



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Two Alaska Schools Named National ESEA Distinguished Schools

JUNEAU -- Willow Elementary School and Finger Lake Elementary School in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District have been named National ESEA Distinguished Schools by the Department of Education and Early Development, Alaska Education Commissioner Dr. Michael Johnson announced today.

Willow Elementary School was recognized for exceptional student performance for two or more consecutive years. Finger Lake Elementary School was recognized for excellence in serving special populations of students.

The National Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Distinguished Schools Program (formerly known as the National Title I Distinguished Schools Program) is a project of the National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators that publicly recognizes schools for their positive educational services. It highlights the efforts of schools across the country making significant improvements for their students. Because only two schools per state can be selected as a National ESEA Distinguished School each year, this award is an especially prestigious honor for the schools, staff, and students.

"I am very proud of the educators, students, and families at Willow Elementary and Finger Lake Elementary who work hard every day to provide an excellent education for every student," said Commissioner Johnson. "It is an honor to congratulate these communities for their well-deserved recognition."

Alaska identifies eligible schools for the award based on their students' performance on the Performance Evaluation for Alaska's Schools (PEAKS) assessment in English language arts (ELA) and Mathematics. Identified schools chose to apply for the honor, providing evidence of effectiveness in evidence-based instructional strategies; providing opportunities for all children to achieve; coordination of Title I with other programs; professional development of staff; and partnerships with parents, families, and communities.

Willow Elementary is an elementary school in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. Their tight-knit community-minded school serves approximately 166 students in preschool through fifth grade. These students are fortunate to be guided by a fantastic group of educators

and support staff who firmly believe that positive relationships and high expectations lead to student achievement. All of Willow Elementary School's staff understand that developing and sustaining relationships with students, families, and school partners will result in a strong, resilient community. Willow Elementary School takes great pride in the positive academic and social emotional development of their students and is excited to continue to do great work for kids.

Finger Lake Elementary is a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. With a current enrollment of approximately 448 students, student population growth is a great reflection of the positive learning environment in a district of choice. Finger Lake Elementary has made significant gains in student achievement in the Alaska Native, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities student groups and continues to strive for academic excellence. PEAKS data is used each spring to celebrate growth, identify areas for improvement, and determine schedules. Finger Lake Elementary strives to build authentic relationships with families and community business partners, and aims to grow their partnerships every year.

For more information about the National ESEA Distinguished Schools Program visit www.ESEAnetwork.org.

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