



Commissioner Roger Sampson
Department of Education
& Early Development
801 W. Tenth Street, Suite 200
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894
www.eed.state.ak.us

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More information: Eric Fry, Information Officer, 465-2851.

U.S. Department of Education lifts possibility of sanctions

Alaska will not face sanctions or have conditions placed on its federal grant that helps teachers become highly qualified, the U.S. Department of Education said this month.

Last month, Alaska and several other states were told by federal education officials that conditions might be placed on a federal grant if the states did not meet all the requirements of implementing the highly-qualified-teacher provisions in the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Alaska receives about \$14 million a year in the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, which it disburses to school districts to help teachers demonstrate they are highly qualified to teach their subjects.

In response to the federal concerns and with the assistance of school district staff, the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development moved quickly to provide the U.S. Department of Education with the most recent data, which is from late in the 2005-2006 school year, about the number and percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers in eight large districts. The data included special education teachers of core academic subjects, as the federal agency had requested.

On June 16, the U.S. Department of Education said it is satisfied with Alaska's preliminary data and will not impose sanctions.

Preliminary data from eight large school districts, representing 75 percent of classes in the state, show that the percentages of classes taught by highly qualified teachers range from 62.5 percent to 98.7 percent.

Most of the districts have improved their rates, sometimes dramatically, since data were last reported, said Henry Johnson, Assistant Secretary of Education, in a June 16 letter to Alaska Education Commissioner Roger Sampson.

Like all states, Alaska still must submit by July 7 a revised plan that details the steps that school districts and the state will take to reach the goal of having all teachers highly qualified by the end of the 2006-2007 school year. The state expects to meet the deadline.

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