



Oral Report to the Legislature

James Fields, Chair, State Board of Education & Early Development

AS 14.07.168. Report to the legislature

Under state law, the board annually presents a report to the legislature that includes: 1) a summary of the resolves and rationales in support of policy decisions; 2) program and curriculum changes made, discussed, or recommended; and 3) additional information relevant to efforts made to improve and maintain the public education system.

Strategic Priorities

In 2015, the State Board of Education & Early Development developed strategic priorities to guide the board in its leadership role and focus the department's actions on student achievement as the highest priority. Informed by the perspectives of superintendents, legislators, and school board members, the State Board established three priorities as the foundation of its plan: 1) empower local control of educational decisions; 2) modernize the state's educational system; and 3) ensure high-quality educators for Alaska's children.

Resolutions

In December the State Board approved three resolutions: 1) Supporting no change to the minimum student count for school funding; 2) supporting repeal of the minimum expenditure for instruction; and 3) recommending funding of cooperative arrangement grants as provided in AS 14.14.115.

Significant regulations

In keeping with empowering local control, the State Board adopted regulations to permit an alternate route for obtaining an administrator certificate with a superintendent endorsement. The board's intent was to encourage a larger pool of applicants for superintendent positions, in light of the many annual vacancies among superintendents. Many rural districts supported the certificate. The new certificate contains many requirements to ensure quality.

The State Board raised educators' fees for certification in order to fully cover the annual cost (approximately \$300,000) of operating the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

In keeping with empowering local control, the State Board repealed the requirement for school districts to administer early literacy assessments to students in kindergarten through third grade. The state no longer funds such assessments. Without repeal, the assessment requirement would be an unfunded mandate. Districts favored the repeal.

In keeping with empowering local control, the State Board adopted a regulation to allow advanced nurse practitioners to diagnose fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and other health impairments in determining a student's eligibility for special education. Previously, only physicians were allowed to make that determination, which placed a burden on districts. The regulation was requested by health practitioners and vetted by the state's chief medical officer.

Board Officers and New Members

The State Board elected James Fields as Chair, Sue Hull as First Vice-Chair, and Barbara Thompson as Second Vice-Chair, effective July 1, 2015, through June 30, 2016. John Harmon of Palmer and Dr. Keith Hamilton of Soldotna were appointed to the board. Alec Burris of Wasilla joined the State Board in July 2015 as student advisor for a one-year term.

Charters

The State Board approved requests for all eight charters, new or renewed, that it received. All such requests had been approved first by the applicants' local school board.

Alaska Measures of Progress

The written report to the legislature reflects events in 2015. Since then, the department has decided to not use the Alaska Measures of Progress assessments after this school year. Federal law requires us to give an assessment this spring. The department will prepare an RFP for a new test vendor for the following years. Superintendents and other stakeholders will be consulted in the process.

The Every Student Succeeds Act

The new federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act, returns to the states some of the control over their schools that was lost in No Child Left Behind. Alaska intends to work with stakeholders to build a school accountability system that meets the needs of parents, students, educators, and the public.

The State Board will consider removing from state regulations the former federal requirement that school districts incorporate data about student achievement in educator evaluations. Using

such data sounds like a good idea, but implementing its use in a fair and valid way would be an enormous and time-consuming task for districts. The districts would have to generate valid before-and-after data about student achievement for all subjects, including the many subjects that don't use standardized tests.

Beyond that, the Every Student Succeeds Act allows the states more flexibility in the type of assessment, more freedom in creating a school accountability system, and more local control over corrective measures for low-performing schools.

The department will be working with stakeholders on the state's plan to operate under the new law. The plan is due at the end of October 2016.

The department will convene an advisory committee to develop options for the state plan. The committee will include members from urban and rural districts and at least one member each from education, parent, business, nonprofit, and Alaska Native organizations. The public will be able to comment on the options, on the draft plan, and on the revised draft plan.

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project, a partnership of the department and the University of Alaska, has been serving school districts since the 2004-2005 school year. One of its main goals is to improve teacher retention, particularly in rural districts, so that students can benefit from experienced teachers.

Since the project began, mentors have served in 52 of Alaska's 54 districts in over 80% of Alaska's approximately 500 public schools. For 2015-16, 30 mentors are serving 328 early career teachers in 188 schools within 28 school districts. The state funds 12 mentors (nine full-time, three part-time) in 23 rural districts. The remaining mentors are funded through external sources. A federal grant funds a study that evaluates the effectiveness of ASMP in five urban districts; it supports fourteen mentors (10 urban and four rural). The remaining four rural mentors are funded through two other federal grants. See <http://www.alaskamentorproject.org/>

The State Libraries, Archives & Museums Division

The State Libraries, Archives & Museums Building, now under construction, will place the Alaska State Museums, the Alaska State Archives, and the Alaska State Libraries in one facility at the site of the current State Museum. The new building is scheduled to open in April 2016. See <http://lam.alaska.gov/slam>.

Libraries, Archives & Museums benefits lifelong and K-12 education. Examples are:

- Live Homework Help offers live tutoring for students in grades 4 to early college, seven days a week, from noon to 2 a.m.

- In Alaska's Digital Pipeline are hundreds of full-text online books, magazines, newspapers and other research resources for students.
- Many school districts' Alaska Native language materials are scanned and available online.

Graduation and dropout rates

In 2015, the preliminary five-year graduation rate was 78.3%. This refers to a cohort of students who were 9th-graders five school years previously. Many graduated in four years, but others needed all or part of a fifth year. The five-year rate reflects more accurately than the four-year rate the percentage of 9th-graders that do get a diploma.

Alaska's four-year rate in 2015 was 75.6%, up from 71.2% in 2014. With the repeal of the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam, more students are receiving a diploma.

Preliminary information for the 2014-2015 school year shows a grade 7-12 dropout rate of 3.68% compared to 4.0% in 2013-2014. The dropout rate generally has declined from 6.0% in 2004-2005.

National Assessment of Educational Progress

Every two years the U.S. Department of Education, through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), tests large samples of 4th-graders and 8th-graders in each state in reading and math. The most recent results were released in 2015.

NAEP's state and nationwide results are presented as average scores on a scale of 000 to 500. The "scale scores" fall into four categories of achievement: advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic. Thus, NAEP also reports the percentage of students who fall within those categories of achievement.

NAEP's definition of proficiency is rigorous. In NAEP, *basic* refers to partial mastery of the subject. *Proficient* refers to competency in challenging material, including knowledge, application, and analytical skills. *Advanced* is superior performance. In no state did more than 54% of students score proficient on any of the NAEP tests.

Alaska's performance on the NAEP is poor. It is similar to the national average because that also is poor. Some states perform notably better than Alaska and the national average. The department has cited Alaska's performance on NAEP as one indication of the need to implement higher standards in English language arts and math.

Alaska is about at the national average in 4th-grade and 8th-grade math. Alaska is notably below the national average in 4th-grade reading but only a little below in 8th-grade reading.