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Press Release

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Performance Incentive Program Recognizes Achievement at 11 Schools

JUNEAU -- The Alaska Public School Performance Incentive Program will pay \$305,875 in bonuses to principals, teachers and support staff at 11 schools for students' academic gains in the 2008-2009 school year.

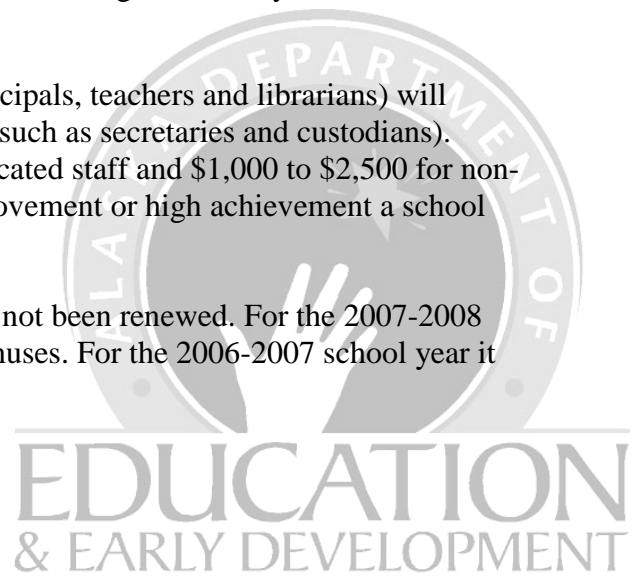
The Performance Incentive Program pays bonuses to all staff members at schools that have shown significant improvement in student scores over the previous year, or whose scores have remained at high levels, in state assessments in reading, writing and math.

The program also rewards school district staff members, excluding superintendents, who have contributed to an awarded school's improvement. This year, districts with awarded schools will receive a combined \$15,294 to distribute to eligible district staff members.

The awarded schools are: the Johnson Youth Center in Juneau, False Pass School, Ella B. Verneti School in Koyukuk, the Mat-Su Youth Facility in Palmer, Evergreen Elementary in Wrangell, Tanalian School in Port Alsworth, Juneau Community Charter School, Dot Lake School, Pioneer Peak Elementary in Palmer, Sterling Elementary, and Seward Elementary.

Ninety-eight certificated educators (such as principals, teachers and librarians) will receive awards, as will 63 noncertificated staff (such as secretaries and custodians). Bonuses range from \$2,500 to \$5,500 for certificated staff and \$1,000 to \$2,500 for non-certificated staff, depending on how much improvement or high achievement a school showed.

This is the final year of a three-year pilot. It has not been renewed. For the 2007-2008 school year, the program paid \$1,061,944 in bonuses. For the 2006-2007 school year it paid out \$1,850,493.



The department launched the incentive program after researching performance pay systems in other states. The Alaska program sought to avoid mistakes made elsewhere. The Alaska program gave schools credit for student improvement as well as for proficiency. It compared each student with his or her performance from the prior year. It set clear, easy-to-understand targets. It was based on objective student data rather than subjective evaluations. To encourage cooperation and collaboration within schools, the program rewarded all staff members at schools.

But the program fell short in a number of ways. The department did not win significant support for the program, particularly from teachers. The targets for achieving bonuses were high; they were too challenging for many schools, even those showing growth, to achieve. Some educators did not believe the bonuses should be based exclusively on students' assessment scores.

The department did learn valuable information about schools by piloting the incentive program. The program's methodology for comparing students' performance from one year to the next provides clear information about the academic growth of students on an individual and schoolwide basis. School districts and the department can readily see how many students improved, remained static, or lost ground in each school. This information will continue to help the department evaluate whether schools are chronically underperforming and need assistance in improving student achievement.

In several respects, the incentive program's methodology provides more useful information than the accountability system of No Child Left Behind. First, the incentive program compares each student to his or her previous performance. NCLB compares one year's student body with the previous year's student body, although many of the students are not the same. Second, the incentive program examines trends in proficient and advanced students as well as in nonproficient students. NCLB does not address improvement in proficient students. Third, the incentive program examines student progress in the three core disciplines of reading, writing and math. NCLB combines reading and writing into one language arts score.

Background information about the program is available at www.eed.state.ak.us/spip.

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