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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Two Alaska Schools Named National Title I Distinguished Schools

JUNEAU -- John Shaw Elementary School in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District and Alaska Native Cultural Charter School in the Anchorage School District have been named National Title I Distinguished Schools by the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, Commissioner Mike Hanley announced today.

John Shaw Elementary was recognized for exceptional student performance for two or more consecutive years. Alaska Native Cultural Charter School was recognized for significantly closing the achievement gap between student groups.

Title I schools receive federal funds to support programs that supplement instruction to meet the educational needs of low-achieving students in high-poverty schools. The National Title I Distinguished Schools Program is a project of the National Title I Association. Selected schools must have a poverty rate of at least 35 percent and have met or exceeded state standards for making adequate yearly progress for two or more consecutive years. Each state, using its own selection process, may select two schools for the honor.

“These two distinguished schools demonstrate the power of communities to provide all students the opportunity for a good education,” said Commissioner Hanley. “The awards recognize the dedicated efforts of students, parents, educators and school district staff. Their achievements are an inspiration.”

Alaska identifies eligible schools for the award based on their students' performance on state standards-based assessments in reading, writing and math. Identified schools then must choose to apply for the honor, providing evidence of effectiveness in research-based instructional strategies, opportunities for all children to achieve, coordination of Title I with other programs, professional development of staff, and partnerships with parents, families and communities.

John Shaw Elementary in Wasilla serves approximately 385 students in grades pre-kindergarten to 5. Last school year, 87 percent of its state-assessed students scored

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proficient or above in language arts; 84 percent were proficient or above in math. Nearly half its students are economically disadvantaged, a quarter are students with disabilities, and a fifth are English language learners.

John Shaw Elementary believes that relationships are the foundation upon which they build instructional practices. All core teachers “loop,” spending two years with the same class of students. The school has a strong professional learning community framework to engage in on-going professional development targeted to the unique needs of the students. Teachers participate in “instructional tours” allowing teachers the experience of seeing best practices happening in other classrooms and the ability to give and receive feedback to each other to improve instruction. The school places emphasis on parent engagement and has trained a group of parents that serve as instructional tutors.

The Alaska Native Cultural Charter School serves approximately 225 students in grades pre-kindergarten to 7. Nearly all students are economically disadvantaged and about 90 percent are Alaska Natives. The school has showed gains in proficiency at each state-assessed grade level over the past three years. For example, more than 90 percent of third-graders are proficient in reading and writing, and 81 percent are proficient in math.

The Alaska Native Cultural Charter School focuses on professional development for teachers to support academic learning as well as to support the social, emotional, and cultural needs of the students. The school staff works together as a team, coordinates with numerous district and federal programs to ensure a unified and purposeful approach to strengthening students, and has established partnerships with many organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club and The Alaska Native Heritage Center.

For more information about the National Title I Association Distinguished Schools program, see www.nationaltitleiassociation.org.

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