



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** State Board of Education & Early  
Development

**Date:** March 16, 2021

**Thru:** Commissioner Michael Johnson

**Telephone:** (907) 465-2857

**From:** Director Tamara Van Wyhe

**Subject:** Division Updates

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### Assessments

#### **NAEP Update 2.11.21.**

- The NAEP 2021 School and Teacher Questionnaire Special Study will be administered online tentatively from February through March. Superintendents and Principals of the districts and schools that were originally notified of selection for NAEP 2021 will receive informational notices pertaining to this special study soon. While the NAEP 2021 assessments were postponed until the spring of 2022, this postponement did not include the associated NAEP School and Teacher Questionnaires customarily administered to administrators and content teachers.

#### **District Test Coordinator Training**

- On February 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, the annual District Testing Coordinator meeting was held via distance delivery. District Testing Coordinators were provided training and technical assistance in preparation for the upcoming Performance Evaluation for Alaska's Schools (PEAKS) Assessment administration window. PEAKS Assessment will occur according to the following schedule:
  - March 29 – April 30, 2021: Performance Evaluation for Alaska's Schools (PEAKS), Computer-based
  - April 5 – April 23, 2021: Performance Evaluation for Alaska's Schools (PEAKS), Paper-based

#### **Districts are anticipated to provide testing according to the following methods:**

- Computer-based – 43 districts
- Paper-based – 6 districts
- Both Computer-based and Paper-based – 4 districts

### **Assessment Request for Information Proposal**

- DEED has solicited through a Request for Informal Proposal (RFI) process for the development of an Innovative Assessment System to replace the Performance Evaluation for Alaska's Schools (PEAKS) assessment. The RFI solicitation closed on January 29<sup>th</sup> and the Proposal Evaluation Committee will meet on February 19<sup>th</sup> to review proposals and begin the interview and selection process.

### **Career and Technical Education program**

- The annual CTE Perkins Funding Application Workshop was held virtually this year for four hours each day February 9-12. In addition to providing technical assistance to school districts and a handful of post-secondary grantees, themes included expanding the conversation about apprenticeships to include a variety of work-based learning options to meet students where they are. CTE stakeholders collaborated on locally grown virtual instruction practices, improving equity and access to CTE programming for all students, and explored how to adjust CTE programs of study to align to re-skilling and recovery efforts. Around 70 participants joined over the course of 4 days.
- Application processes will open this spring for school districts to apply for FY22 federal CTE funds.
- Three competitive professional development grants were awarded to Anchorage School District, Fairbanks school district, and Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center (NACTEC) to provide CTE training directly to CTE instructors across the state.

### **COVID-19 Relief**

- On December 27, 2020, President Trump signed into law the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, 2021, Public Law 116-260, which provides an additional \$54.3 billion for an Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief II (ESSER II) Fund. The State of Alaska's ESSER II Fund allocation is \$159.7 million. These funds are in addition to the \$38.4 million that State of Alaska received for the ESSER I Fund under the CARES Act.
- The CRRSA Act provides \$5.4 billion for the Emergency Assistance for Non-Public Schools (EANS) program, which is part of the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER II) Fund. Under the EANS program, the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) was awarded funds to provide services or assistance to eligible non-public schools to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on non-public school students and teachers in the State. DEED will release the EANS Program application on February 12, 2021, and applications are due to DEED no later than March 12, 2021, at 5:00pm Alaska Standard Time.
- DEED continues to create and update resources related to the CARES Act and the CRRSA Act. All resources are posted to the DEED COVID-19 Relief website at <https://education.alaska.gov/safeschools/infectiousdisease#covidrelief>.

### **Data and Accountability**

- Accountability System

- The US Department of Education released an addendum for accountability for the system that will be calculated in Fall 2021. This addendum provides for some flexibility around: indicators in which we have missing data from 2019-2020, long-term goals (bumping them one year forward), and around school identification and continued school support. DEED prepared a plan, shared this plan with stakeholders in December, and finalized this plan in late January. The addendum (and a corresponding waiver for the identification of TSI schools in Fall 2021) was submitted to US ED in early February.
- Data Collections
  - The Suspensions and Expulsions collection opens for trial submissions on 4/19/2021.
  - The Participation Rate collection opens for trial submissions on 03/15/2021.
  - The Fall OASIS collection opened on 10/23/2020 and closed on 11/06/2020. 2020-2021 enrollment reports have been posted to the web.
- EDFacts – Federal Reporting Requirements
  - The February EDFacts and CSPR Part I and Part II data collections have been completed.
  - There are additional rounds of EDFacts submissions coming up in March-June.
- The State, District, and School Report Cards to the Public have been generated and posted to the web. A number of guidance documents were created this year to help data users interpret and consider the data from last school year. As a reminder, many federal requirements related to the Report Card that uses data from the 2019-2020 school year have been waived:
  - Percentage of students assessed and not assessed
  - Assessment results
  - Number and percentage of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities taking an alternate assessment
  - Accountability system description
  - Other academic indicator results (academic growth)
  - School quality or student success indicator results (chronic absenteeism, Grade 3 ELA)
  - Progress toward meeting long-term goals and measurements of interim progress

## **Early Learning Program**

### **Pre-Elementary**

- Seventeen school districts are receiving PreK grant funds. Most districts have been providing services virtually or with a hybrid model. Many districts started in-person services either totally or as a hybrid model in January. Individual communities continue to make service delivery decisions using the Smart Start guidance.
- The annual PreK grantee meeting is scheduled for February 26 and will be held via virtual platform.
- The federal Preschool Development Grant is complete. The resulting Alaska Early Childhood Strategic plan may be found at [earlychildhoodalaska.com](http://earlychildhoodalaska.com). This plan was created through collaborative work with Alaska's early childhood community, including state agencies, non-profit agencies, early childhood educators, administrators, and families.
- Congress appropriated FY21 funding for Head Start. This includes a 1.2% COLA increase. An additional \$250 Million of CARES funding was released for programs, which will be approximately \$290 per slot.

- The Alaska Head Start Association held their annual awards banquet to honor Head Start parents, staff, and community partners. The Alaska Gateway School District was honored with the School District Collaboration award for their work with Tanana Chiefs Conference. The Head Start Teacher of the Year was Hazel Hall from Kid's Corp. The Early Head Start Teacher of the year was Erin Barrows, also from Kid's Corp.
- In December, the CDC published a report on "Implementing mitigation strategies in Early Care & Education settings for Prevention of SARS-COVID-2 Transmission." This report found that Head Start & Early Head Start programs have been successful in implementing CDC-recommended mitigation strategies to limit transmission. Alaska was one of the 8 states included in this mixed method study.

### **ESEA/ESSA Federal Programs**

- The ESEA Federal Programs team is hosting its annual ESEA Consolidated Application Technical Assistance Workshop virtually April 19-22, 2021. This workshop provides guidance and technical assistance to districts in complying with the provisions under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). DEED staff provides programmatic and Grant Management System (GMS) application updates to approximately 115 district staff throughout the State.
- The US Department of Education released preliminary State FY2022 allocations for School Support and Accountability (SSA) programs. The US Department of Education expects to release final allocations in June 2021 that will be the basis of the July 1 grant awards.
- The [Impact Aid Coronavirus Relief Act](#) (H.R. 8472) was signed into law. This act, among other things, authorizes the Secretary of Education to use Migrant Education Program (MEP) child count data from school year 2018-19 or 2019-20, whichever data are greater, to determine States' Title I, Part C MEP award amounts for state fiscal year 2022 and any subsequent year in which 2019-20 child count data would have otherwise been required to be used by law.
- In January 2021, US ED approved the requested waivers to allow for greater flexibility in the use of Title IV-A funds for the 2020-2021 school year. The waivers have been approved for the following requirements:
  - Section 4106(d) of Title IV, Part A of the ESEA, related to LEA needs assessments for the 2020-2021 school year.
  - Section 4106(e)(2)(C), (D), and (E) of Title IV, Part A of the ESEA, with respect to content-area spending requirements for State fiscal year (FY) 2021 Title IV, Part A funds.
  - Section 4109(b) of Title IV, Part A of the ESEA, with respect to the fifteen percent spending limitation for technology infrastructure for State FY 2021 Title IV, Part A funds.
- Funding was provided to Title III districts in the State to support attendance at the virtual ESEA National Conference in February. There were several sessions related directly to educating and supporting English learners. Over 50 participants took advantage of these funds and attended on behalf of their district's English learners.
- Every 5 years the Afterschool Alliance conducts the America After 3pm household survey to determine the status of afterschool across the country. This survey provides a snapshot and a ranking of afterschool in all 50 states. **For 2020 Alaska was ranked 4th in the country.** This is a tremendous increase in ranking for our state moving from 31st in 2014, to 4th in 2020.

- The 6th Annual Alaska Afterschool Conference--co-hosted by DEED, the Alaska Afterschool Network, and DHSS--occurred virtually November 19-20 and engaged 216 afterschool educators from 21 Alaskan communities. This year's conference provided 26 hours of professional development for the afterschool workforce. Overall conference evaluation results are below:
  - 74% of participants strongly agree that they gained new knowledge and skills
  - 73% of participants strongly agree that they strengthened their ability to work with diverse student populations
  - 73% of participants strongly agree that they increased awareness of available resources
  - 60% of participants strongly agree that they expanded their professional networking connections

## **Health and Safety Programs**

### **COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Preparedness**

- DEED, via an exciting partnership with the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, has established a new long term non perm Mental Health Education Specialist II Position as part of its COVID 19 Response and Recovery Efforts. This position is fully funded by the Trust and resides on the Health and Safety Team. The position will provide mental health support to students of all ages, prioritizing rural and remote school districts who do not otherwise have available mental health supports, for the next 2.5 years. Teachers and faculty in Alaska school districts, and particularly those smaller districts with fewer mental health resources, have expressed a need for increased mental health supports as a result of the pandemic's impact on staff and student wellness. DEED has just filled this position and is expanding its pandemic mental health response efforts.
- The Health and Safety Team, in partnership with Public Health, conducted more than 40 presentations entitled "*Supporting Staff, Students, and Families through COVID*" to more than 1800 educators, parents, and community members on how to mitigate and recover from the school-based stress, grief, and anxiety COVID 19 has generated.
- DEED, in partnership with DHSS, has continued to deliver School Health ECHO trainings to districts every Monday at 3pm. These popular statewide virtual trainings provide weekly updates on COVID 19 mitigation strategies and allow districts to both seek clarification on COVID related issues and to share successes and challenges.

### **School Health and Safety Events**

- The team is partnering with the Department of Health and Social Services to co-sponsor the 15th annual School Health and Wellness Institute. Typically held in the Fall, the 2020 Alaska School Health & Wellness Institute (SHWI) is pivoting to online trainings in February 2021. To provide needed training for the Alaskan school staff members across the state adapting to the many stressors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we will be offering a slate of sessions through virtual platforms. Sessions will focus on Mental Health/Suicide Prevention and Trauma-Engaged Schools; COVID-19 Response; Self-Care for Educators; School and Family Partnerships; Health Education Support; Physical Health Activities and Nutrition; Relationships and Violence Prevention; Substance Misuse Prevention; and more.

- The team is participating in a statewide group hosted by AASB regarding professional boundaries and child sexual abuse in the educational setting. The group is focused on supporting student safety through promoting policies, creating accountability, and providing training on professional boundaries.

### **Quality Schools Program**

- The Health and Safety Team completed the annual Legislative Report on the Quality Schools Program. COVID-19 constituted a significant challenge to measuring student academic growth/impact in many districts as a result of their QS programming as the statewide summative assessments were paused.

### **School Disciplinary Reports**

- Annual Gun-Free Schools Report completed and submitted to USED
- Annual State Restraint and Seclusion Report completed
- School Discipline Data Ed Facts Reports (utilizing district suspension and expulsion data) completed and submitted to USED
- In general, significant declines in the reported numbers was present across all of these reports. This decline was expected due to the interruptions in school and broad-based delivery of virtual instruction.

### **School Improvement**

- **Staffing**
  - Math / Science Content Specialist, Joy Abbott, starts May 24, 2021.
- **Grant funding News**
  - **CLSD**
    - CLSD Program Manager making monthly calls with grant recipients; basic reading supports and research provided for district needing additional technical assistance
    - April Convening in planning stages for community building and professional development
    - CLSD Specific Website up and running; CLSD Newsletter published 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday every month to provide updates, resources, and highlight a great project in the grant
  - **School Improvement Grants for CSI and TSI Schools**
    - Convening for Comprehensive and Targeted Schools of Improvement held February 1, 2021 to provide professional development for 70 school district personnel across the state
      - Training on the 4 Domains of Rapid School Improvement from WESTED
      - Training on using Curriculum as a Lever for School Improvement
      - DEED supports and plans for ongoing professional development shared
    - CSI TSI Newsletter published 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of every month to provide CSI TSI Specific information, support, resources, and to highlight a great thing happening in one of the designated schools.

- 15 districts with at least one school designated as CSI Lowest 5% have been invited to participate in a curriculum and instructional materials survey through Johns Hopkins University Center for Education Policy
- **SSOS**
  - Regional meetings and biweekly DEED and SSOS coach meetings to provide updates, professional development, share ideas, and collaborate to better support our districts.
  - SSOS coaches focusing in on collected data to support school improvement planning and goals
    - 1,378 hours of combined hours of coaching service provided to CSI lowest 5 % schools
  - SSOS Coaches are supporting schools through academic needs, but also providing a safe outlet to guide through tough situations (death of an elder, loss of community members and students, fires, power outages, and concerns with COVID-19)
- **Professional Development / Resources**
  - Book Study
    - Balance with Blended Learning – Three team members teaching
    - Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain – 1 team member supporting from a technology perspective
  - Echo Sessions
    - SRS Team provided 5 Echo Sessions December 2020 and January 2021
  - CSI TSI Convening
  - CLSD ongoing support and training
  - ELA Content Specialist working on social studies standards adoption process
  - New Teacher Talks
    - Relationship Building completed; Classroom Management completed
    - Teacher Gazette Newsletter published 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every month to provide literacy strategies, family connection components, educational technology, and health and wellness tips and tricks.
- **Relationship Building**
  - Convenings, Echo, Book Studies, monthly calls, and a service-driven experience is creating opportunities to reach teachers all across the state
- **Teacher Recognition**
  - Teacher of the Year
    - Nominations close March 15; Announcement will be made for the 2021-2022 Teacher of the Year during the first week of May (Teacher Appreciation Week)
  - Milken
    - Milken Family Foundation did not select an Alaska recipient this year

### **Special Education Program**

- Compliance/ Special Education Monitoring –
  - The FY20 compliance monitoring complete and the compliance monitoring corrective actions are estimated to be complete in March 2021.
  - The FY21 compliance monitoring is still ongoing via desk auditing of files

- The FY21 technical assistance support schedule is pending the completion of the compliance monitoring and will be conducted virtually
- Weekly special education webinar continues for special education professionals. The focus is COVID-19 issues, but other special education updates and a Q&A session is included. The department will continue these webinars indefinitely.
- Autism Speaks, a national organization has contacted the department to consider making 14 the age to require secondary transition plans in the Individual Education Program (IEP) to start. Alaska current does not restrict any age but follows the federal requirement of mandatory by age 16 (34 CFR 300.320).
- The Special Education Part B State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) data have been submitted to the US Department of Education. The target scores were established through stakeholder input.
- The SPP/APR report was presented to the state Special Education Advisory Panel for comment in accordance with regulations (34 CFR 300.169). The department has received no input that would affect the report from this presentation to date.
- The state maintains support of district use of PowerSchool–Special Education in accordance with state requirements.
- The annual federal grant application for special education is posted for public comment and will be updated with fiscal data as it becomes available from the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).
- The department will be conducting the second of two special education director trainings on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2021, which is a weekend. This was planned for director's that could not get free on weekdays.
- All federally required data that is posted on the state special education website is current and ADA compliant.
- Complaint and Due Process Hearing information remains available to the public (not posted online Re: 34 CFR 300.513 (d))
- The Due Process and Administrative Complaints data for the current reporting period is follows:
  - Due process Hearings: 1 in progress
  - Complaint Investigations: 2 completed, 1 in progress

## **Teacher Certification Information**

### **Emergency Certificates**

Teacher Certification has continued to issue emergency certificates. As part of the Declaration of Public Health Disaster Emergency issued by Governor Mike Dunleavy on March 11, 2020, and Alaska Statutes 26.23.020(g)(1) and (7), the Governor, under Order of Suspension No. 2, suspended statutory and regulatory requirements that were barriers for educators to gain or maintain Alaska certification and for districts to focus on the continuation of educational services to their students. The suspension of requirements applied to any applicant for Alaska certification and all certificated staff of Alaska School Districts. Additionally, Commissioner Johnson invoked his authority under AS 14.20.020 and 4 AAC 12.410 to issue emergency certification and waive requirements for the renewal of certification in light to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Because of the disruption caused by the pandemic, the following certification requirement were suspended:

- Basic competency examination
- Content area examination
- Alaska studies coursework
- Alaska multicultural coursework
- Notarization
- Minimum required hours for student teaching

As of February 12, 2021, the teacher certification office has issued 337 emergency certificates for the 2020-2021 school year. Of those emergency certificates, 293 were teacher certificates, 37 were special service provider certificates, and seven were administrative certificates. All emergency certificates must have the support of an Alaska public school district. All emergency certificates will expire at the end of the school year.

The department continues to work with the Department of Public Safety to allow for a temporary name based criminal history check as an alternative to the submission of a fingerprint card. The name based criminal history check will allow the department to process applications while giving the applicants additional time to find a trained technician to roll their fingerprints.

### **National Board-Certified Teachers**

Founded in 1987, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards advances the quality of teaching and learning through a voluntary advanced certification. On December 23, 2020, the following Alaska educators achieved National Board Certification (NBC):

<b>New NBC Educators</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Certification</b>
Lori Mertes	Fairbanks	Exceptional Needs Specialist
Stephanie Thornton	Anchorage	Social Studies-History

During the 2020-2021 school year, Alaska's public schools employed 118 individuals who hold or has held National Board Certification.

<b>Districts</b>	<b># of NBC educators</b>
Aleutians East Borough School District	1
Anchorage School District	57
Bering Strait School District	1
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District	31
Hoonah City School District	1
Iditarod Area School District	1
Juneau Borough School District	4
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District	7

Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District	1
Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District	11
North Slope Borough School District	2
Sitka School District	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>

More information about National Board Certification can be found [here](https://www.nbpts.org/) (https://www.nbpts.org/).

### **Upcoming CAEP Accreditation Visits**

The University of Alaska Anchorage's Advanced Programs are scheduled for an accreditation visit in March. In May, the University of Alaska Fairbank's Advanced Programs are scheduled for an accreditation visit in May.

The Alaska Pacific University is scheduled for the review of its initial teacher preparation program in the Fall of 2022.

### **Alaska Teacher Placement Job Fairs**

Alaska-focused Job Fairs are being held in March and April. The Alaska Educator Expo (Anchorage Job Fair) will be a virtual event held on Saturday, March 27, 2021.

ATP will also host Lower 48 Job Fairs in the following locations:

- Portland, Oregon – Saturday, April 10, 2021
- Minneapolis / Bloomington, Minnesota – Wednesday, April 14, 2021
- Houston, Texas - TBA

The Teacher Certification administrator will be participating in the virtual Anchorage Job Fair to provide technical assistance to district's hiring teams and direct service to applicants.