



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** State Board of Education & Early Development  
**Date:** November 3, 2021

**Thru:** Commissioner Michael Johnson  
**Telephone:** (907) 269-4583

**From:** Susan McKenzie, Director  
Division of Innovation and  
Education Excellence  
**Subject:** Agenda 10A. Division of  
Innovation and Education  
Excellence Standing Report

The Division of Innovation and Education Excellence (IEE) is dedicated to providing an excellent education for every student every day by focusing division efforts around the five priorities of the Alaska's Education Challenge; providing oversight of state and federally funded programs to ensure quality and equity of student services; and providing excellent technical assistance and support to districts statewide.

The IEE Division encompasses nine teams that manage a wide range of programs and activities for the State. These teams include the Assessment Team, the Career and Technical Education Team, the Early Learning Team, the ESEA Federal Programs Team, the Health and Safety Team, the School Recognition and Support Team, the Special Education Team, and the Teacher Certification Team. In addition, staff from each of these teams have been very involved in supporting the COVID Fiscal Team's work.

Included in the IEE Board Report are highlights of work with initiatives, compliance work, and support to districts as it relates to the Alaska's Education Challenge priorities.

**Alaska's Education Challenge Priority #1:**  
**Support all students to read at grade level by the end of third grade.**

### Early Learning

- Based on input from the field, the department has implemented the streamlining of the process and training in the PreK Assessment under the new vendor (previously Teaching Strategies Gold, now COR Advantage). The importance of this assessment highlights student developmental progress for readiness in reading instruction, as well as other success predictors and milestones.

Bi-weekly input sessions are conducted to gather feedback from the field on implementation successes and challenges.

### **ESEA Federal Programs**

- The Title III-A Program is finalizing updates to the department's website in order to provide resources and information about the recently adopted WIDA English Language Development Standards, 2020 Edition. These Standards help to prepare effective education professionals by providing them with resources to help them meet the needs of Alaska's English Learners, including helping support all students to read at grade level by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade by providing a well-researched framework to support Alaska's identified English learners.

### **School Recognition and Support**

- The Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) grant serves students from birth to grade 12, and focuses on early literacy skill instruction, early interventions, reading on grade level by end of grade 3, and increasing reading proficiency rates. The grant's top project goals are:
  - Providing resources to meet LEA/school literacy needs;
  - Offering professional development in best practices for literacy instruction; and,
  - Implementing a statewide comprehensive literacy plan.

Projects have continued in spite of setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, pivoting as needed. Examples of these adjustments include:

- Book projects/literacy packets sent to homes instead of delivered in-person at schools;
- Literacy coach positions replaced with curriculum director and paraprofessional support;
- Virtual literacy events and social media outreach to families; and,
- Creation of virtual avenues rather than travel for professional development.

### **Special Education**

- To best prepare staff working with students experiencing a specific learning disability in dyslexia, the department has developed and is in the immediate process of uploading to the internet, a Dyslexia training eLearning Module. This is anticipated to be released for public use in December 2021.

### **Alaska's Education Challenge Priority #2:**

**Increase career, technical and culturally relevant education to meet student and workforce needs.**

### **Career and Technical Education (CTE)**

- The department is moving ahead to develop a statewide clearinghouse of CTE resources in partnership with the Alaska Association for Career and Technical Education (AK ACTE).
  - AK ACTE is a membership based CTE advocacy organization made up of school and district CTE staff from across the state. The department will grant funds to develop and support an online platform to facilitate sharing of CTE curriculum/program resources among school districts and CTE staff.

- This initiative will further the Alaska’s Education Challenge’s focus on CTE as well as help to address capacity constraints of Alaska’s smaller districts (addressing equity issues).
  - For the new school year, school districts have received increased federal Carl Perkins subgrants due to unused state funds from COVID-19 travel restrictions and an increased federal award.
    - Districts are receiving up to 20% larger grants this year, and the amount of unused funds from FY2021 that is redistributed to districts is 3 times more than in past years.
    - For FY2022, up to 12 of Alaska’s 54 districts will not choose to apply for federal Perkins CTE funds.
    - Increased funds will allow districts to pursue upgrades to CTE content delivered to students.
  - The AK ACTE recognized these outstanding Alaskan educators, organizations, and sponsors at their virtual statewide Professional Development Conference held October 4-5, 2021:
    - CTE Teacher of the Year: Wade Roach, Dimond High School, Anchorage School District. Award sponsored by Alaska Resource Education.
    - New CTE Teacher of the Year: Jerry Jones, Southwest Region School District. Award sponsored by the Alaska Business Education Compact.
    - CTE Leadership Award: Missy Frazee, Anchorage School District. Award sponsored by the Alaska Safety Alliance.
    - Community Service Award: Matanuska Telephone Company.
    - Innovative Program Award: King Tech High School Aviation Academy, Anchorage School District. Award sponsored by Donlin Gold.
- Congratulations to our outstanding CTE colleagues!

### **COVID-19 Fiscal Team**

- Districts are continuing to complete and revise their funding applications for FY2022 COVID Relief funding to include funds from the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES), Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA), and American Rescue Plan (ARP) Acts.
  - Districts are finding innovative ways to use the funds to support a variety of identified needs within their districts.
  - Many districts are finding innovative ways to supplement their existing CTE efforts by expanding opportunities offered to students using these funds.
  - Other districts are finding innovative ways to incorporate culturally relevant educational activities using these funds.

For further details on eligible expenditures under these funds, see the Resource for Educators and School Districts to Help Guide Effective Spending of COVID Relief Funds: [Here](#).

- The department issued districts an intent to award the ARP – Homeless I funds. Districts eligible to receive McKinney Vento awards were eligible for additional Homeless I funds for FY2022. The following districts were eligible and awarded the following amounts for further support in this category in the following amounts.
  - Anchorage School District, \$184,646
  - Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, \$80,423
  - Juneau School District, \$48,469
  - Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, \$44,448
  - Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District, \$90,588

## Early Learning

- The Head Start program is working directly with CTE for development of a statewide Career Technical Education Program of Study (CTEPS) in Early Childhood Education, where high school students can earn dual credit towards an early childhood degree.
- The Head Start and CTE teams are currently working with the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) to develop a program of study, including a one dual-credit course entitled “Exploring Early Care and Education (ECE) for Personal Growth and Career Opportunities” to introduce high school students to Early Childhood Education as a career option. This support can provide jobs for students in their local community in a high-demand field.

## Special Education

- The department’s State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) activities support students with disabilities leaving school. Activities include:
  - Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) work agreements for all qualifying students with disabilities exiting school districts;
  - Cooperative work with DVR through the established Alaska Intra-agency Transition Council (AITC); and,
  - Joint trainings (virtual) for secondary transition camps in cooperation with the Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRC).

### **Alaska’s Education Challenge Priority #3:**

**Close the achievement gap by ensuring equitable educational rigor and resources.**

## Assessment

- The department has partnered with NWEA to implement a creative approach to balanced statewide assessment that better reflects learning throughout the school year and helps educators target instruction to students’ individual needs. Key activities this fall include:
  - Assessment design and development activities with NWEA and subcontractor ETS are underway, to include approval of test blueprints, conducting the Range Achievement Level Descriptors meetings with Alaska educators, and bias/sensitivity reviews of summative test items;
  - Understanding district needs and responding to questions and concerns with the transition to AK STAR; meeting with different groups (district test coordinators, technology directors, correspondence school leaders, superintendents) to hear and address their questions and concerns in preparation for spring 2022 testing; and,
  - Engaging in planning for professional learning events with multiple collaborators, to include NWEA, Region 16 Comprehensive Center, SERRC, and the department; ensuring technical training topics are addressed while also promoting assessment literacy in spring 2022; establishing plans and protocols for the certified facilitator trainings.

This balanced approach aims to increase the quality of real-time data and information at the student, school, district, and state levels, ensuring proactive efforts to address student needs throughout the year and not only in response to statewide summative assessment results.

- **Monitoring District Assessment Activities**  
The Assessment Team is reviewing the purpose and processes for monitoring districts' assessment activities as established to ensure standardized assessment administration, test security, and reporting protocols in alignment with federal and state policies.
  - The team is exploring how to focus the assessment monitoring initiative to address Peer Review requirements as well as attention to continuous improvement of assessment and other connected practices.
  - Through the shift in emphasis around the assessment monitoring processes and data, the department seeks to promote productive communication between the department and districts, including the validation and sharing of productive practices and resources.
  - By spotlighting examples of effective district assessment practices, the department can focus attention on the successful efforts of districts in executing an equitable assessment program.
  - By capitalizing on lessons learned within and across districts, the department can amplify the productive assessment activities, expand the existing knowledge base, and share useful resources across the state.

### **COVID Fiscal Team**

- The department is currently working on applying for Emergency Assistance to Non-public Schools (EANS II) funding from the U.S. Department of Education (US-Ed). This would be the second round of funding from US-Ed to support private schools with COVID-19-related expenses. This funding would allow private schools to address any learning loss experienced by private school students and help those students achieve reading goals.
- The department has scheduled a series of webinars and networking opportunities for districts in the months of October, November, and December to receive support in the planning and spending of their federal COVID Relief Funds. During these webinars and office hours, the department supports districts in utilizing their funding to address Alaska's Education Challenge and local educational needs.
- The department is in the process of awarding the American Rescue Plan – Homeless II funds. Funding is distributed to districts via a formula that uses the local educational agencies' (LEA's) allocation under Part A of Title I of the ESEA and the number of identified homeless children and youth in either school year 2018-2019 or 2019-2020, whichever number is greater. Based on this formula, the district must be eligible for at least \$5,000 in order to receive these funds. This resulted in 20 of the 54 school districts receiving funding, allowing districts to provide tutoring, supplemental instruction, and enriched educational services that are linked to the achievement of the same challenging State academic standards established for other children and youths.

### **Data and Accountability**

- As part of Alaska's [American Rescue Plan Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief \(ARP ESSER\) state plan](#), data elements related to access to technology were added to Fall OASIS 2021. Preliminary feedback from district representatives suggests that these elements will need to be refined to be more parent friendly. To this end, an advisory group of district representatives will be convened to determine the best way to pose the questions. Refined elements will be presented for stakeholder input in early 2022 (in compliance with [Section G.1.ii](#) of the ARP ESSER state plan).

- The data team is working with Education Northwest to prepare for calculations as outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) school ratings in Fall of 2022. Ratings permit the department to identify schools and student groups in need of support. Preparations include identifying strategies for handling missing data in 2020 and the introduction of a new year end summative assessment in Spring 2022. Proposed options were presented to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC<sup>1</sup>) in November and for public comment in early 2022.
- While the most recent assessment data (PEAKS 2021) is preliminary at this time, the department knows that fewer students took the test in comparison to past years. Historically, statewide PEAKS participation in the past has been around 90%. However, due to concerns related to COVID-19, in 2021 flexibilities were extended by the department to include reduced reporting requirements; extension of testing hours to evenings and weekends; and extension of the testing window by a week to help schools safely assess as many students as possible given the necessary mitigation practices. Even with these flexibilities, participation rates varied significantly from district to district and among demographic categories. Statewide, less than two-thirds of students participated in the assessment.

### **ESEA Federal Programs**

- The Migrant Education Program team at the department provided training on the identification and recruitment of migratory children to all school districts operating a migrant education program.
  - Approximately 160 school district staff from 40 school districts participated in these trainings.
  - Annually, districts are responsible for identifying and recruiting approximately 13,000 migratory children statewide.
  - Once migratory children are recruited, districts provide them with Title I-C funded instructional and support services that address their unique educational needs that result from their migratory lifestyle and permit them to participate effectively in school.
- The Migrant Education Program also awarded the Title III Immigrant Grant to the Mat-Su Borough School District (~\$18,000). This funding helps to close the achievement gap by providing extra resources/supports to newly arrived immigrant students.

### **Health and Safety**

- The eLearning program is an online training program to assist educators in complying with a number of state and federal laws that require district staff training.

The chart below shows the primary eLearning courses completed between July 1, 2021 - October 19, 2021. These courses help educators understand Alaska's students and their life experiences and how those experiences may impact their education.

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<sup>1</sup> The TAC is an interstate team of experts in the areas of assessment and accountability that work with department staff to ensure that Alaska is administering a valid and reliable assessment as well as a meaningful accountability system for schools and districts.

eLearning courses completed between July 1, 2021 - October 19, 2021	Number of completions
Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect	3,501
Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Training for Educators	2,914
Suicide courses Parts A-D	2,845
Prenatal Alcohol and Drug Related Disabilities	1,430
Equity Training for Educators	824
Trauma-Sensitive Schools	102
Trauma-Engaged and Practicing Schools	73
Trauma-Engaged Educators Guide	215
Overcoming ACEs in Alaskan Schools	162
Overcoming Stress and Anxiety in Alaskan Schools	117
Medication Administration: Training for Unlicensed School Staff	223

### Special Education

- The Special Education Team is currently working on Indicator 17 of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (S-SIP). The plan focuses on improving graduation rates and was approved by the Federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).
  - Approval includes reporting on training and supports, coordinated with the Alaska Interagency Transition Council (AITC).
  - Secondary Transition of special education populations is critical to closing the gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

These activities are conducted in cooperation with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRC).

- The Special Education Team continuously tracks compliance with federal requirements pertaining to equity regarding students with disabilities. The majority of monitoring involves Special Education paperwork completion and due date compliance.
- Communication is maintained with school districts via a live weekly webinar with Special Education Directors in order to provide frequent and real time question and answer opportunities to district staff. While many of the questions have centered around COVID-19 over the past year, the team is currently fielding many questions about intensive needs students.

### School Recognition and Support

- Project for Successful School Improvement:
  - The department has partnered with the Region 16 Comprehensive Center (R16CC) to create a School Improvement plan for CSI lowest 5% schools. Components include the Rural Playbook, the District Playbook, and Empowerment Specialists. The plan covers a four-year implementation timeline.
  - Five schools have been selected to take part in this project for year one, based upon a number of participation criteria. Hiring for Empowerment Specialists is underway through SERRC.

- District/Schools selected and confirmed:

School District	School	State Designation	Rural Designation	Student Enrollment	Region Location	Change in Superintendent	SSOS Coach
Alaska Gateway School District	Tetlin School	CSI lowest 5 %	Rural hub/fringe (on & off-road)	39	Interior	No	No
Bering Strait School District	Wales School	CSI lowest 5 %	Rural remote (off road)	42	Northwest	No	No
Kuspuk School District	Joseph S. & Olinga Gregory Elementary	CSI lowest 5 %	Rural remote (off road)	290	West	No	No
Lower Kuskokwim School District	Negtemiut Elitnaurviat School	CSI lowest 5 %	Rural remote (off road)	169	West	No	No
Northwest Arctic Borough School District	Davis-Ramoth School	CSI lowest 5 %	Rural remote (off road)	272	Northwest	No	No

- The Project for Successful School Improvement serves Alaska’s Education Challenge goal of closing the achievement gap by ensuring equitable education, rigor and resources, through the hiring and placing of Empowerment Specialists, the guidance of the playbook, and the assistance of the Academic Development Institute (ADI), R16CC, and department staff.

**Alaska’s Education Challenge Priority #4:  
Prepare, attract, and retain effective education professionals.**

**Assessment**

- Stakeholder Engagement for the Assessment Program
 

The Assessment Team is looking to increase avenues and opportunities for stakeholder engagement in various aspects of the state assessment program. Some of the engagement efforts being planned include:

  - Inviting educators to be involved in key test development and review activities;
  - Resurrecting the Assessment Advisory Panel to strategically involve a small group of state educators in assessment discussions and actions;
  - Promoting educator representation on the TAC;
  - Seeking opportunities to engage in cross-team stakeholder engagements to build connections between assessment, standards, instruction, and other statewide initiatives; and,



- Review of educator feedback from the most recent test development activity (RALD meeting) to inform next steps in recruitment and involvement of educators in test development/review.

By increasing Alaska educators' contributions to the assessment design, the assessment products will be more representative of the geographical, cultural, social, economic, and educational needs of students and families around the state. This will make the assessments more effective at providing valid and reliable information about Alaska students.

### **ESEA Federal Programs**

- Funds from ESEA programs are currently supporting the opportunity for districts to access recordings of WIDA's eConference; 13 teachers have accepted so far. This helps to prepare effective education professionals by providing them with resources to help them meet the needs of Alaska's English Learners.

### **Special Education**

- Special Education Directors and Coordinators received training on September 30 and October 1, 2021 on how to properly support students in the progression of their graduation credit courses with the implementation of 4 AAC 06.078 (alternate courses for graduation credit for students on an individualized education program (IEP)). Through implementation, increases in graduation rates and reductions in student dropout rates have been achieved in a statistically significant way. The key to success in this level of student support is to identify at risk-students and remediate on a one-to-one basis.

### **Teacher Certification**

- The TEACH-AK project to move most of the Teacher Certification Office's applications and other services to a web-based environment continues to move forward.
  - At this stage, the work is focused on adapting the off-the-shelf product to conform with Alaska statutes and regulations.
  - The teacher certification administrator is meeting weekly with inLumon's design team to work through required changes.
- Recruiting educators that can satisfy all certification requirements continues to be a challenge for Alaska school districts.
  - As of October 20, 2021, the Teacher Certification Office had issued 106 emergency certificates to 29 Alaska School Districts. Below are the number of emergency certificates issued to each of the 29 districts for the 2021-2022 school year:

<b>Alaska School District</b>	<b>Emergency Certificate Issued</b>
Alaska Gateway	2
Aleutians East	1
Anchorage	7
Annette Island	1
Bering Strait	28
Chatham	1
Delta/Greely	2
Denali Borough	1

<b>Alaska School District</b>	<b>Emergency Certificate Issued</b>
Dillingham	2
Fairbanks North Star	1
Galena City	2
Hoonah City	1
Iditarod Area	2
Kashunamiut	3
Kenai Peninsula	2
Ketchikan Gateway	1
Kodiak Island	3
Kuspuk	1
Lower Kuskokwim	8
Lower Yukon	15
Mat-Su Schools	4
North Slope Borough	2
Northwest Arctic Borough	1
Pelican City	1
Sitka	2
Southwest Region	3
Yukon Flats	6
Yukon/Koyukuk	2
Yupit	1

- Below is a list of the endorsement areas on the issued emergency certificates:

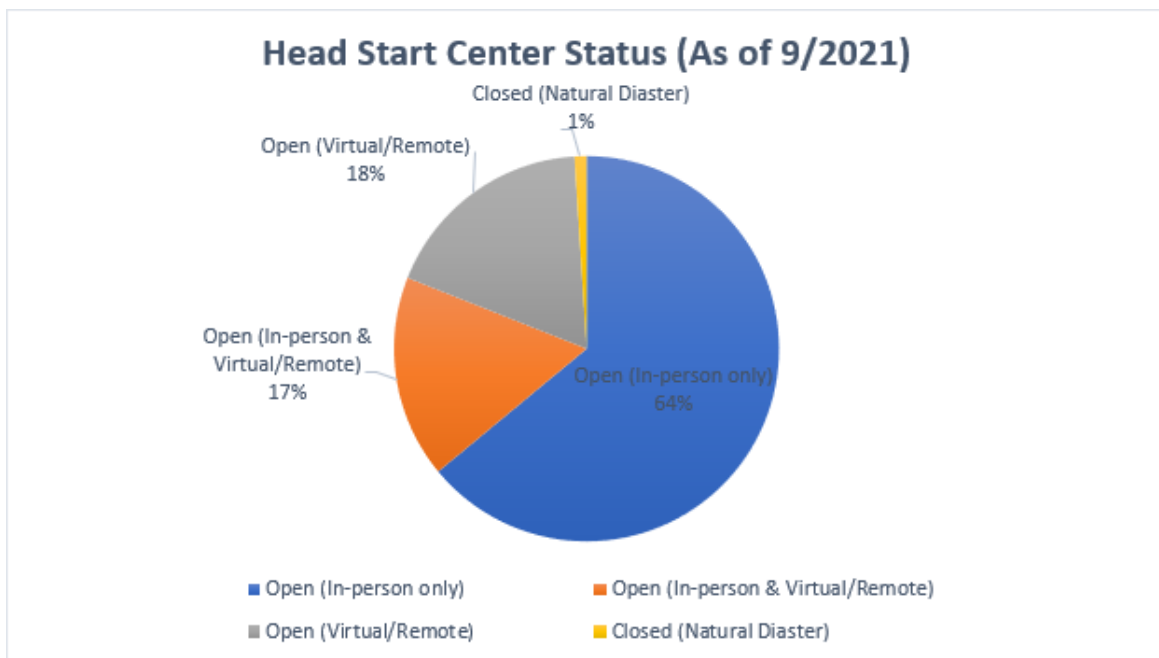
<b>Emergency Certificate Endorsements</b>	<b>Endorsement Count</b>
Administration	1
Agriculture	1
Art	1
Biology	1
Chinese	1
Director of Special Education	1
Early Childhood Education	2
Elementary Education	30
English	6
English/Language Arts	6
General Studies	1
Generalist	20
Language Arts	2
Math/Science	2
Mathematics	11

Emergency Certificate Endorsements	Endorsement Count
Middle School	2
Music	3
Music - Choral	1
Physical Education	3
Reading	2
Reading Specialist	1
Science	9
Secondary Education	1
Social Sciences	1
Social Studies	3
Spanish	2
Theatre Arts	1

**Alaska’s Education Challenge Priority #5:  
Improve the safety and well-being of students through school partnerships  
with families, communities, and tribes.**

**Early Learning**

- Head Start and Early Learning Agencies collected data on numbers of open and closed programs based on safety issues, such as staff shortages due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following chart represents that data.



## Health and Safety

- Bree's Law Education: Alaska Safe Children's Act state authored curriculum titled *Bree's Law Education*.
  - This is a grade banded dating violence/sexual assault prevention and awareness curriculum, constructed to assist districts in complying with the student training requirements within the Alaska Safe Children's Act.
  - This essential safety training for students in grades 7-12 will be delivered via the department's eClassroom, which is part the of eLearning Program at no cost to districts.
  - In addition, work on phase 2 began, which includes creating new activities and scenarios to create a second set of lessons for each of the 3 grade bands to provide variety to the curricula offerings within grade banded years.
- Alaska Healthy Schools Learning Collaborative  
The department, in collaboration with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), will be providing a Professional Development Series to Alaskan Educators on various health topics. Throughout the school year, recorded virtual sessions will be held covering such topics as: Mental Health, Staff Wellness, School Health, Trauma-Engaged Practice, School Climate/Relationship skill building, and more. No matter what the role in the schools, there will be a session for everyone to view live or recorded. Please visit the department's new [Alaska Healthy Schools Learning Collaborative](#) website for more information.
- Behavioral Health in Schools  
In December 2020, the Alaska Mental Health Trust (Trust) and partners from the State of Alaska Departments of Education and Early Development and Health and Social Services met to develop a visioning for working towards improved mental health supports and services for Alaskan students. A primary takeaway was a collective need for more information on the landscape of current school mental and behavioral health activities and services around the state to help project partners determine how to best focus their future efforts. The Trust contracted with Stellar Group to do an environmental scan of Alaska's school districts. You can access the complete report and accompanying school district profiles on the Trust webpage: "[Mental Health Supports in Alaska Schools, A Landscape Assessment.](#)"
- The department, in partnership with DHSS, has continued to deliver School Health ECHO trainings to districts every Monday at 3:00pm. These popular statewide virtual trainings provide weekly updates on COVID-19 mitigation strategies and allows districts to both seek clarification on COVID-19 related issues and to share successes and challenges.

## Other Updates

### COVID-19 Related Updates

- On August 27, 2021, the U.S. Department of Education (US-Ed) announced the approval of Alaska's American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) state plan and distributed the remaining ARP ESSER funds to the state.
  - The State Plan describes how Alaska plans to use ARP ESSER funds to safely reopen and sustain the safe operation of schools and equitably expand opportunities for students who need it most, particularly those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - Alaska's total ARP ESSER allocation is approximately \$358 million.
    - Two-thirds of that total - about \$239 million - was released on March 24, 2021.

- With the approval of Alaska's State Plan, US-Ed released the final \$119 million. Over ninety percent of the ARP ESSER funds are awarded directly to school districts who work with their local school boards on how to spend these funds.
- Districts are continuing to complete and revise their FY2022 COVID-19 Relief funding applications to include resources from the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES), Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA), and American Rescue Plan (ARP) Acts. They are finding innovative ways to use the funds to support a variety of identified needs.
  - Many districts are purchasing new reading curriculum and high interest reading materials to support Alaska's Education Challenge of supporting students to read at grade level by the end of third grade.
  - Many districts are providing incentives to staff so they can retain effective education professionals including nurses, mental health practitioners, janitors, support staff, and teachers.
  - Many districts are using these funds to coordinate school partnerships with families, community organizations, and tribes.
- Districts have recently submitted required mitigation plans and district ARP plans to the department, as required by the ARP Act. Department staff continue to work with districts by providing technical assistance to help complete, update, and revise their mitigation plans and district ARP plans as needs arise.