



Innovation and Education Excellence

To: Members of the State Board of Education & Early Development
From: Monica Goyette, Ed. D., Director
Date: October 14, 2026
Item: 23.A

Standing General Report

The Division of Innovation and Education Excellence (IEE) advances the priorities of the [Alaska Education Challenge](#) and the State Board of Education and Early Development's strategic plan and SMART goals. The division oversees state and federally funded programs and provides professional learning, resources, technical assistance, and support to school districts statewide to ensure an excellent education for every student every day.

Alaska Reads and Early Learning Team

- District literacy implementation continues through the District Reading Improvement Plan (DRIP) and Department Reading Program (DRP). Districts are submitting and implementing their annual DRIPs, while Alaska Reads Act Reading Specialists partner with districts and DRP schools to strengthen literacy systems, evidence-based instruction, intervention, progress monitoring, and the use of data to respond to student needs.
- DEED is expanding statewide support for evidence-based writing instruction. More than 450 educators registered for the Write Now Conference, hosted August 10. This virtual conference touched on all grade levels through 12 learning sessions led by nationally recognized writing experts. Asynchronous writing courses have also been added to the Virtual Learning Consortium (VLC), and Alaska Reads Act Reading Specialists are prepared to facilitate district professional learning communities (PLCs) to extend conference learning and support application within schools.
- The statewide Structured Literacy Coaching Academy is strengthening literacy coaching and instructional practice. The Academy includes 10 professional learning sessions coupled with office hours designed to build coaching knowledge, strengthen literacy instruction, and support educators in translating professional learning into classroom practice.
- High-dosage tutoring support is strengthening the effective use of tutoring to improve student literacy outcomes. Professional learning focuses on using student data to identify needs, monitor progress, recognize variables affecting student response, and adjust instruction and tutoring supports accordingly.

- The Early Learning Team reviewed eight applications for the Pre-Elementary Grant. All eight were awarded, totaling \$3.2 million in funding for the three-year FY27–FY29 grants cycle. One Early Education Program Grant application was received and awarded. A second Request for Applications was posted for the Early Education Program Grant, with submissions due October 1.
- The Early Learning Team reviewed 17 applications for approval to count 4- and 5-year-old students toward Preschool ADM aid. Sixteen were approved and a one-year Early Education Program Grant was awarded to the 17th. A total of 19 districts are now approved to count students for Preschool ADM aid.
- The Early Learning Team continued to provide technical assistance and oversight to support districts in meeting the Alaska Early Education Program Standards under the Alaska Reads Act, including training in early childhood screening and assessment, emerging literacy, and program development.

Career and Technical Education

- The Career Advising Demonstration Project held the third annual Career Guide Training Conference in Anchorage, September 9-11. Career Guides serving 20 districts worked with RootEd, Department of Labor, and Sealaska Heritage Institute to develop plans to support seniors in achieving postsecondary success. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion among students served by Alaska Career Guides increased from 41.4% for the Class of 2025 to 60.1% for the Class of 2026, 25 percentage points above Alaska’s statewide rate of 35.1%.
- Twenty-two school district applications for CTE Perkins funds are approved for the 2026-27 school year. Of Alaska’s 53 districts, 31 are eligible for the minimum \$20,000 Perkins allocation, while the remaining districts receive larger awards based upon demographic data. DEED staff support districts in developing funding applications and strengthening programs of study.
- In early September, DEED was notified of an award through the Rural Health Transition Program, managed by the Alaska Department of Health. The program will provide competitive education awards to school districts, training partners, and industry/employers to support the recruitment and training of secondary students for healthcare careers. DEED is developing the process for distributing these funds.
- The Alaska Association of Career and Technical Education (ACTE) held its annual CTE Professional Development Conference in Anchorage, October 4-7. This conference provides an opportunity for CTE partners to connect and collaborate on CTE across the state. The four 2026 recipients of the SBOE CTE Recognition awards were recognized.

Data and Accountability

- The Data Team welcomed two key staff members: Data Manager Tasha Bailey joined us from the Department of Health Division of Public Assistance, and Education Associate Diane Ditton transitioned from DEED's Alaska Reads team.
- The Team completed and finalized the Summer OASIS data collection and made significant progress towards completing and submitting federal reporting metrics, including Staff Full-Time Equivalent (FTE), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B Child Count Data, and federal Maintenance of Effort (MOE)/Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) data.
- The team successfully completed and posted the Spring 2026 assessment results and is actively working on accountability calculations. The team collaborated with districts to adjust graduation cohorts for accurate graduation-rate reporting, cleaned and published the Alternate Assessment Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) dataset, and received completed Special Education Supplemental Workbooks from districts.
- The team populated school year calendars into the central calendaring system and released the 2026 First Day Vacancy and Fall 2026 Staff Accounting handbooks. Technical assistance webinars were provided throughout August and September to support district administrators with these processes. The team also responded to ad hoc data requests throughout the summer.

ESEA Federal Programs

- DEED conducted a competitive request for applications for federal 21st Century Community Learning Center funds, resulting in more than \$3.8 million in awards to provide out-of-school-time programming in nine districts: Alaska Gateway, Anchorage, Dillingham (through SERRC), Fairbanks North Star, Kenai Peninsula (through the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Kenai Peninsula), Kuspuk, Lower Kuskokwim, Nome, and Yukon Flats. These awards are expected to be renewed annually for the next five years, contingent upon congressional appropriation of funds.
- During August and September, the Department's Title I, Part C Education of Migratory Children team provided statewide training to school district staff on the identification and recruitment of migratory children. Once recruited, migratory children receive Title I-C-funded instructional and support services that address their unique educational needs resulting from a migratory lifestyle and enable them to participate effectively in school.
- The ESEA team collaborated with SchoolHouse Connection to host the Homeless Liaison Conference in Anchorage, September 22–23. The conference explored current data, national trends, and local issues. It provided training, built connections, and established support for Alaska's homeless liaisons so they could better support youth experiencing homelessness in their districts.

Health & Safety

- The Health & Safety Team, in collaboration with partners, planned and hosted the fall Safety & Well-Being Summit, held September 16–17 at the Egan Convention Center in Anchorage.
- To support the “Strive for 5” initiative, the Health & Safety Team is receiving technical assistance from Attendance Works through an agreement with WEEAC. Attendance Works’ new Principal’s Attendance Toolkit is being shared through the department’s fall Community of Practice. The team also launched an Attendance Tracker for Families, available on the [department’s website](#) and distributed at the Safety & Well-Being Summit to support families in monitoring and improving student attendance.
- DEED received a Rural Health Transformation grant to support the Alaska Presidential Physical Fitness Testing (APPFT) program. Through the APPFT Award, districts may receive funding for up to five years to implement the program and support testing or school- and community-sponsored activities aligned with APPFT goals. Each district may receive up to \$50,000, plus \$5,000 per participating school. Districts will designate an APPFT Coordinator and assess student progress at least twice per year using the program’s established standards.

School Recognition and Support

- FY26 School Improvement applications were closed out, and FY27 application reviews are in progress. As part of the review process, empowerment specialists work with Local Education Agency (LEAs) and schools to strengthen plans and budgets. To support identified schools with implementation, the team provided a pre-conference day prior to the September Safety & Well-Being Summit, technical assistance webinars, site visits, and individualized coaching.
- 2027–2028 ESSA designation notifications identifying schools requiring support will be issued to districts in November. Designations include Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) for schools with a student group performing below the 10% threshold, Comprehensive Support and Improvement–TSI (CSI-TSI) for schools with one or more student groups performing below the 5% threshold for three consecutive years, and CSI-MRI schools that have not met exit criteria after three years of designation. As an off-cycle year, no new schools will be designated for Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) or Comprehensive Support and Improvement 5% (CSI 5%).
- FY26 Quality Schools end-of-year reports were collected and reviewed beginning in July. Data on the type and frequency of district strategies and interventions is being analyzed. A survey will be conducted this fall or spring to collect data on the alignment of district curricula with state standards. Applications for FY27 Quality Schools will be approved by November, with funds anticipated to be allocated in January 2027.
- To build an exceptional talent pool for department recognition programs, DEED is promoting use of the [Talent Pool Recommendation Form #05-19-048](#). The department seeks candidates who

demonstrate effective instructional practice, leadership and accomplishment, unrecognized impact, leadership potential, and community engagement.

Special Education

- DEED is supporting the third and final cohort of districts to transition to the new Embrace® platform for managing and submitting Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Their transition will be complete within the 2026–27 school year. Districts may transition to Embrace after this cohort; however, the state will no longer cover transition costs. State support for PowerSchool Special Programs will sunset at the end of the 2026–27 school year.
- The Special Education team is evaluating systems for statewide compliance monitoring. The team determined that the pilot of LeaderServices' SPARCs Compliance Monitoring platform was too burdensome for districts; therefore, it will not move forward this school year. Software options are limited because statewide compliance monitoring systems are typically highly customized and often designed for use by a single state.
- Weekly meetings with special education directors resumed for the 2026–27 school year. These optional Wednesday meetings provide brief state updates followed by an opportunity for district questions and technical assistance. Meetings generally last less than 15 minutes, and recordings are available upon request. Stakeholder feedback supported continuing this resource.
- The August 2026 edition of the State Special Education Handbook was finalized and updated to reflect current regulations. Model forms were removed from the handbook, and significant revisions address 4 AAC 52.250 and 4 AAC 52.252, including expanded use of videoconferencing for supervision and updated supervision requirements. These changes are intended to increase operational flexibility and reduce district costs while maintaining appropriate oversight and support.

Standards and Assessment

- In preparation for the 2027 AK STAR and Alaska Science assessment administrations, the Standards and Assessment Team conducted data and item reviews and bias and sensitivity convenings with Alaska educators. These reviews ensure assessment items align with standards and accurately measure student understanding. Sixty-eight educators from across the state participated.
- Content specialists continue to provide high-quality, standards-aligned resources to support districts in aligning curriculum and instruction. Recent resources include a new infographic, Supporting Students to Strengthen Skills on The AK STAR; new social studies eLearning modules; and distance-delivered professional development for districts.
- A Standards and Assessment team member and two Alaska educators joined more than 100 educators and state representatives from across the country in standard-setting for the WIDA

ACCESS for English Language Learners (ELLs) assessment. This process will establish updated cut scores for the assessment. Alaska's participation helps ensure the assessment reflects the state's context and strengthens the Assessment Team's ability to understand the assessment and support districts in preparing students for annual administration.

- DEED's Standards and Assessment Administrator retired in July, and recruitment for the position is underway.

Systems Improvement and Accountability

- The Systems Improvement and Accountability Team was established to provide coordination and communication structures that support alignment and effective collaboration within DEED and with external partners. Jayne McFarland transferred to the team from Early Learning, and recruitment for an Education Specialist 2 is underway.
- To advance Phase 2 of DEED's Regulatory Reform Plan, recommendations for revision of regulations that are outdated, redundant, burdensome, or unclear were submitted to the Department of Law for preliminary review. DEED continues to coordinate with the Department of Law on the Phase 1 repeal recommendations and Phase 2 revision recommendations.
- The division is developing an LEA Strategic Planning Tool on the Grants Management System (GMS) platform. LEAs may use the tool to develop, implement, and monitor strategic plans aligned to *Alaska's Education Challenge* that meet grant requirements and address local priorities. To ensure the tool helps districts maximize resources and advance outcomes without increasing administrative burden, a cross-division team, spearheaded by Sarah Emmal from the ESEA team, is collaborating with districts, educational support agencies, and vendors. Production of the tool will begin this fall, with a pilot scheduled for spring.
- Teams across DEED contributed to the SEA Action Plan, aligned with *Alaska's Education Challenge* Strategic Priorities and SMART Goals. Teams considered programs, resources, data and other factors to develop a three-year plan for monitoring progress and providing technical assistance, resources, and continuous support to advance outcomes statewide.
- Planning for the State of Alaska Blue and Gold Ribbon School Recognition Program is underway. Recognition of schools eligible for the 2025 and 2026 accountability cycles is planned for March 2027.

Teacher Certification

- The current processing timeframe for teacher certification applications is five to eight weeks. Applications submitted without required components, such as official transcripts, fingerprint/background check results, or program verification forms, may require additional processing time until all materials are received. This timeframe supports the accuracy and integrity of the certification process.
- Between June 1, 2025, and June 1, 2026, the Teacher Certification team processed more than **4,730** certificates, including the following:
 - 1,676 Professional Teacher Certificates
 - 550 Added Endorsements
 - 388 Professional Out-of-State Certificates
 - 316 Emergency Teacher Certificates
 - 269 Initial 2/3-Year Certificates
 - 94 Initial Program Enrollment Certificates
 - 44 Limited Type M Certificates
 - 34 Re-employment Certificates
 - 9 Limited Type W Certificates
 - 6 Master Teacher Certificates
- We are pleased to welcome Devanie White to the Teacher Certification team. Devanie brings valuable experience from AVTEC in Seward and NOAA Fisheries in Juneau and will be a strong addition to the team.
- Suzanne Morris, Team Lead for Teacher Certification, accepted a position with the Department of Labor's Vocational Rehabilitation Division. Her last day was August 14. Recruitment for her replacement is underway.
- The Teacher Certification team provided District Communication Hub training to superintendents to improve access to certification information and strengthen districts' ability to track applications and view staff certificates.
- Teacher Certification continues to collaborate with Alaska's universities to expand access to Alaska Studies and Alaska Multicultural coursework. This partnership supports educators in meeting certification requirements and addresses long-term statewide needs related to preparing a qualified teaching workforce.

Tribal Affairs and Alaska Native Languages

- The Council for Alaska Native Languages met virtually on August 14 to discuss revisions to its Biennial Report to the Governor and Legislature. The Council's next meeting will be held in person on October 21 in Anchorage during Alaska Federation of Natives week.

- The Literacy Screener for Alaska’s Indigenous Languages project currently includes the development of screeners in five languages: Tlingit, Yugtun, Iñupiaq, Gwich’in, and Dena’ina. The University of Oregon will seek proposals to develop screeners in two additional Alaska Native languages beginning this year.
- The 2027 Alaska Native Language Summit is scheduled for May 5, 2027, at the Dena’ina Civic and Convention Center following the Alaska Science of Reading Symposium.
- The Tribal Affairs team is expanding outreach and engagement through participation in regional Tribal conferences throughout the fall and spring.