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**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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State to Award Digital Teaching Initiative Grants

JUNEAU – The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development will award grants to four school districts to strengthen instruction through digital teaching and learning, both within their districts and across district boundaries.

The Digital Teaching Initiative grants were proposed by Gov. Parnell and enacted and funded by the legislature in the past session. They will provide funding for three years beginning in fiscal year 2015.

“This is an opportunity to strengthen 21st century best practices in Alaska and provide greater access to high-quality teachers and content for more of our Alaskan students,” Alaska Education Commissioner Mike Hanley said.

The Digital Teaching Initiative is designed to deliver high-quality interactive distance courses to middle and high school students; increase student access to a diverse array of courses; empower teachers to reach beyond their own classrooms; train teachers; and expand school districts’ infrastructure, technology, and staffing. The initiative promotes students’ preparation for career training, college, and the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS).

The department will award grants to four school districts, each of which is partnering with other school districts.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District will receive an \$819,915 grant and is partnering with the Bristol Bay Borough School District and the Cordova City School District.

The grant is intended to increase distance-delivered math, science, and Advanced Placement courses; train and evaluate teachers for best practices in online and blended instruction; create support services; codify best practices; and conduct replication studies in the Bristol Bay and Cordova school districts. Blended instruction refers to courses that are partly in-person and partly online.

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The Copper River School District will receive a \$652,053 grant and will focus its partnering on small, remote districts.

The grant is intended to expand access to high-quality, APS-eligible courses, including dual-credit high school/university coursework and innovative college- and career-focused elective courses through True North Academy Online, an online high school that dovetails with a planned variable-length residential educational program.

The Kodiak Island Borough School District will receive an \$890,260 grant and is partnering with the Pribilof, Lower Kuskokwim, Lower Yukon, Northwest Arctic, Lake and Peninsula, Nome, St. Mary's, and Annette Island school districts.

The grant is intended to increase student engagement and academic performance in core content areas with an emphasis in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM); increase life-literacy skills; enhance and expand online delivery models; and create a network of well-trained online educators.

The Ketchikan Borough School District will receive an \$837,744 grant and is partnering with the Craig, Annette Island, Klawock, Hydaburg, and Southeast Island school districts to create Alaska Digital Academies.

The grant is intended to provide an online enrollment portal to high-quality interactive courses for middle and high school students taught by highly qualified teachers who are proficient in distance technology and who understand alternative forms of education. Students will have access to teachers throughout the school day, after school hours, and when school is not in session. Students will regularly demonstrate mastery through performance-based assessments, assessments during the unit or course, and end-of-unit or -course assessments. Educators will use student assessment results to support interventions that increase student success.

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