



MEMORANDUM

To: State Board of Education & Early Development
Date: October 9, 2024

Thru: Deena Bishop Ed.D, Commissioner
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From: Division of Innovation and Education Excellence
Subject: Agenda 19A. Division of Innovation and Education Excellence Standing Report

Division of Innovation and Education Excellence 2024 Board 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 Education Challenge](#); providing oversight of state and federally funded programs to ensure quality and equity of student services; and providing technical assistance and support to districts statewide.

The IEE Division encompasses eleven teams that manage a wide range of programs and activities for the State. These teams include Academic Support, Career and Technical Education, Data and Accountability, Early Learning, ESEA Federal Programs, Health and Safety, School Recognition and Support, Special Education, Standards and Assessment, Teacher Certification, and Teaching and Learning.

Academic Support and Teaching & Learning

The Department Reading Program is collaborating with schools in five districts to implement and provide coaching support for their Intensive Support Reading Intervention Plans. The Academic Support Team's Reading Specialists will engage with each school, district, and department on an ongoing basis. This initiative aligns with AK Challenge Priority #1, which aims to ensure that the lowest 25% of schools achieve grade-level reading proficiency by the end of third grade.

Across the state, districts are utilizing Amplify's mCLASS DIBELS 8 as the primary elementary state screening tool for students in grades K-3. To support this effort, the Virtual Learning Consortium has introduced an online calibration course for educators administering the required literacy screener assessment. To date, 1,008 educators have completed this course, and an additional 460 are currently enrolled.

The Virtual Learning Consortium is also developing a library of professional development courses available to any educator in Alaska:

- mCLASS DIBELS 8 Calibration
- Keys to Literacy: Keys to Beginning Reading – A fully asynchronous 45-hour course that meets the requirements for the AK Reads Endorsement.
- UFLI Foundations – A phonemic awareness and phonics curriculum for K-3 students, listed on DEED's Evidence-Based Reading Intervention and Supplemental Programs list.
- Heggerty – Coming soon: A phonemic awareness curriculum listed on DEED's Evidence-Based Reading Intervention and Supplemental Programs list.
- Phonics for Reading – Coming soon: A phonics curriculum for 3rd grade and above, listed on DEED's Evidence-Based Reading Intervention and Supplemental Programs list.

The Academic Support Team and the Teaching and Learning Team participated in a Student-Focused Coaching retreat in September. This retreat will be integrated into district support efforts and will be a key component of the professional development and services provided through the Virtual Learning Consortium. A coaching model will be utilized to assist schools participating in the Department Reading Program and educators seeking implementation support after completing any of the online courses through the Consortium.

Each Reading Specialist serves as a direct point of contact for districts to support the implementation of the AK Reads K-3 District Reading Intervention Plan. This support includes revising the K-3 Plan for the current school year, conducting beginning-of-year assessment screenings, and adhering to the timelines and requirements of the District Reading Intervention Plan.

Career and Technical Education

The Career and Technical Education (CTE) Team perform three general tasks:

- Applies for and manages annual federal Karl Perkins funds and works to support districts to implement CTE Programs of Study and courses for students. DEED staff are currently assisting 46 out of 54 Alaska school districts to apply for funds and to deliver meaningful and rigorous programming this school year.

- Supports districts as they implement broader CTE programs through local funding and for all grades. The team sponsors two, annual statewide CTE conferences to support successful programing and promote collaboration among a variety of partners.
- Maintains key ongoing partnerships throughout the state with organizations such as the Department of Labor & Workforce Development, the University of Alaska system, industry advocacy organizations, the Alaska Commission of Postsecondary Education, etc. The team also maintains relationships with other states and national CTE advocacy and training organizations. Additional duties of CTE Team members include managing the Alaska Performance Scholarship program and student recognition programs such as the United States Senate Youth Program.

The team supports Alaska’s Education Challenge goal of “increase[d] career, technical, and culturally relevant education to meet students and workforce needs” through the general support and funding as well as specific initiatives such as support for Alaska’s six CTE Student Organizations and promotion of recent Student Career Advisors.

Data and Accountability

- During the previous quarter, the data team has supported districts and schools by providing webinars, handbooks and technical assistance for several data collections including Summer OASIS, Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS), and Suspensions and Expulsions.
- The APS data collection was a new, one-time data collection that was developed to help districts identify students newly eligible for the APS based on the new criteria.
- All the data collections go through a data quality review by the Data Team before it can be used for reporting. The data is then used to meet all federal and state mandated reporting requirements. Over the last few months, the Data Team submitted 23 EDFacts files to the US Department of Education.
- The Data Team, Standards and Assessments Team, and IT collaborated to ensure the timely publication of accurate assessment data and a smooth roll out of statewide results.
 - The team participated in a review process prior to the distribution of NWEA’s reports to the districts to ensure accurate, unduplicated data was released to districts.
 - In July, the Data Manager attended the Superintendent’s Fly-in to answer questions related to assessment data and address any district questions following receipt of local results.
 - Prior to the public release, statewide calculations were completed, reviewed for accuracy, and then released to IT for publication on the website.
- The Data Team has participated in weekly internal discussions related to the AK Reads Act reporting requirements. Several data collections have been revised and assistance provided to the districts to support updated reporting requirements and ensure clear and accurate reporting on Reads Act initiatives to state policy makers.
- Under Alaska’s ESSA plan, the Data Team has completed the accountability system calculations for the accountability system. The designations derived from the index scores help schools and districts identify areas of success as well as areas where additional support is needed.

Early Learning

- Head Start

FY2025 Head Start state matching funds allocated through legislative appropriation totaled \$9,435,000. Funds were distributed to 17 Early Head Start and Head Start Programs in Alaska. The funding provided to these programs is through an [equitable funding formula](#).

- **Pre-Elementary Grants**
Any Alaskan public school district was eligible to apply for the FY24-26 Pre-Elementary Grant (PEG) for the planning, implementation, and support for pre-elementary programs serving 3- through 5-year-old-children. The legislative appropriation for this grant totaled \$3,200,000.00, which has been distributed to nine school districts who are in year 2- of a 3-year grant cycle.
- **Early Education Program Grants**
Any Alaskan public school district is eligible to apply for the Alaska Reads Act Early Education Program (EEP) Grant for the development or improvement of early education programs serving children four and five years of age. The legislative appropriation for this grant is \$3,000,000. Seven school districts make up Cohort 1 for FY23-24, FY24-25, FY25-26. Funding allowed an additional two districts to receive funding as Cohort 2 for FY24-25, FY25-26, and FY26-27.
- **Early Education Program Approval and .5ADM Formula Funding**
 - The FY24 State Approved Early Education Program was Anchorage School District
 - The FY25 State Conditionally Approved Early Education Programs include Skagway School District and Valdez School District
- **Teaching Strategies GOLD**
DEED provides Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD), an online observation-based assessment tool that informs programs about each child's developmental growth as well as classroom, site, and program efficacy. Currently, 23 school districts and 16 Head Start programs utilize this tool. TS GOLD addresses Standard 5 of the [Alaska Early Education Program Standards](#).
- **Agencies & Stages Questionnaire Screener**
The Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) was procured this past spring and is in alignment with the statewide universal developmental screening initiative. DEED is providing the Ages and Stages Questionnaire materials, including the online platform, as well as the necessary corresponding training to teachers and program administrators. All PEG and EEP grantees use this screener.
- **LETRS EC – Professional Development**
DEED's Early Learning is providing the LETRS for Early Childhood professional development to educators in the state in order to meet the requirements of Alaska Reads Act for [Early Education Lead](#) Teachers. This course supports educators working with Alaska's youngest learners in better understanding the foundations of reading.

ESEA Federal Programs

- Using unspent/forfeited 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) funds, the ESEA team ran a mini-grant opportunity for current 21st CCLC grantees that enabled them to provide spring break and summer programming that included swimming lessons, Coding in Minecraft, high school credit for rising 8th graders, welding and driver's education for high schoolers, as well as enrichment programming, meals, and bussing that coupled with and supported Alaska Reads Act instruction.

- Title II, Part A funds continue to support Science of Reading courses through Keys to Literacy and NWEA/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH). Title II, Part A funds continue to support Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA) in providing professional development and mentoring support to PK-12 principals through the Alaska School Leadership Academy (ASLA) and professional development for teachers in computer science through Code.org.
- Expiring American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief – Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) funds are paying for the second Alaska State Homeless Liaison conference this September. This conference is hosted in partnership with SchoolHouse Connection (national non-profit organization working to overcome homelessness through education), providing districts with McKinney-Vento training, technical assistance, support, and opportunities for relationship building.
- During the months of August and September, the Title I, Part C Migrant Education Program Team provides statewide training on the identification and recruitment of migratory children to school district staff. Once migratory children are recruited, districts provide those children with Title I, Part C funded instructional and support services that address the unique educational needs that result from their migratory lifestyle and permit them to participate effectively in school.
- New and updated guidance related to English Learners (ELs) has been developed and is currently in process to be uploaded to the DEED website. A Data Sharing Agreement was recently completed for the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) to examine EL achievement on ACCESS for ELLs and the State Content Assessments for the purposes of revisiting EL exit criteria and looking for other significant and insightful trends in Alaska’s EL student achievement. New, free professional learning courses related to English learner education will be available to all Alaskan public-school educators on September 1st through DEED’s membership in the WIDA Consortium.

Health & Safety

- The Health & Safety team and other state partners have been collaborating to host the fourth School Safety & Well-Being Summit. The Summit will be held September 25-26 at the Egan Center in Anchorage. Information about the Summit can be found on the Summit website: <https://akschoolsafetyandwellbeing.com/>.
- The Health & Safety Team assists and supports Alaska school districts in numerous ways. The team is always available to support districts during any crises that arise, whether natural or otherwise, such as the recent landslide in Ketchikan. The Health & Safety Team contacted the district to offer support in the form of resources and availability to listen to staff as they process the event, and to connect them to further supports as needed.
- This quarter, PBIS regular support meetings have begun for the school year. Districts and schools have been provided in-service training at 3 different sites. All PBIS trainings integrate the [*Transforming Schools: A Framework for Trauma-Engaged Practice in Alaska*](#). The Health & Safety team will be meeting with identified PBIS schools 2-3 times each month throughout the school year to help them implement Schoolwide Positive Behaviors Support. Data shows that when PBIS is implemented with fidelity, there are reductions in discipline referrals, which results in more student learning time. The Health & Safety team is working in collaboration with the School Recognition and Support team to integrate PBIS into school improvement plans.

- The Health & Safety team has begun regular meetings with the Alternative Schools Coalition. DEED has partnered with REL NW (Regional Education Lab Northwest) to help these schools implement a continuous improvement cycle using the *Transforming Schools: A Framework for Trauma-Engaged Practice in Alaska*. Helping schools use data to identify where to make changes, and helping them implement Trauma-Engaged Practices, should result in fewer behavior issues and more time spent learning.

School Recognition and Support

- Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant: <https://clsd.aklearns.org/home>
 - In Spring of 2024 DEED applied for and received a no cost time extension (NCTE) to allow an additional year for subgrantees (35 projects spanning 33 districts) to spend down the remaining federal funds, totaling nearly \$8 million to expire September 30, 2025. The 5-year grant would have originally ended on September 30, 2024; the NCTE will give subgrantees another full year to fulfill project goals, review their progress, and plan for sustainability past the closure of this grant.
 - CLSD (Year 6) Project workbooks have been created for each of the districts to allow for grant project team members and the CLSD program manager to simultaneously track:

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|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1) Project Overview | 6) No Cost Time Extension |
| 2) Project Leadership Team | 7) Professional Development |
| 3) District Specific Project Goals | 8) Parent Involvement |
| 4) Timeline Milestones | 9) Project Evaluation Narrative |
| 5) Communication Plan | 10) Sustainability Plan |
 - On September 4th, DEED was notified of award in the FY2024 CLSD grant competition. DEED was awarded \$10,000,000 for...
- School Improvement:
 - Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) Office Hour Webinars have been provided to designated schools (48) and districts to help onboard them to the Empowerment Process and provide technical assistance. In addition to these webinars, the team has created 9 short videos that detail components of the Empowerment Process as a resource for all designated schools (117 total) to access asynchronously.
 - All submitted FY25 School Improvement Applications have been reviewed and approved or have had feedback provided on submitted School Improvement plans and budgets. In addition, technical assistance has been provided to districts who request help with the School Improvement applications.
 - DEED has onboarded four Empowerment Specialists, a role dedicated to working with Alaska's lowest-performing schools and districts as identified through the accountability system, helping them to build capacity in the realm of school improvement while identifying root causes and implementing evidence-based practices to change adult behaviors and improve student achievement.

Special Education

- The Special Education (SPED) team is conducting routine, beginning of the year training for district staff on Grants Management System and State Professional Development Grant (SPDG) reports.
- Last year SPED received the GREAT Grant to help prepare paraprofessionals for teaching certification in the Special Education field. The team is supporting them in obtaining needed materials and resources for the program.
- The SPED team is assisting districts in developing corrective plans tailored to unique district needs to address identified disproportionality. Significant Disproportionality is used to describe the widespread trend of students of certain racial and ethnic groups being identified for Special Education higher than their peers.
- The Military Coalition (MIC3) is working to establish norms for the transfer of military-affiliated students, including credit transfer and the right to remain in correspondence programs when leaving the state.
- SPED is sending out determination letters regarding the results of this year's monitoring visits. As districts work through their findings, the SPED team provides technical assistance and supports to remedy findings.
- SPED is negotiating with the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to shift the focus of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) from graduation rates to early literacy. Concurrently, OSEP is collaborating with the SPED team on submissions related to corrective actions from the recent monitoring visit.

Standards and Assessment

- In July, two new Content Specialists were hired in the IEE Team, and the Assessment team became the Standards and Assessment team.
 - Ryia Waldern is the new Science and Math content specialist.
 - Curtis Jensen is the new English Language Arts and Social Studies content specialist
- Districts were provided local Alaska System of Academic Readiness (AK STAR), and Alaska Science Assessment results on July 26th through the system portals.
- Statewide AK STAR, Alaska Science Assessment, and Dynamic Learning Maps, and WIDA English Language Learner results were released August 30th
 - 5th Grade ELA and Science both showed a marked improvement from 2023 results.
 - DEED will be targeting support and technical assistance to districts through key initiatives, new Content Specialist supports, and ongoing professional development.

Teacher Certification

- As of June 1, 2024, The Educator Application & Certification Hub Alaska (TEACH-AK) has become the exclusive certification route for educators.
 - This significant shift marks a fully online certification process, which is especially beneficial for educators in remote districts with limited access to mail services.
 - The digital platform allows applicants to check the status of their applications in real time, which will ultimately enhance the efficiency of application processing.

- Since the launch of TEACH-AK, the Teacher Certification Office has successfully processed over 1,300 applications from June to August.
 - The streamlined process not only accelerates application handling but also improves transparency, giving educators more control and visibility over their certification status.
- In addition to the TEACH-AK launch, the Teacher Certification Office has introduced the District Communication Hub, now live and accessible from the DEED Teacher Certification [homepage](#).
 - This site provides districts with comprehensive information on certificates and application statuses, enabling them to better support educators in their district.
 - These efforts are tailored to meet the specific needs of districts and partners.
 - Districts are encouraged to actively assist applicants by ensuring all required documentation is uploaded, guiding them through the dashboard, and communicating with the Teacher Certification Office. By helping applicants navigate the new system, districts can significantly reduce delays and improve the overall certification process for educators and districts.