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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Alaska receives federal Transition to Teaching grant

JUNEAU -- Alaska will begin its first alternate route to teacher certification under a Transition to Teaching grant by the U.S. Department of Education.

The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development was awarded the five-year grant, worth \$3 million in total, for the Alaska Transition to Teaching program, known as AKT2.

“This grant will allow us to find, select and train Alaskans who have the skills to be good teachers but who didn’t follow the traditional route of preparing to be a teacher,” said Education Commissioner Roger Sampson. “To ensure quality, the new teachers will gain proficiency in the best teaching practices while they work side by side with experienced teachers. The ultimate goal, which is the mission of the State Board of Education & Early Development, is to improve the academic achievement of our students.”

In the AKT2 program, the department will recruit highly qualified mid-career professionals, education paraprofessionals with bachelor’s degrees, and recent college graduates; prepare them as teachers for Alaska’s high-needs schools with teacher shortages, including special education; and mentor the new teachers during their first two years in the classroom.

High-needs schools are those with a significant number of students from low-income families. Many of these schools also have a high rate of staff turnover.

Applicants for teacher certificates under the AKT2 program must meet the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act for highly qualified teachers. In addition, they must pass the Praxis I test of basic academic skills, which is a requirement for all certificated Alaska teachers.

AKT2 teachers will receive an individualized plan they must complete to move from their three-year initial teacher certificate to the professional certificate. For example, an AKT2 teacher might be required to take courses in classroom management.

The AKT2 teachers will receive significant structured support in their first years on the job. The department will work with high-needs school districts to transform several regular schools into Professional Development Schools, where the newly certificated teachers will work with experienced teachers before moving on to other schools.

In the Professional Development Schools the entire staff will be a community of learners that, within the context of a systematic and continuous school-improvement effort, work cooperatively to define and employ the best practices to raise student achievement.

Teacher mentors and principal coaches from the existing Alaska Statewide Mentor Program, a joint effort of the department and the University of Alaska, will work with the entire staff at the Professional Development Schools.

In the first year of the grant, which is the 2007-2008 school year, the department will work with stakeholders such as school districts and teachers to develop the program, “so we all agree on what a person needs to know to be a teacher and to make sure they have that knowledge,” said Cynthia Curran, Administrator of Teacher Education & Certification for the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development.

For more information from the U.S. Department of Education, see:
<http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2007/06/06292007b.html>.

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