



# New Visions: New Hope

A Progress Report  
on the state of Arts Education  
in three Alaskan Districts

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**I**n 2009 the Alaska State Council on the Arts (ASCA) adopted a new initiative to “*work with targeted districts to establish and implement arts curriculum in order to research and develop model arts education programs in rural and urban Alaska*”. The “New Visions” project was designed largely in response to a 2008 study produced by the Council called “On Thin Ice.”

This seminal research documented, among other things, that 73% of Alaskan districts had no arts curriculum, only six included the arts as a graduation requirement, 72 % had no budget allocation for the arts, and that less than 2% of the state’s teaching force was highly qualified in the arts. Though the Council and the National Endowment for the Arts had funded Artist in the Schools (AIS) residencies across Alaska for over thirty years, the net effect of those arts experiences had not significantly impacted district policies or funding, teacher preparation programs, or on-going arts instruction for



students. The Council boldly launched New Visions to see what more could be done, with a \$10,000 year financial investment/district, along with on-going technical support and assistance. Districts were required to match the ASCA funds.

In consultation with the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development three diverse districts were invited to participate in the five year New Visions initiative, with the goal of increasing access and quality to arts learning for all K - 12 students. Districts selected were: Bering Strait, Copper River and Kodiak.

In three years some significant outcomes were achieved in each of the districts, and together portray an important cumulative snapshot of what might be possible, to increase and improve arts learning for all students. **Together, the three districts spent \$524,357 over three years, matching the ASCA funds.**

Implementation of district designed Arts Action Plans were managed within the complex ecosystem of standards and testing requirements, budget reductions and constraints, long distance communication, teacher/administrator turn-over, contract

negotiations and school improvement mandates. District superintendents, though supportive and interested in “arts for arts sake”, vigilantly voiced the importance of *integrating* the arts within existing curriculum and available resources, not “adding on one more thing” for staff or administration.

Using a framework adapted from the Kennedy Center “Changing Education Through the Arts” Model the New Visions districts designed Arts Action Plans around five central components for school reform using the arts:

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

Each district tailored activities reflecting their unique needs and realities in each component. The outcomes outlined in this report indicate some of the effectiveness of their activities. There is indeed hope that the arts can play an important, sustainable role in enriching the education of Alaskan students in urban and rural schools, at all grade levels. The ice is not so thin anymore, in these three districts. They have paved the way for others to follow.

## The Schools

### Bering Strait School District (BSSD)

- + 15 schools
- + 1,851 students
- + 226 teachers

### Copper River School District in the Interior

- + 5 schools
- + 472 students,
- + 33 teachers

### Kodiak Island Borough School District

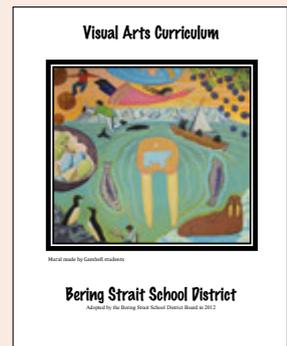
- + 13 schools and District Correspondence Program
- + 2,410 students
- + 195 teachers



## CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

### ***Two districts adopted K-12 Visual Arts curriculum.***

- + Bering Strait adopted a Visual Arts curriculum that includes the study of Bering Sea artists for the first time
- + Copper River adopted its first K-12 integrated arts curriculum, in the Visual Arts, and is working on an integrated Drama curriculum closely linked to literacy development
- + ARTiculate Visual Arts kits were purchased by all three districts, to provide teachers with standards based, Alaskan developed resources
- + 213 discrete classes in the arts were added to the Bering Strait list of all classes that can be offered across the district
- + As part of the science curriculum review in Kodiak there was an alignment of the science instructional plan and ARTiculate Visual Arts kits



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Over 300 Alaska teachers were trained in how to integrate the arts across the grades, across the curriculum.*

- + In the New Visions districts a total of 36 teachers were trained to integrate the arts in two week Basic Arts Institutes. They teach in 19 schools, and informally share what they learned with dozens of teaching colleagues
- + Kodiak hosted a 12 hour Teaching Artist Academy to train 9 local artists to work in K – 8 schools. Seven of these artists then offered a four day summer workshop for 15 local teachers, to model their art forms and show how art techniques could be integrated with other academic content
- + 49 Copper River teachers participated in hands-on arts learning in a District in-service led by local teachers. It was the first time the arts were front and center at such an in-service
- + 28 Kodiak teachers were trained in the use of ARTiculate kits in a five day summer workshop
- + BSSD teachers in 8 schools participated in optional, after school workshops with AIS artists, as well as workshops offered during the school day, designed so that all staff could participate
- + In BSSD 210 teachers attended “Working Weekends” where teachers learned strategies to integrate the arts across the curriculum. They featured topics such as Music and Math, Science Illustration, Comics and Language Arts, and Digital Storytelling



## LEADERSHIP

*Over 11 administrators assumed leadership roles where they advocate — and activate — for the inclusion of the arts as part of “basic education”*

- + 11 administrators – Central Office and/or school principals – attended one or more Administrator Arts Retreats sponsored by the Alaska Arts Education Consortium. This training resulted in more schools hosting AIS residencies, more display and celebration of student art, from school hallways to board rooms, the hiring of new teachers with some arts background, and set aside funding for site based professional development
- + Kodiak was one of five national finalists for the Kennedy Center/Association of School Boards Award for Leadership in Arts Education
- + Copper River administrator meetings and monthly school board meetings now routinely include mention of arts activities throughout the district
- + The Kodiak School Board and administration launched an initiative to add the Arts to the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) movement and have become outspoken supporters of STEAM
- + More school leaders recognize the power of advocacy, having had experience visiting their legislators during the 2011 Administrator Arts Retreat in Juneau. They speak up more often, on behalf of the arts as a core in the education of all children in their schools and districts
- + Thanks to the creation of Arts Action Teams in each district, new networks of communication were activated so that all schools are connected to the arts and opportunities



## INSTRUCTION

***Over 4,433 K-12 students received arts instruction where they had not before.***

- + Copper River School Board adopted a 1 credit Fine Arts Requirement
- + High school Visual Arts courses are now taught in two Copper River schools
- + Six new staff in Copper River now teach classes in visual arts, theater, vocal music, percussion, and elementary music
- + Bering Strait hired its first two highly qualified arts teachers for two remote schools, so that K - 12 students routinely receive arts instruction
- + Over 50% of Kodiak middle school students now receive music instruction in band, orchestra or choir, and participate in an all district musical performance each spring. K 12 students in the District's small, remote schools received regular music instruction through video teleconference connections
- + A middle school jazz program was started in Kodiak
- + Home school students in Copper River got arts instruction for the first time in 2010-1.
- + For two years BSSD paired a Teaching Artist with a local teacher to deliver 2 - 4 week summer schools in 14 sites, for over 254 students who needed additional time to meet district standards. Teachers reported this strategy increased summer school enrollment and heightened student interest
- + All three districts were awarded Artist in the Schools district grants in 2011, enabling residencies in the visual and performing arts in 22 schools. These were the first AIS residencies ever in Copper River





## New Visions Team

**Kim Sweeny**, *Teacher (retired) and Arts Coordinator, Bering Strait School District*

**Tammy Van Whye**, *Director of Teaching and Learning Support, Copper River School District*

**Marilyn Davidson**, *Assistant Superintendent, Kodiak Island Borough School District*

**Annie Calkins**, *ASCA Consultant, Technical Assistance Support*

**Rob Picou**, *Superintendent, Bering Strait School District*

**Michael Johnson**, *Superintendent, Copper River School District*

**Stewart McDonald**, *Superintendent, Kodiak Island Borough School District*

And then parallel or close by to the team listed above...what is below:

**Alaska State Council on the Arts**  
Shannon Daut, *Executive Director*  
Laura Forbes, *Arts Education*

**Alaska Department of Education and Early Development**  
Les Morse, *Deputy Commissioner*

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

***Over 4,540 parents and community members saw first hand how the arts can excite, inspire and reflect student learning.***

- + Bering Strait initiated a rotating, annual, Student Art Show where all community members were invited to view student work. 250 people attended the 2011 Arts and Science Fair hosted by Shishmaref, a community of 587
- + In Kodiak celebratory arts events, such as the District Music Festival and Peterson Elementary Art Walk, attracted communities on the island at many levels
- + In the Copper River valley the community newsletter now regularly includes student, school and community arts events and achievements



Alaska State Council on the Arts