

STANDARD 4: A School System Uses the Results from System-Designed and/or -Adopted Assessments to Adjust, Improve, or Terminate Ineffective Practices or Programs.

A school system meeting this audit standard has designed a comprehensive system of assessment/testing and uses valid measurement tools that indicate how well its students are achieving designated priority learning goals and objectives. Common indicators are:

- A formative and summative assessment system linked to a clear rationale in board policy,
- Knowledge, local validation, and use of current curricular and program assessment best practices,
- Use of a student and program assessment plan which provides for diverse assessment strategies for varied purposes at all levels -- district, school, and classroom,
- A way to provide feedback to the teaching and administrative staffs regarding how classroom instruction may be evaluated and subsequently improved,
- A timely and relevant data base upon which to analyze important trends in student achievement,
- A vehicle to examine how well specific programs are actually producing desired learner outcomes or results,
- A database to compare the strengths and weaknesses of various programs and program alternatives, as well as to engage in equity analysis,
- A database to modify or terminate ineffective educational programs,
- A method/means to relate to a programmatic budget and enable the school system to engage in cost-benefit analysis, and
- Organizational data gathered and used to continually improve system functions.

A school system meeting this audit standard has a full range of formal and informal assessment tools that provide program information relevant to decision-making at classroom, building (principals and school-site councils), system, and Board levels.

A school system meeting this audit standard has taken steps to ensure that the full range of its programs is systematically and regularly examined. Assessment data have been matched to program objectives and are used in decision-making.

What the Auditors Expected to Find in the Anchorage School District

The auditors expected to find a comprehensive assessment program for all aspects of the curriculum, pre-K through the twelfth grade, which:

- Was keyed to a valid, officially adopted, and comprehensive set of goals/objectives of the school district,
- Was used extensively at the site-level to engage in program review, analysis, evaluation, and improvement,
- Was used by the policy-making groups in the system and the community to engage in specific policy review for validity and accuracy,
- Became the foci and basis of formulating short- and long-range plans for continual improvement,
- Was used to establish cost and select needed curriculum alternatives, and
- Was publicly reported on a regular basis in terms that were understood by the key stakeholders in the community.

Overview of What the Auditors Found in the Anchorage School District

This section is an overview of the findings that follow in the area of Standard Four. The details follow within separate findings.

The auditors found in the Anchorage School District evidence of personnel capacity for sophisticated data analysis. *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001* provides extensive data tables and analysis organized to provide district-wide and individual school student achievement data and survey results. The Student Management System (SMS) provides reports for principals by student, classroom, or school-wide regarding achievement and other data.

Board members, some central office, and school administrators were actively seeking data regarding student achievement and program evaluation. This is particularly so in the area of early literacy. Board policy requires the assessment of student achievement. However, data results were not explicitly linked to a comprehensive set of objectives of the school district. There was a lack of evidence of a systematic, systemic use of data. Schools also were not systematically provided with some key data and training on how to use that data in evaluating student achievement to determine how well each school was meeting the needs of each of its student subpopulations. Data were not always provided in a timely manner, and at least one department outside of the Assessment and Evaluation Department is becoming a source for data gathering and dissemination, which creates the potential for the introduction of errors and confusion in data reporting.

While there is evidence of some pockets of units within Anchorage School District where data are used to adjust instructional programs and teaching, there was not a common understanding or use of terminology by personnel interviewed. For example, different speakers referring to the use of “disaggregated data” gave the term a wide variance of meaning.

Many district staff members are proud of Anchorage School District achievement data, but others acknowledge that there is a need to move to the next level to meet the needs of all children. While test scores exceed state averages, there is a consistent group of students that is not sharing that success. Performance gaps will persist unless the district takes new action. Some staff members interviewed minimized flat test scores by pointing out the changing demographics of the district. However, the district has the capacity and opportunity to reshape its practices to meet the needs of all of its student sub-populations and to change the achievement scores to a positive trend line for all while narrowing and eventually eliminating the achievement gap.

While board policy requires evaluation of pilot programs, there is no systematic, comprehensive plan for assessing whether a program or approach is worth the expenditure of budget and staff resources in terms of student growth. No formal plan was presented to the auditors to indicate that Anchorage School District has a strategy in place to examine, modify, replicate, or eliminate a program based on data. Lack of staffing makes it impossible to conduct cost-benefit analysis of programs.

Finding 4.1: Anchorage School District Test Scores Are Above State Averages; However, Scores Have Been Nearly Flat for Five Years. The Scope of Assessment Is Not Adequate. An Analysis of Achievement Gaps Between Majority/Minority Students Shows Some Progress, But Other Areas Remain Unchanged or Worsening. Ratios of “Years to Parity” Show that at the Current Rate Some Gaps Will Take from One to 26 Years to be Closed, and Some Indicate that There Is Little Hope for Closure.

Student assessment data allow district personnel and stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum and classroom instructional methodologies in terms of academic achievement. Data also provide valuable feedback to decision-makers regarding the need for a change in focus or other modifications that need to be made in curriculum content or classroom practice to maximize academic achievement for individual students and groups of students. Where large gaps in achievement scores

exist, central office and school staff members need to use the data to examine existing programs and make systematic, focused changes to close the gap within a reasonable amount of time.

Meaningful decisions about curriculum and instructional processes can only be made when a comprehensive set of student achievement data is available in each subject area that comprises the curriculum. An effective assessment program requires that the major objectives in each subject area be assessed at each grade level. Without this information, the Board, district decision-makers, teachers, students, and the community cannot be adequately apprised of the status of the educational programs provided by the district.

The auditors examined district policy, assessment procedures, Anchorage School District student achievement data, and other documents furnished for our review regarding requirements for student assessment, the scope of curriculum to be assessed, and student achievement on district-wide assessments. The following excerpts express performance expectations found in policy, as well as expectations for student learning and assessment.

Board Policy 144 Expectations for Performance states, “The Board shall adopt and periodically review expectations for performance of the instructional program of the district, including statements of instructional goals, priorities among instructional goals, expectations for student achievement, and short- and long-range goals for instructional improvement.”

Board Policy 349 Evaluation states, “Evaluation shall be for the purpose of instructional improvement. Evaluation of the school program is an administrative function and shall be conducted annually in priority goal areas. The results shall be reported to the Board and the public. To effectively appraise educational progress the Superintendent shall report orally and in writing to the Board as circumstances dictate and may require such periodic reports from state members.”

Board Policy 341.1 Course of Studies states, “The secondary courses will include language arts, social studies, mathematics, science, world languages, career technology, fine arts, physical education, and health. Additional electives in the middle schools may be offered, pending approval of the Middle School Executive Director. A Program of Studies book for each level will be published annually and describe the curricular offerings.

“The elementary curriculum shall include language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, art, health, music, physical education, and library skills.”

Board Policy 343.1 Grading System states, “The Superintendent shall be responsible for a student evaluation system. Schools may request waivers from the Superintendent to allow use of alternative evaluation systems. The teacher has the responsibility to determine grades within the approved system. An appeal of a grade may be made to the principal.”

Board Policy 343.2 Reports states, “A progress report to students and parents is required on a quarterly basis. This requirement may be satisfied with either a written report or a parental conference. Results from standardized tests for grades 3 through 11 shall be provided on an annual basis to parents. An attempt shall be made to notify parents and students of their academic progress and/or failing grades at each mid-quarter of the school year.”

Board Policy 343.23 Retention states, “Recommendations for retention will be based upon the student’s age, achievement, social, physical, and mental development. The recommendation may be initiated by the teacher or parent. Parents will be informed by the end of the first semester of a possible retention through a parent conference. The principal must consult with the parent before making the final determination.”

Board Policy 343.25 High School Graduation states, “High school students must complete the district’s required coursework and pass state required examinations to graduate and receive a diploma. Students who complete the district’s graduation requirements but do not pass the state-required High School Graduation Qualifying Examination or special education students who exit the public school

system at or before their twenty-second birthday without successfully completing the above, will receive a Certificate of Attendance.”

Board Policy 343.41 (6) (e) states, “Students who graduate in 2002 and beyond must pass all three sections of the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) prior to receiving a diploma; failure to pass all three sections will lead to a certificate of attendance (AS 14.03.075).”

In addition to the board policy statements cited above, the Anchorage School District has goal statements that appear in both published materials and on the district website. Among these are the following statements relating to assessment:

District website Mission and the Anchorage School District 2002-02 Preliminary Financial Plan p. I-5 states, “We, the Anchorage School Board, Superintendent, and district staff commit that:

1. “Students will demonstrate academic excellence as indicated by performance on state and district measures of academic performance. All students will make progress toward meeting Anchorage and State Benchmarks for reading, writing, and math. Performance will be assessed on:
 - a. Alaska Benchmark Exams (grades 3-6-8)
 - b. Terra Nova Basic Skills Exams (grades 4, 5, 7, and 9)
 - c. Anchorage Writing Assessment (grades 5-7-9)
 - d. Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam

These various assessments will provide information on the status of student group performance at grade levels 3-10.”

2. “A higher percentage of students will acquire basic skills and strategies to read independently by the end of third grade as indicated by:
 - Meeting the Alaska standard for performance on the grade three Alaska Benchmark Reading Exam.
 - Teacher Assessment. Teacher pre- and post-assessment using a variety of measures as well as teacher observation and judgment will be used.”
3. “A higher percentage of students will demonstrate a high level of math skills at the end of each grade level in grades 3 through 10. Performance will be assessed based on:
 - The percentage of students meeting state standards in mathematics as indicated on Alaska Benchmark Examinations, Terra Nova, and the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam will increase.
 - The percentage of students who have been successful in completing Algebra 1 in grade 8, geometry in grade 9, and Algebra 2 in grade 10 will increase. Grades earned in each class will also be reported. Student grades and credits earned by students in algebra classes for each middle and high school will be reported by student grade level.
 - The district will continue to develop and implement training in math content and teaching strategies for elementary and middle school teachers.
 - The district will work with student, parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, and community representatives to increase expectations for elementary, middle, and high school math.”
4. “All students will demonstrate a high level of spelling skills or growth in spelling at the end of each grade level in grades 2 through 10.
 - The number of students achieving proficiency in the conventions of writing (spelling, punctuation, capitalization usage) will increase as measured by the Alaska Student Assessment system in grades 3-10 and the Anchorage School District Writing Assessment in grades 5, 7, and 9....”

The Anchorage School District's *No Child Left Behind Federal Programs Integrated Project Application* for School Year 2002-2003 sets a goal for two percent of LEP students to improve their performance on the Benchmarks from "not/below proficient" to "proficient/above proficient."

The cited documents reveal that there is policy requiring the Board to review performance expectations for the instructional program of the district and to set expectations for student achievement. Policy sets instructional improvement as the purpose of evaluation and requires periodic reports on evaluation of school programs. Required course offerings are listed in board policy. Policy assigns responsibility for the student evaluation systems and alternate systems to the superintendent, and requires progress reports to parents. Policy requires students to complete required coursework and pass all three sections of the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination to receive a diploma. The goals set for improvement, while specific in content areas, are not specific in expectations for improvement. The Anchorage School District's *No Child Left Behind Federal Programs Integrated Project Application* sets a specific, but low goal of two percent of LEP students to improve their performance on the Benchmark tests.

In interviews with board members, central office, school staff, and parents, the following representative comments regarding the scope of assessment and level of achievement were shared:

- "I think we're over tested."
- "We don't do nearly as much 'results based' assessment as we should."
- "It's hard to measure what progress we are making. We haven't had a clear benchmark."
- "It's always bothered me that when a curriculum is brought to us the assessments haven't been thought through. So often that gets put aside. That's not an integral component of it."
- "Despite the growth in free and reduced (lunch) and mobility, our scores stay steady, so that is progress."
- "Absolute performance at the lower grades has improved."
- "We have kids in every school who are not achieving."
- "Our scores need to improve. That is one of our weaknesses."

Comments from board members, central office, school staff, and parents indicate awareness of student achievement as an area needing improvement; however, there is concern about the amount of testing and whether the data generated by testing are providing users clear information.

The auditors sought to determine the extent to which the curriculum areas being taught were being tested. Board policy confirms the administration of state required tests of the Alaska Benchmark Exams in grades 3, 6, and 8; the Terra Nova Basic Skills Exams in grades 4, 5, 7, and 9, and the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE). Additionally, it requires an Anchorage Writing Assessment in the years prior to the Alaska Benchmark Exams (grades 5, 7, and 9). The auditors examined the following documents for information about the testing program required by the district and the state:

- *Anchorage School District Profiles of Performance 2000-2001.*
- *Teacher's Guide to the Alaska Benchmark Examination (grade 3 pages 7-8 and 135-136, grade 6 pages 7-8, grade 8 pages 7-8)* (2001) published by the Alaska's Department of Education and Early Development.
- *District Test Coordinator's Manual Spring 2002, pages 1- 3*, published for the State of Alaska by CTB McGraw-Hill.
- *Anchorage School District Title I Program document dated 5/17/2002* presenting descriptions of optional Title I assessments and examples of data use by several schools. In the examples presented, data disaggregation was by gender and LEP status only.

Exhibit 4.1.1 lists the tests administered in the Anchorage School District required by the State of Alaska as part of the Alaska Comprehensive System of Student Assessments. According to the State of Alaska, this program is to provide ongoing information about performance on the Alaska reading, writing, and mathematics performance standards.

Exhibit 4.1.1		
Descriptions of Alaska-required Assessments (Information derived from: <i>Teacher's Guide to the Alaska Benchmark Examination (Grade 3, Grade 6, Grade 8)</i> (2001) and <i>District Test Coordinator's Manual Spring 2002</i>) Anchorage School District		
Student Assessment	Grade(s) Administered	Description
Developmental Profile	Kindergarten and entering Grade 1	Teachers record students' developmental readiness using 11 indicators and record background characteristics in three areas.
Benchmark Assessment	Grade 3 (Benchmark 1) Grade 6 (Benchmark 2) Grade 8 (Benchmark 3)	Untimed, proficiency-based, criterion-referenced test developed specifically for Alaska to measure whether students are achieving state-wide academic standards in reading, writing, and math. There are three types of questions: multiple choice, constructed response, and extended constructed response. Students demonstrate one of four different levels of performance on each subject area test: advanced, proficient, below proficient, and not proficient. Individual API performance scores that show placement within the categories are also provided by the state.
Terra Nova, The Second Edition, CAT Complete Battery Plus	Grades 4, 5, 7, and 9	Norm-referenced test to provide information about how well students in Alaska compare with students nationally. Each district is required to test reading and language arts, vocabulary, language mechanics, mathematics computation, and mathematics. Anchorage also has chosen to administer the optional remaining subtests of spelling, science, and social studies.
High School Graduation Qualifying Examination	First offered to students in spring of grade 10. Students can continue taking until they pass all three parts. Offered again twice a year in grades 11 and 12, and twice a year for up to 3 years after completion of high school.	Untimed, proficiency-based, criterion-referenced test developed specifically for Alaska to measure whether students are achieving state-wide academic performance standards in reading, writing, and mathematics. There are three types of questions: multiple choice, constructed response, and extended constructed response. Each student demonstrates one of four different levels of performance on each subject area test: advanced, proficient, below proficient, and not proficient.

- There is a state-level assessment when students first enter the system in kindergarten or grade 1.
- There is state-level required testing in reading, writing, and mathematics in grades 3 through 10.
- State-level required testing in grades 3, 6, 8, and the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) are criterion-referenced to state-determined performance benchmarks in reading, writing, and mathematics.
- Data are available from the state to show how well a student scored on a benchmark test as well as which one of four category rankings is merited by that score.

- State-level required testing in grades 4, 5, 7, and 9 is norm-referenced and concentrates on reading, language arts, and mathematics. Auditors did not receive documents that indicated if or how the state or district explicitly connects the norm-referenced test to its content standards.
- Anchorage School District has chosen to include the science and social studies portion of the norm-referenced test.
- High school students have five opportunities to pass all sections of the HSGQE to graduate with their class.
- Students must be able to answer multiple choice, constructed response, and extended constructed response competently.

In addition to the required state testing program, Exhibit 4.1.2 *Anchorage School District Assessments*, describes tests not required by the State of Alaska, but used by the Anchorage School District to make instructional and placement decisions.

Exhibit 4.1.2 District Assessments (Information from the <i>Profiles of Performance 2001</i> , p. 4) Anchorage School District		
Student Assessment	Grade(s) Administered	Description
Anchorage Writing Assessment	Grades 5, 7, and 9	The Anchorage Writing Assessment provides information on how well students are meeting district expectations on six traits of good writing. The assessment takes place at mid-year so that students who are not meeting district expectations may be identified prior to the year when they must take Alaska Benchmark exams or the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Examination. Schools and teachers have a chance to use results of this assessment to identify students who need extra help to meet state standards in writing.
Pre-Algebra Qualification Test	Grade 6	All grade 6 students take a local pre-algebra qualification test to help with grade 7 placement. The test is designed by district teachers to identify students who are ready for pre-algebra placement in grade 7. The test is keyed to the Anchorage School District math curriculum and provides a measure of the attainment of advanced math skills across the district. The Assessment and Evaluation Department has undertaken a study to determine if the information from the grade 6 Benchmark Mathematics Test could be as predictive as this Anchorage School District-written test.

Exhibits 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 show that district-wide testing is mainly focused on reading, writing, and mathematics, and highly driven by state requirements.

- Anchorage School District has created writing and math assessments in addition to the state testing requirements.
- The Anchorage Writing Assessment is designed to identify students who need additional support if they are to attain proficiency on the State Benchmark Writing Test the following school year.
- The Pre-Algebra Qualification Test was written by district teachers to identify students who are likely to be ready for a more accelerated sequence of mathematics instruction (pre-algebra in grade 7).
- There are no district-wide tests written by the district to measure attainment of major objectives in any courses outside of language arts and mathematics, and many major objectives in language arts and mathematics are not tested.

Exhibits 4.1.3 and 4.1.4 display the scope of formal tests administered district-wide for the courses of study required in Anchorage School District board policy for elementary and secondary education offerings.

Exhibit 4.1.3									
Scope of Formal Tests Administered by Board-required									
Elementary Course of Study by Grade Level									
Anchorage School District									
Course of Study (from Board Policy 341.1)	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	No. of Grades Tested	% Tested
Language Arts	D	*	*	B	C	C, W	B	5	71
Mathematics				B	C	C	B, M	4	57
Social Studies						C		1	14
Science						C		1	14
Art								0	0
Health								0	0
Music								0	0
Physical Education								0	0
Library Skills								0	0
Total Learning Areas Tested	1	*	*	2	2	4	2	11	
Total Percent Tested	11	0	0	22	22	44	22		17
<p>Key: D = Anchorage Developmental Kindergarten Profile B = State Benchmark Test C = Terra Nova The Second Edition CAT/6 Complete Battery Plus H = High School Graduation Qualifying Exam W = Anchorage Writing Assessment (Six Trait Writing Assessment) M = Anchorage Grade 6 Mathematics Placement Test * = Reading and mathematics tests administered by school choice from central list of options recommended by Title I, but not required in all schools. Data are in the process of being collected by Title I rather than the Assessment and Evaluation Department.</p>									

Examination of Exhibit 4.1.3 indicates that:

- Only 17 percent of the elementary curriculum required by board policy is formally assessed.
- District-wide testing at the elementary school level occurs only in language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science.
- District-wide testing concentrates on the areas of required state testing: reading, writing, language arts, and mathematics.
- Elementary schools only test science and social studies progress at grade 5.

It should also be noted that while Anchorage School District does use the science and social studies subtests, according to staff in Assessment and Evaluation, the tests each have 20 questions. This is a limited means of determining how students are achieving in those content areas.

Exhibit 4.1.4								
Scope of Formal Tests Administered by Board-required Secondary Course of Study by Grade Level Anchorage School District								
Course of Study (from Board Policy 341.1)	7	8	9	10	11	12	No. of Grades Tested	% Tested
Language Arts	C, W	B	C, W	H			4	67
Social Studies			C				1	17
Mathematics	C	B	C	H			4	67
Science			C				1	17
World Languages							0	0%
Career Technology							0	0%
Fine Arts							0	0
Physical Education							0	0
Health							0	0
Courses of Study Tested	2	2	4	2	0	0	10	
Percentage of Courses Tested	22	22	44	22	0	0		19
Key: B = State Benchmark Test C = TerraNova CAT/6 (new for grades 5 and 9 in 2001-02) H = High School Graduation Qualifying Exam W = Anchorage Writing Assessment (Six Trait Writing Assessment)								

Examination of Exhibit 4.1.4 indicates that:

- Only 19 percent of the areas of secondary curriculum required by board policy are formally assessed.
- There is no secondary school testing in grades 11 and 12, with the exception of students who need to retest sections of the *High School Graduation Qualifying Exam*.
- There is no assessment of student progress in science or social studies in high school.
- There is no assessment of world languages, career technology, fine arts, physical education, or health.

The scope of assessment is inadequate to inform the district on the progress of its students. Leaders, school administrators, and teachers lack information to determine how well the major objectives of the district's curriculum are being taught and learned. Auditors were not presented information on the correlation of the Terra Nova with Alaska Performance Standards, and the Anchorage School District connections to Alaskan content standards provide insufficient specificity to ensure consistently high achievement for all students (see Finding 4.2). The *Profile of Performance 2000-2001* on pages 78-82 does present data on student grades and high school credits, but there is no indication of how those teacher grades relate to student performance on district-wide tests. While the district staff can make national comparisons regarding student performance, district leaders cannot determine how well students are mastering the district's major objectives because there is no explicit link of the student's performance to the district's curriculum (see Findings 2.3 and Finding 2.4) and there are no district-wide, district-developed tests explicitly linked to major objectives.

The State of Alaska has administered the 1995 edition of the California Achievement Tests (CAT/5) since the 1995-96 school year. In the 2000-01 school year, the CAT/5 was only administered in grades 4 and 7. The CAT/5 tests students in vocabulary, reading comprehension, spelling, language mechanics, language expression, mathematics computation, mathematics concepts and applications, and study skills, as well as a brief test in science and in social studies. In the 2001-02 school year, the state changed from the CAT/5 to Terra Nova, The Second Edition, CAT/6 Complete Battery Plus. The Terra Nova is now used in grades 4, 5, 7, and 9. According to the *Profiles of Performance*

2000-2001 page 42, it is expected that these scores will be linked to Benchmark test scores at grades 3, 6, and 8 and the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam first administered in grade 10.

The state's Benchmark Exams have been administered since the 1999-2000 school year. Beginning in February 2003, student growth will be reported by the State of Alaska in reading, writing, and mathematics for State School and District Report cards.

Auditors examined data in Anchorage School District's *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001* and other electronic data provided by the Assessment and Evaluation Unit to determine trends in student performance on tests administered to all students. Test data for the 2001-2002 school year were not yet available to the district at the time of the audit. Therefore, the data analysis will not include scores of the 2002 test administrations. However, in analyzing the results from tests that have been used for several years, we can see trends in Anchorage School District student achievement.

The *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001* pages 22-25 provided a five-year history of California Achievement Test (CAT/5) performance data for all students and by some ethnic groups at the district-wide level. According to interviews with staff in the Assessment and Evaluation Unit, central reporting of subpopulations' five-year data history by individual schools is not done due to relatively small numbers of students of specific ethnicity in some schools. While the *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001* provides 2000-01 district-wide performance data based on socio-economic subgroups, it did not provide a five-year history of those subpopulations.

The auditors had access to the percentile rank data derived from mean NCE scores. The auditors first graphed the five-year history of percentile rank scores on the CAT for all students in total reading (see [Exhibit 4.1.5](#)), total language arts (see [Exhibit 4.1.7](#)), and total mathematics (see [Exhibit 4.1.9](#)). Spelling (see [Exhibit 4.1.11](#)) was also included due to its being one of the Board's priorities. Following each graph is a table of data (see [Exhibits 4.1.6, 4.1.8, 4.1.10, and 4.1.12](#)) listing the percentile rank scores furnished in the *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001* pages 22-25, adding an indicator showing the change in percentile rank from the 1996-97 administration to the latest administration of the CAT/5 for that grade level. While the charts indicate a change, the auditors recognize that percentile ranks are not interval data where gains and losses can be accurately analyzed. However, the percentile rank data can still be used to make cautious observations. The addition of Benchmark testing at the state level, and the change in grade levels assessed with CAT/5 are noted in the exhibits. By 2000-01, only grades 4 and 7 have a complete five-year history.

Exhibit 4.1.5
 Five-year History of Percentile Rank Scores
 CAT Total Reading—Spring 1996 through Spring 2001—Grades 3 through 11
 Anchorage School District

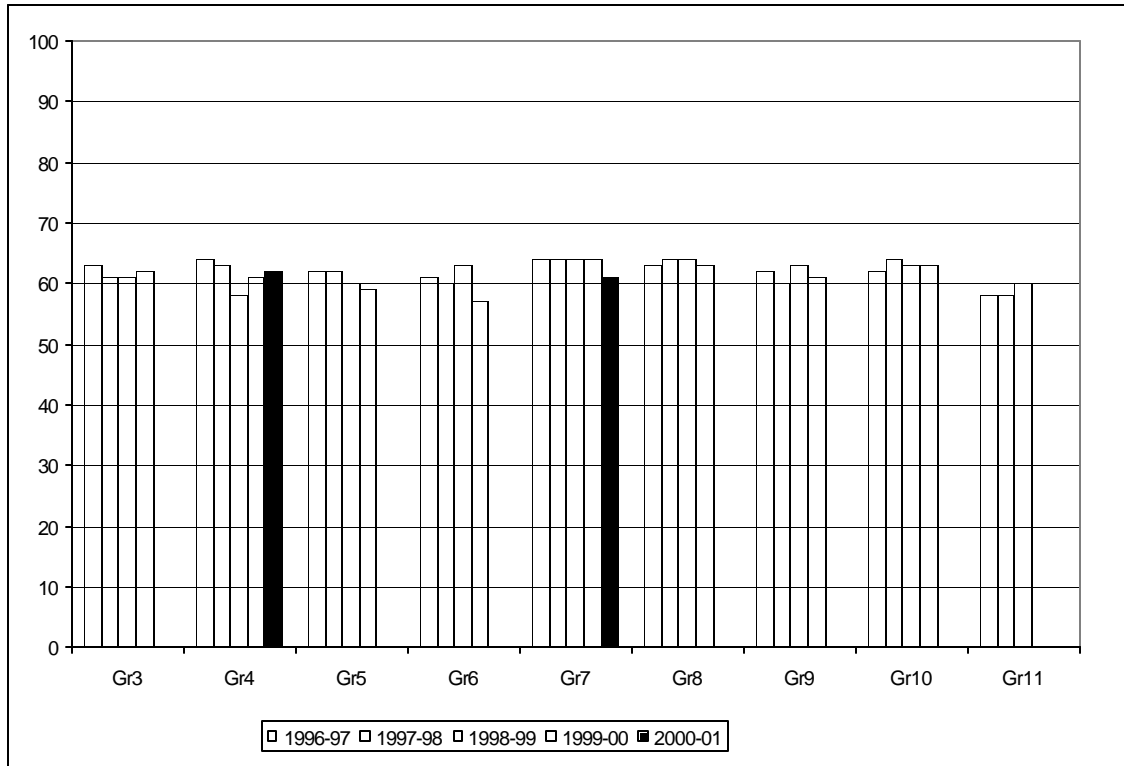


Exhibit 4.1.6
 Five-year History and Change in Percentile Rank Scores
 CAT Total Reading – Spring 1996 through Spring 2001 –Grades 3 through 11
 Anchorage School District

Year	Gr3	Gr4	Gr5	Gr6	Gr7	Gr8	Gr9	Gr10	Gr11
1996-97	63	64	62	61	64	63	62	62	58
1997-98	61	63	62	60	64	64	60	64	58
1998-99	61	58	60	63	64	64	63	63	60
1999-00	62	61	59	57	64	63	61	63	-
2000-01	-	62	-	-	61	-	-	-	-
Change from 1996-97 to most recent available score	-1	-2	-3	-4	-3	0	-1	1	2

Examination of the data in Exhibits 4.1.5 and 4.1.6 indicates:

- Beginning in school year 1999-2000, changes were made in grade levels assessed with the CAT, resulting in only grades 4 and 7 having a complete five-year history.
- CAT total reading percentile ranks are above national averages, with the lowest score being for grade 6 in 1999-200 and the highest being 64 for grade 10 in 1997-98.
- CAT total reading percentile ranks have declined slightly since 1996-97 in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9.
- CAT total reading percentile ranks have remained flat in grade 8.
- CAT total reading percentile ranks have improved from slightly in grades 10 and 11.

- While there is minor change observed, percentile ranks have remained essentially flat in CAT total reading for five years.

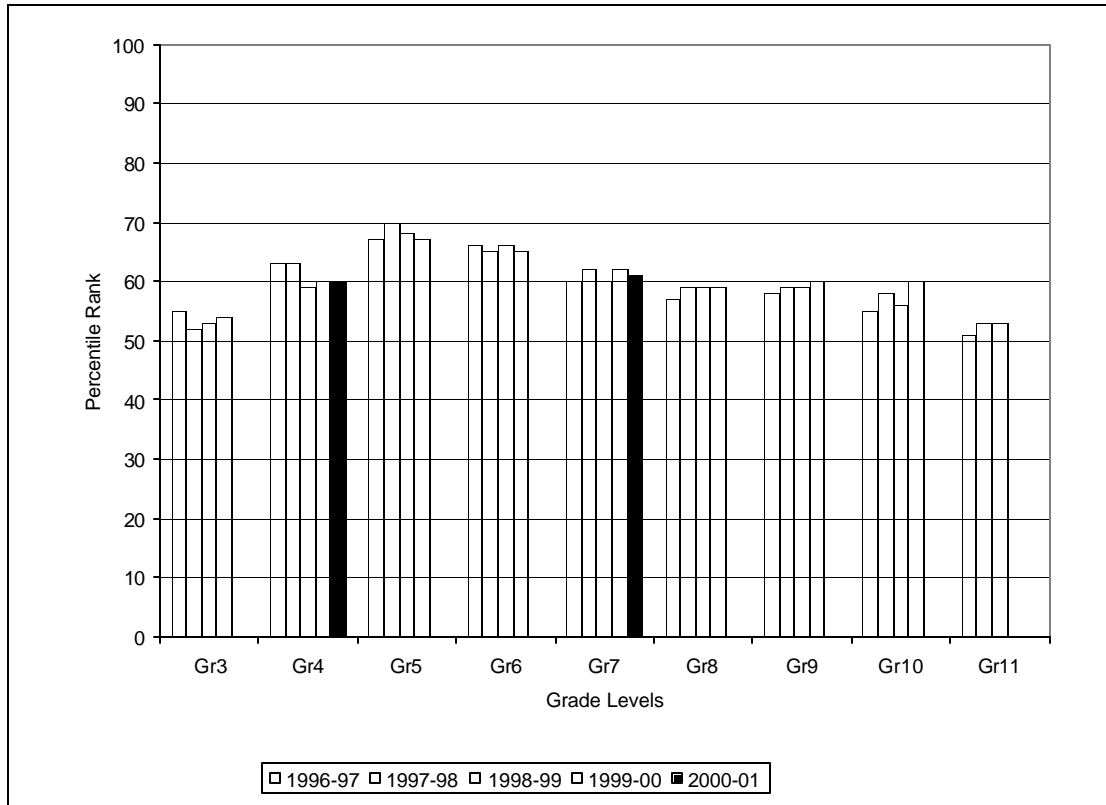


Exhibit 4.1.7
 Five-year History of Percentile Rank Scores
 CAT Total Language Arts—Spring 1996 through Spring 2001—Grades 3 through 11
 Anchorage School District

Exhibit 4.1.8									
Five-year Anchorage School District History and Change in Percentile Rank Scores									
CAT Total Language Arts – Spring 1996 through Spring 2001 –Grades 3 through 11									
Anchorage School District									
Year	Gr3	Gr4	Gr5	Gr6	Gr7	Gr8	Gr9	Gr10	Gr11
1996-97	55	63	67	66	60	57	58	55	51
1997-98	52	63	70	65	62	59	59	58	53
1998-99	53	59	68	66	60	59	59	56	53
1999-00	54	60	67	65	62	59	60	60	-
2000-01	-	60	-	-	61	-	-	-	-
Change from 1996-97 to most recent	-1	-3	0	-1	2	2	2	5	2

- Beginning in school year 1999-2000, changes were made in grade levels assessed with the CAT, resulting in only grades 4 and 7 having a complete five-year history.

- Scores are basically flat over the five-year period, with the lowest percentile ranks being 51 and the highest 70.
- CAT total language arts percentile ranks have declined slightly since 1996-97 in grades 3, 4, and 6.
- CAT total language arts percentile ranks have remained flat in grade 5, consistently the highest scoring grade level.
- CAT Total Language Arts percentile ranks have improved in all secondary school grades from two to five points.
- While there is minor change observed, percentile ranks have remained essentially flat in CAT total language arts.

Exhibit 4.1.9

Five-year History of Percentile Rank Scores
 CAT Total Mathematics—Spring 1996 through Spring 2001—Grades 3 through 11
 Anchorage School District

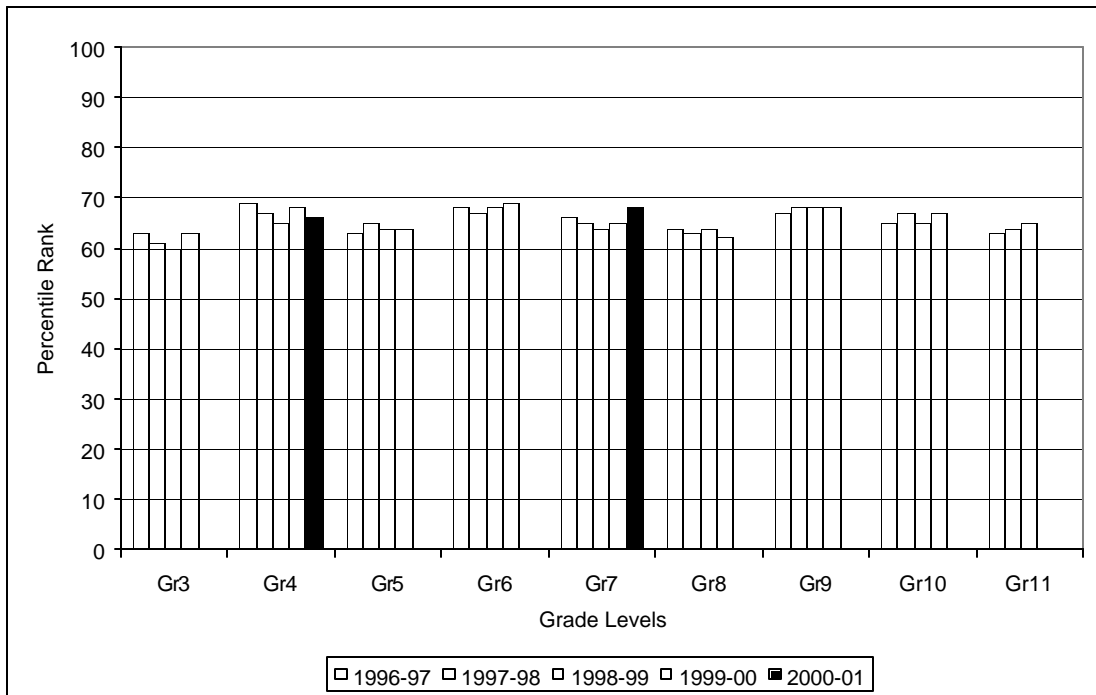


Exhibit 4.1.10

Five-year Anchorage School District History and Change in Percentile Rank Scores
 CAT Total Mathematics—Spring 1996 through Spring 2001—Grades 3 through 11
 Anchorage School District

Year	Gr3	Gr4	Gr5	Gr6	Gr7	Gr8	Gr9	Gr10	Gr11
1996-97	63	69	63	68	66	64	67	65	63
1997-98	61	67	65	67	65	63	68	67	64
1998-99	60	65	64	68	64	64	68	65	65
1999-00	63	68	64	69	65	62	68	67	-
2000-01	-	66	-	-	68	-	-	-	-
Change from 1996-97 to most recent	0	-3	1	1	-1	-2	1	2	2

- Beginning in school year 1999-2000, changes were made in grade levels assessed with the CAT, resulting in only grades 4 and 7 having a complete five-year history.
- Scores are basically flat over the five-year period, with the lowest percentile ranks being 60 and the highest 69.
- CAT total mathematics percentile ranks have declined by one to three points since 1996-97 in grades 4, 7, and 8.
- CAT total mathematics percentile ranks have remained flat in grade 3, which has been the lowest ranking grade level with the exception of 1999-2000.
- CAT total mathematics percentile ranks have improved from one to two points in grade 5, 6, 9, 10, and 11.
- While minor change is observed, percentile ranks have remained essentially flat in CAT total mathematics.

Exhibit 4.1.11
 Five-year History Percentile Rank Scores
 CAT Spelling—Spring 1996 through Spring 2001—Grades 3 through 11
 Anchorage School District

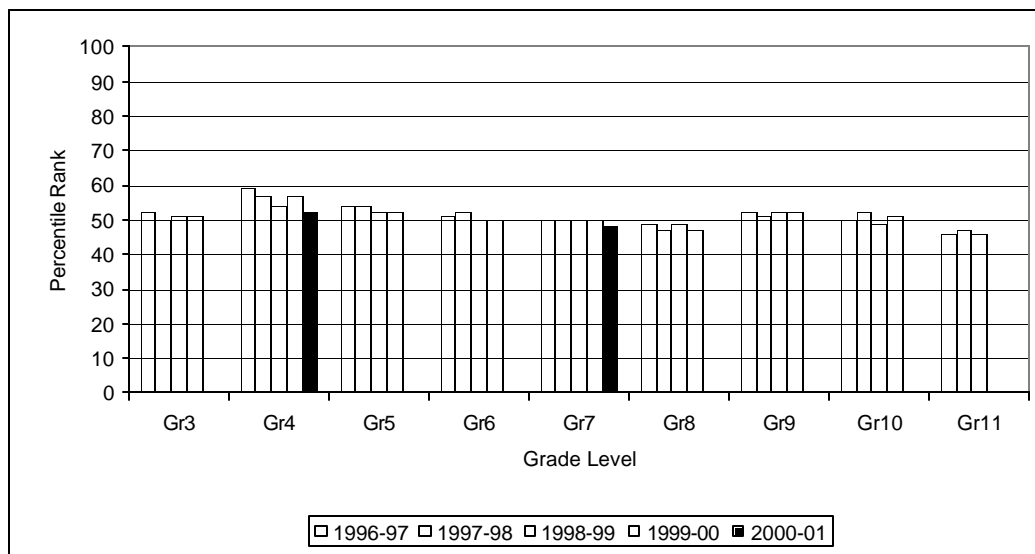


Exhibit 4.1.12
 Five-year Anchorage School District History and Change in Percentile Rank Scores
 CAT Spelling—Spring 1996 through Spring 2001—Grades 3 through 11
 Anchorage School District

Year	Gr3	Gr4	Gr5	Gr6	Gr7	Gr8	Gr9	Gr10	Gr11
1996-97	52	59	54	51	50	49	52	50	46
1997-98	50	57	54	52	50	47	51	52	47
1998-99	51	54	52	50	50	49	52	49	46
1999-00	51	57	52	50	50	47	52	51	-
2000-01	-	52	-	--	48	-	-	-	-
Change from 1996-97 to most recent	-1	-7	-2	-1	-2	-2	0	1	0

- Beginning in school year 1999-2000, changes were made in grade levels assessed with the CAT, resulting in only grades 4 and 7 having a complete five-year history.
- Spelling scores are basically flat over the five-year period, with the lowest percentile rank being 46 and the highest 59.
- CAT spelling performance has declined by one to seven percentile ranks since 1996-97 in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8.
- CAT spelling percentile ranks have remained flat in grades 9 and 11.
- CAT spelling percentile ranks have improved only in grade 10 and only by one percentile rank.
- CAT spelling percentile ranks are at or below national average in the last year tested in grades 6, 7, and 8.

Student performance on the CAT/5, while above national averages, has remained relatively flat. While spelling improvement is a Board goal for the district, spelling performance has only increased in one grade level.

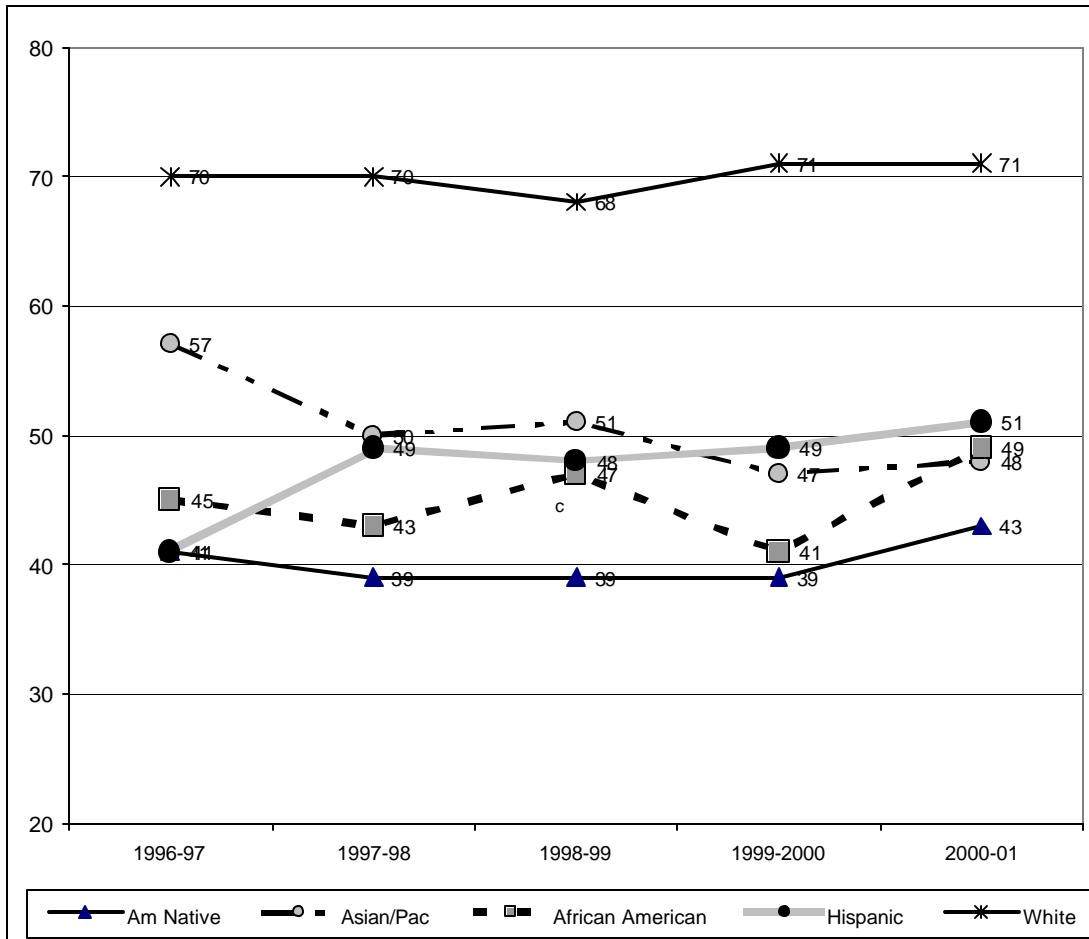
Total CAT reading and language arts scores are above national averages; however, Anchorage School District leadership is aware of a gap in performance for students on free and reduced lunch as noted on page 61 in *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001*.

“Average scores for students eligible for free lunch range from the 31st to the 42nd percentile depending on grade and test area. Average scores for students eligible for reduced-price lunches range from the 44th to the 55th percentile. Average scores for students not eligible for free and reduced lunch range from the 64th to the 72nd percentile. While individual students on free or reduced lunch may score at any level, the relation of low family income and lower achievement is persistent and obvious.

While the gap in performance between students qualified for assistance is obvious in all of the tested areas, it is greatest in reading and language arts. The gap in mathematics has closed somewhat in the past few years reflecting gains made in mathematics in the Title 1 schools where there are substantial numbers of students getting assistance.”

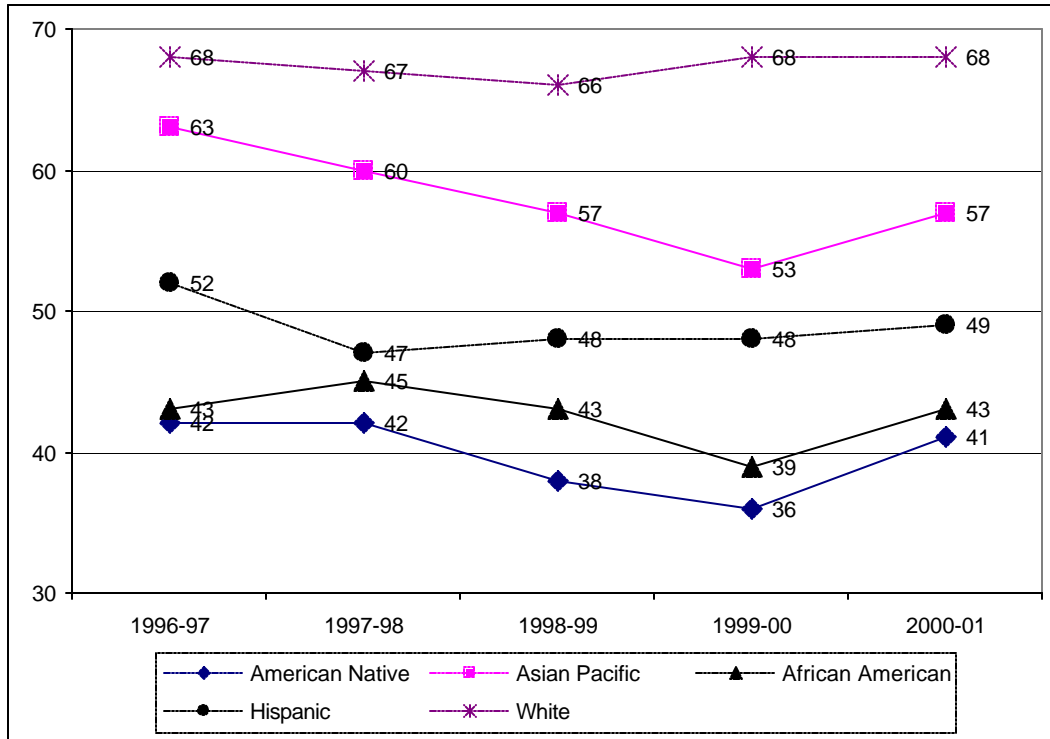
Grades 4 and 7 have percentile rank scores available for the five-year period from 1996-97 through 2000-01. The *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001* provide data on performance on the CAT in separate tables for the following ethnic groups: American Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, African American, Hispanic, and White (pages 92-114). The auditors prepared charts to graph the performance by major ethnic groups using the percentile rank scores corresponding to average (mean) NCE scores on the CAT during the five-year period from 1996-97 through 2000-01. Compared to performance by White students in Grade 4, there is a persistent and sometimes increasing gap in student performance in total reading (see [Exhibit 4.1.13](#)), in total language arts (see [Exhibit 4.1.14](#)), in total mathematics (see [Exhibit 4.1.15](#)), and in the total battery (see [Exhibit 4.1.16](#)).

Exhibit 4.1.13
 Percentile Rank Scores Corresponding to Average (Mean) NCE Scores
 CAT 1996-97 to 2000-01 in Grade 4 Total Reading by Ethnicity
 Anchorage School District



- Grade 4 American Natives consistently score below all other ethnic groups in total reading.
- Hispanic students have increased performance at a faster rate than American Natives and African Americans in grade 4 total reading.
- Grade 4 African American students dropped to their lowest percentile rank in 1999-2000, but have returned to their high of 49th percentile, somewhat closing the over 20-point gap with White students.
- Grade 4 Asian/Pacific Islander student percentile ranks trend downward over the five-year period, widening the performance gap.
- Grade 4 White students consistently outperform all other ethnic groups in total reading.
- White percentile ranks based on Mean NCE scores have remained flatter than all other groups, with a range from 68-71 in grade 4 total reading.
- There is not a parallel rise and fall of all ethnic groups in grade 4 total reading percentile ranks.

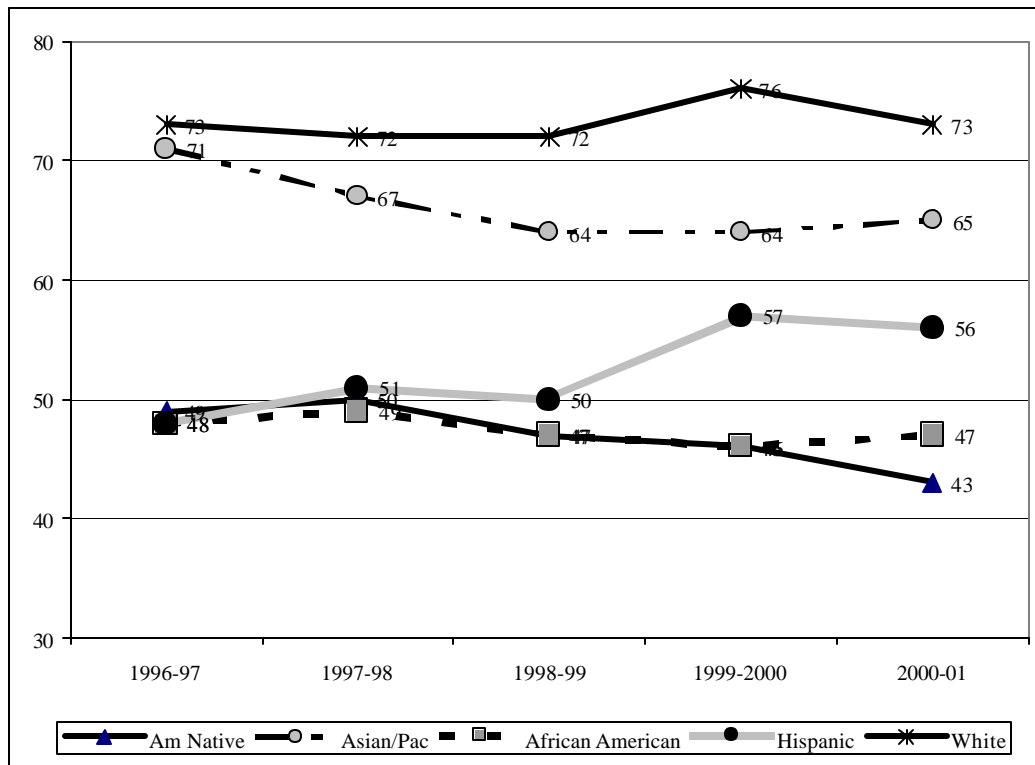
Exhibit 4.1.14
 Percentile Rank Scores Corresponding to Average (Mean) NCE Scores
 CAT 1996-97 to 2000-02 in Grade 4 Total Language Arts by Ethnicity
 Anchorage School District



- American Natives consistently score below all other ethnic groups in grade 4 total language arts.
- Grade 4 Hispanic students' percentile rank scores have gained only two percentile ranks after falling five percentile ranks in 1997-98.
- African American students dropped to their lowest percentile rank in 1999-2000, but have returned to their 1998-99 level in grade 4 total language arts.
- All grade 4 ethnic subgroups consistently perform in bands that do not cross each other in total language arts, so that in every administration of the CAT/5 from 1996-97 to 2000-01 the percentile rank corresponding to mean NCE from greatest to least follows the same order: Whites, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, African Americans, and American Natives.
- There is no ethnic group with performance that consistently trends upward in grade 4 total language arts.
- American Native percentile rank corresponding to mean NCE scores range from 36 to 41; African American students from 39 to 45, Hispanic students from 47 to 52, Asian/Pacific Islander students from 53 to 63, and White students from 66 to 68 in grade 4 total language arts. Asian/Pacific Islander students have the greatest variation in percentile ranks. White students have the least variation in percentile ranks in total language arts.
- Grade 4 White students consistently outperform all other ethnic groups in total language arts, with the gaps ranging from least to greatest in the following order: Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, African Americans, and American Natives.
- Asian/Pacific Islander student percentile ranks trend downward for the first four years of the five-year period, with the 2000-01 rank returning to the 1998-99 level.

- White percentile ranks based on mean NCE scores have remained flatter than all other groups, with a range from 66-68 grade 4 total language arts.
- Both African American students and White students have the same percentile rank in 2000-01 as they did in 1996-97. All other ethnic groups have lower percentile ranks in 2000-01 than they did in 1996-97 in grade 4 total language arts.
- While grade 4 White students maintained their percentile rank in both 1999-2000 and 2000-01, all other ethnic groups' percentile rank corresponding to mean NCE was higher in 2000-01 than in 1999-2000.

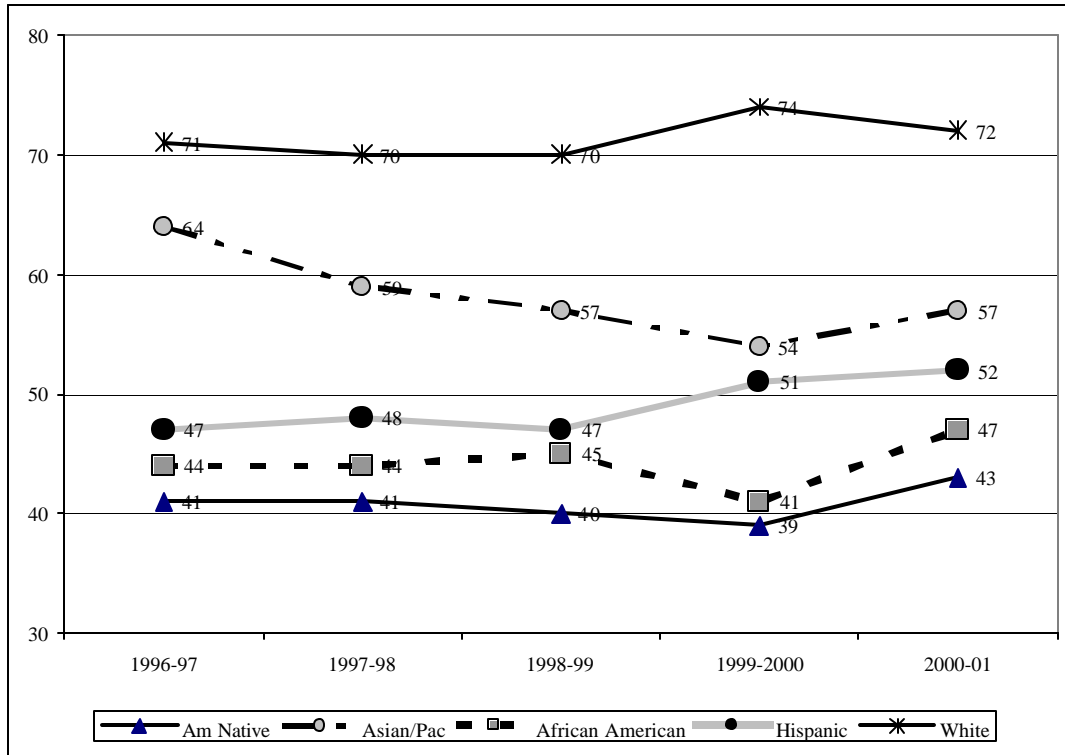
Exhibit 4.1.15
 Percentile Rank Scores Corresponding to Average (Mean) NCE Scores
 CAT 1996-97 to 2000-01 in Grade 4 Total Mathematics by Ethnicity
 Anchorage School District



- There is a tight clustering of grade 4 total mathematics percentile rank corresponding to mean NCE among American Natives, African Americans, and Hispanics for the first three years (1996-97 through 1998-99), with Hispanic students then making noticeable gains in 1999-2000 and American Native percentile rank trending downward.
- CAT/5 grade 4 total mathematics percentile ranks derived from mean NCE scores by ethnic group in 2000-01 range from a low of 43 to a high of 73.
- Asian/Pacific Islander student percentile ranks trend downward over four of the five-year period, widening the performance gap in grade 4 total mathematics.
- White students consistently outperform all other ethnic groups in grade 4 total mathematics, with the gap growing for American Natives and African American students.
- White and Hispanic student performance percentile ranks spiked upward in 1999-2000, and moved slightly lower the following year.

- There is not a parallel rise and fall of all ethnic groups in grade 4 total mathematics percentile ranks.

Exhibit 4.1.16
 Percentile Rank Scores Corresponding to Average (Mean) NCE Scores
 CAT 1996-97 to 2000-01 in Grade 4 Total Battery by Ethnicity
 Anchorage School District



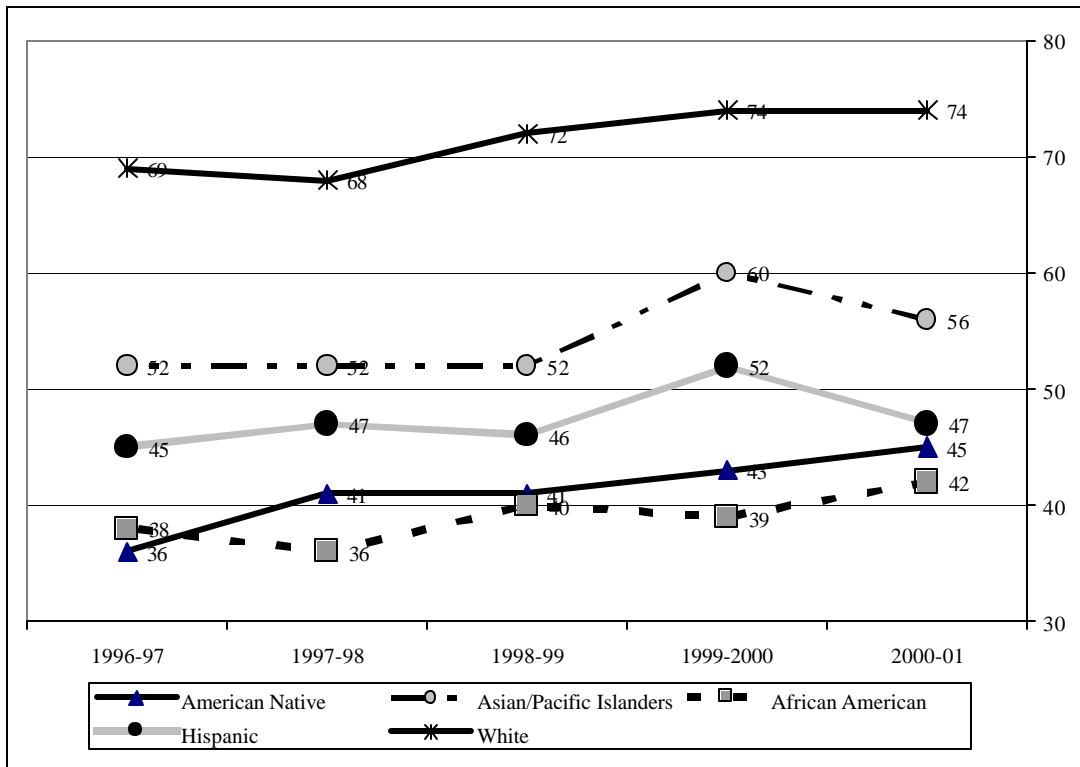
- Grade 4 CAT/5 total battery percentile rankings derived from mean NCE scores by ethnic group in 2000-01 range from a low of 43 to a high of 72.
- American Natives consistently score below all other ethnic groups on the grade 4 total battery.
- Hispanic students' percentile rank scores have gained more consistently than other reported subpopulations on the grade 4 total battery.
- Grade 4 African American students dropped to their lowest percentile rank in 1999-2000, but have surpassed their previous high to reach the 47th percentile in 2000-01.
- All subgroups consistently perform in percentile rank bands that do not cross each other on the grade 4 total battery. American Natives rank from 39-43, African Americans from 44 to 47, Hispanics from 47-52, Asian/Pacific Islanders from 54 to 64, and Whites from 70-74.
- Whites consistently outperform all groups on the total battery, with the gaps ranging from least to greatest in the following order: Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, African Americans, and American Natives.
- Asian/Pacific Islander student percentile ranks trend downward for the first four years of the five-year period, with the 2000-01 rank returning to the 1998-99 level.

The high percentile rank scores of the Anchorage School District result despite a large gap in performance for minority students. While some gains were noted for some ethnic groups, there is not

a consistent pattern to close the achievement gap. Additionally, the scores for White students are either flat or slightly decreasing in the 2001 school year.

These same performance trends by ethnicity occur in grade 7 data. The performance of grade 7 in the CAT/5 total battery is illustrative of the performance of students over the five-year period in that grade, as shown in [Exhibit 4.1.17](#).

Exhibit 4.1.17
 Percentile Rank Scores Corresponding to Average (Mean) NCE Scores
 CAT 1996-97 to 2000-01 in Grade 7 Total Battery by Ethnicity
 Anchorage School District



- Grade 7 American Natives begin with the lowest percentile rank score of all ethnic subgroups, but surpass the African American subgroup for the next four years and maintain a positive trend line on the CAT/5 total battery.
- Grade 7 Hispanic subgroup percentile ranks corresponding to mean NCE scores reached a high of 52 in 1999-2000, but have declined to their 1997-98 percentile rank.
- The grade 7 African American student subgroup dropped to their lowest percentile rank corresponding to mean NCE scores in 1997-98, and while making recent gains, continue as the lowest performing subgroup ranking at the 42nd percentile while the White subgroup ranks at the 74th percentile.
- All grade 7 subgroups consistently perform in percentile rank bands that do not cross each other on the Total Battery. American Native students rank from 39-43, African American students from 44 to 47, Hispanic students from 47-52, Asian/Pacific Islander students from 54 to 64, and White students from 70-74.
- Grade 7 White students consistently outperform all groups on the total battery, with the gaps ranging from least to greatest in the following order: Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, African Americans, and American Natives.

- Grade 7 Asian/Pacific Islander student percentile ranks trend downward for the first four years of the five-year period, with the 2000-01 rank returning to the 1998-99 level.

Exhibits 4.1.13, 4.1.14, 4.1.15, 4.1.16, and 4.1.17 clearly reveal a persistent and sometimes growing gap in student performance. Though it is true that some schools have very small numbers of students of a particular ethnic group, the groups as a whole are important members of the Anchorage School District community, and many schools do have larger populations of ethnic subpopulations. While student performance should be increasing for all subpopulations, it must increase faster for those performing at lower levels if the gap is ever to be closed.

The CAT is a norm-referenced test, making clear connections to Anchorage School District curriculum and Alaska performance standards more difficult to correlate. However, the Alaska Benchmark Exams were specifically written to measure the performance standards for the state that are required of all Alaskan students. Auditors only had data for the first two administrations of the benchmarks, and acknowledge that there is controversy at the state level on the proficiency rating standards set for some of the examinations. Still, all students are being measured by the same standards on these tests, so looking at how students are doing relative to others can reveal issues worth investigating. While state benchmark tests will continue to evolve, it is important to note that they are being created to measure Alaska performance standards for what is expected of students. This has the potential to be a significant, stabilizing target for curriculum, professional development, and classroom instruction over time.

Tables 20-22 in the *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001* indicate the percentage of students meeting the Alaska Standards by grade. “Meeting Standards” is defined as having a score meriting “Advanced” or “Proficient.” In the school year 2000-01, Anchorage School District student performance equaled the average percent of students meeting the reading in grades 3 (73 percent) and 10 (66 percent) and performed higher than the state average in two grades (grade 6: 75 percent versus 69 percent and grade 8: 87 percent versus 83 percent). On the state’s writing assessment, Anchorage School District students performed higher than state average in three of the four grades tested (grade 3: 57 percent versus 54 percent; grade 6: 78 percent versus 73 percent and grade 8: 71 percent versus 68 percent) while not meeting the state average in grade 10 (45 percent versus 47 percent). In mathematics, Anchorage School District students exceeded state averages of students meeting the standards in every grade.

The *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001* did not indicate where Anchorage student performance stood in comparison to other large districts in the state. The auditors selected Fairbanks and Juneau’s data reported by the State of Alaska on its website to compare with Anchorage School District in Exhibit 4.1.18. Between 95.5 percent and 98 percent of all students in Fairbanks and Juneau were tested, according to website data. Since the data in the Profiles was reported in whole numbers, auditors rounded all performance figures to whole numbers.

Exhibit 4.1.18
 Percent of Students Meeting Standards in Spring 2001
 Grades 3, 6, and 8 Benchmark Tests
 Comparison of Selected Cities with the State
 Anchorage School District

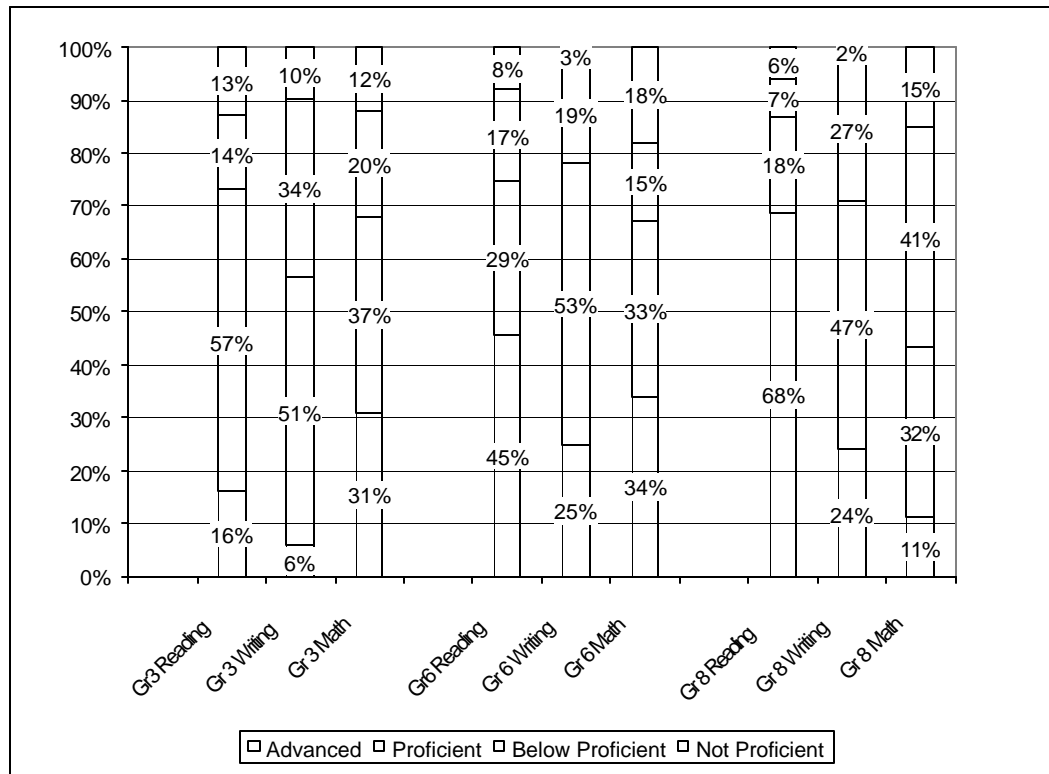
		Grade 3			Grade 6			Grade 8		
		Reading	Writing	Math	Reading	Writing	Math	Reading	Writing	Math
Anchorage	Met Stand.	73%	57%	68%	75%	78%	67%	87%	71%	44%
	# Tested	3,857	3,858	3,842	3,712	3,715	3,686	3,523	3,515	3,459
Fairbanks	Met Stand.	81%	65%	73%	78%	82%	70%	88%	74%	38%
	# Tested	1,217	1212	1207	1,208	1204	1207	1,142	1135	1135
Juneau	Met Stand.	78%	60%	81%	76%	81%	76%	89%	78%	55%
	# Tested	416	416	417	397	399	397	413	416	414
State	Met Stand.	73%	54%	66%	69%	73%	63%	83%	68%	40%
	# Tested	9,920	9,919	9,931	9,955	9,952	9,922	9,606	9,460	9,531

- Anchorage has the largest school population. The three comparison school districts have more than half of the state’s tested population at each grade, thereby driving state scores.
- Fairbanks exceeds state averages on all benchmark tests except grade 8 mathematics.
- Fairbanks exceeds all Anchorage benchmark test averages except grade 8 mathematics.
- Juneau exceeds state averages on all benchmark tests.
- Juneau exceeds all Anchorage benchmark test averages.

While Anchorage School District leaders can take pride when district student performance exceeds state average scores on benchmark tests since the volume of their scores drive state averages, it must also be noted that other urban cities in Alaska exceed Anchorage School District’s student performance. These data, however, do not reflect a more important measure of performance. It is good to meet the proficiency standards, but better to have high numbers of students attain the “Advanced” rating.

Exhibit 4.1.19, Anchorage School District Achievement is taken from page 146 of the *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001*. It examines in greater detail how students performed relative to state standards in reading, writing, and mathematics. It indicates that in many areas, high percentages of students are scoring at the advanced level in spring 2001.

Exhibit 4.1.19
Benchmark Scores by Grade Level and Test
Anchorage School District
March 2001



- On every benchmark test in March 2001, Anchorage School District students met proficiency (advanced plus proficient) for over 50 percent of its students, except in grade 8 mathematics.
- There is no single area of reading, writing, or math where the number of advanced ratings is consistently higher than in other areas.
- Grade 8 reading benchmark for March 2001 is not only the highest meeting the standards, it does so with 68 percent of the Anchorage School District students achieving at the advanced level.
- Students achieving the advanced rating on benchmark tests in grades 3, 6, and 8 range from six percent (grade 3 writing) to 68 percent (grade 8 reading) in March 2001.
- Students achieving at the proficient rating on benchmark tests in grades 3, 6, and 8 range from 18 percent (grade 8 reading) to 57 percent (grade 3 reading) in March 2001.
- Students achieving at the below proficient rating on benchmark tests in grades 3, 6, and 8 range from seven percent (grade 8 reading) to 41 percent (grade 8 math).
- Students achieving at the not proficient rating on benchmark tests in grades 3, 6, and 8 range from two percent (grade 8 writing) to 18 percent (grade 6 math).
- Twelve to 18 percent of Anchorage School District students score not proficient in mathematics benchmarks.

Page 30 of the *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001* also provides valuable data on student performance on the Benchmark tests disaggregated by ethnicity. [Exhibit 4.1.20](#) shows the number tested and passing rate (advanced and proficient) for students of Alaskan Native Heritage, American

Indian Heritage, Combined Native Heritage, Asian/Pacific Islander Heritage, African Heritage, Hispanic Heritage, Caucasian Heritage, Other Heritages, and All Heritages.

Exhibit 4.1.20 “Passing Rates” on Spring 2000 and 2001 Benchmark Tests and <i>HSGQE</i> Results Aggregated by Racial-Ethnic Group Taken from Anchorage School District Profiles of Performance 2000-2001, Page 30 Anchorage School District													
Students of Heritage...	Grade	Reading				Writing				Mathematics			
		2000		2001		2000		2001		2000		2001	
		# Tested	Pass Rate	# Tested	Pass Rate	# Tested	Pass Rate	# Tested	Pass Rate	# Tested	Pass Rate	# Tested	Pass Rate
Alaskan Native Heritage	3	466	56%	467	54%	467	29%	466	36%	464	48%	466	52%
	6	414	56%	440	54%	414	56%	445	60%	414	49%	439	48%
	8	326	78%	348	73%	328	52%	349	50%	322	26%	343	22%
	10	249	59%	237	47%	248	33%	243	26%	246	18%	254	32%
American Indian Heritage	3	47	66%	50	78%	48	40%	49	61%	48	60%	52	65%
	6	46	65%	37	81%	46	59%	36	83%	46	52%	36	61%
	8	36	89%	45	84%	36	72%	44	61%	36	31%	44	22%
	10	40	83%	34	56%	42	36%	37	46%	40	28%	38	47%
Combined Native Heritage	3	513	57%	517	56%	515	30%	515	38%	512	49%	518	53%
	6	460	57%	477	56%	460	56%	481	62%	460	49%	475	49%
	8	362	79%	393	74%	364	54%	393	51%	358	27%	387	22%
	10	289	62%	271	48%	290	33%	280	29%	286	19%	29	34%
Asian/Pacific Islander Heritage	3	348	64%	384	64%	349	50%	382	53%	352	58%	385	57%
	6	358	65%	378	66%	358	71%	373	74%	357	59%	375	59%
	8	333	77%	371	80%	332	64%	368	67%	332	35%	365	39%
	10	291	61%	326	48%	288	39%	337	38%	280	25%	320	41%
African Heritage	3	343	63%	343	65%	345	40%	345	44%	344	51%	344	48%
	6	352	56%	334	66%	351	60%	334	68%	354	42%	333	50%
	8	300	77%	299	76%	298	61%	299	54%	298	17%	297	21%
	10	252	59%	207	41%	248	26%	216	26%	246	13%	216	17%
Hispanic Heritage	3	216	63%	217	58%	214	44%	218	39%	217	58%	212	49%
	6	186	59%	208	66%	187	64%	210	70%	186	49%	210	51%
	8	167	79%	180	82%	170	61%	180	62%	167	25%	176	26%
	10	162	63%	133	50%	162	34%	142	28%	160	21%	142	26%
Caucasian Heritage	3	2379	84%	2436	82%	2378	62%	2339	64%	2380	75%	2323	77%
	6	2499	83%	2280	82%	2499	84%	2282	84%	2497	77%	2259	76%
	8	2372	93%	2245	92%	2373	82%	2239	87%	2371	51%	2200	52%
	10	2041	87%	2060	76%	2032	59%	2186	53%	2025	44%	2213	53%
Other Heritage	3	7	43%	56	62%	7	43%	55	49%	7	43%	55	56%
	6	8	50%	34	70%	8	50%	34	76%	8	38%	33	58%
	8	5	80%	30	83%	5	80%	30	70%	5	20%	29	28%
	10	12	42%	26	54%	11	18%	27	22%	9	11%	25	28%
All Heritages	3	3806	75%	3857	73%	3808	53%	3858	57%	3812	67%	3842	68%
	6	2863	74%	3712	75%	3863	77%	3715	78%	3862	67%	3686	67%
	8	3539	88%	3523	87%	3542	74%	3515	71%	3531	43%	3459	44%
	10	3047	78%	3023	66%	3031	51%	3188	46%	3006	36%	3228	46%

The auditors used the data provided in the *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001* to examine the gap by the ethnic subpopulations where data were provided: Alaska Native, American Indian, Combined

Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, African, Hispanic, and Caucasian. The auditors are aware that these are different labels than furnished for CAT scores, but will use the labels as furnished within the table prepared in the *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001*, page 30.

Grouping the percentage of those achieving proficient or advanced status as “passing,” the auditors examined achievement across sub-populations or ethnic groups. There was a clear gap in performance, with the subgroup of Caucasians having the highest achievement in terms of percent classified as Proficient or Advanced. Using the data from Exhibit 4.1.20, the auditors subtracted the passing rate of the selected group from the passing rate of the Caucasian group. This yielded a performance “gap” between the two groups for performance in spring of 2000 and spring of 2001.

The auditors then prepared tables that show the gap between each ethnic subgroup and the Caucasian percent passing, adding a column to indicate by how much the gap narrowed, widened, or if it remained unchanged between academic year 1999-2000 and 2000-01. Using that change, the auditors calculated the number of years required at that rate of change to close the achievement gap between the two groups being compared if no changes were made in current practices.

Exhibit 4.1.21 examines Benchmark Examinations in Reading for 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. A negative number in the Change 2000-01 column means that the gap has narrowed. A positive number means that the gap has continued to increase, and is shown in bold numbers.

Exhibit 4.1.21									
Achievement Gap Analysis of Percent Proficient or Advanced on Benchmark Examinations in Reading for the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 Academic Years and Years to Parity at Current Rate of Change by Grade Levels and Selected Subpopulations* Anchorage School District									
Grade	2000	2001	Change 2000-01	Years to Parity	Grade	2000	2001	Change 2000-01	Years to Parity
Gap: Alaska Native - Caucasian					Gap: American Indian- Caucasian				
Gr. 3	28	28	0	Never	Gr. 3	18	4	-14	1 Year
Gr. 6	27	28	1	Never	Gr. 6	18	1	-17	1 Year
Gr. 8	15	19	4	Never	Gr. 8	4	8	4	Never
Gr. 10	28	29	1	Never	Gr. 10	4	20	16	Never
Gap: Combined Native - Caucasian					Gap: Asian/Pacific Islander – Caucasian				
Gr. 3	27	26	-1	26 Yrs	Gr. 3	20	18	-2	9 Yrs
Gr. 6	26	26	0	Never	Gr. 6	18	16	-2	8 Yrs
Gr. 8	14	18	4	Never	Gr. 8	16	12	-4	3 Yrs
Gr. 10	25	28	3	Never	Gr. 10	26	28	2	Never
Gap: African – Caucasian					Gap: Hispanic – Caucasian				
Gr. 3	21	17	-4	5 Yrs	Gr. 3	21	24	3	Never
Gr. 6	27	16	-11	2 Yrs	Gr. 6	24	16	-8	2 Yrs
Gr. 8	16	16	0	Never	Gr. 8	14	10	-4	3 Yrs
Gr. 10	28	35	7	Never	Gr. 10	24	26	2	Never
*Data derived from <i>Profiles of Performance 2000-2001</i>									
Note: Caucasian scores declined in all four reading grade levels on the 2001 Reading Benchmarks.									

Exhibit 4.1.21 indicates 11 areas where the achievement gap is currently increasing in benchmark reading. In the ten areas where the gap is being narrowed, only five gaps could be closed within five years at the current rate of change.

- Benchmark reading gaps range in 2000 from a low of four percentage points (American Indian – Caucasian in grades 8 and 10 to a high of 28 points (African American – Caucasian grade 10, Alaska Native-Caucasian grades 3 and 10).

- Benchmark reading gaps range in 2001 from a low of one point (American Indian – Caucasian grade 6) to a high of 35 points (African American – Caucasian grade 10).
- Fourteen areas had gaps greater than 20 points in 2000.
- Only three areas reduced achievement gaps by more than 10 points (American Indian – Caucasian grades 3 and 6 and African American – Caucasian grade 6).
- The achievement gap in benchmark reading did not change in three subpopulations even though Caucasian performance declined.
- The achievement gap in benchmark reading increased in 11 areas in 2001.
- The achievement gap in benchmark reading decreased in 10 areas in 2001.
- Where benchmark reading gaps are narrowing, the range until parity can be as small as one year and as great as 26 years at the current rate.

Exhibit 4.1.22 examines gap data on the writing benchmarks again using data originally derived from the *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001* as reflected in Exhibit 4.1.20.

Exhibit 4.1.22									
Achievement Gap Analysis of Percent Proficient or Advanced on Benchmark Examinations in Writing for the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 Academic Years and Years to Parity at Current Rate of Change by Grade Levels and Selected Subpopulations* Anchorage School District									
Grade	2000	2001	Change 2000-01	Years to Parity	Grade	2000	2001	Change 2000-01	Years to Parity
Gap: Alaska Native - Caucasian					Gap: American Indian- Caucasian				
Gr. 3	33	28	-5	6 Yrs	Gr. 3	22	3	-19	7 Yrs
Gr. 6	28	24	-4	6 Yrs	Gr. 6	25	1	-24	1 Yr
Gr. 8	30	37	7	Never	Gr. 8	10	26	16	Never
Gr. 10	26	27	1	Never	Gr. 10	23	7	-16	1 Yr
Gap: Combined Native - Caucasian					Gap: Asian/Pacific Islander – Caucasian				
Gr. 3	32	26	-6	5 Yrs	Gr. 3	12	11	-1	11 Yrs
Gr. 6	28	22	-6	4 Yrs	Gr. 6	13	10	-3	4 Yrs
Gr. 8	28	36	8	Never	Gr. 8	18	20	2	Never
Gr. 10	26	24	-2	12 Yrs	Gr. 10	20	15	-5	3 Yrs
Gap: African – Caucasian					Gap: Hispanic – Caucasian				
Gr. 3	22	20	-2	10 Yrs	Gr. 3	18	25	7	Never
Gr. 6	24	16	-8	2 Yrs	Gr. 6	20	14	-6	3 Yrs
Gr. 8	21	33	12	Never	Gr. 8	21	25	4	Never
Gr. 10	33	27	-6	5 Yrs	Gr. 10	25	25	0	Never

*Data derived from *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001*

Data from Exhibit 4.1.22 show:

- Benchmark writing gaps are narrowing the range until parity can be as small as one year and as great as 26 years. Gaps in 2000 are all double digit, ranging from a low of 10 points (American Indian – Caucasian in grade 8) to a high of 33 points (African American – Caucasian grade 10, Alaska Native – Caucasian grade 3).
- Benchmark writing gaps range in 2001 from a low of one point (American Indian – Caucasian grade 6) to a high of 37 points (Alaska Native – Caucasian grade 8).
- Eighteen areas in benchmark writing had gaps greater than 20 points in 2000.
- Only three areas reduced achievement gaps by more than 10 points (American Indian – Caucasian grades 3, 6, and 10 and African – Caucasian grade 6).

- The achievement gap in benchmark writing did not change in one group (Hispanic – Caucasian).
- The achievement gap in benchmark writing increased in eight areas in 2001.
- The achievement gap in benchmark writing decreased in 15 areas in 2001.

Exhibit 4.1.23									
Achievement Gap Analysis of Percent Proficient or Advanced on Benchmark Examinations in Mathematics for the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 Academic Years and Years to Parity at Current Rate of Change by Grade Levels and Selected Subpopulations* Anchorage School District									
Grade	2000	2001	Change 2000-01	Years to Parity	Grade	2000	2001	Change 2000-01	Years to Parity
Gap: Alaska Native - Caucasian					Gap: American Indian- Caucasian				
Gr. 3	27	25	-2	13 Yrs	Gr. 3	15	12	-3	4 Yrs
Gr. 6	28	28	0	Never	Gr. 6	25	15	-10	2 Yrs
Gr. 8	25	30	5	5 Yrs	Gr. 8	20	30	10	Never
Gr. 10	26	21	-5	Never	Gr. 10	16	6	-10	1 Yr
Gap: Combined Native - Caucasian					Gap: Asian/Pacific Islander – Caucasian				
Gr. 3	26	24	-2	12 Yrs	Gr. 3	17	20	3	Never
Gr. 6	28	27	-1	27 Yrs	Gr. 6	18	17	-1	17 Yrs
Gr. 8	24	30	6	Never	Gr. 8	16	13	-3	5 Yrs
Gr. 10	25	19	-6	4 Yrs	Gr. 10	19	12	-7	2 Yrs
Gap: African – Caucasian					Gap: Hispanic – Caucasian				
Gr. 3	24	29	5	Never	Gr. 3	17	28	11	Never
Gr. 6	35	26	-9	3 Yrs	Gr. 6	28	25	-3	9 Yrs
Gr. 8	34	31	-3	11 Yrs	Gr. 8	26	26	0	Never
Gr. 10	31	36	5	Never	Gr. 10	23	27	4	Never
*Data derived from Profiles of Performance 2000-2001									
Note: Caucasian scores declined in grade 6 mathematics on the 2001 benchmark									

Exhibit 4.1.23 demonstrates the following:

- Grade 6 mathematics show a narrowing of the gap for every subpopulation except Alaska Natives; however, Caucasian proficient and advanced percentages declined in mathematics in grade six thereby accounting for some of the narrowing of the gap.
- Benchmark mathematics gaps in 2000 are all double digit, ranging from a low of 15 points (American Indian – Caucasian in grade 6 to a high of 28 points (Combined Native – Caucasian grade 6, Hispanic – Caucasian grade 6).
- Benchmark mathematics gaps range in 2001 from a low of six points (American Indian – Caucasian grade 10) to a high of 31 points (African American – Caucasian grade 8).
- Seventeen areas had gaps in benchmark mathematics greater than 20 points in 2000.
- Only two areas reduced achievement gaps by at least 10 points (American Indian – Caucasian grades 6 and 10).
- The achievement gap in benchmark mathematics did not change in two groups (Alaska Native – Caucasian grade 6 and Hispanic – Caucasian grade 8).
- The achievement gap in benchmark mathematics increased in eight areas in 2001.
- The achievement gap in benchmark mathematics decreased in 14 areas in 2001.
- Where benchmark mathematics gaps are narrowing, the range until parity can be as small as one year and as great as 27 years at the current rate.

The achievement gap is a serious issue for Anchorage School District. The auditors did not receive similar data for limited English proficient (LEP)/ non-LEP students. However, the No Child Left Behind Federal Programs Integrated Project Application set a goal of merely two percent improvement to move from “not proficient/below proficient” to “proficient/advanced.” There is no written rationale for setting this goal at two percent.

There are many in the district who stated that socio-economics (SES) is the prime predictor of student performance. The Education Trust and the Council of Great City Schools have conducted research on the subject, pointing out thousands of high-performing, high poverty schools and high-performing, high-poverty and minority schools that have outperformed expectations for students of low SES. The auditors examined the achievement data by SES using free and reduced lunch as an indicator of low SES.

The Anchorage School District’s Assessment and Evaluation Department provided the auditors with electronic data by school regarding the numbers of students qualifying for free lunch, reduced lunch and non-free or reduced lunch status. They also provided the subgroup performance of those student populations on the Benchmark Tests. The auditors used data from the 71 schools for which all data could be matched on the two files provided by the district.

The auditors graphed the data for free lunch, reduced lunch, and non-free or reduced lunch in each performance category. The results indicated that SES was a strong factor in performance, as shown in Exhibit 4.1.24. The first column indicates the students scoring “Not Proficient,” the second column indicates those scoring “Below Proficient,” the third column indicates those students that scored “Proficient,” and the fourth column indicates those scoring at the “Advanced” level.

Exhibit 4.1.24
2001 Benchmark Performance by Lunch Status and Benchmark Achievement
Anchorage School District

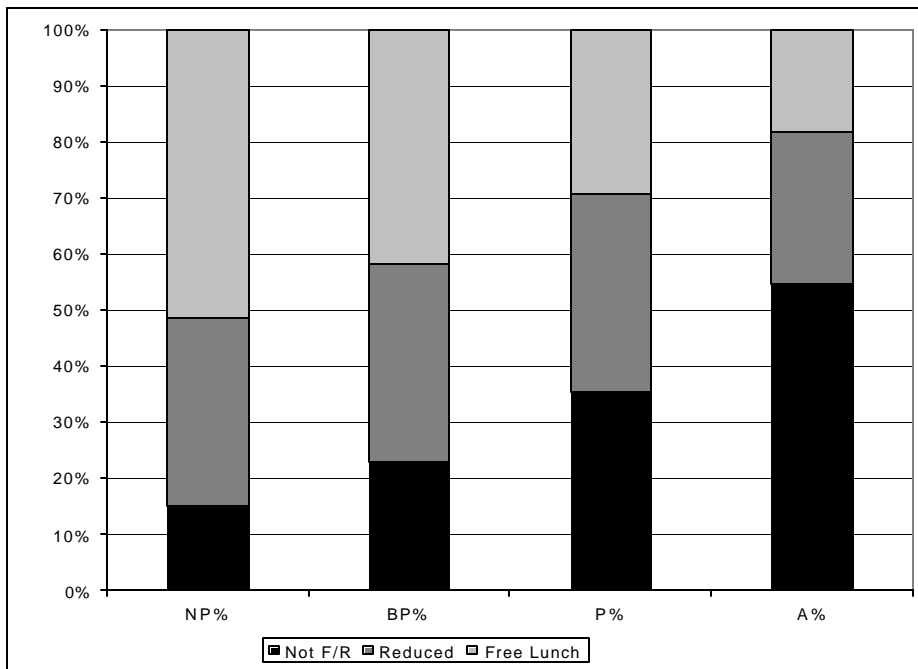


Exhibit 4.1.24 demonstrates the following:

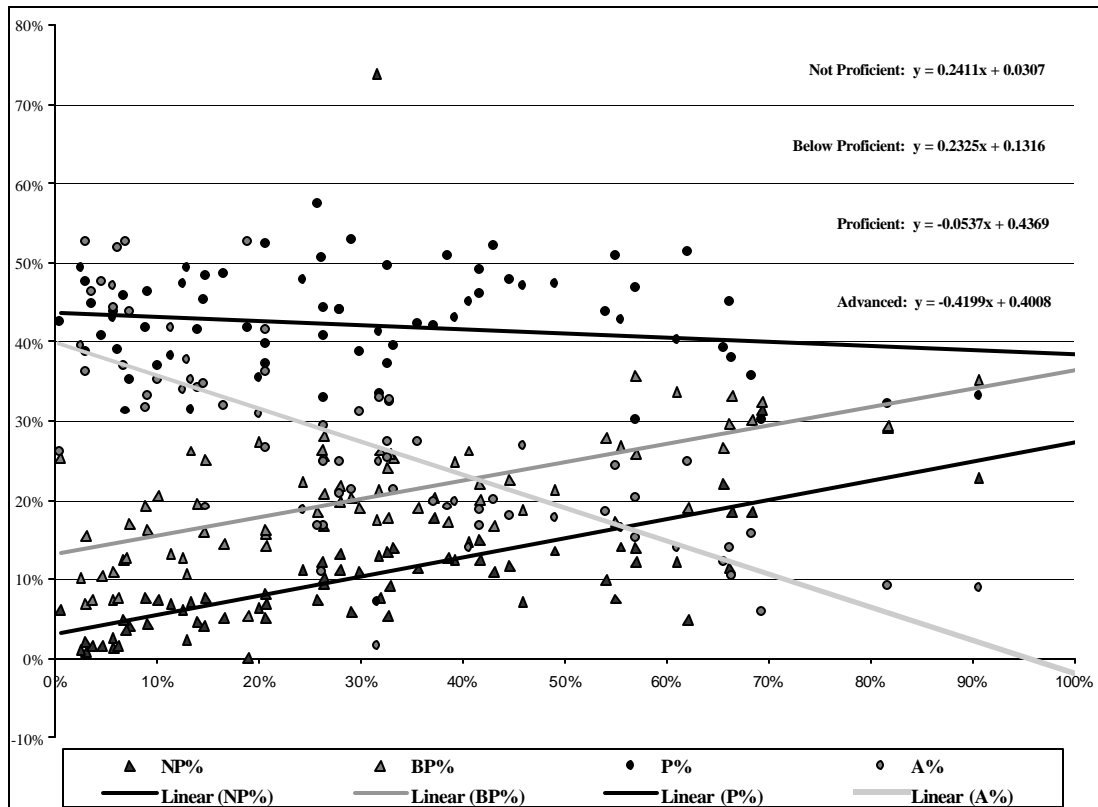
- Students from all categories of free, reduced, and non-free or reduced lunch are represented in all four levels of Benchmark proficiency.

There is an inverse relationship of lunch status to scoring level, with Free Lunch decreasing in representation from “not proficient” to “advanced” and Not Free or Reduced Lunch increasing in representation across those same categories.

The Anchorage School District data indicate that SES status is a strong factor in performance. The auditors wanted to adjust for that factor in order to identify schools that were underperforming or outperforming based on what would be expected given that school’s percentage of students with low SES. Since free lunch is not administered at the high school level, high school was not included.

The auditors combined all tests taken at a given school. The percentage of the students in the school that scored in the four performance categories was calculated. The auditors then calculated the percentage of students in each school that were low SES based on the percentage of students participating in free and reduced lunch programs. A scatter plot by school was made of the percent of students achieving in each of the four performance levels versus percentage of low SES of the school. Thus, there were four points plotted for each of the 71 schools. The auditors calculated a linear interpolation for each of the performance categories. The equations are indicated in the scatter plots shown in [Exhibit 4.1.25](#).

Exhibit 4.1.25
 School Performance by SES and Achievement Category with Trendline
 All Tests Taken by Elementary and Middle Schools
 Anchorage School District
 Spring Benchmark 2001



The auditors then took each of the formulas for the trend lines and calculated the expected percentage of the students in each of the achievement categories using the school’s low SES percentage. The auditors then calculated the difference by school in each of the achievement categories between actual and SES-expected performance within Anchorage School District derived from the trend line formulas. The auditors subtracted the actual performance from the calculated performance and

multiplied by the sign of the slope of the trend line. The auditors summed the four differences to determine an overall performance variance indicator.

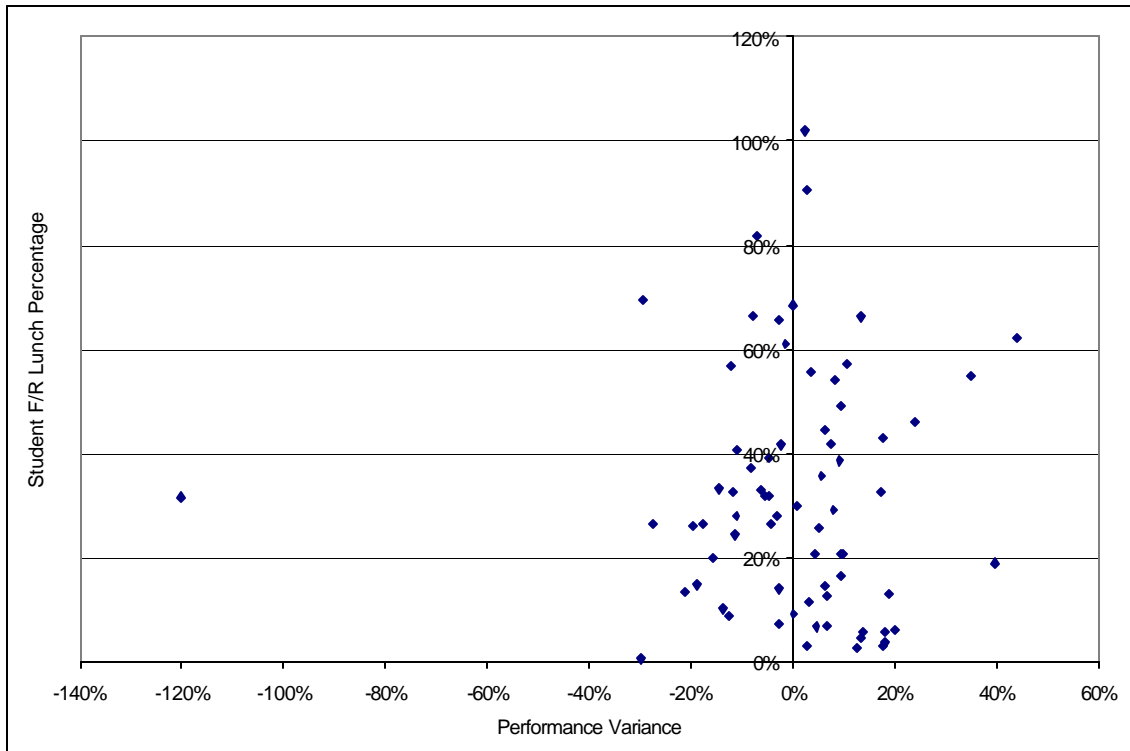
The auditors plotted the overall performance variance indicator versus percent low SES for each school. Schools to the right of the vertical axis, exceeded expectations that trend line equations predicted for their SES. Schools to the left of the axis, under-performed the expectations predicted for their SES. Eighty-nine percent of the schools were within approximately plus or minus 20 percent of expected performance based on SES. As expected, increasing low SES percentage also increased non-passing percentage and decreased passing percentage. However, some schools far exceeded predictions.

Four schools were outliers in the positive direction. These four are Ursa Major (43.9 overall performance variance indicator), Mount Spur (39.6 overall performance variance indicator), Ursa Minor (34.9 overall performance variance indicator), and Government Hill (23.9 overall performance variance indicator). Four schools were outliers in the negative direction, meaning that they under-performed given their level of low socio-economic students: Campbell (-27.4 overall performance variance indicator), Muldoon (-29.5 overall performance variance indicator), Family Partnership (-29.8 overall performance variance indicator), and Whaley Center (-120.1 overall performance variance indicator).

These variances are not indicators of absolute test scores, merely scores that are different than would be predicted by Anchorage School District SES achievement data alone. Some schools with high scores may indeed be under-performing given their student population.

This analysis is not intended to build competition among schools, but rather to indicate where practices might be found in schools outperforming the trend line that can be replicated in other schools and to spur discussion of issues that may exist in schools that under-perform expectations within the district's own data. It is also a means of encouraging the district to re-examine assumptions about SES. While certainly a strong factor, performance gaps can be closed. It has been done in other school districts, and Anchorage School District can change student performance for all subgroups.

Exhibit 4.1.26
 Overall Performances Variance Vs. Student Free-Reduced Lunch Percentage
 All Tests Taken Benchmark Tests
 Anchorage School District
 March 2001



Summary

The Anchorage School District has a tradition of performing at or above state averages; however, it has persistent achievement gaps among its subpopulations. Its testing largely is limited to reading, language arts, and mathematics. The district has been developing an emphasis on the Six Traits of Writing, and the achievement gap displays the greatest number of gains in benchmark writing, but the gap is still increasing for at least one grade level in each subpopulation on that test. Unless actions are taken to intervene, the gap in some areas may never be closed. Student assessment information was insufficient in scope to provide adequate evaluation of the instructional program required by board policy. Socio-economic data does serve as a predictor of performance; however, several schools have far exceeded performance that would have been predicted by Anchorage School District trend data. Similarly, schools with fewer students on free and reduced lunch have performed worse than would be predicted by Anchorage School District.

Finding 4.2: While Test and Other Demographic Data Have Been Compiled in a Comprehensive Document, the “Bridges” to Data Use are Neither Systematic Nor Systemic to Inform Decisions related to Curriculum Development, Staff Development, Budget Development, and Site-level Instructional Decisions to Improve Student Achievement.

Auditors expect to find that school district staff have comprehensive data on which to base decisions. District leaders must have carefully decided what data are needed to inform decision-making. They also must have a systematic way of communicating to the teaching and administrative staffs how the data relate to the written curriculum and classroom instruction. A clear, focused direction on how to use the data must exist throughout the district in a systematic way, designed to improve student or program performance. District-wide aggregated test data alone can be misleading. For a district to be successful with all student sub-populations, test data and demographic data must be systematically and systemically used to ensure that all students are progressing at an adequate pace to master the standards set by the district.

Bridges from policy and written curriculum must exist, clearly linking assessment with both. Assessment and other demographic data must be used for curriculum revisions and for the creation or modification of support documents. Administrators and teachers must share a common understanding of how the test and other demographic data are related to written curriculum and standards. Focused, clear dissemination strategies designed so that all staff understand the implications of the test and demographic data go beyond merely publishing data. Professional development should also be prioritized so that teachers have knowledge of the content and strategies to strategically improve student achievement. Instructionally-focused professional development must consistently include the use of data and its explicit connection to curriculum and instruction so that the importance of data-driven instructional decisions is clearly communicated. Budget development begins with analyses of student data to determine budget priorities targeted to improve student achievement. Data are collected and used so that expenditures for programs, interventions, staff development or materials have led to desired results. There must be a single source for district data to maintain data integrity and accuracy.

In Anchorage School District, the *Profiles of Performance 2000-2001* document provides an extensive collection of data coupled with thoughtful discussion of the data. There are current and historical test data, as well as demographic data and survey data. However, no document was presented to auditors which outlined how decisions were made regarding which data needed to be reported and how those reports could best be formatted to assist in data interpretation in the schools. Other documents presented to the auditors indicated that linkages on what data should be collected and how end users of test data should analyze student performance with demographic data are fragmented and dependent upon leaders of different programs rather than as part of a central, district-wide focus. Curriculum documents do not specify in sufficient detail the connection of the curriculum to the various district-wide assessments administered in the district (see [Finding 2.2](#)), and instructional materials and classroom instruction are not systematically linked to content and performance standards that are measured (see [Findings 2.3](#) and [2.4](#)).

While individual schools can and do request additional data, there is little evidence of systemic, systematic examinations of the performance of major sub-populations at every school, meaning that some schools may be scoring well overall, while a large gap may exist for sub-populations within the school (see [Finding 4.1](#)). There was no evidence presented to auditors that all schools had specific goals to accelerate learning for subpopulations or individual students performing consistently below their peers.

The auditors examined board policy and other documents regarding formal directives regarding collection of data.

Board Policy 144 Expectations for Performance states, “The Board shall adopt and periodically review expectations for performance of the instructional program of the district, including statements of instructional goals, priorities among instructional goals, expectations for student achievement and short- and long-range goals for instructional improvement.”

Board Policy 349 Evaluation states, “Evaluation shall be for the purpose of instructional improvement. Evaluation of the school program is an administrative function and shall be conducted annually in priority goal areas. The results shall be reported to the Board and the public. To effectively appraise educational progress the Superintendent shall report orally and in writing to the Board as circumstances dictate and may require such periodic reports from state members.”

Anchorage School District 2002-02 Preliminary Financial Plan p 93 sets the responsibility of the Assessment and Evaluation Department. It states, “The Assessment and Evaluation Department has the responsibility for measuring and reporting district progress toward meeting goals for student academic achievement.” The department maintains and operates the district-wide assessment programs. These include the state-mandated Terra Nova, Benchmark and High School Graduation Qualifying Exams, and Kindergarten and First Grade Profile, and local writing, pre-algebra, and curriculum-referenced tests. The department provides reports of student achievement for individual students, schools, programs, and the district as a whole. State examinations show student status relative to state standards at benchmark grades. Norm-referenced examinations show student status relative to a national population. Additional activities include program evaluations, coordination of evaluations for funded programs, community and student surveys, collection of input into staff evaluations, and institutional research as requested by the School Board and Administration. The Assessment and Evaluation Department provides valid and accurate data on student performance combined with assessments of the success of the Anchorage School District in meeting academic achievement goals.

Anchorage School District Profiles of Performance 2000-2001, provides extensive data and analysis of test scores, demographic data, and survey data at the district-level as well as reports by individual schools. School data are not easily compared in the current format, making it difficult to capitalize on pockets of outstanding instruction or areas needing more assistance. Data are not collected and reported by the same ethnic group labels for each test. This may reflect state decisions, but indicates that the district has not yet determined how it wants to analyze and reflect on its data for subpopulations.

SMS Test Score Reports, dated April 19, 2002, lists and describes 18 data reports from the Anchorage Student Management System that all administrators can access. Reports can be generated by student, classroom, building level, and district-level. Samples of the reports are also included. Schools can display CAT/5 achievement results by gender, ethnic group, special education services, migrant education services, free lunch, reduced lunch, bilingual services, and Title I services for the current year or past year.

Test Score Menu, published by the Data Processing Department in January 2002, as a user guide, lists maintenance and HSGQE scheduling options, in addition to test score reports.

Elementary Principal Inservice, dated August 20, 2001 contains an agenda on test data analysis for Benchmarks, CAT, and Writing Assessment to be used as information to share with teachers and parents, a means of beginning school report card goals and learning opportunity grant plans, and a template for staff development on test and data analysis. There was no written statement regarding feedback on the actual usage of the material, nor did auditors receive similar documents for secondary schools.

Anchorage School District Title I Program document dated 5/17/2002 presents descriptions of optional Title I assessments and examples of data use by several schools. In the examples presented to auditors, data disaggregation was by gender and LEP status only.

Construct and Predictive Validity of the Alaska State High School Graduation Qualifying Examination First Administration written by three Anchorage School District staff members for presentation at the 2001 American Educational Research Association Convention in Seattle Washington is an extensive analysis of the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination in Anchorage and raises multiple questions about the test assessing standards that were adopted in 1999. “In response to a state survey, better than 20 percent of the responding teachers indicated they offered ‘little’ or ‘no’ instruction relative to seven of the 14 reading standards included in the survey, one of the three writing standards, and all of the 27 math standards.” The paper states, “Principals and teachers must understand what is expected of students and provide instruction in line with the expected standards, based on information relative to students’ progress.” The report also points out that surveys asking teachers if the standards are taught are stated so generally, that it is not possible to know if the respondents were addressing the specific concepts and skills students need to learn to be successful on the test.

While there is board policy establishing the purpose for evaluation and a requirement for the Board to review expectations for the performance of the instructional program, there is no direction connecting the written curriculum to classroom instruction and assessment, nor are there responsibilities specified for the use of data. There is no requirement for the administration to determine the demographic and test data that must be collected and reported, nor is there a directive that the administration have a system for the dissemination and use of the data. While reporting structures are in place and capable staff are able to make data available to schools, no documents presented to auditors indicated that a district-wide systematic plan for systemic use of data was in place or being planned.

While many reports are available on the Student Management System, few staff members explicitly referenced these reports. Interviews with the Data Processing Department indicated that the department accepts individual school requests for additional types of reports. If the department decides to devote resources to produce the report, the report is available to all schools. The department presents information and documents to principals regarding the availability of reports. No evidence was presented that the availability and use of these data reports is part of an overall plan for the use of data within the Anchorage School District.

Interviews with board members, central office, school staff, and parents provided indications of the lack of bridges or connections, among the assessment and evaluation department and other departments concerned with curriculum management. While many agree that they receive important data, there is not agreement on how the data are disseminated for use and whether the data are formatted for ease of use. There is no clear message on how the data are to be used or how well they meet the schools’ needs. There are also mixed perceptions on the processes used in the district to share data and how the central office uses data to improve its own materials and supports to schools. However, based on interviews, there is a growing awareness on the need to use data. The following statements from those interviews reflect that while most are aware of the presence of data, systematic, systemic bridges are not in place for end users to use the data to improve student performance.

Desire for Data

- “There are people in Anchorage that have a hunger to understand their programs and use data-driven decision-making.”
- “We’re hoping to become a data-driven school.”

Bridge to Disseminate Data to End Users

- “They (Assessment and Evaluation Unit) send us everything we need. The *Profile* is very helpful.”

- “We don’t get data in a timely manner or in the best format. I don’t know if there is feedback and a mechanism for making changes. It’s a bit haphazard.”
- “We’re not getting the (assessment) data in a usable format for high school. It’s awfully hard to hold teachers accountable. Staff development is needed to teach teachers how to use the data in some kind of a prescriptive manner.”
- “The campus receives the raw data. We must disaggregate by hand if we want information by groups.”
- “There’s test score data kind of scattered around.”
- “You get data, but only if you ask for it.”
- “Our system of getting the information to the classroom has to be improved. You have to ask for it to get it.”

Bridge to Internal Processes to Use Data to Improve the System

- “How does the assessment department and curriculum department work together?”
- “I don’t know if our test data goes to curriculum or elementary ed.”
- “Some teachers get a lot of content staff development, but as far as tying it to assessment; I don’t think it has been linked.”

Bridge to School Use

- “I am not sure how things relate to state standards.”
- “It’s silly to have the tests and not do anything with the data.”
- “*Profiles of Performance* is a wonderful book. But we don’t make any changes given what the numbers show in it.”
- “We get it (test results) so late in the year. The kids will be gone. We look at the API. We have a staff meeting. The teachers work by grade level to make statements about what the data is telling us. We list where we are doing well and where we are missing the boat. Everybody buys into the fact that this is a school-wide responsibility.”
- “One of the things we did with the data was give it to counselors to contact every parent of a child who did not pass a section of the test to explain it to them. Other than that, to be honest we haven’t done a lot. We are working to figure out what the data means. We have been working with math to align their courses and also in freshman and sophomore English to be sure they are more standards aligned. It’s had a positive impact in classroom instruction.”
- “Trying to figure out how to make the data usable is tough. It’s especially hard when the test results are not back in time to do something with them before the end of the school year.”

Indicative that there is not a common vocabulary regarding test data, these statements are made in interviews:

- “We disaggregate data primarily by grade level.”
- “We disaggregate by special education/regular education, and SES.”
- “We disaggregate by special education, ethnicity, SES, and use it to plan goals and instruction.”
- In response to question regarding disaggregated data, “What’s that?”
- “Disaggregated data? I think they’re working on that.”
- “We break down the data by grade level and regular education/special education.”

Interviews revealed that there are many Anchorage School District staff using data, but there is a lack of systemic or systematic use of data throughout the district. Clear linkages have not been forged so that end users understand or have a voice in which data are collected, how the data flow to schools

and departments, and how data are to be used to improve student achievement. There is also a lack of common vocabulary to describe these practices.

For test data to be used with maximum impact, there must be a clear alignment of the written, taught, and tested curriculum (see [Finding 2.2](#)). Teachers must have explicit links of curriculum, classroom instruction, and test data. There must be required, explicit training on the use of data for all staff. In the Anchorage School District, the Elementary Council received training in how to begin analyzing data at the school and classroom level to identify areas of strength and weakness. Title I schools have begun an assessment program reporting data to track student progress. These are pockets of direct instruction on the use of data. However, as seen in [Exhibit 4.2.1](#), there are many bridges that are needed to inform curriculum development, staff development, budget development, and site-level instructional decisions to improve student achievement.

Exhibit 4.2.1 Explicit Bridges for Use of Data Anchorage School District		
Document/Activity	Purpose	Status of Bridge
<i>Board Policy 144 Expectations for Performance</i>	Requires the Board to set expectations for performance of the instructional program of the district.	Only a portion of the instructional program is measured (see Finding 4.1). Policy does not address the use of data in setting priorities.
<i>Board Policy 349 Evaluation</i>	Sets the purpose of evaluation of priority areas as an annual function for the purpose of instructional improvement and requires reports to the Board and the public.	There is no setting of responsibilities for the use of data. Policy does not address the use of data an integral component for determining priorities for district action in staff development, classroom instruction, and in budget planning, as well as a tool for reviewing the district's curriculum. While the district does collect and report data with sophisticated analysis of the data, school interviews reveal only pockets where the data are used in depth.
<i>Anchorage School District 2002-02 Preliminary Financial Plan, page 93</i>	Sets the responsibilities for the Assessment and Evaluation Department.	There is no explicit responsibility for directly training others on the meaning or use of data at the district and school levels, nor requiring collaboration with other departments and schools to ensure the data collected and format in which data are reported meets user needs.
<i>Anchorage School District Profiles of Performance 2000- 2001</i>	Reports to Board and Schools data from and analysis of test performance and other data impacting instruction and perceptions of stakeholders in the Anchorage School District.	There is no explicit bridge explaining how it was determined which data to collect and report. There is no explicit bridge to train users on the implications of the data for their program or school.
<i>SMS Test Score Reports, dated April 19, 2002</i>	Provides a list and description of reports available to administrators through the Student Management System.	While interviews indicate that the document is disseminated to administrators in a meeting, there is no explicit bridge to ensure that administrators are trained in the use of the system and the data implications for their school. Auditors did not see a document calling for tracking the use of the system to provide a feedback bridge for knowing which

		reports are the most useful to schools, which should be modified or dropped, or which schools may need additional support in the use of the report system.
<i>Test Score Menu</i>	Provides a user guide to test score reports, maintenance, and HSGQE scheduling options.	There is no evidence that the training principals received covered how to analyze the data in the reports and the implications of the reports for school decision-making and budget planning. Auditors did not receive feedback on actual usage of the data reports.
Exhibit 4.2.1 (continued) Explicit Bridges for Use of Data Anchorage School District		
Document/Activity	Purpose	Status of Bridge
<i>Elementary Principal Inservice, dated August 20, 2001</i>	Provides elementary school principals with data analysis tools that appear to be a reduced in scope from similar tools found on the state's website. There was no evidence presented to auditors that the reduced scope was purposeful or a prelude to a planned expansion in the use of data to be phased in over time.	There was no explicit indication that this information reached every principal, nor feedback on whether or how it was used at every campus.
<i>Anchorage School District Title I Program document dated 5/17/2002</i>	A set of options for Title I schools to collect data on student progress in state-tested areas and a move to become more data driven, disaggregating data by gender and LEP status only. Data collected from schools is reported to Title I for the creation of a database.	This program is in its initial stages and intends to provide data that can follow the student via a new database structure. In its initial stages, interviews indicate that its use and fidelity of application varies across the schools. The setting up of a separate database may lead to complications in accuracy of data maintained in Anchorage School District when state and federal reports must be made or when data are furnished to the public. There is no explicit bridge indicating that there may be future implications in the Anchorage system as a whole, should the testing program prove useful.
<i>Construct and Predictive Validity of the Alaska State High School Graduation Qualifying Examination: First Administration</i>	A paper presented at the 2001 American Educational Research Association Convention in Seattle Washington extensively analyzing the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination in Anchorage and raising multiple questions about the test, particularly regarding its alignment to classroom instruction and variables that are outside of school control.	This paper raises serious concerns about teacher understanding of the standards and the inclusion of classroom instruction that gives students the opportunity to learn what they need to master for success on assessments of those standards. Deep training of teachers to understand and apply the performance standards in instruction is a bridge that must drive staff development and curriculum support. While interviews indicate that the bridge has begun in the area of writing (see Finding 1.4), there are no documents presented to the auditors that indicate there is a systematic, systemic plan to address the issue in all areas.

- There is strong data analysis capability in Anchorage School District evidenced in the documents published through the Assessment and Evaluation Department.
- There is the beginning of use of an analysis tool in the elementary school program; however, there is little feedback regarding how extensively it has been implemented or how classroom practice has been impacted.
- Central office and school staff have no explicit requirement through board policy to use test and other demographic data to design, modify, or terminate their programs or to use those data in the design and modification of classroom instruction.
- Policy does not address the use of data an integral component for determining priorities for district action in staff development, classroom instruction, and in budget planning, as well as a tool for reviewing the district's curriculum.
- There is no explicit set of expectations for training of staff on the availability and use of test and other demographic data.
- There is a beginning of parallel maintenance of data systems.
- There is no systematic feedback loop built into the use of reports or other mechanisms to know if schools are accessing or using data reports or whether other forms of data reporting would be useful.

Summary

The Anchorage School District has personnel who have demonstrated sophisticated capabilities for the collection and analysis of test and other demographic data in the reports they have produced. In interviews, many staff evidence a deep understanding of those data. In some areas, data use is promoted. However, the Anchorage School District lacks key bridges to ensure that data are used to drive curriculum, programmatic, instructional, and budgetary priorities and decisions. There is no policy stating that data use is a requirement in the district, specifying responsibilities or directing the Superintendent to develop written responsibilities regarding collection, dissemination, training and use of data. There is no indication of systematic collaboration to ensure that the data collection and reporting serves the users well and that all instructional staff are instructed in how to interpret and use the data to improve their programs or instructional or budgetary planning decisions. While pockets of data users do exist, there is no evidence of systemic use of data.

Finding 4.3: There is Inconsistent Use of Test and Other Data within the Schools to Improve Student Achievement Growth. While Some Principals are Aggressive and “Data-focused,” others Lack Either Interest and/or Skill in Data Utilization in Constructing Plans or in Pursuing Strategies which are Likely to Yield Improved Student Achievement on Required Testing Instruments. Data Disaggregation Does Not Include Ethnicity at the Site-level.

Auditors expect to find a comprehensive system of assessment and testing which creates a timely and relevant database through the use of valid measurement tools that indicate how well students are learning the district-determined learning goals and objectives. Teachers and administrators demonstrate a clear understanding of how students are assessed on required testing instruments, including the standards, types of questions, and level of the concepts, skills, and knowledge students must master to be successful. The test results are well understood so that all administrators and teachers know how to analyze important trends in the instructional program district-wide, as well as areas of strength and weakness by classroom, groups of students, and individual students. They use this information for planning and improving classroom instruction and programs that are likely to improve student achievement measured on required testing instruments. Data are disaggregated consistently and in meaningful ways for the district leaders to determine that all sub-populations are

attaining the instructional goals and objectives district-wide and within each school. Each school leader and teacher makes frequent use of data to design programs and classroom instruction that is targeted to improve student achievement.

The auditors reviewed board policy and other district documents presented to them to indicate how data are used in the schools. While board policy calls for evaluation for the purpose of instructional improvement, it is vague in mandating the use of achievement data. Board policy does not specify the responsibilities of central office and school personnel in terms of use of the data for the purpose of instructional improvement. It does not require the reporting of student achievement by subpopulations to verify that all students are making adequate progress. It does not require that major objectives be measured or that a process for doing so be established (see [Finding 4.1](#)).

- *Board Policy 144 Expectations for Performance* states, “The Board shall adopt and periodically review expectations for performance of the instructional program of the district, including statements of instructional goals, priorities among instructional goals, expectations for student achievement and short- and long-range goals for instructional improvement.”
- *Board Policy 349 Evaluation* states, “Evaluation shall be for the purpose of instructional improvement. Evaluation of the school program is an administrative function and shall be conducted annually in priority goal areas. The results shall be reported to the Board and the public. To effectively appraise educational progress the Superintendent shall report orally and in writing to the Board as circumstances dictate and may require such periodic reports from state members.”
- *Anchorage School District Title I Program document dated 5/17/2002* presenting descriptions of optional Title I assessments and examples of data use by several schools. In the examples presented, data disaggregation was by gender and Limited English Proficiency status only.
- *No Child Left Behind Federal Programs Integrated Project Application School Year 2002-2003, Appendix A* provides school level plans for school-wide programs. Each school specifically calls for analyzing test data to address student needs. However, auditors did not note any schools specifically referencing alignment of instruction to the testing requirements
- *Elementary Principal Inservice, dated August 20, 2001* provides an agenda on test data analysis for Benchmarks, CAT, and Writing Assessment to be used as information to share with teachers and parents, a means of beginning school report card goals and learning opportunity grant plans, and a template for staff development on test and data analysis. The document mentions alignment of curriculum content and test content as well as teacher expectations. It asks school staff to review test score data by Alaska Performance Index (API), which indicates a child’s score and subsequent placement within the range of the four proficiency categories. Schools are to manually plot API scores by Benchmark test and grade level by classroom, school-wide, district, and Alaska cut score. CAT scores are to be analyzed by percentile rank. Teachers are to review a set of questions to analyze areas of strength and weakness, including analyzing content standards related to performance standards.

These documents indicate the Board’s intention to set expectations and review evaluation data to appraise educational progress. The Title I program staff and leadership in the elementary schools are working towards the use of data to drive instructional decisions. Auditors did not receive documents indicating the responsibility of school leaders to use data (see [Finding 4.2](#)). Tools for using data are more suggested than required. Auditors saw no evidence of a requirement for all schools to disaggregate data by ethnicity, socio-economic status, LEP/non-LEP, special education, gender, nor to compare performance of Title I to non-Title I student performance. There is no direction to examine survey data, attendance data, or any other non-test data. This lack of direction and specificity contributes to inconsistent and ineffective use of data.

The auditors interviewed board members, central office staff, principals, teachers, and parents regarding the use of data in Anchorage School District. The following comments illustrate the inconsistent use of data:

- “The data report rank orders students on low to high on any one of the tests. They can identify those most in need. It also identifies other special programs in which in the child participates.”
- “It (graphing data) opened their (K-3 teachers’) eyes to the fact that all teachers are responsible for achievement of each child.”
- “Last year we agreed on the tests we would all give (for early reading). Each school decided what would mean struggling or proficient. There are great similarities, and so we created a district standard. The teachers were 73 percent accurate in determining whether students would score proficient (on reading).”
- “All principals got the data and graphed it and took it back to their sites. We were not told to share it, but it was suggested that we did.”
- “We test our readers with a DRA kit and district benchmark kit and other assessments with a mid-year test for the struggling readers. A lot of the schools used criterion-referenced tests to determine the status of their readers.”
- “Everyone does their own thing. On the reading K-4 test, the teachers did their own test rather than the one that was designed and did their own scores.”
- “I really like test data to see where the strengths and weaknesses are in the team. If the kid is low in grammar, they can look at what to do to help. We can use the CAT to look at the school as a whole. When you do the stats, we look at ethnicity.”
- “The data we get from the district regarding assessment is usually on school reports or benchmark testing. It’s never the testing teachers would use to alter instruction. It’s the big stuff.”
- “We compile and discuss trends in student data at third grade.”
- “In the fall, we work with the data to do a profile for each grade in multi-level grade level groups. It was not disaggregated as much as I would have liked, but central office is working on it.”

Interviews reveal a willingness to use data, but an inconsistency in the use of test and other data within the schools. There are a variety of interpretations as to what district expectations are for utilizing data to develop plans and strategies likely to improve student achievement on required testing instruments.

Summary

District leaders and many principals indicate that data are being used in the Anchorage School District. There is no requirement for each school to examine test and other data such as attendance rates, retention rates and patterns, and other data readily available in the district that indicate how well a school is meeting the needs of its students. The lack of clear, comprehensive, district-wide training in the use of test data to align classroom instruction and programs (see [Finding 4.2](#)) has resulted in some principals lacking either interest or skill in utilizing data to construct plans or pursue strategies which are likely to yield improved student achievement on required testing instruments.

Finding 4.4: There Have Been Little Systematic Program Evaluation Activities Completed by District Personnel; Board Members Indicate Frustration with the Lack of Data Regarding Program Effectiveness, Especially Around Budget Development and Continuing Budget Support for Non-evaluated Programs.

Schools institute programs as a means to address a perceived need. A comprehensive program assessment provides a foundation on which to base decisions on the success of instructional or other interventions. The district’s systematic program assessment is a vehicle for examining how well

programs are actually producing desired results. The evaluation of programs can also provide feedback to teachers regarding how classroom instruction can be more effective and provides data by which the staff can compare the strengths and weaknesses of various programs and program alternatives. Appropriate and continuous program evaluation needs to be an integral part of the overall assessment system.

Program assessment must not be left to chance or conducted in a haphazard manner; rather, it is deliberate, purposeful, and clearly defined. The well-managed district consistently employs a data collection process that determines the quality of existing programs. New programs are not put into place without designing and implementing an evaluation plan that looks at the impact of the program. Instructional programs must always have a component that measures student achievement gains, not merely perceptions or attendance of participants or if the implementation was completed according to schedule. The lack of careful, planned program evaluation leaves the Board and education leaders with only anecdotal and random evidence concerning the effectiveness of programs and interventions, and leaves parents and students uncertain about the extent of student learning.

The auditors wanted to be able to directly trace the impact of modifications or enhancements made in programs or school-level interventions to a positive impact on student achievement and that the programs and interventions were implemented based on data-driven decisions. The auditors reviewed policy, assessment data, and procedures regarding program evaluation. Interviews with school district personnel and board members also presented data on program evaluation activities. The review of documents and interviews with staff revealed that there has been little systematic program evaluation, even though board policy requires it for pilot programs.

Board Policy 349 Evaluation states, “Evaluation shall be for the purpose of instructional improvement. Evaluation of the school program is an administrative function and shall be conducted annually in priority goal areas. The results shall be reported to the Board and the public. To effectively appraise educational progress, the Superintendent shall report orally and in writing to the Board as circumstances dictate and may require such periodic reports from state members.”

Board Policy 341.22 Pilot Programs states, “Pilot programs may be modifications to the current curriculum and/or changes in how the curriculum is delivered. The Superintendent shall create procedures for developing, implementing, and evaluating pilot programs. Pilot programs shall be reported to the Board. Pilot programs that have major impact or involve the expenditure of more than \$20,000 shall require Board approval.

Interviews indicated dissatisfaction with the lack of program evaluation, and a lack of resources to conduct the type of evaluation upon which program continuance, termination, or modification could be based.

- “We have not done a good job at evaluating our programs.”
- “We used to do it (evaluation of programs) anecdotally. We are moving away from that. We now have a variety of sources on how well programs are doing. I’d like to do a better job with that. There is feedback, but we could be better.”
- “At one point we were doing a lot of evaluations, but the luxury of having that amount of labor has dwindled.”
- “One thing the district does not do is real objective evaluation of programs. We get a program and it stays forever. There isn’t any evaluation of that program. That function needs to rise to the top.”
- “I really don’t think we made decisions made on test data.”
- “We don’t do nearly as much ‘results-based’ assessment as we should.”

- “I think the Board does get enough data. Descriptions of the program and schools. Six pages on each school. You can track what is working and what isn’t from these data.”
- “The Board has made decisions based on test data. They have come into the community to work with us. We request surveys so we can continue to receive our grants.”
- “We need to validate what works best.”
- “We put programs into effect and assume (evaluation) is done. I’m not sure we have a good system in analyzing programs.”
- “We never see any results from these community surveys.”
- “Fifteen years ago we linked programs and demography and special reports, pilots of instructional materials, but that was sort of deconstructed over the years.”

Auditors received several documents indicating program evaluation was taking place; however, there was no central plan presented nor clear design for the use of the evaluations. Grant programs that are evaluated as a provision of the grant were not received in written form for review, but were discussed in interviews. [Exhibit 4.4.1](#) lists the documents received, provided an overview of the document, and an indication of the use of data within the evaluation.

Exhibit 4.4.1 Overview of Program Documents and Evaluation Description Anchorage School District		
Evaluation Document	Overview	Evaluation
1994 Graduate Survey Results, Assessment and Evaluation Report #94-6, February 1995	Survey related to high school academic and non-academic experiences, perceptions of program quality, and satisfaction with staff and school rules, helping to fulfill a Federal Government requirement for collecting information on the success of grant funded vocational education programs.	Data collected, tabulated, and reported for 19 percent of the class. All large high schools had 10 to 18 percent of their graduates contacted.
Class of 1997 Graduate Survey, Assessment and Evaluation Report #98-2, March 1998	Survey related to high school academic and non-academic experiences, perceptions of program quality, and satisfaction with staff and school rules, helping to fulfill a Federal Government requirement for collecting information on the success of grant funded vocational education programs.	Data collected, tabulated, and reported for 25 percent of the class. All large high schools had 11 to 20 percent of their graduates contacted. There is no explicit indication of whether changes were made in programs based on the analysis of the 1994 Graduate Survey Results.
Class of 1999 Graduate Survey, Assessment and Evaluation Report #01-1, July 2000	Survey related to high school academic and non-academic experiences, perceptions of program quality, and satisfaction with staff and school rules, helping to fulfill a Federal Government requirement for collecting information on the success of grant funded vocational education programs.	Data collected, tabulated, and reported for 27 percent of the class. All large high schools had from 11 to 20 percent of their graduates contacted. There is no explicit indication of whether changes were made in programs based on the analysis of the Class of 1997 Graduate Survey.
May 13, 2002, ASD Memorandum #278	The memorandum summarizes the 2002 application, providing a	There is no mention of evaluation plans for these programs.

(2001-2002) to the School Board from the Office of the Superintendent regarding the <i>No Child Left Behind</i> Federal Programs Integrated Projects Application	detailed summary of 27 programs that will be included in the No Child Left Behind Federal Programs Integrated Projects Application.	
Exhibit 4.4.1 (continued) Overview of Program Documents and Evaluation Description Anchorage School District		
Evaluation Document	Overview	Evaluation
<i>No Child Left Behind</i> Federal Programs Integrated Project Application School Year 2002-2003	Application for federal funds that lists over 50 separate programs taking place in schools	On pages 19-28, of the 30 programmatic evaluations listed, only three specifically called for increased student achievement as a measure of success. Evaluations of most programs are primarily based on attendance and feedback surveys rather than results in terms of student behaviors and demonstrated skills. The Creating Successful Futures project is an exception in that discipline referrals and academic pre- and post-tests will be utilized in the evaluation. Another exception is on page 13 where staff development will be evaluated by training evaluations, data analysis of student performance, focus group feedback and teacher interviews. Appendix A school plans do measure goals by student achievement results, but no explicit rationale is provided regarding why a particular strategy is expected to yield results on the state-required tests.
Instructional Technology Plan: A Working Document, Fall 2001	A document that anticipates actions and costs required to implement the Alaska Technology Standards for Students.	Evaluation calls for unspecified monitoring of progress toward the goals and integration of technology into the curriculum at the beginning and end of each school year. Each school will be responsible for an as yet unspecified process to evaluate the effects of technology on student achievement of Alaska content and performance standards.

- In reading the three Graduate Survey Reports, there was no indication of how the data was used to change program implementation from one year to next.
- Most program evaluations submitted to auditors are driven by grant or federal requirements.
- Evaluations in the *No Child Left Behind* Federal Programs Integrated Project Application rarely examine impact on student achievement, but rely on attendance and opinion of participants rather than measurable results. Success of individual school plans in Appendix A will be measured in terms of student achievement and call for the analysis of achievement data. However, there is no

explicit rationale for the use of particular programs to achieve the goals set, nor specific evaluation set in place to see which of the strategies prove to be most successful.

A partial list of programs in the *No Child Left Behind* Federal Programs Integrated Project Application, School Year 2002-2003 is presented in Exhibit 4.4.2. While it would require enormous resources to do a formal evaluation for each program, auditors were not given any document that indicated a plan to review the programs on a rotating basis.

Exhibit 4.4.2 Partial List of Programs <i>No Child Left Behind</i> Federal Programs Integrated Project Application Anchorage School District	
1. Title I School-wide programs in 13 schools 2. Title I Targeted Assistance programs in five schools 3. Preschool at North Star ES 4. Parent Involvement 5. Professional Development 6. Training for teaching assistants 7. Title I Summer Enrichment Academy 8. Services to homeless children 9. Supplemental services for residential treatment programs 10. Academic support and transitions to school and community for students at McLaughlin Secondary School 11. Migrant Education 12. Teacher and Principal Training 13. Assessment Training 14. Professional development in Math and Science 15. Literacy 16. Class Size Reduction in K-1 17. Technology training for building level coordinators 18. Services to LEP students 19. Resolving Conflict Creatively Program 20. Infusion of alcohol/ drug/ violence prevention material into the K-12 curriculum 21. Development of the district five-year plan for staff development 22. Continuance of current administrative training 23. Math and Science Family Fun Nights 24. Learning Through Performance Tasks collaboration	25. Posting lesson plans, assessments, and strategies on district website 26. Infuse Alaska Cultural standards into curriculum through teacher training 27. Kagan Cooperative Learning 28. Learning Opportunity Grants 29. Corrective Reading 30. Second Chance Reading 31. CRISS 32. REAL Grant 33. Gifted program 34. CFS Program 35. RCCP 36. Peace in the School 37. Peaceable Schools 38. Parent Home Activities guide 39. Peace in the Family 40. Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) 41. The Search Institute 42. Don't Laugh at Me (grades 2-9) 43. Quest International 44. Peer Education 45. DARE 46. Gates-McGinitie Reading Assessment as pre/post measure 47. Lightspan 48. The Great Body Shop 49. Here's Looking at You 2000 50. Project ACHIEVE 51. The Giraffe Project

Summary

Within Anchorage School District schools, the auditors observed many programs and initiatives. While policy calls for evaluation of pilot programs, there are insufficient district resources available to conduct even these evaluations. Auditors did not receive a plan for periodic review of all major programs. Title I has begun its own collection of data. The data, however, are not explicitly tied to specific interventions or program implementation.

Finding 4.5: There is No Assessment Plan in Place for the Design or Acquisition of Testing Instruments, the Evaluation of Other than State-required Curricular Areas (no local

Criterion-referenced Tests other than in Writing); or for the Stipulation of Goals and Objectives to Guide the Assessment Process (and Which Fulfill a Locally-adopted Board Policy).

A school district establishes its expectations for student performance at each grade level and for each course through its Board-adopted curriculum. The district must have a mechanism to measure student progress to ensure that students are mastering the major objectives it has set forth. Since the district curriculum must encompass state-level requirements, a teacher who ensures that students master that curriculum should find that students do well on state assessments as well as curriculum-aligned district assessments. Teachers, principals, and the district need to have formative as well as summative data linked to a well-defined, aligned curriculum.

Finding 4.1 indicates that state testing drives assessment of student learning in the Anchorage School District. The district priority must address the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics so that all students achieve at least at grade level on norm-referenced tests and reach at least proficient on benchmark tests. However, the district must also ensure that teachers are teaching and students are mastering the whole curriculum.

The Anchorage School District does implement its own writing assessment in grades 5, 7, and 9 in anticipation of state benchmark testing in grades 6, 8, and 10 (see Finding 4.1). While the Anchorage School District does write its own Pre-Algebra Qualification Test for grade 6 to determine program placement, it does not monitor student progress at specific points throughout the year to know how students are progressing or if interventions are being effective in mathematics in all grade levels. Title I has implemented some assessment instruments in state assessment areas. There were no other district-developed criterion-referenced tests directly linked to the Anchorage District Curriculum major objectives presented to auditors.

Auditors did not receive any document nor did interviews reveal that an assessment plan to go beyond state-tested areas is in place or under discussion. Auditors found board policy regarding the intention of the Board to evaluate student progress which names the courses that must be offered to students. These policies are as follows:

Board Policy 144 Expectations for Performance states, “The Board shall adopt and periodically review expectations for performance of the instructional program of the district, including statements of instructional goals, priorities among instructional goals, expectations for student achievement, and short- and long-range goals for instructional improvement.”

Board Policy 349 Evaluation states, “Evaluation shall be for the purpose of instructional improvement. Evaluation of the school program is an administrative function and shall be conducted annually in priority goal areas. The results shall be reported to the Board and the public. To effectively appraise educational progress the Superintendent shall report orally and in writing to the Board as circumstances dictate and may require such periodic reports from state members.”

Board Policy 341.1 Course of Studies states, “The secondary courses will include language arts, social studies, mathematics, science, world languages, career technology, fine arts, physical education, and health. Additional electives in the middle schools may be offered, pending approval of the Middle School Executive Director. A Program of Studies book for each level will be published annually and describe the curricular offerings.

“The elementary curriculum shall include language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, art, health, music, physical education, and library skills.”

Board Policy 343.1 Grading System states, “The Superintendent shall be responsible for a student evaluation system. Schools may request waivers from the Superintendent to allow use of alternative evaluation systems. The teacher has the responsibility to determine grades within the approved system. An appeal of a grade may be made to the principal.”

Board Policy 343.2 Reports states, “A progress report to students and parents is required on a quarterly basis. This requirement may be satisfied with either a written report or a parental conference. Results from standardized tests for grades 3 through 11 shall be provided on an annual basis to parents. An attempt shall be made to notify parents and students of their academic progress and/or failing grades at each mid-quarter of the school year.”

While teacher grades are evidently meant to provide formative assessment data, auditors did not receive any written document other than staff development on writing that indicated there was a district-wide effort to standardize performance expectations for students. Auditors did not receive documents that indicated other criterion-referenced assessments were under development or discussion.

Summary

There is no assessment plan in place to go beyond state-testing requirements by designing or acquiring testing instruments for formative assessments linked to the curriculum, or assessments in content areas other than reading, writing, or mathematics. Thus the Anchorage School District does not stipulate the major objectives that must be assessed to guide the assessment process.