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07-154

Court Rules in State's Favor in Education Case Additional State Oversight of School Districts Required

June 20, 2007, Anchorage, Alaska - Alaska has "fully met its constitutional obligation to adequately fund education," Anchorage Superior Court Judge Sharon Gleason ruled today in the case of Moore vs. Alaska.

"We are very pleased that the court has reaffirmed that the state supplies adequate funding for education," said Alaska Attorney General Talis J. Colberg.

The plaintiffs, which included NEA-Alaska and several school districts and parents sued the state, asking the court to order significantly more state funding for Alaska schools — seeking to double Alaska's education budget. They also asked the court to impose educational programs such as the arts and languages, and order a study to determine adequate funding in the future.

Instead, Judge Gleason left decisions about the state's education funding formula to the Legislature, and said the court would not determine educational programs.

Judge Gleason said the evidence shows that Alaska has "thorough and appropriate" educational standards and a "finely tuned" method of testing children. Gleason said, "In many respects EED (the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development) has done a truly commendable job in improving education for Alaska's children."

But the state must be more aggressive in overseeing troubled school districts, the judge ruled, citing the Yupiit School District, one of the plaintiffs, in particular. In those schools, the court also found that students haven't had sufficient opportunity to prepare for the high school exit exam. The court stayed the order for one year pending the state's efforts to increase its oversight of, and assistance to, Yupiit and any other districts in the same situation.

The Department of Education & Early Development has worked extensively in the Yupiit School District since 2005. The department sent a team of experts to the district to redesign the curriculum, provide instructional tools and train staff, and has closely monitored the district's compliance with the improvement plan drafted by the experts.

"We believe that our effort in Yupiit was significant and consistent with our policy of local control of education. However, with the judge's order, we will review with renewed vigor our efforts to assist the Yupiit School District and other low-performing districts so that all children in Alaska have the opportunity for a quality standards-

based education," said Education Commissioner Roger Sampson. "That has been the mission of the State Board of Education & Early Development and we have developed an extensive accountability system and numerous services to achieve that."

For more information, contact Eric Fry, Information Officer, Department of Education & Early Development, 465-2851; and Neil Slotnick, Assistant Attorney General, Department of Law, 465-4149.

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