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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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State ramps up career and technical education

JUNEAU – Longtime educator Helen Mehrkens has been named Administrator of Career and Technical Education (CTE) at the Department of Education & Early Development.

The position, which is new, will help the department fulfill the goals of the Alaska Education Plan, created in November 2008 by several hundred Alaskans as a blueprint for 21st century schools. The plan's main goal is that all students will graduate prepared for careers or postsecondary training and education. The plan is available at www.eed.state.ak.us.

“When students are engaged in studies that are relevant to their dreams, they are more likely to graduate and become fulfilled and productive members of society. Ms. Mehrkens provides the department with the capacity to develop priorities in career and technical education and evaluate the effectiveness of programs, so that the state's and school districts' resources are used wisely to benefit students,” Alaska Education Commissioner Larry LeDoux said. “The department will reach its goal by collaborating with other state agencies to serve the needs of Alaska's students in this critical field.”

Mehrkens will collaborate with the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development on workforce development projects such as those in the Alaska Gasline Inducement Act. She will work with the University of Alaska CTE programs to coordinate services, professional development and training for Alaska's school districts and vocational/technical centers.

“We're looking forward to expanding our partnership with the Department of Education & Early Development, as we continue to help students make a seamless transition from secondary to postsecondary education, including vocational education programs such as tech prep and registered apprenticeship,” said Greg Cashen, executive director of the Alaska Workforce Investment Board, a part of the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Board members, appointed by the Governor, provide policy oversight of state and federally funded job training and vocational education programs.

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Additionally, Mehrkens will administer the Alaska Career Ready program, which provides courses and assessments for students in academic skills that employers have said are critical to the workplace. She also will administer the state's participation in the federal Carl Perkins CTE grant program, which provides funds to school districts.

Mehrkens previously has taught in Minnesota and Petersburg, and has administered department programs in adult and vocational education, basic education, health promotion, school improvement, and career and technical education.

“This position is an opportunity for the state and school districts to work creatively to establish measureable and lasting improvements, incorporating federal resources where appropriate and partnering with our postsecondary institutions, the private sector and workforce development agencies,” Mehrkens said.

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