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NEWS RELEASE



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Governor Proposes Incentives for School Staff to Raise Student Achievement

(Juneau) -- Governor Frank H. Murkowski will introduce bills in the House and Senate to establish monetary incentives for staff at public schools to significantly improve student academic performance.

"The Alaska School Performance Incentive Program is intended to encourage everyone on a school's staff to collaborate and take shared responsibility for all students, use instructional time effectively, and use the results of standards-based assessments to target students' academic needs," said Education Commissioner Roger Sampson.

The program will award bonuses to a school's administrators, teachers and support staff if a substantial number of students show more than a year's academic growth as measured by scores on the state's standards-based assessments. Some school district central office staff may receive a bonus as well.

The bonuses, which are not part of an employee's base pay, will range from \$2,500 to \$5,500 for certificated staff and \$1,000 to \$2,500 for non-certificated staff. There will be several levels of bonuses, based on how much growth students have shown.

"The performance incentive program will inspire and empower Alaska's outstanding educators to use their expertise and innovative instructional practices to improve student growth and achievement," Murkowski said. "This program will enhance Alaska's teacher recruitment efforts, raise accountability by linking the incentive payments directly to increased levels of student achievement, and promote effective instruction."

To determine whether a school's staff is eligible for bonuses, each student's test score will be placed in one of six categories: advanced, proficient, below proficient plus, below proficient minus, far below proficient plus, and far below proficient minus.

At the end of every school year, the state will compare each student's performance with his or her performance the year before, as shown by the six categories. Schools will receive various points for students based on whether a student moved up or down in the categories or stayed in the same one.

The points for a school's students will be totaled and then divided by the number of students to produce a school score. The score will be applied to an index that has several levels. The higher the score, the larger the bonus. Schools that show only a year's growth or less will not receive bonuses.

"The program meets a need in Alaska schools for accountability," Commissioner Sampson said. "The money is directly linked to increasingly high levels of student learning. The program provides an incentive for a school's staff to work differently and creatively."

The proposed program differs from merit pay, an idea that has had a mixed reception in other states. Merit pay programs often pitted staff against one another; thus, in order for one to win, others must lose. Such programs hindered cooperation and collaboration.

- Alaska's incentive plan awards bonuses for student growth, even if students aren't yet proficient. Therefore, every school has an equal opportunity to win a bonus.
- Alaska's plan applies to all school staff.
- The targets for school achievement are clear and objective.

The cost will depend on how many people earn bonuses, and on details of the point system and the index, which will be set in regulation by the State Board of Education & Early Development.

A fiscal note prepared by the Department of Education & Early Development estimates the range of what the program could cost. For example, if 5 percent of the state's school staff members won the highest level of bonus, it would cost nearly \$3.1 million. If 25 percent of the state's school staff members won the highest level of bonus, it would cost about \$15.4 million.

More information: At the Department of Education & Early Development, contact Les Morse, Director of Assessment & Accountability, 465-8691; or Eric Fry, Information Officer, 465-2851.

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