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Education Department Releases Spring High School Exam Scores *Scores Once Again Confirm Learning Gap For Ethnic Groups*

The Department of Education & Early Development today released the statewide results of the Spring 2004 administration of the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination and posted the results on the web at www.eed.state.ak.us/ under "Headlines."

Said Education & Early Development Commissioner Roger Sampson: "Overall Alaska students do well on the high school exam. But when we look at specific groups of students, we see large disparities in achievement. The achievement gap is real. We are aggressively working to implement strategies, procedures and systems to close that achievement gap while moving all students towards higher levels of achievement. Alaska's standards-based education movement is designed for all students to meet the academic standards in reading, writing and math."

The results are termed "preliminary" because the department is still verifying a small portion of test data with a few school districts. Final verified numbers used in this news release will not significantly change, according to Les Morse, Director of Assessment and Accountability for the department. Percentages used will not likely change, he said.

The State Board of Education & Early Development requires all tenth grade students to take the exam in the spring. The exam was a retest for eleventh and twelfth grade students who did not score proficient on one or more parts of the test in earlier administrations. As a result far greater numbers of sophomores took the test in the spring than juniors and seniors. Retests are also administered in the fall for juniors and seniors.

Results for the spring 2004 administration of the high school exam were:

Tenth grade students

- Reading: 70.1% (or 6,564 students) proficient; 29.9% (or 2,799 students) not proficient.
- Writing: 86.1% (or 8,026 students) proficient; 13.9% (or 1,291 students) not proficient.
- Math: 66.7% (or 6,297 students) proficient; 33.3% (or 3,149 students) not proficient.

Eleventh grade students

- Reading: 29.9% (or 478 students) proficient; 70.1% (or 1,118 students) not proficient.
- Writing: 50.4% (or 502 students) proficient; 49.6% (or 494 students) not proficient.
- Math: 29.2% (or 537 students) proficient; 70.8% (or 1,300 students) not proficient.

Twelfth grade students

- Reading: 31.7% (or 199 students) proficient; 68.3% or (428 students) not proficient.
- Writing: 53.2% (or 202 students) proficient; 46.8% or (178 students) not proficient.
- Math: 33.7% (or 281 students) proficient; 66.3% (or 554 students) not proficient.

This is the first year that high school seniors need to pass the exam and complete required course work in order to receive a high school diploma. The test results do not reveal the number of seniors who will or will not graduate in 2004. This is because some test takers who did not score proficient may be eligible for waivers from passing the exam and others who scored proficient may not have completed their required course work. The department will collect graduation data from school districts in the fall.

The results show disparities in student achievement among ethnic groups. In particular, Alaska Native students on average scored lower than other ethnic groups, and much lower than white students. Those test score disparities are revealed each time the state has administered the high school exam and other state required tests to elementary and middle school students.

The exam showed the following disparities between tenth grade Alaska Native and white students:

Alaska Native Students

- Reading: 43.5% (or 900 students) proficient; 56.5% (or 1,170 students) not proficient.
- Writing: 73.4% (or 1,494 students) proficient; 26.6% (or 542 students) not proficient.
- Math: 47.9% (or 1,003 students) proficient; 52.1% (or 1,089 students) not proficient.

White Students

- Reading: 81.8% (or 4,716 students) proficient; 18.2% (or 1,048 students) not proficient.
- Writing: 91.5% (or 5,261 students) proficient; 8.5% (or 486 students) not proficient.
- Math: 75.9% (or 4,414 students) proficient; 24.1% (or 1,403 students) not proficient.

Other results for tenth grade students:

- In math, male students (69.1% or 3,384 students) scored at higher levels of proficiency than female students (64% or 2,907 students).
- In reading, female students (73.6% or 3,309 students) scored at higher levels of proficiency than male students (66.8% or 3,250 students).
- In writing, female students (90.9% or 4,058 students) scored at higher levels of proficiency than male students (81.7% or 3,961 students).
- In reading, low income, limited English proficient and migrant all had proficiency rates lower than 50%. In writing, those groups each had proficiency rates higher than 66%. In math, they were between 37.8% and 55.2%.
- In writing, 44.1% of disabled students scored proficient. Less than one-quarter of disabled students scored proficient on the reading and math parts of the exam.

The data posted on the web also compares the spring 2004 high school exam results to spring administrations of the exam in 2002 and 2003. Year by year comparisons of results show little if any change among test administrations.

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