



MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS & PLANNING, INC.

**State Intervention in Underperforming
Local School Districts: The Case of Alaska**

**A Report Commissioned by the
Alaska Attorney General in the Case of
*Moore et al v State of Alaska***

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State Intervention in Underperforming Local School Districts: The Case of Alaska

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I. Executive Summary¹

Contemporary state-directed efforts to intervene productively in the operation of low performing Alaskan school districts (“target districts”) are:

1. *Likely, if sustained and reinforced over a sufficient period of time, to elevate student achievement in target districts*
2. *Consistent with (1) Alaska’s unique educational challenges, and (2) a two-decade trend of state-directed efforts to enhance Alaska’s public school effectiveness*
3. *Rational outcomes of planning deliberations, that included the setting of priorities and the contemplation of alternative reform strategies, undertaken within the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)*
4. *Applied to Alaskan target districts only after completion of an appropriate set of technical and professional appraisals identifying persistent and unacceptably low levels of local school district academic performance*
5. *A carefully crafted balance between a need for state intervention and the utility of preserving productive components of local district operational control*
6. *Productively aligned with what is known academically and what has been determined practically regarding effective education reform practices*
7. *Intended appropriately to elevate the instructional culture and instill a sense of positive professional efficacy within target districts, and enhance their long run internal capacity to address academic and other performance challenges*
8. *Capable of being implemented flexibly as needed in target local school district circumstances, including being capable of elevated intervention intensity, on the part of the state, should such eventually prove appropriate,*
9. *Mindful and accepting of local school district preferences for added instructional or reform elements*
10. *Part of a consciously constructed cycle of continuous improvement by which state intervention efforts can be corrected and repeatedly refined as needed*
11. *Worthy of continued legislative and judicial restraint in order to achieve the critical mass of local school district capacity and experience known to be needed to produce substantive education reform.*

¹ The following conclusions have been deduced from the resources and published materials to which subsequent reference is made in Section VII of this report. A more complete explanation of each point is offered in the Conclusion, Section VI.

II. Introduction

The purpose of the report is to:

- (1) Review the range of contemporary intervention strategies whereby state agencies seek to enhance the effectiveness of low performing local school districts, and
- (2) appraise Alaska's specific efforts in this regard.

This report pursues the above-specified purposes through the examination of evidence derived from appropriate research and professional publications, information gleaned from interviews with current and former Alaska state and local education officials and state contracted reform consultants, reading of relevant depositions and other trial related documents, and observations and data collected from personal visits to Arctic area Alaska school districts.

III. Context: Unique Education Alaskan Challenges and the Contemporary State Response

The modern world's complexity is a widely acknowledged fact of everyday life. The interactive consequences of electronic technology, Internet informational access and instant communication, global economic competition, geopolitical terror, ecological threats, and energy shortages are everywhere present and have woven a complex and inconsistent web of comfort and concern never before experienced on a comparable scale by humans.

A National Perspective

The United States is attempting to cope with this torrent of change in multiple ways, a major means of which is to elevate the educational attainment of its citizens. This quest involves a variety of tactics. Financial resources for schools are now at their highest point in history. Federal statutes have established elevated public school achievement expectations. State and federal accountability systems have ratcheted up the consequences for low performance in schools and districts. Experiments are taking place with various forms of market oriented educational operations intended to enhance the performance of schooling.

Never before in history has a large nation attempted to elevate the education level of virtually all of its citizens. However, two conditions pose daunting challenges to the success of this venture: (1) uncertainty regarding instruction and (2) pockets of cultural misalignment contributing to apathy or even antipathy regarding formal schooling.

Instructional Uncertainty

Little is known with scientific certainty regarding human learning and instruction. What class size optimizes achievement? What characterizes a successful teacher and how can these traits and behaviors be captured in policy? What is the appropriate sequence for math and science curricula? What performance incentives should characterize an education system? By what means can parents and communities be productively engaged in the process of schooling? How can modern electronic technology be harnessed to enhance instructional effectiveness?

This list could be extended, but the point would be the same. There exist daunting levels of uncertainty regarding the instructional process, and those who attempt to impose overly simple, silver bullet solutions, imperil the process even further.

The point of this recitation is not to provoke debilitating pessimism but to urge constructive caution.

In the face of policy uncertainty, the most appropriate strategy is to specify goals, encourage pursuit of diverse tactical solutions, incessantly measure progress toward success, quickly learn from failure, and reward success.

This is precisely what the Alaska DEED intervention strategy is designed to accomplish.

Cultural and Community Misalignment

Schools are a limited instrument in pursuing elevated individual and societal capacities. Even the most optimistic social science view ascribes only one third of the variation in students' academic achievement to the effectiveness of schools. Other factors such as cultural concern for schooling, individual genetic potential, parental education level, financial resources and commitment, neighborhood and peer group influence, and personal aspirations also strongly affect school outcomes.

Schools are most effective when there is a high coincidence of individual aspiration and ability, cultural reinforcement for formal learning, and parental, neighborhood, and peer group support for schools. When these conditions are insufficiently aligned, schools are at their weakest. In selected pockets, often in economically disadvantaged urban and rural areas of the United States, where these conditions are frequently unaligned, academic achievement is at its lowest and schools are the most challenged to achieve academic success with their students.

None of the foregoing is intended to imply that schools are powerless to affect student performance in such communities. Children do learn to read, write and

compute, but frequently at much lower levels than those in more advantaged communities.

Alaska's Unique Educational Challenges

All the uncertainties and misalignments that accompany education reform efforts throughout the United States apply at least equally in Alaska. However, Alaska has unique additional features that render the fashioning of an effective education system, and the intervention by the state in the operation of local schools, even more daunting. Among these conditions are the challenges of remote settlement, extreme diurnal cycles, and cultural misalignments that sometimes do not support academic achievement.

Environmentally Associated Challenges

Alaska is the only one of fifty states that categorizes its school systems as "On" or "Off" Road. Certainly other states have rural and remote areas. However, none experience a comparable scale of issues regarding districts that are accessible only by air or water and then only at limited times of the year. The long Arctic winter, with its short daylight periods, creates a living and schooling environment found nowhere else in the United States.²

Culturally Associated Challenges

Alaska's remote school districts are largely populated by Alaskan Natives whose cultures have evolved remarkably successful means for survival in inclement weather and remote circumstances. However, these peoples have not historically depended upon formal education as a means for cultural transmission. Hence, on occasions and in some communities, there are dysfunctional incompatibilities between Alaskan Native cultural expectations and the imperatives of Western style formal instruction.³

The foregoing description of contemporary education's overall challenges, and Alaska's unique conditions are not put forth as apology for persistent low academic achievement. Even in the face of adversity, schools and individual teachers and students can succeed.

However, the combination of these circumstances must be taken into account when fashioning education policy. Specifically, in the case of Alaska, a state intervention strategy must account for unique features such as geographic remoteness, scale diseconomies in small local school districts, communication

² The author often observed in Arctic area schools noticeable numbers of students who were sleep deprived and for whom administrators and teachers consciously condoned sleeping during the middle of the school day.

³ The author was present in Wales and Savoonga when, unpredictably by conventional United States education standards, schools were missing many students. This occurred in Wales when the death of a prominent community member prompted a sustained period of communal mourning. Similarly, the killing of a whale emptied the Savoonga school on NCLB test day.

difficulties, and, in some villages, long standing differences between Native Alaskan and Western European cultures.

Preceding Two Decades of Alaskan Efforts at Education Reform

A detailed depiction of recent Alaskan education reform efforts is provided in an official DEED publication entitled *History of Alaska School Reform: 1991–2002*.⁴

Suffice it here to emphasize the complete and coherent nature of those state policies and to assert, and subsequently to be demonstrated, that recently deployed state intervention policies appropriately rely upon and are a consistent extension of the late 20th and early 21st century state policies summarized below.

In the past two decades, Alaska has adopted these policies.

- State specified student learning objectives
- State student performance assessments linked to specified learning objectives
- Technical assistance to school professionals provided by local and state organizations
- Appropriate and related instructional materials
- Professional development opportunities
- Significant financial investment in public K-12 education
- Financial resources aimed at students most in need
- Rejection of the conventional link between school spending and student socioeconomic circumstances
- Sustained legislative consideration as a means for having a functioning feedback loop for continuous improvement

IV. State Interventions Generally

States have a long standing track record of intervening in school districts with financial and managerial problems. However, state intervention in school districts to remedy low academic performance is relatively recent. Moreover, results in this endeavor has been mixed. Such intervention is a key feature of NCLB, and as a consequence all 50 states are contemplating ways to improve the performance of schools and districts that cannot or will not reform on their own.

⁴ The author provided a more extensive discussion of recent Alaskan school reform efforts in his 2005 expert report submitted for the Moore case. That expert report is included in Appendix ii.

To date, there have been no reports of any state that has consistently and substantially reversed the trajectory of a significant portion of its low performing school.

In spite of substantial state and federal attention and funding, and many dedicated education professionals addressing intervention issues, why the apparent lack of success? At least a partial answer to this rhetorical question comes from Spreng (2005) who, in his RAND report on policy options for intervening in failing schools, observes:

The review of existing studies shows that relatively little is known about the impact of interventions on school performance. In particular, the comparative effectiveness of interventions, for example between moderate and strong interventions, is almost impossible to estimate with any degree of confidence. Studies of interventions indicate that turning around underperforming schools is very hard to do well. Success is not the norm and there is no particular intervention that is generally more successful than any other intervention.

One should not conclude that nothing is known about intervention in low performing schools or districts. Nor should one adopt uncritically any of the many purveyors of putative simple solutions. A claim that one or a package of interventions is the answer may be well intended, but in reality is naïve or disingenuous. If states knew with certainty how to reduce the number of or turn around low performing schools, at least one would have succeeded by now.

State education agencies are constrained in their ability to intervene successfully in low performing schools and districts. They operate in a hyper political environment and have to negotiate a consensus among diverse groups of stakeholders to gain support for any intervention strategy.

Spreng (2005) offers these additional views to reinforce understanding of the difficulties involved in state intervention:⁵

Just about everywhere it has been tried, reconstitution has raised the strong ire of local teachers unions.....

New Jersey has avoided taking over more underperforming districts because, having already assumed responsibility for three of the state's largest districts for an average of over 10 years [each], there is scant evidence that it has transformed these districts as originally envisioned. ...

⁵ Quoted from pages 43–46 of Spreng

Though interventions are typically applied in an escalating fashion, the full sequence, from mild to moderate, all the way to strong interventions is a rare occurrence. Interventions remain, more often than not, at the mild or moderate stage. With escalating interventions, the political costs increase in proportion to the intervention's disruptiveness. Strong interventions are seldom enforced because they carry large political costs and because their effectiveness is not beyond reproach. The hitch here is that strong interventions suffer from a lack of empirical evidence regarding their effectiveness, so that they are only tried in the most extreme circumstances, which in itself limits the possibility of collecting more empirical evidence.

Strong interventions always have high political costs. The preference for avoiding them demands the careful and realistic design of an escalating schedule of interventions that, once it is in place, should be adhered to.

To intervene precipitously or overly aggressively, invites unpleasant reactions from citizens, legislators and some times courts. A reform that is initiated, then stopped or redirected is often worse than no reform at all. States, such as Florida, North Carolina, and Texas, with strong records of successful reform are characterized by developing a strategy and adhering to it, changing only when feedback indicates a better tactic would be useful.

Even though schools and school districts are creatures of the state, all states, except Hawaii, have delegated authority for operating schools to local school districts. This may be an artifact of history, but even in modern time, maybe especially now, a strong case can be made that this mix of central and decentralized operation makes sense. Local boards, parents, and educators are more likely to be sensitive to the needs and unique characteristics of their students, and provide educational programs accordingly. Also, and more to the point of low performing schools, local communities are likely to resent interventions by outsiders, and given the geographic, and often cultural distance between local communities and state agencies, it is essential for any intervention strategy to permit local buy-in.

Short of replacing school board members, administrators, and teachers, it is unlikely that a state can force meaningful changes on local districts. Even with such sweeping changes, parents, students, and members of the community, resenting such heavy-handed action by the state, can often thwart efforts to improve student performance.

It is in this context that the Alaskan DEED intervention strategy should be evaluated. Impediments to strong interventions notwithstanding, Alaska is among a very few states that are more aggressively pursuing reform of under performing schools. In fact, Alaska is one of just eight states with an "extensive"

level of involvement in corrective action aimed at low performing districts (Fulton 2008). The remaining states' interventions were deemed moderate, minimal, or undetermined.

V. Alaska's State Intervention Specifics

When Alaskan state education department officials initiated their target district intervention planning,⁶ they were fully cognizant of the afore-mentioned contextual complexities, possible dysfunctional organizational dynamics, and potential political pitfalls accompanying any state issued prescriptions for local school district corrective action.⁷ Consequently, they went to considerable effort in designing interventions that were research based or practically proven, mutually reinforcing, and which were sensible in the Alaskan context. They were also careful to avoid an overly simple or overly intrusive correction action model.

As a result of these and similar considerations, Alaskan education officials crafted, and gained legislative authorization,⁸ to operate a multi pronged intervention plan that (1) balances state interests and local district strengths, (2) appropriately blends proven solutions with responsible experimental techniques, (3) responds to local district circumstances, (4) assists local districts in building their own long term internal capacity to confront performance challenges, (5) contains self correction mechanisms, and (6) holds the promise, if sustained over time, of significantly elevating student achievement in target districts.

Alaskan Individual Intervention Components

The following is a description of ten individual intervention components. However, a reader should understand that these separately described activities are intended to be reciprocally reinforcing and their likely effectiveness is dependent upon their being implemented as a whole and in a manner that permits them to derive maximum effectiveness from their interaction.

State Specified Learning Objectives

In 1992, Alaska initiated and formally adopted state specified learning standards. Thereafter, these were expanded by the provision of program guidelines and subsequently local districts were helped even more by the provision of grade level expectations. These specifications of what students should learn and be able to do are crucial to any state system of school district accountability and corrective action. These specifications are also crucial components of a system by which local districts can monitor their own school performance. "If one does not

⁶ DEED planning for so-called "Corrective Action," prompted by the No Child Left Behind Act requirements, was initiated in 2004. These plans were then yoked to the needs further requested by the Court in its 2006 trial decision. (Personal conversation with Roger Sampson)

⁷ Personal conversations with DEED officials Roger Sampson and Les Morse

⁸ Enrolled Senate Bill 285 and relevant regulations

know where he or she wants to go, then any route will suffice." State specified learning objectives overcome such indecision and supply direction and purpose.

Alaska's late 20th century efforts to specify learning objectives were reinforced by 2001 enactment of and related regulations flowing from the federal No Child Left Behind statute.

Objectively Appraising District Performance to Determine Intervention Targets

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development acted responsibly in the selection of target districts. Through use of school performance data resulting from the Alaskan Standards Based Assessment (SBA) system of standardized testing the Department was able to responsibly specify candidates for corrective action and then assemble additional indicators to determine those districts most badly in need of intervention. These systematic procedures, that came to be known as a "desk audit," avoided an intrusive shotgun approach of wasted action and resources and minimized the prospect of triggering unwarranted anxiety among local school districts.

On-Site Target District Instructional Appraisals

Local Districts that emerged as possible corrective action targets as a consequence of DEED Desk Audit procedures were subsequently subjected to intense on-site instructional appraisals by a team of state agency contracted professionals. These instructional audits, undertaken through procedures devised jointly with experts from federally funded Regional Laboratories and Teacher Quality resources centers, served to isolate and pinpoint district and school deficiencies. Vetted versions of the instructional audits were then provided to target district officials.⁹ These reports served as an informational basis for the next step in the intervention process, construction of a DEED-District jointly designed school improvement plan. While the instruments and procedures for the Instructional Audit were works in progress, they are based on research and consistent with practices observed in other states and employed by Regional Laboratories and other agencies.

DEED-District Cooperatively Constructed Instructional Improvement Plans

Following completion of local district on-site Instructional audits, DEED officials conferred extensively with local district administrators to construct corrective action plans tailored to appraisal findings, district circumstances, and district preferences. The resulting district improvement plan then serves as an agreed upon basis for district action and provides criteria by which DEED can assess district progress. The practice of requiring schools and districts to develop improvement plans is almost universally accepted as a necessary, if not seldom a

⁹ Instructional Audit results provided to district officials were vetted to protect the confidentiality of interview respondents.

sufficient, precondition to instructional improvement. DEED's insistence that the plans focus on instructional improvement is supported in research and practice.

Performance Data Analysis Systems

Effective instruction is crucially contingent upon the availability and teacher use of a continuous flow of appraisal information regarding individual student performance. By providing target districts with access to formative assessment tools and strategies, such as AIMSweb, ACFA (Alaskan Computerized Formative Assessment) and RTI (Response to Intervention), and ensuring that local district teachers and principals have an understanding of the use of such tools, the DEED is facilitating a local target district transition to diagnostically driven and personalized instruction. Formative assessment driven instruction is based on research and consistent with the best information available, an essential element of improved instructional practice.

DEED provided Superintendent and Principal Training

The Alaskan DEED has designated professional training resources specifically aimed at enabling corrective action target district principals and superintendents to become knowledgeable regarding effective use of student performance formative assessment data. The objective in this instance is to facilitate moving their schools and instructional staff toward diagnostically oriented classroom instruction that is tailored for individual students. The critical role of instructional leaders in supporting school reform is well established in research and practice.

Mandated Collaborative School Level Conversations

This is a catalytic component of the overall DEED intervention strategy. It is a component the significance of which too easily can be overlooked. It is this component that is particularly crucial to the formation of professionally oriented school learning communities focused upon instruction and continuous instructional improvement.

Diagnostically driven individualized instruction depends crucially upon the above-mentioned formative assessment tools (e.g., AIMSweb). In addition, it benefits from instructors having easy access to other informed professionals with whom they can routinely interact, test their diagnoses, and seek either affirmation of their "treatment" ideas or additional ideas. The mandated collaborative conversations ask local school teachers regularly to interact with each other in a collective effort to improve instruction, construct remedial strategies for individual or groups of students, and reinforce each others' and a principal's efforts to create a productive school culture.

It may be that mandated collaborative conversations are the element that is the glue that holds together the entire reform effort at the school. Contrary to the

claims of some of the Plaintiff's experts, it is unlikely that all of the teachers in the intervention schools are devoid of skills, experience, or ideas. The collaboration meetings are a structured forum for faculty to build on existing abilities, and discover where additional skills or knowledge are needed. It is largely this process that facilitates the transition from a state imposed process into a local plan to improve instruction for local children.

DEED Provided Professional Coaches

State provided coaches link DEED with individual target districts and provide a conduit for a reciprocal flow of ideas and information. Also, the provision of district coaches sets the stage for a system of continuous improvement whereby, regardless of whether a district succeeds or misfires, the next intervention step can be carefully tailored to evolving local circumstances.

The role of coaches is a sensitive one. Too much power, and they can alienate local educators and citizens, too little and they will lack necessary influence as they interact with local district teachers and administrators. However, it appears that DEED has struck the correct beginning balance in providing an independent, external resource to assist local leaders critically evaluate local progress, and to acquire additional resources.

State Uniform Standards Based Assessments

The Alaska state-administered annual assessments, linked to state specified student and grade level learning expectations, provide a continuous learning feed back loop needed to ensure that an intervention plan remains on course. It also serves as the basis from which the state accountability system can be employed to ensure responsible action by local district school officials.

Legislative Oversight

DEED reporting to the Alaskan Legislature, even if at no time other than during budget hearings, serves at least a twofold purpose. Legislative oversight offers an opportunity to the department to report on its corrective action progress and to seek added administrative authority or financial resources, should either be called for. Also, cyclical engagement with the legislature offers yet another mechanism by which the entire intervention apparatus is part of a cycle of continuous improvement.

VII Conclusions

The following conclusions are derived from a thorough consideration of the aforementioned education reform factors and the information resources recounted in the subsequent section of this report.

Conclusions and Their Support

Contemporary state directed efforts to intervene productively in the operation of low performing Alaskan school districts (“target districts”) are:

1. *Likely, if sustained and reinforced over a sufficient period of time, to elevate student achievement in target districts.*

Whereas there is little experimental evidence for any specific intervention component, or any aggregate of intervention actions, all the Alaskan corrective action steps are consistent with best practices among the 50 states, and appear logically appropriate and practically consistent in the Alaskan context.

The most important next step is to permit sufficient time to pass to give the presently operating activities a chance to succeed. It takes time to turn around low performing schools and districts, and the path of improvement is rarely straight. It is reasonable to expect an uneven upward performance trajectory over the next five to seven years.

2. *Consistent with (1) Alaska's unique educational challenges, and (2) a two-decade long trend of state-directed efforts to enhance Alaskan public schools effectiveness.*

For almost two decades, Alaska's DEED has been constructing reform scaffolding to facilitate transformation of the state's public school systems. These state-directed intervention steps, involving the specification of learning objectives and the design and implementation of a statewide standardized achievement assessment system, have been carefully tailored to Alaska's unique environmental and cultural circumstances. The ten previously described target district corrective action plan components build upon these state specific accountability platforms.

3. *Rational outcomes of planning deliberations, that included the setting of priorities and the contemplation of alternative reform strategies, undertaken within the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED).*

DEED planning, initially required for NCLB compliance, also is consistent with the additional needs specified by the court for added intervention in low performing local school districts. This planning took into account a wide range of possible alternative actions and eventually resulted in a ten component coherent corrective action strategy well suited for Alaska.

4. *Applied to Alaskan target districts only after completion of an appropriate set of technical and professional appraisals identifying persistent and unacceptably low levels of local school district academic performance.*

The DEED relied upon appropriate and thorough appraisal steps that resulted in a set of target local school districts most in need of corrective action. These appraisals involved both analyses of district and school performance data and on-site interviews and observations of candidate target districts.

5. *A carefully crafted balance between a need for state intervention and the utility of preserving productive components of local district operational control.*

Alaska environmental and cultural circumstances necessitate a unique blend of centralized state direction and decentralized local school district implementation of reform procedures. The planning basis for this blend of reform actions is the district improvement plan constructed collaboratively between DEED and local school district officials.

6. *Productively aligned with what is known academically and what has been determined practically regarding effective education reform practices.*

Even given that there is virtually no extensive experimental evidence for education reform, the Alaska ten point plan is consistent with what is known empirically and practically. For example, for twenty years, the efficacy of having state learning standards and state assessments has been evident from the statewide successes of school systems in Florida, Massachusetts, and Texas. Moreover, diagnostically-driven individualized instruction, a major Alaska reform plan objective, is a clear logical link to elevated student academic achievement.

7. *Intended appropriately to elevate the instructional culture and instill a sense of positive professional efficacy within target districts, and enhance their long run internal capacity to address academic and other performance challenges.*

Alaska's corrective action plan is among the best of states in its emphasis upon elevating the instructional capacity and contributing to an added sense of self-efficacy of low performing schools in target districts. The provision of achievement analysis capacity (e.g., AIMSweb) and the mandated professional collaborative conversation are important components of good instruction, components that target districts should long ago have had in place. By requiring these actions now, the DEED is appropriately providing guidance in assisting the district in meeting its responsibilities.

8. *Capable of being implemented flexibly as needed in target local school district circumstances, including being capable of elevated intervention intensity, on the part of the state, should such eventually prove appropriate.*

The Alaskan DEED corrective action plan has an appropriate open ended feature. It can be altered better to fit local district circumstances or even amended to accommodate a greater state role.

9. *Mindful and accepting of local school district preferences for added instructional or reform elements.*

A target district can request that in its DEED approved improvement plan, the cooperatively constructed mechanism that serves as a template for intervention efforts can be revised and if determined to be appropriate either the district can

supplement its efforts with its own resources or the state can provide added assistance.

10. Part of a consciously constructed cycle of continuous improvement by which state intervention efforts can be corrected and repeatedly refined as needed,

At virtually every step in the DEED corrective action process, there is an opportunity to redirect what is to follow. If a district does not appear to be sufficiently low performing, then as a result of various appraisal activities, it is not placed on the intervention list. Once on the target list, then a local district is asked collaboratively to design the specifics of its own intervention plan. If such a plan eventually proves insufficient, it can be altered. There are plentiful provisions for local district contributions to the corrective action. The DEED provision of professional development and coaching certainly allows for continued monitoring of local district performance and alteration or augmentation, should such be needed.

11. Worthy of continued legislative and judicial restraint in order to achieve the critical mass of local school district capacity and experience known to be needed to produce substantive education reform.

The Alaskan corrective action plan is rationally derived, appropriately targeted, consistent with the state of the intervention art, flexible in its implementation, mindful of Alaskan unique circumstances, accommodating of possible future needs, and highly likely to bear fruit, eventually. Every shred of evidence from other settings testifies to the fact that intervention efforts are time consuming. One cannot continually pull plants from the ground to appraise how well they are growing without damaging their prospects. Similarly, the DEED reform plan is in need of and deserving of a substantial period of undisturbed trial.

Concluding Observation

It is relatively easy for a remote expert, or those who are targets of state corrective action, to be critical of the Alaskan DEED's strategy. Academics and educators often specialize in criticizing the plans and efforts of others. Moreover, those subject to the yoke of mandated change can be particularly critical of those in higher authority. However, the author knows from personal experience that implementing programs at the state level is often more complex and difficult than are such actions in a school district.

There frequently are more powerful stakeholders at the state level who can affect policy, and a state director has inherently less operational authority than a district superintendent. It is altogether more difficult to implement a program in the rough and tumble of the real world. Implementers have to deal with competing interests, lack of scientific knowledge to guide actions, resistance from various stakeholders, and an abundance of options without any clear right choice.

DEED has made thoughtful, rational, good faith choices and moved forward in this environment. For example, the desk audit is a thorough and data driven undertaking. Here, as in other places, DEED has made rational choices that are as at least good as those in other states and better than many. Implementation may be uneven, but DEED is learning, modifying based on evaluation and feedback. It is very likely that they will get better as they go forward unless unduly redirected by an external force.

As is known from successful reforms in other states, staying the course is essential. It would be a pity in Alaska to permit pursuit of a perfect policy to prevail over that which is presently possible and practically sensible.

VIII. RESOURCES

Research Publications

- Angrist, J. & Guryan, J. (2003). *Does teacher testing raise teacher quality? Evidence from state certification requirements.* Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Boyd, D., Goldhaber, D., Lankford, H., & Wyckoff, J. (2007). The Effect of Certification and Preparation on Teacher Quality. *Future of Children.* 17(1), 45-68.
- Boyd, D., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., Rockoff, J., & Wyckoff, J. (2008). *The narrowing gap in New York City teacher qualifications and its implications for student achievement in high-poverty schools.* Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
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- Clotfelter, C.T., Ladd, H.F., & Vigdor, J.L. (2007). *How and why do teacher credentials matter for student achievement?* Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Fulton, Mary. (2008). Analysis of State Policies for Districts in Corrective Action under NCLB. Education Commission of the States.
- Glazerman, S., Mayer, D., & Decker, P. (2006). Alternative routes to teaching: the impacts of Teach for America on student achievement and other outcomes. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management.* 25(1), 75-96.
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- Kane, T. J., Rockoff, J. E., & Staiger, D. O. (2007). Photo Finish: Certification Doesn't Guarantee a Winner. *Education Next.* 7(1), 60-67.
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- Walsh, K. (2002). Positive Spin: The Evidence for Teacher Certification, Reexamined. *Education Next.* 2(1), 79-84.

Walsh, K. (2001). *Teacher Certification Reconsidered: Stumbling for Quality. A Rejoinder*. Baltimore, MD: Abell Foundation.

Walsh, K. (2001). *Teacher Certification Reconsidered: Stumbling for Quality*. Baltimore, MD: Abell Foundation.

Other Publications

History of Alaska School Reform 1991 – 2002 (DEED May 2002)

Recent Legislation

Senate Bill 285 and accompanying regulations

Trial Related Materials

Trial Exhibits

Defendants 2510 Desk Audit

Defendants 2513 Instructional Audit

Plaintiff Reports

Expert Report submitted by Linda Darling-Hammond (EdD)

Expert Report Submitted by John A. Davis

Depositions

John Davis

Norman Eck

Carol Doyle

Diane V. George

Jim Hickerson

John Lamont

Gary Whiteley

Evidentiary Hearing Transcripts

June 9, 2008

June 10, 2008

June 11, 2008

Interviews

Paul Prussing, August 1, 2008

Les Morse, August 7, 2008

Gary Whiteley, August 18, 2008

Roger Sampson, August 12, 2008

Personal Visits to Alaska Artic Area Off-Road Local School Districts

Akiak

Aniak Auntie Mary

Aniak Secondary

Kasigluk

Chevak

Koyuk

White Mountain

Savoonga

Wales

Kivilina

Wainwright