

Roger Sampson

Commissioner

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STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Education Commission of the States recognizes Alaska for education innovations

JUNEAU -- The Education Commission of the States has named Alaska winner of the 2007 Frank Newman Award for State Innovation. The award will be presented July 11 in Philadelphia at a national forum on education policy sponsored by the commission.

The commission cited Alaska as deserving of national attention for its history of school reform including recent programs such as the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project, the Alaska Public School Performance Incentive Program, and the Alaska Reading course.

"I am pleased that a national organization of education leaders has recognized Alaska's initiatives to improve student achievement," said Governor Sarah Palin. "We are laying the groundwork for all of Alaska's high school graduates to be prepared to enter the workforce or postsecondary institutions."

Other innovative programs in Alaska's nomination were classroom assessments linked to state academic standards, a performance-based system of teacher certification, detailed grade-level academic standards, and online daily lesson plans aligned to state academic standards.

"All of these programs support the mission of the State Board of Education & Early Development: To ensure quality standards-based instruction to improve academic achievement for all students," said Roger Sampson, Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development. "Our goal has been to provide school districts with the resources to increase student achievement."

The Education Commission of the States is an interstate compact that exchanges information and ideas among state policymakers and education leaders.

As previously reported to the media, Commissioner Sampson has been named President of the Education Commission of the States and will resign as Alaska education commissioner effective August 17. Alaska was informally notified it had won the 2007 Frank Newman award several months before ECS began recruiting for a president.

According to the commission, criteria for the Frank Newman Award include “policies that are bold, courageous and nonpartisan, including new policies with the potential for large-scale impact, existing policies with evidence of continued support, and education improvement efforts that are replicable and hold valuable for other states.”

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project Alaska has completed the third school year of providing mentors for approximately 400 teachers and 85 principals who are in their first and second year as educators. It is a partnership of the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development and the University of Alaska. The goals are to increase teacher retention and improve students’ academic performance. It is funded by the state legislature.

The Alaska Public School Performance Incentive Program will make monetary awards to all the staff members at schools whose students show significant academic growth or remain at advanced levels of achievement. The program, now in the first year of a three-year pilot, 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 state assessments to target each student's academic needs. The awards to staff members range from \$1,000 to \$5,500.

Alaska and national experts have developed the Alaska Reading course, which prepares teachers in all content areas and all grade levels to teach reading or to help students improve in their reading. The systematic, balanced course will be delivered only by trained instructors. Teachers will understand the alphabetic foundation, word study, fluency, vocabulary learning, language comprehension, and composing meaningful text. The goal is that all teachers take responsibility for helping students to read better.

More information on these and other department initiatives is available at www.eed.state.ak.us or by contacting Information Officer Eric Fry at 907-465-2851 or eric.fry@alaska.gov.

Commissioner Sampson is available for interviews July 5 and 6 and the morning of July 9.

The ECS contact person for the award is Carla Mirabelli at 303-299-3629 or <mailto:cmirabelli@ecs.org>.

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