



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Education & Early Development

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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March 29, 2025

The Honorable Löki Tobin
Chair, Senate Education Committee
Alaska State Capitol, Room 115
Juneau, AK 99801

The Honorable Rebecca Himschoot
Co-Chair, House Education Committee
Alaska State Capitol, Room 411
Juneau, AK 99801

The Honorable Andi Story
Co-Chair, House Education Committee
Alaska State Capitol, Room 403
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Tobin and Representatives Himschoot and Story,

This memo serves as a response to follow-up questions from the State Board of Education (SBOE) Annual Report presentation on Monday, March 10, 2025, to the Joint Education Committees.

1. How many of the first day vacancies were for Special Education Teachers?

Job Code	Count	Job Name
11	48	Counselor
13	2	Remedial Specialist
21	107	Special Education (SPED) Teacher
24	6	Psychologist
25	1	Psychometrist
26	23	Speech Therapist
27	2	Physical Therapist
28	13	Occupation Therapist
29	1	Audiologist
33	1	Orientation and Mobility Specialist

The data highlights critical shortages across various special education-related professions on the first day report. The most significant shortfall is seen in the role of Special Education Teachers (Code 21) indicating a pressing need for qualified educators to support students with disabilities.

Other essential support roles also face shortages, though to a lesser extent include:

- Counselors (Code 11): provide social-emotional support to all students, including those with special needs
- Psychologists (Code 24): trained professionals who support students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs, working to create safe and supportive learning environments
- Psychometrist (Code 25): medical professionals who administer psychological tests
- Speech Therapist (Code 26): address communication disorders
- Occupational Therapists (Code 28): assist in developing fine motor and daily living skills
- Orientation and Mobility Specialist (Code 33): assist visually impaired students with navigating their environments safely and independently

2. Is there a limit to how many educators with a J-1 visa can work in Alaska?

The J-1 visa does not have a limit but is a short-term visa. The H-1B visa allows for a longer-term position appointment but is limited by federal caps on how many visas may be approved annually.

Visa Challenges: There are two types of visas districts are predominately using for international hiring. J-1 visas enable cultural and educational exchanges by allowing foreign nationals to participate in programs aimed at fostering a mutual understanding through temporary visits to the United States. J-1 visas do not have a specific annual cap, making them easier to secure. These visas, however, do not offer long-term.

H-1B visas, which permit U.S. employers to temporarily employ foreign workers in specialty occupations, offer a more stable solution due to their longer duration and the possibility of transitioning to permanent residency. The challenge lies in the federal caps and stiff competition from various sectors for these visas.

Resource: Department of State, Teacher Exchange Visitor Information – Teacher webpage (<https://j1visa.state.gov/programs/teacher>)

3. Please provide both the teacher and bio information on the Teachers of the Year as far back as we have them.

Teacher of the Year information is always available on the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) website.

Present Teacher of the Year: <https://education.alaska.gov/recognitionprograms/TOY>

Past Teachers of the Year: <https://education.alaska.gov/recognitionprograms/toy/pastreipients>

4. How many certified teachers were employed at Mt. Edgecumbe High School (MEHS) prior to the pandemic (2018)?

In 2018, there were 27 certified teachers at MEHS.

5. Can correspondence school allotments be used to fund postsecondary education after graduation?

According to Alaska Statute (AS) 14.03.310(d)(2), any unspent funds from a student allotment must return to the district once the student is no longer enrolled in the correspondence program. This means that student allotment funds cannot be directly allocated for postsecondary education after graduation.

6. What is the breakdown of schools using the Coding for Minecraft program? Are they more rural or urban?

The Coding in Minecraft program is implemented in 41 districts and at Mt. Edgecumbe High School, representing both urban and rural district usage. A list of participating districts is attached in the document titled, *Coding in Minecraft Coding Program Participants*.

7. Provide a report on burdensome reporting for districts.

Based on feedback from both a large district and a remote rural district, the DEED has identified several specific reports that could benefit from a thorough review and possible revision to better balance oversight with administrative capacity.

- The Annual Staff Accounting Report details job and assignment codes, in-field teacher assignments, and certification endorsements. It is used by state and federal agencies to monitor compliance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Alaska Reads Act, and to assess workforce qualifications and staffing trends. District reporting can impose a significant administrative burden.
- The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) is federally mandated, collected by the federal government, and used by the DEED for the Report Card to the Public. It requires extensive coordination across Information Technology (IT), Human Resources (HR), and multiple district departments, taking months of planning, data extraction, input, and editing. Policymakers and advocacy groups use this data to monitor equity in education, track student discipline disparities, assess access to advanced coursework, and analyze teacher qualifications. However, districts have reported that the CRDC template frequently contains errors and programming inconsistencies, requiring extensive corrections. Additionally, shifting federal requirements make compliance challenging, increasing staff workload.
- The Fund Balance Report legislative intent language requests for FY2024 and FY2025 provide a snapshot of district funds at a single point in time. This report is intended to help financial oversight entities assess district financial health and determine available resources. However, districts have noted that this report offers only a limited view rather than a comprehensive financial picture, which may lead to misinterpretations of available resources. The annually required financial statements provide a more accurate and complete assessment of a district's financial situation.
- The Quality Schools Report is required for the state-funded Quality Schools Grant and is subject solely to state reporting mandates, meaning modifications can be made without federal implications. The report tracks the effectiveness of school improvement initiatives and the use of state grant funding, helping policymakers assess investment impacts and ensure accountability. However, districts have noted that the reporting requirements are overly complex, as they often braid multiple funding sources to support initiatives, making the final reporting process unnecessarily burdensome.

- The Report Card and OASIS (Online Alaska School Information System) Data Collections provide essential information for the federally mandated Report Card to the Public and state requirements such as the Alaska Reads Act and other divisions like the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) which use some of the data collected for the Alaska Performance Scholarship. The Report Card to the Public is designed to enhance transparency for parents, community members, and policymakers by reporting on school performance, student achievement, and available resources. Schools are required to collect and submit various data points. Additionally, some metrics, like internet speed, are already reported to federal agencies, creating redundancy in data collection.
- The School Improvement Plan (SIP) requires extensive documentation, including a detailed plan and comprehensive needs assessment. The report serves as a tool for districts and state agencies to outline school improvement strategies and track funding allocations. Unlike the Quality Schools Report, the SIP is associated with federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funds, including Title I. DEED has already integrated the Title I plan into the SIP to streamline processes and reduce redundancy. Further refinements to this integration could help lessen the administrative burden on districts while maintaining accountability and effectiveness.

8. Provide a written report on the Civics Standards that are being adopted by the SBOE.

See the attached report titled, *Civics Report*.

9. Provide the Alaska Reads Act Annual Report. Provide information on the make-up of the stakeholder group, indigenous language screener and supports for districts with language immersion programs, and any feedback provided by the stakeholder group.

Alaska Reads Act Annual Report

The first annual Alaska Reads Act Evaluation Summary will be available within the next month. In September 2024, DEED partnered with Pacific Research and Evaluation (PRE) to assess the effectiveness of the Alaska Reads Act. The Year One study established baseline data and included:

- The DEED District Reading Survey was completed by 52 district representatives in 2023 and 38 district representatives in 2024
- Student outcome data (school year 2023-2024) from
 - Amplify, mCLASS DIBELS 8, K-3 statewide literacy screener,
 - Alaska System for Academic Readiness (AK STAR), statewide summative assessment for grades three through nine grade progression, waivers, and
 - Teaching Strategies GOLD assessments, prekindergarten observation tool
- Stakeholder input from informational interviews with seven DEED staff and four external partners
- Background research, a logic model, research questions, and an evaluation plan

These findings serve as a benchmark for tracking program impact and progress in future evaluations.

Literacy Screeners for Alaska Indigenous Languages (LSAIL) Project

The DEED has contracted with the University of Oregon (UO) Center on Teaching and Learning (CTL) to develop early literacy screening tools for kindergarten through grade five in up to ten Alaska Native languages (ANL) over five years. These literacy screeners will align with the Alaska Reads Act in up to ten ANLs for kindergarten through grade five. This project will also document the

development and validation process, document the psychometric properties of the screeners, and develop a web-based online tool for further literacy screener development for additional ANLs. The five-year timeline includes two years for development, one year for validation for each language, and one to two years for dissemination of results and launching the online tool.

This project is currently in the development and validation phase for three languages that have established immersion programs: Iñupiaq, Tlingit, and Yugtun. The project has hired three Linguistic and Cultural Ambassadors: Mikic Janice George, Yugtun; Naakil.aan Hans Chester, Tlingit; and Myles Creed, Iñupiaq. Language Advisory Panels for each group have been organized and are meeting regularly. Content development in Tlingit and Yugtun is completed for letter-sound knowledge, phonological awareness, and word reading measures, and pilot data collection for these measures is in progress. Content Developers who have experience in storytelling for children and are interested in writing short passages for these screeners are in the process of being hired. Iñupiaq development began in the early months of 2025 with piloting scheduled to occur either in spring or fall 2025. In addition to documenting the development and validation process for each language, the project hopes to present on progress to date at the 2025 Convention of the National Indian Education Association.

Later this spring, the project will initiate the process of selecting up to two additional ANL. The plan is to either follow the process for the first three languages or to subcontract with linguistic and cultural organizations for each additional language. The aim is to select the languages and begin the development process before the end of the project year two. In project year three, two additional ANL will be identified, with development work to begin that year. Objectives for these languages mirror those for the first three languages.

In addition, the project is working on developing online tools that ANL workers can use to create assessments in additional ANL. This work aims to provide a mechanism for extending the work to additional ANLs after the life of the project.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any further inquiries.

Sincerely,



Deena Bishop, Ed.D.
Commissioner

Enclosures: Coding in Minecraft Coding Program Participants
 Civics Report

cc: Jordan Shilling, Director, Governor's Legislative Office