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## Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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### Three Alaska schools honored nationally

JUNEAU -- Three Alaska schools are among 314 schools nationwide to be named Blue Ribbon Schools by the U.S. Department of Education. The Alaska honorees are Glennallen Elementary, North Star Elementary in Kodiak, and Larson Elementary in Wasilla.

The Blue Ribbon program recognizes schools that: a) score in the top 10 percent of their state's schools in state assessments in language arts and math, or b) show dramatic improvement in those subjects and whose student body includes at least 40 percent disadvantaged students as indicated by disability, economic status, or limited proficiency in English. The Alaska schools won in the latter category. Awarded schools also must have made adequate yearly progress last year under the accountability system of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

"Alaska's Blue Ribbon Schools are inspiring examples of students, families and educators working together to achieve excellence," said Alaska Education Commissioner Larry LeDoux. "Like these schools, the Alaska Education Plan embodies one vision of high expectations for all students: to inspire thinking and creativity, and to support dreams and create opportunities."

**Glennallen Elementary**, with 100 students and a staff of 16 (nearly all full-time), is in the Copper River School District. With strong academics and a wide variety of community and extracurricular activities, the school meets its mission to provide all students the opportunity to learn and develop to their highest personal potential -- mentally, socially, and emotionally.

At the heart of Glennallen Elementary is exceptional classroom instruction tailored to the needs of individual students. Using routinely updated standards-based curriculum correlated with the Alaska grade-level expectations, teachers develop compelling lessons for their classes.



EDUCATION  
& EARLY DEVELOPMENT

With small classes, teachers are masters of differentiated instruction, tailoring classroom activities to the specific learning needs of individual students. Working as a cohesive unit, teachers and instructional aides also provide essential academic intervention services.

The school centers each year's activities on an annual theme. Recent themes have included "Character/Learning/Fitness", "Forging the Future", "Built to Last", "Panthers Prowling the Planet", and "I Accept Rachel's Challenge". Each year concludes with a festival highlighting and celebrating students' best work on the year's theme.

The main purpose of assessment at Glennallen Elementary is to ensure that the educational needs of every student are met. A specific emphasis is placed on analysis of assessment data for grades K-1. This allows early intervention for students not meeting proficiency standards. At the first district-wide in-service in the fall, half a day is allocated to reviewing the standards-based assessment results from the previous spring.

Intervention plans, which address individual needs and rely on small group instruction, are created for every student who does not meet grade level expectations for proficiency. Each teacher also uses the assessment information to reflect upon and review their own teaching practices resulting in improved classroom instructional methodologies.

**North Star Elementary** is a K-5 school of 215 students and a staff of 48 (full- and part-time) in the town of Kodiak. In 2004, North Star began work with the Response to Intervention model approach used nationally as a way to close the gap between academically at risk students and their peers. Collaboration among staff, parents, and community members has brought about consensus as to one vision for its students.

The shared vision at North Star is to have a solid foundation of basic skills where individual talents and ability are internalized and used in every area of study and where the environment enables children and adults to engage in successful learning.

North Star was founded thirteen years ago as a community of multiage learners. Teachers and families come to this school because of a strong belief in the multiage philosophy, which allows students to construct meaning and understanding through opportunities afforded them with peers of various ages. Most recently, North Star offered families a looping option. This option allows a student to be with a teacher for two years but in one grade level. Adding looping to North Star gave support to those families who wanted a single grade classroom.

Whether in a looping class or a multiage class, the constructivist theory prevails. Students feel a sense of community because of the deep relationships established over time with a significant adult, their teacher. This is especially true for students who are English language learners or students who struggle with communication.

North Star houses an Intensive Behavioral Support program for the school district in which students develop their social, emotional, and academic skills, as well as a resource

program. Vital services are provided by certificated staff including: regular education teachers, counselor, speech/language therapist, physical therapist, an English learner acquisition specialist, a gifted and talented teacher, as well as two reading specialists on staff. Support staff such as an Indian education aide and regular and special education aides round out the teaching staff. Instruction is guided by the grade-level expectations established by the state, by the district curriculum, by adopted programs, and by response-to-intervention efforts.

The instructional program is data-driven. North Star's Teacher Assistant Team, the Response to Intervention team, and grade level teams' focus on the success of the individual child through regular intentional collaboration. Attendance at the weekly meetings promotes and encourages ongoing assessment, revision, and modification of the lessons and is paramount to the students' success. North Star's educational team meets bi-monthly as a Classified/Certified Committee, and monthly, at staff meetings, so that all staff members are informed and united about North Star's goals and objectives.

**Ron Larson Elementary** is a suburban school of 286 students and 48 staff (full- and part-time) in Wasilla in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District.

Larson has a reputation for creativity and high standards in both academic and co-curricular activities. The Larson community -- staff, students, parents, and local community members -- strives to make the school a safe and nurturing environment. with a carefully balanced program of academics and social activities.

It achieves this by providing a bully-free school environment in which students can be successful learning reading, math, language arts, science, health, and social studies curricula. The school is dedicated to fostering good citizenship with its students through advocating universal virtues such as honesty, kindness, tolerance, compassion, responsibility, determination, and respect.

Larson supports a myriad of extra-curricular activities such as band, choir, drama, track and field, cross-country running, basketball, volleyball, and girl and boy scouts. The school also supports academic challenges for students such as the Spelling Bee, Geography Bee, and Word Power Challenges.

Larson offers family activities such as Read Across America week -- a fun, week-long activity involving community read-alouds, dressing up as Dr. Seuss characters, decorating classroom doors, and having school-wide reading times. It sponsors an annual Family Literacy Night involving community readers and entire family groups. The school community also enjoys monthly Family Movie Nights, along with special annual events such as Family Dance Night, Jump Rope for Heart and our Spring Carnival.

The school actively encourages children to take responsibility for their own learning, while expecting the support of parents as each child's first teacher. Celebrating student success is an integral component of this responsibility. Students are honored quarterly with a success assembly, which highlights both their citizenship and their academic

achievements. Family members, teachers and other staff are also recognized as contributors to student success.

The school mission includes providing standards-based best-teaching practices. Staff makes decisions by examining by school achievement data and tailoring teaching to specific student needs. Teaching teams coordinate curriculum mapping, aligning, and scaffolding to ensure careful presentation of the curriculum across content areas.

The school has actively sought ways to increase student learning for all ability groups, implementing a Response to Intervention program and an explicit instruction-skills block for primary students in reading. Intermediate students are grouped for math instruction to meet their individual learning needs.

School contacts: Principal Tamara Van Wyhe, Glennallen Elementary, 907-822-3232. Principal Janel Keplinger, North Star Elementary, 907-481-2000. Principal Ann Marie Bill, Larson Elementary, 907-352-2300.

For more information on the Blue Ribbon Program, see [www.ed.gov/programs/nclbbrs](http://www.ed.gov/programs/nclbbrs) or call David Thomas at 202-401-1579.

For more information in Alaska: Peggy Corazza, Blue Ribbon program manager at EED, 907-465-8418; [peggy.corazza@alaska.gov](mailto:peggy.corazza@alaska.gov).

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