

In Consideration of a State Sponsored Virtual School- Alaska

by Robert Boyle, Crossroads Education

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Presented to:

Tamara Van Wyhe

Division Director

Alaska Department of Education & Early Development

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I. Executive Summary, AkVS

Research concerning the quality of education offered over a geographical area has led some national reports to claim that it is possible to make fairly accurate assumptions concerning the education offered to a student based on their ZIP code. Alaska is no exception to that observation. The difficulty, and expense, in providing access to equitable educational opportunities that provide an adequate educational program increases the further one travels from the road system. When you reach a zip code destination where there is no entry except by plane, the chances that the local school will not have resources to offer advanced placement, foreign language, or STEM courses is relatively high. In many instances, advanced math, English, or other core subjects, if offered, are not taught by teachers well-prepared in those subjects. Frequently, dual credit/early entry to college programs are not available. Recruiting qualified teachers for these zip code areas is challenging and expensive. Housing those teachers is expensive. Providing utilities for the school is expensive. The result is more funds are deflected from instructional effort than in zip code locations where the Alaskan Life Style is broader. A school exists in those locations, but course choice of advanced, rigorous programs or choice of schools is not available. Dial-in on the zip code and many times the student achievement level and post-secondary success can be projected as lacking equity in programs.

Virtual schools, VS, are not a panacea for the limitations imposed by zip code, however VS can provide more equity in choice and access. Newer technologies, refined teaching methods, and improved access to the internet is such that 30+ states are offering VS programs to their public school students. Specifically their efforts are to improve student achievement and to reduce the inequality imposed by zip code.

Alaska's Challenge is to provide adequate education to all students. In *Moore vs the State of Alaska, 2012*, adequate is stated as providing programs based on educational and demographic (size-expense) variations in schools. This concept levels up (funding) to meet the needs in each district. Should that mission be taken whole-heartedly, access to VS programs, offered at a state-level is a step in that direction. Well-constructed VS programs are not only technology enhancement, they offer improved pedagogy, reduce instructional costs, and provide support for statutory requirement of equity: and more. Alaska's Challenge directs more collaboration between districts and expanded teacher training. A state level virtual school makes Alaska's Challenge achievable.

There are a number of reasons for road system students to seek an online education. Credit recovery, incarcerated youth, homebound students (medical), homeschool preference, to list a few. A state program offering school and course choice is also needed for students having access to a traditional school. See Appendix: *Why do students choose blended and online schools? The "end of average" requires personalized learning environments.*

It is possible to immediately implement a quality state operated VS program to address adequacy. The limitations of VS rest in political support, funding, staff development and improved practice. Currently, skepticism on the effectiveness of VS appears to be driven by failed starts: lack of regulations, restrictive funding, poor pedagogical practice of early on-line providers, limited bandwidth, and technology that was fickle in the arctic climate all impeded local school efforts. Staff turn over also limited on-going continuity of effort to implement programs and/or support of students. The better should not be confused with the best and or the perfect. Waiting for the perfect, designing and repetitively re-designing programs in hopes of perfection, results in imposing restrictive instructional programs to those who can succeed now. Service providers of national recognition, vetted by research, are eager to provide Alaskan students access to educational programs far beyond what they are currently receiving.

Recommendation

It is recommended that DEED start a state-operated virtual school as soon as possible using one of the high-quality service providers knocking at our door. National service providers are prepared to “franchise” their models to DEED and develop a state-sponsored school, AkVS. Their programs may be customized as necessary. From successful implementation, it is possible to build an Alaskan specific program.

Immediate implementation requires DEED and district support, legislative statute, DEED regulation, defined mission, timeline of sequenced steps, and funding. This report offers direction in those areas at the end of this report.

*A well constructed funding formula may keep the total costs of a VS program to a much smaller amount than previously considered. A five year plan the modifies funding of AkVS is recommended.

II. State Role

Vision and Mission of AkVS

AkVS Vision/Mission can be minimal or expansive. In a limited fashion, AkVS simply brokers STEPP plans (or other school improvement efforts) of local schools to add virtual school options, a *course choice* solution. Schools where teachers deliver the instruction based on the online curriculum, is a *blended* instructional model. A more progressive mission statement creates a new school district with AkVS offering entire school programs, including diplomas. AkVS becomes a *school choice* model when capable of awarding a diploma. It is possible for a virtual school to be a full online program school choice model that provides blended and course choice programs.

Vision

Recommendation- The vision of AkVS is to a leader in innovative teaching through online, blended learning and course choice programs that use best practices to promote academic excellence in a student-centered environment. All students in Alaska are entitled to and have access to adequate educational opportunities. AkVS strives to provide educational access and equity statewide.

Mission

Recommendation- The Mission of AkVS is to ensure all students in Alaska are provided with an academically rich and rigorous education through online learning opportunities that meet the needs of Alaska's diverse learners. AkVS will work collaboratively with local schools and directly with parents of children not attending a public school to provide blended and online learning programs. AkVS will provide out of school programs for children not able to attend school. AkVS will provide access to early college entry and dual credit programs statewide. AkVS will provide staff development and support programs. It is the mission of AkVS to ensure there is equitable access to high quality educational opportunity and course choice for all Alaskan students.

The Mission drives funding considerations- recommendation

Alaska is in the midst of an unprecedented effort to connect its rural communities to the internet. Quintillion has provided modern internet connectivity to areas that have never had it before. See Appendix: Quintillion, <http://qexpressnet.com/system/>

However, access for many students will be limited without a state-operated virtual school (VS) program and revised funding efforts. AkVS will provide rural schools in those areas immediate access to quality programs, if the small districts/schools can afford them. There are multiple documents related to state funding that, if applied to VS programs, suggest funding concepts need to be revised. The Alaska School District Cost Study Update, ADA, in 2015, provides insight that rural schools do not have access to funds needed for the specialized staff expected in a comprehensive high school. Additionally, ADA indicates the cost per teacher is much higher for rural schools. With fewer teachers and more expense per teacher, the adequacy of rural programs in relationship to funding does not match more urban settings.

Funding disparity is shown in other fiscal reports. Until 2017(?) districts in Alaska were required to show 70% direct instructional effort. DEED still complies that information. A number of districts consistently did not meet that requirement. Districts able to make the 70% effort clearly have an instructional advantage for their students. Larger districts with large contributions to direct instructional effort are able to further enhance their programs over rural districts.

Failure to meet the 70% rule is sometimes seen as *willfully* spending outside the instructional effort. However, the districts not able to meet 70% are generally faced with expenditures related to: maintenance, operations and support of staff related costs. Significant costs related to recruiting, larger percentage of staff turnover, housing, training and pay effect the application of funds to instruction. A more detailed look at direct instruction expenses suggests additional hardship for rural schools. Each rural teacher costs more (APA, 2015). Given two districts have an equal direct instructional effort, the rural school will still have fewer teachers and students will have less access. VS programs hold the promise of greatly reducing housing, recruiting, insurance, and other costs related to staffing.

The report, *Alaska's Public School Funding Formula: A Report to the Alaska State Legislature, January 15, 2001*, includes the following statement concerning financial statements being the indicator of instructional effort: "Financial statements serve a number of purposes, but are not designed as cost research tools. While some accounts may be useful for comparisons, we are of the opinion that the analysis of cost drivers for district level costs may not be adequately served by financial statement data alone." See Appendix: Alaska's Public School Funding, 2001.

Combining various reports to the Legislature suggest that equity can be enhanced through statute that addresses the costs of recruiting, hiring, training, and supporting teachers in rural areas. A funding structure supporting virtual schools supports equity.

Funding AkVS

Funding should be legislative appropriation/grant funded for three to five years. After that time period time, it may be appropriate to adopt formula driven funding. This allows AkVS to develop skill in providing a high-quality program in order to create an appropriate formula. However, appropriations/grants limit the outreach to the allocated fund level. See Appendix: Funding

Line item funding, appropriation, is effectively a grant. Adopting a service provider determines the amount of grant required, based on desired effect of legislators. For example FLVS charges \$400 per semester hour. A legislative appropriation of \$500,000 annually restricts offerings to 9-12 programs to approximately 450 semester hours. The cost of the 450 hours is approximately \$360,000, the remaining expenditures for administration and technology costs (bandwidth). The service provider, K12 Education, has a franchise (setup) fee. The amount of student courses is then limited to the remaining balance. Limited grant funds may determine the service provider.

Formula funding of some type may be necessary to support the education of homeschool students requesting AkVS programs. Homeschool students may enroll in AkVS directly or through the local school. See the Appendix: Funding

Fees can be a source of funding. The local school pays a fee per course to AkVS. It is recommended that fees are also formula driven to provide equity in programs state-wide as follows:

Schools that are not able to offer a comprehensive high-school program that reflects adequate education are provided differential fees based on:

- Size of school, use school size differential in formula to determine break,
- FTE staff, any school with less than 6 teachers cannot offer specialized instruction,
- Past academic performance, schools on needs improvement have reduced fees, and;
- economic status, 80% or higher free and reduced lunch have reduced fees.

The formula should allow small, remote schools to offer AkVS at no charge to the school. Other combinations of needs accumulate reduction in fees from a reduced cost to no cost. The costs related to those schools should provide formula funds to AkVS.

See Appendix: Funding

Plan, to Participate

Part of the Mission of AkVS is to improve practices across the state. It is recommended that STEPP planning (or other approved school improvement plans) that require access to AkVS, is proved fee reductions. Schools with ESSA requirements to improve school performance should be required to provide a course choice or school choice program of virtual school access. Districts should adopt policy that reflects VS programs.

Statutes, Chapter 16

Alaska Law, Education AS 14, Chapter 16 deals with the establishment of special schools. It currently does not appear to support virtual schools in a specific manner. Chapter 16 does support boarding

schools, specifically Mt. Edgecumbe. It is recommended that statutes be provided to our legislators that provide for virtual schools, their operation and governance of programs. Appendix: Chapter 16 contains draft statutes and samples from other states.

Of particular importance is the recommended action in a proposed AS 14.16.035. Admission to a Virtual School, which states an: Alaskan student who is between the age of 6 and 21 shall be eligible to enroll in the Alaska Virtual School, at no cost to the student, provided that public school students shall be given priority. The age range is larger than currently supported in a regular school.

III. District Role

There have been successful VS programs in Alaska, however, several attempts have not taken hold and there is a general lack of state regulations concerning virtual schools. In facing a difficult funding period, general support for a state run program that offers a diploma is difficult to determine. **However, the success of any state program will be determined at the district level.** If district leadership teams do not support AkVS, it will be difficult to have continuity in services.

Rural schools tend to see *Equity* and *Access* as a rationale for engaging in virtual schools, while *Choice* is seen as an attempt to undermine small remote schools. Many road system schools see VS as a quality *Choice* option and have limited appreciation for equity. *Equity* for the more urban student may rest in homeschool and those not able to or willing to attend a public school. "Course choice" appears to be embraced by rural schools. "School choice" is more agreeable to road system schools.

Engaging points:

- rural schools; Course Choice and Equity,
- urban schools; School Choice and individual need.

The belief that VS is a path to greater equity, access, and course choice that leads to higher student achievement requires local district buy-in. How can DEED create buy-in? Rural/urban/private/home schools have various needs. They can all be served well, online. Buy in may actually be, buying-in. The funding mechanism of AkVS will be important. Statute driven change may be necessary. Legislative support in creation of AkVS offers credibility for the program. Specific deals may be brokered with Galena, PACE, Raven, and Alaska Digital Academy. All of those programs offer services that are agreeable to the parents they serve. It may be in the interest of DEED that they continue their programs.

Buy-in may also hold requirements. An engagement process for districts and AkVS to collaborate is the STEPP or other school improvement planning format. Alaska's Challenge encourages that collaboration. Approved plans should trigger the funding process. Districts with requirements through ESSA to engage in school improvement must include AkVS as part of that plan.

Districts will need to work with AkVS effectively to increase E-rate and access to additional bandwidth. AkVS funding should include a venue to provide rural schools with supplemental support in e-rate fashion. Districts should participate in the "convention" to establish VS programs, Districts should adopt policy to reflect VS in their district.

See Appendix: Draft policy and handbooks

IV. Course Providers

A number of programs have been reviewed from across the nation. Three stand out as offering programs that are adaptable to needs state-wide. Additionally, all three have been used in the state in various capacity. The three programs discussed profile the national trends.

Florida virtual School was established in 1998 and is recognized nationwide and through various research projects as a high-quality program. It was selected by the Anchorage school district as a provider and used by Lower Kuskokwim School District. Since that time they have developed a “franchise” model called the Global School, which enables FLVS to set up a full service school anywhere in the world. FLVS claims to have offered courses in all 50 states and 65 countries. Their services include 180 courses—including NCAA-approved core courses, elective, honors, and AP classes. FLVS can provide a teacher within 48 hours of notification. The student is enrolled and contacted, their daily online effort monitored, weekly progress reported, papers graded within 48 hours (weekend/holidays are excluded). Additionally, local teachers can be covered. Example: For an open teaching position, or if a teacher leaves midyear, FLVS can supply online programs until a replacement is hired or to complete the year. They are prepared to open a state-operated virtual school through the Global School program in short order. Their charge is \$400 per semester ½ credit for high school, \$189 per core subject for elementary students. They acknowledge that AkVS will use some of their materials in becoming a stand-alone program. FLVS claims to have set up similar “franchise-to-own” programs in Missouri and Iowa. FLVS appears to be the stronger “course choice” provider (they do not hire AK employees, however they will gain AK certification). Appendix: FLVS Service provider

K-12 claims to be the largest online provider in the US. They were part of a program set up in Wrangle which did not succeed. K-12, since that time has improved and more responsive resources are available. K-12 representative Megan Henry, SVP of School Services, and Don Lee, VP of Government Affairs claims they will hire Alaskan teachers to work in the AkVS program. Don states that he set up a similar program in Arkansas. K-12 is available in more than 33 states and claims: Award-winning online curriculum with hands-on materials, instruction from state-certified teachers, access to course offerings that include core subjects in multiple levels, world languages, and a wide range of electives, an individualized learning plan tailored to each student’s strengths and needs, access to an online community and a variety of support, all designed to help students feel connected and engaged. K-12 appears to be the stronger “school choice” provider. (K-12 will hire AK based employees) Appendix: K-12 Service Provider

The Alaska Digital Academy, AkDA, based in Ketchikan, was developed through grant funds for Alaska specific schools and students. It has offered classes to students in 30+ districts in AK. While it has many of the features of FLVS and K-12, it does not have the depth of program knowledge or resources as the other providers. For example it is not accredited. AkDA is Alaskan grown. However it may take several years to develop into a comprehensive program that matches either FLVS or K-12.

V. Alaska’s Challenge

Rural Education

In “Digital Learning Strategies for Rural America: A scan of policy and practice in K–12 education, 2018,” author Amy Valentine states: “The common narrative around rural America has shifted from being largely positive and even mythical, to a greater emphasis on the challenges of rural regions of the country, including the lack of economic opportunity for rural residents.”

Rural schools face a number of challenges that are different than the challenges of their urban, town, and road system counterparts. Some remote road system schools also have the constraints placed on rural off-road schools:

- Declining enrollments
- High socioeconomically disadvantaged populations
- High transportation costs
- High utility costs
- Lack of computer and internet access in homes
- Fewer teachers, especially in high level courses
- High teacher turnover
- Difficulty in recruiting teachers
- Costs associated with teacher care: housing, medical, in-service training
- Fewer courses available to students.

Many rural schools lack advanced courses in math and science, challenging electives, and world language courses. In rural Alaska many high schools are not able to offer calculus, physics, and or even Algebra II.

Not only are fewer courses available to students, but the courses not available are most commonly: Advanced Placement, honors, world languages, and advanced STEM classes—precisely the types of classes that would appear to correlate with college success. Due to the small staff size access to dual credit or early entry programs is often limited.

While the concept of school choice is important, even more significant course choice. Course choice CAN happen in rural Alaska, however school choice in those locations is very difficult. Course choice, when offered through online programs, through the local school is often a blended education program. See Appendix: Foundation for Blended and Online Learning and Evergreen Education Group. 2018.

School Choice CAN be offered to rural students through a state operate virtual school, AkVS, as described in this report. School Choice is when a student is able to complete all, or the majority of their course work online.

Often lacking across rural schools is collaboration or a consortium of several rural schools (in the same district or other districts). Alaska's Challenge asks that such collaboration takes place. AkVS may also act as the consortium and broker consortium efforts of rural schools. See Appendix: Alaska's Challenge.

Alaska is not a member in one of the oldest and highly respected organizations the features rural education. Offering studies on rural schools and various supports since 1907, the National Rural Education Association contains a wealth of information on rural education. It is recommended that Alaska immediately join NREA to take advantage of the resources and improve professional status associated with rural teaching. See Appendix: NREA, a professional rural school organization.

Equity

The brunt of economic forces related to utilities, teachers, transportation, and health services/insurance costs weigh heavily on small local schools and community. Historical documents (APA, DEED funding, others) suggest the impact of these items restrict rural school's ability to offer high quality and choice programs. While technology may well be the center piece in improving schools and community, the location and economic capacity of a community may limit the ability to do so. Many education reform advocates believe that providing students and families a selection of schools to choose from, including charter schools, helps address inequities in education. Rural students, particularly, are not offered equity in access or choice in their schools. AkVS is a viable path to those enhancements. Appendix: APA Review of Alaska's School Funding Program

Adequate education

In MOORE VS. THE STATE OF ALASKA, 2012, the main points of the Moore complaint was access to an adequate education. Moore refers to equity as being very similar to the term adequate. Equity and adequate are used in a similar pattern in this report. Appendix: Understanding Moore

VI. School Structure

AkVS can function as a course choice, blended and school choice program. In several states VS programs are operated as a regular school under a district, some states have them as stand-alone districts, and a few have the VS program as an independent charter school. All of the various state level structures appear to be viable. The determining factor in the quality of the program appears to be accreditation. It is recommended that an accredited full cyber school, offering a diploma is created.

In reference to how a full online virtual school operates, please see the Appendix: Teacher Handbook. It provides insight to the duties a cyber school, online teacher carries out and the expectations of a supervisor of instruction.

To understand how a student engages in online learning, K12 provides the following information:

<https://www.k12.com/k12-education/how-online-learning-works.html>

The expectations of a teacher and student is they participate in the course being taught on a regular basis. That structure is able to deliver high quality instruction that is meaningful and achieves the adequacy standard. The structure of an online school can be an independent school district, a charter school, or function as an academy. For Alaska an independent school district, parallel to that of Mt. Edgecumbe is recommended.

AkVS may be able to reduce costs in hiring and reducing staff turnover costs. Staffing is a major drag on rural school efforts to succeed. Difficulty in staffing rural schools can be alleviated. As the supplier of difficult to fill positions AkVS reduces efforts in recruiting, lowering costs, focusing efforts. Specialized teachers are supplied ready to go, reducing training costs. In providing access to programs not previously available, it provides adequate education and meets the expectations of the *Moore* settlement. Knowing that the AkVS staff will return each year reduces the drag on small schools in recruiting staff for those positions. AkVS has the ability to step in when there is a staffing shortage. And vendors have the ability to respond to staff shortage developing during the school year.

VII. Reflective considerations concerning online education

Recent comments are that online learning should be available to everyone, but not everyone should learn online. A state operated online school will improve access to an adequate education in Alaska and appropriate funding of VS may help balance equity, but AkVS not a cure all in improving student achievement. Online learning requires a skill set that is somewhat different than a traditional classroom. Some students will need specialized support to be successful online. Not every teacher is skilled in providing blended learning support or in proctoring an online course. Paraprofessionals in some rural schools have the basic skills to support students, but need more training to be effective in proctoring online programs. Some schools are not staffed or scheduled in a manner that takes advantage of the expanded curriculum. Special consideration for some individual students is required. Staff development is needed. New school improvement models should be developed.

Pedagogy related to VS programs should be aware of *Transactional Distance*. That theory suggests that distance between teacher and learner affects student achievement. Distance can be physical and in the case of online programs, emotional and cultural. Emotional distance can be reduced and learning increased through purposeful effort. Frequent contact by the online teacher with the student through various social media applications appear to be effective in reducing the negative effects of Transactional Distance. The online service provider will also need some cultural training. Cultural training for teachers hired by the service provider should be part of the duties of the AkVS staff.

It is stated by online practitioners in Alaska that a student should be self-motivated, self-directed with strong reading, and writing skills to be successful. Specialized on-site support may be necessary for students not having the full set of skills.

It is recommended that school improvement plans include ongoing staff development to enhance teacher skills in blended learning and online support. Additionally, students may need to be taught skills for online learning. Some student may need additional resources to be successful in the VS environment. In that regard, a “new learning disability” related to *transactional distance* may require specialized support of specific students. See Appendix: Serving Handicapped Students Online

VIII. Step by Step and Time-line

Start now, start small, grow fast!

It is recommended that DEED establish an independent school district for the AkVS program. It is also recommended that AkVS purchase a “franchise” model of VS school. From that franchise Alaska will be able to develop and operate its own program. Recent efforts have centered on development of the software and programs of a VS program. Those will prove costly, unnecessary and time consuming to arrive where the franchise is already complete. The end product will more than likely not have the robust features of a purchased program. Please see the Appendix: Software.

Several actions may augment development of AkVS. DEED may include virtual school options as requirements for ESSA plans of improvement. DEED may also wish to encourage Districts to adopt policy concerning online education. Some states have adopted statutes that require each student to have an online experience for graduation (Florida). See Appendix Proposed Policies.

Adoption of statutes, regulations, and governance of the VS program that reflects those established for Mt. Edgecumbe is recommended, see Appendix: Chapter 16.

Until a full set of statutes and regulations are adopted, operating under Mt. Edgecumbe regulations is possible with State Board of Education approval.

A significant exception to Mt. Edgecumbe, additional regulation, is the structure of governing board. AkVS is full online school program. It is a school choice, the same as Mt. Edgecumbe, and requires infrastructure to operate well. Additionally, AkVS also functions as a course choice program. Course choice, the ability to offer blended programs in a local school, requires additional regulation. District support of AkVS is important and requires interagency collaboration. Active engagement with AkVS administration and districts is necessary. Procedures to support the course choice are outlined in the Appendix: “Invitational Convention.” Details in how districts desire to work with AkVS should be developed by the Convention and subsequent Board approval. See time lines below

A state level virtual school may be established **as soon as DEED decides to operate a VS school**. To review potentials, requests for draft proposals from both FLVS and K12 have been made. AkVS will be set up to be scalable, starting small with the ability to grow based on the demand and funding. Both FLVS and K-12 have the capacity to open a school and provide the support necessary for AkVS personnel to offer courses state-wide, grades 9-12. FLVS may require more support in Alaska to be effective. K-12 states it will establish an office in Alaska as part of their franchise fee. Also, K-12 has options to provide K-8 programs. It appears that K-12 has a more established program for homeschool parents.

The main difference between FLVS and K-12 is contracts. FLVS is able to establish its Global School network with no set up fees, costs are based on consumption of courses. K-12 has a set-up fee, however they propose hiring Alaskan teachers.

Both FLVS and K12 are accredited programs. It is possible to offer diplomas through local schools using teacher of record regulations. AkDA, the Digital Academy, is not accredited.

To open ASAP, if required to address state procurement issues, it is recommended offering contracts to the two strongest vendors of VS programs, FLVS and K12. And offer AkDA an option to provide services with consideration for local development, as well as allowing others to offer services through scholarship type of programs. The main restriction that may be imposed is the lack of accreditation by agencies other than FLVS or K12.

If funding is restricted, FLVS may be the more viable option. Should funds be available K12 appears to have a more comprehensive program and will hire Alaskan teachers. Starting in August 2019, FLVS has the capacity to offer Alaska a turn-key state school as soon as directed. After agreeing to a **Global School** program, within 48 hours of Alaska providing the names and demographic information FLVS will have students enrolled. They are able to serve anywhere from 1 to 100 students, immediately and grow

as need develops. Missouri and Iowa offered FLVS Global Schools in their states and have converted them to state only programs using the FLVS franchise as the base. FLVS Global School courses, high school, are \$400 per semester, \$800 per year. For K-6 (a new program); \$189 per student. Both programs include teacher, admin, records, and book keeping for each student. K12 states they can set up and operate VS, from kindergarten to grade 12 and offer a diploma, by late August. They intend to hire a full set of Alaskan teachers/administrators for the K12 VS program.

State Virtual School: AkVS

There are multiple influences to opening AkVS. Several critical items need to be clarified for action.

1. What are State procurement issues and procedures
2. What is the level of funding
3. What is the AkVS Mission

The following assumes: **State procurement issues exist** and offers a working path forward. Funding level is assumed to be limited. Grant funds and school improvement funds transferred to AkVS support are needed. The mission is assumed to be a full online school offering course choice and school choice that can provide a diploma. See the Appendix Pathways for optional timelines assuming no procurement issues and full formula supported funding.

Month 1, 2019- Announce the VS program, DEED contracts a VS coordinator. Responsibilities include: scholarship program, directs implementation of AkVS through 2020. Coordinator is to develop and implement short term and long term goals of AkVS.

Month 2, 2019- Coordinator announces “ 2020 AkVS Scholarships” to the first 125 course selections.

“Scholarships” issued to students as follows: 50 FLVS, 50 K12, 25 AkDA, and/or district choice providers, open to other selections, (total \$100,000). These are scholarships to vendors who are ready to provide programs immediately. This allows an evaluation of vendors and market survey. Scholarship requirements include STEPP plans to include AkVS.

Other scholarships: have 50 available for any late vendors who wish to compete or if demand for listed vendors in high. Produce support documents for Districts, schools, and public.

Month 3, 2019- Coordinator produces AkVS schedule

Month 4, 2020- announce 100 additional ½ scholarships, if needed/ funding available, based on funding strategies. These scholarships are after the closing dates: district paying half of fees, or Free and Reduced schools, priority, high need schools, remote small schools, may be full scholarships based on funding.

Month 5, 2020- State-wide, AkVS Invitational Convention- all districts invited as well as Naïve Corporations, Home-school Parents, others. Establish the Greater AkVS Advisory Board, AkVS AB, of 15 members serving 4 years, staggered by 2 years for 5/7 members. AkVS-AB convenes annually. AkVS-AB takes representative nominations every 2 years. AkVS AB determines Mission Statement and operational concepts. See Appendix VS Convention.

July 2020- ACSA meeting with DEED. DEED indicates the relationship between VS and STEPP planning. Relationship between VS and Free/Reduced. Availability to all students in AK. Proposed statute changes and funding structures.

Aug 2020- AkVS enrolls students in the scholarship program. AkVS is open for business as a “course” choice program.

Sept- Greater Advisory Board, 15 members by online conference, conducts selection of 5 board members. First AkVS Board Meeting. AkVS Board conducts business 3 times annually, minimum of 2 are virtual meetings. Agenda of first meeting is determined by Coordinator.

November 1- based on enrollment figures, customer satisfaction, and Board direction, selection of full “permanent” program vendor.

Dec 1, 2020- hire IT production engineer to adoption of the AkVS program based on franchise model and resources from vendor. Missouri and Iowa both states started with FLVS Global and adopted that program into their state program. If K12 is selected, they also expect AkVS to adopt program materials to AK requirements and will assist in the AK conversion.

January 2021- offer statute changes and legislative support role. AkVS open for business as a “school” choice

February 20, 2021, based on enrollment, legislative environment, AkVS open for business in FY 2021, in a scalable manner.

*Perhaps the most significant issue to timelines is the Alaska Procurement Process.

Recommendations

Quality vendors, FLVS and K12, have programs ready to serve Alaska. How well they deliver quality education to remote schools will determine long-term success. Direct DEED support of any vendor is required. DEED is the liaison to interface with local students and online teachers. A vendor should be selected. If procurement issues inhibit selecting a single vendor, then multiple scholarships allocated to potential vendors may address the issue.

The Mission of AkVS should be to offer a full online, cyber school capable of issuing a high school diploma. A mission statement is critical to AkVS. A DRAFT mission statement should be adopted by DEED to lead into the Virtual School Convention.

Funding should be appropriations for three to five years to stabilize the program. Formula based funding in support of appropriations is practicable after viability and scope of AkVS is established. Equity should drive the funding process. Funding mechanisms should be designed to encourage use of AkVS and collaboration between districts.

State actions are needed to provide adequate funding and adoption of statutes that support VS programs.

District actions should be to adopt policies and create school improvement plans that require VS offerings.

School, staff, student support mechanisms should be developed at the state level, then open for modification by each district as necessary in collaboration with a AkVS Coordinator.

The Commissioner is empowered to establish a new school district based on need. Create a new virtual school district.

Regulations are essential. If necessary present AkVS as a Charter School to the State Board for approval. Charter Schools have the flexibility to establish operating procedures that differ from established practice. After adoption of appropriate statutes and DEED Regulation, convert to a traditional school model.

An online state operated VS school can be set up and operated in a very short time frame, with a determined effort to create the program.