

# Kids these days

The publication for people who care about Alaska's Kids!

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## Safe Routes pave healthy pathways to school

By AASB Staff



Remember the first time you walked or biked to school? Some may have fond memories of how it was a nice way to start their day. Others may continue the practice in their daily routine to work. Research states that little bits of activity, like walking or biking to school, may better prepare children and youth to focus and to learn. And, in the face of rising childhood obesity rates nationwide, walking and biking to school has the added benefit of health through exercise. An extra advantage is the fact that it could help your pocketbook by saving money on gas.

- To make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age saving on gas.

- To facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools



In Alaska, perhaps especially in winter, the trip to school can be as much of an adventure as the experience of learning new things. The snow, ice, and lack of substantial light in winter, or the road conditions or limited safe access the rest of the year, are obstacles that may deter most parents from allowing their kids the freedom to walk or bike. Enter *Safe Routes to School*.

**Safe Routes to School** (SRTS) programs enable community leaders, schools and parents to collaboratively improve safety and encourage more children to safely walk and bicycle to school. SRTS has three objectives:

- To enable and encourage children in grades K-8, including those with disabilities, to walk and bike to school

**Steve Soenksen, the SRTS Coordinator for Alaska**, is passionate about working with communities to make safe, environmentally low-impact travel to school a reality for more children and youth across the state.

*"We are currently working in about 20 communities... [and] would like to assist many more Alaskan communities in getting involved in the program and taking advantage of opportunities to take positive steps to improve walking and biking pathways for children. Besides the health and safety benefits, this process also improves local communication and cooperation that ultimately improves the built environment around schools."*

And Soenksen isn't talking about working only with adults to solve these issues.

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# DJ dances in Toksook Bay

By Amy Flaherty, RurAL CAP Youth Development Specialist

Youth in Toksook Bay were lacking something fun and constructive to do with their free time after school and during the weekends. They brainstormed, "wouldn't it be fun to attend a dance that played the music we want to hear?" Within a few short months of that initial question, youth in Toksook are hosting regular DJ Dances for themselves, while promoting a safe and drug and alcohol-free activity, youth leadership, health education, and of course, physical activity.

Last winter, RurAL CAP's AmeriCorps BIRCH (Building Initiatives in Rural Community Health) Member, Daniel Charlie, joined RurAL CAP's new Youth Action Program. The program is designed to increase rural youth opportunities.

Local youth and Daniel formed the **Toksook Bay Warriors Youth Action Group** to address teen interests and needs.

After securing a place to host the first Toksook teen dance, the youth set-up their music with mp3 players, charged a small entry fee, and sold refreshments to raise money. Responsibilities were soon added, including a youth bouncer who ensures participating teens are alcohol and tobacco free. They cleaned-up their space after the first dance

and declared their attempt a success. Theresa Alexie, age 15, said "If there weren't any dances, I'd be doing nothing really. Just staying home and doing my regular chores, or riding my ATV, walking, baby sitting or watching a movie."

DJ dances are quite popular in Toksook



Photo by Lee Huntoon

Bay right now. This outlet not only provides a recreational and supervised activity for village youth, but they are also learning. Every dance includes an intermission to hear public service announcements the youth are writing and recording during weekly meetings. They've even shared their educational messages with the local radio station.

The subsequent group meetings focused on how to improve and better prepare for future dances. Daniel says the youth learned that "pre-planning is better than last-minute planning and communication is very important to the outcome of their planned event."

By using simple computer technology, they are addressing tobacco use and teenage pregnancy, and will continue to examine more issues. Listening to their creative work during the dance spreads the word, and also gives peer recognition. Fundraising efforts during these DJ Dances have allowed for the recent purchase of a lighting system, which adds a 'cool' element to the nightly scene. Sarah Alexie, age 13, says, "I do this to raise money for the DJ dances and what we need. We also do door prize tickets and enjoy free time and watch others have fun."

One of the many goals for the Youth Action Program is to provide healthy opportunities for rural youth, as AmeriCorps Members and community members have mentioned as an important need. Teens planning their activities, community service, and health or environmental education experience

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## First Alaskans Elders and Youth Conference

Celebrate Alaska Native intellect. Encourage young people and Elders to attend the 26th Anniversary of **First Alaskans Institute Elders & Youth Conference Oct. 19-20, 2009, in Anchorage**. The conference stimulates dialogue between young people and Elders and encourages them to maintain traditional Native values and practices while thriving in the modern world.



For more information and to register for the conference, go to: [www.firstalaskans.org](http://www.firstalaskans.org).



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# Parent volunteer uses art to reach students

By Darrell Vincek, Principal Bowman Elementary



Ordinary spaces become extraordinary at **Bowman Elementary School in Anchorage** due to the generosity of parent volunteer Mary Sauders.

Color and shapes burst from the soffits in the hallways, the gym and the walls of the library. When students settle in the nurse's room, they lay amid heartfelt shapes that comfort and soothe.

In the music classroom, notes cascade where the ceiling meets the wall. On closer examination, the melody is revealed to be the "Alaska Flag" song.

Kind messages are emblazoned on many of the surfaces, like "respect," "lend a hand," "share" and "compassion." Quotes are also used, such as "The privilege of a lifetime is being who you are," from philosopher Joseph Campbell that shine under the lights in the hallways.

**Students generate the art with Sauders as their guide.** Projects usually start as a piece of wood, which is sanded and primed by the students, and then painted in a wide spectrum of colors of their choosing before installation.

Sauders is an artist and a mom. Two of her children are currently enrolled in Bowman, and two more are at Service High School. She earned a bachelor's in fine arts from Carnegie Mellon University and came to Alaska when her husband took a job as an engineer.



In the Gym



Mary with a Student



Hallway Banners



In the Library

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*"Parent volunteer Mary Sauders is really an amazing asset builder, she has no idea the impact she has had on young people through her passion for art and sharing it with them."*  
-----  
- Julie Vincek, ASD  
Youth Development Specialist  
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*"I started doing mini-courses with the optional program during school, but I wanted to work with more children," Sauders said.*

Soon she was enlisting students from every class to fill the spaces with what the students have come to feel is their legacy.

Mary is remarkable. We are very lucky to have her. Her contributions have deepened the relationship the students and their families have with our school. They feel ownership in a very creative and sustainable way.

*"I have a lot of fun. It looks like kids go to school here. They get to experience it and then live with it," Sauders said. "There is so much required of the children, this is just extra fun. They're proud of it."*



# Challenger Learning Center inspires through real-life applications

By Ryan Aguilar, AASB Staff

Believe it or not, algebra, physics, calculus, and chemistry classes weren't created to confuse us. They may have somewhat intangible aspects for some students, but their intended goal is pure.

The stigma surrounding math and science disciplines for many current (and former) students (myself included) can lie in a failure to realize its real-world applications. The **Challenger Learning Center of Alaska**, located in Kenai, offers workshops and program curricula that help to eliminate that disconnect, educating and inspiring children, youth, and even adults.

The Challenger Learning Center of Alaska (*Challenger Center*) is a non-profit created as a statewide project to meet the educational needs of students across the state, built in commemoration of the Challenger space shuttle disaster. Using simulated space missions, distance education, and hands-on science workshops, the Challenger Center inspires participants from pre-school ages through adults to develop an interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM disciplines) and to consider careers in these fields. Challenger Center workshops and distance learning programs integrate STEM with problem solving and collaborative learning, supporting success through individual efforts and teamwork.

**"Our goal is to inspire students to not only want to stay in school, but to excel and move onto higher education."**

**- Marnie Olcott**  
Challenger Learning Center COO

"Everything we do at the Challenger Learning Center involves hands-on, interactive learning," explains Marnie Olcott, Chief Operations Officer at the Center. "We learn by doing. It's REAL to the participants, with real opportunities to succeed and strategize when the first attempt doesn't work out so well. It's relevant to real life situations."



*The Challenger Center has dynamic programs for youth and adults*

So far, **over 35,000 Alaska students have had the benefit of attending a workshop or working online with the Challenger Center.** Students work in groups to build probes, conduct experiments, evaluate comets, and resolve space station emergencies while practicing communication and problem solving skills as a team. The space exploration curriculum gives students the direct experience of applying classroom instruction to real life situations.

The experience is often a highlight of their school year. **A few Willow Crest Elementary students had this to say about their visit to the Center:**

-- "I really like it when all of us had to participate and work together to make our mission to Mars successful."

-- "I liked how we got to go into a separate room for the space shuttle and how there was smoke. My favorite part was the intercom and getting to talk to the others. It was the most wonderful experience throughout all my elementary experiences."



*Students collaborate on engineering project*

-- "I really liked the Robotics Workshop when we built the robot because it felt like we really were engineers and technicians who built a very unique robot."

The Challenger Center also provides corporate, organizational, board, and community groups the opportunity to enhance cooperation and improve decision-making skills through an engaging, dynamic, and challenging experience.



*AASB Board and staff at the Center*

AASB's Board of Directors and a handful of AASB staff took part in a teambuilding activity in conjunction with a 2-day summer board meeting held at the Challenger Center of Alaska in July. It was an opportunity to come together, work collaboratively, and have fun in the process.

**For more information on the Challenger Learning Center's curriculum and workshop offerings, for students and adults, call (907) 276-4769 or visit [akchallenger.org](http://akchallenger.org).**

**"I know my students very well and I saw some who were getting poor grades, who don't stay engaged in the typical classroom, just come alive this week. One 6th grader in particular, who we are all concerned is a prime candidate for dropping out was sitting up front every day."**

**- Principal from Fairbanks**

# Eagle River youth learn about the “other” 3 R’s

By AASB Staff

**Reduce. Reuse. Recycle.** While these 3 R’s have less to do with academic success than the traditional 3 R’s – Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic – they do have significant relevance to our lives at school, home, and work, and can teach youth and adults important lessons.



Youth getting their hands dirty

A group of youth got an introduction to conservation through a summer recycling project, sponsored in part by Alaska ICE, with the Boys and Girls Club of Eagle River.

The youth learned about personal responsibility, community service, and simple methods of how and what to recycle by helping a few local businesses with their recycling needs. Perhaps more valuable than conservation awareness through these efforts was their time spent collaborating with caring adults on the project.

*“The main idea of this program was to educate the youth on what can be recycled, how they can incorporate this green-friendly attribute into any aspect of their lives, and how easy and fun a project like this can be,”* said Tracey Hupe, manager of the Eagle River Boys and Girls Club. **“Not only did they become knowledgeable about recycling, but they also encouraged their parents to do the same.”**



Lessons for adults and youth that apply to school, work, and home

The program was initially set to run for nine weeks, but the students’ interest and enthusiasm carried it for an additional three weeks for a total of 12 weeks.

Sharing the 3 R’s message about the importance of being mindful about what we use and how we dispose of waste struck a chord with the youth and the adults in the program. The youth shared their new knowledge with friends and family and all of the adults who assisted with the project have become proactive about their personal recycling efforts.

Activities and efforts have expanded from the original project to include participation and contributions from local individuals and businesses. The future of this program and similar efforts are bright.

*“Adults are working with teens to beautify and improve the parks and bike trails of Eagle River and Chugiak,”* says Hupe. *“Parents are bringing their recycling in to the Club. **The plans for the future are to offer additional learning opportunities for the youth to experience reduce, reuse and recycle techniques, and encourage them to continue sharing that knowledge with others.**”*

## Web Resource: NIDA for Teens

Looking for free resources and ideas on how to integrate the science behind drug abuse into your classroom activities? You can complement your lesson plan by using the FREE online resources from the National Institute on Drug Abuses (NIDA) **NIDA for Teens** Web site, a component of the NIDA Goes Back to School campaign.

NIDA, part of the National Institutes of Health, has created a Web site to keep youth, parents, and educators in the loop all year long. Teachers can enhance classroom activities with suggested activities, diagrams, and **teacher guides**. Students can participate in the **Sara Bellum Blog**, where teens can join the discussion and learn about drugs and the effects they have on the brain and body. Your students can be the first to interact with a team of NIDA scientists, science writers, and public health analysts. We connect your students with the latest scientific research and news, so they

can be empowered to make healthy and smart decisions.

For more information, visit the **NIDA for Teens Web site!**





# Safe Routes

cont. from Page 1

“Kids have more fun if they are able to participate in something like this and see how their communities work.”

This collaborative approach engaging youth and adults empowers communities, gives local ownership of the projects, and encourages youth involvement beyond typical school responsibilities. You might be surprised by who has the greater impact.

“Kids are often the best consultants and see things differently than adults do. They often have better solutions than adults.”

### The Six Simple Steps to Staying Safe:

1. When walking, stop at every curb or edge.
2. Always look and listen, especially while crossing. Look left; look right; then left again, before stepping past any curb or edge.
3. Always wear a helmet when riding a bike.
4. Always ride in the same direction as traffic.
5. Know what signs say. When walking or riding, follow all traffic signs and signals.
6. When riding, always stop; look left; look right; then left again before pulling out of a driveway.

*(Alaska Safe Routes to School)*

This program empowers local communities to plan, identify, and implement low cost improvements and help take steps to create a healthier environment for children...[and] healthy communities are important to all of us.”

**A Safe Routes representative will be presenting at our Fall Boardmanship Academy on Sept. 19.**

For more information on the Safe Routes to School program or how to apply for grants visit [www.dot.state.ak.us/stwdplng/saferoutes/](http://www.dot.state.ak.us/stwdplng/saferoutes/).

## Grants awarded for early childhood partnerships

By Patty Ginsburg, Best Beginnings

Nine organizations in Southeast, Southcentral, coastal, and Interior Alaska will receive **Best Beginnings** grants to foster early childhood partnerships in their communities. Funding for the grants is possible because of major contributions from BP, Conoco Phillips, and the State of Alaska.

Local partnerships are the cornerstone for building a statewide network and system that support all aspects of early childhood development.

### The grant recipients are:

- Anchorage Success By 6
- Early Childhood Development Commission, Fairbanks North Star Borough
- Gustavus Early Childhood Coalition
- South (Kenai) Peninsula Coalition for Young Children
- Hoonah’s Coalition for Kids
- Juneau Partnership for Families and Children
- Ketchikan Early Childhood Leadership Coalition
- Kodiak Early Childhood Coalition
- a MATter of Success, Mat Su Borough

Grant recipients will receive up to \$10,000 each to organize and coordinate partnerships among people from a variety of sectors with an interest or stake in early childhood. The combined service areas of the grant recipients represent approximately 40,000 children under age 5.

**“We know from extensive research that the more we do in the earliest years of a child’s life, the better chance that child has of succeeding in school and in life. One of the obstacles is the lack of any overarching structure or coordination among the various entities that touch on early childhood,”** said Abbe Hensley, executive director of Best Beginnings.

*“For older children, the K-12 school system provides that structure. There’s no comparable structure to coordinate resources and services for early childhood,”* Hensley said. *“These grants will allow communities to create partnerships – or in some cases, support existing partnerships – that can take a broader view of early childhood needs and ways to meet those needs.”*

Each partnership will conduct a community assessment to identify early childhood needs and gaps, and create a work plan that addresses those needs.





## DJ Dances

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meaningful engagement. It's Empowerment through Involvement. **As they form an agenda and see it through, the youth learn valuable life skills and form supportive relationships.** Creating healthy and alternative events also decreases the incidence of substance abuse among teens, such as the tobacco and alcohol-free youth at Toksook's hip, new venue.

Toksook Bay is one of nearly a dozen rural Alaska villages helping youth lead healthier and productive lives as part of the Youth Action Program facilitated through AmeriCorps Members. Dancing requires coordination, creativity, risk-taking, training and spontaneity, and so do these youth efforts. Erik Charlie, age 12, says he participates to "have fun and be with friends because they might just be bored outside."



### Did You Know...

AASB sponsored its first Youth Leadership Conference in 1991. The yearly event now attracts more than 70 high school students -- School Districts and Boards are invited to bring youth -- to each AASB Annual Conference.

The 2009 Annual Conference will be held in Anchorage on Nov. 5-8. For registration information, [click here](#).



## Calling out to the AK

By Karen Zeman, SOY Executive Director



The [Alaska Teen Media Institute \(ATMI\)](#) has launched a new feature which will allow the program to share the voices of teens from around Alaska. Teens are now able to submit content including: video, audio, photos and written news or public interest stories through ATMI's Web site. A selection of stories will be aired on ATMI's live radio broadcast "In Other News" on KNBA in Anchorage. Others will be shared through the Web site or the Public Radio Exchange.

ATMI will be providing in person and online trainings throughout the next year and will make instructional tools available to teens through its Web site.

The program will be partnering with schools and radio stations around the state. At various times the Web site will feature calls for teen input and contests to encourage submissions.

For more information visit [www.alaska-teenmedia.org](http://www.alaska-teenmedia.org) or contact the Alaska Teen Media Institute Director, Rosey Robards at 907-272-2864 or [rosey@alaskateenmedia.org](mailto:rosey@alaskateenmedia.org).



Teens interview Sen. Mark Begich



Visit the KTD archive online at:

[www.kidsthesedays.org](http://www.kidsthesedays.org)

and

[www.alaskaice.org](http://www.alaskaice.org)

