

What is tribal compacting of education in Alaska?

Compacting is a process through which the State of Alaska and Alaskan Native Tribal governments reach an agreement that formally recognizes Tribal governments' authority to operate and oversee K-12 schools. These State Tribal Education Compact Schools (STECs) would be public schools open to all students and would offer a unique, culturally rich combination of Western and millennia-old tribal educational models.

Why is tribal compacting important?

The Alaska's Education Challenge convened parents, lawmakers, teachers, and education leaders from across the state who collectively recognized the need for systemic change in Alaska's system of education. One of the Alaska Education Challenge's five strategic outcomes encourages tribal and community ownership of excellence in education to help close the achievement gap and increase equitable access to an excellent education.

Student test scores, suicide rates, and the continuing call for system-wide reform are all communicating the same message: meaningful, systemic changes to K-12 education are necessary. Establishing STECs is one example of the many innovative, meaningful changes we can introduce. STECs would help actualize the educational outcomes our exceptional educators, in partnership with our state and Tribal governments, have worked so hard to achieve for generations.

How do we establish STECs?

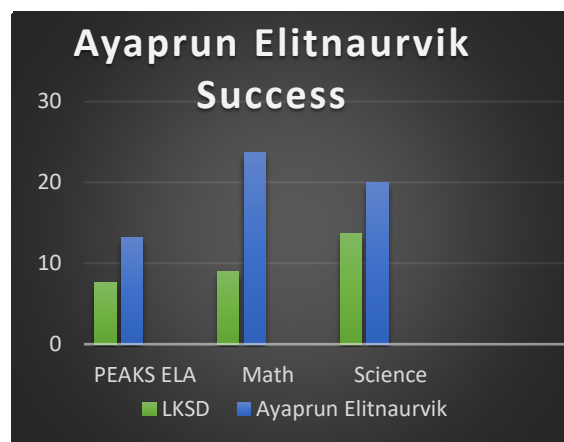
The STEC(s) compact option would be made possible, in part, by a legislative enactment that identifies who is authorized to negotiate and sign a compact agreement on the State's behalf. Revising our charter school laws is another option to facilitate increased ownership for tribes and communities over their students' education, and to support the process of establishing STECs.

The legal framework for compacting negotiations is co-developed and includes two components: (i) a master agreement that outlines the general terms for a negotiating process that would result in a compact to establish one or more STECs, and the relative obligations of the signatory parties with respect to those STECs; and (ii) a funding agreement.

What kinds of educational outcomes could we expect from STECs?

Among other things, it would increase the potential for students to perform better on their sixth grade assessments and overall education scores, as they progress to high school and college; students would see more of themselves reflected in their education; teacher retention would improve; and research indicates suicide rates could plummet within our Alaska Native student population, as a result of the linguistic and cultural revitalization STECs would facilitate. Indeed, a recent study found that "youth suicide rates effectively dropped to zero in [tribal] communities in which at least half the band members reported a conversational knowledge of their own "Native" language." In sum, STECs not only would improve educational outcomes, they would help revive Alaska Native cultures and save students' lives!

Ayaprun Elitnaurvik, in Bethel, is a great example of how well students respond to a culturally and linguistically relevant teaching model. The graph on the right shows Ayaprun Elitnaurvik's test scores beside the Lower Kuskokwim School District's overall test scores.



Conclusion

STECs provides a systemic framework for parents and community elders to develop a culturally recognizable school system. For thousands of years, Alaskan Native peoples used hard work, innovation, and learning to thrive in Alaska. Tribal ownership of education would enable Tribes to draw from knowledge and teaching skills accumulated over millennia to create an education system that meets the demands of the modern world, improves student educational outcomes, addresses the needs of both Native and non-Native students, and revitalizes the cultures and languages of Alaskan Native peoples. An excellent education for every student every day is only a STEC away!

¹Aboriginal Language Knowledge and Youth Suicide. Hallett, Darcy; Chandler, Michael J.; Lalonde, Christopher E.

