



Feds approve growth model for Alaska accountability

(June 11, 2007) The U.S. Department of Education has approved Alaska's growth model as part of the state's accountability system for schools and districts under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. It is a pilot program.

Under NCLB, Alaska schools and districts must meet annual targets for the percentage of students who score proficient in state assessments in language arts and math in grades 3-10. By 2014, all assessed students should be proficient.

Schools and districts that meet the annual targets have made "adequate yearly progress" (AYP). Schools and districts that do not meet the targets face consequences including setting aside funds for tutoring, implementing improvement plans, and eventually restructuring or other significant changes.

Growth models, such as Alaska's, compare individual students' scores on assessments with their scores from the previous year. Students who are not proficient but who show significant improvement may count positively for schools and districts in determining adequate yearly progress.

"Most importantly, Alaska's growth model allows parents, students and teachers to look at individual students from year to year and see how they're progressing," said Roger Sampson, Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development. "Parents want to know the target for their children to become proficient."

Growth models are valuable because: 1) they place the focus on individual students' improvement over time; 2) they give schools proper credit for significant improvement even if the student isn't yet proficient; 3) schools that are improving will be less likely to face NCLB-mandated consequences that are not needed; 4) interventions will be more likely to serve individual students' needs.

"Alaska schools will now have new information about the achievement of individual students within their schools. This information will make school

improvement efforts much more effective and powerful for our students,” said Les Morse, Director of Assessment, Accountability & Information Management at the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development.

Alaska’s new accountability system adds a growth component to the current methods of determining whether a school or district has made adequate yearly progress.

Under the Alaska growth model, students who do not score proficient on state assessments will count positively for a school or district if they have met or exceeded targets for their scores and have not declined in their score from the previous year.

The students’ targets lay out a four-year or less trajectory of improvement over a baseline year, and require all students to be proficient by grade 10 to count positively for the school or district.

At the same time, Alaska will continue to apply the current methods of determining whether a school or district has made AYP. The state looks at what percentage of students in a school or district score proficient on state assessments. A school or district also can make AYP through another route, called “safe harbor.” Under safe harbor, schools and districts have made AYP if the percentage of students who are nonproficient has declined by at least 10 percent from the previous year.

Under the pilot, students who are on track to becoming proficient are added to the proficient students in totaling a school’s or district’s students who count positively in NCLB’s accountability system.

In addition, the state will notify schools and districts of students who score proficient but whose scores have declined from the previous year. This decline does not affect the determination of AYP, but it is useful information in keeping students on track.

The State Board of Education & Early Development has opened a period of public comment on proposed state regulations to implement the growth model. If the regulations are approved, the state will apply the growth model to the assessments students took in April, which are the basis for determining the AYP status of schools and districts for the 2007-2008 school year. Those results will be released in August 2007.

For more information, see:

www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/Assessment/akgrowthmodel.html. Contact Les Morse at 907-465-8691 or Information Officer Eric Fry at 907-465-2851.

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