

Dr. Mary Wegner
ED 647 - Community Building
District Analysis of School, Family Partnership Plan

Introduction/Needs Assessment:

1 – Parenting: Historically, the Sitka School District has not focused on being a resource to help families increase their understanding of child and adolescent development other than through informal conversations teachers have had with parents who participate in the same social activities as the teacher. However, five years ago the school board adopted a goal to work towards closing the achievement gap for students who qualify as low income, and three years ago our Woch.teen Yei Jigaxtoonei preschool program began as a vehicle to help achieve the school board goal. Woch.teen partners with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) and Head Start to offer 6-hours a week of a culturally-rich preschool to any youth in the community for free, and we have approximately 45 children involved in the program each year. One of the Head Start staff is a Family Engagement Specialist, and consequently we have been learning more about how to meet families from different social and economic spheres in order to help raise their awareness and skill in supporting students through their development process.

Last year the school board adopted a goal to foster family engagement by researching and adopting models that support welcoming and academically sound schools, and to help achieve this goal this year we partnered with the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) on an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant to help seven school districts in the state develop Culturally-Rich Embedded Social Emotional Learning (CRESEL) skills in school communities. Prior, we worked with a local partner, Sitkans Against Family Violence (SAFV), and AASB to prepare our administrative team to lead in school implementation of SEL principles.

2 – Communicating: Over the years, each school has done a credible job of providing one-way communication to families about school events and opportunities for families to be involved and support students in classroom and school events, and we have over 90% of our parents participating in parent teacher conferences at all schools except our comprehensive high school. However, most two-way or interactive communication about school activities and student progress happens when parents are not happy with something that is happening in their child’s school experience. This school year we implemented a Learning Management System (LMS) that allows parents to learn about their child’s academic progress on a daily basis. We are all still learning the system; however, parents have positively responded to having information readily available so they can in turn help their child be successful in school. An LMS serves as an online grade book to document student progress, as well as a communication tool to engage with students and families around the course content.

3 - Volunteering Activities: Parents volunteer in classrooms at our K-1 school; however, there is no system of training or alignment of parent skill and classroom needs. Rather, parents randomly volunteer to assist in their child’s classroom, which is managed completely by the teacher. Through our Woch.teen preschool program, STA assists with organizing Native Elders to come and work with Woch.teen students, which has been incredibly successful. We often talk about the need to have a staff person dedicated to a volunteer program so we can mobilize families and community members to volunteer. As a first step, we have decided to leverage our partnership with STA to have Native Elders expand the classrooms they visit to include our Arts, Culture, and Technology (ACT) teachers.

Three years ago we began a partnership with STA, the Sitka Fine Arts Camp (SFAC), and the Alaska Arts Education Consortium (AAEC) to provide professional development for teachers to integrate arts, culture, and technology into their everyday lessons with students. Out of that first Basic Arts Institute (BAI), grew our ACT standards and the beginning of an ACT curriculum. Last summer through the same partnerships we offered an ACT Special Institute. Both summer sessions included approximately 20 Sitka School District teachers, and at least 5 other teachers from around the state. Teachers were not paid to participate; however, they did have the opportunity to earn continuing education credits with the cost of the BAI and/or Special Institute registration waived. This summer we will offer a BAI and an Advanced Arts Institute (AAI). Two years ago the Sitka School District received a 5-year New Visions grant from the Alaska State Council on the Arts (ASCA) to support our ACT initiative, and this year SFAC received a 10-year Margaret A. Cargill Foundation grant to support our ACT initiative.

4 - Learning at Home: This year our teachers and administrators became overwhelmed because they were implementing the new standards in Math and English Language Arts (ELA) coupled with the new Educator Evaluation expectations, and consequently they felt pulled in too many directions to be effective. Impacting this is that we had a number of local initiatives, such as the ACT standards and curriculum and our work in the area of SEL, of which teachers wanted to learn and implement. Consequently, the administrative team started to have conversations about how to pull our work under an umbrella to weed out things that were not essential and also help teachers and the school board see how everything fits together. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that every student at every level has the supports and interventions they need to be successful in the classroom. In order to achieve this goal, we are in the process of re-defining how our Special Education Director uses her time and are moving her position to become a Student Engagement Director focused on helping to ensure there is a continuum of interventions for students whether or not a student has a disability; a focus on shifting our Response to Instruction (RTI) work to a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Re-purposing some special education staff combined with funds available through our AASB i3 grant, we will create at least two other social work/counseling positions to work under the leadership of our Student Engagement Director. A critical piece of our work in the area of interventions and student engagement is to work with families both face-to-face and by leveraging our LMS to provide more support in how they can help their child with homework, as well as understand the nature of the work being studied. Another area we are tying-in is the preschool population and our Wooch.een program.

5 - Decision Making: We do not have PTA's but rather Principal Advisory Committees (PAC). Each school holds PAC meetings every 4-6 weeks depending on what is needed at each school. Other than our K-1 school where parents are active in the school environment and our alternative high school that requires family involvement, our PAC meetings are very sparsely attended and there is no shared decision-making process. As we examined why this is, we noticed that other than our alternative high school, families who attend our PAC meetings are not typically of any minority culture. To start to remedy this, we started a Wooch.een for Student Success school board committee this year consisting of 2 School Board members, 2 STA Tribal Council members, and key staff at both Sitka Schools and STA. As you can see from the embedded image, our goal is not just to remove barriers for our students of Alaska Native heritage but for all of our students. (Note: Wooch.een means to work together.)

Wooch.een for Student Success committee members go out into the community and engage families in the issues surrounding student success, such as attendance, and invite families to participate in decision-making about the school district. This is a very new initiative that has so far been well received during our efforts to build trust with families from all ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, the school board adopted a new school board goal this year to develop a definition of the Sitka School District's measurement of student success and school completion including but not limited to graduation. We want to engage, listen, and collaborate.

Tribal Council/School Board
Wooch.een for Student Success

Goal of the Committee: The Sitka Tribe of Alaska's Tribal Council and the Sitka School District's School Board's *Student Success Committee* will wooch.een to identify and remove barriers to ensure that all students reach their full potential.

6 - Collaborating with the Community: One of the cornerstones of our success, and something likely already discovered through this needs assessment/introduction, is how the Sitka School District constantly looks to leverage collaboration with community resources in order to assist us in educating our students. We are known as the amazing school district we are because of our many projects that enhance student learning. Every student benefits from at least one if not many of these collaborations, be it working with SFAC to bring Teaching Artists to our classrooms through ASCA's Artists in Schools program, or the Sitka Sound Science Center (SSSC) who brings visiting scientists to work with all elementary students in multi-dimensional learning opportunities both in school and at SSSC.

District: Sitka School District			School Year: 2016-17		
Goal 1 - Academic: The Sitka School District will provide resources and professional development that support differentiated instruction in order to increase by at least 8% over a 2-year period the number of students who demonstrate proficiency in Math, and 2% over the same time period the number of students who demonstrate proficiency in Reading and Writing.					
Desired Results: All students at all levels will be provided with appropriate intervention and supports needed to successfully engage in the class content in classrooms that area welcoming.			How will the goal be measured? Evaluation of student achievement growth will be measured through the state-mandated annual assessment, and our welcoming environment will be assessed through the School Climate and Connectedness Survey.		
Activity	Type (1-6)	Date(s)	Grade Levels	What Needs to be Done	Person(s) in Charge
Working with First Alaskans Institute (FAI), we will continue the conversations started with the community re: meaningful family engagement and needs students have to be successful	1	TBD 2-4 FAI facilitated conversations during the school year	Families and community members who support all students, and PK-12 staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District Office administrators coordinate conversations with AASB and FAI Process conversations during Admin Team meetings Principals use information to develop CRESEL implementation plan at schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-Assistant Superintendents Admin Team Principals
Increase communication with families around interventions at schools implementing CRESEL	2	Fall, Winter, and Spring	6-8 and alternative high school	Focus on 2-way communication with parents re: student supports and provide a continuum of interventions	Student Engagement Director and Team
Provide meaningful assistance to families regarding homework	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inservice days Ongoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K-12 K-12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide teachers with professional development to use the LMS to provide assistance to families with homework Work with families to understand how to access information in the LMS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-Assistant Superintendents and District PD Committee Student Engagement Director and Team
Goal 2 – Climate of Partnerships: The Sitka School District will partner with STA, SFAC, and AAEC to offer professional development in ACT standards and to implement ACT curriculum in 15 classrooms a year until all teachers have been involved, and work with UAS Teacher Education programs to embed ACT standards and curriculum development in pre-teacher training through the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation grant.					
Desired Results: Arts, culture, and technology provide context to academic content in all classes throughout the district, and students are engaged in the content being learned.			How will the goal be measured? Development of a comprehensive PK-12 ACT curriculum, participation by all teachers in the BAI, AAI, and/or Special Institute professional development opportunities, and evaluation of Teaching Artist residencies.		
Activity	Type (1-6)	Date(s)	Grade Levels	What Needs to be Done	Person(s) in Charge
Native Elders are in classrooms to support implementation of ACT standards and curriculum	3	Ongoing	PK-12	Coordinate with BAI, AAI, and Special Institute participants regarding ACT curriculum implementation needs, and arrange for Native Elder support as needed	Sitka Schools' Cultural Director and STA Education and Language Director
Continue work of Woonch.een for Student Success Committee	5	Ongoing	PK-12	Support active committee participation and implement activities in the community	Superintendent and School Board President
Collaboration	6	Ongoing	PK-12	Communicate with community partners during project implementation and to develop new project ideas, as needed	Superintendent and Co-Assistant Superintendents

Summary: There are no simple answers to complex problems, and overhauling a local education system that has not done the best job of family and community engagement requires diligent and thoughtful work in a variety of areas. And... no superintendent can do this work alone. Each of the two goals identified in the plan noted previously details the evidence we will be looking at to guide our implementation efforts.

Although we were given the latitude to focus on a few of the 6 types of family and community engagement instead of addressing all of the types, throughout the course of my analysis of our work in this area, I found that we were hitting on each of the identified types in a way that surprised me. Until I had started this project I was not taking the time to reflect on some of our projects in regards to the value they provide in the whole of the process of family and community engagement. Looking at the whole of what we are doing, I am proud of how we are naturally bringing richness and dimension to our work. I know our work will evolve over time and that we are just at the beginning stages; however, I see clearly that we have key anchors in place that will provide guidance in the process, and I have confidence that our students and community will benefit as a result of our journey.