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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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State Encourages Instruction During School Closures

JUNEAU -- Alaska Education Commissioner Larry LeDoux signed September 1 an emergency regulation that provides an incentive for school districts to offer instruction during emergency closures.

The regulation takes effect immediately and expires on December 29, 2009, by which point the State Board of Education & Early Development will have had time to consider making the regulation permanent through the usual public regulatory process.

The regulation was signed as an emergency measure because there could be lengthy school closures during the H1N1 flu pandemic. However, the regulation applies to any cause of emergency closure, such as blizzards, fires and floods.

Essentially, the regulation sets criteria by which school closures can be counted as days in session. Per state law, public schools must be in session for at least 180 days a school year.

When districts close schools for a day or two for an emergency, they often can make up the days by adjusting their calendar. For example, to make up for a snow closure, districts might cancel a teacher training day or add a day to the school year. But when districts have long closures, such as for a week or two, it may be hard to make up those days by adjusting the calendar.

Alaska education commissioners have the authority to waive the statutory requirement of 180 days in session, but they rarely do so, instead directing districts to make up days lost to emergency closures.

"The emergency regulations provide districts another pathway," Commissioner LeDoux said. "Districts always place the health and safety of students first. At the same time, closures don't have to affect students educationally or cause families to lose vacation time. In some cases, it will be feasible to offer instruction during closures and complete the school year at its scheduled time."

A large, faint watermark of the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development seal is visible in the background of the lower half of the page. The seal is circular and contains the text "ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & EARLY DEVELOPMENT" around the perimeter. In the center of the seal is a stylized graphic of a person's hands holding a child's hands.

EDUCATION
& EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Under the emergency regulation, when districts offer instruction during emergency closures they may apply to the commissioner to count those days as days in session. For example, districts might offer instruction at alternative sites, such as by using a different building after a school fire, or by alternative methods of delivery, such as through computers.

The regulation also sets the criteria by which the commissioner will decide whether to count a closed day as a day in session. The criteria include the extent to which the district planned for educational services during closures, the quality of the educational services, communication with families to facilitate instruction during closures, the nature and duration of the emergency, and the public interest.

The State Board of Education & Early Development, which will consider the regulation in October, welcomes written comments at the Department of Education & Early Development, 801 West 10th Street, Suite 200, P.O. Box 110500, Juneau, AK 99811 or at www.eed.state.ak.us/regs/. The comments must be received no later than 4 p.m. on October 2.

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