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State Board approves two regulations

The State Board of Education & Early Development, meeting May 8 by teleconference, set the same minimum size for all subgroups of students accounted for under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

The action will allow Alaska to be considered for a growth model for determining schools' and districts' adequate yearly progress toward proficiency goals.

The State Board also approved a regulation that gives schools and districts more flexibility in showing that students with disabilities have made adequate yearly progress.

Under No Child Left Behind, the progress of schools and districts is measured not only by the student body as a whole but in subgroups of students.

The nine subgroups for Alaska are: African-American, Alaska Native/American Indian, Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic, Multi-Ethnic, Economically Disadvantaged, Students with Disabilities, and Limited English Proficient Students.

A key point in No Child Left Behind is that schools and districts cannot meet proficiency goals while ignoring minorities. However, if a school or district has too few students in a subgroup to generate statistical significance, then it will not be held accountable for that subgroup separately. The students in the subgroup still will be assessed and their scores reported with the school and district as a whole.

Alaska schools and districts had been held accountable for students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency if at least 41 students took the assessments, and for all other subgroups if at least 21 students took the assessments. On May 8, the State Board adopted a uniform minimum number of 26 students for all subgroups.

The U.S. Department of Education is requiring a uniform minimum subgroup size for states, such as Alaska, that have applied to pilot a growth model for determining schools' and districts' adequate yearly progress.

Under a growth model, which measures the academic progress of individual students, schools and districts are given credit for nonproficient students who are on track to be proficient in a few years.

The State Board also approved a regulation that benefits schools or districts that do not make adequate yearly progress solely because of the proficiency rate of their students with disabilities. Under the provision, those schools or districts can add 15 percentile points to the percentage of students with disabilities who scored proficient on assessments. The provision requires the state to use a uniform minimum subgroup size.

In addition, the State Board gave Alaska Education Commissioner Roger Sampson the authority to withdraw the state's uniform minimum subgroup size if the U.S. Department of Education does not allow Alaska to pilot a growth model. A federal decision is expected in May.

The Department of Education & Early Development's news release about the growth model, which provides a basic description, is available at: <http://www.eed.state.ak.us/news/releases>. Further information is at: <http://www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/Assessment/akgrowthmodel.html>.

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