

**Agency: Commerce, Community and Economic Development****Grants to Named Recipients (AS 37.05.316)****Grant Recipient: Copper River School District****Federal Tax ID: 92-0056757****Project Title:****Project Type: Planning and Research**

# Copper River School District - Residential and Virtual School Program Planning Grant

**State Funding Requested: \$275,000****House District: 6 / C**

Future Funding May Be Requested

**Brief Project Description:**

Conduct necessary research and planning to evaluate the feasibility of a residential school program and a virtual school program to be located in Glennallen Alaska.

**Funding Plan:**

|                               |                    |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Total Project Cost:           | \$275,000          |
| Funding Already Secured:      | (\$0)              |
| FY2015 State Funding Request: | <u>(\$275,000)</u> |
| Project Deficit:              | \$0                |

*Funding Details:**No previous funding. New project***Detailed Project Description and Justification:**

The attached planning grant proposal outlines ideas for an integrated residential program and virtual school. True North Academy would take advantage of the recently vacated Alaska Bible College (ABC) Campus, including a fully-equipped dorm, gymnasium and student-life center. The ABC campus is adjacent to the Glennallen High School campus, which includes a spacious state of the art vocational education facility. The proposed programs, if they are determined to be feasible, will leverage available resources to increase and improve the educational choices available to Alaska's students.

**Project Timeline:**

Planning project to be completed during FY 2015.

**Entity Responsible for the Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of this Project:**

Copper River School District

**Grant Recipient Contact Information:**

|               |                                        |
|---------------|----------------------------------------|
| Name:         | Michael Johnson, Ph.D.                 |
| Title:        | Superintendent                         |
| Address:      | PO Box 108<br>Glennallen, Alaska 99588 |
| Phone Number: | (907)822-3234                          |
| Email:        | mjohnson@crsd.us                       |

Has this project been through a public review process at the local level and is it a community priority?  Yes  No



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January 24, 2014

The Honorable Representative Eric Feige  
State Capitol Room 126  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Feige:

The Copper River School District has been one of the top performing school districts in Alaska. Like many other communities in Alaska, the challenges of economic decline continue to impact our schools in various ways. As we adapt to the changes, we are eager to embrace Governor Parnell's vision for a quality and efficient rural Alaskan education system enhanced with technology.

In his State of the State Address, Governor Parnell stated that education reform in Alaska should include an increase in digital teaching and residential programs. The Copper River School District has a unique potential to efficiently provide both education options statewide.

The attached planning grant proposal outlines our ideas for an integrated residential program and virtual school. True North Academy, as we are calling it, would take advantage of the recently vacated Alaska Bible College (ABC) Campus, including a fully-equipped dorm, gymnasium and student-life center. The ABC campus is adjacent to the Glennallen High School campus, which includes a spacious state of the art vocational education facility. We hope, with your support, we can leverage these available resources to increase and improve the educational choices available to Alaska's students.

With a modest appropriation of \$275,000, we can conduct the necessary planning and establish key partners to host a unique and high quality educational program from the Copper River Valley. The educational and economic benefits of True North Academy would extend far beyond our own community.

If you have any questions regarding our planning grant proposal, please contact me at 907-822-3234 ext. 223 or [mjohnson@crsd.us](mailto:mjohnson@crsd.us). I look forward to an opportunity to discuss our ideas and your potential support when your busy legislative schedule permits.

Respectfully,

Michael Johnson, Ph.D.  
Superintendent



District-Operated Statewide Virtual School and  
Variable-Length Residential Educational Program

## **Planning Grant Application**

Copper River School District  
Dr. Michael Johnson, Superintendent

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Glennallen, AK 99588  
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## **Planning Grant Goal & Objectives**

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**The Copper River School District requests Planning Grant Funding to develop an educational program that will benefit rural students across the state of Alaska.** Our vision for a statewide virtual school and variable-length residential learning program will allow students from across Alaska to enjoy a high-quality education in their schools and/or home communities, as well as in-depth, hands-on experiences in targeted areas that will prepare them to be productive, successful citizens with the skills and confidence to pursue training, college, and careers after high school graduation.

### **PROJECT GOAL: Develop Plan for Comprehensive Statewide Virtual School and Variable-Length Residential Educational Program**

#### **Objective A: Develop Project Infrastructure**

- Employ staff, including Project Manager and Assistant
- Develop and implement project communications and public relations activities
- Develop project website
- Develop project organizational chart
- Conduct grant administration activities, tracking, and reporting

#### **Objective B: Conduct Virtual School Planning**

- Conduct research and develop model that meets the needs of statewide population
- Research, design, and develop student/parent website for virtual school
- Develop recruiting strategies and enrollment procedures
- Assess facilities, staffing, equipment, and other needs of virtual school
- Partner with content providers to develop course offerings and pathways
- Conduct technology, infrastructure, and communications planning
- Develop budget for virtual school

#### **Objective C: Conduct Residential Educational Program Planning**

- Conduct research and develop model that integrates variable-length residential academies with virtual school programming
- Identify and assess staffing, equipment, and facility needs
- Design and develop course offerings and pathways for residential academies
- Conduct facility planning and renovations
- Conduct technology, infrastructure, and communications planning
- Develop budget for residential educational program needs, including staffing, equipment, and facility improvements

## **Request for Funds: Project Budget**

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### **Total Planning Grant Funds Request: \$275,000**

*Project Director:*

- 1.0 FTE: 195 days
- Benefits and wages: \$103,866

*Project Assistant:*

- .75 FTE: 195 x 6 hours/day
- Benefits and wages: \$42,808

*Facilities Condition & Technology Infrastructure Survey*

- \$25,000

*Consultant Fees (Research and Facilities):*

- \$50,000

*Travel:*

- \$15,000

*Communications/Miscellaneous/Contingency Fund:*

- \$21,674

## **Project Description, Rationale, and Benefits**

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A report prepared by JSC Consulting indicates that 1,286 Alaskan students attended high schools with 30 or fewer students during the 2012-13 school year. Of the 126 high schools noted in this report, 56% percent (71 of the 126 schools) had between 1 and 10 students. It cannot be refuted that students in Alaska's smallest schools simply do not have access to the same courses, experiences, and opportunities afforded to students in larger high schools. For this reason, the CRSD wishes to plan a statewide program with focused recruiting and enrollment efforts on students from rural districts across the state who most need access to high quality, rigorous coursework and hands-on experiences that will prepare them for life after high school. Our commitment will be to preparing students for college and careers so that they may contribute to their communities and state in later years.

Requested Planning Grant Funds will allow us to devote necessary resources to investigating, coordinating, and planning a statewide virtual academy that connects with on-site learning opportunities ("skills academies") at a residential educational program located in Glennallen. The following narrative provides initial information related to the vision for a new statewide educational program hosted by the Copper River School District.

The vision for our virtual school and variable-length residential education program, **True North Academy**, includes opportunities for students in rural places to take courses using synchronous and asynchronous technologies from their home communities. We envision True North Academy to serve as a comprehensive school for students in grades 7-12 that provides college and career guidance and planning services, co- and extra-curricular activities, a support network for students and parents/guardians, a focus on education of the *whole* child (including wellness, nutrition, and life skills education), and opportunities for on-site, hands-on, concentrated study and practice through on-site variable-length residential "skills academies." Pairing a virtual school with a variable-length residential educational program will provide students across Alaska with opportunities to learn in unique, innovative, and individualized ways.

We envision True North Academy as a school that will allow rural Alaskan students to remain in their home communities for the entire school year (if students take courses through the Virtual Academy only) or for portions of the year (for those who participate in on-site residential academies in Glennallen). This structure makes it possible for students to continue to benefit from local support systems, family relationships, and cultural/community involvement while simultaneously growing as a member of a statewide learning community. Regardless of if students are taking courses from home or learning during on-site residency academies, they will benefit from access to high-quality online content delivered by highly-qualified, dynamic Alaskan teachers. On-site residencies tied to students' individual academic needs will ensure each student has the appropriate level of support, according to their individualized learning plans. In addition, on-site residencies will provide students opportunities to gain hands-on college and career readiness skills in areas of interest, such as college prep, technology, arts and media, medical and health professions, and more. In addition, a cohort approach will allow students to build relationships in both online classes and during residential academies. This focus on rela-



## **Project Description, Rationale, and Benefits (cont.)**

tionships will be essential in ensuring both academic and personal successes throughout students' enrollment in True North Academy and beyond.

High-quality online content that has been planned, delivered, and supported by highly-qualified, engaging, committed rural Alaskan educators who understand the unique needs of rural Alaskan students is currently only sparsely available to students statewide. A wide variety of coursework delivered via asynchronous and/or synchronous technology is critically needed in our state, and the virtual academy we envision would provide students in even the smallest, most remote schools and communities with opportunities to qualify for the Alaska Performance Scholarship, tackle Advanced Placement coursework, pursue Career and Technical Education (CTE)-focused courses, and truly become college and career ready by the end of their high school careers.

The Governor's Digital Teaching Initiative Demonstration Project highlights the state's commitment to providing students in rural places with equal access to rigorous coursework and academic opportunities. True North Academy will be a leader in allowing Alaskan students to "overcome the barriers of geography and district boundaries" through the use of digital media and content delivery systems to reach students far beyond the borders of the Copper River School District. Our current use of video-teleconferencing, distance-delivered courses utilizing learning platforms like Blackboard and Elluminate-Live, and our partnerships with learning platform and content delivery companies such as Edgenuity, Edmentum, and Apex Learning are important: this experience has prepared us to expand our delivery of coursework to students across the state.

The Copper River School District's academic achievement over the past decade has been outstanding. The CRSD has worked diligently to provide our teachers and administrators with training and support to implement the increased rigor and complexity of Alaska's new Standards. Our students consistently demonstrate high levels of achievement due to our district's commitment to rigorous coursework, effective instruction in the classrooms, and reliance on data to guide our decisions. This commitment to quality and academic achievement will apply to our virtual academy and variable-length residential programs, as well, providing hundreds of additional students from across Alaska new opportunities to succeed.

Requested **Planning Grant Funds** will allow us to devote necessary resources to coordinating and planning a statewide virtual academy that connects with on-site learning opportunities ("skills academies") at a residential educational program located in Glennallen.

## **Background Information: Pre-Planning, Location, Facilities, and Infrastructure**

Phase 1 of the proposed project funded by the requested Planning Grant will include preparation for the launch of a statewide virtual academy, with initial courses available to students in Fall 2014. Planning for the virtual academy will be closely linked with program planning for a variable-length residential school in the CRSD. A District-Operated Statewide Residential Education Program application will be submitted in March 2015.

Significant thought and initial planning within the CRSD have already occurred, allowing us to best utilize Planning Grant funds to prepare for the launch of a virtual academy and residential program, rather than merely investigating the feasibility. District staff, business leaders, board members, and community representatives have met multiple times during Fall 2013 for initial conversations and planning related to the proposed project. Our geographic location, available facilities, district infrastructure, a shared desire to extend quality educational opportunities to students beyond the CRSD, and a clear vision for the future of education in rural Alaska place us on a fast track to bringing our plan to reality.

The location of our proposed program is ideal for students from across Alaska, regardless of if they participate in virtual academy courses only, or if they further engage with residential program opportunities. Glennallen is located on the road system approximately 200 miles east of Anchorage, with a local airport a short distance from the Glennallen School campus and CRSD district offices. Administrative services for both the virtual school and the residential program will be managed by existing Copper River School District staff, eliminating the need for costly duplication of management personnel. In addition, many of our distance-delivered courses will be taught by talented CRSD staff members with a passion for quality education in rural Alaska.

Offices and classrooms for True North Academy will be located on the recently-vacated Alaska Bible College (ABC) campus in Glennallen, AK, which is immediately adjacent to the Glennallen School campus. The ABC Board of Directors supports the CRSD's desire to develop the campus as a re-visioned school for Alaskan high school students. The campus includes a dormitory, office space, multiple classrooms, a multi-purpose gymnasium, a food service facility, a Laundromat, additional single-family housing, and a library facility with several offices and classrooms. In addition, Prince William Sound Community College (PWSCC) currently serves local students from the library building, providing True North Academy students with opportunities to engage in college coursework via distance from their home communities, and then to participate in classes on-site when attending a hands-on, on-site academy. In addition, the Glennallen School campus (a short walk from the proposed residential school campus) includes a large vocational education shop facility, auditorium, and additional sports facilities. See Appendix A for a photographic tour of available facilities.

Initial conversations surrounding a virtual school and variable-length residential educational program in the Copper River School District have been tremendously positive and have garnered the support of local businesses, service providers, and government agencies. We are anxious to support Alaska's future by planning and providing a one-of-a-kind learning opportunity that has the potential to transform education for students in rural parts of our state.

## **Introduction to Curriculum and Academic Program**

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Technology has broadened opportunities for students in rural Alaska over the course of the last several years, including students in the CRSD. Over the course of the last four years, in particular, the CRSD has focused on developing infrastructure to support distance learning for students. Courses are offered throughout the district using video-conferencing; students have taken VTC-delivered courses from other providers (e.g., AVTEC); CRSD teachers have planned and taught courses for the Alaska Learning Network, and our students have taken courses through AKLN; and we have used digital content from providers such as Edgenuity, Edmentum, Apex Learning, and Aventa K-12 to provide students with a vast array of learning opportunities. We have experience with various types of distance learning and have developed our own set of research-based best practices to support students' success as learners in non-traditional classrooms.

Our vision is that True North Virtual Academy provide students with access to a range of courses in all core content areas, taught by highly-qualified Alaskan teachers. Course sequencing will be made available to students from initial enrollment to support qualification for the Alaska Performance Scholarship, as well as college and career readiness. A partnership with Prince William Sound Community College will provide students dual-credit opportunities aligned with degree programs at University of Alaska campuses. Providing students with critical support in completing college-level coursework while in high school will better prepare students for success at the college level.

The ability to standardize a calendar for courses offered through a statewide virtual academy will allow students from across the state to study and learn at approximately the same pace, making synchronous conversations and activities via VTC or Skype more relevant and engaging for students, regardless of their geographic location. In addition, students who chose to participate in on-site residential program academies will have the opportunity to continue their study in a traditional, face-to-face classroom setting with a "live" teacher. For students who lack opportunities to learn with a number of same-grade learners due to small high school size, opportunities to interact with teachers and classmates while attending residential academies will be beneficial in preparing them for training and study beyond high school.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) will be a critical component of True North Academy. Assisting students in identifying career interests and goals early in their high school careers will lead to more meaningful coursework, study, and hands-on learning throughout their enrollment in our envisioned program. Content tracks we will explore during the planning phase of the project include:

- Natural Resource Management (in partnership with BLM, National Park Service, and Ahtna)
- Northern Latitudes Agriculture (in partnership with University of Alaska Fairbanks and Cooperative Extension Services)

## **Introduction to Curriculum and Academic Program (cont.)**

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- College Preparation Program (in partnership with PWSCC)
- Fine Arts (in partnership with Alaska State Council for the Arts and the Alaska Arts Education Consortium)
- Technology Careers (in partnership with PWSCC)
- Health Occupations (in partnership with local health/medical facilities and PWSCC)
- Office Management (in partnership with PWSCC and Ahtna)
- Broadcast Journalism (in partnership with local radio stations KCAM and KCHU)

**Appendix A:**

**Alaska Bible College Map and Facilities  
Glennallen School Campus Facilities**

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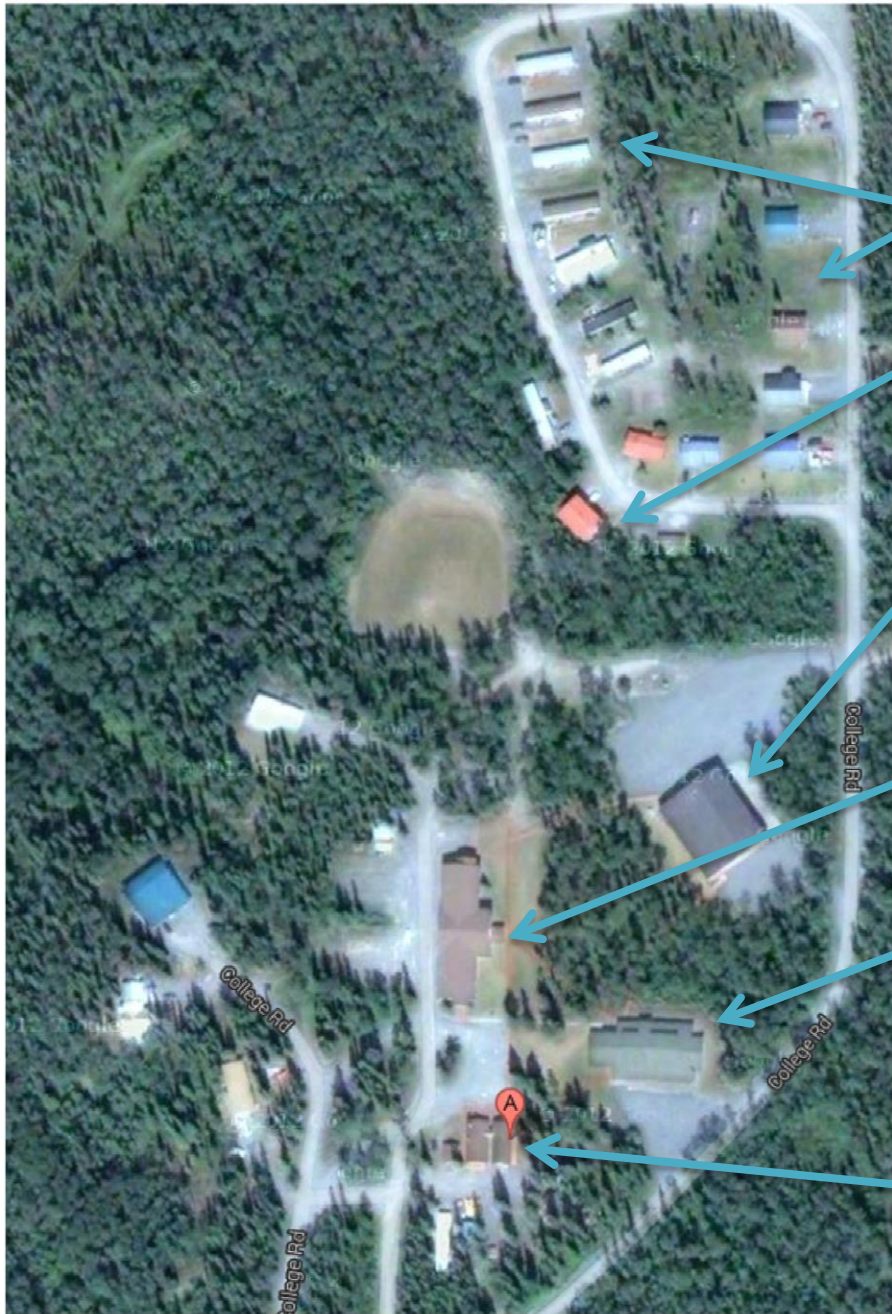
Aerial view of current Glennallen School campus and Alaska Bible College campus

ABC Campus

CRSD District Office & Glennallen School Campus



# ABC Campus Detail



**Campus housing:** Single-family homes and trailer houses

**Laundromat:** Two-story facility with laundry on lower level; apartment on upper level

**Murdock Center:** gymnasium, large public space/rec room, weight room, rock wall

**Joy Hall:** Reception area, extensive office space, classrooms, boys & girls dormitories

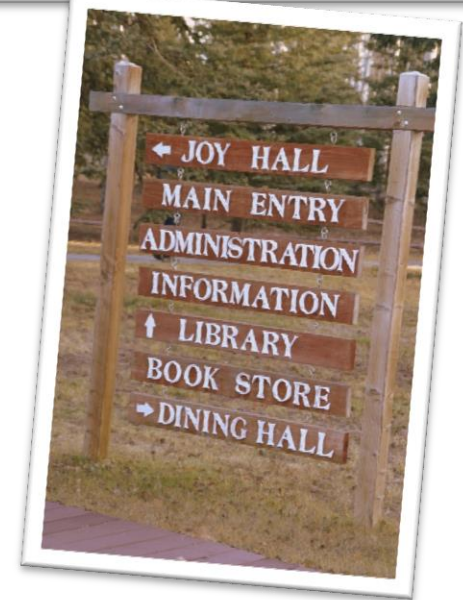
**Bell Memorial Library:** Library/book space, multiple classrooms of varied sizes, several large offices, upper and lower study areas

**“Food Cache” Dining Services:** Commercial kitchen and student dining area

**ABC Campus Entrance:**  
Located just off Glenn  
Highway frontage in  
Glennallen



**Glennallen School campus:**  
Directly adjacent to ABC campus



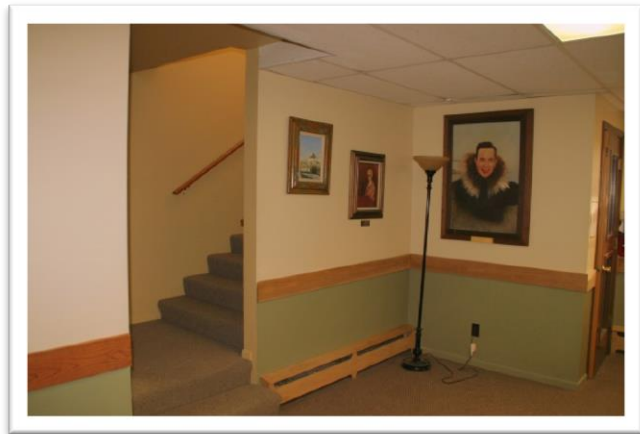


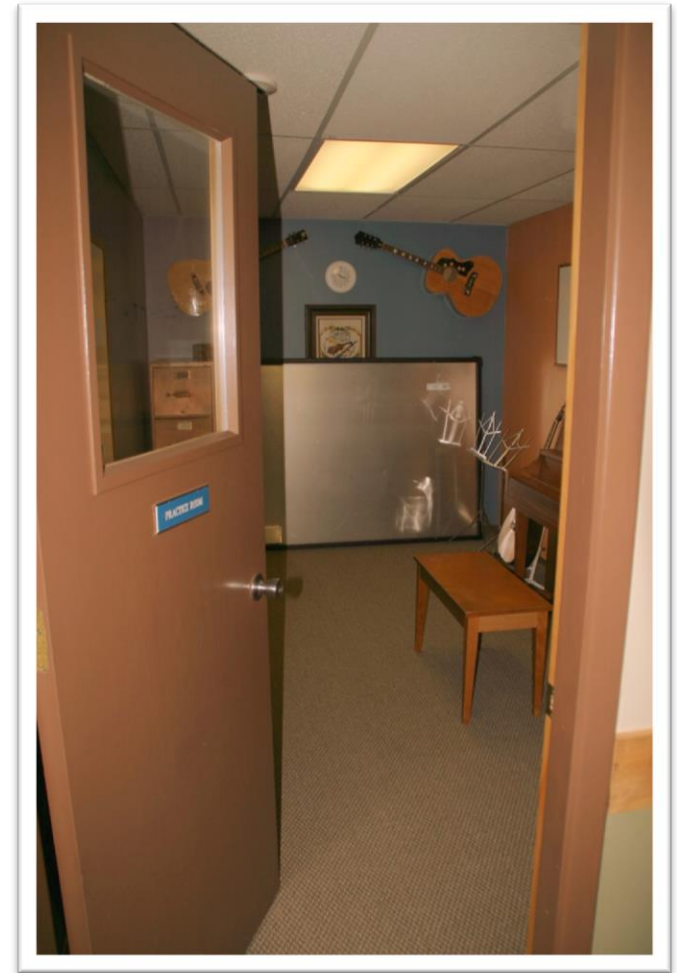
# Joy Hall





Main Level: Foyer, reception area and office, stairs to girls' dormitory





Main Level: Student mailboxes and lounge area, music practice rooms



Main Level: Two large classrooms, very large public space (previously used as chapel/performance space)



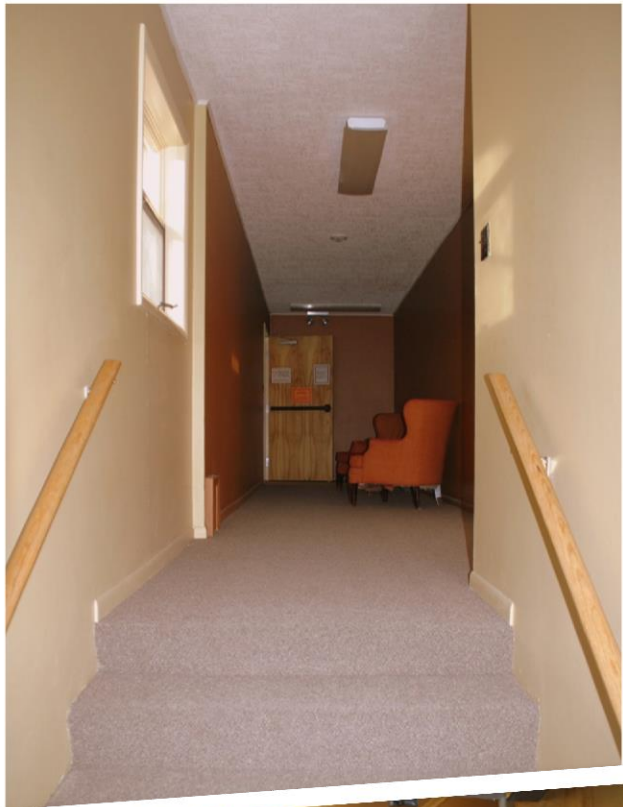
Main Level:  
Multiple offices,  
public restrooms





Main Level: Boys'  
Dormitory  
8 dorm rooms  
4 shared bathrooms





Upper Level:  
Girls' Dormitory  
8 dorm rooms  
4 shared bathrooms



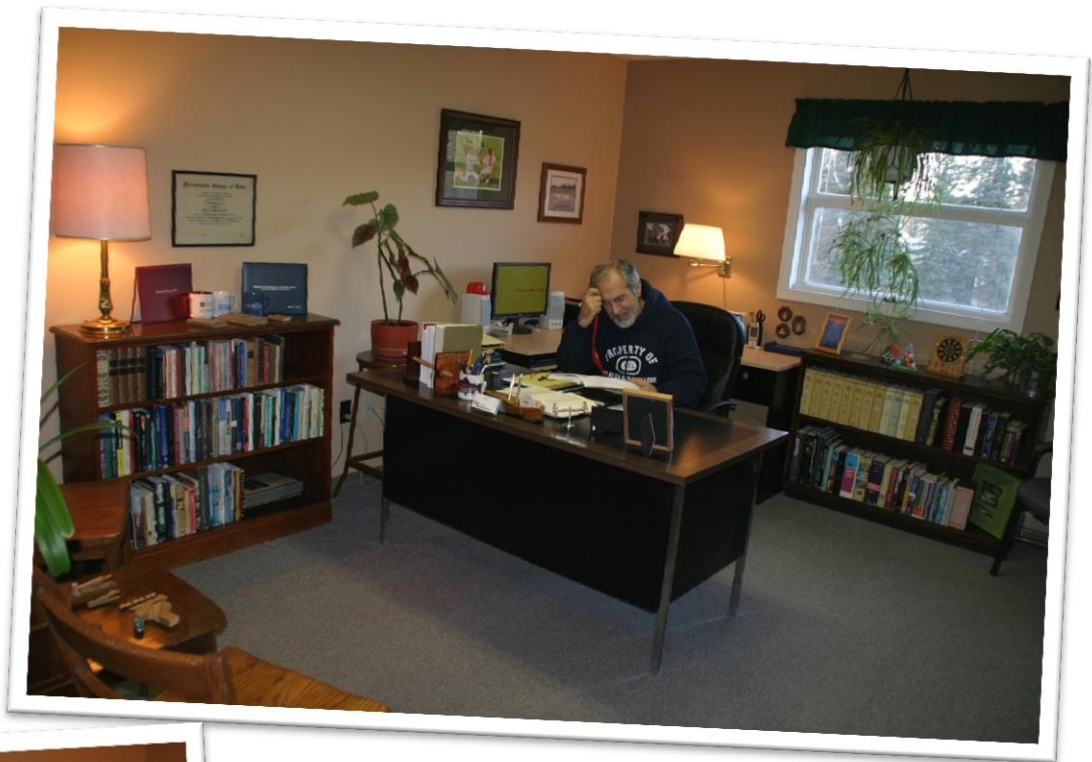


Stairs from main level to upper-level offices

Upper-level office space include  
“cubicle” work spaces and private offices,  
conference room, and lounge area









Adjoining upper-level hallway with multiple large offices, public restrooms, and storage areas

# Murdock Campus Center



Looking from Joy Hall to Murdock Center:  
All buildings connected by boardwalks





Murdock Center foyer area and public restrooms

Constructed  
in 2003



Large common area / rec center



Murdock Center  
gymnasium, basketball  
court, rock wall, and  
weight room



# Bell Memorial Library



Currently home to Prince William Sound Community College



Proximity of library to Joy Hall/dormitories

Main Level:  
Public areas  
Book stacks  
Access to offices  
and main level  
classrooms



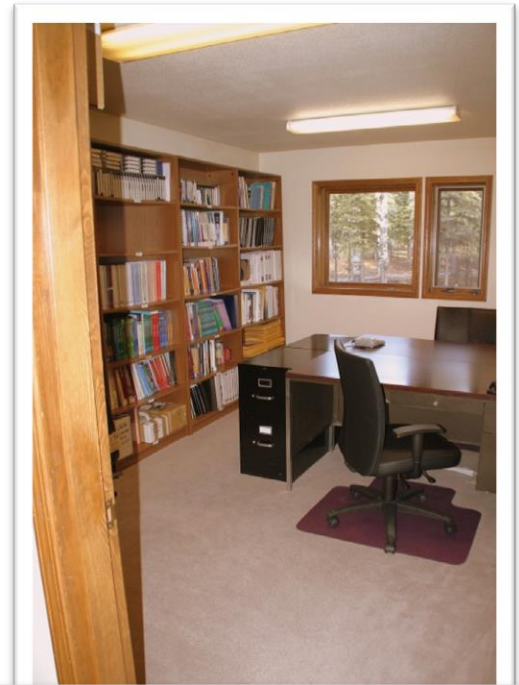




Main level: Multiple classrooms  
of varying sizes



Main level: Several spacious offices and work areas





Upper Level: Large classroom  
Two separate student study areas  
(could also be used as classrooms)



# “Food Cache” / Dining Services



# Commercial Kitchen and Dining Hall





Laundromat (lower level)  
with apartment above

Eight trailer houses, each with arctic  
entry



Multiple single-family homes

Duplex with adjoining door between units



# Glennallen School Campus



# Glennallen School Vocational Education/Shop Facility



Upper-level  
classroom space







North half of building:  
Woodworking,  
construction,  
carpentry



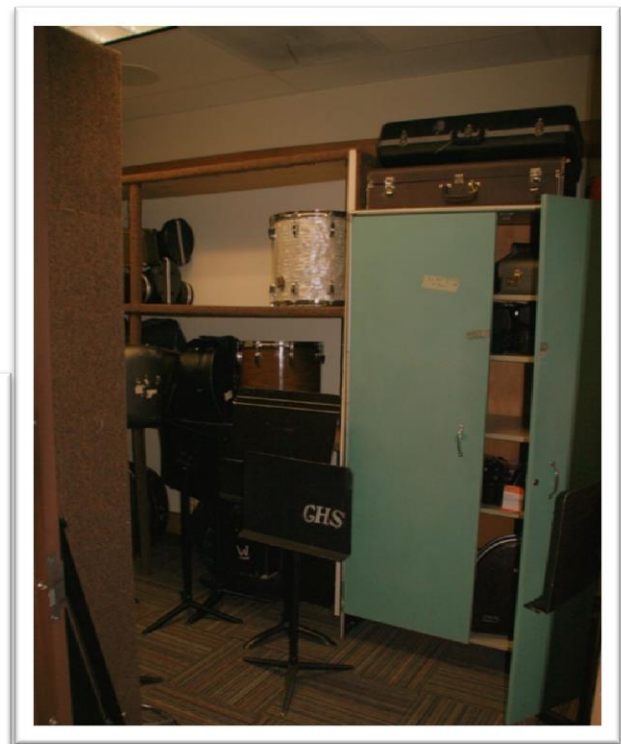
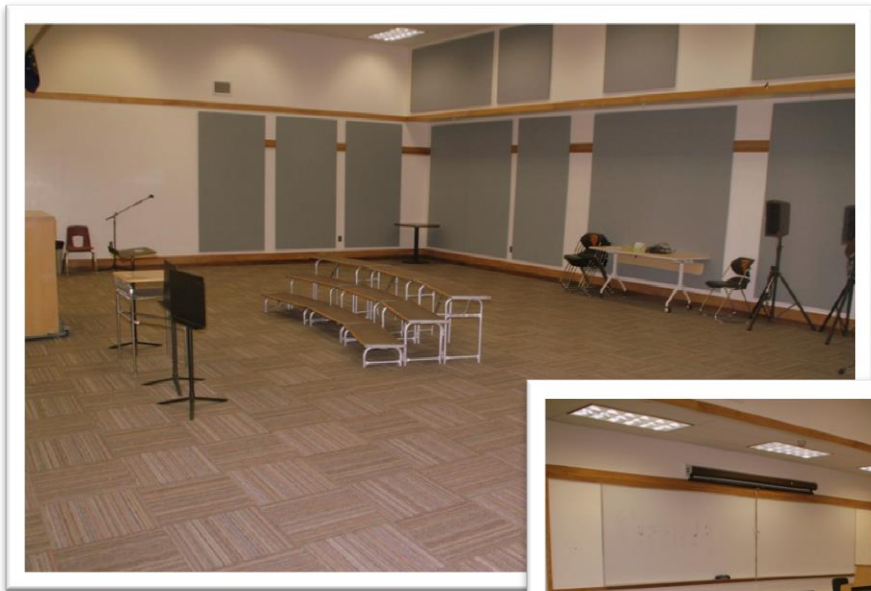
South half of building:  
Automotive, small engine  
repair, metal works





Welding Shop:  
Six individual  
welding booths  
Separate room for  
welding instruction  
and practice





Fine Arts wing:  
Large vocal/instrumental  
music room  
4 individual practice rooms  
Instrument storage room



## Theater:

Large stage, backstage area with  
loading dock, full curtain riggings,  
catwalks with theater lighting

300-seat auditorium

Separate control booth

Costume/make-up/dressing room

