

Alaska State Constitution education clause

Section 7.1 - Public Education.

The legislature shall by general law establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the State, and may provide for other public educational institutions. Schools and institutions so established shall be free from sectarian control. No money shall be paid from public funds for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution.

Mission of the State Board of Education & Early Development

To ensure quality standards-based instruction to improve academic achievement for all students.

Recent milestones in leadership

Over the last two years, the State Board has promulgated regulations to improve Alaska's public schools. This foundation of educational excellence positioned Alaska to receive a waiver from the accountability system of No Child Left Behind. The state and school districts are working to make this foundation a reality in the classroom.

Specifically, we have:

- increased the rigor of our English language arts and mathematics standards, which now span all grades;
- tied educator evaluations partly to student learning; and
- implemented an Alaska system of accountability and support for schools.
- Rigorous assessments are planned for spring 2015.

The ultimate aim of our new K-12 standards is to provide a platform for increasing student achievement.

The ultimate aim of educator evaluations is to provide supports to teachers in order to increase student achievement.

The ultimate aim of the accountability system is to provide supports to students, teachers and schools in order to increase student achievement.

The ultimate aim of assessing students is to provide supports to students, teachers and schools in order to increase student achievement.

REGULATIONS AND OTHER BOARD ACTIONS

Assessments and accountability

To reduce the number of assessments that school districts must administer, the State Board in April repealed the requirement to give students a norm-referenced test in grades 5 and 7. Norm-referenced tests compare students with sample populations of students nationwide, rather than with a set of standards. Alaska will continue to have points of comparison through the National Assessment of Educational Progress in grades 4 and 8 and the SAT and ACT for college-going juniors and seniors. See http://education.alaska.gov/State_Board/pdf/13_april_packet.pdf

In June, the State Board adopted regulations to implement Alaska's new accountability system, replacing the federal accountability system of No Child Left Behind. Alaska's new accountability system includes the Alaska School Performance Index; a star rating system for schools; public acknowledgement of highest-performing and high-progress schools; state assistance to schools that need improvement; public reporting of aggregate data; and reporting of individual student results to parents and their educators. No individually identifiable data about students will be made available to the federal government.

Alaska's accountability system is based on data about student achievement and *growth* in reading, writing and mathematics; attendance; performance on work-ready and college-entrance assessments in high school; participation in work-ready assessments; and high school graduation. This formula, called the Alaska School Performance Index, ranks schools from one star to five stars.

Additionally, each school and district has the goal of reducing its percentage of non-proficient students by half over six years, including in each subgroup of students: students with disabilities, English language learners, economically disadvantaged students, Alaska Natives and American Indians, Caucasians, African-Americans, Hispanics, Multi-Race, and Asian/Pacific Islanders.

Districts are required to implement improvement plans in one-star, two-star and three-star schools. Improvement plans also are required for four-star and five-star schools whose graduation rate has declined from the previous year; or whose assessment scores have declined for two consecutive years; or which have not met their targets for reducing non-proficiency for two consecutive years. The last two criteria apply to achievement in the student body as a whole or any subgroup(s) of students.

As required by the U.S. Department of Education, the state will:

- recognize highest-performing and high-progress schools as Reward Schools;

- require the lowest-performing 5% of Title I schools (recipients of federal anti-poverty funds) to implement a significant program of improvement aligned with comprehensive turnaround principles (Priority Schools);
- and require the next 10% of low-performing Title I schools to implement appropriate interventions to address specific deficiencies (Focus Schools).

The results of the first year of the new accountability system appear later in this report.

Teacher quality

In April, the State Board approved the University of Alaska Southeast's endorsement program in distance delivery and e-learning for certified teachers. The program will increase the competence of teachers to design and deliver online courses. The program fits well with Alaska's Learning Network, whose goal is for highly qualified Alaska teachers to design and deliver online high school courses so that all students have access to career-ready and college-ready courses.

http://education.alaska.gov/State_Board/pdf/13_april_packet.pdf

In June, the State Board approved an advanced endorsement program from the University of Alaska Anchorage for certified elementary teachers. The 18-credit endorsement is in teaching English language learners. Teachers will learn to support students' academic achievement while sustaining their cultural identity. The program supports the board's adoption of cultural standards for teachers and schools, and its goal of academic achievement for all students. See

http://education.alaska.gov/State_Board/pdf/13_june_packet.pdf

In September, the State Board approved an advanced endorsement program in K-8 elementary education at the University of Alaska Southeast. The 18-credit program is offered by distance throughout Alaska. See http://education.alaska.gov/State_Board/pdf/13_sept_packet.pdf

In December, the State Board approved a new bachelor's degree program in secondary education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Candidates can obtain an initial teaching certificate with a secondary education endorsement (grades 7-12) in art, biology, chemistry, Earth science, economics, English, French, German, history, mathematics, political science, or Spanish. Candidates simultaneously take a double major: one in their subject matter, and the other in secondary education. Candidates potentially can complete the program in four years. Prior to this program, students earned a bachelor's degree in a subject area and then underwent one to two years of teacher training for which there was very limited financial aid. See

http://education.alaska.gov/State_Board/pdf/14-DecemberPacket.pdf

Energy efficiency

In accordance with Senate Bill 237, the State Board received a recommendation from the department's Bond Reimbursement and Grant Committee for energy-efficient codes for school construction and major renovations. In March, the State Board adopted by reference the

American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers' Standard 90.1. 2010 edition.

Residential programs

In March, the State Board adopted regulations to allow district-operated statewide residential programs to accept variable-term students. Variable-term programs rotate students in and out of the program for short periods of study. The programs operate throughout the full school year. The board was responding to requests from rural districts that want to bring students from villages to hub cities for short-term programs in career and technical subjects, personal growth, and study skills. The regulations support the board's goal of serving the needs of all students.

In December, the State Board adopted a regulation to align residential program regulations with new state law. The regulation refers to residential programs as residential schools, removes the limit on the number of such schools, allows for district-wide residential schools, and allows for schools that accept students for variable terms during the school year.

Early literacy

In June, the State Board adopted regulations to require districts to screen kindergarten, first-grade, second-grade, and certain third-grade students for early literacy skills, in order to identify students experiencing delays. The department will maintain a list of approved screening assessments. Districts will report the data once a year. The regulation implements a state appropriation for such screenings. See [http://education.alaska.gov/State Board/pdf/13_june_packet.pdf](http://education.alaska.gov/State_Board/pdf/13_june_packet.pdf)

In December, the State Board adopted a regulation to clarify the frequency of required early literacy screenings, provide two tracks by which a screening tool may be approved by the department, and clarify the manner in which districts must provide data to the department. The regulation gives districts more flexibility in choosing screening tools and more time to report data.

State Museum

In June, the State Board adopted regulations to formalize the policies of the state-required Museum Collections Advisory Committee regarding the acquisition and deaccession of artifacts. See [http://education.alaska.gov/State Board/pdf/13_june_packet.pdf](http://education.alaska.gov/State_Board/pdf/13_june_packet.pdf)

The 70% instruction requirement

In March, the State Board approved requests from five school districts for waivers from the state requirement that districts spend at least 70% of their operating funds on instruction. These waivers refer to the audited financial statements for fiscal year 2012. The districts are: Alaska Gateway, Galena, Kashunamiut, Klawock, and Yakutat.

In October, the State Board approved waivers for 24 districts from the state requirement to budget at least 70% of their operating funds for instruction. The districts are: Alaska Gateway, Aleutian Region, Aleutians East, Bristol Bay, Chatham, Copper River, Hoonah, Hydaburg, Iditarod, Kake, Kashunamiut, Kuspuk, Lake and Peninsula, Nome, North Slope, Northwest Arctic, Pelican, Pribilof, Saint Mary's, Skagway, Southeast Island, Tanana, Yukon Flats, and Yupiit.

Charter schools

In March, the State Board approved a five-year renewal of the Anvil City Science Academy's charter in Nome, a 10-year renewal of the Frontier Charter School's charter in Anchorage, and a five-year initial charter for the Greatland Academy Charter on the Kenai Peninsula. See http://education.alaska.gov/State_Board/pdf/13_march_packet.pdf.

In June, the State Board approved a 10-year renewal of Highland Tech Charter School in Anchorage. See http://education.alaska.gov/State_Board/pdf/13_june_packet.pdf

New officers, members and staff

The State Board elected Jim Merriner as Chair, Esther Cox as First Vice-Chair, and Janel Keplinger as Second Vice Chair, effective July 1, 2013, through June 30, 2014.

Sue Hull of Fairbanks was sworn in as a member of the State Board in March. Hull will serve a five-year term in a seat reserved for the Fourth Judicial District.

James Fields of Glennallen was sworn in as a member of the State Board in April. Fields will serve a five-year term in a seat reserved for the regional educational attendance areas, which are the school districts in the unorganized borough.

Carly Williams of Palmer joined the State Board in July as student advisor for a one-year term.

Lt. Col. Douglas Hays joined the State Board in September as military advisor. The military determines his term.

In June, longtime Alaska educator James A. Seitz of Anchorage was named Executive Secretary (director) of the Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission. The nine-member commission, appointed by the Governor, ensures that members of the teaching profession at the K-12 and postsecondary levels are qualified and ethical educators.

In March, Jackie Fernandez was named Curator of Collections at the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka, one of the Alaska State Museums. She oversees 6,000 artifacts representing each of Alaska's Native groups.

The State Board approved four appointees to Mt. Edgecumbe High School's advisory board. They are Doreen Deaton, Loraine DeAsis, Regina Johnson, and Ty Mase.

Resolutions

In January 2013, the State Board passed a resolution supporting the Denali Centennial Climb scheduled for July 2013, in which descendants of the first people to reach the summit, in 1913, climbed Denali. Many of the original climbing party were young Alaska Natives. The State Board supported the educational and inspirational nature of the climb. See [http://education.alaska.gov/State Board/resolutions/01-2013.pdf](http://education.alaska.gov/State_Board/resolutions/01-2013.pdf).

SIGNIFICANT STEPS

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver

In May, the U.S. Department of Education granted Alaska a two-year waiver from major provisions of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, commonly known as No Child Left Behind. The waiver took effect in the 2013-2014 school year.

Alaska was the 37th state (plus Washington, D.C.) to receive a waiver. Under the waiver, states agreed to:

- adopt standards in English language arts and mathematics that prepare students for education and training after high school, often referred to as college-ready and career-ready standards;
- devise their own system for holding schools accountable for students' academic success, including student populations that traditionally underperform; and
- require school districts to evaluate teachers and principals partly on student achievement.

Under the two-year waiver, Alaska has opted out of NCLB's system of accountability and consequences known as Adequate Yearly Progress.

NCLB's goal was that all assessed students be proficient in reading and math by spring 2014. Schools and districts were held accountable in up to 31 categories. If schools and districts underperformed in any category to any degree, they were subject to consequences. School districts around the nation were concerned they would soon face consequences for not meeting unattainable goals. States were concerned they would have to implement consequences that are expensive, disruptive, and in some cases unjustified.

Alaska was in a position to apply for a waiver because it had been working since 2010 on new standards and on methods of evaluating educators:

- In June 2012, the State Board adopted Alaska's college-ready and career-ready standards.
- In December 2012, the State Board adopted regulations for school districts' evaluations of educators.
- In June 2013, the State Board adopted regulations to implement Alaska's own accountability system.

New accountability system: the Alaska School Performance Index (ASPI)

The Alaska School Performance Index measures schools by a combination of data: student achievement on the state's reading, writing and math assessments; growth in the school's student body in those assessments from the prior year; and attendance. Schools with high school students also are measured by graduation rates; student performance on college-ready and career-ready assessments such as the SAT, ACT, and WorkKeys; and students' participation rate in the WorkKeys assessment.

This year's school ratings are at: <http://education.alaska.gov/aspi/>. Fifty-two of 503 rated schools earned five stars, the highest rating; 190 schools are four-star schools; 162 schools are three-star schools; 49 schools are two-star schools; and 50 schools are one-star schools. Collectively, nearly 92 percent of students attended schools in 2012-2013 that earned three stars or above.

Reward Schools

Under the Alaska School Performance Index, the state's new accountability system, the department recognized 49 schools as 2013 Reward Schools to honor their student achievement from the 2012-2013 school year.

Reward Schools are recognized in two categories: highest performing and high progress. Thirty-one schools were highest-performing and 37 schools were high progress. Nineteen schools were recognized in both categories, making a total of 49 schools to be named Reward Schools.

Alaska names both categories of Reward Schools in three grade spans: K-8 schools, 9-12 schools, and K-12 schools, which represent the spectrum of rural and urban schools. (Elementary schools and middle schools are included in the K-8 grade span.)

To qualify for Reward status as a *highest-performing* school:

- the school must be in the top 10 percent of schools in its grade span (K-8, 9-12, or K-12) based on its score under the Alaska School Performance Index (explained above);
- over the two most recent years, the school must have a graduation rate that averaged at least 85 percent, if it has 12th-graders; and
- over the two most recent years, the school must have met its goal for increasing the percentage of students who are proficient in reading, writing, and math, for the student body as a whole and all subgroups of students.

To qualify for Reward status as a *high-progress* school:

- the school must be in the highest 10 percent of all schools in the Growth and Proficiency Index (explained below);

- have an average score of at least 95 in the Growth and Proficiency Index over the past three years for all students;
- have an average Growth and Proficiency Index score of at least 90 in the most recent year for the subgroups Alaska Native/American Indian students, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners (if there are at least five students in a subgroup);
- the graduation rate must average at least 85 percent over the two most recent years, if the school has 12th-graders.

The Growth and Proficiency Index, briefly stated, measures whether a student population in a school is increasing, remaining stable, or declining in achievement in reading, writing, and math from one year to the next. A school receives an index score for its student body as a whole, and scores for each of the four subgroups mentioned above. The index looks at each student's performance over those two years and creates a combined picture of a school's performance.

See http://education.alaska.gov/news/releases/2013/reward_schools_oct2013.pdf

Implementing accountability

The department's website now provides easy access for educators, parents, the media, and the general public to understand Alaska's English language and mathematics standards, educator-evaluation regulations, the school accountability system, and eventually the new assessments.

The webpages include background documents, fact sheets, FAQs, and resources for educators. The standards are broken down by grade level, for easy access by educators and parents. The parent link supplies easy access to parent guides and PTA tips for each grade level, as well.

The department regularly emails a newsletter to school districts and education organizations to alert them to new resources and upcoming professional-development opportunities.

The department has participated in conferences and trainings with educators, including superintendents and principals, bilingual/multicultural educators, career and technical educators, science and math teachers, and place-based educators.

The department has distributed 40,000 printed copies of the parent guide and tips. Through ads in newspapers, on movie screens, and over the radio the department has publicized this parent resource.

The department has distributed 45,000 copies of a parent brochure about early learning, emphasizing its value, the ways that schools help struggling readers, and how to help children at home. Through ads in newspapers and over the radio, the department has publicized these parent guides.

The department has posted Alaska School Performance Index and Annual Measureable Objective worksheets for all schools, using 2012-2013 student performance data. Based upon these results, all schools have received a performance ranking from one star to five stars. Sixteen schools have been designated as Priority Schools, 29 schools as Focus Schools, 48 schools as Reward Schools, and 12 districts as Tier II and Tier III districts.

All districts are categorized within one of three tiers. Districts in which fewer than 25% of the schools are 1-star or 2-stars are Tier I districts. Districts in which 25% to 49.99% of the schools are 1-star and 2-star schools, or 25% to 49.99% of the students attend a 1-star or 2-star school, are Tier II districts. Districts in which 50% or more of the schools are 1-star and 2-star schools, or 50% or more of the students attend a 1- or 2-star school, are Tier III districts. Tier II and III districts must submit an improvement plan to the department.

Nine department staff have been trained and assigned as liaisons to the 98 1-star and 2-star schools and the 12 Tier II and III districts. These liaisons assist in completing School and District Improvement Plans. Schools submitted plans by the November 1 deadline, and liaisons are providing feedback.

Implementing Awareness Campaign for Early Literacy

In accordance with amendments to AS 14,03.072 (a), the department has implemented a campaign to improve parental awareness of the importance of early literacy. The department created brochures informing parents about their schools' intervention strategies, home literacy plans, grade retention policies, and strategies and resources to help children learn to read. The department mailed 55,000 copies to the school districts, which are distributing them to parents of children in kindergarten through grade 3. Additionally, the department has established a web page to serve as a resource for parents about literacy research and ways to help their children at home. See [Http://education.alaska.gov](http://education.alaska.gov) and click on the yellow Parent/Community star. The department is publicizing the importance of early literacy, and advising parents to contact their schools for more information, through radio and newspaper ads.