

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### ALASKA GROWTH MODEL PROPOSAL

#### Meeting the Principles

<b>Core Principles</b>	<b>Alaska Response</b>
1. The accountability system must ensure that all students are proficient by 2013-14 and set annual goals to ensure that the achievement gap is closing for all groups.	Alaska's proposal ensures that all students are proficient or on track to be proficient by 2013-14 and maintains the current targets for closing the achievement gap.
2. The accountability model must establish high expectations for low-achieving students, while not setting expectations for annual achievement based upon demographic or school characteristics.	Alaska's proposal maintains high expectations for all students and does not differentiate achievement for students based upon demographics or school characteristics.
3. The accountability model must produce separate accountability decisions about student achievement in reading/language arts and in mathematics.	Alaska's proposal will produce accountability decisions based on reading/writing (language arts) and mathematics separately.
4. The accountability model must ensure that all students in the tested grades are included in the assessment and accountability system. Schools and districts must be held accountable for the performance of student subgroups. The accountability model, applied statewide, must include all schools and districts.	Alaska's proposal continues to maintain the high student inclusion rate. Alaska tests 97.6% of the students in grades 3-10 and meets the 95% participation rate for all subgroups. All schools and districts have been a part of accountability in Alaska since 2002, and that does not change as a result of the Alaska proposal.
5. The State's NCLB assessment system, the basis for the accountability model, must include annual assessments in each of the grades three through eight and high school in both reading/language arts and mathematics, must have been operational for more than one year, and must receive approval through the NCLB peer review process for the 2005-06 school year. The assessment system must also produce comparable results from grade to grade and year to year.	Alaska's proposal includes annual assessments of students in grades 3-10 in the content areas of reading/writing (language arts) and mathematics. Alaska has tested all students in grades 3-10 since 2002, using custom designed assessments based on Alaska standards in all those grades starting in 2005 that produced comparable results from grade to grade and were specifically designed to determine measurable growth from grade to grade and from year to year. The Alaska system was peer reviewed in November 2005 and will meet all the requirements in a timely manner.
6. The accountability model and related State data system must track student progress.	Alaska's proposal includes the implementation of a student identification system, started in 2002, that enabled the state to track individual student progress statewide.
7. The accountability model must include student participation rates in the State's assessment system and student achievement on an additional academic indicator.	Alaska's proposal continues to incorporate participation rates and an additional academic indicator as outlined in the approved Accountability Workbook.

## **Organization of Proposal**

The Alaska proposal to incorporate growth of individual student learning into NCLB adequate yearly progress includes the letter from Commissioner Sampson, this executive summary, and the NCLB Growth Model Application based on the exact language from the Peer Review Guidance provided by the United States Department of Education on January 25, 2006. This executive summary provides an overview of how Alaska meets the seven core principles outlined in Secretary Spellings' November 21, 2005 letter to state chief school officers. The summary continues by outlining the background and purpose of the proposal, history of the development of the Alaska system to support a growth model, how Alaska is addressing school accountability, and how stakeholders have been involved in the design process. The Growth Model Application itself follows the outline of the guidance, and references are made to five pieces of evidence that are attached to the proposal, (1) AMO Trajectory, (2) Appendix 21 of the Technical Report, (3) Appendix 22 of the Technical Report, (4) Henry L. Johnson Ltr., 012506, and (5) TechReport 55-57.

## **Alaska Growth Model**

The Alaska proposal counts toward the AMO those students who are proficient and those who are on track to be proficient within four years in grades 4-9, and three years for grade 10. To determine if a student is on track to be proficient, the student's test results for grades 4-10 will be compared to the results of that same student when he/she was in grades 3-9. Alaska tests students in all grade levels between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade, allowing this model to work for all grade level schools that are currently assessed under NCLB for adequate yearly progress. The content area assessments used for this evaluation will be those currently used for adequate yearly progress determinations: mathematics and reading/writing (language arts). Students in grades 4-9 who are on track to be proficient within four years will be combined with the proficient population for comparison toward meeting the AMO. Grade 10 students will have to be on track to be proficient within three years (three years from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade as a result of the growth measured from 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade). As a result, all schools will be measured based on 100% meeting the AMO by 2014.

A student is on track if (1) he/she is not already proficient, and (2) his/her score in the second year is at least as high as the score the previous year plus one-fourth of the gap (one-third for 10<sup>th</sup> grade students) between the score the previous year and 300 (proficient). Therefore, the State of Alaska includes students on track to become proficient within four years in grades 4-9 and three years in grade 10 with those who are proficient to measure against the Annual Measurable Objective target.

Alaska uses a 100-600 scale for all content areas and all grade levels, with 300 being proficient in all cases. An example of a student considered to be on track to become proficient follows:

- A student last year in 4<sup>th</sup> grade had a score of 260.
- $(300-260)/4=10$
- At the end of 5<sup>th</sup> grade if a student has 270 he is on track to become proficient.

## **Background**

Alaska proposes this modification to the existing model because:

- It will result in a better, more valid system providing information that will result in the best interventions and strategies to apply to schools and students.
- It focuses on the individual student's academic achievement and progress from year to year.
- It reflects what Alaska educators, legislators, and policymakers agree on to accurately measure individual student academic achievement.
- It reflects expected and significant student growth from year to year.
- It values proficient students and students making satisfactory progress toward proficiency.
- It's simple: easy for the public, educators, and students to understand.
- It's based on straightforward processes.
- It builds validity by increasing the number of schools making AYP: those with good status scores and progressing growth scores.

School accountability based on status alone does not work in Alaska. Small remote schools are over-identified despite the fact they are making progress with their students toward meeting proficiency. With the majority of schools serving very small student populations, combining status and individual student growth measures creates a more valid and an inherently fairer system of school accountability within the state. Educators, parents, policymakers, and lawmakers in the state know that a system that measures individual student growth and status is meaningful and provides the opportunity for schools to design better improvement plans. Knowing how a school is really doing involves understanding long-term longitudinal performance of students, including those students who may be on track to become proficient within a reasonable timeframe.

## **History**

Previous to the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Alaska was designing a state accountability model that incorporated status and growth of individual student achievement. Upon the passage of NCLB, Alaska's first Accountability Workbook included growth as a measure of school accountability. However, those aspects were removed from the workbook, and Alaska submitted a plan that is fully compliant with the NCLB status and safe harbor models. Growth of individual students, however, continues to be an important issue to Alaska lawmakers, policymakers, and stakeholders alike. Under the leadership of the current Alaska Department of Education & Early Development administration, the standards and assessment system was redesigned,

incorporating grade level expectations and development of a custom-designed assessment program to accurately measure Alaska standards. Alaska's proposal meets the core principles of a growth model not by coincidence, but by design.

In 2004 Alaska completed the design of grade level expectations, involving outside experts in the review of those expectations. When those standards were reviewed through the NCLB peer-review process, the reviewers noted: "Alaska has done a good job with their content standards. The standards appear rigorous, including DOK analysis." These standards served as the foundation of the assessment system that was designed specifically to determine student achievement against Alaska standards. During the design process Alaska worked with a highly qualified national Technical Advisory Committee, designing an assessment system that would serve as the foundation of school accountability that incorporated individual student growth as a measure of achievement. The new Alaska Standards Based Assessments were given in April 2005, will again be given in April of 2006, and each April thereafter.

Measuring growth is widely supported by stakeholders in Alaska, and the state has worked to assure a technically sound system for a growth model. Alaska introduced legislation to the Alaska legislature regarding rewards for staff working in schools where students have demonstrated significant academic growth. While the system used for rewards as outlined in that legislation provides incentives for moving all students to higher levels of achievement, the proposal outlined in the NCLB Growth Model Pilot Application will not allow high-performing students to compensate for lack of growth among other students. Overall the concept of measuring student growth is valued in Alaska by all stakeholders.

The legislation introduced in Alaska is built upon a system that will provide awards to school staff using a value table that takes into account progress of all students. While the methodology proposed within this application differs from the value table for rewards within the state, it is based on the same foundation of growth toward proficiency and is a valid indicator of school performance and improvement. Alaska has taken the time and utilized resources to create a technically sound system for measuring individual student growth as a measure of school achievement.

### **Accountability in Alaska**

Alaska has been making efforts to increase student achievement through strong accountability, inclusion of all students, making information public, and improving teacher quality for many years. The foundation of the school reform efforts leading to increased accountability and improved student achievement began in 1991. In 2002 Alaska began assessing students in grade 3 through 10, and used the assessments for school accountability, including adequate yearly progress designations. This year 41.2% of schools in the state did not meet adequate yearly progress. Alaska has worked hard to make sure school accountability meets the state and federal statutory requirements, thereby supporting NCLB as a system to further enhance student achievement.

***Ensuring that students are learning, including state efforts to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap.***

Alaska is closing the achievement gap. That conclusion is based on assessment results and analysis of the gap in performance between Caucasian and Alaska Native students. The new assessment system Alaska designed is more appropriate for students in the state. Items that are part of the custom-developed assessment are reviewed by Alaska educators for bias and sensitivity, and therefore the tool to assess students is uniquely designed to accurately measure Alaska student progress toward meeting the state's rigorous standards. The assessment is designed based on clear and very public targets, which every educator, parent, and policymaker can access. An assessment system that is an accurate measure of student achievement creates a valid system for closing the achievement gap.

Evidence that Alaska is closing the achievement gap can be seen in the statistics regarding school adequate yearly progress designations. Of the schools that were identified for not meeting adequate yearly progress, 13.7% did not meet AYP partly as a result of the performance of Alaska Native students this year as compared to 17.5% the previous year. Of the same schools, 13.7% did not meet AYP this year partly as the result of the performance of economically disadvantaged students as compared to 19.3% the previous year. Alaska is committed to raising overall achievement and closing the achievement gap.

***Ensuring school and district accountability for all students and subgroups, including annual testing in grades 3-8 and high school in reading/language arts and mathematics by this school year and reporting data on student achievement by subgroup.***

Alaska goes beyond the requirements of the law by testing students in ninth grade; therefore, Alaska is able to have an accountability system that incorporates growth for all school configurations. The assessment system used in Alaska is custom designed to assess student achievement of the Alaska standards as articulated in the grade level expectations in reading/writing (language arts) and mathematics. The new custom designed criterion-referenced assessments were first administered in April 2005 and will again be administered in April 2006. The results have been disaggregated and reported by major subgroup every year.

***Ensuring that information is accessible and parents have options, including information on school quality, providing accessible and understandable school and district report cards, identifying schools in need of improvement, and providing quality school choice options and supplemental educational services.***

Alaska produces school report cards that are posted on the state website under the Report Card to the Public link and maintains the documentation of adequate yearly progress designations. The website provides a detailed picture of the performance of each school, a list of schools meeting and not meeting adequate yearly progress, as well as a list of

schools that qualify for recognition. This information is made public in multiple genres, including a press release each August, information distributed to schools from the department, and in mailings to families from each school and LEA. The information hosted on the state website regarding school performance can be viewed at:

<http://www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/assessment/accountability.html>

Once schools are identified, the public needs to be aware of programs that involve school choice and supplemental services. Alaska posts information regarding this on the website and includes sample letters for districts to send to families regarding choice and supplemental services. School districts are monitored, and during that process the state receives assurances that choice, when available, and supplemental services are provided. Alaska has worked to ensure that supplemental services are available, which is no easy task in a state with school sites that are isolated and not connected to a road system. On the front page of the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development website is a link titled No Child Left Behind, which provides details for parents and educators. That site can be viewed at:

<http://www.eed.state.ak.us/nclb/home.html>

***Improving teacher quality, including a rigorous system to ensure that all teachers are highly qualified and parents and the public receive information on the quality of their local teaching force.***

Alaska is focused on school improvement, and all requirements under NCLB have been incorporated into state regulations. LEAs are required to notify parents of the highly qualified status of their teachers as prescribed in NCLB. These public/parent notification requirements are monitored by the SEA staff to ensure that all districts are in compliance.

The SEA has demonstrated leadership by working with schools to make information about highly qualified status and academic targets public and to support school improvement. The state has worked with each district to assure school improvement planning is done with clear targets focused on analyzing data and changing and improving student instruction in the classroom.

In addition to ensuring that NCLB teacher quality requirements are being implemented, the state is working to assure that students are taught by a highly qualified staff by implementing the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project for teachers and principals. The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development has a formal partnership with the University of Alaska to implement this mentoring project. The 2005-2006 school year is the second full year of implementation. Over half of the State's beginning teachers are being mentored by full-time mentors released from their current full-time teaching positions, based on the New Teacher Center's mentoring model that is housed at the University of California Santa Cruz. Thirty-six of our 53 school districts are participating in this project and the number is expected to increase in the 2006-2007 school year.

Alaska has completely overhauled its teacher certification program and requirements, including methods to assure that teachers are highly qualified to teach content and deliver

the instruction. Beginning in September 2006, teachers in Alaska will be required to demonstrate they know content and they know how to teach through a performance requirement within the teacher certification program. Teachers will be required to successfully complete the performance requirements before they are allowed to move from Tier I–Initial to Tier II–Professional Certification or into Tier III–Master Certification. The tiered licensure system will guarantee, along with the highly qualified information, that Alaska’s teachers are able to prepare students for successful achievement of the Alaska standards.

Additionally, the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development is working with all Alaska universities and colleges that have teacher preparation programs to develop a performance-based accreditation process for those programs.

### **Stakeholder Involvement**

In the past three years, Alaska adopted grade level expectations that are vertically aligned and assessments that measure similar, yet more sophisticated, content across grade levels. While developing this coherent standards and assessment system, the state has involved stakeholders in committees, which regularly provide feedback. Five hundred and seventy-one stakeholders have been involved in committees to establish the standards, review assessments, or have a role in the implementation of the assessment and accountability system within the past year. In a state where 8,130 teachers are employed in the public schools, that is significant involvement.

In 1998 the legislature passed, and the governor signed, legislation to put into statute a school accountability requirement and implementation of detailed and informative school report cards. As a result of this law, the state convened the Alaska Designator Committee to design an accountability system. That committee worked diligently to incorporate growth and status into a system to evaluate schools. The work of that committee has served as a foundation for the design of accountability and is at the core of this proposal to incorporate individual student growth into adequate yearly progress.

Alaska has involved the Assessment and Accountability Advisory Committee that represents stakeholders across the state to give early feedback into the concept of a growth model. Alaska has a national Technical Advisory Committee that has examined the growth model and guided the state in designing an assessment system that serves as a foundation for building a growth model.

### **Closing**

School accountability is important in Alaska. Measures of status and individual student growth are highly valued and viewed as a much more valid system. Twenty three percent of Alaska schools have three or fewer teachers and adding a measure that checks if students not proficient are on track to become proficient will add validity and credibility to the accountability system. Alaska has supported NCLB, particularly the focus that it has provided for improving student achievement.

The state legislature acted by adopting statutory language calling for accountability, and the State Board of Education has adopted language that regulates school accountability to meet both the state statute and NCLB. The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development has worked to create a coherent grade 3-10 assessment system that is vertical in nature for determining growth in achievement and aligned to the state standards. The assessment system serves as the foundation for measuring individual student growth. Alaska has a student identification system that is tested and will support the analysis necessary for success of this growth proposal.

Understanding if students are demonstrating growth and recognizing schools where individual student growth is occurring is a valid method to measure school improvement. It is not an easier method for meeting adequate yearly progress, and in fact may prove to be quite challenging. The proposal for incorporating growth is to provide better information regarding achievement of Alaska students, gain support from stakeholders, and raise the bar of accountability.