

# Homeschool Programs on Kenai Peninsula

Connections currently has nearly 900 students being served by 7 ½ certified teachers (we use the term advisors), 1 special education teacher, and 6 ½ support staff. We have three locations. The Soldotna office is in a building shared by the warehouse and purchasing department as well as a few other offices. The Seward office occupies a classroom in Seward Middle School. The Homer office is housed in two portables in front of Paul Banks Elementary.

Connections currently has 105 seniors. Our current expectation is that 88 of those seniors will be graduating this year. Additionally, we have already graduated 3 students this year, two were early grads and one was a fifth year senior who completed their coursework during 1st semester. We also have another six juniors who have been approved and are on track to graduate this year.

Connections arranges and hosts many fun and educational events throughout the year. Prior to the Covid-19 health mandates, Connections had hosted or participated in at least 90 different activities. These activities ranged from Battle of the Books, to Forensics, to providing volunteers to set up, serve, and clean up the Christmas dinner at the Kenai Peninsula Food Bank. All three offices host activities that mesh with their unique communities. Connections activities promote hands-on learning and provide opportunities for students and families to connect socially.

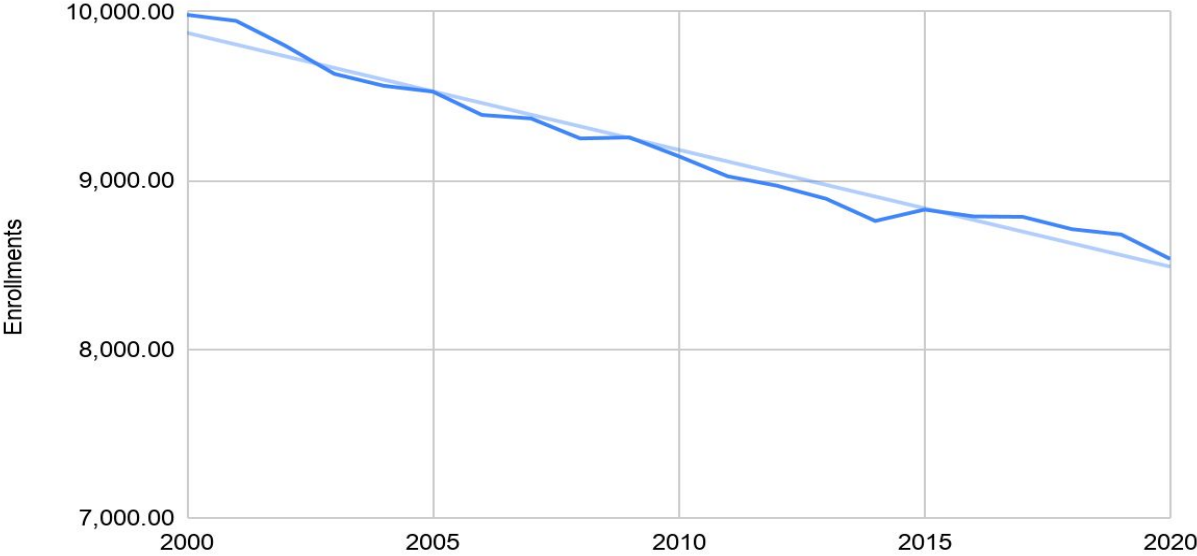
Connections has some unique challenges that make it different from other schools in the district. Connections is an educational institution promoting learning through homeschooling. Connections has direct competition for homeschool students. Galena City School District and Craig City School District are two of a handful of statewide homeschool programs competing for students on the Kenai Peninsula. Such direct competition requires more of a business model than is typical for public K-12 education.

Connections occupies a unique position as the only homeschool program on the Kenai Peninsula that is only for Kenai Peninsula families. Connections' students can take up to two classes (or two hours for elementary students) at their traditional neighborhood schools at no cost. Connections students are also able to participate in sports and other extra-curricular activities at their neighborhood schools. This partnership with neighborhood schools is one of Connections great assets, and is also a challenge.

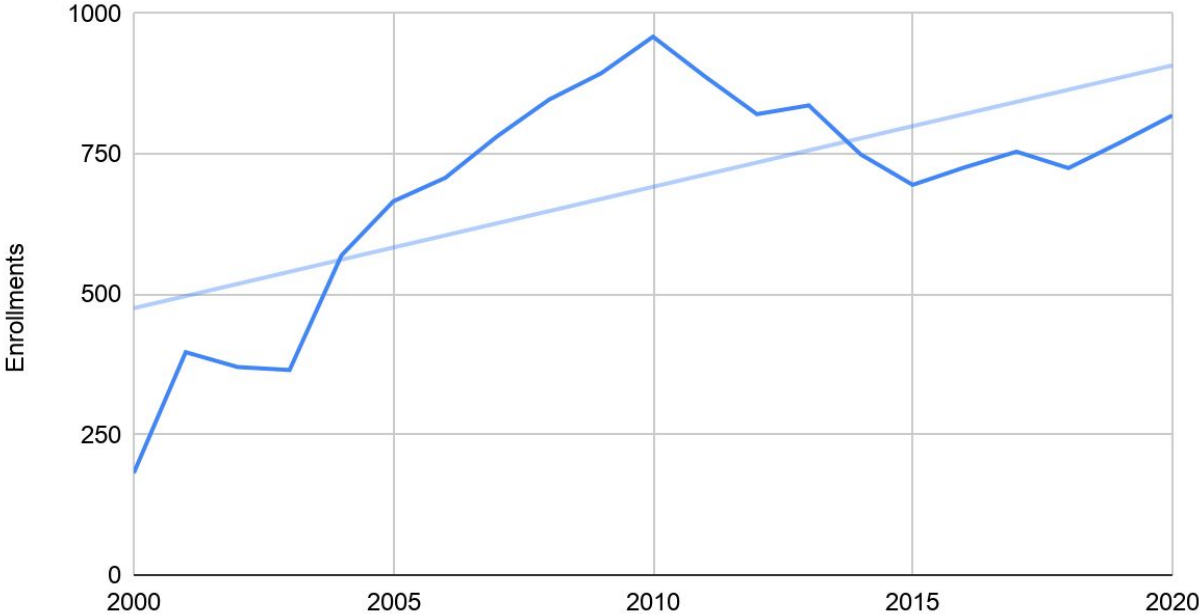
Connections has seen an increase in interest for homeschooling next year. The Covid-19 response is expected to increase the number of Alaskan homeschoolers, at least in the short term. As a positive, while the Covid-19 related health mandates have impacted homeschool activities, most Connections families seem to be doing well as far as being able to maintain their educational programs. This crisis has put a spotlight on home-based learning opportunities.

# Current Enrollments and Trend

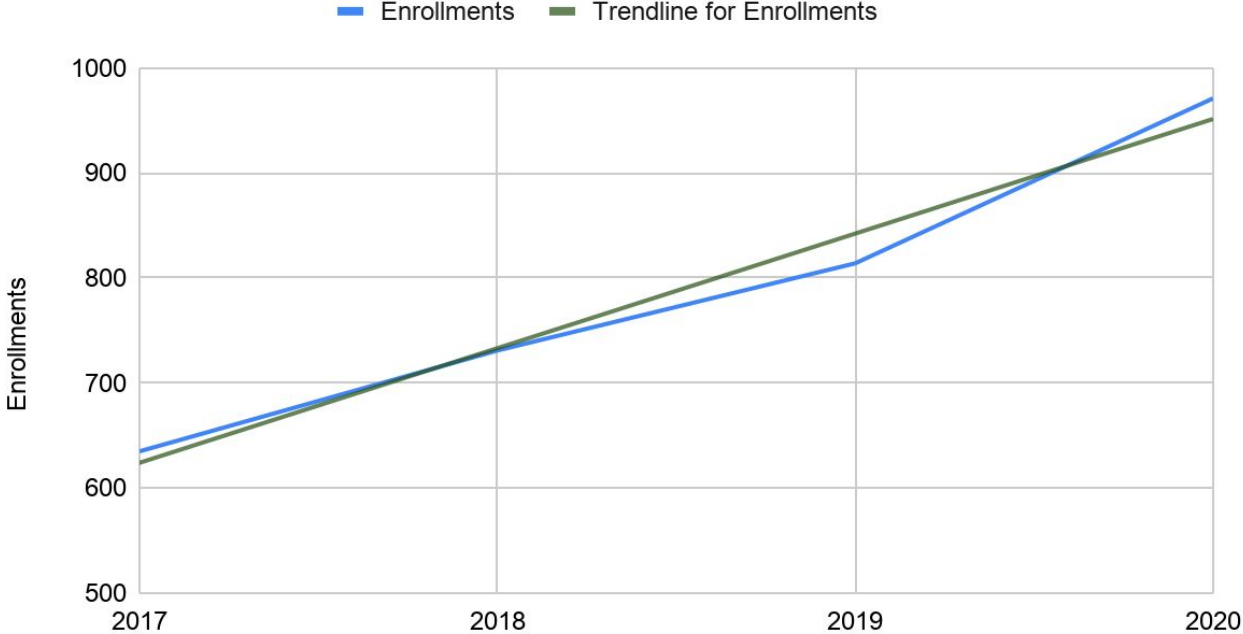
KPBSD Enrollments - ADM



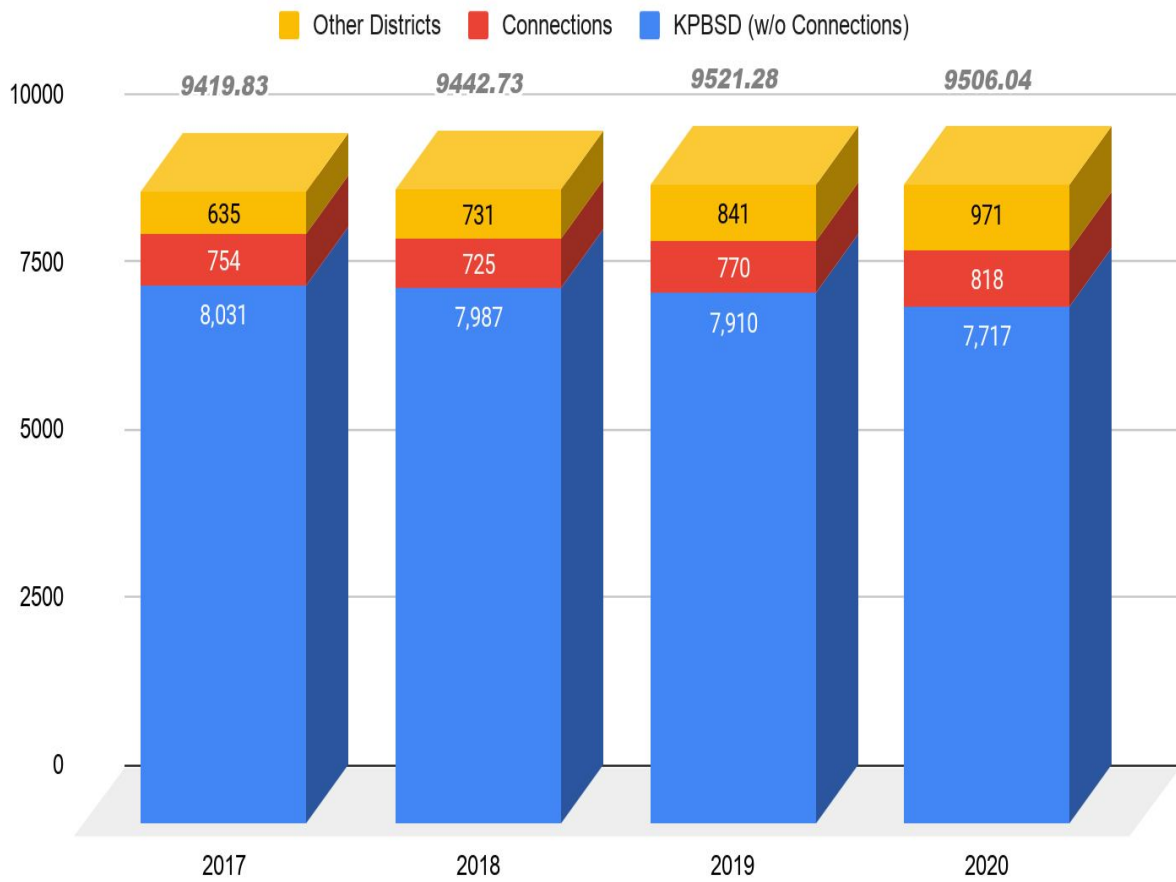
### Connections Enrollments - ADM



### Kenai Peninsula Students Enrolled in Other Districts



## # of Students on Kenai Peninsula (KPBSD + Other Districts)



- Since 2015, KPBSD has seen a decline in enrollments of just over 200 students.
- Since 2015, nearly 500 (additional) Kenai Peninsula students have enrolled at other districts.
- Since 2015, Connections has seen enrollment growth of just over 120 students.
- Since 2015, Connections has grown from roughly 8% to close to 10% of KPBSD enrollments.
- In 2020 there were roughly 9810 students on the Kenai Peninsula enrolled in Alaskan school(s)/districts (KPBSD and other districts.).
- In 2020, roughly 19% of students on the Kenai Peninsula chose to homeschool with a state approved program (including Connections).
- In 2015, less than 14% of students on the Kenai Peninsula chose to homeschool with a state approved program.
- Note: We have no way to track the number of families who choose to independently homeschool their children.

## Challenges

### Perception

- Connections was a response to IDEA, not a desire to support homeschooling.
- Connections is an alternative school for the KPBSD.
- Connections is considered less accepting of using faith-based materials than other programs.
- Connections scrutinizes use of allotments more closely than other programs.
- Connections' paperwork and procedures are more cumbersome than competitors.

### Situation

Connections is one of 43 schools on the Kenai Peninsula with roughly 10% of KPBSD students. Our primary competitor, IDEA is one of 4 schools in the Galena City School District and represents 93% of their student enrollment. These contrasts lead to some competitive challenges for Connections.

- Connections has always been very careful not to compete with KPBSD schools for students.
- Our competitors promote homeschooling and aren't worried about where students come from..

- Competing district's programs have policies and practices that heavily consider impact on homeschooling.
  - A policy example that cost Connections students in the past was the one year high school credit for a three credit college class. While there is no empirical data on this, advisors heard from several families that that policy led to leaving the district.

## Relationship with Neighborhood Schools (Local Advantage)

- The ability to take classes in neighborhood schools is a key advantage for Connections.
- Students enrolled in other school districts lose a portion of their allotment if they enroll in a class (or classes) at a KPBSD brick-and-mortar school.
- Not all schools welcome Connections students with open arms.
- State rules allowing students to participate in sports and extracurriculars at KPBSD schools eliminated part of the "local" advantage.

## Technology and Infrastructure

- Connections is using an outdated internal database system, COMA. Replacing that system with a web-based, modern system is a strategic need. This move will address the cumbersome nature of our paperwork and procedures.
- Connections website is in need of a total remodel.
- Connections is in need of a cohesive marketing plan aligning messaging with print, radio, and social media campaigns.