

“How interesting it is to go through a cycle of education. Many of you who are Alaska Natives will remember hearing some of the older men and women of your community not giving a speech, but talking to the family.

‘There goes our grandfather. He will say a few words to us. Where did he get his education? He has no reading knowledge, no pencil or paper, no research books.’

‘Where is grandpa going today? He’s just walking around. Why is he walking around? Grandpa is going to school. He’s watching the birds; he’s watching the clouds; he’s watching the sea; he is listening to the birds, looking at the fish, the tree limbs; and in the spring time he is watching the buds coming out. He sees the trees swaying in the wind. Grandpa’s books are the whole world of nature.’

When he goes out, he looks up and sees the symphony in gray - the gray clouds, never still. He observes from which direction the clouds are moving. If it’s coming from this way, it will mean snow; if it’s coming from that way, it will mean cold wind. If it’s coming from one direction, it will mean rain; if it’s coming from another, it will mean a clear day. And so when the young people - the teenagers especially - were going out for a hunting trip, he would say ‘Don’t go! Don’t go!’ And if you asked him why, he would say ‘The clouds are telling me that a storm is coming up.’

And so grandpa was well-versed. He went to the world university, the world that we say God made. ‘The heavens declare the Glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork.’ Grandpa’s school!

And when grandpa spoke, the others would say: ‘Sit still; grandpa is speaking! Listen, listen!’ I recall people telling me

when I was a child to sit down and listen. And when grandpa said a word, he often didn’t repeat it. And I remember to this day some of the words grandpa said to me just once. How interesting! The young mind in that olden day was so alert, was so respectful, was so concentrated that it heard grandpa’s message only once; and it is remembered to this day.”

--Dr. Walter Soboleff (from a speech given to the second, Alaska Native Education Summit, December, 2002).

Alaska Native Education Facts at a Glance

Alaska Native education has seen some improvements over the last thirty years: access to local high schools and educational attainment are the most notable.

- Since 1974, 155 new high schools have been built in Alaska, mainly in villages.
- 71% of rural Alaska Natives, age 20 and over, have high school diplomas, up from 48% in 1980.
- The number of Natives who have gone on to four-year college degrees more than tripled between 1980 and 2000.
- In 2000, 73% of all Alaska Natives over the age of 18 held high school diplomas; and 25% of the same age group held bachelor degrees. Also in 2000, almost 40% of Native high school graduates had completed at least one year of college.
- There is a growing cadre of second-generation Native college graduates - those whose parents had received their own degrees.

But disparities in educational achievement continue to worry Alaska Native parents and educators:

- In 2002, only 5% of all teachers certified and teaching in Alaska’s statewide public education system were Alaska Natives.
- Native high school dropout rates almost doubled in just three school years (1998-2001).

- Between fall, 2001, and spring, 2003, only 49% of Native third-grade students passed Alaska’s benchmark reading test. During the same three school years, only 14.3% of Native 11th and 12th graders passed the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam’s reading test.
- In 2000, 3,138 Alaska Natives were enrolled in either college or graduate school; 1071 (34%) were men, while 2067 (66%) were Native women.
- Less than 3% of the University of Alaska’s statewide faculty were Natives in the fall of 2003, and more than one-half of those were instructors, not professors.

Discussion of Selected Data from the Status of Alaska Natives Report 2004

As Dr. Soboleff notes, traditional Native systems of education and child-rearing were rooted in extended families and the community. Modern Native education is comprised of traditional and public education school systems.

In an effort to understand what Alaska Natives think about modern public education, the First Alaskans Institute contracted with an Alaska research firm, the McDowell Group, Inc., to conduct a random telephone survey of 1,000 Alaska Native households in the spring of 2001. The survey results indicated that Alaska Natives believe that graduation from high school, college, and vocational/technical school is highly important. Alaska Natives...“value classroom as well as traditional Native learning and feel both are relevant in their lives...Alaska Natives expect their education to give them the skills to be competitive and employable.”⁵⁹ The survey also indicated that Alaska Natives are not satisfied with the current system of education for their children, questioning whether or not such education can prepare their children for life after high school.

The following section discusses Native access to the public education system from a student and employment perspective, achievement and attainment. The data support Alaska Natives’ concerns about the public educational system.

Access to the Public Education System

Facilities

In 1974, before most of today’s rural high schools were built, there were **55** Alaskan communities with one or more high schools offering instruction to the 12th grade level - and a few others that went to the 9th or 10th grades. Some of these were state boarding schools, some state day schools, and some church-operated schools. A few urban communities in Alaska had more than one high school.

But by 2003, there were **210** Alaskan communities with high schools. The following is a listing of increases in the numbers of high schools, by the 12 ANCSA regions, since 1974.⁶⁰

Table 6-1. Numbers of Communities with High Schools by ANCSA Regions from 1974 to 2003

ANCSA Region	Number of High Schools from 1974 to 2003
Arctic Slope	From 1 to 8
NANA	From 2 to 11
Bering Straits	From 2 to 16
Calista	From 2 to 45
Bristol Bay	From 3 to 22
Aleut	From 4 to 10
Koniag	From 3 to 7
Cook Inlet	From 9 to 13
Doyon	From 9 to 38
Ahtna	From 2 to 5
Chugach	From 3 to 9
Sealaska	From 15 to 26

Source: ISER, *Status of Alaska Natives Report, 2004*, page 6-4 and 6-5

The absence of rural high schools before 1974 required most village students to leave their families in order to receive any schooling beyond the eighth or ninth grade. Although that caused serious disruption of children’s lives, it was the common practice for decades. In the early 1970’s, a number of Native

students and parents living in villages sued the State of Alaska, claiming that this system violated at least two provisions of the Alaska Constitution:

1. The *Public Education* section of Article VII says: "The legislature shall by general law establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the State."

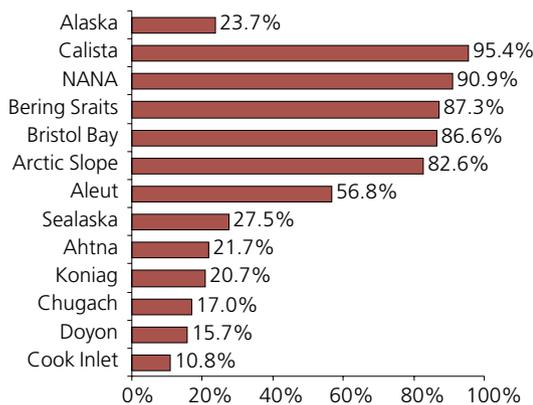
2. The *Inherent Rights* section of Article I says: "... all persons are equal and entitled to equal rights, opportunities and protection under the law..." This is the "equal protection" provision, reflecting the same principle in the United States Constitution.⁶¹

That is how the "Mollie Hootch" lawsuit was won. That case, plus the negotiations to settle it, plus state oil revenues from Prudhoe Bay, established the 155 high schools that have been built in rural Alaska since 1974.⁶²

Education attainment levels among Native people rose sharply after high schools were established in most villages in the 1970's. The proportion of rural Natives over the age of 20 who have high school diplomas jumped from 48% in 1980 to 68% in just ten school years (1980 to 1990).

Student enrollment

Figure 6-1. Alaska Native Student Enrollment as a Percent of Total Enrollment, by ANCSA Region



Source: State of Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2002-2003 school year. Native students are displayed as a percent of total students.

Source: The McDowell Group. (2003, October). Alaska Native K-12 education indicators, page 12

In the 2002-2003 school year, there were 31,873 Alaska Native students enrolled in Alaska's public schools, out of a statewide enrollment total of 134,364 students. Natives represented 23.7% of the total student population. Figure 6-1 shows how these Native percentages of total enrollment break out by the 12 ANCSA regions.

Numbers of Alaska Native Educators

Access to education also includes employment within the education system. The Table 6-2 shows the numbers and percentages of Alaska Natives employed in the public education system for the school year 2002-2003. In the 2002-2003 school year, about 5% of teachers statewide (certified *and* teaching) were Natives. Compare that percentage with the 19% of Natives in the state's population - and the 24% of Natives in the total student population in Alaska's schools.

Table 6-2. Numbers and Percentages of Alaska Native Educators, 2002-2003

Category	# of Natives compared to total	% Native
Superintendents	3 of 52	6%
Principals	3 of 344	4%
Teachers	385 of 8,325	5%
All educators	401 of 8,721	5%

Source: McDowell Group. Alaska Native K-12 education indicators report. October 2003, page 8

In 2003, less than 3% of all faculty members statewide in the University of Alaska were Natives. In 1980, the University of Alaska employed 138 Natives in all job classifications (4.3% of the University workforce). In 2002, 299 Natives worked for the University (5.2% of the University workforce).

Achievement

State law requires that Alaskan students meet state standards in reading, writing and math.

Benchmark Exams

Benchmark Exams test these basic skills in the third, sixth and eighth grades. Figure 6-2 shows statewide percentages of Native and non-Native students who passed any parts of the exams in school year 2002-2003. These are based on the number of students who took the exams, not the number of students enrolled.

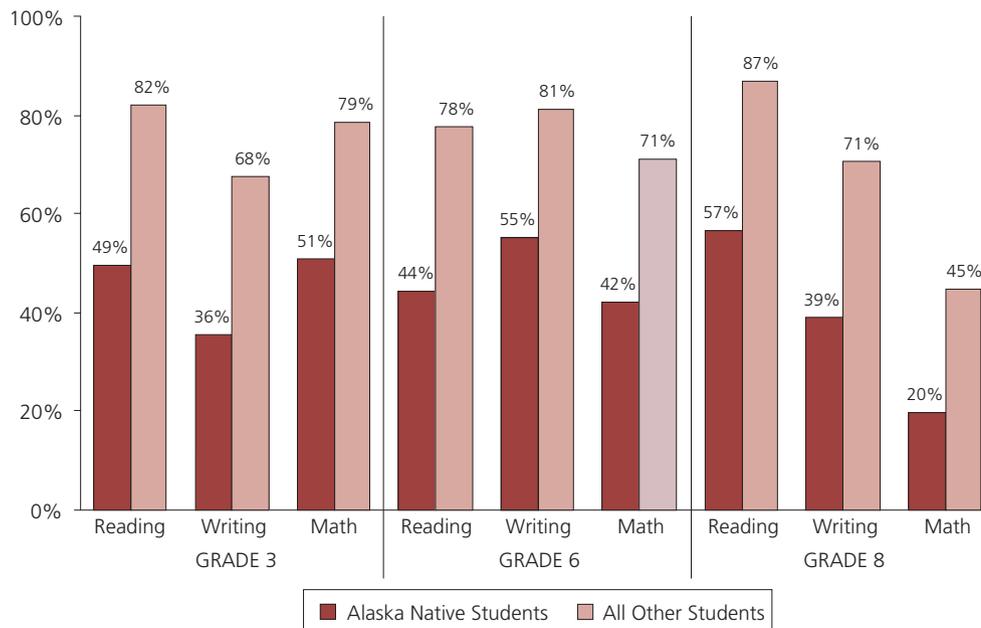
The left-hand section of this graph shows results among third-grade students; the center section is for the sixth-graders; and the right-hand section shows the eighth-graders. In the bar graph, you see the percentages of students who passed each of the three skills (Native students shown in the lighter pink and non-Native students shown in the darker red). The exact percentages of Native and non-Native

students who passed are shown at the tops of the vertical bars. There are large gaps between Native and non-Native student performance at all three grade levels.

High School Graduation Qualifying Exam

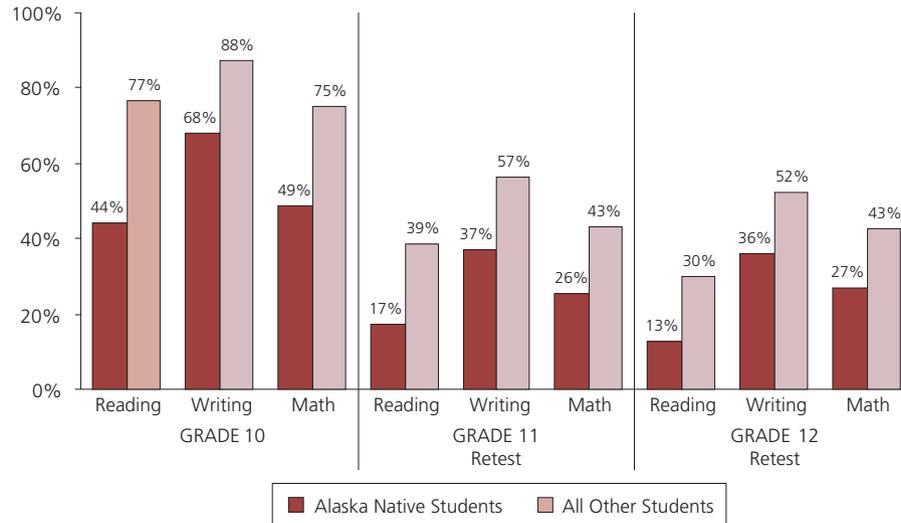
Alaskan students must pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam in order to receive his or her high school diploma. This exam, which also tests reading, writing and math skills, is first given in the 10th grade. Any student who fails one or more skill areas in 10th grade may retake in the fall and spring of 11th grade – and again in the fall and spring of 12th grade. Those who do not pass one or more parts of the test receive Certificates of Attendance, not high school diplomas.

Figure 6-2. Benchmark Exams, 3rd, 6th and 8th grade, 2002-2003 School Year



Source: McDowell Group. Alaska Native K-12 education indicators report. October 2003, page 31

Figure 6-3. High School Qualifying Exam Scores, School Year 2002-2003



Source: McDowell Group. Alaska Native K-12 education indicators report. October 2003, page 31

Figure 6-3 shows percentages of Native and non-Native students who passed any parts of the exam, whether in the 10th grade (left-hand section), the 11th grade (middle section of the graph) or the 12th grade (right hand section of the graph). Like the benchmarks, these scores are calculated by the number of students who took the exam at any grade level.

These numbers point out the gaps between Native and non-Native educational achievement and are critically linked to drop out rates and economic opportunities beyond high school. Students who do not pass the HSGQE are more likely to drop out, and may or may not complete their high school educations. Without the high school diploma, job opportunities and advanced educational opportunities become more difficult to achieve; which is again linked to the economic indicators of income and poverty.

The Native community is responding to these issues. The Cook Inlet Tribal Council was recently recognized for their efforts working with Alaska Native high school students during the 2003-2004 school year.

Cook Inlet Tribal Council

On April 27, 2004 KTUU Channel 2 News reported that during the 2003-2004 school year 94.8% of Alaska Native students in the Anchorage School District passed the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam and that the Anchorage School District credited the success of students to their partnership with with Cook Inlet Tribal Council.

CITC prepared Alaska Natives students, parents, and the school district for the High School Qualifying Exam by providing standards-based classes in Language Arts and Math, by developing an accurate count of Native students in school, and by ensuring students were present and participating during the testing process. Efforts included contacting families, discussing testing with students, creating posters, providing transportation for students to school when needed, and lastly by providing breakfast to students prior to test taking.

--Loyd, Amy. K-12 Director, Educational Services System. CITC. Personal Interview. (2004, June).

Adequate Yearly Progress

Holding schools accountable for the performance of all students is a cornerstone of the No Child Left Behind Act. Standardized test results, participation in the testing, and graduation rates form the basis for measuring Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In 2002, 282 schools did not make AYP.

There are 31 ways to measure whether a school is making Adequate Yearly Progress. Schools must have 95 percent of the student enrollment complete the reading, writing, and math portions of the test (three measures), each of the nine ethnic and socioeconomic groups must be proficient on the reading, writing, and math exams (27 measures), and the final measure of AYP is graduation rates from schools that go up to the 12th grade. If a school does not go to the 12th grade, they are measured using attendance rates. Performance on reading, writing, and math assessments are the main indicators of meeting AYP. In addition, 12th grade graduation rates or attendance standards must be met. Schools with student proficiency in all subjects and socioeconomic groups can still fail to meet AYP if less than 95 percent of the students took the exam.⁶³

Attainment

High School Attainment

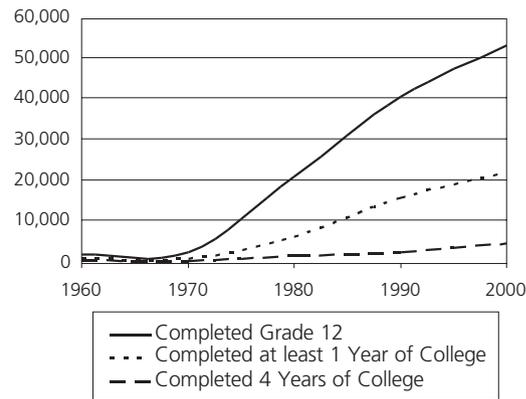
Figure 6-4 shows a combination of improvements and other issues in Native levels of educational attainment. Five censuses record the numbers and percentages of Alaska Natives who had completed high school, who had attended some college, or who had graduated with bachelor degrees.

- The number of all Native high school graduates has risen from 1,691 in 1960 to 52,872 in 2000, **more than 31 times** what it had been 40 years earlier.
- The number of Natives who have completed at least one year of college went from 499 in 1960 to 21,851 in 2000, **almost 44 times** what it had been 40 years earlier

- The number of Natives who hold four-year college degrees has increased **more than 21 times** in 40 years.

The total number of Alaska Natives, age 18 or older, who had completed four-year college degrees or higher was 4,325 in 2000, about 6 percent of the Alaska Native population (age 18 or older). In comparison, 25% (91,755) of the non-Native population age 18 or older hold four-year or higher college degrees. This is a gap that deserves more effort and progress, especially in improving the quality of public school preparation for post-secondary education.

Figure 6-4. Alaska Natives (Over 18) Who Had Completed High School, Attended Some College, or Held 4-Year Degrees, 1960-2000*



*Note: The very small (unweighted) number of Natives in the 1960 sample--only about 200 Natives over 18, only 5 of those with any college--makes any weighted estimated for 1960 unreliable (ISER, 2004).

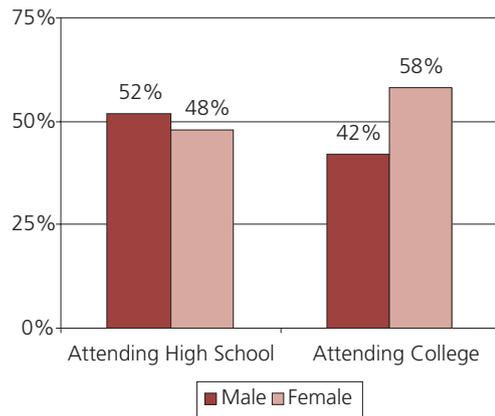
Source: ISER, Status of Alaska Natives Report, 2004, page 6-8

Alaska Natives Attending High School and College

As shown in Figure 6-5 on the following page, the percentage of Native males in high school in 2000 slightly exceeded the percentage of Native females (52% to 48%). But at the college level, that picture changes significantly. 58% of all

Native college students in 2000 were women, while 42% were men. Statewide, as well as in 9 of the 12 ANCSA regions, Native women are more likely than Native men to attend college and to have earned some college credits.

Figure 6-5. Percent of Alaska Native Men and Women Attending High School and College, 2000



Source: ISER, Status of Alaska Natives Report, 2004, page 6-10

Rural Development Program, University of Alaska Fairbanks

The College of Rural Alaska at UAF offers both a BA and an MA in Rural Development. There are currently over 150 students all across Alaska studying for these degrees. The BA program began in 1984 and has had 140 graduates, with over 85% being Alaska Natives. Since its inception in 2000, the RD MA program has had 10 graduates, all of whom are Alaska Natives. Place-committed students are able to earn these degrees from their home communities through distance technology. Most of these students are very active in leadership positions within their communities and do not wish

to relocate to be near a university campus. The RD program, which utilizes Native Elders to incorporate indigenous knowledge and values into the curriculum, provides background information related to how Alaska Natives fit into the global economy, technical skills, and personal development techniques.

--Gordon L. Pullar, Ph.D., (June 2004) Director, Department of Alaska Native and Rural Development, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Alaska Native Databases

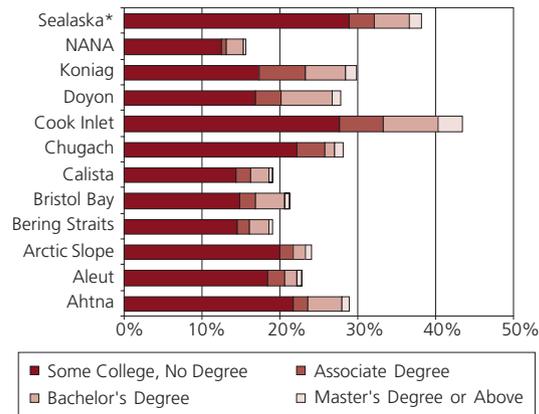
The Interior-Aleutians Campus of the College of Rural Alaska is developing two databases that hold information on Alaska Native scholars. One database "Alaska Native Wisdom Keepers" is of Alaska Natives who have received honorary degrees from the University of Alaska. The other database of "Alaska Native Scholars," consisting of Alaska Natives who have received their advanced degrees, is also being developed to identify those who have experience in conducting research, a needed component in our communities.

In May 2001, A Gathering of Wisdom Keepers came together to encourage more Alaska Natives to get their PhD's. Clara Johnson, chair of the UAF Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Native Education, states that, ".....increasing those numbers, and seeing more people going through the system, would dramatically change higher education in Alaska."

--Johnson, Clara. Chair. UAF Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Native Education. Personal Interview. (2004, July).

Figure 6-6 shows percentages of Native men (25 years or older), in each of the 12 ANCSA regions, who have achieved some level of post-secondary education. Sealaska and Cook Inlet, with large, urban areas, lead the way in total levels of educational attainment.

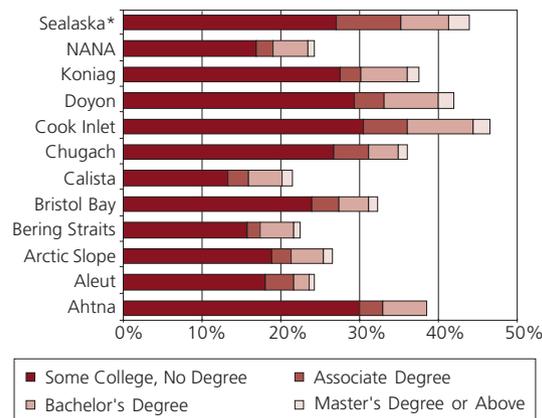
Figure 6-6. Education Attainment Percent of Native Men 25 Years and Older with College Credit or Post-Secondary Degree(s), 2000



*Annette Is. Reserve included with Sealaska Region.

Source: U.S. Census 2000 American Indian and Alaska Native Summary File

Figure 6-7. Education Attainment Percent of Native Women 25 Years and Older with College Credit or Post-Secondary Degree(s), 2000



*Annette Is. Reserve included with Sealaska Region.

Source: U.S. Census 2000 American Indian and Alaska Native Summary File

Native women are significantly more likely to attend college and to earn some credits than are Native men. Native women made up 60% of all Native college students in 2000; and in some ANCSA regions, Native women in college outnumbered Native men by 2 to 1.

Alaska Natives have become much more likely to earn four-year college degrees in the past 20 years, as the number of Native graduates more than tripled between 1980 and 2000. And 1/3 of Natives had earned at least some college credits by 2000, up from 15% in 1980 and 28% in 1990.

Figure 6-7 shows the post-secondary educational attainments of Native women over the age of 25, in each ANCSA region. In all 12 regions, the women surpassed the men in levels of education beyond high school.

RAHI

The Rural Alaska Honors Institute Program (RAHI) aims to increase college persistence and success for rural Alaska Native students. Founded in 1983 at the request of the Alaska Federation of Natives, RAHI selects high school students to participate in a six-week academic course at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Students learn skills, work habits, self-awareness, and self-confidence, which prepare students for higher educational pursuits.

Since 1983, RAHI has seen over 1000 students graduate from the program, and has seen from its alumni the following successes: six Doctorate Degrees, 18 Masters Degrees, 157 Bachelor Degrees, 69 Associates Degrees, and 32 Certificates.

--Wartes, Denise. Interim Coordinator, Rural Alaska Honors Institute, UAF. Personal Interview (2004, June).

Native students from some of the 12 regions are much more likely to attend college than in previous decades. The best example is the Chugach region, where 10% of Native adults were in college in 2000.⁶⁴

Native college students at the University of Alaska (UA) are still 50% less likely to graduate with bachelor's degrees than are UA's non-Native students. In order to address this issue, efforts such as the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program are making progress in helping Native students stay in college.

ANSEP

The Alaska Native Science & Engineering Program (ANSEP) at the University of Alaska Anchorage is based on a partnership called the Pacific Alliance, which includes the University of Alaska, the University of Washington, and University of Hawaii. ANSEP focuses on academic successes of Alaska Natives in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, by offering support services to students.

--Mueller, Tracey. Alaska Director Pacific Alliance. UAA. Personal Interview. (2004, June).

Although relatively few Alaska Natives leave the state, many younger, better-educated Native students leave Alaska for further education and careers. This is true for non-Native students as well. This is a disturbing "brain drain" of the "best and brightest," both Native and non-Native.

RANA Distance Education Program, Alaska Pacific University

The Rural Alaska Native Adult (RANA) Distance Education Program is offered by Alaska Pacific University. Through education programs relevant to rural areas, a combination of indigenous culture and modern global education, cost-effectiveness, and accessibility, RANA provides access to higher education for working adults with families who choose to remain in their rural communities while pursuing a higher education degree program.

APU, a forerunner in the field of online web-based distance education, began the RANA program in 1999. As of the spring 2004

semester, 15 graduates have completed the program and 91 students have enrolled. With improving technology and connectivity, students have better access to education, technical support has been minimized, and delivery of services on all levels has improved.

--Evans-Dinneen, Laurie, Director, and Zella, Annette, Associate Director, Rural Alaska Native Adult Program. APU. Personal Interview (2004, June).

High School Dropout Rates

Data presented earlier in this Chapter show gains, over the past 40 years, in the percentages of Natives who complete high school. In the last decade, this trend has slowed down and in some cases has begun to decrease. Figure 6-8 on page 93 shows that high school dropout rates among Alaska's Native and non-Native high school students have almost doubled between 1998 and 2001.

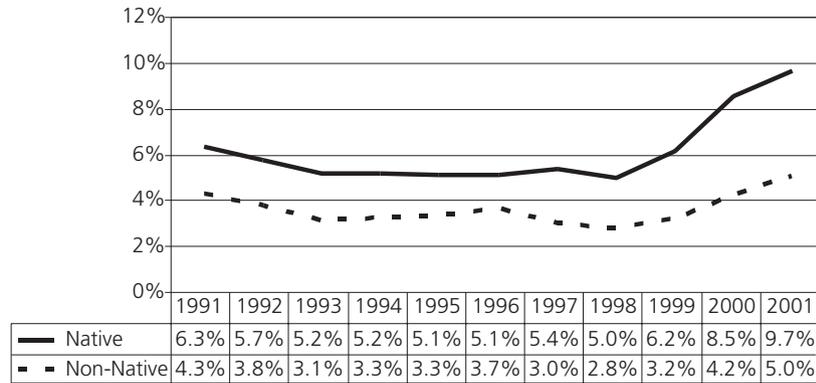
- The dotted line below shows that the rates for non-Native students, which have traditionally been well below those of Native students, increased from 2.8% to 5.0% in four school years.
- The solid line shows that the rates for Native students have gone from 5.0% to 9.7% in the same period: almost one of every ten Native high school students, or nearly twice that of all other Alaska students.

Native and non-Native students in those regions that have Native enrollments of 80% or more have the highest dropout rates. But in the early 1990's, dropout rates had been fairly similar in all 12 regions.

"We want information on what is pushing Native students out - and on effective programs to prevent dropouts."

"Many dropouts are not 'unintelligent,' but they leave school anyway. We need data about the impacts of No Child Left Behind and the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam on dropouts and GED programs."

Figure 6-8. Dropout Rates, Alaska Native and Non-Native Students, 1991 to 2001



Source: ISER, Status of Alaska Natives Report, 2004, page 6-12

"I think a recent large increase in Adult Basic Education enrollments at Kuskokwim College comes from students who dropped out of high school because of the federal law, the state exam, or both."

"Some high school dropouts can find menial jobs at \$8 per hour - in which case they are actually employed, but will most likely remain stuck in low-level jobs."

--Comments from community meeting in Bethel, March 2004.

"Native parents and community leaders need to address the dropout issue. Having Native grandparents and other Elders in the classroom might improve student behavior and attitudes toward education."

--Comments from regional meeting in Nome, February 2004.

High school students have their own viewpoints on the drop out situation. At the semi-annual Association of Alaska Student Governments, student representatives, both Native and non-Native were asked their views on why students drop out from high school.

"Why are students dropping out?"

- Frustration concerning not enough preparation for work after high school;

- School is not exciting; there are a lack of activities and a lack of motivation;
- It is more valuable to many students to get a job now, as opposed to waiting until after high school; they don't see the value of completing high school;
- Students don't see the relevance of what they are learning in school;
- Racism and Harassment;
- There are concerns that this problem will worsen with the HSGQE.

What would contribute to solving this problem?

- Increase Parental Involvement (Parents encouraging Students to stay in school);
- Address Racism and Harassment Issues;
- Availability of more curriculum reaching all students - to help them see that dropping out is not OK;
- Community Service Projects (students and community both acknowledging the serious contributions that students can and do make in their communities) - changing perceptions of adults who see students only as trouble makers;

- *One school proactively trained students to not only to be aware of when prejudice, segregation and racism are happening, but also how not to let it happen;*
- *Students in one school were trained to watch for graffiti and to not allow it in their schools;*
- *Mandatory workshops for students on harassment, racism, and bullying;*
- *Information and discussion available to all students via the Student Newspaper. (One school had all students involved in the development of the student newspaper. With this level of involvement the school saw rates of dropouts decline. The newspaper consistently sent out messages on Native pride.)"*

--Comments on Drop-out Issues from presentation to Alaska Association of Student Governments, April 2004.

Issues and Implications – The Alaska Native Policy Center View

The education data, like health and economics, indicate improvements in Native access to education and in Native educational attainment. The data also point out severe disparities that will continue if they are not addressed by Alaska Natives. The data indicate quality of education, its relevancy to the skills needed in the modern world, and the safety of the educational facilities are continuing challenges that need to be addressed. Additional issues of educational disparity include low test scores, comparatively few Native educators, and increasing dropout rates that, if unchecked, will prevent many Native students from achieving their hopes and dreams.

Alaska Native leaders, school board members, parents, teachers, community leaders and

policy makers need the kind of data provided in this analysis in order to have a clear understanding of Native education issues. When the issues are understood, it is easier to work together to correct the disparities in the quality of educational access and attainment. The Policy Center Project Team and participants in the discussions and meetings identified the following data needs:

- Research shows that **preschool child development programs** (nursery school, pre-kindergarten, Montessori, Head Start, etc.) are beneficial to early learning. We need to know which communities still lack early childhood learning programs, including **literacy programs**. Many Native students entering elementary school are at a significant disadvantage in the numbers of words they know, compared to non-Native students. This vocabulary disparity must be addressed in order for Native students to succeed in school.
- Mt. Edgecumbe High School and the Rural Alaska Honors Institute (UAF) have **successful records of high school preparation**. Cook Inlet Tribal Council has had success in working with Native students to improve their studies and bring up their test scores. What are these schools and programs doing that are helping Native students succeed? The underlying philosophies of these programs, teaching materials and methods may be transferable to other areas of the state.
- The performance record of schools using **immersion programs** that put Native cultures, languages and Elders back into the classroom must be better understood because such programs appear to be helping student achievement as well as galvanizing community support. We need to know what effect this has on learning.
- We need to support **growing our own teachers and administrators**. We must know how many Native people are studying to become educators and what kind of support they receive from the Native community. Teacher training must prepare teachers in what students need to know in order to function in today's knowledge-based society. We need better information about the impacts of teacher turnover and whether or not teachers from a community are more inclined to stay in the community and support the educational program.

- **Local school boards and their policies** are a critical part of the school and learning process. In another survey conducted by the McDowell Group,⁶⁵ parents identified school boards and school districts as the most responsible entities for addressing issues of education. How can school boards better respond to what needs to be done to improve education for Alaska Natives?
- **High school drop out rates** must be better documented and understood. Students, as well as teachers, parents, school board members, local Native leaders and community members need to be involved in this effort. Students know why they are dropping out and how we can help them stay in school.
- **GED numbers** need to be understood. Additionally, are there differences in post-secondary attainment or training opportunities between those who earn a GED and those who earn a high school diploma?
- **Computer skills** are critical to success in the modern workforce. Do Alaska's schools have the necessary access to computers, the internet and methods to teach proficiency in computer skills?
- The data identified improvements in educational attainment, but a continuing gap exists particularly in **higher education**. Strategies for how to close the gap of access to post-secondary education are needed in order that Alaska Natives have equal access to quality education.
- The dynamics of the Native "**brain drain**," whether it moves Native students from rural to urban Alaska or from Alaska to other states or countries, needs to be understood. Who are the students who move, why do they go, and how can we utilize their skills and training to address the issues raised by the data in the *Natives 2004* report?

The 1994 Alaska Natives Commission Report addresses Alaska Native education needs and makes recommendations that address the disparities noted above (see Native Commissions Report, volume II). Native education needs are also addressed by Dr. William G. Demmert Jr., former Commissioner of Education for the State of Alaska, and Director of Native American Education Programs, Woodring College of Education, Western Washington University. Dr. Demmert's *Improving Academic Performance among Native American Students: A Review*

of the Research Literature, summarizes Native education research and what has worked in certain circumstances:

- Provision of a safe, challenging and enriched environment early in the child's life to promote development of smart, healthy and well-adjusted children;
- Use of Native language and culture-based education for motivation of Native students, promoting positive self-images and attitudes about school and others;
- Use of appropriate teaching methods that meet the range of intellectual abilities of all students;
- Community and parental involvement – an important factor for both students and teachers – reflecting the fact that support of the schools by the community and parents is tied to the success of both schools and students.⁶⁶

When participants in the Policy Center meetings reviewed the data, they were able to see linkages. A very young Native population (44.2% under the age of 20) needs a quality elementary and secondary education, as well as vocational training and college, in order to obtain knowledge and skills necessary to participate in the modern workforce. Significant economic development cannot occur in Alaska, rural or urban, without a well-trained, healthy, workforce that is placed in the jobs that currently exist or that might be created through economic development projects.

In the Alaska Natives Commission Report, Alaskan voices say: "As parents, leaders and Elders, we must get deeply involved within our children's' education, both at the elementary and the high school level. We must get involved in the villages' educational system, visiting our schools, and participating in programs of the schools, to insure that the children are given the good education. By our involvement, the students will begin to understand why education is very important." James Sipary, Toksook Bay."

--Irwin, M. (Ed.). (1994). Alaska Natives commission final report. (Vols. I). Anchorage, AK: Alaska Native Commission, page 52.

Endnotes

⁵⁹ The McDowell Group. (2001, November). *Alaska Native education study: a statewide study of Alaska Native values and opinions regarding education in Alaska*. Anchorage, AK: First Alaskans Institute. Section 4, page 1.

⁶⁰ Institute of Social and Economic Research. (2004, May). *The status of Alaska Natives report 2004*. Anchorage, AK. Page 6-4 and 6-5.

⁶¹ State of Alaska. (1956, February). *The constitution of the state of Alaska*. The Office of Lieutenant Governor.

⁶² See http://www.alaskool.org/native_ed/law/mhootch.html for more information about the Molly Hootch case.

⁶³ The McDowell Group. (2003, October). *Alaska Native k-12 education indicators*. Anchorage, AK: First Alaskans Institute Alaska Native Policy Center, page 15. For more information on Alaska Natives and AYP, please refer to the "Alaska Native K-12 Education Indicators Report" available at <http://www.firstalaskans.org/policy/research.cfm> Note: At the time the K-12 Indicators report was printed, only 488 of 502 schools had reported.

⁶⁴ Institute of Social and Economic Research. (2004, May). *The status of Alaska Natives report 2004*. Anchorage, AK. Page 6-10.

⁶⁵ See "A Survey of Native Perspectives on Alaska Issues", prepared for the Alaska Humanities Forum and the First Alaskans Institute, June 2003.

⁶⁶ Demmert, William G. Jr. (2001). *Improving academic performance among Native American students: A review of the research literature*. Charleston, WV. Page 42-44.