.⁴ Participants discussed each of the choices extensively, and many found things to support in each option. However, they also realized that it would not be possible to do all these things; resources are limited and they would have to set some priorities.

Participants had rich and passionate discussions about what approaches or combination of approaches would do the most to improve outcomes and where Anchorage should focus its efforts. In each session participants arrived at very consistent sets of priorities.

1. Set higher standards: raise the bar

- **The “proficiency gap.”** Participants across the board were shocked at how poorly Alaska students perform when compared to students in other states.⁵ They were dismayed at the discrepancy between “proficiency” on the Alaska Standards Based Assessment (SBA) and “proficiency” on a national measure like the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), which many felt misleads parents into believing their children are doing better than they actually are.⁶ When participants were asked an open-ended question about the most important or surprising thing they learned in the Community Conversation, the discrepancy between Alaska scores and national measures was the single most cited response. In every session participants wanted to raise the bar and implement a rigorous curriculum for all kids.

“Students are not tested with a national or international standardized test; as a parent I feel duped.”

“[I was surprised] that Alaska ranks so poorly when compared to other states; Alaska sets our expectations low so we can communicate to parents we are performing at average or above average levels, when really we're not.”

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATION PROGRESS (NAEP)

NAEP is a nationwide test given to representative samples of 4th, 8th and 12th graders in each state; scores in reading and math (and sometimes writing and science) are compared from state to state. Compared to other states, Alaska students perform near the bottom in 4th grade math and reading. Due in part to intense teacher effort, Alaska students gain significant ground in later grades, performing close to or slightly above the national average in 8th grade math and reading. More information can be found at: <http://nationsreportcard.gov>.

NAEP scores set a different threshold for proficiency than the Alaska Standards Based Assessment (SBA): in 2011, 74% of Alaska 4th graders taking the SBA in reading were rated “proficient”; however when Alaska students took the NAEP test, only 25% were “proficient.” Similarly, 68% of Alaska students were rated “proficient” on the 8th grade math SBA; only 35% of students taking the NAEP were “proficient.”

4. The only exception was Eagle River, where Choice 4 was ranked third.

5. Anchorage students are performing at similar levels to students in other parts of the state: Anchorage students score slightly higher in reading, slightly lower in math. (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development).

6. The “proficiency” benchmark for the SBA tests is set by the Alaska Department of Education.

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- **Rigorous curriculum ≠ college prep.** When asked what “rigorous curriculum” meant, participants were clear that it did not necessarily equal college-prep. It could include high-level technical education, humanities, science, mathematics, or arts—the key was that all instruction would be at a consistently high level so that any student graduating from ASD would be ready either for college or for a skilled technical job.
- In particular, participants overwhelmingly supported **more and better vocational and career education.** At almost every session, participants explicitly added vocational and career training to the list of what should be included in a rigorous, high-standards curriculum. Nearly three-quarters of participants (73%) felt that some students are not cut out for college and should be educated for jobs that do not require a college degree. Only about 1 in 5 (19%) felt that all students should be in college prep courses because that level of education is required for most well-paying jobs today. Overall, Community Conversation participants supported tailoring students’ education to their interests and ability, rather than trying to fit all students into the same “pre-college” box.

“Not all kids meet the standards; [we should] have paths for each student within the school based on their ability. One path will never fit all.”

- **Participants also voiced strong support for:**
 - **Adopting the Common Core standards** (a set of K–12 curriculum standards, internationally benchmarked, that have been adopted by 45 US states). 74% supported signing on to national standards
 - **Benchmarking Alaska State tests to NAEP** so that “proficiency” on one equals “proficiency” on the other. In every session, this was listed as an important step.⁷
 - **A “formative assessment” approach to testing** that uses ongoing assessments to help teachers understand where kids need help and tailor instruction to each student’s individual needs. Most participants were initially unfamiliar with the term “formative assessment,” but as they learned more about it many came to feel this kind of ongoing assessment was needed for all core subjects and at all grade levels (not just in K–6 reading where it is used now).

Many of the teachers and administrators in the room noted that raising standards in these ways would be more complicated than simply announcing a new set of standards or benchmarks—it would require major investment in training and professional development.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

The Common Core Standards are a set of K–12 curriculum standards that define the knowledge and skills students should learn so that they will graduate high school ready to succeed in entry level jobs, college courses and job training programs. The internationally benchmarked standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts from across the country.

So far, 45 states and the District of Columbia have signed on and are adopting the Common Core standards. Only Alaska, Nebraska, Virginia, Texas, and Minnesota have not adopted them.

Since the Community Conversations were held, the Anchorage School Board has decided to adopt the Common Core standards for grades K–12 independent of whether the Alaska Department of Education adopts them for the entire state. Board members noted that this will be a cost-effective way of raising standards as the district will be able to draw on professional development resources being used in other states rather than having to develop these resources from scratch.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

An approach in which students are regularly tested to see whether they are learning critical skills, and teachers then use that information to help shape instruction for each individual student. Unlike traditional standardized tests that measure how well a student has mastered a subject after the fact, “formative assessment” is ongoing. It provides teachers real-time feedback while students are learning—what they understand, where they need help, and how to help them improve.

ASD has a formative assessment program for literacy called “Response to Instruction” (RTI). RTI is currently used in all district elementary schools and is being rolled out in middle and high schools.

7. In addition, ASD is considering having all 4th, 8th and 12th graders take the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Currently, the NAEP is given in only a sample of Anchorage schools.

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- **Too much testing?** At the same time, many participants (63%) were at least somewhat concerned that “kids are being tested too much, and new standards will create even more focus on test scores.” Educators were especially likely to hold this view (72%), though a majority of non-educators agreed (56%). Many teachers in the groups said that the current focus on high-stakes tests too often gets in the way of helping students learn. Rather than relying exclusively on these “after-the-fact” tests, they wanted to see more emphasis on on-going “mastery learning” assessments. Such assessments help teachers understand whether students are mastering the material, pinpoint ways to help students improve and allow students to move on

once they have mastered a given topic or skill. (Shifting the focus of testing was an especially high priority for educators, as will be discussed in the following section.)

Participants’ conclusion was clear: “rigorous curriculum” does not mean more and harder tests: it means hands-on real-world instruction that prepares kids for the workforce and for life.

2. Good teaching and more of it

Participants were also clear that higher standards—important as they are—will not be enough by themselves. Without high-quality teachers, higher standards will make little difference in student outcomes.

- **Hire good teachers and give them lots of support.** This was a top priority in every session. Participants felt that raising standards, involving the community and giving students more options within the district were all important, but that these steps would not be as effective without a teaching corps that is highly qualified, motivated, and passionate.

- 88% agreed that “hiring and rewarding high quality teachers and principals is the best way to improve schools.”
- 79% agreed that “good teachers can help every student learn regardless of the student’s background or education.”
- When asked what it means to “support teachers,” participants tended to emphasize non-monetary support rather than calling for increased pay. They felt that teaching should be an attractive and well-respected profession, and that good pay is part of that.

But they placed much more emphasis on professional support: especially professional development, mentoring, and supporting new teachers in the first few years of their careers. Teachers also underscored the need for better teacher education programs at local universities, with several saying the training they had received in those programs had not prepared them well for the classroom.



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• Give good teachers more autonomy and flexibility in classroom ... and hold them accountable for results.

- *Flexibility and accountability went hand in hand* in every conversation. In the aggregate, 48% of all participants said that setting high standards and giving teachers more autonomy in how to meet them is one of the most important things we can do. And 49% said that making it easier to retrain/remove ineffective teachers is one of the most important things we can do. (See Table 2.)

In their discussions many participants said greater autonomy would improve outcomes by allowing teachers to accommodate students’ different needs and learning styles. Several sessions also pointed out that it’s not just teachers: principals also should have greater flexibility and accountability in how they run their schools.

- *How to evaluate teacher (and principal) performance.* At several sessions participants raised the question of how best to evaluate teacher (and principal) performance: any approach must be both accurate and fair. Most suggestions centered on the need for multiple assessments to give a comprehensive picture: no one’s performance should be judged based on one particular test or observation.
- Participants also agreed across the board that *struggling teachers should get additional support* to help them improve, and that *those who do not improve should face dismissal*. To some participants’ surprise, most teachers also voiced support for weeding out teachers who are failing to improve outcomes for their students.⁸

Table 2

Q: How important are each of the following proposals in making sure all students have access to a world-class education?	
	% saying "most important"* (Aggregate)
Make it easier to retrain or remove ineffective teachers	49
Set high standards and give teachers more flexibility in how to reach them	48
Rely less on high stakes tests and more on on-going assessments of student progress	43
Reward teachers who are more effective or take on difficult assignments	40
Improve teacher training in colleges and in-school training for new teachers	39
Adopt national standards and train teachers and principals in meeting those standards	28
Create ‘parent resource centers’ to provide classes and programs for parents	22
Increase school-business partnerships	21
Provide vouchers that parents can use to help pay for private schools	16
Make it easier to start independent charter schools	15

*Participants were free to identify multiple items as “most important”



“I was surprised that the teachers in my group supported more critical evaluation of their peers and to dismiss those who cannot perform. This says a lot.”

8. 76% of educators and 84% of non-educators rated this most or very important.

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- ***Some differences between educators and others.***

While the common ground shared between educators and non-educators was very strong, some interesting differences emerged between how the two groups assessed specific proposals for making sure all students have access to a world-class education.

- Educators and non-educators were likely to identify the same five proposals as most important. However the rank order differed. (See Table 3.)
 - Educators appeared to prioritize proposals that they believed would help teachers do their job better: their top priority was to focus on tests that can be used to actively improve student learning

(rather than simply assessing their progress after the fact). They also were likely to support improved teacher training, as well as setting high standards and giving teachers more flexibility in how to reach them.

Given that many people in the “educator” category were or had been teachers, these steps may have seemed most relevant to the challenges they faced in the classroom. Steps like making it easier to retrain or remove ineffective teachers and rewarding those who take on difficult assignments were generally seen as important, but were less likely to be flagged as “most” important. Overall their message seems to be: ***“Give us the tools we need to do our job better and remove some of the obstacles we face; then we can weed out the people who are not up to standard.”***

- Non-educators, however, tended to view the schools’ challenges from the outside. This group focused on steps that would make the teaching corps as a whole as effective as possible: especially retraining ineffective teachers and weeding out those who fail to improve. They also put a very high priority on setting high standards and giving teachers more flexibility in how to reach them. It was clear in the discussions that many participants (especially parents) put a high value on good teachers’ expertise and professionalism.

For this group, approaches like formative assessment and improved teacher training were generally seen as helpful but were less likely to be flagged as “most” important. Their message seems to be: ***“Use both carrots and sticks to make sure we have the best teachers possible, and then get out of their way.”***

- ***Merit pay.*** The most striking difference between educators and non-educators was the question of merit pay. In the aggregate, participants were split on this question: when asked which position was closer to their view, 43% said “teachers should be financially rewarded when their students do well” and 49% said “it’s not fair to pay more to teachers whose students do well.” But there was a striking difference in how educators and non-educators viewed this question: 54% of non-educators supported merit pay and 38% said it wasn’t fair. Only 28% of educators supported merit pay; 65% opposed it. (See Table 4.)

The discussion shed some light on possible reasons for these different perspectives. Some participants noted that incentives and pay-for-performance work in other sectors; they felt that teaching is no different and that incentives will help attract and motivate the best teachers. Others felt that teaching is different—because so many factors are involved in how well kids do, they said, teachers can too easily be blamed for things that aren’t their fault. Some teachers also said that as professionals they felt insulted by the idea that they needed a financial incentive to give their best to their students.

It is important to note that all participants clearly supported evaluations that help teachers improve their performance; where they were split was whether those evaluations should affect teachers’ pay.

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Table 3

Q: How important are each of the following proposals in making sure all students have access to a world-class education?			
Educators	% saying "most important"	Non-educators	% saying "most important"
Rely less on high stakes tests and more on on-going assessments of student progress	52	Make it easier to retrain or remove ineffective teachers	57
Improve teacher training in colleges and in-school training for new teachers	44	Set high standards and give teachers more flexibility in how to reach them	54
Set high standards and give teachers more flexibility in how to reach them	41	Reward teachers who are more effective or take on difficult assignments	45
Make it easier to retrain or remove ineffective teachers	39	Rely less on high stakes tests and more on on-going assessments of student progress	38
Reward teachers who are more effective or take on difficult assignments	32	Improve teacher training in colleges and in-school training for new teachers	36
Adopt national standards and train teachers and principals in meeting those standards	27	Adopt national standards and train teachers and principals in meeting those standards	27
Create parent resource centers to provide classes and programs for parents	27	Increase school-business partnerships	22
Increase school-business partnerships	19	Create parent resource centers to provide classes and programs for parents	19
Provide vouchers that parents can use to help pay for private schools	11	Provide vouchers that parents can use to help pay for private schools	19
Make it easier to start independent charter schools	11	Make it easier to start independent charter schools	16

**Participants were free to identify multiple items as "most important"*

Table 4

Q: Which comes <u>closer</u> to your point of view?			
	Educators % agree	Non-educators % agree	Aggregate % agree
Teachers should be financially rewarded when their students do well; they make a difference in whether kids succeed.	28	54	43
OR			
It's not fair to pay more to teachers whose students do well when so many things that affect student learning are beyond a teacher's control.	65	36	49





3. Community involvement

In all six discussions participants emphasized the importance of parental and community engagement, but they struggled to find concrete and effective ways of bringing that about.

- In every session, participants expressed a strong desire for *more community involvement* (93% agreed that schools need the help of the entire community to improve outcomes for students; and 75% agreed strongly). The need for more involvement was also a major recurring theme in the group discussions.
 - In every session participants said that getting parents more involved in kids' education was essential, but they quickly agreed that *parents alone were not enough*. The whole community, including community organizations, businesses and local agencies, would have to work together and make K–12 education a priority.
 - In particular, people wanted to see *businesses become more involved* – especially through mentoring and internships for high school students.
- The idea of developing *parent resource centers at local schools* gained a lot of traction during the discussions, and participants at every session voiced strong support for the idea as a key way of getting parents more involved in schools. Ideally, they said, such centers would not only help parents get access to the tools and resources they need to help their kids succeed, they could also prepare parents to act as leaders and advocates on behalf of their kids and schools in general. Many also felt these resource centers would help make schools into centers that could serve as a resource not only for families with children but for the community at large.



As people worked to set priorities, however, the idea of parent resource centers was not especially highly ranked as one of the “most important” things that would boost student achievement, falling far behind teacher autonomy/flexibility and formative assessment. The enthusiasm shown for the idea in the discussion may reflect participants’ sense that too many parents are not actively engaged in their kids’ education: parent resource centers seemed like a good way of changing that. Educators were slightly more likely to emphasize the need for greater parental involvement.

But when push came to shove, most participants felt that increasing involvement by itself would not do enough to address the challenges ASD faces: 59% of participants agreed that “encouraging parent involvement is a good idea but it won’t do much if we don’t take steps to improve our schools.”

*“Good ideas about parent/community involvement—
[but] not strong enough to act upon.”*

Similarly, people liked the idea of “school-business partnerships” and recognized the importance of businesses getting involved, but in the face of so many pressing needs, this was not the first place they would recommend putting resources.

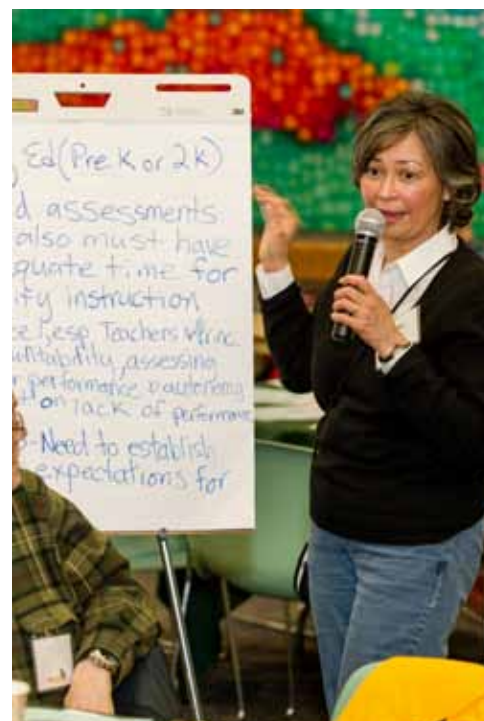
4. Expanding school choice

- People wanted to see *more choice and variety within the Anchorage school district*. This was especially important given participants' sense that kids have very different abilities and learning styles, and that they need access to a variety of educational tracks and approaches. Three-quarters of participants (77%) agreed that more choice means kids can find an environment that works for them. They were especially interested in increasing options for kids who are not college bound.
- But participants emphasized that *increased choice must happen within the district*, not by means of increasing students' access to private or independent charter schools. In most sessions participants altered the language in the written materials to underscore that increases in choice must occur within ASD.
- *There was little appetite for vouchers or independent charter schools*. While there were some vocal and committed supporters of these approaches at each session, most participants remained cool to the idea throughout the discussion. Compared to the other possible reforms, vouchers and independent charters received the lowest levels of support on the survey as ways for improving outcomes. This was not just weaker support: 35% of participants said increasing charter schools was not important, and 51% said the same of vouchers. Opposition to vouchers was stronger among educators (59% said vouchers were not important), but it was widespread among others as well (45% of non-educators said vouchers were not important).⁹
- At the same time, many participants wanted to see a *big expansion of alternative programs* within ASD, like those in place today. Parents who had experience with these programs (e.g. Chugach Optional) were very satisfied and felt such opportunities should be made more widely available.

When asked whether giving parents more options about where to send their kids to school would spur improvement in neighborhood schools, educators and non-educators had somewhat different perspectives. 57% of non-educators believed it would spur improvement, but only 43% of educators held that view.

However, when asked to choose between improving all local schools so that children can stay in their neighborhood school and increasing parents' choice by developing alternative and charter schools, educators and non-educators strongly agreed, and by similar margins. *Two-thirds (67%) of participants said Anchorage should focus on making all schools high quality*. Only 27% wanted to concentrate on developing alternative and charter schools.

- In most sessions participants also noted that *transportation* is a key obstacle preventing families from making use of alternative schools and programs within the district. While there was widespread concern about the expense, most people felt that more should be done to make transportation available, for example through school buses, free or low-cost public transportation, or van pools.



9. One possible reason is that Anchorage does not have a strong private school culture (only 5% of Anchorage children attend private or parochial schools, compared with rates of 10% or more in other US cities). It may also reflect the fact that participants were relatively wealthy and highly-educated; in other locales vouchers and charters have often been most popular among lower-income and minority groups, especially parents with children in failing schools. More research is needed to understand whether this pattern would hold in Anchorage.

PROJECT REPORT

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- **Open for more discussion.** The school choice issue raised powerful emotion at nearly all the Community Conversations, and it was one of the few topics where we saw strong disagreement. In almost every session there were partisans both in favor of and opposed to school choice, charters and vouchers—and many were mistrustful that the process was rigged to swing participants one way or another. This was especially true when it came to vouchers, which several participants mentioned in the open-ended section of the questionnaire.

“True school choice (vouchers) didn't get the attention it deserves because it was the last on the list.”

“This questionnaire seemed to have a bias toward private/charter schools that was not raised anywhere in the dialogue by anyone.”

- However, most participants were not especially familiar with school choice, charters or voucher programs. Some complained that the three-hour session was too short for them to get up to speed on this issue, especially when emotions ran high; they felt that the topic merited a separate set of conversations on its own.



5. Other key points

Several other points not included in participants' materials were consistently raised in the Community Conversations.

- **Strong support for more early childhood/Pre-K resources.** In every session, participants independently raised the idea of increasing support for early childhood development and pre-K—something not included in the materials. Many participants saw support for early childhood learning as a crucial part of making sure students arrive at school ready to learn and they wanted to see high quality early learning opportunities for all Anchorage kids. Many believed this would make as big a difference for student outcomes as any other step, and they wanted to see more systemic and ongoing support for pre-K from the state.¹⁰
- There was also consistent interest in adopting a **longer and more flexible school day and school year.** Many felt that kids do not get enough time at school, and they wanted to see the school day and school year extended to allow for more classroom time, one-on-one instruction and tutoring and attention to non-core subjects like arts and music. Several also noted that the traditional school day is a poor fit for modern families: they wanted to explore changing the school day to allow later start times

for teenagers and more afternoon options for kids with working parents. They saw the traditional day and calendar as an artifact of a bygone era: it would not be possible to make Anchorage schools internationally competitive in the 21st century while using a 19th century calendar.

“We are not an agricultural society or state—expand the school year!”

“Many other countries have school all year round and this contributes greatly to their students' achievement.”

10. A few tied this idea to broader concerns about the social determinants of learning: kids can't learn when they are badly nourished or affected by crime, substance abuse or domestic violence.

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- **Look to other models.** Several participants raised examples of education models they had experienced in other states and overseas (Japan, Singapore, Canada, Finland). Examples from these systems included: a longer school day/year; high academic standards; attention to vocational education; and highly qualified teachers. If other states and countries are getting good results, participants said, we should examine what they are doing and see if their best practices can be applied in Anchorage.
- **Administration needs to listen to us.** In several sessions participants complained that school and district administration were not tuned in or responsive to public concerns. Some teachers echoed this sentiment, saying that district officials were often disconnected from the realities of the classroom and the community.
- **Need for diversity.** Overall, participants in the Community Conversation tended to be highly educated, middle-aged and white, a fact that was not lost on participants themselves.¹¹ Across the board, participants felt it was crucial to broaden this conversation to include more low-income parents and people of color and find ways to get those often-marginalized voices to the table.

“ASD administration appears to be quite disconnected from what is going on...; they need to listen more to teachers and parents.”

Effect of dialogue

- The Community Conversations were well attended, with overflow crowds at some locations. At every session participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be heard and to hear from a range of other concerned residents. They hoped that their input would help bring about positive change for Anchorage schools.
 - 88% said the materials they received were very or somewhat helpful, and several participants took the materials home to show them to family and friends.
 - 86% said participating in the Community Conversation affected their thinking about the issues.
- Many participants said they were surprised at the civility of the conversation and the amount of common ground shared by people of different backgrounds and beliefs. One wrote: “There were people with whom, on a surface level, I would disagree – and I found myself agreeing!”
- As participants talked with each other and engaged with the issue over the course of the conversation, a sense of trust and optimism began to develop. Some participants said they had had very low expectations and that they were pleasantly surprised to find that the session was respectful, balanced, and even fun. They were impressed with a process that allowed people with widely varying points of view to be heard, respected and to find common ground. This for many was a welcome change from the polarized shouting matches that too often characterize public meetings.

“I was surprised realizing the number of common elements that people were saying and thinking about.”

“I was surprised that this was not an agenda program [to push us] one direction or another.”



11. Most of those who participated were women (about 62%). Almost half of all participants had children in grades K–12, with most of those attending public school (52% in traditional schools; 38% attending alternative public schools within the district).

IMPLICATIONS

The Community Conversations identified some possible ways forward for building a world-class education system for Anchorage.



less support. Such a conversation will require a significant investment of time and structure and seems unlikely to result in majority support.

- ***Start with common ground.*** Participants were clear that the status quo is not an option. The Community Conversations revealed a great deal of common ground about what people want to see for education reform and what they are prepared to support.
 - ***Raise standards:*** Set the bar high. The Anchorage School Board’s recent move to adopt the Common Core standards and dramatically increase literacy standards for grades K-3 are likely to enjoy widespread public support.
 - ***Give all students access to a rigorous, high-quality curriculum*** that prepares them for college or a well-paying job.
 - ***Increase technical and vocational programs*** for those kids who are not college-bound.
 - ***Emphasize good teaching and more of it:*** This includes offering teachers more training and support, setting high standards, and giving teachers greater authority and flexibility to help their students reach those standards.
 - ***Enhance school choice WITHIN the district.*** There was strong support for making more alternative and optional programs available within the ASD. However, expanding this idea to include independent charter schools or vouchers received much less support. Such a conversation will require a significant investment of time and structure and seems unlikely to result in majority support.
- ***The “proficiency gap” is a powerful starting point.*** In every dialogue participants were especially struck to learn about Alaska’s low scores on national benchmarks and the gap between Alaska’s definition of “proficiency” and the bar set by NAEP. This piece of information framed the discussion, creating a sense of urgency and a conviction that everyone has something at stake. It is likely to be a simple but effective starting point for further engaging the public.
- ***Scale up the conversation.*** The Community Conversations reached a few hundred people but that will not be enough for the ongoing work of change. Widespread, ongoing outreach is needed at every stage of the process to build awareness, solicit community input and build public ownership and support for the changes that will be made.
- ***Address mistrust.*** On an issue as volatile and emotional as schools and our children’s future, there are all too many opportunities for mistrust to emerge—even when (as we have seen here) common ground is extensive. A few key steps can help forestall this mistrust:
 - ***Make sure all stakeholders are at the table.*** In particular more effort must be made to include low-income and minority residents, who were underrepresented at the Community Conversations. Several steps have been especially effective bringing in underrepresented groups, including: having groups and organizations from those communities act as conveners (e.g. faith groups, neighborhood associations, ethnic associations, and tribal groups); piggybacking on local community events (street fairs, farmers’ markets, sporting events) to raise awareness of the effort and opportunities to participate; outreach through libraries, community centers, health clinics and other community organizations.

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In addition, it will be important to bring in more than the “usual suspects,” and to include stakeholders who are not often engaged in discussions of K–12 education (for example businesspeople, civic leaders, community organizations, faith groups, and people without children in school).

- *Create a process that is respectful, responsive and inclusive.* Building on steps that have already been taken in the Mayor’s Summit and the Community Conversations, it’s important to get meaningful input from all stakeholders, and to set up an effective feedback loop where ongoing community input helps to shape the reform initiative moving forward.



- ***Build a constituency for change.*** At the Mayor’s Summit in November Kati Haycock, President of the Education Trust, pointed to the need for public involvement in initiating and sustaining major change:

What we’ve learned from experience around the country is that good leaders in school systems need outside pressure in order to move change further, faster. So don’t hold back! Organize to support education, but demand quality education. That’s the best thing you can do to give the leaders in your system the leverage they need to do the hard work of change.

With their energy and commitment, participants in the Community Conversations represent exactly this kind of potential constituency for change. They can be powerful advocates for excellence in education and effective ambassadors for the work of reform in their communities, with the district and with other leaders at the state and local level.

These Community Conversations have been an important step in the ongoing process of education reform in Anchorage. They show a public committed to the goal and ready to engage in the hard work of creating an education system that gives all students in Anchorage access to a world-class education. The common ground they defined provides a promising basis on which to build.



THREE PHASES OF THE PROJECT

The Community Conversations were the second phase of a three-phase initiative:

Phase #1: Education Summit (November 15–16, 2011)

The two-day summit November 15–16 in which 100 civic and community leaders, drawn from education, policy makers, business, labor, neighborhoods, service organizations, faith-based communities, and others, explored significant innovations, challenging ideas, and reforms from other jurisdictions. They then developed a set of scenarios on possible directions for education reform in Anchorage to be further discussed with citizens.

Phase #2: Community Conversations (February 2012)

A series of discussions with Anchorage citizens was held in February 2012 to discuss the reform ideas that come out of the November Summit. During the discussions, citizens explored the potential reforms and learned about what reforms they would be prepared to support.

Phase #3: Capstone Summit (June 6–7, 2012)

Participants from the November 2011 Summit and representatives from the Community Conversations will convene to review citizen comments from the Community Conversations and finalize recommendations for several high-leverage reforms and action plans to move them forward.

Overall goal

*While Anchorage fares above average in comparison to many other American schools, regrettably that achievement bar is not very high. Because of Anchorage's unique location, we are more directly involved with international trading partners than many other American cities. The goal is to raise the achievement bar for Anchorage schools to a higher standard, such as those of Pacific Rim countries, so our graduates can be internationally competitive.**

DIALOGUE PROCESS

Each Community Conversation was a structured and professionally facilitated three-hour conversation. Each session involved the following steps:

- **Introduction:** Participants first watched a brief video of clips from the November Summit outlining the issue, some key background and the four choices.**
- **Discussion #1:** What Should K–12 Education in Anchorage Look Like in Five Years? Next, participants worked together in small groups (about 8-10 people) to consider four possible approaches for creating a world-class education system in Anchorage and the pros/cons of each. This was followed by a brief plenary in which the small groups reported back their conclusions and compared common ground across the groups.
- **Discussion #2:** What Steps Should We Take to Create a World-Class Education for All Anchorage Students? Participants then returned to their small groups to discuss how best to move Anchorage towards a world-class education system. This was followed by a second brief plenary in which the small groups again reported back and looked for common ground.
- At the end of the session, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire and (if they wished) to sign up for a mailing list to be kept up to date on this issue. They were also asked to indicate if they would be interested in being one of the citizen participants that will be invited to attend the Capstone Summit planned for June 2012.

* More information on ASD can be found at: <http://www.muni.org/Departments/Mayor/Pages/ISERReports.aspx>

**The video can be viewed at: <http://vimeo.com/channels/educationsummit>

APPENDIX B

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QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS - EDUCATION SUMMIT COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

RATING THE CHOICES

Looking back at the description of the four choices, how much do you think each would do to create a world-class K–12 education for Anchorage's students?

Rate each choice on a scale of 1 to 10.

1 = lowest (it wouldn't do much and should be a low priority)
10 = highest (it would do a lot and should be the highest priority)

	mean
1. World-class leadership: Invest in teachers and principals	8.5
2. Make the anchorage community a true partner in K–12 education	7.7
3. Set great expectations for student success	8.6
4. Expand choice and opportunity for all	7.0
5. If you had to give Anchorage's education system a grade, what would it be?	
	%
A	3
B	26
C	41
D	17
F	6
No response	7
6. How important are each of the following as goals for public education in Anchorage?	
6a. Teaching every student the basics of reading, writing and math	
Most important	73
Very important	26
Somewhat important	1
Not very important	0
No answer	0
6b. Ensuring that teachers and principals are highly qualified	
Most important	49
Very important	43
Somewhat important	6
Not very important	1
No answer	1

6c. Providing students with the skills or technical education they need to get good jobs

	%
Most important	51
Very important	42
Somewhat important	6
Not very important	1
No answer	0

6d. Preparing students for college

	%
Most important	22
Very important	58
Somewhat important	19
Not very important	1
No answer	1

6e. Preparing young people for participation in democracy

	%
Most important	36
Very important	44
Somewhat important	16
Not very important	2
No answer	1

6f. Ensuring that young people are well-rounded citizens, with exposure to the arts, humanities and sciences

	%
Most important	40
Very important	42
Somewhat important	15
Not very important	3
No answer	0

6g. Developing skills in problem solving and critical thinking

	%
Most important	66
Very important	30
Somewhat important	3
Not very important	1
No answer	0

6h. Teaching skills of cooperation and working with others

	%
Most important	48
Very important	37
Somewhat important	13
Not very important	2
No answer	0

7. Which comes CLOSER to your point of view?

	%
Teachers should be financially rewarded when their students do well; they make a difference in whether kids succeed.	43
It's not fair to pay more to teachers whose students do well when so many things that affect student learning are beyond a teacher's control.B322	49
No answer	9

8. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

8a. Schools can't do it alone: parents, grandparents, community and religious groups, businesses and local agencies all have to act together to improve schools

	%
Strongly agree	75
Somewhat agree	18
Somewhat disagree	4
Strongly disagree	1
No answer	1

8b. Hiring and rewarding high quality teachers and principals is the best way to improve schools

	%
Strongly agree	40
Somewhat agree	48
Somewhat disagree	9
Strongly disagree	2
No answer	1

8c. More choice in schools and programs means that all kids can find a learning environment that works for them

	%
Strongly agree	38
Somewhat agree	39
Somewhat disagree	18
Strongly disagree	2
No answer	3

8d. Anchorage should sign on to national standards to ensure that all students perform at a high level

	%
Strongly agree	38
Somewhat agree	36
Somewhat disagree	16
Strongly disagree	6
No answer	4

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<p>8e. Encouraging parent involvement is a good idea but it won't do much if we don't take steps to improve our schools</p> <p style="text-align: right;">%</p> <p>Strongly agree 26</p> <p>Somewhat agree 33</p> <p>Somewhat disagree 22</p> <p>Strongly disagree 16</p> <p>No answer 3</p>	<p>10. Which comes <u>CLOSER</u> to your point of view?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">%</p> <p>Some students are just not cut out for college—they should be educated for jobs that don't require a college education. 73</p> <p>Every student should be in college-prep courses because most well-paying jobs today require that level of education. 19</p> <p>No answer 8</p>	<p>11e. Provide vouchers that parents can use to help pay for private schools</p> <p style="text-align: right;">%</p> <p>Most important 16</p> <p>Very important 12</p> <p>Somewhat important 19</p> <p>Not very important 51</p> <p>No answer 2</p>
<p>8f. Good teachers can help every student learn, regardless of their background or situation</p> <p>Strongly agree 47</p> <p>Somewhat agree 32</p> <p>Somewhat disagree 15</p> <p>Strongly disagree 3</p> <p>No answer 2</p>	<p>11. How important are each of the following proposals in making sure all students have access to a world-class education?</p> <p>11a. Make it easier to start independent charter schools</p> <p>Most important 15</p> <p>Very important 22</p> <p>Somewhat important 27</p> <p>Not very important 35</p> <p>No answer 2</p>	<p>11f. Create "parent resource centers" to provide classes and programs for parents</p> <p>Most important 22</p> <p>Very important 29</p> <p>Somewhat important 33</p> <p>Not very important 13</p> <p>No answer 3</p>
<p>8g. Giving parents more options on where they can send their kids to school will force neighborhood schools to improve to attract families</p> <p>Strongly agree 26</p> <p>Somewhat agree 26</p> <p>Somewhat disagree 26</p> <p>Strongly disagree 20</p> <p>No answer 2</p>	<p>11b. Set high standards and give teachers more flexibility in how to reach them</p> <p>Most important 48</p> <p>Very important 41</p> <p>Somewhat important 9</p> <p>Not very important 1</p> <p>No answer 1</p>	<p>11g. Improve teacher training in colleges and in-school training for new teachers</p> <p>Most important 39</p> <p>Very important 44</p> <p>Somewhat important 13</p> <p>Not very important 2</p> <p>No answer 2</p>
<p>8h. Kids are already being tested too much; adding new standards will create an even greater focus on test scores</p> <p>Strongly agree 24</p> <p>Somewhat agree 39</p> <p>Somewhat disagree 21</p> <p>Strongly disagree 13</p> <p>No answer 3</p>	<p>11c. Increase school-business partnerships</p> <p>Most important 21</p> <p>Very important 46</p> <p>Somewhat important 29</p> <p>Not very important 3</p> <p>No answer 1</p>	<p>11h. Reward teachers who are more effective or take on difficult assignments</p> <p>Most important 40</p> <p>Very important 35</p> <p>Somewhat important 16</p> <p>Not very important 6</p> <p>No answer 3</p>
<p>9. Which comes <u>CLOSER</u> to your point of view?</p> <p>We should concentrate on developing alternative schools and programs and independent charter schools so parents will have more choice of where to send their children. 27</p> <p>We should focus on making all our local schools high-quality so children can stay in their neighborhood schools. 67</p> <p>No answer 6</p>	<p>11d. Make it easier to retrain or remove ineffective teachers</p> <p>Most important 49</p> <p>Very important 32</p> <p>Somewhat important 17</p> <p>Not very important 1</p> <p>No answer 2</p>	<p>11i. Rely less on high-stakes tests and more on on-going assessments of student progress</p> <p>Most important 43</p> <p>Very important 38</p> <p>Somewhat important 13</p> <p>Not very important 4</p> <p>No answer 2</p>
		<p>11j. Adopt national standards and train teachers and principals in meeting these standards</p> <p>Most important 28</p> <p>Very important 31</p> <p>Somewhat important 29</p> <p>Not very important 9</p> <p>No answer 3</p>

APPENDIX B

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12. How useful were the provided materials in helping you think about this issue?

Very	35
Somewhat	52
Not very	9
Not at all	1
No answer	3

13. Overall, how much impact did your participation in this dialogue have on your thinking about the issues facing K–12 education in Anchorage?

	%
A lot	34
Some	52
Not much	9
None	1
No answer	3

14. How did you hear about today's session?

	n = 405	%
E-mail	20	
Newspaper	18	
Radio	15	
Direct invitation	3	
Employer, union, or workplace colleague	17	
Friend or family member	8	
Community organization	3	
Other (please specify)	17	

15. What was the most surprising or important thing you heard in today's session?

Open ended

15a. Were there any important aspects of the issue that were not raised in tonight's discussion?

Open ended

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

16. Do you currently have children in grades K–12?

	%
Yes	44
No	54
No answer	3

16a. IF YES: what kind of school do your children attend?

	n = 190	
Traditional public school	52	
Alternative public school or program	38	
Private/parochial school	7	
Home-school	4	

17. What field do you work in?

	n = 360	
Education	42	
Health	3	
Finance	4	
Energy	2	
Tourism	1	
Government	8	
Non-profit	8	
Not employed	3	
Other (please specify)*	30	

18. What is your gender?

Male	33
Female	62
No answer	5

19. What is your age?

Under 18	1
18-34	12
35-44	18
45-54	30
55-65	29
Over 65	7
No answer	2

20. What is the highest level of schooling you have completed?

	%
Less than high school	2
High school graduate	1
Some college or technical school	11
College degree	28
Graduate study/degree	53
No answer	3

21. What is your ethnicity?

African american	2
Alaska native	1
Asian	2
Latino	2
White	78
Other (please specify)	7
No answer	8

22. What was your total household income in 2011 (before taxes)?

\$20,000 or less	2
\$20,001–40,000	6
\$40,001–60,000	9
\$60,001–80,000	16
\$80,001–100,000	14
More than \$100,000	39
No answer	15

23. On policy issues like education, do you consider yourself to be:

Very liberal	7
Liberal	31
Conservative	32
Very conservative	9
No answer	21

In addition to the face-to-face Community Conversations described here, another 178 Anchorage residents took the questionnaire online. Their responses were overall quite consistent with these findings, including their ranking of the four choices and their relative priorities for improving outcomes for Anchorage students. The only notable difference was that online respondents were somewhat more likely to support vouchers (28% said it was one of the “most important” proposals for improving the system, which puts it 5th on their list of priorities; in the face-to-face sessions 16% said it was most important and it was 9th on the list). Vouchers still had the strongest opposition of all the options on the list (43% of online respondents said vouchers were “not very important”; vs. 51% of Community Conversation participants).

There were few major demographic differences between the online respondents and the Community Conversation participants: the online group had fewer educators and more government workers. These respondents were also a little younger, more likely to be male (45%), and more likely to describe themselves as conservative.

* Top responses: self-employed; stay-at-home parent; retired

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The Future of K-12 Education in Anchorage

Report on Community Conversations for the Mayor's Education Summit

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