

Anchorage School District

Anchorage, Alaska

Evaluation of the Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement (Alaska ICE)

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Interviewers: Kayla Boettcher, David Osher, Elizabeth Spier

Prior to testing him for Special Education services, the psychologist who helps with academic testing was told by another staff member that David's grades were "in the toilet" first semester (translation: 5 Fs). He pulled them up to 4 As and only 1 F third quarter. When the psychologist asked David what inspired him to do so much better, he smiled really cute, and she said, "Oh, a girl?" David said, "No. My teachers. They're like my family."

One Anchorage elementary school principal makes his accessibility a priority and strives to make it easy for people to communicate with him. When he took the job at his current school, the office was arranged so the principal could hide—the office had a small window, and the former principal kept the outside window blinds drawn all the time. He rearranged the office so students and staff can see him, make eye contact with him, and know he's available. In addition, the front counter of the main office used to be too high for the littlest students—they couldn't see over the counter. The principal asked that it be lowered. Soon after that, a kindergartener came in and said, "Hey, now I can see you guys!"

RESPONDENTS

In conjunction with Anchorage Safe and Drug-Free Schools (SDFS), 31 individuals were recommended to inform evaluation team members about Alaska ICE initiatives within the Anchorage School District (ASD). These respondents included five elementary school principals, three elementary school counselors, one elementary school Family-School Service Coordinator, one middle school principal, two middle school counselors, two high school principals, the SDFS coordinator, three SDFS Youth Development Specialists, the SDFS Youth Asset Specialist, the Parents as Liaisons Coordinator, the Peaceable Schools Coordinator, the Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders Coordinator, the ASD Curriculum Executive Director, the ASD Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum Director, the Executive Director of ASD Middle Schools, the ASD No Child Left Behind Coordinator, one Cook Inlet Tribal Council school staff member, and four high school students. See Appendix 1 for a description of each respondent's background and responsibilities within ASD.

CONTEXT

Community

Anchorage, the largest borough in Alaska, is located in south-central Alaska at the head of Cook Inlet. Anchorage is home to more than 270,000 residents—about 40 percent of Alaska's entire

population. Approximately 72 percent of the population is white, 10 percent Alaska Native or part Native, 6 percent African American, and 6 percent Asian and Pacific Islander. There is also a military population of about 12,000.

Anchorage has a relatively stable economy, with about 2 percent growth in recent years. Oil and gas are important elements of the economy, as well as government and tourism. The unemployment rate for the Anchorage metropolitan area is 5.9 percent; the statewide unemployment is 7.4 percent. Seven percent of Anchorage residents were living below the poverty level in 2000. One respondent indicated that jobs don't seem to be a huge problem, although not everyone has "good" jobs. She said, "In Alaska overall, the scarce resource is people. For this reason, people may find themselves a valued part of the community faster than they might in other places."

Although the city covers nearly 1,700 square miles, respondents said Anchorage feels like a small community, especially when it comes to youth development efforts. There are many people who are very connected and committed to these initiatives. There is also a great deal of trust among youth-serving agencies—so much so that the United Way has hired a person through one of their grants, but lets that staff be supervised by someone outside of United Way.

Twenty miles north of Anchorage is the community of Eagle River. While still within the municipality of Anchorage and the Anchorage School District, Eagle River is somewhat of an independent community. Approximately 30,000 people live in Eagle River and the surrounding areas. There are eight schools (K-12) in Eagle River, attended by about 5,000 students. Although Eagle River is considered to be part of Anchorage, respondents said there is a feeling of dissociation; there is a sense of isolation and distance from the city. They also said there is a greater sense of cohesion and continuity among residents of Eagle River than in Anchorage. There is a lower rate of mobility in Eagle River when compared to the district overall, and fewer students are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program.

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Anchorage School District is a comprehensive urban district, the largest district in Alaska, and 82nd largest district in the United States. Every year nearly 50,000 students are enrolled. The 92 schools in the district include eight comprehensive high schools, nine comprehensive middle schools; 60 traditional elementary schools; four charter schools (with two more slated to open soon); and one K-12 alternative school. The school district covers a large geographical area: from Eklutna in the north to Girdwood in the south is about a 70-mile span.

Today 44 percent of the students in Anchorage School District represent ethnic minorities, compared to 13 percent in 1976 and 31 percent in 1995. Alaska Native is the largest ethnicity (13 percent), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (11 percent), African American (8 percent), and Hispanic (6 percent). In recent years there has been a significant increase in Hmong immigrants. Schools included in this report range from 15 to 87 percent students of color.

Ninety-five languages are spoken within the Anchorage schools, making communication a particular challenge with children and families. Finding appropriate translators and tutors can be

difficult for the schools. One district administrator commented that the district is working on cultural responsiveness: “We recognize as we start to work with these kids we need to make sure we’re using strategies that allow them to demonstrate their strengths and connect to their prior learning.”

There is a significant amount of mobility within the district, largely due to economic difficulties. Approximately one-third of the students in the district are enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program. Informants estimated the overall mobility rate to be about 30 percent. District-wide, there are 2,000-2,600 students in the Child-in-Transition program, which exists to help children who are homeless or in foster care to complete the school year in the same school where they began. Native family connections to rural villages also play a role in student mobility—students frequently move between Anchorage and an outlying community. Further, the military population contributes to student mobility, although their mobility is less likely to happen mid-year or multiple times within a year.

There is a district-wide reading and math database, so when a student transfers to another school, the teacher can look online and know how the he or she is performing on benchmark tests. A couple of school personnel said the database really helps in times of transition for students by improving communication between schools and with families.

Schools

Representatives from eleven Anchorage schools were interviewed for this report. These schools were located throughout the district’s geographical area, including schools in Eagle River.

The elementary school representatives mentioned several district-wide programs used in their schools that reinforce the Developmental Assets framework. One that was frequently mentioned was Dr. Geoff Colvin’s *School-Wide Discipline Plan*. This is a site-based, system-wide approach to improving school climate and empowering students. Other programs mentioned by the elementary school staff include Character Counts, Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), peer mediation, and *Kelso’s Choice*, a conflict management program for young children. Several of the elementary schools were identified as “neighborhood schools,” or schools that serve the students living in the area. There is also a K-6 “Open Optional” program at one of the schools, which is an alternative program available to any family in the district. Students enrolled in this program experience more student-directed learning, assessments through portfolios and standards instead of report cards, and significant family involvement.

Standard middle schools in Anchorage are arranged in teams. Every student belongs to a team, which is usually led by teachers in math, language arts, social studies, and science. Teachers have the ability to block, and many arrange their time to include an advisory period. Each team has two team times during the day, which they use for tracking students and holding conferences. The Anchorage middle schools house 600—1,200 students. One middle school representative said, “Middle school students have a tendency to organize themselves into groups, and they’d do it themselves, maybe into groups we wouldn’t want, if we don’t do it for them.” She continued,

Of any grade level that the assets are important to, it’s middle school. Our kids are finally old enough to understand, take a look at it and determine if they have this asset or not, and then figure out ways to add that asset to themselves.

Middle school is really where they decide and arrange their life for which direction they're going to go. The asset framework gives them an opportunity to look at where they are and how they might be in charge of their own life.

The Small Learning Communities (SLCs) high school structuring strategy is gaining momentum in Anchorage. Some schools are completely divided into smaller groups of students with different programs available for the students to choose. Some schools have structured their learning communities around age levels, giving particular attention to freshman students and working to ease their transition out of middle school. Anchorage high schools can be quite large (some with enrollments over 2,000), and smaller learning communities offer students the opportunity to build closer relationships with their peers and teachers. In a discussion about SLCs, one high school representative said, "The idea was to establish some real teacher and peer relationships to keep kids from falling through the cracks and build some assets."

Cook Inlet Tribal Council—Partners for Success

Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) is the non-profit arm of Cook Inlet Regional Incorporated (CIRI), a local Native corporation. Five or six years ago CITC started looking at native education in the high schools, reviewing statistics, and wondering how they could help improve examination scores and graduation rates of native students. "Partners for Success" is the program that evolved as a partnership between CITC and Anchorage School District. CITC hires and pays for teams of professionals that work in four middle schools and four high schools. The teams consist of certified math and English teachers, teaching assistants, academic counselors, and family advocates who focus specifically on Native Alaskan and American Indian students. Classes are voluntary and open to any NA/AI students, but enrollment in classes is held at 20. Culture is infused into all of their activities. One particular example of a frequent service provided by CITC staff is helping a Native student to "check out" when leaving a school. Many Native students move back and forth between Anchorage and a rural village, and they often lose some of their academic credits because they are unaware of school policies for checking out. If a student leaves school but does not check out, they will fail their classes. This is a common example of why a Native student may not graduate on time, if at all. CITC staff engages the family in the process and has them come in to check the student out, so when he gets to his new school, he can pick up where he left off, rather than having to start over again.

Safe and Drug-Free Schools Department

The ASD Safe and Drug-Free Schools (SDFS) staff oversee several grants and programs administered to schools throughout the district. Anchorage SDFS has developed an approach to drug and alcohol prevention that is more focused on promoting positive behaviors than preventing negative ones, with the belief that the former also accomplishes the latter. Several district-wide affective programs are housed within SDFS, including Peaceable Schools; Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders; and Parents as Liaisons. In addition to these specific programs, SDFS provides the district with training and consultation services focused on the Developmental Assets™.

Through a partnership with the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), one SDFS staff member is fully funded by Alaska ICE, and two others receive half of their funding from Alaska ICE. SDFS also receives additional grant money from ICE that is distributed to schools throughout the district for asset-building initiatives. Originally, in 2001–2003, SDFS provided an “ICE grant” to schools that submitted applications and were approved. Two years ago, SDFS altered their structure to provide a more balanced mixture of money and consultation. They now give smaller asset-building grants to 57 schools, while 6 schools receive larger grants and more focused consultation for their asset-building efforts. These six schools are part of the School Community Asset Initiative, and are referred to as SCAI (pronounced “sky”) schools.

Issues Important to Youth

In general, respondents said that the issues important to the youth of Anchorage are similar to the issues “important to young people everywhere.” Middle school students are particularly concerned with social time, especially the 5-minute “passing time” between classes, harassment, and gossip. Middle and high school students seem to be concerned about what they’re going to do after they graduate, having friends, and “fitting in.” One respondent said she firmly believes every child wants to be successful, and that a lot of their behaviors that seem unsuccessful are just a way to cover up their desire to succeed. Some have family situations they need to address. Respondents said the need to be safe here is the same as anywhere else—to be safe physically, emotionally (no harassment or bullying), and intellectually (not picked on for wrong answers in classrooms). The students voiced concerns about the cliques at their school, and how it didn’t feel like a community there because of all the segregations based on ethnicity or involvement in certain activities.

Issues important to the school district

The Anchorage School Board has articulated three overall district goals:

- 1) Increase achievement and decrease achievement gap
- 2) Safe and supportive learning environment
- 3) Public accountability

The district’s catchphrase is “success for all.” Please see Appendix 2 for a detailed look at the district’s mission statement and goals.

Respondents said that student safety, achievement, and support for students in all their needs were of high concern for the district. Other school leaders mentioned the increasing ethnic diversity within the district and the accompanying challenges, such as a need for translators. One administrator mentioned that the superintendent talks about “the need to bring parents from the minority communities into the fold.” Several respondents voiced a concern for the high level of student mobility and the difficulties they face in providing consistent education and support for those students.

A recent conference on Small Learning Communities drew a crowd of 300-400 participants, including several district administrators, to discuss effective strategies for successful schools. One administrator reported that the speakers at this conference discussed how positive school environments are an important component for academic achievement. She added that the topics

of school climate and caring connections at school are “popping up all the time” with professionals throughout the district. Further, she said, “I would like to think that since No Child Left Behind is leveraging more pressure, people are truly looking at the research about climate, connections and relationships more and more. Those are things that have been the mantra through SDFS for a lot of years, but I think it’s helpful that now they’re hearing it from more credible sources.”

In 1996, the Anchorage School District adopted a policy that called for a district-wide implementation of the Developmental Assets framework. Several respondents offered this as an indication that the district places strong emphasis on the assets and other affective programs. Two respondents mentioned that SDFS regularly gets time at district leadership meetings, and they said this is an indication that the district places a priority on assets. Involving the community in education was also mentioned as important to the district. One example of this is the promotion of school-business partnerships throughout the district. At least one of the schools also demonstrates their emphasis on community involvement through their mission statement, which calls for a partnership between home, school, and community.

Every comment made about the district superintendent was positive. Respondents said she is visible, supportive, and available to the district and the community. Three people mentioned that she shows her dedication to students and staff by attending every youth activity in the community and also showing support for her staff. One administrator, several SDFS staff, a principal and a counselor all mentioned that the superintendent seems supportive of the assets framework, and open to trying new things in order to make improvements for the students. The administrator who talked about this said, “I don’t know whether our superintendent is going out into the community and saying ‘we believe in the asset framework—jump on board with us,’ but I think her gestures, actions, and efforts certainly support that.”

ASD just completed a comprehensive six-year strategic plan in the fall of 2004. District administrators all said this is a positive step toward further district unification, and believe the completion of this plan will help them to communicate better with parents and the community. They agree that going through the process to develop this plan has helped to clearly define their vision and mission, and the twenty-seven chapters in the plan are all tied to the school board goals. At the time of these interviews, administrators were just distributing the CD version of the plan to teachers, and trying to get the word out to parent and community members as well. One administrator emphasized the importance placed on accountability in the plan—that the district is committed to not just talking about what their initiatives are, but how they plan to evaluate and rate the success. “We’re absolutely focused on moving in the same direction,” she said.

A new component of the six-year plan is a specific Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum plan. A full-time coordinator has been hired to oversee the development and implementation of SEL standards and benchmarks, which will be aligned with the Developmental Assets framework. Several respondents, specifically administrators and SDFS staff, exhibited great enthusiasm for the incorporation of SEL curriculum, and said that the superintendent is showing her support for assets by creating the coordinator position and allowing the district to move forward with this plan. At this time, it is not a mandate that all

schools incorporate SEL; however, by 2008-2009, the district plans to move to a standards-based report card, and include SEL standards and benchmarks on that report card.

Several school staff and one administrator made comments about the level of site-based power given to principals. They say in many ways the district remains “hands-off” and allows the principal to have a lot of leeway in their schools, which sometimes results in resistance when things *are* mandated from district administration. This was mentioned in the context of district-wide asset building initiatives—that even though the school board has adopted assets and the whole SDFS department operates within the assets framework, there is variation among schools in their willingness to participate. Further, on numerous occasions, a change in principal has negatively affected a school’s asset-building efforts because the new principal did not continue the assets initiatives.

Several respondents also mentioned a lack of communication among the three school levels—they said there is not really a platform for elementary, middle, and high school leaders to meet together and discuss district-wide efforts or concerns. Two specific concerns that were mentioned were the implementation of assets and the integration of Cook Inlet Tribal Council staff and programs. However, all but one of these people also commented that the superintendent is working to improve communication across the district.

Personal Impact

All of the people we interviewed were familiar with the assets, and many of them became aware of the assets through the Safe and Drug Free Schools staff. Two principals reported learning about the assets three years ago from Clay Roberts, a national speaker on assets and positive school climate. Roberts was initially brought to Anchorage by SDFS to speak to district administration, and was invited to return once or twice to present to specific schools. Two other respondents said they learned about assets when the assets were integrated into the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program. Several counselors and principals learned about the assets through SDFS school in-services, the SDFS Assets Fairs, or during the process of applying for an ICE grant through SDFS. Two people noted a specific link to AASB—one principal reported that her school nurse attended an AASB conference in 1995 and brought back information and enthusiasm about the assets; another heard about them from Stan Mayra (SDFS staff) after he had attended a conference. This principal believed the entire district initiative began with Mayra. The students’ first introduction to assets was through a Training of Promoters and Storytellers (TOPS) presented by Alaska ICE staff and hosted by SDFS. One counselor first learned about the assets in 1996 while living in Colorado through that state’s initiative, while another counselor learned about assets through her counseling graduate program at the University of Alaska. The representative of Cook Inlet Tribal Council first became aware of the assets in 2002-2003 when she and her colleagues were revising some grant objectives to include community engagement goals. They came across the assets because some of their staff were working in schools that had an assets focus.

The extent to which awareness of the assets has affected personal behaviors varies. Most informants said that learning about the assets validated their existing values and practices, and offered relief and reassurance that they were doing the right thing. One administrator said, “It’s

very validating—as a good teacher, you’re doing this all the time anyway. It wasn’t an add-on, it’s not a new thing, it’s an awareness that these things are important. You’re probably doing these things already and if you’re not, you need to start.” A principal commented that learning about the assets “made me feel really good about what we’re doing. Professionally, frankly, I’ve gotten quite a bit of recognition about our buy-in of [assets]. We’ve had some really great publicity and others are taking a look at what we’re doing over here. Why? Because of many of the things we did based largely on assets.” Another administrator appreciates the assets framework because of how accessible it is. “It’s beautiful in its simplicity,” she said.

Although these comments came from respondents who spoke enthusiastically about the organizational impact the assets framework has made on their schools and professional lives, they didn’t think that a new awareness of Developmental Assets prompted any specific change in their outlooks or behaviors. One commented that learning about the assets didn’t change her natural way of thinking at all, but she’s thrilled to see it developed as a formal plan. Another offered the following:

I don’t know if it’s changed anything about me, but the framework provides a great way to talk about where we want to go. Instead of just espousing philosophies to people, it becomes something concrete and tangible. This is what I wanted to see happen with the school—it’s not touchy-feely, it’s really about academics. But if we don’t have kids that buy in and trust us or feel good about their school or feel safe, their scores aren’t going anywhere, and nobody’s going to care about a darn thing.

On the other hand, other respondents said that learning about the assets *has* changed how they interact with young people on a personal as well as professional level. Two counselors both reflected that they now make an intentional effort to talk with the young people in their neighborhoods. Another person said that when she and her husband hear neighbors or friends talk about coaching or other involvement with kids, they say, “You’re building assets!” and always try to introduce and incorporate the assets language into conversations. An administrator said the assets have changed how she communicates with parents. One former teacher (now an administrator) said the assets affected her teaching because of a focus on building strong relationships and connections with students.

I know who they are as people, they trust me, they believe in me, they know I care about them—it all goes together. And they’ll run through a wall for you if they know you care about them and you’re going to treat them fairly and you’re going to challenge them. I have relationships with former students that have gone on for 15 years.

Another respondent listed several ways she has been personally affected by the assets framework. She said the assets bring her out of her introverted nature and compel her to “chat” with the teenagers who take her groceries to her car at the store, or to check on the well-being of a neighborhood child who is being teased. She commented that she once saw a Search Institute brochure that said the biggest thing kids want is acknowledgement through eye contact or a greeting, and for adults to not cross the street when approaching a group of kids—she is now intentional about these things. While she was being interviewed, students knocked on her door several times and she always answered it. She said she meant no disrespect to the interviewer,

but the students are her priority, and that belief is stronger because of her awareness of assets. The strongest influence assets have had on her is shown through her commitment to be a significant adult in the life of her nephew, who lives on the east coast. She said, “If it wasn’t for learning about assets, I probably would have looked for a new line of work a couple of years ago. Assets give me something to help recharge and focus on things I *can* do.”

One informant spoke of the assets being a “revelation” for him. Instead of focusing on each problem or issue and always dealing with the negative behaviors, it was a revelation to think people could promote positive behaviors and the negative behaviors would go away at the same time. “In fact,” he says, “I’ve shared this with lots of other people who have been in the treatment field a long time, and now there’s a joke about being members of the ‘Church of Assetology.’ There’s a lot of us who have been plugging away at ‘silo approaches’ [in the field], and when you learn about the assets, you say ‘Ah. That’s it!’”

One principal gave several examples of how he incorporates assets into life outside of school.

I’ll indoctrinate anybody. I give a lot of books away—my wife and I usually drive around in the van with a few books. It’s not that we’re zealots, it’s just that we always tend to gravitate toward the negative stuff and the drama that’s going on and we tend to forget the good stuff. We want to be significant adults in the lives of other kids and we want to make sure our kids have other significant adults—that’s very important. We purposely got involved in a faith community because we felt it was important to expose our kids to that experience—and religion is also an asset.”

The students we spoke with generally agreed that the work they did at the TOPS has helped them become better presenters, and for two of the students, this has helped them overcome a tendency to be shy. One student said she wants to be an asset to other people and show them that she cares—the TOPS helped her do more of that. She also mentioned that she was very involved in community service where she used to live, and learning about the assets made her want to get more involved with that in Anchorage. Another student said his awareness of assets helps him analyze things more and be able to categorize things that are assets and things that are not. Two of the students acknowledged that the assets align with their Native values and make sense to them culturally.

The students said they had spoken with their friends about the TOPS to some extent, either because their friends wondered where they were for two days, or because they were excited to share what they had learned. One student said she encouraged her boyfriend to learn more about it—he said he would give it a try if she liked it. One other student said his friends were also “sort of” interested in learning more. A third student said her friends “weren’t really that into it.”

Other student feedback from a previous TOPS training indicates that students wanted to be more involved in their community, build assets within themselves, be a change agent at their school, use it in daycare setting with smaller children, and be a positive role model for their peers.

ASD'S HISTORY WITH ASSET-BUILDING

On November 12, 1996, SDFS staff and numerous other school staff and community members attended a training led by former AASB staff person Derek Peterson. At the time, Peterson was beginning to offer workshops to schools and school boards around the state to introduce the Developmental Assets framework. Alaska ICE did not yet exist; AASB was simply promoting the assets as a useful tool for schools.

Three SDFS staff members and one administrator were able to discuss what happened within ASD after this initial introduction to assets. SDFS staff members were ready for a new approach to drug and alcohol prevention and felt that assets provided a viable alternative. One respondent recalled,

Frustration made me ready [to embrace the assets]. I think our charge in SDFS for a lot of years was intervention-type work in the school district. We've all come from different backgrounds in prevention and youth work and we all care about kids. When we were presented with the model and some of the research behind it, it gave us a chance to unify our vision with all caring adults. We've been around long enough to know there's no silver bullet—there's not a single program, practice, or one particular thing that's going to have a significant impact. For me, it was seeing that possibility that there is a framework for all—parents, community, schools, etc.—that if somehow we could get behind that and promote it, that we would have a significant impact down the line.

The other SDFS staff person agreed, and Peterson's training prompted them to take action. They felt that the assets were more than another "program of the day" and that this model "necessarily provides [school personnel] with some motivation and a framework, which is a nice organizing tool."

At that point, the Anchorage school board had also been trained in the assets and saw value in the framework. One administrator remembered the assets model being presented to the assistant superintendent, who also became interested in using the framework, and then, together with SDFS, they discussed it with the school board. The school board passed an initiative that officially adopted the assets framework as a district-wide initiative in 1996.

"Then came the big thing of explaining what the assets are to everyone," said one administrator. SDFS staff started by explaining it to principals—particularly elementary school principals—and presenting in-services to school staff of all grade levels. SDFS staff members said the first couple of years were primarily focused on building awareness, and they gave presentations and workshops throughout the district and even out into the community. An administrator also remembered SDFS and AASB doing a lot of publicity through presentations and fliers that were handed out year after year.

One of the first SDFS initiatives was to host an Assets Fair—an event that brought together representatives from throughout the district and community to learn about the assets. SDFS

invited Peterson to present at that event, and they said it “made a big splash.” One staff member said that event really introduced the idea of community engagement into this model—that this was not an isolated thing for SDFS programs, and they needed to think outside the school boundaries. They became intentional about including the community in their efforts because they “believe it’s the community’s responsibility too—that’s part of the whole deal.”

One elementary school principal said she also initially learned about the assets in 1995-1996, but through a different path. Her school nurse at the time attended an AASB training and became very excited about the possibilities. When SDFS began to use the assets as their primary tool, this principal invited Michael Kerosky (SDFS supervisor) to speak to her staff about assets.

Once the assets became the primary language for SDFS, things started to change. “Just our *way of being* seriously changed after ’96,” one staff member said. “Even the way we wrote grants started to change. In our online grant applications for the mini-grants, we started asking all the folks to identify which of the assets they build for each of their projects. I think we started to help people see a bigger picture and we really started to promote that...we became known for that.”

SDFS started to incorporate assets into the language of all their programs, including Peaceable Schools and the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP). One staff member was holding classes for parents to learn conflict resolution skills at the time and said as soon as she learned about the assets model she started to incorporate assets into her training. Now she even includes teens in the presentation of those trainings. She says parents will say to the teens, “I can’t talk to my teenager at home, but what do you do or think about this?” The parents now treat these young people as the experts on how to deal with their teenagers. Another SDFS staff member indicated that adopting the assets framework provided an opportunity to step back and review organizational structure in terms of the assets. “One of the things we try to help our schools with is understanding how all the great programs and practices that exist already can be integrated into the asset framework. That’s the umbrella—everything can fall beneath them, and this is how we can make it most effective in the schools.”

School staff and administrators reported a variety of initial asset-building initiatives. Two schools in particular talked about incorporating the assets into programs that already existed at their schools, namely RCCP. One school originally chose twelve assets to focus on throughout the year, but eventually narrowed it to three assets that correspond well with RCCP: responsibility, interpersonal competence, and positive peer influence.

When asked about his efforts to unify the various philosophies and programs, one principal said,

When I first got here I wanted to see what kind of buy-in I’d get for these existing programs (RCCP and Project Achieve). It was really overwhelming that the teachers didn’t want a canned program, but the community did. The parents want a system that works for everybody, that’s equal across the board, a zero-tolerance policy for this and that. The staff wants something that will be appropriate for each child. Oftentimes what’s preset won’t work for that child. So it’s my job to marry the two, and the only way I could do that was to bring Developmental Assets in because they sort of took the framework out of both. It’s just such common sense, very simple—it’s just how we treat others.

One elementary school focused specifically on caring school climate, and sought input from the community and school business partners for how to improve their school climate. Another hosted a Winter Carnival for their students. The student price of admission to the carnival was to bring a significant adult with them, and while the kids were playing at the carnival, the adults were given a presentation about assets. This school principal also hosted a TOPS training for his entire staff. He persuaded a neighborhood church to loan their space to the school for this training, and the elders of the church were invited to attend. As a result of their attendance at this TOPS, members of the church began to incorporate assets messages into their Sunday services.

Two elementary school principals talked about integrating the assets with Geoff Colvin's school-wide discipline and behavior program. One of these principals said they used fictional characters to illustrate the frameworks to the students by acting out positive and negative behaviors. The other principal said that the assets and Colvin's work are "two coinciding frameworks" that provide an underlying philosophy, or "the *modus operandi* for the whole staff."

Four schools focused their early asset efforts on extracurricular programs, such as activities or tutoring, targeting a specific purpose or population. A school with a more affluent population focused their programs on students who may not have as many opportunities as their peers do. Another mentioned that they had a problem with students being late to school, so they created a before-school basketball program. The other school simply wanted to provide students with opportunities to be at school for "fun" reasons. One of these schools also "plastered" the hallways with assets information and posters in an effort to make kids aware of the assets as well, but "this took a lot of time." Another school had two social work students placed at their school in internships, and these interns used the assets in their work with students and with the after-school program.

An administrator, who is a former high school teacher, said she incorporated the assets into her classes all the time. An example she offered occurred while teaching *The Crucible*. As she taught about escalation of conflict, she talked with students about where an intervention could have happened to prevent the conflict, and then used that opportunity to talk with students about their own choices within the context of conflict.

Several respondents talked about the use of "silent mentoring" at their schools. Schools that use this initiative will place the names of all their students on a wall at the beginning of the school year and staff will place stars next to the names of students with whom they have a significant relationship. Staff members then make commitments to place a special focus on students with no stars by their name and make an effort to know them.

Students from the Native Culture Club gave an assets presentation at a family gathering hosted by Cook Inlet Tribal Council at the Alaska Native Heritage Center. They introduced what the assets are, read from *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style*, and asked parents to participate by suggesting ways they could build assets in their children.

Relationship with Alaska ICE

SDFS supervisor Michael Kerosky was involved in the brainstorming and design of the Alaska ICE grant, and had helped to create some momentum toward a statewide initiative through his work in Anchorage. He said the collaborative efforts of a few youth advocates in Alaska got the attention of the state's senators (Frank Murkowski and Ted Stevens), and the *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style* book was presented to the senators as a lobbying device. One respondent said she had particular confidence in this grant because there was awareness about assets at the federal level, and there was bipartisan buy-in for the concept. When AASB received the two million dollar grant in 2001, they offered SDFS a portion of it. SDFS wanted to focus their efforts on involving students by hiring someone to help youth build assets in other youth, so AASB granted a full-time staff person to SDFS for these efforts. Initially this staff member, the Youth Asset Specialist, tried to be personally involved with students at all of the middle and high schools by creating asset-building programs and initiatives at each of the sites. This was too overwhelming, however, so she began to identify “Assets Champions” in each school who could be a contact and instigator for assets initiatives in their schools. These individuals were chosen because they were familiar with assets and had shown interest in being involved.

One of the other ways SDFS first used their ICE funding was to increase the amount given to certain schools in their “mini-grants” and prompt those schools to focus on assets. SDFS called these mini-grants “ICE grants.” Within a couple of years, however, they realized that just giving the schools money didn’t really help them further their asset-building efforts. SDFS changed their method of support to the schools and began to give them more consultant time, oversight, and training. In 2003, they picked six schools and decided to give them primarily consulting time, all of which is paid for by SDFS funds, plus a little extra funding from ICE to expand their asset-building efforts. These schools are called School Community Asset Initiatives, or SCAI schools. One SDFS staff member said, “Those six schools were chosen intentionally—it wasn’t just arbitrary. We had long-term relationships with those schools where we had seen their efforts and their successes. Their point of readiness was also really important—they were ready to go to a deeper level with their initiatives.”

Two elementary school respondents indicated that they had applied for an ICE grant at one time. One school received the grant; the other did not. Both commented on the rigor of the grant, saying it was a lot of work to apply for the grant and to keep up with the additional responsibilities. The school that received the grant used it to fund some before- and after-school activities. They strategically opted to fund less and less of the programs each year so the school would find ways to make it self-sustaining and not dependent upon the grant. The other school hoped to use their ICE grant to create a network of “family groups” within their school, where every staff would have a group of 9-12 students and meet with them for 45 minutes every 2 weeks to do activities with them and discuss issues. Although they did not receive the grant, they had already obtained the commitment from their school through the application process, and they attempted to establish some family groups without the financial assistance. These groups ended up being too big to manage, but this has now evolved into a classroom buddy system, where older classes are paired with younger classes.

Two respondents said they asked students to use the “assets checklist” found inside *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style* to identify their own assets. In both cases, school administrators also

used that information to gain a better understanding of where their students had needs and where to place more intentional efforts.

All of the interviewees were familiar with the book *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style*, and several made additional, unprompted comments about *Helping Little Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style*. Four respondents indicated they formerly and/or presently make these books available to the parents of their students. However, three of these people said they use it less now than they did when it was first published. All respondents made favorable comments about the books, saying that they provide great details and suggestions. One person mentioned how much she appreciates the direct tie to Alaska Native culture, saying these books are evidence that the Native population endorses the assets framework, and they are helpful to her in working with Native families. Another informant said she thought the books were good, but “sort of overwhelming” and another thing that just ends up on the shelf.

One respondent offered feedback about another ICE resource. She said the “newer version of the TOPS manual is very good. The page that discusses the two versions of success is especially powerful...this is why assets in particular speaks to our [Native] students so clearly.”

The SDFS staff articulated several other connections to AASB and Alaska ICE. SDFS has brought Alaska ICE trainers to Anchorage on several occasions to present TOPS workshops with staff, students, and Parents as Liaisons (PALS) program participants. SDFS staff generally concurred that these trainings have been valuable to their work in Anchorage, and helped spread the awareness and understanding of assets throughout the school district and into the community. For the first three years, ICE scheduled a series of general TOPS, which helped to raise assets awareness among adults throughout the community. In the past two years, SDFS asked ICE to alter the content of the TOPS to specifically address particular audiences and build upon the foundation that has been established, such as for teens or for CITC. SDFS staff also mentioned the “partners meetings” provided by Alaska ICE every few months, which offer an opportunity for ICE-funded programs to network. Respondents said this has been helpful to them, as it gives them a big picture of what’s happening around the state and how ASD is connected to those initiatives.

SDFS staff also said the Alaska ICE website is a good resource for helping teachers and other educators understand the other ways assets are being implemented throughout the state. One staff member voiced particular appreciation for ICE’s willingness to fund community efforts outside of the school district that complement what’s happening within ASD. “That’s been a tremendous resource,” he said. “As the asset framework was becoming more well-known, we were getting inundated with calls from the community to come and do an asset training here or there...but we were barely keeping up with school requests. So ICE funded somebody full time in the community through United Way. Now even the community has moved beyond building awareness—they need consultation on how to implement it.”

Amidst all the appreciative comments about Alaska ICE resources, respondents voiced some concern that AASB/Alaska ICE does not recognize their contributions to ASD as part of a bigger picture. SDFS also receives funding from other sources that matches or exceeds the amount they receive from Alaska ICE. However, some individuals said Alaska ICE requests participation

from ASD that extends beyond the commensurate level of funding and resources they provide to the Anchorage effort. For example, Alaska ICE has asked ASD to regularly submit stories to their website and quarterly newsletter, and to send staff to participate in ICE-sponsored community events outside of the school district. While ASD representatives certainly want to cooperate with Alaska ICE in their statewide initiative, they indicated that they don't always have enough staff or resources to delegate for all that is requested of them.

Although other district respondents were familiar with AASB and Alaska ICE, their only connections to the organization were generally through SDFS and the grants funneled from ICE through SDFS. A few respondents mentioned attending a training led by Derek Peterson, a former AASB staff person.

Training/consultation

School staff listed a variety of assets-related trainings and presentations they had attended. All of the school staff discussed training and consultation they had received from SDFS staff, either on assets in general, or specifically about one of the assets-related programs, such as Resolving Conflict Creatively or Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders. Schools that had an ICE grant at one time or that currently have a SCAI grant were all in agreement that their staff had been trained in the assets framework, and those trainings were generally provided by SDFS staff.

Two schools had been to workshops presented by Derek Peterson, a former AASB staff person and one of the original assets promoters in the state. Peterson was also mentioned as a keynote speaker at one of ASD's annual assets fairs. One principal said he had attended a TOPS hosted by ICE. Two schools had offered workshops with Carol Lieber, creator of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, and another mentioned a training given by Geoff Colvin, developer of the proactive school-wide discipline plan that is implemented in many ASD elementary schools. Although these programs are not specifically about assets, many respondents said they considered these programs to be asset-building efforts. Two school staff members mentioned attending presentations that had been given by Father Michael Oleksa, a Russian Orthodox priest and noted Alaskan speaker on the topics of assets and community engagement.

The high school principals said the most significant assets trainings they had attended were presented by Clay Roberts, a senior consultant with Search Institute and a national speaker on assets and school climate. Roberts' first visit to Anchorage was for a presentation to school administrators, and one principal in particular felt that Roberts spoke directly to some of his school's current programs. This principal, with the help of SDFS, invited Roberts to present a half-day in-service to his school staff the following fall. The principal said,

It was probably the most positive beginning of the year I've ever seen. You need to know for any in-service presenter to have a half-day when we only have 3 days before school starts is a very tough thing to do with teachers—mostly they want to be in their rooms, preparing, getting stuff done. But they totally bought into it. It did a couple of things: it reminded people why we are here and what we're about, and it gave us a common language...a framework we could put things in.

Another principal said, “Clay was the one who made the assets very real and showed how practically they can be used in schools.”

One district administrator had attended several SDFS trainings, as well as a workshop led by Clay Roberts. She said, “After you’ve been to all these trainings, it’s hard to separate them out—but I’m not sure you *want* to, or need to say ‘I got this from this training and that from that training.’ It’s just all good stuff to take with you.”

Four students who had attended a TOPS were all in agreement that they like the training and felt they benefit from learning about assets. Aside from the beginning of the training, which they agreed was “a little dragging,” they felt the two-day workshop was good because it “wasn’t long and lecturing” and that the trainers “kept you moving, especially with the balloons.” When asked to describe what happened with the balloons, one student said,

Everybody was given a balloon to blow up and then let it go—there was a chair up in the front. The closer you got to the chair the more assets you were giving the person in the chair. It showed how successful you were—if you didn’t get that close, he’d explain what happened to do that. Another thing was the yarn, the web—we had a balloon, and you just had to keep them up, and if they fell, you needed to add more assets.

The goal of the student TOPS (or STOPS) was to give students enough information to give presentations about assets in their schools. The students said they had given a presentation already, and thought perhaps their school should have a special Assets Day to educate more people about the assets framework.

In addition to the students and one principal, only one other respondent, an administrator, mentioned being trained directly by Alaska ICE staff. She said an ICE trainer presented “the dreamcatcher” (the balloons and yarn assets presentation), which was very effective for her colleagues and herself. All other respondents attributed their assets knowledge to SDFS trainings and consultation. Feedback given about SDFS staff was very favorable and appreciative. One of the district administrators said,

SDFS went to every group—middle school principals, school board, any school that asked, parent groups, faculty meetings, beginning of the year programs for new staff, some things with kids—student advisory board, parent advisory committee—it was almost every single group and they’re still doing it with new people and groups that come in, so they will understand what we’re talking about.

Respondents generally said that raising awareness about assets within their schools has had a positive impact on the interactions between adults and students. Adults trained in the assets seem to be more intentional about building relationships with students and helping them to achieve emotional and behavioral success. One person felt that it is important to role model for other school staff how to build positive relationships with students, and that seeing another teacher having strong relationships with students makes a huge impact. She further commented:

Those fence-sitters—those folks who have a sense that there’s something more to teaching than just the subject, but they’re not really sure where they

fit into that—I've seen [assets] have a huge impact [on them]. They're more intentional about building relationships, and being aware of and honoring [students'] individual strengths and needs and life situations, and understanding that all of that goes into how they learn and what we need to teach them. But those teachers who are only focused on teaching the subject...assets don't have so much of an impact on them.

Many people said that learning about the assets didn't necessarily change their own behaviors, but it validated what they "were already doing" and provided a common language and context that everyone could share. One counselor appreciates that the assets allow her to evaluate the other affective programs offered at her school (i.e. RCCP, Kelso's Choices) and know which assets are being built through those programs. "There are all kinds of ways to build assets without specifically identifying them as assets," she said.

One principal said she thought learning about the assets prompted teachers to talk more with students about being a good role model and being mindful of the positive when discussing issues.

Aside from the original AASB training that sparked the SDFS district-wide movement, only one other person directly connected a school's action to a training event. This person specifically mentioned that Clay Roberts' training had mobilized an entire school staff to focus on assets. Other respondents linked behavior or programming changes to a general awareness of assets and not because of a specific training.

Buy-in of schools, district, and community

When informants were asked about the extent to which their individual schools had "bought in" to the assets, responses seemed to correlate with the type of grant the school had received. Schools that had an ICE grant or currently have a SCAI grant indicated that a majority of their staff had embraced the assets and the school's assets initiatives. Part of the application process for these grants also requires school staff to secure commitment from a majority of the staff (the actual required percentage was not determined—responses ranged from 80% to 95%). One elementary principal indicated that Geoff Colvin's school-wide discipline plan had provided the staff buy-in they needed to focus on asset building. This same principal indicated he had not had any staff turnover in three years, aside from retirements. Other schools mentioned that a challenge with maintaining buy-in is the rate of student mobility and staff turnover, and that "keeping the staff's awareness hasn't been easy." At least two representatives from elementary schools said they had incorporated assets into their mission statement. When asked if there was any particular reason why 100% of the school may not be on board, respondents said "there is no anti-assets movement;" that it just depends on the staff's other priorities. One principal said, "100% buy-in is hard to define—are they bought in because they act on it and do something new, or because it's how they live their lives anyway?" Another principal said there was an "enormous difference" in her staff's buy-in because they have an assets-focused counselor who is available to support teachers and use their grant to supply resources for assets initiatives.

One administrator said she felt the schools that adopted the assets did so because the principals and staff wanted to focus on school climate and were ready to use the assets framework. Another respondent said there has been a significant change in buy-in and awareness because of the

support they have from the current executive director of the middle schools (who also oversees the SDFS programs). When she first took over the leadership of these departments, she didn't really have the awareness or understanding of assets; now she devotes an entire staff salary to direct the Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders program within all the middle schools. "I think the fact that she sees the benefit to the AVB program indicates a positive change and gives huge applause to the SDFS department."

One administrator said there is an overall awareness of assets at the administrative level. "I know it's a force, it's always there, it's an awareness. I'm not sure I hear a lot of it coming from the executive director level, but it's certainly something the principals and teachers are aware of. There are [assets] leaders in almost every school."

Although respondents were reluctant to articulate the percentage to which they thought the district had bought in to the assets, there was general agreement that district leadership is supportive of assets initiatives within the schools. One administrator felt that the elementary and middle schools are 100% on board. "I'm pretty comfortable saying 100%," she said, "and saying 100% for anything is hard." She thinks it's "a bit of a harder sell" at the high school level, because there "the focus is less on the student and more on the subject." She says at the high school level "there are people who haven't been able to make the leap that this is embedded in our curriculum—it's not an add-on, it's not the touchy-feely stuff, it's just part of human beings and how we interact. But we're getting there." One of the elementary principals agreed in thinking that assets were more prevalent at the elementary level than in the middle and high schools. Another respondent said "silent mentoring" initiatives have been undertaken in at least three of the nine high schools. "For three out of nine high schools to do that—to me, that's a threshold that we are well on the way to becoming internalized," he said.

Four respondents perceived that a majority of schools in the district are involved with assets to some degree. One SDFS staff mentioned that 63 of the 87 schools have some type of SDFS grant that requires them maintain a level of focus on assets. One principal said there were several elementary principals who retired last year, and she wondered if there were fewer schools involved with assets as a result. Many people mentioned that the district trains new teachers in the assets, but they were unsure if paraprofessionals, principals, or other new staff are also trained. One respondent from an Eagle River school said she felt certain that all of Eagle River is bought in to the assets. She said when SDFS funding was threatened, all of the Eagle River principals (seven elementary, two middle school, one high school) activated their community to advocate to legislators on behalf of SDFS. There seemed to be overall agreement among respondents that the superintendent, school board, and administration are all informed and supportive of assets initiatives.

One person believes most of the schools are involved with the exception of a few back-to-basics schools ("ABC schools"), which are schools that are traditionally "only interested in the academic basics and don't get involved with grants or other frills." However, she said she recently heard of a teacher transferring into an ABC school and starting a running club, which has been very successful at that school. She thinks this is a sign that assets are continuing to spread, and said, "It's refreshing to see one of the last bastions of resistance is getting involved and seeing the value of assets." The increased involvement in Assets Fairs also seems to be a

sign that district involvement has continuously increased over time—where only SDFS school coordinators used to attend, a few respondents mentioned that attendance has grown to include parents, administrators, and other school staff. One counselor also mentioned that assets are discussed at district-wide counselor meetings.

Administrators agree the strongest sign that district leadership is invested in assets is the addition of a Social Emotional Learning curriculum, and a full-time staff person devoted to creating the SEL standards and benchmarks.

One group of respondents discussed the buy-in to assets throughout all of Anchorage. They were asked to reflect on their progress in terms of a rating scale, with “0” representing no community awareness, and “10” indicating that everyone in the city knows about assets. There was group consensus that in 1996, when they began their asset-building efforts, the community was at a zero or one. They agree that now, in 2005, the community is about a six or seven. Respondents believe there are many factions of the community aware of the assets and involved on some level. Other community entities they mentioned include the mayor, United Way (which has an asset-building trainer on staff), numerous non-profit organizations, early childhood service agencies, and several churches. Businesses are just starting to be “on board.”

CURRENT ASSET ACTIVITIES

Specific uses of SCAI grant money and consultation have included the following:

- A lunchtime social skills program for students struggling with social skills and/or academic achievement
- An after-school enrichment program, which included computer lab time, a card and game club, chess club, knitting class, and athletic activities
- A before-school tutorial for the first quarter for students identified as struggling with reading skills.
- A Healthy Kids initiative, targeting kids toward healthy lifestyles and healthy activities. Students who are sedentary and at risk for obesity came to school early and got involved in various activities, such as skating, playing basketball or volleyball. Some parents joined their children in these activities.
- Staff wellness activities: three days per week, activities such as yoga and aerobics were available before school for staff. Some special events were organized, such as a week of before-school “reindeer games” for staff. Book study groups were also formed. The goal for this school was to promote greater bonding and communication among the whole staff, reduce polarization of staff based on the programs with which they were involved, and provide opportunities for fun and connections among the staff. The principal commented, “If people are having fun, feeling valued, and feeling connected, that’s going to translate to the kids. If the staff are unhappy and grumpy, it translates out.”
- Adopt-a-Staff—students created bulletin boards about school staff members, providing opportunities to get to know individuals at the school better.
- A student talent show where students connect at least one asset to the talent being showcased. The assets are announced during the show and in the program.
- A partnership between an elementary school and a high school provides teenage mentors for the younger students. The boys’ basketball team provided some particularly good male role models.
- The purchase of literature on assets, RCCP manuals, curriculum, and assets music (songs about respect, cooperation, etc.)
- Sixth grade assets retreat, which included a half-day of focused conversation on assets. Following the retreat, students gave presentations about assets in the younger grades.
- One day “intensives”—students attend different classes taught by a teacher, student, or parent with special interests in certain areas. The goal is to make connections between people and common interests and encourage constructive use of time.

In addition to the ways that SDFS and Alaska ICE funding is being used for asset-building initiatives, respondents provided additional examples of how Anchorage schools promote assets. Representatives from seven of the eleven schools said assets are included in their regular parent newsletters. Some schools include the “Ideas for Parents” newsletter that is published by Search Institute and distributed in Anchorage by SDFS. Asset-building information from other schools are written by a staff member who chooses specific assets or groups of assets, giving information about what those assets are and how parents can build them in their children.

Representatives from seven of the schools indicated that assets are discussed on morning announcements. One counselor said the student council prepares these announcements by using *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style* and putting that information in their own words. Two principals talked about using the announcements to highlight students or classrooms that have been especially respectful, or done something particularly well. One of these principals gives out little awards for these recognitions, and students receive their awards in the principal's office, which he says helps the students attach positive events to the principal. Another principal says he prioritizes morning announcements and makes an effort to be “visible” on them, but hasn’t included information about assets in announcements or in the newsletter—he “scolds himself” every time he forgets.

Two elementary school respondents reported that they include assets on hallway bulletin boards or signs; one additional person said they have signs “everywhere” that identify how respect, responsibility, and safety (their overarching school expectations) look in the classroom, hallways, lunchroom, or playground.

Respondents from three schools said they introduce the assets at the beginning of the school year. Two of them focus on parent awareness, by distributing packets of information, the *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style* book, and/or through presentations to parents. The third respondent said he presents the assets to his staff during in-service time. Two SDFS staff said every new teacher in the district gets a full day of asset training from SDFS staff, including special education teachers. They said these trainings have been happening for the last eight years, and the district has replaced 60% of their teachers in the last five years.

There are numerous unique initiatives that individual schools have incorporated as asset-building efforts. One elementary school principal spoke of several ways they partner older students with younger students, or regular classroom students with special education students. Another principal said she includes assets language in her grant writing as much as possible. Two other school representatives said they focus assemblies and parent nights around assets.

One elementary school principal encourages students to write four thank-you letters per year to a significant adult at the school. The letters are personally delivered to the adults, and copies of the letters are hung in the hallways. The principal reported that this is a powerful way to recognize adults for everything they do—he’s had teachers in tears because of these letters. He also hopes that staff who aren’t receiving any letters re-evaluate their efforts and place more attention on building relationships.

Students at this school are also involved in staffing decisions as much as possible. A group of students will give a potential candidate a tour of the school, and after the tour, the principal asks the students what they thought of this person and if they’d like to see him or her working at the school. They will have an official interview as well, but many times the committee will take the tour group’s input under consideration.

Several elementary school staff mentioned asset-building activities they have created for students who need additional support and assistance, such as Reading Club, Social Skills group, and a 6th grade girls group to target harassment. In response to their recess discipline problems, one school

started a Recess Club, which provides structured activities with adults during recess. There was a drastic reduction in the number of office referrals during the first month of Recess Club, indicating that this was an effective initiative for this school.

Other respondents discussed youth empowerment efforts as part of their assets initiatives, including Youth Court, student-led conferences, peer mediators, and a forum structure for students to discuss issues relevant to their school or grade. Respondents from one school said the forum structure had been particularly strong. Students in an older grade at this school had begun a discussion on “cruelty in schools,” and eventually representatives of that grade led a discussion on this topic at a community meeting with parents and staff, and were also planning to make presentations with students in the younger grades.

One of the high school principals highlighted ways his school had used the assets to promote academic achievement. One of the requirements for a school to pass the qualifying exams is that 95% of the student body (including 95% of each identified subgroup) is present to take the exams. Two years ago, only one of the ten subgroups at this school had a 95% turnout. More than forty upperclassmen who had already passed the test identified students who had already missed two days of school, and focused their efforts on encouraging them to come to school on test day. These students also spoke in every freshman and sophomore English class about how important these tests are to the school. Teachers had the option of trading an in-service day to spend the Saturday before the tests calling parents to remind them of the upcoming tests. Ninety-five to ninety-eight percent of the students were in school all three days.

The leaders of this school also prompted their students to strongly consider post-high school education by paying for every sophomore and junior to take the PSAT. The principal said this provided a purpose for counselors to meet with students and talk with them about future plans. Furthermore, once you’ve taken the PSAT, colleges start sending promotional information, which prompts the student to give some thought to college. In the past, approximately 200 students had taken the test. School staff promoted the test in school and at parent night, and promised a pizza party for all the students who took the test. More than 600 students took the test that day, and was overall a very positive experience. The principal said,

It was a great day—600 kids, half the staff were there to proctor, and afterwards we ordered 200 pizzas, listened to music and just relaxed. From there, on that particular day, it so happened that we were also in the state football finals, we had a gymnastics meet, and a dance recital. We put a huge article in the paper about this day, where we had over 50% of our student body directly involved in some student activity that day. This was in October. It was so positive, kids and teachers felt so good about their school...it really made a positive boost for the year.

Last year, the high schools began to include Change of Heart workshops for various student groups. Change of Heart is a type of diversity training facilitated by SDFS staff where students learn to see past stereotypes. One SDFS staff member said the Change of Heart workshops empower students to enhance their school climate. This year, students from last year’s workshop were trained to lead workshops with younger students, and they trained 600 freshmen in this model.

Another SDFS representative said she'd recently been to a faculty meeting at one of the high schools to make a presentation. She witnessed the principal announcing to his faculty of "200 or so" what the "asset of the month" was, and ways the staff could focus on that asset. She said, "What was really interesting to me was that people had asset books with them, and as he was talking, they opened up their books. They took it very seriously."

One principal shared that he struggles with knowing there isn't immediate visible evidence of his school's focus on assets. "But," he says, "I truly believe, from my experience as an administrator, that if you name something, you're going to kill it. So, even though I'd like to do a little bit more with the assets, instead of naming it and beating the horse to death, we just do it." He also mentioned his attempt to host a parent asset training last year, but had only two parents show up, despite their efforts to publicize the event. He hopes to try it again, and perhaps offer the training in conjunction with a family night at their school.

Although several respondents said a focus on assets "isn't something extra" and enhances the schools' efforts to succeed even with the addition of NCLB expectations, one principal disagreed. This school leader mentioned that their school used to have a significant focus on assets, but with the addition of NCLB, they had to refocus their attention on those requirements. Although assets are still important to the school, there is less emphasis on them now. Another principal commented that NCLB was placing "tremendous stress" on schools to meet academic standards while at the same time, the grants that help schools focus on student strengths and interests are being cut. She said, "We need to foster [students'] passions to get them excited about learning in order for them to do well. The more canned academic programs we have to do, the more we miss out on fostering that individual excitement."

Students in Anchorage have been spreading the assets message through a few different avenues. Alaska ICE has trained two student groups in a TOPS, and students from both of these trainings have developed their own presentation metaphor for the assets. One group begins their presentation talking about Native Alaskan culture and things that are important to Native communities, using several examples from Native culture. Then they pass out string and paper with holes in it to each table. They bend up the sides of the paper and people begin to weave the string through the holes to make a basket. Each time someone does it, they have to name supportive things they've done to help a student. One respondent offered the following about this presentation:

I've seen groups of 30 adult teachers break down crying because they've been so moved. [The students] just talk about what a basket means or what a basket does...in a Native community baskets hold things, support things, transport things—it's a very vital object. It's like the dreamcatcher presentation, but it's a little more specific to Native Alaskan culture and to the audience who participates.

The second group of students has created another metaphor, which uses adult and juvenile bears to illustrate the assets concepts. Both groups have given numerous presentations of their metaphors within the schools, for community groups, and at the SDFS Assets Fairs.

Some students made an effort to bridge the communication gap between students and their parents by developing *Ten Things Parents Can Talk about with Their Teens*. These students challenged themselves and their peers to go through the assets checklist (a brief questionnaire included in *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style*) and then take it home and have their parents go through it, which ideally will prompt a conversation between parent and child about assets. One respondent said, “They brought that movement back to life—to model the importance of parents knowing what this asset building model is about. And those kids now made a DVD to explain to parents what [the assets] mean. “

At the district level, respondents identified several examples of how the district is maintaining a focus on assets. Through the Parents as Liaisons program, there is an opportunity to translate the assets into various languages. Several principals have handed prospective teachers some assets materials in their interview process and informed them that assets are a priority at their schools. Although it wasn’t necessarily in assets language, one respondent said social supports and involvement in clubs were included in a student’s IEP. One SDFS staff member said people from outside Anchorage have sought jobs in ASD because of the district’s focus on assets.

Several administrative and SDFS respondents discussed the inclusion of Social and Emotional Learning in the ASD curriculum as evidence of the district’s buy-in to assets. The SEL plan is part of a six-year instructional strategic plan that is being implemented to promote greater curricular cohesiveness across the district. District administrators are currently developing SEL standards and benchmarks that will be included on report cards by 2008. As part of this plan, curriculum directors have developed a list of all effective programs within the district (such as RCCP, Kelso’s Choices, etc.) and they are aligning those program goals with assets. They plan to recommend to school leaders a few programs that build the most assets and meet the most SEL standards. The SEL standards will also be connected to the state’s culturally responsive standards, and academic programs will also list the assets and SEL standards that are being met. Administrators are hoping to integrate programs and concepts as much as possible, using assets as the overall umbrella and showing how various programs accomplish asset building. Administrators’ immediate goal is to clearly communicate throughout the district that the SEL curriculum is not an add-on, but more of an intentional focus on things that most schools are already doing. One administrator said this is an effort to instate a district-wide emphasis on social, emotional, and behavioral learning, rather than depending upon each principal to keep these initiatives in place.

When asked if the district would be pursuing SEL if they didn’t have this history with assets, one administrator said, “No. Assets gave us the vocabulary to think about institutionalizing it, and they are a good organizational tool. They put it into a nice, organized framework that makes it easy for the brain to understand.”

Collaboration

Anchorage School Business Partnerships began in 1991 as a joint venture between the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce and the Anchorage School District. The program involves hundreds of businesses throughout the city. Partners provide schools with guest speakers, classroom volunteers, on-the-job work experience for students, material and monetary resources,

and other special activities. Several school representatives highlighted their school-business partnership as a very positive thing, while others said it had been difficult to secure meaningful relationships with their local businesses. One elementary school has Wal-Mart and Subway helping with their recycling efforts by giving rides and providing trash bags. A department store provides their local school with healthy snacks. One principal said two local businesses were very generous and helpful during a time of school crisis. Another elementary school has a partnership with a Native corporation, and every two weeks staff from the corporation come to read to the children. This corporation also co-sponsored a Dad's Night with the school; although school staff said it was nice, it was poorly attended. One principal said,

The best investment [businesses] can make to have a happy, safe, well-functioning community is to have strong children in their society. Right now it's all thrown on the schools, or all on the shoulders of parents—people who don't have children think they don't have the responsibility. Well, they have just as much responsibility to help a child from falling through the cracks. It's money well invested to pursue these partnerships.

Another principal said, "It's not about what we can get from the businesses, it's about what we can share, and getting our kids to know that people in the community value them, and getting the kids to be able to give back." A representative of SDFS recently provided a keynote address on the topic of assets at the annual Chamber of Commerce awards banquet—there were 360 people in attendance.

Anchorage schools have formed other types of collaborative relationships in addition to businesses. The district partnership with Cook Inlet Tribal Council is a collaboration that places teachers and counselors in eight schools to provide educational and social services to native students. While this collaboration is recognized for its efforts to help Native students be more successful, one respondent commented that the relationship between the individual schools and CITC might not be as strong as it could be. This individual said that while the district leadership expresses support and cooperation for CITC, the school principals don't always extend the warmest welcome, and they may not be fully aware of CITC's goals and activities.

One counselor and one administrator each indicated that many schools have partnered with local churches to host events or workshops, and the church leaders have been provided with information about the assets. One administrator said, "The district works with the police department, the municipality, juvenile justice...we literally work with every group that wants to work with us. For instance, the Samoan group has some elders that we work with, and also the Hmong group." Another respondent said assets presentations have been given to the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary, and other community organizations. One principal said his school has "adopted" the local fire station. The school held a fundraiser for the station, and every year students plant a garden in front of the station. He said, "We do things for them because we appreciate what they do, and we really want to get that through to our families and kids. It's about hooking kids up with the community—that's important."

Two counselors and two principals mentioned collaborative efforts with social service agencies, which are very helpful in providing support to struggling students and families. Students who are homeless, for example, are given transportation vouchers to help them stay at their school regardless of where they're living. One respondent also mentioned that the Alaska Department of

Behavioral Health, which funds all the drug, alcohol, and mental health efforts in the community, recently put out a new RFP “permeated” with assets. He said they’ve “switched their focus around from a deficit focus to a youth development focus. And it includes the ability for us as a district to apply for funds from DHHS to work on school climate and school connectedness. That’s unbelievable, that they would do that.”

Barriers/resistance

Some respondents were asked if they had experienced any barriers or resistance to their asset-building efforts. There was general consensus that no one had expressed any disagreement with the concept of the assets; overall, when people learn about the assets, it seems to make sense to them. One respondent said she would hear over and over again from teachers and parents, “Where was this stuff when I was raising my kids?” Another person said the assets excited people to do something positive to reduce teen risk behaviors in ways that prevention programs do not.

Despite the agreement that assets are worthwhile, however, respondents did identify some resistance to implementing assets initiatives. Time and priorities were two common themes—in particular, school staff reported it was difficult to give assets the amount of attention they wanted to give them. One counselor said, “The reality of the day-to-day makes it challenging because so much of it is crisis response.” Several people mentioned it was hard to keep the awareness level up because of constant turnover. Schools where the principals are not receptive to assets are not able to maintain their focus on assets, and schools that have built strong assets initiatives have done so largely because there is one staff person there who is willing to invest time and energy into promoting assets.

Perceptions

Every respondent that was asked about how adults perceive students in ASD gave a positive reply. A principal of a highly diverse school said, “[Teachers] like [the students]. They’re not scared of them; they see the potential. If the teachers don’t like our diverse population, if they don’t like challenges, they transfer to other schools. But we have very few seeking transfers.” One middle school representative said,

You can’t be a middle school teacher unless you like middle school kids—there’s no question that it’s a hard group to work with. They’re kids, they’re adults, they’re happy, they’re sad...we have, honestly, the greatest teachers. It’s incredible. You walk into some of our classrooms and see how enthusiastic the teachers are and all the stuff they do and how they try to organize stuff so it fits middle school kids and be flexible and have a sense of humor—so if you’re talking about the middle school division, we have a huge group of adults that love middle school kids. I think if you walk into any school, I think you’d see that.

Another respondent said, “We operate on a very strengths-based philosophy. We take the kid in front of us, see what’s there, and go forward in a very positive manner.” One administrator said, “I’m very comfortable saying the vast majority of adults in this district perceive students as capable, productive, fabulous, wonderful people. Are there people out there who are scared of kids? Sure. But we’re working on it.” One SDFS representative witnessed a high school principal offer the following invitation to all his new freshmen: “When you see me in the hallway, you come up to me and I want you to tell me not just what’s going well at school, but I want to know everything that is a challenge for you so that I can make it better.” The SDFS person added, “This is a principal who is always in the hallway—I wouldn’t say that about all our principals.”

Respondents offered a varied list of teacher characteristics and actions that show they care about their students. They said they know a teacher cares when he/she takes the curriculum and organizes it so younger students can understand it; works individually with students and bases the learning on the student’s interests and needs; talks with parents; volunteers to run track meets or after-school activities; skips lunch to tutor students; talks with them outside of class or in the halls; and attends student events. One administrator recalled that a new anti-bullying program was implemented for middle schools and not one of the 500 teachers complained about including it in their curriculum. She said “that’s commitment on the part of teachers to make sure kids are safe and do well.”

It seemed more difficult for respondents to articulate how students perceive adults throughout ASD, or even in their own schools, but responses were generally positive. Two administrative respondents said they thought most students would give their teachers a “pretty high thumbs up” and that “most students like and respect their teachers and principal.” Another respondent said,

We have kids that divulge information to us and of course we’ll report and make sure they’re safe, so they understand that school’s a safe place. We have a big program explaining to middle school kids about suicide and encouraging them to let us know in case there’s a problem, and we have numerous kids

every year telling us their concerns about their friends. You don't do that unless you feel safe. You'll also only do that when you feel that the adults are reliable and will respond. I think that's something we try to encourage throughout the district, not just in middle schools.

One principal indicated that they were working on improving the students' perceptions of adults. Another respondent thought it seemed that students are really receptive to their teachers, and have become more likely to ask "the hard questions" of their teachers. "Instead of thinking that the teacher doesn't have time," she said, "they realize that their teachers are approachable and will take the time to answer their questions."

Several respondents said that perceptions have changed since the district raised awareness about assets, particularly in how adults perceive students. One administrator said before people started learning about assets, "there was a perception that there wasn't much you could do about students who didn't have good homes. Now, assets give students and adults the idea that we can overcome things."

One school principal said, "Now that we know about needing positive role models, we talk about how a student doesn't really have anybody like that and we're those people." This principal also felt that knowing about the importance of asset building also helped the school staff approve a decision to use teaching positions as counselor positions. Some respondents felt that teachers are more likely to acknowledge issues happening outside the academic area since knowing about assets, and share their own personal stories about being a student. Others commented that having a common language helps teachers and counselors use the assets format to talk with students and families about how to build more assets. One respondent felt a focus on assets has changed student perceptions of adults by empowering them to approach adults when they need something, ask more questions, and in general be more active participants in their education.

Role of School in Assets

In general, respondents felt there is a place for assets in the schools, but there are some differing opinions about what that role should be. Two principals said the assets should be incorporated into everything the school is doing, from policy-making to classroom teaching. One of these principals said, "I can talk about it all I want, but if there's nothing happening in the classrooms, no discussions or interactions elsewhere, it's just a campaign out there. Our role is to keep promoting, keep reminding, not let it get buried in other stuff." Several other principals and counselors expressed that the best role for schools is to keep exposing students, staff, and parents to the framework and "do what you can" to help them understand the role they can play with assets. One administrator advocated building stronger awareness among the students and empowering them to build their own assets, and also to increase parent awareness so they can help increase the assets in their child(ren). She said, "[The schools] can educate the community, but we can't move it much by ourselves." Another administrator felt assets provide a fair framework for schools because "they divide up what schools can reasonably provide and what things are not in schools' ability or responsibility." She added, "Schools are natural place for assets—it's where the kids are."

OUTCOMES

Parents connected to schools

Representatives from five schools reported that they have high parent involvement, while staff from three other schools indicated that their parent involvement was low. Of schools with lower parent involvement, respondents linked it to high rates of mobility, higher percentages of students from struggling families, or because the families don't speak English or don't have positive memories of school. One principal said families aren't coming in to the school as much, "partly because we've become better at keeping them informed about things—progress reports are sent via email, and teachers can be emailed directly."

Two respondents said it seemed that parents were more involved at the elementary grade levels than they were with the high schools. Two other respondents said that, in general, parents were usually quite satisfied with their child's teacher, less satisfied with the school, and even less satisfied with the district overall. They both cited research that discusses how people have a tendency to feel more positively about the place or person with whom they have the most direct connection.

Two elementary principals said that they "trip over" their parent volunteers because there are so many. One of these principals said that his school works really hard to help the families feel connected, by the way they're greeted when they visit the school, and by holding various family activities at the school. Teachers who may not be as comfortable reaching out to parents are matched up with a peer mentor to help them feel more comfortable with it. He said, "I've run into many parents who have transferred out of [this school] because they moved, and they've told me they don't particularly care for their new school. They can't quite put their finger on it, they use words like 'it doesn't feel the same, it's just not as involved, they're just not as friendly.'"

One principal said there is a very active parent community at his school, but those who are involved are primarily white parents and the diversity of the student body isn't reflected. He said they are working hard to recruit more parent involvement from other ethnic groups. A SDFS staff person said schools generally struggle with access to parents, and the PTAs ebb and flow throughout the district. One administrator commented that consistent parent involvement is "a hard nut to crack."

Most of the school staff felt a focus on assets improved their parent involvement to some degree, but were unable to identify specific ways the assets had helped. An elementary principal said if they weren't using assets as their focus, the parent involvement probably wouldn't be as high as it is. Another principal said his parent group is aware of assets, but not necessarily active with them. A third principal indicated that parents become so involved because they are "natural asset builders," but probably wouldn't verbalize that they're involved *because* of assets. In talking about specific gatherings of Native parents, one respondent said they use the assets to help parents understand how important it is to be involved. However, she added, "Whether we're

explicitly calling it assets or whether it's just the concepts, they're hearing the message one way or another."

Businesses connected to schools

Every respondent said businesses were involved with the schools, in large part because of the district School Business Partnerships. Businesses offer their partner schools donations, matching grants for fundraisers, opportunities for service-learning projects, and reductions on ticket prices for entrance fees or special events.

Most respondents did not attribute any of the business involvement to the school's focus on asset building, but rather because the district had promoted these collaborations. One counselor said, "It's hard to tease that out. We do these things because they're good for kids, and what's good for kids dovetails with the assets."

School climate

All of the respondents felt that their individual schools have a positive school climate. Many of the elementary school representatives quoted their school's report card surveys, in which 80-90% of the students reported they feel safe and welcome at their school, that teachers treat them with respect, and when they have a problem, they know who to go to for help. Positive responses on these questions were somewhat lower in the middle and high schools, averaging more in the 55-65% range. Respondents generally attributed some of their positive school climate to a focus on assets, although most were reluctant to quantify what they can attribute to assets versus what can be attributed to other programs or their natural leadership philosophy. One principal commented that staff morale is at an all-time high, and he said that has a lot to do with the assistance of the SCAI grant. Another elementary school respondent said the anti-bullying curriculum that has been implemented in all elementary schools has had a significantly positive impact on how safe students feel at her school.

One counselor said she's seen a "dramatic improvement" in school climate at her school in the last few years, in part because of a focus on providing the students with more prosocial activities and positive alternatives for their free time. In addition, at this school, a new principal has brought an inclusive leadership style and there is an increased sense of open communication among the staff. At a recent community meeting involving parents and other residents of the local area, one school received favorable feedback about their "talented and friendly staff," "clean and safe facility," "positive and welcoming environment," and "recognition and celebration of student achievements." One administrator felt that assets have contributed to school climate because they've taken away "the feeling that there's nothing I can do" and helped schools find new ways to be encouraging.

Organizational climate

Respondents gave fairly high ratings on the organizational climate of their individual schools, and slightly lower ratings on the overall district organization. School staff from six of the schools felt there is a team or collaborative spirit within their schools, and that staff, students, and parents

were encouraged to give their input on decisions. Everyone agreed that the district's organization had improved since the current superintendent was hired, but some felt that communication could improve between district administration and individual school administration.

Only one of the respondents thought improved teamwork could be attributed to the introduction of assets. When asked if assets played a role in the organizational climate of a school, one elementary principal, who leads a school with "strong staff collaboration," said, "How can you possibly know what part of that is assets? If we recognize assets as 'good teaching,' how can it not impact our organizational climate? But to quantify it is difficult." Another elementary principal felt very strongly that assets improved the sense that the staff works as a team. "By setting up an environment where every student and staff member feels empowered to participate, how can you not be building assets?"

Student connectedness to school

Overall, respondents felt students were fairly well connected to their schools. There is more certainty of strong connections in the younger grades. School staff gave some credit for these connections to their intentional asset building, naming the presence of significant adults as a particular reason that students feel connected to their school. One administrator commented, "As teachers are able to embed [assets] into their curriculum and instruction even more, kids will be able to make a connection specifically, not just to the subject, but also to the teacher, and both of those are going to increase achievement."

Student connectedness to community

Respondents were largely unsure of how well their students were connected to the community, particularly outside of school. Two respondents used service-learning projects and senior projects as examples of ways for students to become more connected, and three of the elementary school principals identified volunteering efforts as examples.

Academic achievement

When asked if asset building has an impact on academic achievement, respondents generally said they do, although these perceptions were largely based on "gut feelings" and most could not base their answers on statistics. One respondent referred to data presented in a workshop by Clay Roberts that showed a correlation between the number of assets and achievement levels, and said that information was "motivation for continuing to promote assets." One principal said her school had to take away their focus on assets when NCLB came into play. "This whole NCLB thing is a big cloud raining down on us," she said.

Risk behaviors

Respondents felt fairly confidant that the school district is making efforts to reduce student risk behaviors; they are somewhat less impressed with the city's efforts to do so. School staff felt the anti-bullying and conflict resolution programs are helpful, and numerous positive comments were made about the SDFS department. No specific comments were made about alcohol or drug

prevention efforts either from the schools or the city. Two administrative respondents felt strongly that there is a connection between ASD's asset building efforts and a reduction in risk behaviors, although neither of them knew of local statistics that could support this.

Spotlight

One high school principal provided data from two years of staff and student surveys that revealed a positive increase in attitudes and perceptions that could be attributed to a school-wide focus on assets. The principal said,

The only real change between last year (03-04) and the year before that (02-03) was that we added a focus on Developmental Assets [in 03-04]. No matter what we've done, it's been about getting more and more faculty to understand the importance of really focusing on students, getting to know the kids, and caring about them. If kids know this is a caring place, then they have more buy-in to school, and a whole lot of these other things start falling into line.

Based on responses of nearly two-thirds of the students and half of the teachers, the following increases were reported:

Survey Items	2002-2003	2003-2004
<i>From student surveys:</i>		
• Our school rules are fair	25.3%	41.8%
• I am safe at school	47%	56%
• If I have a problem, I know who I can go to for help	54.8%	63.2%
• I feel welcome at school	48.5%	59.5%
<i>From teacher surveys:</i>		
• I am satisfied with my involvement with decision-making at this school	47.6%	83%
• The principal and other staff provide me with the support I need with students	69%	86%
• I feel safe at my school	79%	94%
• Students are safe at my school	80%	94%

The principal also reported improvements in the discipline statistics, without having made any changes to the discipline system.

- Assaults down 42%; fighting down 71%
- Drug/alcohol use down 27%
- Withdrawal/failure rate down 46%

In addition, the school reported a 300% increase in PSAT participation (due in large part to an asset-building campaign), an 18% increase in AP subjects offered (up 36% in the past two years), and a 23% increase in individual AP exams taken (up 70% in the past two years). The daily attendance rates also improved.

Future Funding

Respondents are appreciative of the grant funds that they have received from ICE and SDFS, and unanimously agree that the funding has been beneficial to them. Two principals mentioned that SDFS funding was nearly cut recently, and one of them had played an active role in lobbying

efforts to reinstate their funding. One principal said he especially appreciate how SDFS had changed the way they provided the grants; that offering unique consultation and support was much more successful than expecting schools to deliver a specific curriculum without assistance.

Although every respondent indicated that losing the funding would be detrimental, there seemed to be consensus that the schools and the overall district would find a way to continue the assets initiatives. One principal said, “[The SCAI grant] has launched us in a new direction. As long as I am here we will continue to focus on the assets model.” Another said, “Will we keep these things going? Yes. As long as positive things are happening, it seems the district...will help us find a way to continue it. I’d like to institutionalize some of these things so that even if I walk out of here, this is still the way things happen around here.” An administrator stated that “the district certainly wouldn’t give up the framework of assets. We probably wouldn’t have as many people trained in it and it would be harder to get the information out to everyone, especially new people to the district. But would we give up the model? No. We’d continue with the model.” On the other hand, another administrator felts that a loss of funding now could inhibit the district’s progress, and concluded the following:

Assets have been around enough, been promoted enough, that I think we’re getting that institutionalization going on. I don’t think it’s there yet. Losing funding right now, when it’s at kind of a critical juncture, would be devastating. I truly think we’re at a tipping point of making it part of daily business, part of who we are, what we do, what we believe. If we could hold it out for a few more years, we can really make that shift.

When respondents were asked about one thing they believe they are doing particularly well with regard to asset building, several individuals mentioned the extracurricular activities they had implemented with their SDFS grants. One elementary school representative said the “silent mentoring” was especially powerful, while one counselor and one administrator noted the Geoff Colvin school-wide expectations in the elementary schools. Representatives from one elementary school were particularly proud of their efforts to make home visits to all their students at the beginning of the school year, and another counselor highlighted their talent show, which ties student talents to the assets. One principal felt the district overall really has a willingness to try new strategies if they seem to be good for the students, and another principal felt his school has benefited from building a common language around the assets with the whole staff. Another school counselor said that every staff person at her school looks at the whole child and strives to meet each individual’s needs. An administrator stated that having programs like RCCP and Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders system-wide is very positive for the district.

When asked to identify one way in which they’d like to see their assets initiative grow or change in some way, respondents offered a variety of answers. Three school principals said they’d like to promote more parent awareness of the assets, while four principals mentioned their desire to build more student awareness and involvement in assets initiatives. One principal hopes to provide his staff with a “refresher course” on the assets at the beginning of next school year, and two counselors said they’d like to use the assets language more intentionally and increase the use of that vocabulary within their schools. One respondent would like to see the Assets Fairs be site-based, instead of district-wide, giving each school the opportunity to involve their whole school community. One school staff person said he’d like to see greater outreach to the general

community of Anchorage and promote even greater awareness within the whole city. Another respondent would like to see more consistent buy-in to assets initiatives from the school principals throughout the district, and more institutionalization of a school's asset-building efforts so the initiative isn't dependent upon the principal's receptivity. One administrator echoed this remark when she said she'd like to see the assets framework treated less as an add-on and more integrated into everything else that's going on.

Some respondents were asked specifically how Alaska ICE has made a difference in their school or the district overall. One principal acknowledged, "If the SCAI grant hadn't been there, I still would have been somewhat successful. But this allowed me to create some programs that link assets to achievement. It really helped. Achievement skyrocketed, and discipline went down." Another principal thinks "it's wonderful that AASB supports this" and finds the *Helping Kids Succeed...* and *Helping Little Kids Succeed...* books valuable and helpful. However, she said she "can't say whether ICE did or didn't make a difference. But even though we can't directly attribute [low office referrals] to assets, it's important to focus on them. It provides a definition of what is 'good teaching' or 'good parenting.' It's a form of parent education with real value." One administrator commented that it's hard to specify whether the SCAI schools have benefited because of support from ICE or because they are led by principals who have a high level of buy-in to the assets. "Although," she said, "if the leader had something to do with bringing that support in, then there's your connection."

When asked if there is a difference in the school district because of the focus on assets, respondents generally agreed that assets have had an impact. One respondent, who has been with the district for 16 years and consistently involved with SDFS, said, "When I was first going to meetings, there would only be the school SDFS coordinators in attendance. Now it's likely that there are six or seven school representatives, including the principal, and maybe a custodian. This year four people went to the assets fair from our school and I noticed we were one of the smaller groups."

Numerous respondents mentioned that the assets are "common language" throughout the district and even into the community. They said this is important, because it gives everyone a foundation from which to base their conversations and ideas, and it is helpful to feel this consistency across the district. One principal admitted that "it's another thing for us to think about," but she felt it's important enough, and that "a lot of the assets are even more important than academics." One administrator reflected on where they've come since they learned about assets, and prior to knowing about assets, "a lot of people thought you either make it or you don't make it. There was very little thought about resiliency." Several other respondents said learning about the assets was "a sigh of relief;" that this was "something positive I could do." One person said the only resistance to assets comes from thinking it's "something more to do," but she stated that people need to understand that assets provide them with the opportunity to do things "smarter, not harder."

Student respondents said it is important for parents to know about the assets and help their child want to be successful. They also reported that in an "asset-rich" school, you would see the teachers and principal in the hall a lot more, interacting with the students and encouraging them, and there would be a general sense of respect for diversity throughout the school.

SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS

Anchorage School District's Safe and Drug-Free Schools department has been using the assets framework to guide their activities for nearly ten years, and these efforts have made an obvious impact on the district. Because of including assets goals in SDFS grants, the 63 schools (72% of the district) that receive one of their grants have some degree of assets awareness and involvement. Several individuals indicated that the district's progress toward implementing a Social and Emotional Learning curriculum has been directly influenced by the incorporation of assets into the schools.

Participants in this study overwhelmingly agreed that assets are worthwhile and have made a positive impact on the students and the district overall. However, while district administrators discuss the assets as a concept that they have tried to integrate into all other existing programs, many school principals and counselors seem to think of the assets as an additional program, and many have found the assets hard to incorporate into their daily routine. With the introduction of a district-wide focus on Social and Emotional Learning and an accompanying emphasis on district-wide assets initiatives, it will be important to track the impact of these efforts as perceived by individual school leaders.

On a technical note, this site poses an interesting issue of language or semantics. Rather than promoting the Developmental Assets as a separate concept or program, ASD has shown how the assets can be “translated” into the language of existing programs, which encourages a sense of inclusiveness and shows how each of those programs are already asset-building programs. Overall, there appears to be general agreement throughout ASD that naming them “assets” is not necessary. However, it was called to my attention that the School Climate and Connectedness survey uses the word “assets,” which was confusing to many of the participants because of the district’s variable use of the term “assets.” Furthermore, there seems to be a pervading belief that building awareness about assets has been a more focused effort with the adults of the community than with the students. This further adds to the dilemma of asking students about an unfamiliar term, although they may be familiar with how those concepts are embodied at their school.

While the overall district attention to assets is impressive, and gathering the historical context is enlightening, it is important to note the difficulty in identifying the influence of Alaska ICE on ASD’s initiatives. SDFS was already focusing on assets before Alaska ICE even existed, and, in fact, the director of SDFS was involved in helping AASB acquire the grant for their statewide community engagement initiative. In addition, because ASD has integrated the assets concepts into numerous existing effective programs, there is a general reluctance to attribute any outcomes specifically to a focus on assets. Finally, also because of the deep incorporation of assets into district activities, many other resources in addition to Alaska ICE funds are now dedicated to the work of asset building throughout ASD. Many respondents said they would be concerned if SDFS funding were in jeopardy, and a few of them would be affected by the loss of ICE funding, but in general, respondents stated that the district would find ways to continue their asset-building efforts even if these resources became unavailable.

For these reasons, it may be helpful to focus more closely on the following in the next two years of this evaluation project to better understand the current impact of Alaska ICE in ASD:

- Initiatives led by individuals who are funded by ICE: Youth Assets Specialist (full time); Social and Emotional Learning curriculum coordinator (half time); Parents as Liaisons program coordinator (half time)
- Specific use and impact of SCAI grants in individual schools
- Progress of implementing district-wide SEL standards
- Impact of administrative change on Abbott Loop Elementary school, a SCAI school and one that currently exhibits a strong assets focus. The principal of this school was a strong advocate for integrating assets, and is transferring to a different school next year.
- Additionally, it may be interesting to visit the former Abbott Loop principal at his new school, especially if the new school was not formerly focused on assets.
- The Middle School Executive Director is also leaving her position. As this person supervises the SDHS department, there may be some implications on this project.
- Any connection between the above and other ICE initiatives in the community of Anchorage.

Appendix 1: Respondent Positions and Descriptions

<i>Position</i>	<i>Description</i>
Elementary School (ES) principal	This principal is in her second year at her current school, and formerly had an ICE grant for two years.
ES principal	In her eight years of being a principal, she has been working with assets the whole time.
ES principal	In her thirty years with ASD, she has been a regular and special education teacher and principal at five Anchorage schools. She has been at her current school for four years.
ES principal	Prior to his nine years as an elementary school principal, this individual has also served the district as supervisor of secondary special education and as a teacher in regular and special education classrooms. He has been involved with asset building at two Anchorage elementary schools.
ES counselor	In her sixteen years with ASD, this counselor has also worked at an alternative high school and on the staff of SDFS. Prior to moving to Alaska, she worked with adolescents and adults in residential treatment programs.
ES counselor	In her eleven years at her current school, this counselor has been actively involved with numerous prevention activities, parenting workshops, after-school programs, and many affective programs such as RCCP.
ES counselor	Serving as a counselor at this school for four years, this individual coordinates her school's asset-building initiatives, organizes quarterly recognition assemblies, and supervises the high school mentors that work with her students.
ES Family School Service Coordinator	This individual focuses on helping parents build stronger connections with the school through trainings, home visits, and advocating the PALS program. She has worked in this school for 21 years.
Middle School (MS) principal	In her 23 years of working in education, this principal has spent eight years at this school.
MS counselor	This first-year counselor focuses on helping seventh graders, and previously taught special education for 2.5 years.
MS counselor	This individual is in her first year as a counselor, and her third year as a resident of Anchorage. She specifically works with sixth graders.
High School (HS) principal	This principal is also a graduate of the Anchorage School District. In his twenty years as an employee of the district, he has served as teacher and coach in middle schools, high schools, and the alternative school, before becoming a high school administrator. This is his fifth year in his current position.
HS principal	This individual is completing his first year as a principal, which was preceded by three years as assistant principal at another Anchorage high school.

Appendix 1 (con't.): Respondent Positions and Descriptions

<i>Position</i>	<i>Description</i>
Safe and Drug Free Schools (SDFS) staff	This group interview included the following participants: SDFS Coordinator; three Youth Development Specialists; Youth Asset Specialist; Parents as Liaisons Coordinator; Peaceable Schools Coordinator; and the Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders Coordinator. Among these individuals there is a wide range of roles and responsibilities, as well as a diversity of histories with the district. A few of them have been with SDFS since it began using the assets framework in 1996.
District Curriculum Executive Director	Now in her second year as curriculum coordinator, this individual was previously an elementary school principal for eight years with ASD.
District Social/Emotional Curriculum Coordinator	Prior to this new role, this individual worked as a teacher in the district for ten years.
Executive Director of ASD Middle Schools	This administrator oversees the operations of nine middle schools, one K-12 alternative program, and the SDFS department. In her 37 years with the district, she has also served as a principal and teacher.
District NCLB Coordinator	Prior to her two years as the district coordinator of No Child Left Behind, this individual taught high school English classes for fifteen years. She has always been very involved with assets and SEL programs, and has also led trainings for the Developing Capable People and RCCP programs.
Cook Inlet Tribal Council school staff	In her fourth year with CITC, this individual coordinates CITC programs at one of the high schools and also helps with research for CITC.
High school students (4)	These four students have all attended one of the student TOPS trainings facilitated by Alaska ICE. They attend the same high school, and are in grades nine and ten.

Appendix 2: Anchorage School District Mission Statement and Goals

ASD Mission Statement

To educate all students for success in life.

ASD Goals

1. Increase student academic achievement using data to guide adoption of curriculum, methods, materials, and professional development specifically designed to ensure that each group as designated by No Child Left Behind and the Quality Schools Initiative makes adequate yearly progress.
2. Establish and maintain a supportive and effective learning environment by:
 - providing safe, caring, barrier-free schools,
 - promoting health and wellness,
 - continuing to retain, recruit and train highly qualified staff,
 - challenging each student academically,
 - maximizing opportunities for lifelong learning,
 - offering reinforcing extracurricular activities, and
 - collaborating with other community agencies to maximize opportunities for lifelong learning
3. Ensure public accountability through:
 - continued participation in the State and Federal required testing programs,
 - continued preparation and publication of the Profile of Performance, budget basics, and budget and bond summaries,
 - effective consultation with community to ensure wise use of financial resources and responsible construction and maintenance of facilities, and
 - effective communication with students, staff, parents, community and government at all levels.

Examples of mission statements from other schools included in site visit:

Education is the responsibility of the home, school, and community. Everyone in the partnership should ask themselves, "Is it good for the students?"

All school staff and community are dedicated to ensure that all students learn in a safe and respectful environment.

To create life-long learners and happy, functioning positive members of society.

Guiding Principles (specific to one school)

1. The staff embraces respect for individuality, community, and learning.
2. We will provide a safe school environment that is conducive to learning.
3. We will try to reach every student.
4. We are a learning community. Teachers will use different teaching styles to meet individual needs.
5. Teachers will work with the home to provide and promote learning, respect, and community.
6. Adults are accessible to all students.
7. Teachers are accountable. We will do what we say we will do.
8. Our school will be parent friendly.
9. All input is valuable.
10. Each individual brings a unique contribution to the school.
11. Teachers are committed to the process of education and to helping students find the path of learning.
12. Diversity is a critical part of our school. Every child is number one and in first place.
13. School is a place where learning is fun.