

A broad overview of education issues in Alaska, both university and K-12, urban and rural, was presented to the University of Alaska Board of Regents when it met in Kenai in April.

University teacher education and preparation programs have been a high priority for several years because of the shortage of teachers nationally and in Alaska, and because of changing requirements for accreditation and the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation.

Dave Veazey, assistant to the vice president for academic affairs, told the board that the revisions to university teacher education programs that were approved last year are well aligned with the needs for National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation and the requirements of NCLB.

Across the state, Veazey said, data indicates that K-12 schools and districts with high teacher turnover tend also to have lower student performance. "The schools in Alaska that are not making 'adequate yearly progress' according to NCLB are typically rural, small in size and average student body that is 96 percent Alaska Native," he said. "This trend is typical of the rest of the nation where high poverty, high minority schools have less experienced teachers and lower student achievement."

Regents were presented with various policy-level strategies that other states have employed to try to bridge this "achievement gap." These strategies included higher quality teacher preparation, beginning teacher induction and mentoring, incentives for teacher learning, professional development aligned with standards and relevant to the classroom along with higher teacher salaries and the creation of strong university/K-12 partnerships such as professional development schools.

Each of these strategies is a component in addressing the demands of both NCATE accreditation and NCLB compliance. NCATE demands that education faculty collaborate with arts and sciences faculty to ensure both the content knowledge and pedagogy of teaching various content areas is exposed to teacher candidates. In other words, NCATE forces schools and Colleges of Education to be accountable for the content knowledge of their graduates. This complements the requirements of NCLB that ask for a demonstration of

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in small rural villages that have only a few teachers or, perhaps, only one. Alaska is not set up structurally to respond to these requirements under the current school system. Finding qualified teachers who want to teach and stay in rural Alaska

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