

A graphic of a spotlight shining from the top left towards the center of the page.

Alaska School SPOTLIGHT

Galena City School District

December 2023

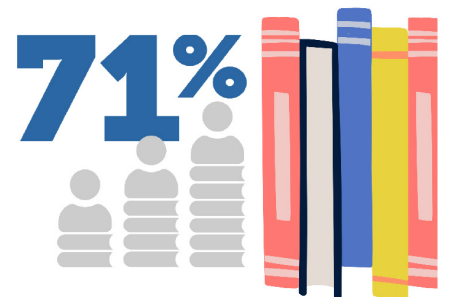


Galena is a small village of about 500 people in central Alaska on the Yukon River, roughly 300 miles west of Fairbanks. In addition to our local Sidney C. Huntington School, (ECE-3 –12th grades), the district also serves students from regions across Alaska in our high school residential school, Galena Interior Learning Academy (GILA), our homeschool support program, Interior Distance Education of Alaska (IDEA), and our online alternative high school education support program, iGrad Alaska.

In 2022-2023, the Galena City School District embarked on a purposeful journey of continuous improvement by adopting a service-oriented leadership model and by placing the best interests of our student-body above all competing elements. In alignment with our school board, we dug-in with committees focused on listening to all stakeholders' voices to create a 5-year Strategic Plan with a strong emphasis on both immediate and long-term persistent steps towards increasing student

Our home here in Galena is small, but the Galena City School District has a vast commitment to education and serving students and families across Alaska.

achievement. Focused goals with specific strategies for accomplishment were written for the target areas of Student Success, Workforce Climate, Embracing Culture, and Community Connections. Under Student Success, and in leaning-in to embrace the Science of Reading as a driving force and guide, the goal of reading proficiency for our elementary students at Sidney Huntington School began with a few immediate shifts. We modified the daily schedule to include uninterrupted reading blocks. We created an after-school Acceleration Academy four days a week, and our elementary teaching staff continues to use this time to focus on literacy skills for specifically our students whose data demonstrates they need additional intensive instruction but invite all students to participate. Parents and families jumped on board, and our data trends showed a steady improvement in literacy by the end of year assessments. "71% of students increased one grade level in reading from January to May last year."



Continued next page...

Our Mission: An excellent education for every student every day.

Next steps included adopting a Science of Reading aligned curriculum through our Curriculum Committee process. We chose Amplify (CKLA), and implemented this curriculum this school year, 2023-2024. In addition, we hired a Reading Specialist to support additional focused instruction for struggling students during the school day, outside of their reading block. This allowed us to provide focused reading instruction in the core reading block, outside the core, and after-school again focused for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students.

In our efforts to increase parent involvement, under Community Connections, we once again embraced the Science of Reading. We saw the Individualized Reading Plans as an opportunity to focus our conversations on student strengths and areas we would strategically focus instruction on in school, after school, and then offered specific ideas to families for further supporting literacy at home. The continuous follow-up to document growth, modify plans, and celebrate milestones in learning has strengthened our parent partnerships. The addition of Family Literacy Nights, and striking the balance of fun and learning, with door prizes and incentives for students, has yet again allowed us to draw families in to share in increasing our student reading and achievement proficiency.

Another addition to our plans is the next step to add a summer literacy and STEM camp (SOAR) for our K-4th grade students. This camp will be held in the few weeks prior to school starting in August as a jump-start to learning and closing the gap of any summer regression prior to the school year. This will allow students to begin instruction in the classroom seamlessly and immediately. We anticipate this addition will further drive achievement growth reflected in our data.

Photo © Adam Demientieff



Galena City School District students.

In zooming out, and a target that spreads across all focus areas of our GCSD Strategic Plan, we recognized providing Early Childhood programs as another way to increase achievement for students and allow our partnerships with families to begin even earlier. We began grant writing and reaching out to our local tribal partners for support. No one hesitated, as supporting families and education supports not only our community but provides a boom to communities in our entire region for many years to come. The grants secured include plans to write culturally aligned units of study for our early learning programs, further

honoring the power of our collective impact as we all aim together to embrace education as a driving force to sustainable village communities up and down the Yukon River.

As we began this school year, we have both a 4-year-old Pre-K program, and a 3-year-old ECE program, with funding woven and braided through state grants and tribal partnership grants. We again leaned into the Science of Reading, adopted SOR aligned ECE curriculums (Amplify CKLA for Pre-K, and Teaching Strategies Creative Curriculum, Heggerty phonics), and are implementing these programs in our early learning programs. Young students and their families are becoming comfortable in our school sooner, gaining valuable skills research tells us has a lasting impact on life-time achievement and success.

While we are in year one of our strategic plan, we are excited about our steady progress to date in implementing our purposeful steps towards our goals. We greatly appreciate our staff, our families, our students, our school board, and our community. The collective support and alignment towards our goals, alongside the commitment to the time and efforts necessary, is what will ensure our student achievement will continue to trend upward. Thank you for the trust, belief, and partnership that we can and will indeed “get there”.



Has your school proven great success increasing student reading proficiency utilizing evidence-based curriculum and materials? Do you have something you are really excited about as an outcome of a shift to Science of Reading best practices? We are interested in hearing what amazing things are happening in your school to positively impact student reading proficiency and achievement. Please submit your story to the e-mail below. You may be chosen as the next school spotlight in a future edition of the Alaska Reading Newsletter.

Please e-mail your submissions or questions to: Jenn.Miller@alaska.gov

You can view the 2022-2023 School Year Alaska School Spotlights here: Alaska-Reading-Resources/alaska-school-spotlights