



# **RISC**

## **Re-Inventing Schools Coalition**

**Superintendent's Conference**  
Bar Harbor, Maine

Sponsored by  
**Commissioner Gendron**  
Maine Department of Education

**[www.reinventingschools.org](http://www.reinventingschools.org)**



# Applying the Model

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in

# Bering Strait School District

*John A. Davis, Ed.D.*

*former Superintendent*



## *The Coalition is growing...*

- Adams 50 School District, Colorado
- Early College of the Redwoods, California
- Ingenium Charter Schools, California
- Flagstaff School District, Arizona
- Lindsay School District, California
- Youth Connections Charter School, Illinois
- Maine Department of Education
  - *Maine Schools - Demonstrations Sites!*



# The Bering Strait School District

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- 400-700 air miles from Anchorage
- Russia and International Dateline
- Arctic Circle on the north
- Yukon River on the east
- It is not connected by road
- District is the size of Minnesota



# The Bering Strait School District

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- 15 school sites (k-12)
- 250 professional staff
- 200 support staff
- During the last eight years
  - Building one school a year
  - Building 30 teacher housing units



# Russia

## Looking across the International Dateline







# It's People

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- Siberian Yup'ik
  - Central Yup'ik
  - Inupiat
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- Native language/non-standards English
  - Subsistence hunting and gathering
  - Rural high schools created in 1976-1985



## In 1999 the District...

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- Community was not clamoring for change
- Staff was not clamoring for change
- Decade long decline in salaries
- Decade long stagnation in funding
- Vocational Ed, Arts and PE eliminated



# The Board was asking why...

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- Their children needed remedial classes in college
- Vocational educations seemed to have disappeared
- What could be done about drop-outs



# Educational perceptions...

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- Students were happy and attending school
- Students attending post secondary programs
- Teacher turnover was not a problem
- Some concern over drop-out rates
- Testing results were not an issue
- Parents were supportive, ambivalent and some were hostile toward school



## The data by schools

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- Reading scores ranged from 11% to 70%
- Attendance - as low as 85% in some schools
- Turnover was 35%-40 annually
- Postsecondary completion - low
- Cohort graduation - 50% +/-



# Economically...

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- Low socio-economic
- High unemployment
- Subsistence life-style
- Largest employers
  - Education, health care, governmental & transportation industry



# Our Curriculum

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Not well established in spite of much effort

Not well supervised

Not consistently applied

Fragmented

Poor correlation between teacher  
assessment and test data



# Wonderful Teachers

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- All individuals (and taught that way)
- Teach for 2-3 years and move on
- How could we keep teachers?
- Best way was to stop trying



# I was asking questions

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- Research stated if a child was not reading at grade level by 3rd grade, he/she may never catch up
- Poor, rural and minority students were failing generation after generation?
- Students learned at differing rates
- We had organized our schools around an efficient industrial model
- Staff did not feel fulfilled professionally
- Research suggested retention did not work
- Who really benefited from social promotion



# An “Adult-centric” School

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Age based grade placement

Letter grades

Teach what “I” am interested in

Independent evaluations



# Time

*(counter-culture)*

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- Delayed gratification
- Live for today
- How to teach when students are not in school?



## I concluded we could teach if...

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- We agreed our students could learn
- We were willing to reorganize ourselves
- We could provide a comprehensive and measurable curriculum
- We expected more from our students
- We all taught using the same rule book
- We could all agree 80-85% was good...but not great

# *Explaining the Moral Imperative*



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- Be the District's First Teacher
- Need for support
- Need for continuous improvement



# Believing and Dreaming

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- The most audacious expectation
  - All children can learn
  - We will be responsible
  - If we expect our students to be great, we must strive to be great ourselves



# Investigation

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- Who, if anyone, was being successful with like students populations? **RISC**
- What were they doing? **Standards-based**
- Would they share their ideas? **Yes**
- Could we replicate their efforts?  
**Absolutely, with work**



# Overview of the RISC Model

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- **Shared Vision**  
Stakeholders drive systemic change
- **Leadership**  
All stakeholders develop leadership capacity
- **Standards-Based Design**  
Standards-Instruction-Assessment-Reporting  
Learning is the constant, time is the variable
- **Continuous Improvement**  
Refine processes that foster excellence



# TEACHING EVERYONE

*building a shared vision*

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- Teachers
- Principals
- Central Office
- Students
- Parents
- Business Mang
- Maintenance Staff
- Support Staff
- Community



# Common belief

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- Our students could learn
- It was our responsibility to teach all children



# Building our own...

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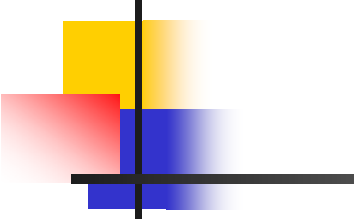
- Leadership Capacity
- Common Curriculum
- Common Assessment



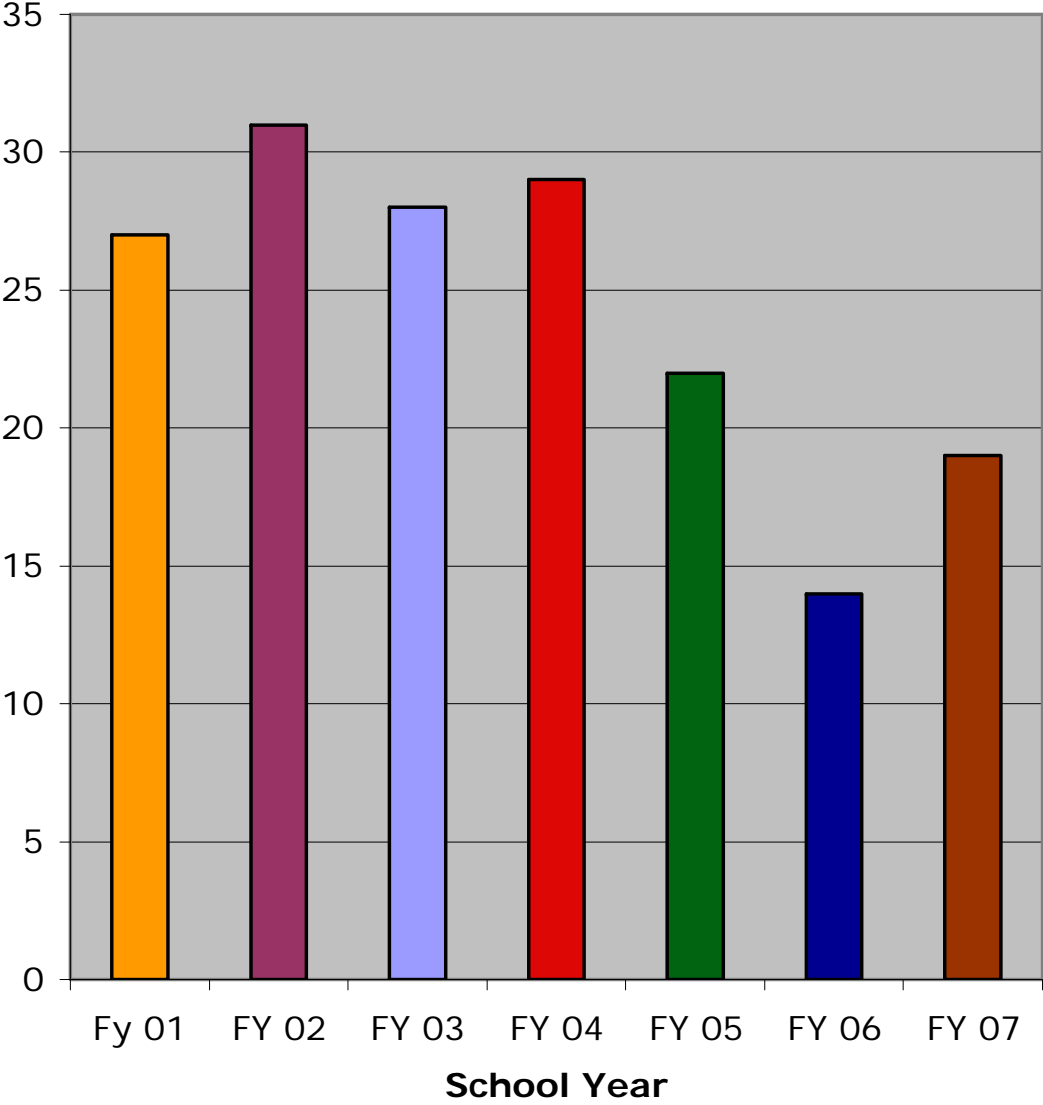
# Teachers

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- Turnover
- Teaching what's in the book
- Teaching what is interesting
- Hit or miss staff development
- Teacher focused



### BSSD Teacher Turnover Rate



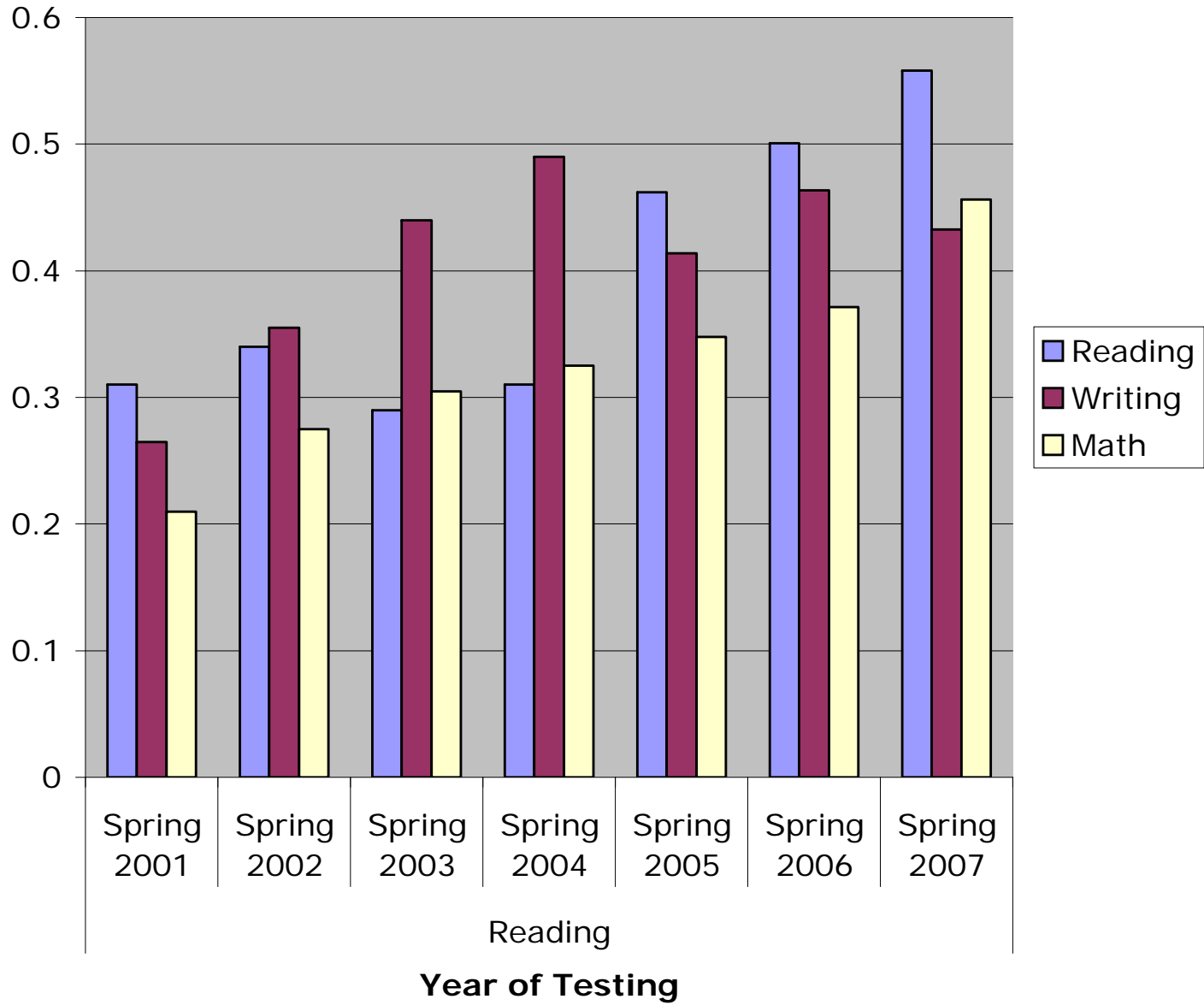


# Instructional focus

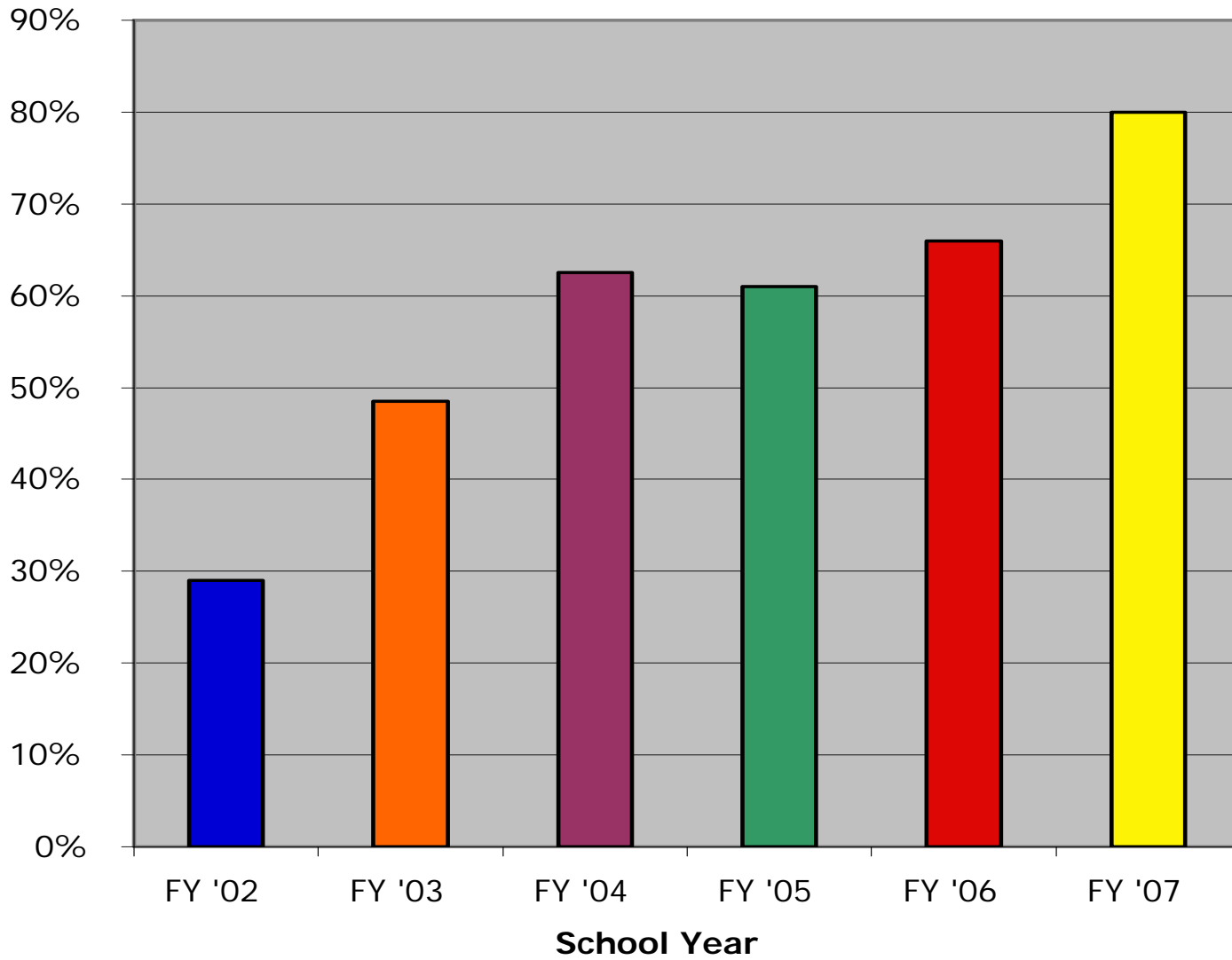
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- Time vs. learning - Learning takes time
- Learning Standards were a community decision - not textbook driven
- Assessments were common and freely available
- Students would be taught at achievement level - not age level

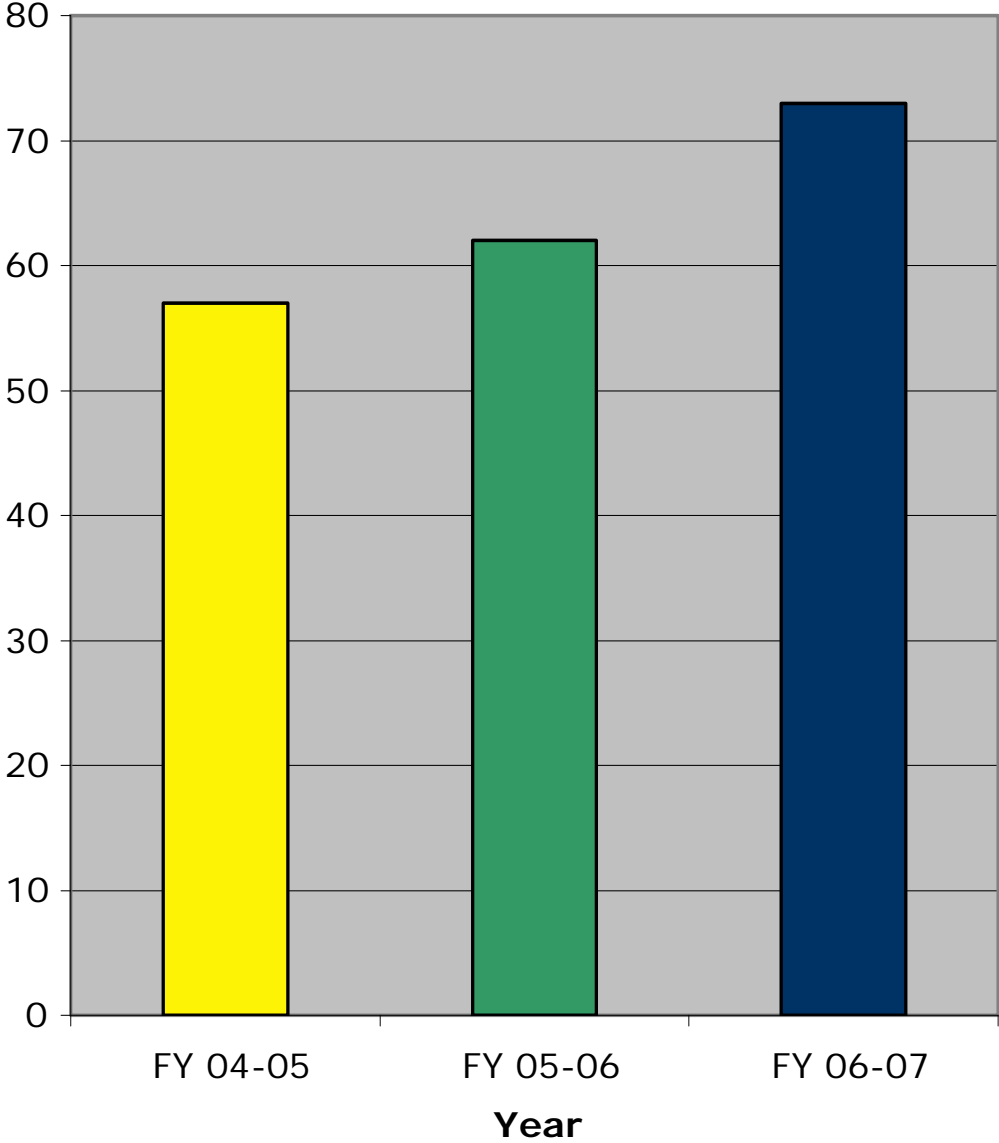
# BSSD SBA Trend Data



## HSGQE PASS RATE FOR BSSD SENIORS



# Number of BSSD Graduate



# Analysis and Alignment

## Standard-Instruction-Assessment

State of Alaska Standards-Based Assessment Results for Bering Strait School District students who demonstrated proficiency on an internally developed and administered pre-assessment.

Grade Level	Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Higher	Percent of Students Scoring in Sub-Sets			
		Advanced	Proficient	Below Proficient	Not Proficient
3	<b>88.89%</b>	38.89%	50.00%	11.11%	0.00%
4	<b>89.47%</b>	31.58%	57.89%	0.00%	10.53%
5	<b>100.00%</b>	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
6	<b>100.00%</b>	57.14%	42.86%	0.00%	0.00%
7	<b>100.00%</b>	36.36%	63.64%	0.00%	0.00%
8	<b>100.00%</b>	66.67%	33.33%		
9	<b>100.00%</b>	50.00%	50.00%		

*Alaska Standards-Based Assessment Data Spring 2005.*



# Process

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- Understanding the data
- Question current convention
- Have a set of beliefs (shared vision)
- Believe students can learn and staff can teach (leadership)
- Apply the known (standards-based)
- Practice and practice again (continuous improvement)



# Lessons Learned

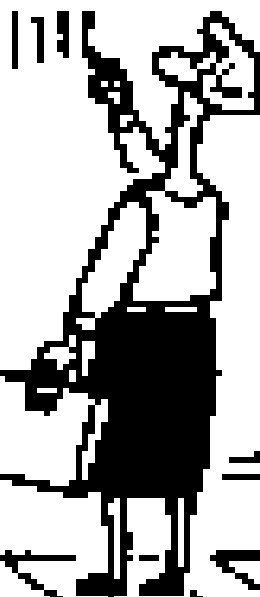
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- Expect to be leading a parade not in sight
- Letter Grades, graduation, class rank, valedictorian, etc
- People in “comfortable shoes”

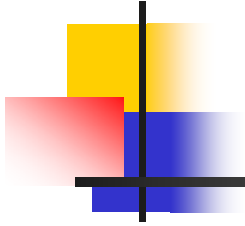
# SUCCESSSES

# LEARNING EXPERIENCES

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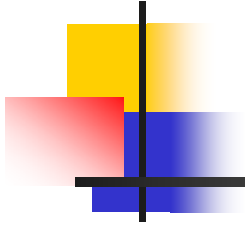



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*“It is not about  
you, it is about  
students”*

John Davis, 2005



*Pay It Forward*  
*Katherine Ryan Hyde*  
*Warner Bros., 2000*

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**"Doing the right things in the right ways."**



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