

**02/19/14  
STATE BOARD OF  
EDUCATION AND  
EARLY  
DEVELOPMENT  
REPORT TO THE  
LEGISLATURE**

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EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT REPORT TO THE  
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State Board of Education & Early Development

Report to the Alaska Legislature

January 2014





## **State Board of Education & Early Development**

Jim Merriner, Chair

Esther Cox, First Vice-Chair

Janel Keplinger, Second Vice-Chair

James Fields

Carol Schaeffer

Sue Hull

Carly Williams, student advisor

Lt. Col. Douglas Hays, military advisor



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## **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](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](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](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](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](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 Yupitit.

## **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](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](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 12<sup>th</sup>-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 12<sup>th</sup>-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](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.

## **SELECTED K-12 TOPICS**

### **Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS)**

The Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education spearheads the APS public-awareness campaigns, disseminates the awards, and maintains the data. The postsecondary commission, the departments of education and of labor, and the University of Alaska deliver an annual APS report to the legislature in January. This State Board report defers to that detailed document.

The department's main task is to help school districts understand and implement the APS regulations, which included the complexities of phasing in curricular requirements. The department and the postsecondary commission have prepared checklists by which students, parents, and counselors can easily monitor students' progress toward APS eligibility.

The department partners with the postsecondary commission to prepare webinars for parents/educators and newsletters for school counselors; fields questions from parents and educators; and reviews applications from private school students and home school students.

### **Child nutrition**

This fall, the department's Child Nutrition Programs unit began piloting a software package for districts that includes nutritional analysis and online school meal applications. The U.S. Department of Agriculture funded it with a \$1 million grant. Districts will be able to access the software by mid-school year.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture released regulations for all foods sold on campus, including fundraisers, school stores, and vending machines. The regulations go into effect in school year 2014-2015.

Child Nutrition Programs worked closely with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide U.S. Department of Agriculture foods to Galena for disaster relief.

### **State System of Support (SSOS)**

The State System of Support, established in regulation at 4 AAC 06.872, continues to strengthen school improvement efforts across the state through the following efforts:

The department designated districts as Tier I, II or III, to determine what levels of support SSOS will give. Tier III districts receive the greatest support.

Following the requirement of our federal waiver, the department designated 16 Priority Schools and 29 Focus Schools based on their Alaska School Performance Index rating and student-

performance data. Priority Schools are those Title I schools most likely to benefit from a significant program of improvement. Focus Schools are Title I schools that would benefit from an improvement program targeted to specific needs. Title I schools receive federal anti-poverty funds to improve student performance.

Federal school improvement funds have been made available to the 45 Priority and Focus Schools to participate in three professional development events this school year: the Teaching and Learning Support Institutes (department-sponsored), the Anchorage Response to Intervention Conference (sponsored by the Alaska Staff Development Network and the Anchorage School District), and the Alaska School Leadership Institute (sponsored by the Alaska Staff Development Network).

The department assisted 1-star and 2-star schools under the Alaska School Performance Index on required School Improvement Planning. Liaisons assist in implementing the state's new accountability regulations and required school-improvement planning.

Expanding the Alaska Administrative Coaching Project, the department has funded the participation of 40 established principals at 1-star and 2-star schools in two training institutes and onsite coaching this school year. The first institute was held October 8-11, 2013.

This school year we expect to have 12 SSOS coaches serving 13 schools with monthly five-day visits and distance coaching between visits. The coaches average more than two decades of experience in education. All have some experience in rural Alaska. Some coaches have been principals. The local school's leader and the coach create a plan of service with specific, measurable goals, specific actions, and designated responsibilities. For example, a goal might be that the reading instruction program be implemented with at least 90% fidelity by all staff. The actions might include the principal modeling lessons in each classroom and the coach providing feedback to teachers. The principal and coach might measure progress through their observations.

SSOS operates under its Effective Schools Framework, which deals with the six domains of leadership, curriculum, instruction, professional development, assessment, and supportive learning environment. The domains are central to the Alaska STEPP (Steps Toward Educational Progress and Partnership) online planning tool, which schools use to plan and implement school improvement. See [http://www.eed.state.ak.us/aksupport/akstepp/STEPP User Manual 2013-2014.pdf](http://www.eed.state.ak.us/aksupport/akstepp/STEPP_User_Manual_2013-2014.pdf)

## **Career and technical education**

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board received state funding for FY14 to help implement the Alaska Career and Technical Education Plan. The departments of education, labor, and the University of Alaska are partners in the plan.

Eligible applicants were: Alaska school districts; Alaska public postsecondary educational institutions, including Regional Training Centers; and Alaska non-profits partnering with such

public education entities. (The grants in FY2013 served 1,425 participants in 14 programs at a cost of \$564,941.)

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board awarded FY14 funds to: AVTEC to upgrade its maritime training lab, the Challenger Learning Center to develop an introductory aviation technology high school course, Copper Valley Development Association to develop an agricultural science program with the Copper River School District, Galena City School District to align its high school health sciences program with postsecondary programs, and Hiland Mountain Correctional Center to increase its trades-related programs and offer college credit.

Also: Juneau Economic Development Council to train elementary teachers to use the Engineering is Elementary curriculum, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District to expand the Project Lead the Way Engineering Academy, Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District to implement apprenticeships with Alaska Ship & Drydock and the Alaska Marine Highway, Mat-Su Borough School District to implement the Aeronautics Student Organization in Palmer, and Pribilof School District to implement a fisheries pathway in its career cluster.

Also: Southeast Island School District to implement an agriculture/horticulture program, University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Rural Health to expand health science programs in rural high schools, University of Alaska Fairbanks Bristol Bay Campus to expand the construction trades program, University of Alaska Southeast to design a medical assistance certificate program, and Yuut Elitnaurviat The People's Learning Center to implement an energy efficiency and retrofit program.

See <http://labor.alaska.gov/awib/cte.htm>.

## **Alaska's Learning Network (AKLN)**

Now in its third school year, Alaska's Learning Network offers online courses taught by highly qualified Alaska teachers, as well as professional development for teachers who create and teach online courses. This school year's fall enrollment is 283.

AKLN helps provide an equitable education for rural students. AKLN's courses meet all curricular eligibility requirements for the Alaska Performance Scholarship and for college entry in general. Some courses offer dual credit with a postsecondary institution.

Courses in 2013-2014 include: Applied Writing, British Literature, English Literature and Composition Skills, World Literature, Advanced Composition, English SAT Prep, English ACT Prep, Pre-Algebra, Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Financial Math, Personal Finance, Math SAT Prep, Math ACT Prep, NASA World Wind: Geospatial 4D and Aviation Safety, Alaska Studies, World History, U.S. History, Economics, U.S. Government, Sociology, Psychology, Human Geography, Physical Science, Earth Science, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Environmental Science, Introduction to Aviation, Introduction to Mining, Computer Literacy, Audio Engineering, Digital Arts, Image Design and Editing, Engineering Design, Post Secondary Prep, Career Planning and Development, Strategies for Academic Success, Lifetime

Fitness, Foundations of Personal Wellness, Healthy Living, Professional Skills for the Workplace, Mathematics in Health Care, First Aid and CPR, Introduction to Health Careers.

In January 2013, the department, the University of Alaska, and Alaska's Learning Network offered a statewide introductory mining course for high school seniors via videoconferencing, web streaming, and an online learning platform. Students who successfully completed this one-semester course were eligible to apply for paid summer internships in Alaska. The dual-credit course offered three university credits and a one-semester high school credit. Mining companies in Alaska helped to fund the course.

See <http://www.aklearn.net/introduction-to-mining>.

In July, the department and the University of Alaska Southeast's School of Education signed an agreement to allow UAS to operate AKLN.

Under the agreement, UAS will ensure that AKLN course content is aligned with Alaska's rigorous new K-12 standards in English language arts and mathematics; contract with Alaska high school teachers to work with university faculty to develop AKLN courses; contract with Alaska high school teachers to teach AKLN courses; develop an online seminar to introduce students to online learning; and develop a plan to rigorously evaluate AKLN courses.

UAS also will provide professional development in online teaching; offer a certification endorsement in e-learning and distance education; and evaluate and support online teachers. UAS will receive for the program state general funds through the department.

AKLN is not a school in itself. The network partners with all 54 Alaska school districts, and it will continue to have an advisory board of school district officials. Alaska's school districts oversee their students' use of AKLN's courses and grant credit. Courses often blend face-to-face learning from local teachers with online learning. The online portion of courses is taught by Alaska teachers.

AKLN was funded in FY14 by \$1.1 million in state general funds and by course fees, which generally are paid by the districts.

### **Suicide awareness and prevention training**

The department awarded six \$25,000 grants to school districts to fund suicide awareness, prevention and "postvention" (the aftermath of suicide). The grant provided an opportunity for schools to implement the State Suicide Prevention Plan Goals and Strategies. The department gave priority to projects that serve at-risk students in schools designated as alternative schools, correctional facilities, and regions that historically have had high suicide rates.

- In the Anchorage School District, the Natural Helpers Project will train high-risk students to become peer-to-peer helpers who recognize the signs of suicide and respond appropriately.

- In the Northwest Arctic Borough School District, youth leaders and an experienced grief counselor will address the postvention issues of grief and healing.
- In the Matanuska Susitna Borough School District, staff at two alternative schools will receive suicide intervention training.
- In the Haines Borough School District, an education campaign will build awareness about warning signs, and a mentoring program will target at-risk youth.
- The North Slope Borough School District will implement SafeTALK training.
- The Petersburg City School District will implement the Signs of Suicide (SOS) program in grades 9-12.

See <http://education.alaska.gov/tls/suicide/>.

In December, the State Board heard a report from State Board student advisor Carly Williams and Alaska Association of Student Government President Ariel Hasse about the efforts of AASG to prevent suicide. These efforts include raising funds to produce a short film, which will be accompanied by student presentations in communities.

### **Teacher mentoring and administrator coaching**

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.

Teacher retention is defined as a teacher remaining in the Alaska public K-12 school system from one year to the next, although not necessarily at the same school. Retention has fluctuated between 72% and 85% for rural teachers served by mentoring. This is an improvement over the retention rates of new teachers in rural districts before mentoring, which was 67% on average.

Since the project began, mentors have served in 52 of Alaska's 54 districts and 70% of Alaska's approximately 500 public schools. The state funds mentors in rural districts. A federal grant funds mentors in Anchorage, Kenai Peninsula, Fairbanks, Mat-Su, and Sitka. This school year, 42 mentors are serving 525 teachers in 244 schools in 40 districts.

The role of the principal has changed significantly over recent years—from a manager of the school to a leader who is expected to develop the “human capital” into a responsive culture that addresses the achievement gap and improves the delivery of instruction.

Implicit in the new role as a leader are the skills and practices to collaborate with teachers, analyze achievement data, identify and set school goals, influence the delivery of instruction, and manage the change process.

The department created the Alaska Administrator Coaching Project in January 2005 to improve student achievement and increase retention of early-career principals. Administrative interns from rural districts also have been served by the project's coaches since 2008 through a federal school leadership grant. In 2013 the project began the Alaska Innovative School Leaders Academy for experienced principals. This school year, 51 early-career principals, five superintendents, and 35 experienced principals are participating in the project. They come from rural and urban districts.

## OTHER DEPARTMENT FUNCTIONS

### Mt. Edgecumbe High School

Mt. Edgecumbe is the state-operated residential school in Sitka. It is the only school run by the department. The State Board serves as the Mt. Edgecumbe board. Parents and others participate on an advisory board.

In September, 406 students from 111 villages throughout Alaska attended Mt. Edgecumbe. Sixty-three percent of the student body is female. Alaska Native students compose 79% of the student population; 10% are Caucasian; and 6% are mixed ethnicity. Sixty-five percent of students meet federal guidelines for free and reduced-price lunches. Eighty-four percent of 2013 graduates were accepted into a postsecondary university or training programs.

Mt. Edgecumbe freshmen and sophomores take the state's standards-based assessments in reading, writing, and math:

- In 9<sup>th</sup> grade last school year, 94% were proficient or above in reading, 92% in writing, and 82% in math.
- In 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 69% were proficient or above in reading, 84% in writing, and 71% in math.

The school's Alaska School Performance Index score for this school year is 91.26, giving it four stars. The school's four-year graduation rate last school year was 97%; the five-year rate was 99%. (This does not include students who transferred out of MEHS and attended another school.) MEHS's attendance rate was 96%.

### Alaska State Council on the Arts

The council supports educators, artists, community-based organizations and statewide partners in delivery of arts education in school and community settings.

The National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation have partnered with U.S. state arts agencies to support Poetry Out Loud, a contest that encourages the nation's youth to learn about great poetry through memorization and recitation. In FY13, 92 teachers from 38 schools in 19 Alaska school districts participated with 4,372 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade students. See <http://iahc.org/arts-education/poetry-out-loud/>.

In February, the State Arts Council and the department held the Arts Curriculum Development Workshop with 12 classroom educators, arts specialists, and curriculum coordinators from seven districts. The arts enhance student learning by engaging students in creative thinking. The arts engage students and often keep them in school. See <http://education.alaska.gov/aksca/pdf/OnThinIceBW.pdf>.

In 2010, the council launched a statewide initiative to train artists about teaching strategies and standards, curriculum and instruction so they can be more effective as artists in schools. In FY13, Fairbanks, Juneau, Anchorage, Kodiak and Kenai provided Teaching Artist Academies based on this model.

In FY13, the council supported the Alaska Arts Education Consortium's Administrators Arts Retreat in Juneau to expand the cadre of school leaders working to increase access to quality arts education for school improvement.

The council awards funding to Alaskan schools, districts, educators and arts/community-based organizations in several categories. Operating Support, Community Arts Development, and Presenting and Touring grants to communities also serve students through school outreach and education programs provided by Alaskan arts and culture organizations.

FY13 marked the fourth year of a pilot New Visions, to develop model arts curriculum with districts. Bering Strait School District, Kodiak Island Borough School District and Copper River School District have made significant progress in Curriculum and Assessment, Professional Development, Leadership, Instruction, and Community Engagement. In FY13, 3,520 students, 315 teachers, 79 administrators and school board members were reached through this program. An additional 2,560 were exposed to the arts in education through community engagement activities such as student performances and exhibitions. For results, see [http://education.alaska.gov/aksca/pdf/new\\_visions\\_report.pdf](http://education.alaska.gov/aksca/pdf/new_visions_report.pdf)

The Artists in Schools (AIS) program is supported by the state, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Rasmuson Foundation. Residencies are at least two weeks and provide arts experiences and training for students, teachers, and the greater community. Districts may apply for up to \$15,000 per year for district-level programs including multiple sites, and match those funds 1:1. Individual schools may apply for up to \$5,000 per year for individual school residencies and must provide a 1/3 match.

In FY 14, the AIS program funded 10 individual school residencies and eight multi-site district residency programs, for a total of 72 school sites. The AIS program awarded \$101,910 to these projects, serving approximately 17,000 Alaskans, including 12,417 students. Council funds were matched by schools, districts, individuals, PTA/PTO, businesses, and other grant programs at more than \$113,000. In-kind contributions included artist lodging and accommodations among other community support, estimated at a value of more than \$58,000.

The Rasmuson Foundation has invested in AIS with Cultural Collaborations grants:

- Cultural Collaborations Project Grants: For programs outside the regular school day that connect artists, students, culture bearers, schools, communities, and community organizations. Students participate in the creation of artist-led work.
- Cultural Collaborations Access Grants: For bringing artists into schools, during the school day, for activities in duration of a week or less, such as an author or artist visit.

- Cultural Collaborations Excursion Grants: For bringing students into arts and culture venues to participate in arts activities with professional artists, such as a field trip to a museum or concert.

In FY13, more than 3000 students were served by Cultural Collaborations grants, working with more than 70 artists in communities. In addition, one Arts Educator Fellowship was awarded to Anchorage School District Art Specialist Robin Murphy to attend a summer intensive workshop.

## **The Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums (LAM)**

The groundbreaking ceremony for the State Libraries, Archives & Museums Building in Juneau was held January 16, 2013. The project 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 project is being phased because of incremental funding and to protect museum objects from damage during construction.

- Phase 1, awarded in 2011 to PCL Construction, is complete and included some site work.
- Phase 2, also awarded to PCL Construction, is the building's construction, including a vault for object storage and the exterior building envelope. The vault is scheduled to be ready by March 1, 2014. At that time, the museum contents will be evacuated, the museum torn down, and the rest of the building's construction will begin.
- Phase 3 will be the interior build-out for a turnkey facility with a planned grand opening in April 2016. Phase 3 is 100% priced and awaits award pending the final installment of project funding.

See <http://lam.alaska.gov/slam>.

The Stratton Building, in Sitka, adjacent to the Sheldon Jackson Museum, was purchased in 2010 for LAM. It is currently unusable, in need of significant safety, environmental and structural improvements for restoration and reuse. Phase 1, a new roof and design for the rest of the improvements, is under way. Phase 2 awaits funding.

The Alaska OWL (Online With Libraries) Project improves the computing capabilities, including a videoconferencing network, of all 100 public libraries in Alaska. The project is funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (<http://www2.ntia.doc.gov/>), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rasmuson Foundation, and the Alaska State Library. The project provides Alaskans with the benefits and opportunities that come with high-speed Internet. This includes e-government services, distance education, and access to professional development.

The State Archives concluded its two-year *Exxon Valdez* Litigation Records Project in September. The federally funded project appraised and organized 3,500 boxes of Alaska

Department of Law *Exxon Valdez* court case records. Archivists selected 918 boxes for permanent preservation in the State Archives, organized and cataloged them, and uploaded a catalog record to WorldCat at <http://alaskastatelibrary.worldcat.org/>; OCLC identification number 856591471.

LAM benefits lifelong and K-12 education. Examples are:

- Live Homework Help monitors live chat tutoring for students grades 4 to early college, seven days a week, from noon to 2 a.m. Use has grown exponentially in the past five years. See <http://sled.alaska.edu/homework>.
- An early literacy project in 2013 sent manipulatives, music, books and play/learning ideas to 70 libraries for children and parents birth to 24 months. In 2014 the division will focus on materials for children age 2 to 4.
- OWL provided non-Internet computers for early learning and digital literacy to Alaska's 100 public libraries. See <http://www.awelearning.com>.
- Alaska's Digital Archives shares historical Alaskan videos, photographs and documents for students and researchers. See [www.vilda.education.edu](http://www.vilda.education.edu)
- In Alaska's Digital Pipeline are hundreds of full-text online books, magazines, newspapers and other research resources specifically targeted to elementary, middle school, high school, and college student academic needs. See <http://sled.alaska.edu/databases/>.
- Many school districts' Alaska Native language materials are scanned and available online.

### **Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission**

The Professional Teaching Practices Commission governs educators' ethical and professional standards and educators' compliance with state law and contractual obligations. The commission reports by fiscal year, not calendar year. In FY13, the commission reviewed 56 cases and levied 14 sanctions, compared with 65 cases and 19 sanctions the year before. The sanctions were: one for sexual harassment of staff, three for sexual misconduct with students, seven for contract violations, and three for professional misconduct. See [http://education.alaska.gov/ptpc/pdf/2013\\_annual\\_report.pdf](http://education.alaska.gov/ptpc/pdf/2013_annual_report.pdf)

# STUDENT DATA

## Graduation and dropout rates

The federal government requires all states to use the same method to calculate graduation rates. The Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate was first implemented in Alaska with the 2010-2011 school year.

A cohort graduation year is assigned to each 9<sup>th</sup>-grade student in the fall of his or her initial entry. The expectation is that the student will graduate within four years. For example, a student who entered 9th grade in the 2009-2010 school year would be considered part of the 2013 graduation cohort group. A student may be added to the cohort as a transfer into the public school system or removed from the cohort upon transfer to an education program with a secondary school diploma track. A deceased student would be removed from the cohort group.

A graduate is defined as a student who has received a regular diploma from a state- or district-approved education program, as evidenced by receipt of a secondary school diploma from school authorities. Any student who receives a diploma under a waiver from the competency examination required under AS 14.03075(a), as specified by the state board, is considered to be a graduate. This does not include a student who receives a certificate of achievement (those students who complete their credits but do not pass the graduation exam) or a general educational development (GED) certificate.

The Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate is reported as a fraction. The numerator is the sum of the number of graduates within the cohort who receive a regular diploma on or before June 30. The denominator is the sum of all students assigned to the cohort.

<u>School Year</u>	<u>Graduation Rate</u>	<u>Graduate Count</u>
2005	61.4%	6,905
2006	61.6%	7,361
2007	63.0%	7,666
2008	62.6%	7,855
2009	67.5%	8,008
2010	67.4%	8,245
<hr/>		
2011	68.0%	8,064
2012	69.4%	7,987
2013	71.7%	7,795

Note: Prior to the 2011 school year, the department used the methodology below: The graduation rate is reported as a fraction. The numerator is the sum of the number of graduates receiving a regular diploma before June 30. The denominator is the sum of the number of graduates, plus the number of dropouts in grade 9 three school years prior, plus the number of unduplicated dropouts

in grade 10 two school years prior, plus the number of unduplicated dropouts in grade 11 in the prior school year, plus the number of unduplicated dropouts in grade 12 during the current year, plus the number of grade 12 continuing students.

Graduate count represents any student who graduated with a regular diploma during the school year (July 1-June 30).

Alaska also calculates the graduation rate for a five-year cohort of students, which includes students who graduated in four years and five years. In 2013 the five-year graduation rate was 74.6%.

There is often confusion between graduation rates and dropout rates. Dropout rates are calculated across a single year. The graduation rates are measures of cohort groups across four years. Dropout rates are calculated by dividing the total number of students dropping out of public school, in grades 7-12, by the October 1 enrollment count for all students in grades 7-12. Graduation rates and dropout rates are calculated independently from each other and are not the inverse of each other. Also, a student counted as a dropout in one reporting year may be counted as a dropout in another year.

Preliminary information for the 2012-2013 school year shows a grade 7-12 dropout rate of 4.0%, which is a decline from 4.8% in 2011-2012. The dropout rate has generally declined from 6.0% in 2004-2005.

## **State assessment results**

Alaska students take the state's standards-based assessments in reading, writing and mathematics in grades 3 through 10, and science in grades 4, 8 and 10.

In the reading assessment administered in spring 2013, the percentage of students who scored proficient or advanced ranged from a high of 81.6% in grade 8 to a low of 75.4% in grade 4.

In the writing assessment, the percentage of students who scored proficient or advanced ranged from a high of 75.4% in grade 4 to a low of 70.1% in grade 6.

In the mathematics assessment, the percentage of students who scored proficient or advanced ranged from a high of 75.9% in grade 3 to a low of 63.7% in grade 10.

Overall, taking all assessed students statewide, 82% scored proficient or advanced in reading; 75% proficient or advanced in writing; and 66% proficient or advanced in math. Those numbers are similar to the previous four years.

In the science assessment, the percentage of students who scored proficient or advanced ranged from a high of 65.9% in grade 10 to a low of 50% in grade 4.

In the 2013 Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Examination, 84% of 10<sup>th</sup>-graders, taking the test for the first time, passed the reading portion, 72% passed the writing portion, and 77% passed the mathematics portion. Sixty-five percent passed all three portions in 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

Of the students in the class of 2013 cohort (excluding 59 students who received a waiver), 89.0% passed the reading portion; 86.9% passed the writing portion; and 86.0% passed the math portion. Altogether, 83.3% passed all three portions. (Note that some students who are not counted as passing may not have taken the exam at all. In other words, the inverse of the passing percentage is not identical to the non-passing percentage.)

See [http://education.alaska.gov/tls/assessment/results/2013/statewide\\_sba.pdf](http://education.alaska.gov/tls/assessment/results/2013/statewide_sba.pdf) and [http://education.alaska.gov/tls/assessment/results/2013/statewide\\_hsgqe.pdf](http://education.alaska.gov/tls/assessment/results/2013/statewide_hsgqe.pdf).

## **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 4<sup>th</sup>-graders and 8<sup>th</sup>-graders in each state in reading and mathematics, including about half of Alaska's students in those grades.

A science test is given to a much smaller sample of 8<sup>th</sup>-graders, including about a fifth of Alaska's 8<sup>th</sup>-graders. No science test was given in 2013.

Alaska has participated in the reading and math tests since 2003 and in the science test since 2011. The most recent NAEP assessments were in 2013.

Students do not receive reports of their scores. Scores are reported only in the aggregate, for student populations as a whole and the subgroups of ethnicity, income, disability status, and English language learners. Scores are reported by state and by a nationwide total.

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 as defined by NAEP: advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic. Thus, NAEP also reports the percentage of students who fall within those categories of achievement.

In general, NAEP's definition of proficiency is more rigorous than that of many states. 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.

To put the scores in context: In the highest-scoring state overall in 2013 – Massachusetts -- 48% and 49% of students scored proficient or above on the 4<sup>th</sup>-grade and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade NAEP reading tests, respectively; 59% and 54% scored proficient or above on the 4<sup>th</sup>-grade and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade math tests, respectively. Similarly, researchers estimate that in the highest-scoring nations on international assessments, 46% to 58% of their students would score proficient or above on the NAEP.

The following data, comparing Alaska results to the national average, are from the 2013 tests. The phrase “significantly lower” refers to statistical significance. It does not mean that Alaska’s scores were necessarily a great deal lower than other states’ scores.

Briefly, Alaska’s average scores in 2013 were flat, but the national average increased.

### Math

Alaska 4<sup>th</sup> grade: 76% basic or above; 36% proficient or above; 6% advanced.  
Nation 4<sup>th</sup> grade: 83% basic or above; 42% proficient or above; 8% advanced.  
Alaska’s average scale score is 236, which is significantly lower than 40 states.  
The national average is 241.

Alaska 8<sup>th</sup> grade: 72% basic or above; 33% proficient or above; 7% advanced.  
Nation 8<sup>th</sup> grade: 73% basic or above; 34% proficient or above; 8% advanced.  
Alaska’s average scale score is 282 which is significantly lower than 29 states.  
The national average is 284.

### Reading

Alaska 4<sup>th</sup> grade: 58% basic or above; 28% proficient or above; 6% advanced.  
Nation 4<sup>th</sup> grade: 67% basic or above; 34% proficient or above; 8% advanced.  
Alaska’s average scale score is 209, which is significantly lower than 46 states.  
The national average is 221.

Alaska 8<sup>th</sup> grade: 76% basic or above; 36% proficient or above; 6% advanced.  
Nation 8<sup>th</sup> grade: 83% basic or above; 42% proficient or above; 8% advanced.  
Alaska’s average scale score is 261, which is significantly lower than 37 states.  
The national average is 266.

In addition to the reading and math assessments, a NAEP science test is given to a smaller sample of 8<sup>th</sup>-graders from each state, including about a fifth of Alaska’s 8<sup>th</sup>-graders. Alaska has participated in the science test since 2011, which is the latest administration.

### Science 2011

Alaska 8<sup>th</sup> grade: 68% basic or above; 34% proficient or above; 1% advanced.  
Nation 8<sup>th</sup> grade: 65% basic or above; 32% proficient or above; 2% advanced.  
Alaska’s average scale score is 153, which is significantly lower than 25 states.  
The national average is 151.

### Performance of ethnic groups

About 50% of Alaska’s students are white. Alaska’s white students have scale scores that are statistically the same as the nation’s white students for 8<sup>th</sup>-grade reading, 4<sup>th</sup>-grade math, and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade math. For 4<sup>th</sup>-grade reading, Alaska’s white students’ average scale score is 3 points below the national average for white students.

About 25% of Alaska's students are American Indian/Alaska Native. Bear in mind that these are average scores. Within any population, students range from advanced to below basic.

The average scale score for American Indian/Alaska Native 4<sup>th</sup>-graders in reading is 173.

The next-lowest average scale scores among ethnic groups for 4<sup>th</sup>-grade reading are 186 for Arizona American Indian/Alaska Native students, 187 for New Mexico American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 191 for South Dakota American Indian/Alaska Native students.

The next-lowest average scale scores among ethnic groups for 4<sup>th</sup>-grade reading are in the 192-197 range. District of Columbia black students, for example, have an average scale score of 197.

The average scale scores for 4<sup>th</sup>-grade math, 8<sup>th</sup>-grade math, and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade reading for Alaska's American Indian/Alaska Natives fall among the lowest scores for other ethnic groups.

For 4<sup>th</sup>-grade reading, 74% of Alaska's American Indian/Alaska Native students are Below Basic; 73% of Arizona American Indian/Alaska Native students are Below Basic; 68% of New Mexico American Indian/Alaska Native students are Below Basic; and 66% of South Dakota American Indian/Alaska Native students are Below Basic.

For points of comparison, 60-65% of African-American students in six states (Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, and Wisconsin) are Below Basic. For the other states, fewer than 60% of their African-American students are Below Basic.

See <http://education.alaska.gov/tls/assessment/naep/NAEPNewsletterFall2013.pdf>

## **WorkKeys assessments**

The state requires 11<sup>th</sup>-graders to take WorkKeys assessments in reading for information, applied mathematics, and locating information (in visual formats). Students in 12<sup>th</sup> grade are allowed to retake the tests. The assessments were developed by ACT, the nonprofit education company that also produces college-entrance tests, with assistance from employers.

Additionally, the department provides all high schools with access to Career Ready 101 and KeyTrain instructional software. Career Ready 101 is composed of Internet-based courses in career awareness and exploration, career preparation, career success skills, and financial awareness. The KeyTrain courseware was created to improve skills assessed by WorkKeys.

ACT has analyzed specific jobs using the same criteria as the test, resulting in a student profile that can be compared to the skill levels needed for a particular job.

Students who earn a combined score of at least 13, with no score lower than 4, have met the assessment requirement for an Alaska Performance Scholarship for a postsecondary certificate program, such as in the trades. In addition, students who score well receive a nationally

recognized career-readiness certificate in one of four categories: bronze, silver, gold, and platinum.

Of the 8,729 students who took WorkKeys between August 2012 and December 2013, 7,096 (81%) earned a certificate.

- Winning a bronze certificate were 1,665 students (19% of all test-takers)
- silver 4,069 students (47% of all test-takers)
- gold 1,336 students (15% of all test-takers)
- platinum and 26 students (.003% of all test-takers)

Bronze is defined as a low score of 3 on any test; silver is a low score of 4 on any test; gold is a low score of 5 on any test; and platinum is a low score of 6 on any test. For example, a student who scored 3, 4 and 5 on the tests would receive a bronze certificate. The highest possible score on the reading or math assessment is 7. The highest score on the locating information assessment is 6.

See <http://education.alaska.gov/tls/assessment/workkeys.html>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Alaska Digital Teaching Initiative

The Governor's proposed \$15 million Alaska Digital Teaching Initiative is a three-year demonstration project to give students better access to high-quality teachers in college-preparatory courses such as science, technology, engineering, and math.

The initiative supports the Governor's goal for Alaska to reach a 90% high school graduation rate by 2020. The initiative also would support students, especially in rural areas, who are striving to be eligible for the Alaska Performance Scholarship. The initiative promotes educational choice at the course level.

The initiative will work directly with school districts and providers of technology services to provide interactive distance delivery. Funding would be used to access existing district capacity to deliver such courses; assist districts that have the capacity now; recruit and train teachers to deliver such courses; focus on secondary STEM courses initially; and buy equipment.

### High School Graduation Qualifying Exam

On Jan. 27, 2014, the State Board unanimously adopted a resolution asking the legislature to repeal the statutory requirement of a competency exam as a condition of receiving a diploma from a public high school. The exam, in effect since 2004, requires students to pass tests in reading, writing, and math to be eligible for a diploma.

The resolution said the exam does not measure students' academic readiness for entry into the workplace or postsecondary education and training. The resolution said Alaska's system of statewide assessment (based on higher standards and given in more grades) accurately measures academic competency and growth. The resolution also cited the loss of instructional time and cost of administering the graduation qualifying exam.

For the text of the resolution, see [http://education.alaska.gov/State Board/resolutions/01-204.pdf](http://education.alaska.gov/State_Board/resolutions/01-204.pdf).

### Department's budget

The State Board, in January 2014, approved the department's fiscal year 2015 operating and capital budgets.