

**Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)  
Assessment and Accountability in the Fifty States: 1999-2000**

**ALASKA**

*This profile was verified by the staff of the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development in July 2000. All information was current as of that date.*

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**State Assessment System (1999-2000 school year)**

*1. Provide a brief overview and history of the assessment system as the context.*

In 1993, Alaskans began the development of higher standards and accountability for their public school system. The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development developed academic standards in ten content areas; last year, performance standards translated the content standards into concise expectations for student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. In March of 2000, students began taking state exams that are the final phase of the curriculum/assessment/revision cycle.

*2. What are the characteristics of the state assessment system, including:*

- *Name of Assessment Instrument(s) or Program(s)* Comprehensive System of Student Assessments (CSSA) which consists of: 1) High School Graduation Qualifying Examination; 2) Benchmark Examinations; 3) California Achievement Test, fifth edition; 4) Alaska Developmental Profile.

- *Grade Levels and Subjects Tested*
  - Beginning in March 2000 Alaska administered the Alaska Benchmark Examinations at grades 3, 6, and 8 in reading, writing, and mathematics. In 10<sup>th</sup> grade, students may take the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Examination, (HSGQE) which in type and format, is a continuation of the Benchmark assessment system. Students must pass the HSGQE to receive a high school diploma. The HSGQE may be taken once in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, twice in 11 and 12<sup>th</sup> grades and twice a year for three years after leaving school.
  - In addition, Alaska regulation 4AAC06.710 requires all students in grades 4 and 7 to be assessed in reading, language arts, and mathematics, using a standardized test. The California Achievement Test (CAT/5) is currently used.
  - Finally, the state administers the Alaska Developmental Profile to all entering kindergarten or first grade students.
- *Norm or Criterion Referenced Both.* The CAT/5 is norm-referenced while the HSGQE and Benchmark Examinations are criterion-referenced.
- *Matrix or Census Testing Census*
- *Item Types (including proportions if available via Internet or interview) such as traditional or enhanced multiple choice, performance tasks, open-ended questions, portfolios, essays, etc.* There are three types of questions in each of the HSGQE and Benchmark Examinations: multiple-choice, short constructed response, and extended constructed response. For constructed-response questions, students write their answers to the questions on lines provided. Short constructed-response items may require a few words, phrases, or sentences; that a problem be solved; or a form or chart be completed. These questions may take two to five minutes to complete. Extended constructed-response items may require students to write a paragraph, an essay, or to complete a multi-step task. These questions may take five to fifteen minutes to complete; the essays may require about an hour to complete. Constructed-response questions in mathematics will require students to show their work and/or to explain or justify their solutions.
- *Time of Testing (specific month(s) or testing window)* Benchmark Examinations, March; HSGQE, October and March; California Achievement Test: March.
- *High School Exit Exam (date of implementation and/or phase-in timeline)* In 1997, the Alaska Legislature enacted a law that requires all Alaska students to pass a competency examination in reading, writing, and mathematics before they can receive a high school diploma. The exam is based on the Alaska Student Performance Standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The graduating class of 2002 will be the first required to pass the exam to receive a diploma; students who do not pass will be awarded a certificate of attendance. The test is administered in the spring and fall; students may take it for the first time in the spring of 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Students may retake parts of the test that they do not pass, up to three years after they have left high school. Special accommodations are made for special education and LEP students.

- *Other Assessments* SAT, ACT
  - *Transitional or Final Assessment System* Phasing in final assessment system
3. *Who designed and produced the assessment(s) used by the state? Probe on:*
- *State Department of Education*
  - *Commercial Testing Organization*
  - *State teachers and administrators*
  - *Assessment Committee*
  - *Other*

The Department of Education & Early Development contracted with CTB/McGraw-Hill to help develop the examinations. Alaska officials provided CTB staff with the Alaska Performance Standards in reading, writing and mathematics and CTB selected test items to assess these standards. Committees of Alaska educators, students, parents, and community members subsequently reviewed the test items to ensure that they measured the standards and were free of bias.

4. *What are the state requirements for local assessment, including the types of assessments and their use in areas such as reporting and accountability, as well as Title I adequate yearly progress? What grade levels and subjects are tested?*

Alaska does not have any requirements for local assessments, although some of the larger districts do choose to administer norm-referenced assessments (CAT/5) at additional grade levels.

5. *Is the state assessment system aligned with the state standards? Are there plans for alignment, and if so, how will the assessment and standards become aligned? Probe on:*

- *Refining standards*
  - *Revamping assessments*
  - *Adding components to assessments*
- What is the timeline for completion of the alignment?*

In 1993, Alaskans began developing higher standards and accountability for their public school system. As the cornerstone of this effort, the Department of Education & Early Development developed academic content standards and associated key elements in the content areas: English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, Government and Citizenship, Skills for a Healthy Life, Arts, Work Languages, and Technology. More recently, performance standards were completed that translate the content standards into more concise expectations for student achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics. The Alaska Benchmark and High School Graduation Qualifying examinations are aligned with the state content and performance standards.

6. *What is the state's approach for ensuring alignment and what evidence of that alignment is provided?*

The State Board of Education & Early Development has appointed several committees of Alaskans to review the work of the test publisher. The committees ensured the examinations are fair for all students in Alaska and that they measure the levels of achievement that Alaskans expect of their young people at certain points in their schooling. The committees also looked at such issues as test bias and alignment with the Alaska Student Performance Standards.

In the Bookmarking process for setting cut scores, the Bookmarking committee members link each test item to specific state reading, writing, or mathematics performance standards.

7. *How is the data included in the state assessment system used?*

- *Student Grade Promotion/Retention, Graduation, Diploma Certification* Not currently. Students will be required to pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination to receive a high school diploma beginning in 2002.
- *Teacher, School and/or District accountability* Not currently. The state assessment will be used for school accountability beginning in 2002.
- *Program Evaluation (Identify federal, state programs)* Yes, Title I
- *Identification of students for programs like Title I, state CompEd, Bilingual, etc.* Currently, CAT 5 data is used in some schools, in conjunction with local measures, to identify students for Title I services.
- *Instructional guidance to local administrators and/or teachers* Yes
- *School improvement (e.g., preparing a school improvement plan)* Not yet, except for identification of Title I School Improvement Sites. It will be used in new state accountability system beginning in 2002.

Information from the norm-referenced assessment is aggregated to a statewide profile, providing parents, educators, policy makers and the community at large with a picture of how Alaska's students compare with their peers nationwide.

Information from the criterion-referenced assessments index student achievement in relation to adopted state standards, and hence provides valid and reliable information to policy makers, guides decision-making, and improves instruction.

8. *Are there changes planned for the state assessment system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?*

No changes are anticipated for the state assessment system, as Alaska is in the process of fully implementing the new assessments.

9. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of state assessment? Explain.*

Alaska is one of the few states whose principal secondary languages are Native. While some Alaskans in urban and seaport areas speak Spanish, Tagalog and other Pacific Island languages, many students in large areas of the state speak Yupiit and Inupiaq Eskimo. Elsewhere there is a renewed interest in learning and teaching other Native languages. In some districts, over 95% of

students are bilingual or LEP. Appropriate inclusion and accommodation of these students is an important concern.

## **Inclusion Policies for Assessment**

*1. What exclusions are made in the current state assessment for students with disabilities? LEP? Who makes the decision about exclusion of a particular child? Does the state collect data or in other ways monitor the number and types of students excluded? Does that vary by test?*

Policies regarding students with disabilities: All Alaska students, including those with disabilities, must be assessed, but students with an IEP team or 504 plan may do so with accommodations. However, staff members must document on the IEP or 504 Accommodation Plan the use of accommodations and provide a clear rationale for determining assessment accommodations.

Policies regarding low English proficient students: Districts with students whose first language is not English and who have participated in language immersion or transitional bilingual programs beginning in kindergarten or grade 1, may delay administering the grade three Benchmark Examination until grade 4. Subsequently, all LEP students will take norm-referenced tests, Benchmark Examinations at grades six and eight, and the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination at the appropriate grade levels. One other exception pertains to LEP students who are recent immigrants. If an LEP student attended school for two or more years in their country of origin and English was not the language of instruction, that student may be exempted from examination for two years from the date they enter school in the Alaska. The student may be exempted from the norm-referenced test and Benchmark Examinations at grades three, six and eight but not from the HSGQE. All other LEP students must participate in state assessments.

*2. What accommodations and/or modifications are made on the current state assessment for students with disabilities? LEP?*

Accommodations that require documentation:

### Timing/Scheduling

- Administering the test over several days, specifying duration (not permitted for the HSGQE).
- Allowing frequent breaks during testing.

### Setting

- Administering the test individually in a separate location.
- Administering the test to a small group in a separate location.
- Providing special lighting.
- Providing adaptive or special furniture.
- Providing special acoustics.
- Administering the test in locations with minimal distractions, in a small group, study carrel, or individually.
- Using a special Test Administrator, including the examinee's teacher.

### Presentation

- Using a Braille edition or large-type edition.
- Signing directions to a student.
- Allowing students to ask for clarifications.
- Reading directions to student.
- Using visual magnification devices.
- Using templates to reduce visible print.
- Using auditory amplification device, hearing aid, or noise buffers.
- Securing papers to work area with tape/magnets.
- Using masks or markers to maintain place.
- Using dark, heavy, or raised lines or pencil grips.
- Using assistive devices.
- Using a scribe.

### Response

- Using graph paper
- Using paper in an alternative format (Braille, etc.).
- Allowing a student to mark responses in test booklet if test employs a separate answer sheet.
- Using a scribe.
- Allowing student to tape response for later verbatim transcription.
- Using typewriter or computer without spell or grammar checker.
- Using a communication device such as an auditory amplification to give directions.
- Dictating to a proctor/scribe.
- Allowing alternative responses such as oral, sign, typed, pointing.
- Using a Braille.
- Using a large-diameter, special-grip pencil.
- Using markers to maintain place.
- Using a device to screen out extraneous sounds.

The list of accommodations above should not be considered exhaustive: any list of accommodations will eventually be rendered incomplete because advances in the technology of adaptive and assistive devices will eventually lead to new accommodations. When considering an accommodation not listed, the IEP team should evaluate the appropriateness of a potential accommodation by considering the following questions:

1. Is the change being considered a modification or an accommodation? In other words, will the change alter the validity of the test?
  2. Will the change give the student an unfair advantage in the test?
  3. Is the change needed to lessen the impact of a disability, or will it artificially raise the test score of the student?
  4. Will the change compromise test security or violate test administration rules?
- 3. Does the state provide assessments in languages other than English? If so, describe. In what grades and subjects?*

No. Although Alaska has alternative languages programs to meet the linguistic and educational needs of LEP students, the state does not currently offer assessments in languages other than English.

*4. Does the state provide alternative assessments for students with disabilities? If so, describe. For which students and in which subjects and at what ages?*

Alaska is in the process of developing an alternative assessment for low incidence (severely handicapped) students. The assessment should be piloted during the 2000-2001 academic year, and fully implemented during the following year. The alternative assessment will be based on content standards, as are the Alaska Benchmark Assessments.

*5. Does the state have a goal for the inclusion of students with disabilities and/or LEP students on the statewide tests? Does the state use any strategies to encourage the inclusion of students with disabilities? LEP students?*

Yes, Alaska has the goal of full inclusion of students with disabilities and LEP students.

*6. Are changes planned for the inclusion of SWD and LEP students in the state assessment system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?*

The Department of Education & Early Development is currently reviewing the Participation Guidelines.

## **Performance Standards**

*1. How many and what performance levels has the state established for its assessments?*

Alaska will implement four levels of achievement for the Alaska Benchmark assessments: **Advanced, Proficient, Below Proficient, and Not Proficient**. A committee composed of Alaska educators, parents, Native and business leaders, and others set the levels of proficiency in the summer of 2000. The High School Graduation Qualifying Examination has passing scores only for each part (reading, writing and mathematics).

*2. Has the state set acceptable levels or targets for schools, districts or the state on tests, dropout rates or other measures (e.g. 70% of students in Maryland pass the MSPAP)?*

Alaska has not set any targets or acceptable levels for students, schools, districts or the state on cognitive or non-cognitive indicators, although by regulation, must do so by August, 2002. On that date, the state must rate each public school as distinguished, successful, deficient, or in crisis.

*3. How are these performance standards calculated? What data are included in the calculations, and at what proportions (e.g. assessment results 60%, dropout and attendance*

rates 40%)? How are the calculations made? What is the final unit of analysis for reporting school and district achievement levels (e.g. performance index, grade, category)?

The school designators, which shall be set in the summer of 2002, will be based entirely on student achievement and other indicators of student behavior.

4. Are all students, schools and districts included in these performance calculations? If not, who is excluded?

All students who take the assessment will be included in performance calculations. All public schools in the state will be included in these school designations.

5. Are changes planned for the state performance standards (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?

The Department of Education & Early Development recently benchmarked its student standards against the NAEP standards as a first step in a standards renewal cycle.

6. What proportion of schools and/or districts fail to meet acceptable levels on performance targets?

Not currently applicable.

## Reporting Performance Data

1. Describe the characteristics of the state performance data reporting system (by whom, what data, who is the audience) for each of the following levels:

- *Student reports*

CTB/McGraw-Hill provides reports on student level performance on the CAT/5, Benchmark Examinations and the HSGQE component of the Alaska Comprehensive System of Student Assessments.

- *School reports*

CTB/McGraw-Hill provides school reports for CAT/5, Benchmark Examinations and the HSGQE component of the Alaska Comprehensive System of Student Assessments.

- *District reports*

CTB/McGraw-Hill provides district reports for the CAT/5, Benchmark Examinations and the HSGQE component of the Alaska Comprehensive System of Student Assessments.

- *State reports*

Alaska produces a **Report Card to the Public**, which includes information on the four key elements around which the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative is structured. These include: High

student academic standards and assessments; quality professional standards; family, school, business and community networks; and school excellence standards. Details include financial information; daily enrollment data; percentage of special education students, bilingual students, migrant students, gifted/talented students; student dropout rate, number of accredited schools, staffing data.

In Spring 2000, the Department of Education & Early Development released the last district level report card. Beginning in January 2001, the state report card will report at the school level rather than the district level.

The state report card contains the following data:

- Statewide profile (area, income, unemployment, number of districts and schools, funding, ADM, low-income students, population education level, graduation rate)
- Total statewide enrollment by ethnicity
- Supplemental program participation
- School-age children in low-income families
- CAT/5 quartile results by grade and subject, including two years of data
- SAT results at state and national level, including three years of data
- ACT results by subject at state and national level
- High school completion rate by ethnicity, alternative diploma or certificate
- Staffing information: teacher preparation, salaries, educator supply and demand
- Accreditation data
- Annual change in membership and transiency rate
- Attendance rate
- Annual dropout rate for grades 7-12, by ethnicity
- Alaska district data, including:
  - Funding communities
  - Number of schools
  - Number of accredited schools
  - 1990 Census population
  - Audited Expenses
  - Average Daily membership
  - Membership change
  - Special Education as percentage of ADM
  - Bilingual population as percentage of ADM
  - Migrant as percentage of ADM
  - School-age low income as percentage of ADM
  - Total number of dropouts from grades 7-12
  - District Transiency rate
  - District attendance rate
  - Number of graduates
  - CAT5 test results by grade, subject, and quartile

Additional state data available on the internet include: district enrollment totals for all Alaskan public school districts, school enrollment total, statewide enrollment by grade by ethnicity,

district enrollment total by ethnicity for all Alaskan public school districts, Goals 2000 annual reports, high school graduates by district by school, special education child count, vocational education status report.

- *Title I reports*

District Title I reports include information required under federal regulations.

2. *How are the data distributed? When during the year (month or time period after assessment)? To whom (students, teachers, parents, the media, the community)?*

Much of the above information is on the Department of Education & Early Development website. Moreover, Alaskan schools and districts are required to release performance data to the public. The Report Card to the Public is distributed to school districts, schools, and the public in March of the following school year.

3. *At what level(s) are data disaggregated (state, district and school levels)? For what groups are disaggregated data reported (see Internet sites for state, district and school level report cards)? Check on the following categories required by federal regulation:*

- *Gender*
- *Race*
- *LEP status*
- *Migrant Status*
- *SWD*
- *SES*

Alaska does not disaggregate much data except for Title I purposes. Enrollment information and dropout statistics are publicly disaggregated by ethnicity, however. In the future, state officials intend to include some disaggregated performance data in school reports. For the most part, disaggregated data is a politically and socially sensitive issue, and officials prefer not to release much of this information. Moreover, Alaska will only release disaggregated data if the subset contains at least three students.

4. *Does trend data exist from the state assessments (example: Texas State Assessment data is available from “1996-97 on”)?*

Trend data does not exist for state assessments, because March 2000 was the first time that the Benchmark Examinations and HSGQE were administered. However, state reports generally include some trend data, on the CAT5 and the SAT.

5. *How are the results of students with disabilities and limited English proficiency reported? Are they included in the aggregate scores reported to the public, or disaggregated by group?*

Currently, the results for all students with disabilities and limited English proficiency who take the assessments are aggregated with other students. In the future, however, this data will be disaggregated, as well as being reported in the aggregated data for each school.

6. *What are the state's requirements for the use of data in school and district improvement planning?*

There are no particular state requirements for the use of data in school and district improvement planning.

7. *Are changes planned for performance reporting (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the accountability system (Title I or in general)?*

School-level Report Card data is due at the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development in July of 2000, school reports cards will be made public the following year. In addition, the district level report cards will be phased out.

8. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of performance standards and reporting? Explain.*

Alaska officials highlighted several issues and challenges with regard to performance standards and reporting:

- In the past, Alaska has not had any requirements for uniformity of definitions when reporting data. Hence, districts or schools could be reporting on the same issue, but the data may not have been comparable due to differing definitions. In the future, Alaska will move towards a system of required standard definitions.
- Alaska has some very small schools. Whereas some states limit the public disaggregation of data in cases of groups of less than ten students, in Alaska, the limit is groups of less than three students. If Alaska were to set the limit at ten, they would have very little disaggregated data, so small are the schools. On the other hand, some of Alaska's schools are relatively large; the urban/rural split is problematic for many policy issues.
- Finally, getting districts to buy into standards-based teaching system has posed some challenges. While some districts have embraced the process, others are not quite aware of the policy and its implications. Local control is also an issue in a state as large and as diverse as Alaska.

## **State Accountability System (1999-2000 school year)**

1. *Provide a brief overview and history of the accountability system as the context.*

The Alaska accountability system was traditionally based on school accreditation and a state monitoring for compliance system. Public or private elementary or secondary schools in Alaska demonstrated the attainment of the standards for accreditation by conducting a self-study using a format prescribed by the department; or providing evidence of accreditation by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges to the department.

Currently the decision to seek accreditation is a local school board option. Alaska is one of only two western states without a mandated accreditation process. Voluntary school accreditation has resulted in only 27 percent of Alaska's public schools seeking accreditation status.

2. *What are the characteristics of the state accountability system?*

*Probe on:*

- *Who is held accountable (students, schools, districts)?*
- *For what are they held accountable (adequate yearly progress, student achievement, processes, multiple non-cognitive indicators, etc)?*
- *Using what criteria (state assessments, local assessments, both state and local criteria)?*
- *To what targets or performance levels?*
- *With what consequences (promotion or graduation, program improvement, additional planning, state takeover, rewards, assistance, etc.)?*

*Organize the response into the following subsections:*

- *Student Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

There were no state level student accountability rewards or sanctions in the 1999/2000 school year. Beginning January 1, 2002 all students will be required to pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination in order to receive a diploma.

- *School Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

Public and private schools in Alaska may seek accreditation either through the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development accreditation or through the Northwest Association of School and Colleges.

The adopted standards for state accreditation of schools are:

- 1) Classroom and instructional strategies support and promote students learning focused on the attainment of high standards by all students; a school demonstrates this standards by giving evidence that it bases curriculum, instruction and assessment on clear student standards and objectives; has established student standards that are meaningful, agreed upon and emphasize the importance of learning; assesses student performance in multiple ways; and holds high expectations for the achievement of all students;
- 2) A climate of high expectations exists not only for students, but also for all staff, and high expectations are communicated to everyone in the community the school serves, with incentives, recognition and rewards in place to promote excellence;
- 3) School time is used for learning
- 4) Fair discipline practices and policies are established, communicated, and consistently enforced;
- 5) The school environment is supportive and physically safe;
- 6) Appropriate technology is used to apply academic skills to simulate real life, workplace situations in addition to performing research and exploration;
- 7) All staff are involved in ongoing and continuous staff development that focuses on school improvement goals and student performance standards;
- 8) Strong leadership that uses established research to guide the instructional program is in evidence;
- 9) Resources are focused on established student standards and school improvement efforts to guide the instructional program;
- 10) The decision-making process for school plans and goals includes everyone in the community the school serves;

- 11) Programs and support are provided to help high needs students achieve school success;
- 12) The school goals and staff behavior promote equity and respect for diversity among students, teachers, administrators, families, and community members of different socio-economic status and cultural background;
- 13) That non-English-speaking and limited-English-proficient students are provided with a strong academic core program that supports the students' first language; and
- 14) Partnerships and collaboration are established between the school and parents, families, businesses, and other community members; a school demonstrates this standard by giving evidence that
  - a. Various types of involvement promote a variety of opportunities for school, families, and community to work together;
  - b. Collaboration between the school and agencies, businesses and the community supports special programs for high needs students and families; and
  - c. Staff and school procedures promote community connections and cross-cultural communications with parents and families.

Beginning in August 2002, the Department of Education & Early Development will ensure accountability by rating each school in the state as "distinguished", "successful", "deficient" or "in crisis. This accountability system is in development.

- *District Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

The state monitoring for compliance system insures accountability through control of funding and enforcement of state regulations.

3. *What methods of measuring progress are used in the state accountability system?*

- *Relative growth*
- *Absolute target*
- *Narrowing the Gap between high and low achievers*
- *Other*

Alaska's current accountability system is based on accreditation and state monitoring and does not include a system for measuring growth.

4. *Are all students included in calculating the measures of progress? If not, who is excluded (probe on inclusion of SWD and LEP students)?*

Not applicable to the 1999/2000 school year.

The school designator system of rating schools as distinguished, successful, deficient or in crisis will be based on the achievement of all students including those with disabilities and LEP.

5. *How do the general state accountability system and the system of accountability for Title I schools compare? Are they the same, or different? How?*

The two systems are different: whereas the state accountability system is based on accreditation of schools, the Title I system of accountability is based on a target percentage that constitutes

adequate yearly progress. However, as Alaska elaborates its new accountability system, officials intend to develop one seamless system that addresses both general state accountability and Title I accountability.

*6. Are subgroup performance results used as an indicator in the calculation of state accountability measures? If so, how? To identify schools or districts in need of improvement? For recognition and rewards?*

No, subgroup performance results are not used as an indicator in the calculation of state accountability measures.

*7. Are charter and/or non-public schools included in the accountability system? If so, how?*

Charter schools are included in the accreditation system, as are non-public schools, if they so choose.

*8. Are changes planned for the state accountability system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

Substantial changes are anticipated for the Alaskan system of accountability. Provisions for the new system are as follows:

(a) Beginning in August 2002, and during each of the following 12-month periods, the department shall assign each public school in each district the performance designation of distinguished, successful, deficient, or in crisis based on multiple student measures, including student achievement. The state board of education shall establish this process by regulation.

(b) A public school assigned a performance designation of deficient or in crisis shall develop a school improvement plan under (e) of this section. The department shall inform the governing body of each district of the performance designation assigned to each public school in the district.

(c) The state board shall adopt regulations to allow a district to appeal the performance designation assigned to a public school in that district.

(d) The department may establish a program of special recognition for those public schools that achieve a distinguished performance designation.

(e) A public school that receives a designation of deficient or in crisis shall prepare a school improvement plan to improve student performance based on a process established by the state board of education. The public school shall undertake an improvement process under that plan to lead to a designation of successful or distinguished. The school improvement plan must be prepared with the maximum feasible public participation of the community, including, if appropriate, interested individuals, teachers, parents, parent organizations, students, tribal organizations, local government representatives, and other community groups. The district shall

consult with and assist the public school in the preparation of the school improvement plan. The school improvement plan must be approved by the local school board. The commissioner may provide technical assistance to a public school or the district at any time during the preparation and implementation of the school improvement plan on the request of an interested person and the approval of the district.

(f) Beginning August 1, 2002, and periodically during each of the following 12-month periods, the department shall monitor the progress of the implementation of each school improvement plan prepared under (e) of this section.

(g) The department may use existing staff or contract with one or more qualified persons to assist a public school that is deficient or in crisis under this section to improve student performance. Qualified persons to provide assistance under this section include educators, business leaders, members of the governing body of that district, and community leaders.

(h) Notwithstanding any other provisions in this title, if the performance designation of a public school has continued to be deficient or in crisis for two consecutive school years, the chief school administrator, if the district employs a chief school administrator, the president of the governing body, and the principal of the public school shall, at a public meeting of the state board of education, present a written report on the performance of that public school.

(i) The state board of education shall develop, by regulation, measures that may be progressively implemented by the commissioner to assist a public school to improve student performance in accordance with this section.

Alaskan officials are still in the process of developing this system. The development of the policy has included broad representation of Alaskan stakeholders; the group has agreed on some principles, but the outlines are still somewhat vague.

*9. What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of accountability? Explain.*

As with reporting, one of the major challenges facing Alaska is the presence of some very small schools, whose needs contrast to those of larger, more urban districts. Some schools may not have any students at a given grade level; the Alaskan accountability system needs to accommodate such cases. Alaskan officials anticipate the need to statistically model data under various systems.

## **Identifying and Assisting Low Performing Schools and Districts**

*1. How are schools and districts identified as low performing? Using what criteria? Do the identification processes and/or criteria differ for Title I and non-Title I schools?*

Currently, the only system for identifying and assisting low-performing schools is the Title I system. For further information on this subject, please refer to the Title I section, below.

2. *Does the district or the state decide whether a school is low performing? If the district is involved in the process, how much discretion do they have?*

Please refer to the Title I section, below.

3. *What types of assistance are provided to these schools and districts by the state?*

- *Evaluation and Planning*
- *Financial*
- *Expert Assistance*

Please refer to the Title I section, below.

4. *Who provides the state assistance?*

- *School/district support teams*
- *Regional centers*
- *Distinguished educators*
- *SDE staff*
- *Other – Explain*

Please refer to the Title I section, below.

5. *Does support to Title I and all low performing schools and districts differ? Is support generally provided for all schools and districts, or are services specifically designed to help those that are low performing?*

Please refer to the Title I section, below.

6. *Has the state established a set of criteria and/or a process for getting schools and districts out of low performing status? If so, what do they include?*

Please refer to the Title I section, below.

7. *Once a school or district is identified as low performing, what types of plans must it prepare? Who are they submitted to once completed? How do they differ from other planning documents?*

Please refer to the Title I section, below.

8. *Are changes planned for the state system of identifying and assisting low performing schools or districts (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

## **Title I and Adequate Yearly Progress**

1. *What criteria are included in the definition of adequate yearly progress for schools and districts under Title I?*

- *What measures are used (relationship between cognitive/non-cognitive data)?*

- *What targets have been established?*
- *Are local assessment systems included as criteria? If so, does the state provide guidance? Monitor their use?*
- *Is subgroup performance included in the criteria?*

The only measure currently in use under Alaska's system of adequate yearly progress is the CAT/5 assessment. Local assessments are not included as criteria. Subgroup performance is not currently included in the criteria, but state officials acknowledge that disaggregation is important for decision making.

2. *What are the definitions of adequate yearly progress for the following:*

- *Title I schools and non-Title I schools*
- *Targeted vs. schoolwide programs, charter, non-public and small schools*
- *Districts*
- *Are these transitional or final definitions? If transitional, when will the final definitions be in place and what criteria and processes will they include?*

The system of adequate yearly progress in Alaska is in transition, currently under a consolidated plan. The threshold at which schools are determined to have made adequate yearly progress is when at least 40% of students who take the CAT/5 exam are scoring at the proficient level. The proficient level is attained when 50% or more of the questions are answered correctly.

There are no particular growth targets for schools in which less than 40% are scoring at the proficient level, nor is there a separate definition for district adequate yearly progress. Charter schools are included in the same definition.

3. *What is the process for identifying those schools and districts that are not making adequate yearly progress under Title I? Does the district or the state make this determination for schools? If the district plays a role, does the state provide guidance on local criteria?*

The state makes the initial determination of schools that are not making adequate yearly progress, then state officials notify districts.

4. *What are the criteria and processes for identifying schools and districts in need of improvement under Title I? What plans must be prepared? How can a school or district get out of Program Improvement? Does the district or the state make this determination for schools?*

The state is responsible for identifying schools and districts that are in need of improvement. Schools are placed in school improvement if they have less than 40% of students scoring at the proficient level on the CAT/5; the same definition applies for districts. Schools and districts are removed from program improvement status when they meet adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years.

Under the Alaska Title I system, schools may not be identified as in need of improvement if fewer than 11 students take the assessment; conclusions based on a small sample size lack sufficient statistical validity. As a result, over 70 schools in Alaska could be identified as school

improvement sites, but they are too small to receive this designation. This is problematic, as many of these schools could very much use school improvement services. Indeed, Alaska officials are looking at better ways of serving these small schools without identifying them as school improvement sites.

5. *What types of assistance are provided to those in need of improvement under Title I?*

- *Evaluation and Planning*
- *Financial*
- *Expert Assistance*

Alaska provides all of the above types of assistance, see below.

6. *Who provides the assistance?*

Alaska has a system of Title I school support teams that are co-mingled with Quality Schools Initiative support teams. These teams, working with the school and district staffs will assist a school in need of improvement in the development of a school improvement plan or through the revision of an existing improvement plan. The plan should be based on identified needs, or on the specific area that puts them into school improvement status. The school may also receive assistance for the implementation of the plan, and evaluation of the plan's effectiveness.

In addition, Alaska provides Title I improvement grants for those schools and districts identified as school or district improvement sites. These are primarily used for professional development. Alaska also has a regional assistance center that works closely with school improvement sites.

Individuals who contribute to the school improvement process under Title I are Quality Schools consultants. These professionals may be retired educators with experience in areas in which schools need assistance, current teachers, Title I Distinguished Educators, or administrators with school and district level expertise in the area of whole school reform, professional development, specific content areas, or community involvement. State department staff with expertise in these areas and in federal programs may also participate in school support teams.

7. *Have waivers played a role in this process?*

There are no current Title I waivers in place in Alaska.

8. *Are there future plans for the state system for schools or districts receiving Title I funding (proposed or enacted and to be implemented) or for the definition of adequate yearly progress? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

Alaska is in process of implementing a system of school designations that will be in place the summer of 2002. Once the school designation system is complete, Alaska officials will redefine adequate yearly progress based on the new rating system. Components that state officials anticipate including are a provision for improvement, rather than a set target level, and the inclusion of disaggregated data. This last point is of particular interest; Alaska officials want to ensure that those populations that are targeted Title I populations are being well served,

particularly those in very small schools. Officials are exploring ways of clustering schools, or using trend data, to counteract some of the variability in scores that may come from a school in which there is a very small sample of students. However, officials are grappling with the issue of how to ensure the inclusion of all, while at the same time developing a concise definition of adequate yearly progress.

*9. Is there alignment between Title I and non-Title I systems for adequate yearly progress?*

At the moment, the Title I definition of adequate yearly progress is the only measure of progress used in Alaska schools. However, as the new state assessments are implemented and the new school designator system is developed, Alaska will achieve a seamless system that links Title I accountability, state accountability, and measures of progress for all schools. Alaska will have a unified school accountability system, rather than parallel state and Title I systems.

*10. What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of Title I? Explain.*

One challenge for Title I in Alaska has been mentioned earlier: that of very small schools.

In addition, Alaska faces the challenge of having a substantial number of limited English proficient students, either from Native or immigrant origin – and the circumstances of these two groups are often quite different. While immigrant children are generally in the more urban areas, Native language speaking students are often in very small villages that are quite isolated. Indeed, these students live in communities where the spoken language is not English; they begin their education in their native language and then transition to English. Clearly, fair assessment of these populations is a concern of Alaskan officials, and they are investigating ways to achieve this goal.

## **Contact Information**

### **Assessment and Accountability**

Richard Smiley  
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development  
801 West 10th Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, AK 99801  
(907) 465-2971  
ardy\_miller@eed.state.ak.us

### **Title I**

Ardy Miller  
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development  
801 West 10th Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, AK 99801  
(907) 465-8691  
richard\_smiley@eed.state.ak.us