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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Graduation rate rises, test scores flat in 2008-2009 school year

JUNEAU -- In the school year 2008-2009, nearly six out of 10 Alaska public schools made adequate yearly progress under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, according to data released today by Alaska Education Commissioner Larry LeDoux. The statewide graduation rate increased over the previous year by 3.2 percent to 65.8 percent.

Of 505 schools, 281 schools -- or 55.6 percent -- made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in 2008-2009. That figure includes 39 schools that did not reach proficiency targets in the 2007-2008 school year but have sufficiently improved to meet the targets in 2008-2009. Another 12 schools that had struggled in the past have made adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years.

In the 2008-2009 school year, 7,995 students graduated from high school, a significant increase from 7,290 in 2004, despite declining enrollments from 131,622 students in 2004 to 128,380 students in 2009.

Schools must meet up to 31 targets, including among selected categories of students, to have made adequate yearly progress. In fact, 84 percent of the schools met the language arts requirement for their student body as a whole; 85 percent met the math requirement; 97 percent met the requirement for participation in assessments; and 91 percent met the targets for attendance or graduation rate.

"The AYP results do not mean that only 56 percent of Alaska's public schools are doing a good job," said Alaska Education Commissioner Larry LeDoux. "The AYP statistics show us whether schools are meeting up to 31 targets in student proficiency and other topics. Many good schools are falling short in just one or two targets. Some schools are falling short by narrow margins. And many positive aspects of our schools are not measured by the AYP system. At the same time, we fully recognize that a significant number of our students are not proficient in core subjects and far too many do not graduate. The state is committed to working cooperatively with school districts to increase student achievement."

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF
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The statewide adequate yearly progress results are generally flat compared with the prior year. For the 2007-2008 school year, 58.7 percent of Alaska's public schools made adequate yearly progress.

Student assessment scores for 2008-2009, which are much of the basis for measuring adequate yearly progress, also are similar to those of 2007-2008. Statewide in 2008-2009, 79.5 percent of students scored proficient in reading, 75.9 percent in writing, and 68.6 percent in math. In comparison, the statewide scores for the 2007-2008 school year were 80 percent proficient in reading, 71.8 percent in writing, and 69.9 percent in math.

Under Alaska's accountability system for No Child Left Behind, nearly all students in grades 3 through 10 take the state's standards-based assessments in reading, writing and math. For NCLB, the reading and writing scores are combined into a language arts score.

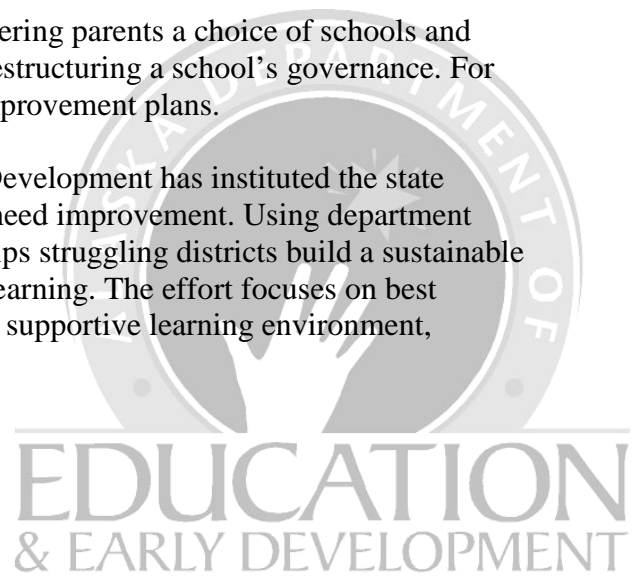
Schools are held accountable for meeting targets each year for the percentage of students who score proficient in language arts and math. Those targets, called "annual measurable objectives" in NCLB, gradually increase over the years to reach 100 percent student proficiency by 2013-2014. Starting in 2007-2008 and continuing through 2009-2010, the targets are that 77.18 percent of students be proficient in language arts and 66.09 percent be proficient in math.

Schools are held accountable for their student body as a whole and in up to nine subgroups of students for language arts and math, and for their participation rate in taking the assessments, and for either a graduation rate or an attendance rate. Thus, schools are held accountable for up to 31 targets. A school that does not meet all of the targets has not made adequate yearly progress. Nearly half of schools that fall short do so in only one or two targets.

Schools that do not make adequate yearly progress are said to be "in need of improvement." NCLB requires school districts to impose consequences on such schools, the details of which depend on whether the schools receive federal Title I anti-poverty funds.

Consequences for Title I schools range from offering parents a choice of schools and tutoring to implementing a new curriculum or restructuring a school's governance. For non-Title I schools, districts must implement improvement plans.

The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development has instituted the state system of support for districts and schools that need improvement. Using department staff and contracted Alaska experts, the state helps struggling districts build a sustainable capacity to improve their schools and increase learning. The effort focuses on best practices in curriculum, assessment, instruction, supportive learning environment, professional development, and leadership.



In addition, the department soon will fill the new position of Director of Rural Education. The director will help bridge the gap between rural schools and communities, identify resources to improve student achievement, and ensure the implementation of the state's standards for culturally responsive schools.

The Alaska Education Plan, created by hundreds of Alaskans from all walks of life in November 2008, is the department's blueprint for its use of human and financial resources to meet the plan's goals of creating safe, world-class schools that prepare every student for a career or postsecondary education.

A media packet of information about adequate yearly progress results for 2009, including data about individual schools, will be available at 8:30 a.m. August 7 on the front page of www.eed.state.ak.us. Look under Headlines in the upper-left corner of the web page. The web page includes a dropdown menu of one-page reports for each school.

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