

Larry LeDoux
Commissioner
P.O. Box 110500
Juneau, AK 99811-0500
www.eed.state.ak.us



Eric Fry
Information Officer
907.465.2851
cell: 907.321.5564
eric.fry@alaska.gov

Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 25, 2008

Nearly half of Alaska's school districts have made adequate yearly progress for the 2007-2008 school year

JUNEAU – Twenty-six of Alaska's 54 school districts made adequate yearly progress for the 2007-2008 school year under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, Alaska Education Commissioner Larry LeDoux announced today.

That represents a decline from 30 districts making adequate yearly progress (AYP) in 2006-2007. Twenty-five districts made AYP in 2005-2006, and 22 districts did so in 2004-2005.

The goal of No Child Left Behind is that all students be proficient in reading and math by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. The AYP process provides an annual check of school and district progress toward this goal. Schools and districts must meet targets for proficiency each year.

State education officials cautioned that this year's AYP results must be interpreted in light of higher targets that became effective in the 2007-2008 school year. For a district to make AYP in 2007-2008, a larger percentage of students must score proficient than in past years.

"We expect that as the proficiency targets rise, the number of districts making adequate yearly progress will decline at first," Commissioner LeDoux said. "But over time more districts will meet the challenge of higher goals. The pattern of growth over the past four years is evidence of continued progress. The Department of Education & Early Development is working with struggling districts to implement improvement plans that lead to higher student achievement. We know that attention to each student's needs is the key. Every student matters."

Districts are held accountable for AYP in the same way individual schools are. Alaska students in grades 3 to 10 take state standards-based assessments in reading, writing and math. The reading and writing scores are combined into one language arts score.

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Districts are held accountable for meeting proficiency targets in those assessments for the student body as a whole and in nine subgroups of students; African American, Alaska Native/American Indian, Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic, multi-ethnic, economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.

Districts are not held accountable separately for subgroups that are so small they would not yield reliable statistics. A subgroup must have at least 26 students.

Districts also are held accountable for the student participation rate in taking the state assessments and for meeting targets in attendance rates and graduation rates.

This year's targets are 77.18 percent of students proficient in language arts, 66.09 percent proficient in math, 95 percent student participation rate in assessments, an attendance rate of 85 percent, and a graduation rate of 55.58 percent.

In a provision known as "safe harbor," districts also can make AYP, in a subgroup or the school as a whole, by reducing the percentage of nonproficient students by 10 percent.

However, the district AYP process includes an element that is not used for school AYP. Districts that have not made AYP in general but have made AYP in at least one grade span (grades 3-5, 6-8 or 9-12) do not advance to a higher level of improvement status.

Improvement status refers to districts that are in need of improvement. There are four levels of improvement status, with increasing consequences. The consequences are set out in state regulations under 4 AAC 06.840.

Districts in Level 1 must consult with the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (EED) regarding the reasons they did not make AYP.

Districts in Level 2 and above must develop and implement a district improvement plan, submit the plan to EED, request technical assistance from EED, and provide notice to parents.

Districts in Level 4 must continue with their improvement plan. They also are subject to corrective actions from the state, such as deferral of funds, changes in curriculum, professional development, replacement of personnel, or removal of schools from the district's jurisdiction.

Currently, three districts are at Level 1, two at Level 2, three at Level 3, and 20 at Level 4. Of those 20 districts, 16 are in multiple years of being at Level 4.

Districts must make AYP for two consecutive years to be removed from improvement status. Three districts came off the improvement list this year.

Before implementing corrective action, EED considers whether a district has shown improvement from the previous year in its AYP performance. The department also looks

closely at student scores on the state assessments to see whether students are improving, even if they have not yet scored proficient.

Only if a district has not shown improvement in student achievement does EED consider performing an on-site audit of the district's instructional practices. The department's audits review the six components of effective schools: curriculum, assessment, instruction, leadership, supportive learning environment, and professional development. The audit leads to a district improvement plan, which EED monitors on a regular basis.

For complete results, see: <http://www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/assessment/accountability.html>. Look under 2008 for "district AYP worksheets." Also, see: http://www.eed.state.ak.us/nclb/pdf/District_Improvement_List.pdf.

For more information: Deputy Commissioner Les Morse, at 907-465-8691 or Director of Assessment & Accountability Erik McCormick, at 907-465-8686.

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