



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Education
& Early Development

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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March 25, 2025

The Honorable Jesse Kiehl
Chair, Senate Education Finance Subcommittee
Alaska State Capitol, Room 511
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Kiehl,

This memo serves as a response to questions addressed to the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) at the Tuesday, March 18, 2025, Senate Finance Subcommittee meeting. Please note that all the dollar figures presented in this document are in thousands unless otherwise noted.

1. The Virtual Consortium was intended to offer opportunities for districts to share access to online learning courses for students throughout the state. The intent was to create a system for sharing courses from one Alaska district to another, and for districts to charge a fee to support district costs. Is that happening at this time? Please provide more information on how the virtual consortium is currently being used. What programs are available?

The Virtual Learning Consortium is researching means to expand access to virtual courses and creating a statewide course-sharing system for districts. Statutes require the consortium to maintain a course database and ensure teachers complete approved virtual instruction training, with a waiver option for experienced educators. The consortium is researching vendors to develop high-quality training programs aligned with the 2025 National Standards for Quality Online Instruction.

2. Provide the list of applicants for the Department Reading Programs, including which applicants were accepted, the current status of support provided, and the location of the applications received.

Schools that participate in the Department Reading Program (DRP) benefit from dedicated reading specialists who provide expert guidance, targeted feedback, professional development, and financial resources. DEED specialists support educators in implementing the Science of Reading, interpreting and applying data-driven insights to inform instruction, and enhancing overall literacy outcomes. Additionally, schools are offered professional development opportunities and financial assistance for high-quality reading materials, educator training, and

other critical literacy supports---reinforcing the state’s commitment to fostering strong reading proficiency among students.

The following table reflects the DRP schools, by district. Please use the embedded link available for each school to access the coordinating DRP 2024-2025 application.

DRP Districts	DRP Schools
Bristol Bay Borough School District (1)	Naknek School
Annette Island School District (1)	Richard Johnson Elementary School
Lower Yukon School District (4)	Kotlik School
(District Support)	Marshall Elementary School
(District Support)	Hooper Bay School
(District Support)	Nunam Iqua School
Southwest Region School District	District Support
Hoonah School District (1)	Hoonah Elementary School
North Slope Borough School District (5)	Alak School
	Fred Ipalook Elementary School
	Meade River School
	Nuiqsut Trapper School
	Nunamiut School
Lower Kuskokwim School District (6)	Ayaprun School
	Joann A Alexie Memorial School
	Akiuk Memorial School
	Ayagina'ar Elitnaurvik
	Mikelnguut Elitnaurviat
	Gladys Jung Elementary School

3. Provide a detailed breakdown on how the Career and Technical Education (CTE) increment of \$750.0 from FY2025 is being used. Also provide a detailed breakdown of how the \$1,250.0 increment in the FY2026 budget will be used.

FY2025 - The \$750.0 UGF CTE increment in FY2025 is being used as follows:

- **\$210.0 (UGF) - Maintain Support for Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs):** Career and Technical Student Organizations have been awarded a second year of state funding to strengthen and expand services across Alaska. These funds support a state-level director, promote the growth of local chapters, and facilitate annual statewide student conferences. This funding supports six CTOS: National FFA Organization, formerly known as Future Farmers of America (FAA), Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), Educators Rising, Business Professionals of America (BPA), Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), and SkillsUSA.
- **\$340.0 (UGF) - Implement Career Guidance Model:** The DEED partnered with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD), Bristol Bay Regional Career and Technical Education (BBRCTE) Consortium, Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI) and the rootEd Alliance to provide career guidance. These collaborations ensure that career pathways align with the cultural strengths and economic opportunities unique to Alaska's communities. Collectively, these organizations support eight career guides serving eleven school districts.
- **\$175.0 (UGF) - Provide Support for Computer Coding Credential Pathways:** The DEED supports computer science education by expanding credentialing opportunities through the Coding in Minecraft program, which equips students with coding skills that lead to industry-recognized certifications. The program has been implemented in 43 Alaska districts across 422 schools, with each school receiving 100 student licenses. As of December 2024, 1,057 student licenses and 60 teacher licenses have been distributed statewide, resulting in 121 industry level credentials earned by Alaskan students. To further strengthen computer science education, DEED is in the process of recruiting a Computer Science Content Specialist to support curriculum development, policy implementation, and the expansion of career pathways in artificial intelligence (AI) and computer programming.
- **\$25.0 (UGF) - Support for the Alaska Education Exchange:** In FY2025, DEED provided grant funding to support the Alaska Education Exchange, a shared CTE platform designed to increase access to high-quality programs of study across districts. The exchange allows districts to offer and enroll students in CTE courses that may not be available locally, with a focus on collaboration, cost-sharing, and credit reciprocity. By leveraging shared online and hybrid delivery models, the platform helps maximize instructional resources and broaden student access to industry-aligned career pathways statewide.

FY2026 - The \$1,250.0 UGF CTE increment in FY2026 would be used as follows:

- **\$210.0 (UGF) - Maintain Support for Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs):** Career and Technical Student Organizations will receive a third year of state funding to strengthen and expand services across Alaska. These funds will be used to support a state-level director, promote the growth of local chapters, and facilitate annual statewide student conferences. This funding expands annual state support to Alaska's six CTOS: FFA,

HOSA, Educators Rising, BPA, FCCLA, and SkillsUSA. Maintaining funding for CTSOs will ensure that students across Alaska have access to leadership development, career exploration, and competitive skill-building opportunities that align with industry needs.

- **\$440.0 (UGF) - Expand and Refine the Career Guidance Model:** The DEED will continue to expand and refine the Career Guide Model to ensure alignment with Alaska's cultural and workforce needs. Building on existing partnerships with the DOLWD, BBRCTE Consortium, SHI, and the rootED Alliance, the initiative will strengthen career exploration services and post-secondary planning for students across the state.
- **\$600.0 (UGF) - Develop and Expand Career and Technical Education Programs of Study (C-TEPS):** The DEED will provide grants to school districts to develop C-TEPS, structured series of courses within a specific CTE pathway. A targeted focus will be on expanding existing Electrician C-TEPS and developing a Plumbing C-TEP to address the growing demand for skilled trades professionals. Funding will support curriculum development, procurement of materials and equipment, and professional development for instructors, ensuring high-quality instruction aligned with industry standards. DEED will provide grants to school districts and adult vocational education programs to establish school year and summer learning opportunities, giving students hands-on experience in real-world trade environments.

4. Provide the staffing level for teacher certification by year for the last five years.

Over the past five fiscal years, the Teacher Certification team has maintained a budget for five staff positions: four technical positions responsible for processing certification applications and providing direct support to educators and districts, and one administrative position overseeing the program. Three of the four technical positions have been consistently filled without turnover. The fourth technical position has experienced intermittent vacancies due to internal promotions and recruitment delays. The administrative position remained stable until the incumbent retired in February 2024; a new administrator was hired within two weeks to ensure continuity of operations.

In FY2025, in response to the increased workload resulting from the Alaska Reads Act, the transition to a fully electronic teacher certification system, and the resulting delays in processing times and customer service responsiveness, DEED is expanding staffing capacity within the Teacher Certification team:

Education Specialist 2: Support through the reassignment of an existing position.
Additional Technical Position: Being supported using certification receipt funding and recouped overtime funds.

Staffing Levels by Fiscal Year:

- FY2020: Four of five positions filled

- FY2021: Four of five positions filled - Fourth technical position vacant July through November 2020
- FY2022: Four of five positions filled - Fourth technical position vacant June through December 2021
- FY2023: Four of five positions filled - Fourth technical position vacant the entire fiscal year
- FY2024: All five positions filled - Fourth technical position filled in February 2024
- FY2025: All five positions filled
 - Education Specialist 2 position added (Anticipated Start Date: May 2025)
 - Recruitment underway for an additional technical position

5. Provide an update on the matching grant program for library construction.

This program is operated by the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development (DCCED). Information regarding this program can be found here:

<https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/dcra/GrantsSection/LibraryConstructionGrantProgram.aspx>.

6. Provide additional information on impacts if the state does not receive the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Grant.

The Division of Libraries, Archives, and Museums currently receives an annual Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Grants-to-States Award for statewide library services. This award has averaged about \$1.2 million per year the past five years. For FY2025, the IMLS Grants-to-States Award for Alaska was \$1,276,792.00 (whole dollars). Attached is a spreadsheet that describes the funding allocation in detail.

The IMLS Grants-to-States Award program uses a population-based formula to distribute funding to the State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs) each year. The SLAAs are official agencies charged by law with the extension and development of library services. The Alaska State Library is the SLAA for Alaska. Grants-to-States projects must develop library services, have a statewide impact, and support the purposes and priorities outlined in the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). The SLAAs may use the funds to support statewide initiatives and services, and they may also distribute the funds through competitive subawards to, or cooperative agreements with, public, academic, research, school, or special libraries or consortia (for-profit and federal libraries are not eligible). ([Alaska | Institute of Museum and Library Services](#))

See the attached report titled *FY2025 IMLS Grants to States Award Alaska State Library for FY2025 Grant- to-States award details*.

7. Explain the relationship between the student aid index and the federal poverty level. In terms of the federal poverty level, which students were able to qualify for Alaska Education Grants (AEG) this year? How much unmet need remains after this funding is applied?

In light of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) simplification legislation changes, as of the 2024-2025 award year, a student may automatically qualify for a Pell Grant if their Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) is a specified percentage of the federal poverty guidelines.

There are three ways a student can now qualify for a Pell Grant, effective 2024-2025 award year and beyond:

- Automatically qualify for Maximum Pell (based on percentage of federal poverty guidelines)
- Automatically qualify for Minimum Pell (based on percentage of federal poverty guidelines)
- Calculated Pell using Student Aid Index (SAI), (Calculated Pell = Maximum Pell – SAI)

As such, there is a relationship between the SAI and federal poverty level. In relation to Alaska Education Grant (AEG) awarding, an SAI demonstrating financial need is one component of the AEG eligibility criteria.

The number of students eligible to receive AEG exceeds the amount of funding available each year. Due to this, the following AEG selection criteria for disbursement prioritization is used:

- Student financial need as indicated by SAI
- Historically, AEG funding is fully expended each year to students with the highest financial need (-1,500 SAI or zero Estimated Family Contribution (EFC) prior to 2024-2025 award year).
- FAFSA filing date, beginning with the earliest submission date
- Status as AEG recipient in previous academic year
- Student enrollment level, with full-time students prioritized over part-time

Soon-to-be published in the 2025 Alaska Higher Education Almanac, for the 2024 academic year, 2,650 students received the Alaska Education Grant with an average award amount of \$2,180.00¹. The average age of AEG recipients was 29 years old, 13 percent of whom are first generation students.

Information about remaining unmet need for each AEG recipient would be calculated and determined by institutional financial aid offices and is not available or reported to the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE).

¹ Represented in whole dollars

Definitions

Student Aid Index (SAI): A formula-based index number that ranges from -1,500 to 999,999 and is calculated based on the information they (and their Contributors) input on the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). The SAI is utilized by institutions and agencies to determine a student's financial need.

- Negative SAI equates to a higher financial need; a -1,500 SAI = highest need/maximum Pell
- In the 2024-2025 aid year, SAI replaced EFC which was previously the calculation used in the FAFSA to determine financial need. A student with a zero EFC would previously qualify for a maximum Pell Grant.

FSA SAI Calculation: *"The SAI formula calculates the total financial resources of you and your parents (or spouse in some cases) then deducts the minimum amount needed for your family's normal annual living expenses. The remaining amount may, in part, be allocated for college expenses."*

Federal Poverty Guidelines: Issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), poverty guidelines are the minimum amount of income a person or family needs to meet basic needs. These income levels are set based on the number of persons within one household.

From the HHS Poverty Guidelines site: "The January 2025 poverty guidelines are calculated by taking the 2023 Census Bureau's poverty thresholds and adjusting them for price changes between 2023 and 2024 using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U)."

For the Alaska poverty guidelines see the attachment titled, *2025 Poverty Guidelines for Alaska*.

Maximum/Minimum Pell Grant Eligibility Criteria from the [FSA Partners Knowledge Center](#), [FSA Handbook](#)

(NOTE: *The examples below are only for Dependent Students as defined by FSA, not Independent Students*)

Maximum Pell Grant Eligibility Criteria

A student is eligible for a Maximum Pell Grant if any of the following is true: ***Dependent Student***

- The student's parent(s) is not required to file a federal income tax return; or
- The student's parent is a single parent and has an AGI greater than zero and less than or equal to 225 percent of the poverty guideline for the applicant's family size and state of residence; or
- The student's parent is not a single parent and has an AGI greater than zero and less than or equal to 175 percent of the poverty guideline for the applicant's family size and state of residence.

Minimum Pell Grant Eligibility Criteria

A student who does not qualify for a Maximum Pell Grant or for a calculated Pell Grant because the SAI is too high can still be eligible for a Minimum Pell Grant if any of the following is true: ***Dependent Student***

- The student's parent is a single parent and has an AGI less than or equal to 325 percent of the poverty guideline for the applicant's family size and state of residence; or
- The student's parent is not a single parent and has an AGI less than or equal to 275 percent of the poverty guideline for the applicant's family size and state of residence.

For the Alaska poverty guidelines see the attachment titled *2025 Poverty Guidelines for Alaska*.

8. For the computer science content specialist added last year, is the position temporary or permanent? If temporary, how do you plan to most effectively use this temporary position?

The Computer Science Content Specialist was added to the base budget in the 2025 budget in the Career and Technical Education component. The position was a long-term, non-permanent position transferred to permanent with this change. The DEED has recruited for this position and just completed interviews. The selected candidate will focus on two key areas:

- Supporting districts in the implementation of the Alaska State Computer Science plan, adopted in 2022. <https://education.alaska.gov/computer-science>
- Supporting districts and industry partners in development and promotion of computer science career pathways for Alaska students.

In addition, this position will support development of statewide policies and guidance to districts on addressing digital literacy and digital safety. A first example will be the support of Artificial Intelligence (AI) recommended policies and guidance for districts. As the subject matter expert, this position will provide technical assistance and support to districts in effective implementation of computer science, digital literacy, and other related content.

9. In the Student and School Achievement component: the financial services line (3001) had FY2024 actuals of \$8,700.0 but is at \$5,400.0 in FY2025 management plan and FY2026 request. What were the additional costs in FY2024? Also, the other services line (3011), varies significantly between FY2024 actuals (\$4,500.0), FY2025 management plan (\$8,000.0), and FY2026 request (\$6,500.0). What is driving these changing costs?

In September 2024 when these numbers were reported, the final year of existing Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) III funds were available and reflected on the report as actual expenses and encumbrances. Because these ESSER III funds were unused in FY2024, the remaining balances were carried forward to the FY2025 Management Plan.

10. Provide copies of DEED's agreements with public facilities by community. How many square feet does DEED have in each community? How much does DEED pay for space by community?

Please see the attachment titled, *DEED Current Lease Agreements with Public Facilities*.

Additionally, there are two attachments for the current lease agreements from ACPE and the Alaska State Council on the Arts (ACSA). They are the *ACPE Lease #2756* and *ACSA Lease #2636* attachments, respectively.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with anything further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Deena Bishop', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Deena Bishop, Ed.D.
Commissioner

Enclosures: FY2025 IMLS Grants-to-States Award Alaska State Library
2025 Poverty Guidelines for Alaska
DEED Current Lease Agreements with Public Facilities
ACPE Lease #2756
ACSA Lease #2636

cc: Jordan Shilling, Director, Governor's Legislative Office
Lizzie Kubitz, Legislative Liaison, DCCED