ALASKA NATIVE EDUCATION STUDY:
A STATEWIDE STUDY OF ALASKA NATIVE VALUES AND OPINIONS REGARDING EDUCATION IN ALASKA

PREPARED FOR:
FIRST ALASKANS FOUNDATION
1577 C STREET, SUITE 320
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99501

Research-Based Consulting

Juneau
Anchorage

NOVEMBER 2001

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SUMMARY

ALASKA NATIVE EDUCATION STUDY: A SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

PREPARED FOR:

FIRST ALASKANS FOUNDATION
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Alaska Natives face many challenges in educational performance, attainment, and opportunities. In an effort to understand Alaska Natives' perspective on these issues, the First Alaskans Foundation embarked on an eight-month research project of Alaska Natives' attitudes and values toward education. The First Alaskans Foundation is a nonprofit organization created by the Alaska Federation of Natives, to influence positive changes in the lives of Alaska Native people. The Foundation engaged the Alaska research-based consulting firm McDowell Group, Inc. to conduct a four-phase study of Native education in 2001.

This summary section outlines the methodology used in the four research components and summarizes the trends found in that research. Following this summary, this document contains complete detailed reports on the results of each component.

Methodology

The multiple-phase project included secondary research, key informant interviews, a household survey, and focus group discussions. This multi-method approach provided a more holistic analysis than a single method. The four reports contained in this full document are:

- *Alaska Native and American Indian Education: A Review of the Literature* was completed in June 2001. This secondary research effort was a review of the literature of Alaska Native and American Indian issues in education. The report also identified methods that could enhance educational programs for Alaska Natives.

- *Perceptions of Alaska Native Educational and Cultural Experts* was completed in September 2001. This document reports on executive interviews of Alaska Native educational and cultural experts conducted in the spring and summer of 2001.

- *Alaska Native Household Education Survey* document was completed in September 2001. A random telephone survey of 1,000 Alaska Natives' opinions, attitudes, and values toward education was conducted in the spring of 2001.

- *Issues in Alaska Native Education: Focus Group Research* was completed in October 2001. Focus group discussions on issues affecting Alaska Native education were conducted in the fall of 2001. High school students, parents, and elders from the rural village of Aniak and Alaska's largest city of Anchorage participated in focus groups, as well as Alaska Native executives from Native corporations, social services, health care, job placement services, and the oil industry.

This brief summary chapter captures the major findings of the four research methods. Please refer to the individual report documents contained herein for detailed analyses. Beginning with a statement of the historical context of Alaska Native education, the summary focuses on consistent themes echoed throughout the research –- barriers to education, the role of family and community, the role of language and culture, education in urban and rural settings, and, most important, solutions for improving education for Alaska Native children.

Since the first Russian schoolmaster began teaching Aleut youth on Kodiak Island, a non-Native education system has determined educational policies and programs for Native people. Like American Indian nations in the Lower 48, Alaska Natives have struggled to make the system work for them, sometimes without success. Nationwide statistics indicate that Alaska Natives and American Indian students are the most at risk of all minority groups for failure in school.[1] When compared to non-Native students, they drop out of school more frequently, are less likely to graduate, and generally have lower educational attainment.

For generations, various approaches have been taken to improve education outcomes. These range from attempts toward complete cultural assimilation to protection and inclusion of Native languages and culture. While there are some successes, statistics show much room for improvement. Results from McDowell Group research indicates that Alaska Natives value classroom education and can identify ways to improve their education as well as their educational experience.

Trends are clearly seen in the findings from the four methods of investigation. Each trend is summarized below. These include perceptible barriers to education, the role that language and culture play in learning, and the role that family and community play in success in school. Finally, Native students may struggle whether they are in a large urban or small rural school, but rural schools cannot compete for teachers and staff, nor offer as many academic opportunities as urban schools.

Barriers to Education

Educational statistics often paint a rather dismal picture of the academic achievement of American Indian/Alaska Native students. The research identifies barriers to academic success that begin in pre-school or kindergarten, and may continue throughout a Native student's academic experience. Among other things, these barriers include:

- Language and culture differences among students, parents, and school staff.
- Ignorance of Native culture among teachers and other school staff.
- Curriculum, learning materials and teaching styles that do not relate to Native cultural experiences.
- Standardized tests that do not take into account language and culture differences.
- Differences in learning styles between Native and non-Native students.
- Lack of educational role models and parents' attitude toward education.
- Problems at home, including alcoholism, neglect and abuse.

[1] American Indian Relief Council, http://www.airc.org/living/education.html.

- Other factors that affect students' performance, such as poverty, indifference, or ambivalence toward education, boredom, and low self-esteem.

Respondents in all levels of the research agreed these and other factors contribute to the gap that sometimes exists between the educational needs of Alaska Native students and the educational services they receive. The perception of a gap was most apparent in the household survey, in which four in ten respondents (42 percent) said Alaska's educational system favors non-Native students. They did not believe Native students receive the same educational opportunities as non-Native students.

Role of Family and Community

Success in school is very dependent upon personal history. In the household survey, personal and family history was the primary reason given for the high dropout rate of Alaska Natives. When grouped by subject, 61 percent said substance abuse, pregnancy, low self-esteem, lack of motivation, peer pressure, and other personal issues led Native students to leave high school before graduation. Thirty-eight percent blamed family background: They said many Native families do not encourage schooling and youngsters lack role models in their homes. Violence in the home and family responsibilities also were given as reasons to stop attending school.

Thirty-six percent of survey respondents cited cultural reasons, including the cultural divide between Native students and non-Native teachers. Only 19 percent of respondents listed academic reasons for dropping out of school.

Focus group participants put the onus on parents to set high expectations for their children in school and help them succeed by becoming involved in their education. They looked at education as the combined responsibility of the school system, parents, and all parts of the community. As Native education experts noted -- from their experience and research -- good parenting skills and community involvement are important at all levels of a child's education. They count the most successful school districts as those that have parental and community commitments.

Schools do not exist in a vacuum. If parents and communities are involved in the local school, the likelihood is greater that educational goals will be achieved, according to the literature. Called "mutual accommodation" in the literature, many studies show that schools and communities need to be engaged in shared leadership, where the school shares decision-making with the community. In communities where this has occurred, student performance reportedly has improved and greater trust exists between school staff and the community (Reyhner, 2001; Yazzie, 2000; Kushman, 1999; and others). Kushman states that "many parents and community members are content to leave education to the educators" unless they have "a compelling goal deeply rooted in community values, like preserving language and cultural knowledge" (Kushman et al, 1999, p. vii).

Role of Language and Culture

The inclusion of Native culture and language in the classroom promotes academic success for Native students, according to the literature (Yazzie, 2000; Reyhner, 1993, 1995; Lomawaima, 1995; Peacock & Day, 1999; and others). Household survey respondents, key informants, and focus group participants agreed that Native language and culture should be included in Alaska's school curricula.

Classroom education is generally inconsistent with Native culture and the rural lifestyle. To close the divide between Western education and Alaska Native culture, experts and parents alike suggest that "Native ways of knowing" will improve Native students' success. Among Native households, more than 80 percent said it was important to teach Alaska Native culture and language. In varying degrees, Alaska Native culture and language studies are being included in school curricula across the state.

Experts agree that Native knowledge should not be limited to language development, history, and traditions. The inclusion of Native knowledge in the teaching of mathematics and science are equally important. Integrating indigenous and Western knowledge into the Alaska school curriculum is the focus of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative. Funded by the National Science Foundation and the Annenberg Rural Challenge, AKRSI is attempting to meld traditional knowledge with public school curriculum including math, science, technology, language arts, and social studies. The pilot program is geared toward rural Alaska, but urban schools would benefit as well.

The McDowell Group research shows the importance of a balance between Native knowledge and classroom education. The incorporation of local knowledge also strengthens the ties of the school to the local community.

Education in Urban and Rural Settings

Over four in ten Alaska Natives say the Alaska educational system favors non-Native students. Households with and without children held similar views. In urban Alaska, Natives feel inequality in the classroom more strongly than do those living in rural Alaska.

Other data in the McDowell Group research verifies a strong perception of prejudice in urban Alaska, where Native students are more likely to be in the minority. The transition from rural to urban Alaska is especially difficult for school children.

While McDowell Group focus group participants indicated that Alaska's cities should do more to welcome and support Native students in transition, the students may lag behind academically long before they reach the cities. The National Indian Education Association indicates that racism is often a large factor in urban schools, making it even more difficult (NIEA, 1990).

Not only is the urban/rural divide geographic, economic, and cultural, it is also academic. Rural Alaskans do not believe their schools can compete with larger communities to attract good teachers. The high turnover of teachers, counselors, and administrators is also a problem in rural Alaska. Residents complain of poor teacher quality as well as teacher ignorance of Native and rural life. They say their students are not academically prepared for post-secondary education or the world of work.

Alaska Natives students who move from the village to Anchorage are not competitive with their peers, or given enough attention to succeed, according to the research. A focus group participant expressed the problem like this:

> *Very rarely does an Anchorage Native student have the attention needed to give them confidence to succeed, and a rural student coming into Anchorage does not have a competitive edge because the schools they come from are too small.*

Not only do rural schools have difficulty attracting and retaining good teachers and staff, rural schools lack course options offered in urban schools. Native education experts, business leaders who participated in focus group discussions, and Native household respondents said rural Native students are not well prepared for the transition to post-secondary education or to a job.

Sixty-five percent of respondents in rural communities favored regional boarding high schools, compared to 57 percent of urban respondents. Focus group respondents saw regional schools as a way to expand village education and help students make a more successful transition from the village to the city. They perceived that regional schools would be better able to compete with urban schools, so their children would get a better education in a regional school.

Rural schools often lack academic courses, counselors, athletics, music, libraries, and many other amenities that are offered in larger schools. Whatever the solution, rural students need greater educational opportunities.

Improving Education for Alaska Native Children

A major purpose of the McDowell Group studies on Alaska Native education was to identify methods to improve and enhance education programs. History cannot be changed, and many of the difficulties Alaska Natives face in school reflect failed education policies, an education system that inherently favors the majority Euro-American culture, and discrimination.

It is up to parents and communities, as well as the educational system itself, to insist that all Alaska children have equal opportunity to be successful at learning, whether they live in rural or urban Alaska, are Native or non-Native.

Alaska Natives value education in the schoolroom and the traditional classroom. To make school more relevant, Alaska Natives support a curriculum that embraces Alaska Native culture, language, ecology, and other Native ways of knowing. They want better teachers in their classrooms and more Native role models. They hope that parents will become more involved in their children's education. They want communities and families to share in the responsibility of education. After all, Alaska Native culture already teaches that it takes a village to raise a child.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ALASKA NATIVE AND AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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Alaska Natives face many challenges in education performance, attainment, and opportunities. Since the first Russian schoolmaster began teaching Aleut youth on Kodiak Island, a non-Native education system has determined educational policies and programs for Native people. Like American Indian nations in the Lower 48, Alaska Natives have struggled to make the system work for them, sometimes without success.

The performance of Alaska Natives and American Indians in school embodies a large portion of the literature on American education. On behalf of the First Alaskans Foundation, a nonprofit organization created by the Alaska Federation of Natives, McDowell Group, Inc. has completed a review of the academic literature surrounding the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives. The literature is one component of a larger study of Native education that McDowell Group is conducting for the Foundation. The purpose of this secondary research is to identify issues and methods that can enhance educational programs for Alaska Natives.

McDowell Group offers the following summary of key issues:

Historical and Current Situation

Historical Perspective

- The difficulties many Alaska Natives face in school reflect the history of education that has emphasized American Indian and Alaska Native assimilation into mainstream culture. Educational reform has been underway for years in Alaska, yet it will probably take decades for true change to occur.

- Evidence of discrimination continues to exist in our school system.

Data Limitations

- Statistics do not tell the entire story. Reliable generalizations of Native academic achievement cannot be made due to small sample sizes, varying statistical methods, and incomparable data.

- Dropout studies indicate high rates for Alaska Natives, however, recent research questions the validity of many of these studies. Many dropout studies blame only the student for failing to stay in school. A variety of other factors contribute to non-retention, including many factors found within the school systems. These studies also do not take into account "stopouts" – students who temporarily stop their education then return to school; a common trend amongst Native peoples.

Findings that Enhance Alaska Native Education

Language and Culture are Key

- Academic programs that honor both Native culture and language appear to be successful in improving academic achievement. It is important, however, that these programs recognize individual and subgroup differences among Alaska Natives.

- American Indian/Alaska Native students perform competently and have a better understanding of mathematics and science when the curriculum integrates Native and Western knowledge systems.

Learning and Teaching Styles

- A program that enhances the learning capabilities of one group of students will heighten the performance of the entire school. For example, holistic and experiential approaches that prove successful with Native students will enhance the education of all students.

- When teaching and learning styles match, educators are better able to address the needs of their Native students. Native learning styles differ from white students, for whom most educational curricula are written.

Community Involvement is Key

- Schools do not exist in a vacuum. Research shows that Native student performance improves when schools reach out to the families and communities they serve. Parents, elders, and other community members should come together to design, implement, and support culture and language programs.

- Programs that link science to local ecology and tap the expertise of local experts create stronger ties between the school and community. Research indicates that Native student achievement improves.

Native Students Need to "Own" Their Education

- Barriers to Native students' success in college or vocational education are rooted in personal background and previous educational experience. Many Natives lack a "sense of ownership" of their education. Greater Native participation in education planning and design will improve Native students' performance throughout their school careers.

Despite the comprehensive literature, McDowell Group believes more research and analysis is needed in many issues affecting the education of Alaska Natives. A list of recommendations for further research concludes this report.

Purpose

Nationwide statistics indicate that Alaska Natives and American Indian students are the most at risk of all minority groups for failure in school.[1] When compared to non-Native students, they drop out of school more frequently, are less likely to graduate, and generally have lower educational attainment. For generations, various approaches have been taken to improve education outcomes. These range from outright attempts toward complete cultural assimilation to protection and inclusion of Native languages and culture. While there are some successes, statistics still show much room for improvement.

On behalf of the First Alaskans Foundation, McDowell Group, Inc. has conducted baseline research on Alaska Native attitudes and values toward education. The First Alaskans Foundation (FAF), a nonprofit organization created by the Alaska Federation of Natives, seeks to influence positive change in the lives of Alaska Native people. The Foundation sees education as a key to positive change.

The McDowell Group study for First Alaskans Foundation has four components:

- Review of the secondary research on Alaska Native education, reported in this document.
- A random telephone survey of one-thousand Alaska Native households' opinions, attitudes, and values toward education. A report of the survey findings is scheduled for June 2001.
- Executive interviews of experts in the education field to provide further insight and suggestions for improving the delivery of education services to Alaska Natives. A report of the executive interviews is scheduled for delivery in June 2001. Approximately 25 key informants within Alaska and outside Alaska will be interviewed.
- Focus group discussions on issues affecting Alaska Native education. The focus groups will be conducted in the fall of 2001.

Methodology

As part of the research for the Foundation, McDowell Group reviewed studies of American Indian and Alaska Native academic performance. The literature review is an overview of old and new philosophies of American Indian/Alaska Native educational methods and needs, and identifies programs that attempt to match methods with those needs. It will give the First Alaskans Foundation a greater understanding of the problems many Native students face in school. The literature review will also provide perspective for survey of Alaska Native attitudes and values toward education, conducted in April and May 2001.

[1] American Indian Relief Council, http://www.airc.org/living/education.html.

This report is not intended to be an exhaustive search of the literature. Rather, the McDowell Group study team has tried to capture the essence of the issues that American Indians and Alaska Natives face as they maneuver within the Euro-centric U.S. educational system. The report summarizes educational statistics for American Indians and Alaska Natives, many of which are distressing. A brief review of the history of Alaska public education helps to put those statistics into perspective. It is followed by a discussion of key educational issues and approaches.

McDowell Group accessed many research articles, books, government documents, and other reports as well as contacted several experts in the education field, who helped provide background and context for this research. A bibliography of all published sources gathered and used is found at the end of the study. The bibliography includes books, periodicals, government documents, and other reports, many of which are available through databases and Web sites. The Educational Resources Information Center, known as ERIC, provides one of the richest collections of materials on education and the Journal of American Indian Education is the most comprehensive resource for American Indian/Alaska Native education. McDowell Group has also attached a list of some of the more useful and relevant Web sites in the section entitled Education Web Sites.

Most researchers agree that more long-term, comprehensive studies of American Indian/Alaska Native education are needed. The Clinton Administration set forth goals in Executive Order 13096 to improve the educational achievement of American Indian/Alaska Native students. As part of the Executive Order, a research team is producing an extensive review of historical and current studies of Native education programs. This review will be available sometime in 2001 on Executive Order #13096 (See the Web site: http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/miscpubs/whitehouse/eo13096.htm).

> Schooling for indigenous peoples has historically tended to be imposed imperialism designed either to assimilate indigenous people into an alien dominant culture and/or to keep them in a second-class status (Reyhner, 2000).

Throughout America, Indian education often meant teaching "Indians to dress, speak and act like white people" as well as to read, write, and do arithmetic. The early paradigm of formal education assumed that education was an effective means of assimilating Native Americans into white society. (Berry, 1968, in Deyhle & Swisher, 1997.) Szasz's *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination, 1928-1973,* provides an excellent history up to the time of the 1969 Kennedy Report (*Indian Education: A National Tragedy -- A National Challenge*) by the U.S. Senate Special Subcommittee on Indian Education. Since that report, the failed policies of the federal government toward Native Americans are generally blamed for many of the problems experienced by Native Americans in school.

Jon Reyhner, a professor of American Indian/Alaska Native studies and tireless researcher, writes:

> Schooling as a formal institution for Indians started with missionaries, and teachers in missionary schools were at least as interested in salvation as in education (Reyhner, 1989).

Alaska Natives' experiences are similar to those of other Native Americans. The most comprehensive history of Alaska education was written by Frank Darnell in *Alaska's Dual Federal-State School System: A History and Descriptive Analysis*. His work is summarized by the Education Task Force in the 1994 final report of the Alaska Natives Commission (ANC),[2] and provides the basis for this overview.

Russian Schools

The first documented Native school in Alaska was opened by a Russian fur trader on Kodiak Island in 1784 to teach young Alaska Natives "the precepts of Christianity," arithmetic, and the Russian language. The Russian Orthodox Church started its mission schools about 1796. The Russian American Company also provided training to "Christianize" Native children, "civilize or Westernize them; and to make them more useful servants of the Russian American Company" (ANC, 1994).

After Alaska was transferred from Russian to American jurisdiction, the U.S. government ordered the Alaska Commercial Company to operate schools on St. George and St. Paul Islands, beginning about 1869. The first American missionary school began in Wrangell in 1877. By the time the last of the Russian schools closed in 1916, American Protestant and Roman Catholic mission schools were operating.

[2] Created by Congress in 1990, the Alaska Natives Commission (ANC) was charged with recommending specific actions to Congress and the State of Alaska that would help assure that Alaska Natives have opportunities comparable to other Americans, while respecting their traditions, cultures, and special status as Alaska Natives. The areas of concern included self-determination, economic self-sufficiency, improved levels of educational achievement, improved health status, and reduced incidence of social problems. Alaska Native Education, Report of the Education Task Force, Alaska Natives Commission Final Report, Volume 1, Section 4, http://www.alaskool.org/resources/anc2/ANC2_Sec4.html#top.

Schools in the District and Territory of Alaska

The Alaska Organic Act establishing the "District of Alaska" directed the Department of Interior's Bureau of Education to provide education for school-age children "without reference to race." Most of the children in Alaska at that time were Alaska Native. Presbyterian missionary Sheldon Jackson was appointed the General Superintendent for Education in Alaska in 1885. By 1895, the Federal Bureau of Education was operating 19 grade schools. Many were run and taught by missionaries, with these educational objectives: "Children must be kept in school until they acquire what is termed a common-school education, also practical knowledge of some useful trade...We believe in reclaiming the Natives from improvident habits and in transforming them into ambitious and self-helpful citizens." Christianity was seen as a "powerful lever in influencing them to abandon their old customs...." (Darnell, 1970).

In 1900, Congress called for the District of Alaska to educate "white and colored children and children of mixed blood who live a civilized life" (Darnell, 1970). The Secretary of Interior retained control of schools for Eskimo and American Indian children. Education continued to reflect the philosophy that Natives should be assimilated into the white culture.

Alaska became a territory in 1912. By 1917, the Territorial Legislature had established a school system, excluding Alaska Natives. The federal Bureau of Education remained responsible for the education of Alaska Natives. *De facto* integration was the result, since neither the territorial nor federal governments had enough money to establish separate schools throughout the Alaska Territory. Western education was the curriculum offered in both schools until 1926, when the federal schools began to include Native games and dances, and some vocational offerings. The federal government subsequently established three vocational schools for Alaska Natives at Eklutna, Kanakanak, and White Mountain.

In 1931, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) took over education of all American Indians and Alaska Natives. The BIA continued the philosophy of assimilation, though policy at the time stated that Native culture should be protected. At the end of World War II, Alaska's Territorial Commissioner of Education proposed a single school system for Natives and non-Natives, as well as a common curriculum. The federal government rejected the proposal and retained control of Native schools. The dual federal/territorial school system resulted in a federal boarding school program for Alaska Natives that was later challenged in the famous Molly Hootch case. Discrimination was even present in determining who would attend the boarding schools:

> While territorial officials undertook to provide local secondary schools for whites, the federal government had a policy of sending Native children away to boarding school. The federal policy was to acculturate Alaska Natives by sending the most intellectually advanced youths to boarding schools for a vocational education, then returning them to their villages. Most were sent to boarding schools in the Lower 48 (Ray, 1958, in Cotton, 1984.)

In 1947, the BIA opened Mt. Edgecumbe boarding high school in Sitka for Natives from across Alaska. The school offered both academic and vocational curriculum. Some Alaska Native students were sent to BIA boarding schools outside Alaska if Mt. Edgecumbe was full. The BIA also operated an elementary boarding school in Wrangell.

Statehood and Molly Hootch

The BIA began to transfer operation of local schools to the Territory of Alaska in 1951. Alaska became a state in 1959 and by 1966 had created a State-Operated School System. For rural students in grades 8 through 12, the state set up several regional high schools, with the educational objective of equipping Native youth to "function in either Native or non-Native cultures" (ANC, 1994). The state abandoned the State-Operated School System in 1975 and set up regionally controlled districts to provide for local control of schools. After the famous Molly Hootch settlement in 1976,[3] the state placed a high school in every village that had an elementary school.

The 1972 class action lawsuit against the state (*Hootch v. Alaska State-Operated School System,* 1972) argued that Alaska's school system discriminated against Alaska Natives. The suit was based on the legal theory that the state, by failing to provide local high schools in all rural villages, was violating the education clause of Alaska's constitution, which requires the state maintain a public school system open to all children. The suit also argued that a system requiring that children leave their homes for nine months each year was not truly "open," especially in light of the high dropout rates and severe dislocation that afflicted children in the boarding-school programs.

Known then as *Tobeluk v. Lind,* an out-of-court settlement was negotiated from August 1975 to October 1976. A consent decree spelled out the minimum size of high school facilities the state had to provide in each village with an elementary school. The state was obligated to provide construction costs to meet the minimum guidelines.

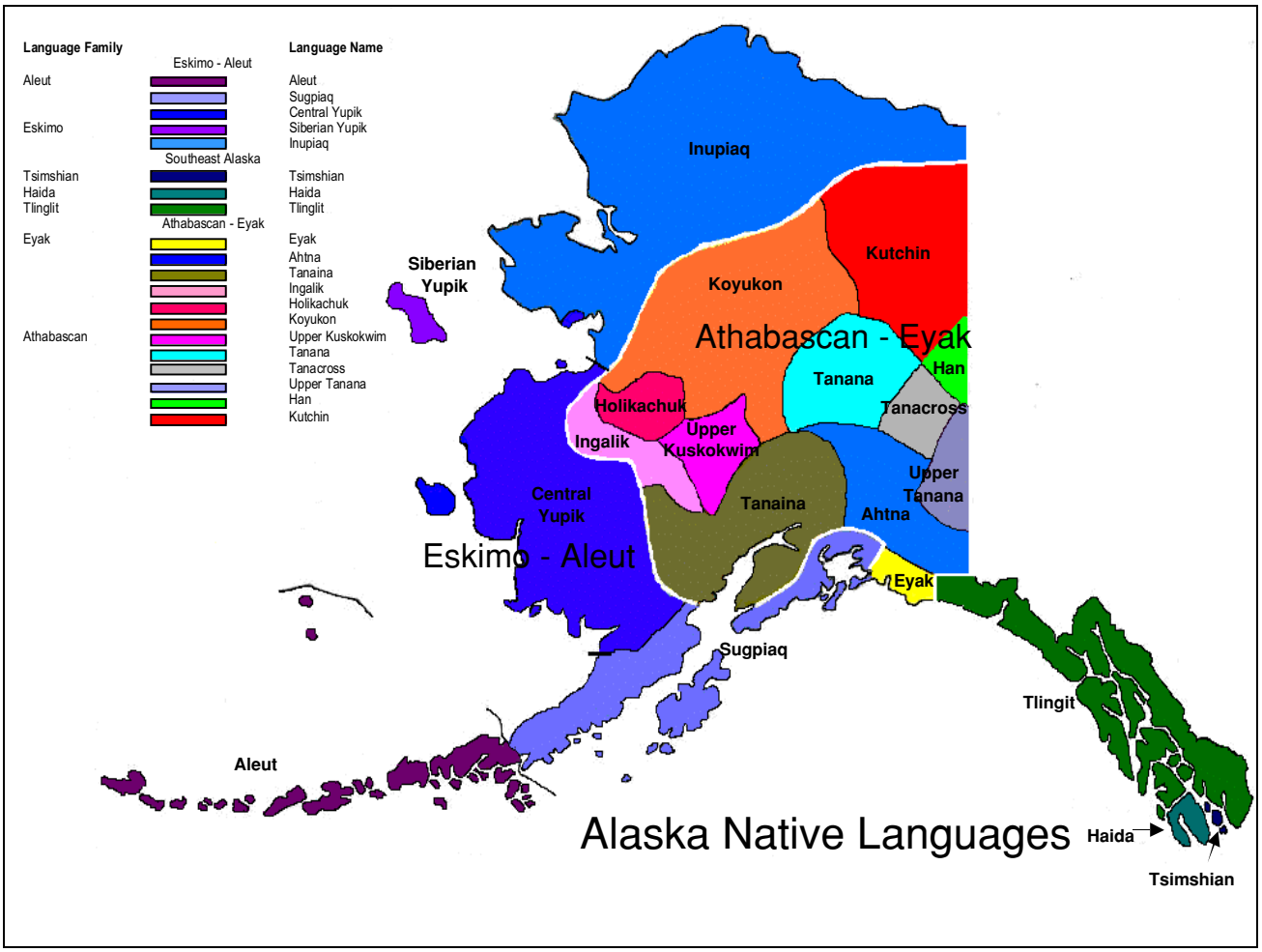
Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)

While Alaska was searching for a school system that would serve all students, the young state was involved in native land claims. In 1971, Congress passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), resulting in the formation of thirteen regional Native corporations. Twelve of these corporations represent Alaska's various regions and Native groups for purposes of dispersing and managing the land and cash provided by the settlement. Natives not residing within one of the twelve regions joined the thirteenth "at-large" corporation that participated in the cash but not the land settlement.

The corporations capture the cultural and geographic diversity of Alaska's Native groups, including Aleut, Athabascan, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Inupiat, and Yup'ik. Each of Alaska's Eskimo and Indian cultures speak a different language, illustrated in the following map. It is very clear that one academic curriculum – especially one designed for a non-Native Western culture – could not serve all Native children.

[3] The August 1972 lawsuit was filed in Superior Court in Anchorage on behalf of Native children and their parents in three Southwest Alaska villages. The first name on the list of 27 plaintiffs was Molly Hootch from Emmonak. A class action suit was then filed on behalf of all similarly situated Native children in rural villages without high schools.

Map of Alaska Native Languages



Summary

Darnell's summary of the philosophy of Native education in Alaska reflects the changing federal attitude toward Native Americans: "…policy makers over the years have vacillated between attempted assimilation of the Native population into white society and protection of their cultural identity."

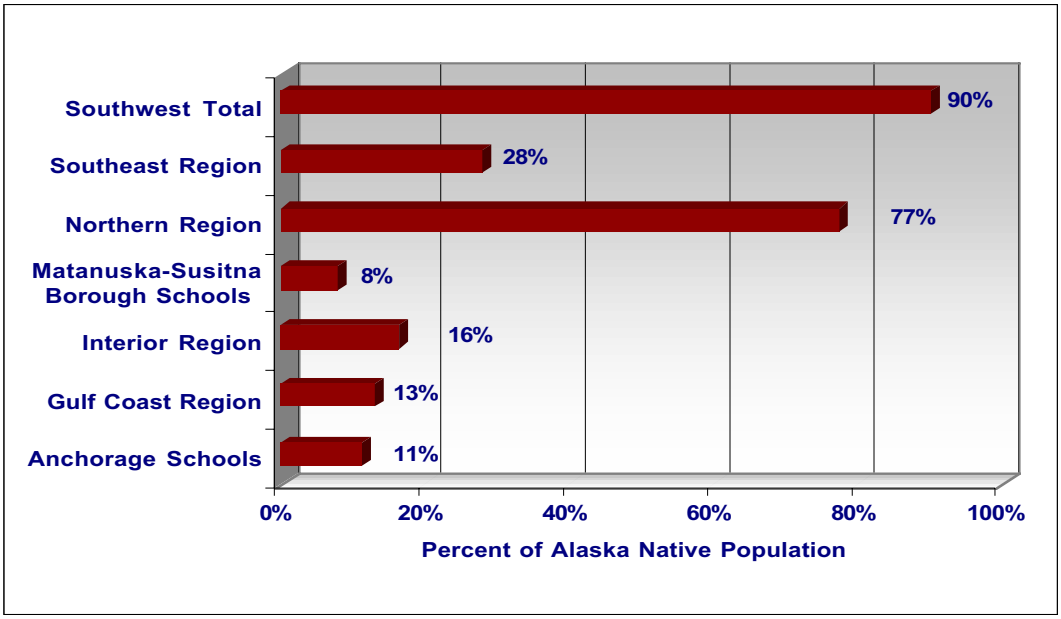
Alaska's educational history mirrors that in other states, where non-Natives determined the educational policies and programs for Native students. The difficulties many Alaska Natives face in academic achievement reflect the nature of more than one hundred years of ambivalence in U.S. education policy in Alaska, and the folly of trying to assimilate rather then educate Native youth.

Current Status of Alaska Native Education: K – 12

Nationwide, Native American students comprise about 1 percent of the total kindergarten to twelfth grade population[4] and 1 percent of post-secondary enrollment.[5] The total Native population is greater in Alaska, where Natives comprised nearly 23 percent of 132,434 Alaska public school students in the current school year, 2000-01. The greatest proportion of Alaska Natives is 99 percent in the Bering Strait, St. Mary's, Southwest Region, and Lower Yukon School Districts. Fewer than 5 percent Alaska Native students attended schools in the Skagway and Delta/Greely districts. The Native population in major urban centers ranged from 21 percent in the Juneau School District to 11 percent in both the Anchorage and Fairbanks school districts. About 90 percent of the students are Native at the state's only regional boarding school, Mt. Edgecumbe High School in Sitka.

Alaska Natives disproportionately represent more than one-third of those who drop out of school, and only about 18 percent of high school graduates.[6]

Percent of Native Students in Alaska's Public Schools, Grades K-12
2000-2001



Source: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. Compiled by McDowell Group, Inc.

Alaska Natives account for only 5 percent of public school teachers. Eighty-nine percent of Alaska's K-12 teachers are white.

[4] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995.
[5] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities"; and Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Fall Enrollment" surveys, 1998-99.
[6] For the school year 1998-99. Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, Report Card to the Public 1998-99, pp. 11 and 23.

An Overview

Educational statistics often paint a rather dismal picture of the academic achievement of American Indian/Alaska Native students. An overview of the literature identifies barriers to academic success that begin in pre-school or kindergarten, and may continue throughout a Native student's academic experience. Among other things, these barriers include:

- Language and culture differences among students, parents, and school staff.
- Ignorance of Native culture among teachers and other school staff.
- Curriculum and learning materials that do not relate to cultural experience.
- Standardized tests that do not take into account language and culture differences.
- Differences in learning styles between Native and non-Native students.
- Teaching styles and teacher training.
- Lack of educational role models and parents' attitude toward education.
- Problems at home, including alcoholism, neglect, and abuse.
- Other factors that affect students' performance, such as poverty, indifference, or ambivalence toward education, boredom, and low self-esteem.

These factors and others may contribute to the gap that sometimes exists between the educational needs of American Indian/Alaska Native students and the educational services they receive.

Early research on academic achievement often assumed that Native students' failure in school and on standardized tests stemmed from inability, rather than racial discrimination or any cultural or language differences. As the approach to educating Native Americans moved away from the assimilation model, educators began to understand the importance of recognizing language and culture in the classroom. Lomawaima (1995) cites decades of research that has contributed several models to the literature: the "culture of poverty" model that labeled Native American and other minority children as culturally, socially and/or economically disadvantaged; studies of dropout, retention and graduation rates that concentrate on the failure of Native Americans in school; research on learning styles and classroom interaction; studies of the cultural discontinuity between school and home, and other studies. The consequences of too little research or highly focused studies, according to Lomawaima, are "that provocative but slender evidence is generalized to all 'Indian' children."

Research and Data Limitations

Small sample size is one of the most relentless problems of research into American Indians and Alaska Natives. They make up only 0.8 percent of the U.S. population. In a sample of 1,000 people, for example, only eight American Indian/Alaska Natives would be represented. Consequently, these students and the schools and staff that serve them are rarely represented in sufficient numbers to permit reliable and valid generalizations about their characteristics. Additionally, researchers have found it too costly to include Indian schools and students in their data collection, due to tribal and linguistic diversity, geographic dispersion, and the preponderance of Natives living in remote rural areas.[7]

As a result, reliable Native American data is limited on the national level, making it especially difficult to tell a story with statistics, which research often strives to do. Small sample sizes may necessitate merging ethnic categories in reporting to avoid confidentiality requirements. In addition, racial/ethnic identification is often uncertain. This is especially true for individuals who consider themselves of mixed descent. Research indicates that American Indians and Alaska Natives make up the least stable racial/ethnic group in terms of self-identification.[8] For example, U.S. Census figures for 2000 show that nearly 17,000 Alaskans say they are Alaska Native and white. Since Census respondents decide how they want to be counted, the reliability of the numbers are "squishy," and their "usefulness questionable," according to an Anchorage Daily News article quoting Alaska's demographer Greg Williams (March 21, 2001).

To avoid erroneous generalities, a wider range of research is needed. Lomawaima and others argue that Native children's educational achievements or failures cannot be generalized to all Alaska Natives or American Indians (Lomawaima, 1995). A historical review of Native educational research by Deyhle and Swisher (1997) concludes that research based on cultural strengths and integrity has "yielded sustainable results for some schools and communities," producing programs that are "grounded in the cultural capital of their respective communities"(p. 182). However, there does not appear to be recognized definitions of "Native culture" and "Native knowledge," so research may not be consistent regarding the inclusion of Native knowledge, culture, and language in curriculum.

A plethora of issues impact Native education. The following sections of this report categorize some of these issues: Student Assessment, Dropout Studies, Language and Culture, Learning Styles, Teaching Styles and Training, Distance Learning and Technology-Based Education, Community Involvement, and Higher Education. This report concludes with Recommendations for Further Study.

[7] Research Triangle Institute, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, "Characteristics of American Indian and Alaska Native Education: Results from the 1990-91 and 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Surveys."
[8] U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, A Test of Methods for Collecting Racial and Ethnic Information, 1995.

High dropout and low graduation rates of minority groups have been the subject of U.S. statistical research for decades. American Indian and Alaska Native students are considered the most at-risk for failing to complete high school and college. However, not all dropout studies can be trusted, due to widely varying statistical methods, incomparable data sets, and frequent student transfers. In addition, some students stop their education for a period of time, then return to school. This pattern is common among American Indian/Alaska Native students. Called "stopouts," these students are counted in dropout statistics.

The way dropout rates are reported also has an impact on the data. For example, Alaska has a highly mobile population. The Department of Education and Early Development reports nearly a 20 percent transient rate statewide, which means that only 80 percent of students are enrolled in the same school for at least 170 days of the 180-day school year.

Alaska collects enrollment head counts on October 1 of each school year. Students enrolled before or after this date are not reported in the schools head count. Therefore, students that move to another district after October 1 are counted as dropouts in the district from which they move. Most of the students who actually drop out do so between the ninth and tenth grades.

Distance learning, correspondence schools, and home schooling also inflate dropout rates. Students that enroll in these programs generally have left a traditional school and are often shown as dropouts from that school. On the other hand, dropout statistics may be artificially lower in some districts. It is often assumed that children who announce they "plan to enroll in correspondence" will later re-enroll in the district, so they are left on the enrollment books. Those students, however, may never re-enroll in that district.

Dropout studies also have not paid enough attention to the reasons that Native American students give for leaving school (Lomawaima, 1995; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Swisher & Hoisch, 1992; and others). Alaska Native and American Indian students drop out for a variety of cultural, social, and economic reasons as well as school, home and student-based reasons. Many of the cultural reasons are explored in this paper. Examples of "school-based" reasons (Reyhner, 1992) include uncaring teachers or inappropriate curriculum. "Home-based" reasons are lack of parental support and speaking English as a second language (Lomawaima, 1995). "Student-based" reasons include boredom, goals that are unrelated to school instruction, pregnancy, and substance abuse (Bowker, 1992, in Lomawaima, 1995).

Research by Deyhle and Swisher (1997) is critical of most dropout studies because they use "a deficit model" that places blame solely on the student. In their analysis of the literature, Deyhle and Swisher note that "failure" is a central theme:

> For many Indian youth, leaving school before graduation is the ultimate expression of academic "failure"; much of the research argued that Indian youth were to blame for their failure, a position we reject...These Indian youth spoke of pressures and problems that lie outside of their individual control, specifically the racially restricted "place" reserved for Indians in the dominant society (p. 22).

Deyhle and Swisher's examination of dropout studies is one of the most comprehensive reviews in the literature on American Indian and Alaska Native education. The researchers reject the statistics that paint such a dismal picture of Natives rather than focus on why students drop out of school. Deyhle and Swisher note that many students say they do not feel like "dropouts," instead they feel they are "pushed out" of school as the system and society fail them (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997, pp. 126 – 138).

Whatever the reasons for leaving school, dropout rates are symptomatic of the failure of an educational system that refuses to accept cultural differences as a strength rather than a weakness.

America's schools offer a variety of programs and services for students who need additional assistance, including bilingual education, English as a second language, remedial reading and remedial mathematics, as well as special education and programs for gifted and talented students.

American Indian and Alaska Native students are over-represented in special education programs and disproportionately under-represented in gifted and talented programs. In Alaska, Natives comprised 23 percent of the total student population but 32 percent of all children with disabilities receiving special education during the 1998-99 school year.[9] The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development does not collect data on the ethnicity of students in gifted and talented programs, though it is expected to reflect national statistics (see below).

Alaska Children with Disabilities Receiving Special Education, 2000

Disability	# of American Indian/Alaska Native Students Enrolled	% of Total American Indian/Alaska Native Enrollment by Disability	# of American Indian/Alaska Native Students Enrolled ÷ Total Special Education Enrollment	White (Not Hispanic) Students	Other Race/Ethnicity Students	Total Special Education Enrollment
Mental Retardation	314	6.2%	38.3%	378	127	819
Hearing Impairments	71	1.4	32.0	111	40	222
Speech or Language Impairments	1,074	21.3	33.9	1,771	324	3,169
Visual Impairments	15	0.3	33.3	23	7	45
Emotional Disturbance	280	5.5	33.2	478	85	843
Orthopedic Impairments	17	0.3	24.6	46	6	69
Other Health Impairments	258	5.1	27.7	568	106	932
Specific Learning Disabilities	2,784	55.1	30.3	5,249	1,158	9,191
Deaf-Blindness	2	0.0	40.0	3	0	5
Multiple Disabilities	187	3.7	38.6	255	42	484
Autism	26	0.5	13.3	137	32	195
Traumatic Brain Injury	16	0.3	22.9	46	8	70
Developmental Delay	9	0.2	90.0	0	1	10
Total	**5,053**	**100.0%**	**31.5%**	**9,065**	**1,936**	**16,054**

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs

[9] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs.

Identifying Special Students

Reliance on standardized tests is partly responsible for the disproportionate placement of American Indian and Alaska Native students in special education programs (Chinn & Hughes, 1987, in Dodd, Nelson and Sprint, 1995). Reliance on standardized tests may be responsible for large numbers of "false-positive placements" in special education (Chinn & Hughes, 1987). The disproportionate placement in special education programs puts American Indians and Alaska Natives at an even higher risk of dropping out, as minorities are more likely to be marginalized in special education classes than in regular classes. Standardized tests also may not identify gifted students who have limited experience and English language skills (Tonemah, 1991).

Critics of standardized tests blame the testing instruments. The tests are generally geared for white middle-class students and do not account for American Indian/Alaska Native language systems, "which rely on nonverbal communication, undetailed verbal accounts, non-competitiveness, soft speech patterns, and mythology rather than science" (Florey & Tafoya, 1988). Even tests that rely heavily on nonverbal skills invariably involve "timed tasks that require rapid, organized thought [which is] incongruent with the Indian concept of a continuous present" (Florey & Tafoya, 1988). Other American Indian/Alaska Native values, such as interdependence, collective decision-making, and group cohesiveness may not be accounted for in current assessment tools (Florey & Tafoya, 1988). Standardized tests rarely recognize intertribal differences (Brescia & Fortune, 1989).

Native Students in Gifted and Talented Programs

Standardized tests are used in many states to identify gifted and talented children. While most states define gifted and talented using multiple criteria, many schools have used only standardized test scores as the single criteria for gifted and talented identification (Tonemah, October 1991).

Because reliable and up-to-date information on American Indian/Alaska Native students is limited, it is difficult to find recent statistics on the number of students in special programs, including gifted and talented. During the 1993-94 school year, 46.6 million students nationwide were enrolled in all special programs and services in public and private schools. Slightly over 6 percent of these students were in gifted and talented programs (2.9 million students).[10]

In the early 1990s, 9 percent of the students attending America's BIA and tribal schools were identified as eligible for gifted and talented programs. Comparable percentages were observed in public schools with high and low Indian student enrollment, however, the percentage of American Indian and Alaska Native students who actually participated in gifted and talented programs was higher in the BIA/tribal schools (Pavel, 1997).

Tonemah (1991) notes that American Indian/Alaska Natives have a critical need for effective leadership, but the focus of federal and state Native programs "has been to provide remedial education." He believes the major barrier to Native participation in gifted programs is assessment procedures that are "biased racially, ethnically, and culturally."

[10] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "School and Staffing Survey, 1993-94."

Alternative Methods of Student Assessment

In recent years, many educators have challenged the appropriateness of using achievement, aptitude, and intelligence tests to measure minority students' abilities. Performance-based indicators are now preferred among many educational researchers. Bordeaux (1995) notes that assessments such as student portfolios, projects, interviews, teacher observations, and other performance measures are more culturally relevant to Native Americans. For example, in the Crow way:

> As children grew up, adults observed them to determine their knowledge and skill development. Children exhibited different levels of knowledge and skill in tasks such as hunting, running, consensus building, healing, and spiritual leadership. Children who demonstrated superior performance were the ones who later led hunting parties, provided spiritual guidance, served as orators for the people, and performed other necessary tasks for the group. (Bordeaux, 1995).

Similarly, performance-based assessment directly examines student performance on specific tasks that are important for life (Worthen, 1993). The increased use of performance-based assessment may help give American Indian and Alaska Native students more legitimate evaluations of their knowledge and skills. Performance-based assessment is also considered a tool for schools using language and culture as integral parts of the total curriculum (Bordeaux, 1995).

Impact of FAS/FAE on Special Education Programs

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE) can have a profound impact on a child's educational potential. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, fetal alcohol problems are now the leading cause of mental retardation,[11] however, it is difficult to assess just how many people are affected by FAS or FAE.

The State of Alaska has little data on the numbers of school children diagnosed with alcohol-related disorders. Until 1999, Alaska had little in-state capacity to diagnose Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, though anecdotal information from school teachers indicates the incidence is quite high.[12] Alaska has an estimated FAS prevalence rate of 1.0 to 1.4 per 1000 live births.[13]

[11] Tineke Bodde Haase, Ed. U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service. Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration, Office of Substance Abuse Prevention. "Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs May Harm the Unborn," pp.17. DHHS Publication No. (ADM) 90-1711, printed 1990.
[12] Diane Worley, Program Manager, Office of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. McDowell Group interview, June 15, 2001.
[13] Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, *1999 Status Update: Alaska's Response to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome*, November 1999, p. 9.

While some alcohol-affected children are placed in special education programs in their local schools, many do not qualify for special services.[14] Alcohol-related disabilities include learning disorders, poor social skills, and disruptive behavior (Finlay, 1995). Specific problems can include (among others) attention deficit disorders, speech/language disorders, information processing deficits, poor impulse controls, inability to relate behavior to consequences, poor short-term memory, poor personal boundaries, confusion under pressure, difficulty grasping abstract concepts, inability to manage anger, and poor judgment (McCreight, 1997).

By the 2002 academic year, the Department of Education and Early Development will begin collecting information on the numbers of students in Alaska schools that may be affected by alcohol-related disorders, and the impact FAS and FAE have on local schools.

[14]Worley interview.

Generations of American Indians and Alaska Natives do not speak their Native language. Many students in federal boarding schools were forbidden or discouraged from speaking their language and did not teach it to their children (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Reyhner, 1993; Reyhner & Tennant, 1995; Peacock & Day, 1999; and others). Instead of cultural preservation, earlier Native education models emphasized assimilation into the mainstream culture.

Much of the current educational research takes into account the bicultural context in which Native students navigate. Programs that honor both culture and language appear to be successful in improving academic achievement. Recent studies indicate that multiculturalism is a source of strength, not weakness.

An early 1990s federal task force on Indian Education recommended several reforms, including the development of instructional curricula that support diverse cultural needs and learning styles (Butterfield, no date). In a year 2000 study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the author notes that "Educational research has clearly established that Native culture and language are essential in Native children's acquisition of knowledge and foster academic achievement" (Yazzie, 2000, p. 7).

Many other studies document that inclusion of Native culture and language in the classroom promotes academic success (Reyhner, 1993, 1995; Lomawaima, 1995; and others). Peacock and Day (1999) report that young Native children who take language and culture classes gain stronger identities, knowledge, and appreciation of their heritage. Native teenagers who are more conflicted about their culture are at greater risk of engaging in gang activity, developing alcohol and drug problems, and dropping out of school.

For example, an early 1990s Yup'ik language-maintenance program on St. Lawrence Island was so successful that it transcended the classroom into the community, helping to "maintain the language through a strong literacy program and helping to counteract the ever mounting influence of English-language television in nearly every home" (Reyhner, 1995). With a federal bilingual education grant, the school district developed K-12 cultural classes that were taught in Yup'ik.

In varying degrees, culture and language are being included in school curricula in Native communities across Alaska and the nation. Native language is practiced to different degrees in American Indian/Alaska Native communities, from flourishing language with speakers of all ages, to extinct language. Traditional Native culture is tied to language in many ways, and as the language dies, the culture changes (Skinner, 1999). Yazzie, a Navajo Indian, observes that the inclusion of Native language and culture in the curriculum is not just a Native versus non-Native issue, but one that has become a debate among and within Native nations and communities. A graduate of the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Yazzie writes:

> Surely the frustration of language loss is felt by both Native speakers and non-Native speakers, just as cultural loss is felt and dealt with differently by both parties. Ultimately, language cannot be just a "speak it or don't speak it" issue; it's also about ways of communication and understanding the culture that the language represents (p. 16).

Yazzie argues that both Native and non-Native teachers can be trained to develop and implement culturally appropriate curriculum in classrooms that serve Native students:

> If we are serious about truly working to incorporate culture and language into the schooling process, then we as educators, parents, and community need to envision a different kind of education that incorporates culturally appropriate ways of thinking and behaving (Yazzie 2000, p. 11).

Implications of Language and Culture for Curriculum Development

Incorporating language and culture into the classroom impacts other curricula for American Indian/Alaska Native students. For example, in mathematics and science instruction, curricula based on American Indian/Alaska Native knowledge systems have multiple purposes. It shows students how these subjects are socially constructed, engages students in constructing a system based on their cultural knowledge, and connects students' knowledge of the subject area "through comparisons and bridges to other aboriginal and Western systems" (Lipka, 1994). Actively involving elders and other community members who have local knowledge of a subject helps foster greater community involvement with a school (Stephens, no date).

Stephens notes that culturally responsive science curriculum integrates Native and Western knowledge systems around science ecology, with the goal of enhancing students' cultural well-being and their knowledge. Reyhner and Davison (no date) indicate that American Indian/Alaska Native students perform better and have a better understanding of mathematics and science.

Such programs link science to local topics and tap the expertise of local experts. This in turn creates stronger ties between the school and community. Because it values local culture, Native-based science and math curricula also offer an alternative to traditional Western schooling and traditional indigenous culture. Such programs provide "an opportunity for elders and the school community to visualize the possible ways in which everyday tasks and knowledge can be a basis for learning in school." (Lipka, 1994).

Integrating indigenous and Western knowledge into Alaska school curriculum is the focus of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (AKRSI). Funded by the National Science Foundation and the Annenberg Rural Challenge over a five-year period, AKRSI is attempting to meld traditional knowledge with public school curriculum including math, science, technology, language arts, and social studies. While AKRSI is geared toward rural Alaska, urban schools would benefit as well.

Traditional Education in Urban Schools

Culturally relevant programs are easier to deliver in rural Alaska communities where the population is primarily Alaska Native and in Lower 48 Indian reservation schools. In Alaska's cities, however, the Native population is growing as more Natives leave rural villages and move to the city.

American Indians and Alaska Natives attending school in urban areas face unique challenges (NIEA, 1990).[15] In many cases, Natives constitute a very small minority of the student body, and racism can be a large factor. Funding is often limited for Native programs in urban areas, especially for vocational education and Head Start programs that compete for grants with other minority groups. Tracking students who move back and forth between rural and urban schools is difficult and some may "slip through the cracks."

As Alaska Natives and American Indian students in urban areas are likely from various Native groups, developing curriculum for them usually assumes a "Pan-Indian" perspective. Deyhle and Swisher (1997) note the need to involve Native teachers, parents, and elders in urban communities to improve education for Native students.

Despite the demonstrated importance of language and cultural programs in Native education, the school -- urban or rural -- cannot take the place of cultural grounding at home:

> To rely upon the school to do for language and culture what neither the family nor the neighborhood will or can do is to court disappointment and to avert one's eyes from the basic loci of ethnocultural and ethnolinguistic continuity (Fishman, 1989 in Slaughter, 1997).

Summary

Research shows that multiculturalism is a source of strength, not weakness. As Native students' academic performance improves with the blending of Western education and traditional Native knowledge, all students will benefit. A program that enhances the learning capabilities of one group of students will enhance the capabilities of all students as well as the performance of the entire school system.

A summary of the most relevant literature by Deyhle and Swisher (1997) suggests that a culturally relevant curriculum is less important for students who have strong cultural identities and language and more important for those who are less rooted in their culture. Still needed, according to Deyhle and Swisher, "is the interpretation of what this research means in the way teachers are trained, schools are organized, curriculum is designed, and instruction is delivered" (p. 182).

[15] National Indian Education Association.

Incompatibility between American Indian/Alaska Native learning styles and standard Western educational curriculum is cited as a key barrier to academic success. To understand this incompatibility, several researchers have focused on thinking processes, active learning, and group dynamic issues.

Taking cultural differences into account reveals the shortfalls of teaching predominantly to one culture. Swisher (1991) even notes that over-generalizing group characteristics leads to "stereotypic notions about the relationship between learning style and cultural group membership, discriminatory practice, and inappropriate excuses for failure in teaching and learning." The result is that many educators fail to recognize that "American Indian and Alaska Native children are individuals who differ dramatically from one another, even within their own communities."

When used appropriately, information about learning styles of different ethnic groups can help educators better address the needs of their students, both in schools that serve predominantly one tribal group and also in urban schools whose students come from different tribes. It can provide insight into students' thinking processes and how they choose to demonstrate knowledge and engage in learning in a group setting.

Thinking Processes

Limited research indicates that the Native American population may be more holistic as well as more visual, aural, and tactile than the general population (Ross, 1982, in Rhodes, 1988). Not surprisingly, these are areas in which the teaching system is weak.

In holistic learning, the learner sees how the parts relate to each other and the whole. Holistic learning involves a multi-level approach in which the learner is encouraged to understand many aspects of an idea at the same time as well as the interrelationships between ideas (Rhodes, 1988). In contrast, Anglo-Americans tend toward categorization by subject and linear thinking.

Backes (1993) uses the Gregorc Style Delineator to classify the holistic and linear learning styles of different cultural groups:

> **Concrete sequential:** orderly, step-by-step, structured, practical, accurate, factual, according to standards, directions-oriented, organized, hands-on, reliable, detailed, particular, and exact.
>
> **Abstract sequential:** logical, academic, structured, intellectual, a reader, a researcher, theoretical, evaluative, analytical, value judge, thinker, debater, and studious.
>
> **Abstract random:** sensitivity, emotion, personalization, imagination, interpretation, holistic view, aesthetic appreciation, part of a social group, discussion, reflection upon feelings, flexibility, and adaptability.

> **Concrete random:** independence, creativity, calculated risk-taking, varied and unusual approaches, variety of options, experimenter, inventor, problem-solver, investigator, intuition, agent of change.

A study comparing Chippewa students to the general population showed them to be generally more abstract random learners, while the Anglo-American population was found to be more concrete sequential (Backes, 1993). Mainstream schooling is clearly geared more toward the concrete sequential learner. One must be cautious, however, to avoid categorizing all Native students as abstract random learners.

Demonstrating Knowledge

In general, American Indian and Alaska Native children learn less through trial and error and more through cycles of extensive observation of a person performing a certain task, repeatedly practicing the task alone, and returning to a trusted adult or older peer to demonstrate competence. They generally value experiential learning without constant supervision and correction (Rhodes, 1988).

Paul Ongtooguk, an Inupiat Eskimo educator, says the prevalent belief that American indigenous people "learn by doing" is a myth. He uses the example of learning to be a hunter in contemporary Inupiat community, which begins with observation. The young boy watches the hunters as they prepare for the hunt then share their game after the hunt. He first observes, listens to their stories, and then serves an apprenticeship.

> In contrast to the system of modern Western education, in traditional Inupiat society the community is a school. The observations that a young boy makes are not scheduled in classes, or confined to a school building or other restricted environment. The immersion of the young hunter in the stories and customs of the community are likewise an integral part of the child's life... The lessons are tied to the traditional cycle of life. (Ongtooguk, no date).

Among the Oglala Sioux, individuals also observe tasks before doing. "Observing, practicing, and self-testing in private, and demonstrating a task for approval are essential steps in learning. Making mistakes in public is not accepted" (Brewer, 1977, and Wax, Wax, & Dumont, 1964, in Swisher, 1991). "A public display [such as group recitation] that violates community or group norms may be an uncomfortable experience" for students (Swisher, 1991).

It is commonly agreed that students' attitudes and motivation toward school are directly related to their learning and academic achievement. McInerney, McInerney, Bazeley, and Ardington (1998) studied the value of competition in Navajo culture, and how it relates as a motivating factor for students. Competition was not found to be a significant element. While most teachers and parents felt that competition is important in today's world, students regarded individual success as an important goal, "but not at the expense of one's peers in a competitive environment. Personal success was determined by bettering one's own performance." (p. 7).

Classroom individualism, as used in the Western education model, is also contrary to Native learning style. The Nomination, Elicitation, Evaluation (NEE) model is commonly used in America's classrooms. In this model, the teacher asks individual students questions to which the teacher already knows the answer, and then the teacher tells the class whether a student has answered correctly (Lipka et al., 1998). This method of "spotlighting" individual students is contrary to traditional Native child rearing practices (Lipka et al. 1998).

Learning within a Group

Maintaining harmonious relations within a group and demonstrating humility tend to be highly rated virtues in American Indian and Alaska Native cultures. In an educational setting, this can mean that Native students may be more inclined to repress their abilities in order to match the achievement standards the group is capable of meeting, as observed among Cherokee and Anglo-American students (Brown, 1980, in Swisher, 1991). American Indian and Alaska Native students are more likely to prefer cooperative learning settings and exclusive group approaches to learning, rather than individual work (Tonemah, 1991).

Teaching style is logically the counterpart to learning style. "When the teaching style of instructors matches the learning styles of students, the probability of learning success increases" (Backes, 1993). Matching styles is best accomplished through direct observation and classroom experience (Swisher, 1991).

Taking into account learning behaviors rather than controlling and dictating the learning environment will empower students to assume more responsibility for their own learning (Haberman, 1991, in Backes, 1993). Effective teaching also means "stretching students" by "planning and implementing student participation in learning experiences that require behaviors the student has previously avoided" (Cox & Ramierez, 1981, in Swisher, 1991).

However, "it is [also] imperative that educators not teach solely to groups (ethnic), but teach to individuals' learning strengths" (Backes, 1993). Lomawaima cautions against one general Indian or a pan-Alaska Native curricula, because of the diversity of Native cultures and experiences. Educators need to work locally to develop relevant content and methods (Lomawaima, 1995).

Even language and cultural programs developed for adaptation at the local level may not take hold. For example, it was difficult to generalize the Standards for Effective Pedagogy (StEP) program developed in the early 1990s by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence at the University of California, Santa Cruz. StEP was to be tailored to the needs of the local school, but Alaska's Yup'ik school districts, in which it was tried, had too many regional differences in Yup'ik dialects, ecology, and subsistence. It also took time for teachers to learn the curriculum. With high teacher turnover and limited professional development time, it was difficult to implement the principles and skills required for the curriculum. Recognizing the validity of the concepts, several communities developed similar programs using their elders and school staff.[16]

The expectation that American Indian and Alaska Native teachers will facilitate a better match between teaching style and learning style is not always supported in the literature. "The effects on aboriginal teachers of being educated in culturally discontinuous classrooms themselves, both at the university and grade school levels, may hinder such teachers from developing culturally based pedagogical practices," according to McAlpine and Taylor (1993).

Deyhle and Swisher (1997) note that little research has been done on the impact of Indian teachers teaching Indian students, and that "cultural relevance is rarely defined and almost always assumed to be significant." This exclusive focus on culture and curricular innovations leaves little room for other factors that may impact one's academic success, including economics and social structure (p. 163).

[16] Per McDowell Group conversations with school administrators in the Southwest Region and Lower Kuskokwim school districts, April 2001.

The Alaska Native Knowledge Network provides extensive guidelines on teaching style. The network is a collection of curriculum resources for Alaska teachers sponsored by the Alaska Federation of Natives and the University of Alaska through the National Science Foundation and the Annenberg Rural Challenge. As previously described, the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative is to "develop educational policies and practices that effectively integrate Indigenous and Western knowledge throughout a renewed educational system." The Network also promotes the "daily use of indigenous languages" in the hope that Alaska's "educational institutions will support us in perpetuating our languages." (See the Web site: http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/).

Teacher Training

Effective teacher training programs are vital to any efforts to improve American Indian/Alaska Native education. In describing why Native Americans have the highest dropout rate of any ethnic group in the United States, current research rejects ideas of intellectual or cultural inferiority and instead points to the nature of schools, education, and teachers as the cause (Reyhner, Lee, & Gabbard, 1993).

Specialized teacher training programs are designed to increase the number of American Indian and Alaska Native teachers and better prepare them for the challenges of the classroom. Non-Natives interested in teaching in Native schools also participate in many of these programs. Such programs are helpful in decreasing teacher turnover, which in some American Indian/Alaska Native communities can be 50 percent or higher (Heimbecker, 2000). Lipka (1994) indicates that teacher turnover in rural Alaska ranges from 5 percent to 20 percent per year.[17]

Persistent teacher and administration staff turnover is the greatest obstacle to sustaining reform. Kushman et al. (1999) notes that turnover hinders reform efforts and "leads to a cycle of reinventing school every two or three years." They suggest that developing teachers and administration staff from within the community may offer the greatest hope of sustaining reforms. Longer-serving local staff can in turn create greater community stability and more trust between school faculty and parents. Stability and trust may lead to increased ability to develop curriculum that is appropriate to the culture of their communities. Many years of commitment are required for the cultural curriculum to become part of the teaching standards of the local communities and the school district.

Content of Teacher Training Programs

Training programs designed to prepare teachers to work with American Indian and Alaska Native students require grounding in anthropology, sociology, and history (Reyhner, Lee, & Gabbard, 1993). This enables teachers to explain the non-Native world to their students and help their students navigate the cultural discontinuity between home and school. It also helps teachers understand how education of Native students has changed over time.

[17] To verify these figures, McDowell Group contacted the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (EED). A department official indicated that EED did not track teacher turnover. It is possible that local school districts do, but McDowell Group was unable to verify which districts may keep these records.

The literature indicates that culturally responsive teaching and experiential/interactive methods enable teachers of Alaska Native and American Indian students to be more effective. The learning environment will better match Native students' needs and backgrounds if teachers adapt instruction to the way their students learn at home; if they provide students real experiences beyond textbooks and lectures; and if they actively listen to and address students' concerns (Swisher & Deyhle, 1992; Cummins, 1989 & 1992; both in Reyhner et al., 1993).

Salzman (1990) notes the importance of teacher-training programs for effective communication across cultures.

> Collaboration across cultural barriers in the service of goals defined by Indian communities requires a basis of respect and understanding. Such a relationship demands a consciousness that does not confuse differences with deficiencies and assumes a willingness to cooperate on the basis of equality (Salzman, 1990).

Salzman (1990) uses what he calls "Intercultural Sensitizer" training to address this issue. The training focuses on inferences that each of us make regarding the cause of behavior. Salzman maintains that training teachers to be more sensitive to the culture of their students enables "non-Native American educators to better interpret behaviors and signals through the cultural/historical perspectives of Indian students, parents, and colleagues."

Specific Teacher Training Programs

School or community-based teacher-training programs are often an effective means of recruiting American Indian/Alaska Native paraprofessionals into the teaching profession. Two examples are the Reaching American Indian Special Elementary Educators (RAISE) program, located on the Navajo Reservation in Kayenta, Arizona, and the Lakehead University Native Teacher Education Program located in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada (Nishabe Nation). Program participants generally have experience working with children in a school setting and are committed to working in education. Such school-based programs allow participants to stay in their own communities, honor family obligations, receive community support, and continue to contribute to the educational life of the community as they work toward their certificates. Daily hands-on training in schools immerses the teacher-trainees in the community culture and the problems they will face as teachers (Heimbecker, 2000).

The 1970s University of Alaska Cross-Cultural Education Development (X-CED) Program is an example of an early bicultural teacher-training program. Although the program was discontinued, UAF has made efforts to replace it with other cultural programs, including a new degree program for elementary education intended specifically for rural Alaska. X-CED reportedly helped increase the number of Alaska Native teachers in a few villages (Reyhner, 1999).

Graduates of the X-CED and similar programs faced being rejected on two fronts: by mainstream teachers who mistrusted the alternative nature of their teacher-training program, and by Yup'ik communities that mistrusted the alien appearance of an Alaska Native teacher (Reyhner, 1999). A research and support group for Yup'ik teachers, known as *Ciulistet*, was established to help teachers address this conflict between mainstream schooling and Yup'ik culture. The teachers developed science and math curriculum that relates to the children's environment, and used the rich Yup'ik oral tradition to develop oral and written literacy. They also devised culturally appropriate ways to interact with Native students, for example, not spotlighting individual students in the classroom. Lipka's *Transforming the Culture of Schools: Yup'ik Eskimo Examples*, details the challenges Alaska Native teachers used as they incorporated Yup'ik culture-based curriculum into a mainstream educational setting. Esther A. Ilustsik's "The Founding of Ciulistet: One Teacher's Journey" also offers an autobiographical account of her experiences with Ciulistet and X-CED.

While there is optimism for success of these programs, acceptance of Alaska Native teachers by school administrators and the communities remains a challenge.

Telecommunications have opened up educational choices that would not otherwise be available to rural Americans, Native and non-Native. It is important to remember that technology-based educational delivery systems are still evolving as technologies and telecommunications infrastructure change. The federal "E-Rate" program has brought Internet access to school districts across the nation, including rural Alaska and American Indian reservations in the Lower 48. Across the nation, at least 96 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native students in rural schools have Internet access (Riley, Nassersharif, & Mullen, 1999, and Snyder & Hoffman, 2001).

All school districts in Alaska are connected to the Internet through the E-Rate program. Alaska schools are in the third year of the program, which gives U.S. elementary and secondary schools a discount on telecommunications carrier services, including Internet access.[18] E-Rate grants come from the federal Universal Service Fund, used to offset operating expenses of telephone service providers in high-cost areas, such as Alaska. Through the E-Rate, schools receive a reduction for telecommunications services based on the number of students eligible for the National Free Lunch Program. Despite the availability of Internet service, the quality of the connection remains a question as well as the quality and availability of computers in the schools (McDowell Group, Inc., 2001).

While students and teachers can access a dizzying variety of data, "access to data does not automatically expand students' knowledge; the availability of information does not intrinsically create an internal framework of ideas" (Dede 1996, in Kerka, 1996). Skilled facilitation by teachers who know how to use these technologies to educate is crucial.

Technology-Based Education

Using CDs or the Internet as learning tools can enable students to be more active and effective learners than they would be in a standard learning environment. Educational studies show that students retain 20 percent of the data they are exposed to in a "see-hear" learning environment. The retention rate jumps significantly in situations where they are engaged in "see-hear-do" activities, such as using technology (Hewitt, 1998). Technology-based education can engage the learner through multimedia (text, sound, video, images, and music), requiring the learner to make choices about navigating within this environment. Because data feedback and access time are nearly immediate, "the learner can constantly make critical branching decisions, choosing new paths to follow." The teacher functions as a collaborator/facilitator, rather than the source of all information (Hewitt, 1998).

[18] Beginning in 1997, the Alaska Science and Technology Foundation provided funding for wiring and hardware for school Internet connections. The statewide investment was approximately $5 million.

It is possible for school districts to develop localized software that is more appropriate for the language community than commercial software designed for the general population. The Yukon-Koyukuk School District has developed English language software for Athabascan students (Kleinfeld & McCurry, 1986). Through the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative and Alaska Rural Challenge, a team of Southeast Alaska education experts and elders are developing "I am Salmon" curricula and educational resources. These resources include Tlingit Cultural Atlases, Electronic Tlingit Language drills, Electronic Salmon part drills, Tlingit Plants, and Salmon Units.

The Web site, http://www.alaskool.org, offers educational resources to Alaska teachers and students. The site features Alaska Native education and history resources, K-12 curriculum, Alaska Native literature, and Alaska Native languages, including an Inupiaq phrasebook and dictionary. The site is developing other units, such as Alaska Native place-name maps.

Federal Technology Innovation Challenge grants provide funding for technological innovation in schools serving American Indians and Alaska Natives. To improve the way teachers teach and students learn through technology, the Chugach School District was awarded a five-year $8.4 million grant in 1998 for its Alaska Reform in the Classroom through Technology Integration and Collaboration (ARCTIC) program. The project also involves developing and implementing a self-sustaining statewide technology consortium.
(See the Web site: http://www.ed.gov/Technology/challenge/98ab.html).

Distance Learning

Distance learning is generally considered a subset of technology-based education, where the teacher and the student are in separate locations. It can take on different forms including coursework delivered over the Internet, by audiographic means (computer graphics and telephone communications), and satellite television.

Research shows that the effectiveness of distance education programs often hinges on the level of comfort the instructor has with the technology. Student interaction can also increase the success of the course. (See Garrels, 1997, in Mielke, 1999).

A number of distance learning programs are offered by the University of Alaska, through the Alyeska Central School of the state education department, and the Interior Distance Education of Alaska (IDEA) Correspondence program in Galena.[19] In addition, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement has developed the Star Schools Program to deliver distance education. A number of Alaska school districts subscribe to Star Schools, especially in rural areas. (See the Web site: http://www.dlrn.org/star/program.html).

[19] IDEA is a home schooling/correspondence program of the Galena City School District, serving the needs of students throughout Alaska (http://www.galenaalaska.org/idea/idea.htm). It provides resources and support to parents who educate their children in the home. The program has home school consultants in most regions of Alaska.

Successful schools are not sustained merely on the dedication and skill of teachers and administrators. Successful schools require the concerted involvement of many other players – parents, community members, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and businesses. This is especially true of schools serving American Indian and Alaska Native students. How to foster greater community involvement in local schools is an important element of school management and beyond the scope of this report; however, certain key concepts and practices come to mind within the context of American Indian/Alaska Native education.

Parental and Community Involvement

Parent and community involvement cannot effectively take place unless there is a spirit of "mutual accommodation" between the student and his family, and the teachers and school (Reyhner interview, April 24, 2001). Schools do not exist in a vacuum, notes Yazzie (2000). Schools and communities need to come together to design, implement, and support such programs.

Lack of parental involvement in local schools is often explained by stereotypical and unsubstantiated hypotheses, such as claiming that American Indian and Alaska Native parents "don't care about education." In reality, one of the major research findings is that parents "being misinterpreted by mainstream school personnel is the norm" (Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996).

This notion of mutual accommodation extends to curriculum, which also influences community involvement. If American Indian and Alaska Native culture is incorporated in an experiential learning environment where students are active participants, then elders, parents, and other community members will likely be involved in the school as their knowledge and expertise are valued and shared.[20]

Finally, the parents' own childhood school experiences must be taken into account when considering parental involvement and establishing an environment of mutual accommodation. Instances of school administrations deliberately circumventing the involvement of the local American Indian/Alaska Native community in important decision-making sustain a climate of mistrust (Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996).

Schools and communities need to be engaged in shared leadership, where the school shares decision-making with the community rather than seeking advice from the community (Kushman et al., 1999). Shared leadership will help mitigate the effects of frequent staff turnover if the community shares in ownership of educational reform.

[20] Examples include the incorporation of Yup'ik culture into classroom education, as described by Jerry Lipka and Ester Ilutsik; also the Hawaiian immersion program, where parents must also learn the Hawaiian language and volunteer in school, among others.

Mechanisms to Facilitate Community Involvement

In a three-year study of educational reform, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the University of Alaska Fairbanks examined seven rural Alaska communities engaged in the Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) reform process.[21] Among other findings, the study illuminated the challenges and successes of fostering greater community involvement in schools. Researchers found that community members engage more fully if reform is built from the inside out rather than completely from external reform models. Moreover, "many parents and community members are content to leave education to the educators" unless they have "a compelling goal deeply rooted in community values, like preserving language and cultural knowledge" (Kushman et al., 1999, p. vii). Finally, "schools in small rural communities cannot achieve their educational goals in isolation from the well-being of the surrounding community" (Kushman et al., 1999, p. viii).

Tribal Education Departments (TEDs) are another mechanism to engender greater involvement in schools.[22] TEDs administer scholarships, supervise Indian education programs, develop curricula and teacher training programs, provide leadership and advocacy, foster cooperative working relationships among different agencies and organizations, and address core problems in Indian education.

One of the most successful TEDs is that of the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation in South Dakota, which has a combination of BIA and public schools. An independent evaluation of the program found major improvements in high school attendance and dropout rates (NARF Legal Review, 1999). The Rosebud Sioux had formal authority over students belonging to the tribe, making it easier to monitor students as they moved between various schools.

The Comprehensive Centers Network (CCN) has 15 centers across the nation, including the Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center (AKRAC) in Juneau. CCN works with disadvantaged schools to improve educational programs and increase community involvement in local schools. Each center tailors its services to the population it serves. In *Making a Difference for Children in Schools,* CCN highlights the efforts of the AKRAC, which serves Alaska's highest-poverty schools, actively promoting local programs and policies that support learning for students most at risk of academic failure. In communities where AKRAC has helped create partnerships among parents, teachers, administrators, elders, and others to take more ownership of their schools, student performance reportedly has improved and greater trust exists between school staff and the community.[23]

[21] In particular, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory cited the village of Quinhagak as an exceptional community that had created and sustained a Yup'ik first-language program for over a decade.

[22] In a Native American Rights Fund list of TEDs in the United States, only Metlakatla was listed in Alaska. The Metlakatla TED focuses on higher education, unlike most TEDs in the Lower 48 that focus on K-12. The limited territorial jurisdiction of Alaska Native groups would likely affect the structure of TEDs, but would not necessarily preclude them from operating TEDs.

[23] The CC Network was created in 1995 by the U.S. Department of Education to provide comprehensive training and technical assistance to teachers, schools, tribes, community-based organizations, and other recipients of Title XIII ESEA funds. Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA), authorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which combines the functions of 48 categorical technical assistance efforts into fifteen Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers. (http://www.akrac.k12.ak.us/)

The most effective efforts to increase community involvement in public schools begin at the local level. When communities are successful and share their stories, others benefit. *Indigenous Community-Based Education* (Reyhner, 2000) describes how indigenous peoples from North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe have worked to take control of their schools, particularly in the development of language immersion programs. Generally considered the most successful, the Maori developed a program that extends from preschool through the university level. Hawaiian language activists, in turn, credit the Maori's efforts with inspiring the structure of a Hawaiian language immersion program. These "grassroots" programs come from local communities where there has been greater parental involvement and trust. The World Indigenous People's Conference on Education, held every two to three years, also provides a forum for an exchange of best practices and current research in indigenous education.

(See the Web site: http://www.wipcehawaii.org/papers/index.html).

Research shows that Alaska Natives and American Indians are the least likely to attend and complete college of all U.S. minority groups (Benjamin, Chambers & Reiterman, 1993; Pavel, 1999; ANC, 1994). Alaska ranks 48th among the 50 states in the number of 19-year-old high school graduates of all races who enrolled in college (Mortenson, 2000).

As a whole, American Indian and Alaska Native students often place poorly on many of the standards used in U.S. schools to rate academic success. On average, they score 963 on the verbal and mathematical sections of the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), while the national average is a score of 1017.[24] The National Commission on Excellence in Education recommends that all college-bound high school students take a minimum of four English courses, three social sciences, three mathematics and two foreign language courses, and some computer science. Nationwide, 28.6 percent of all high school graduates completed these courses, while only 16.5 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives fulfilled the recommendations.[25]

Barriers to Higher Education

Poor academic preparation tops the list of barriers to success for Alaska Natives in post-secondary education. McDowell Group tribal college research (1999) identifies several barriers, including the high cost of college, poor academic preparation, homesickness, cultural differences, and learning styles. Among other factors were parental attitudes toward education and individual student goals. A review of the literature corroborates these findings (see, for example, Pavel, 1999, and McIntosh, 1987).

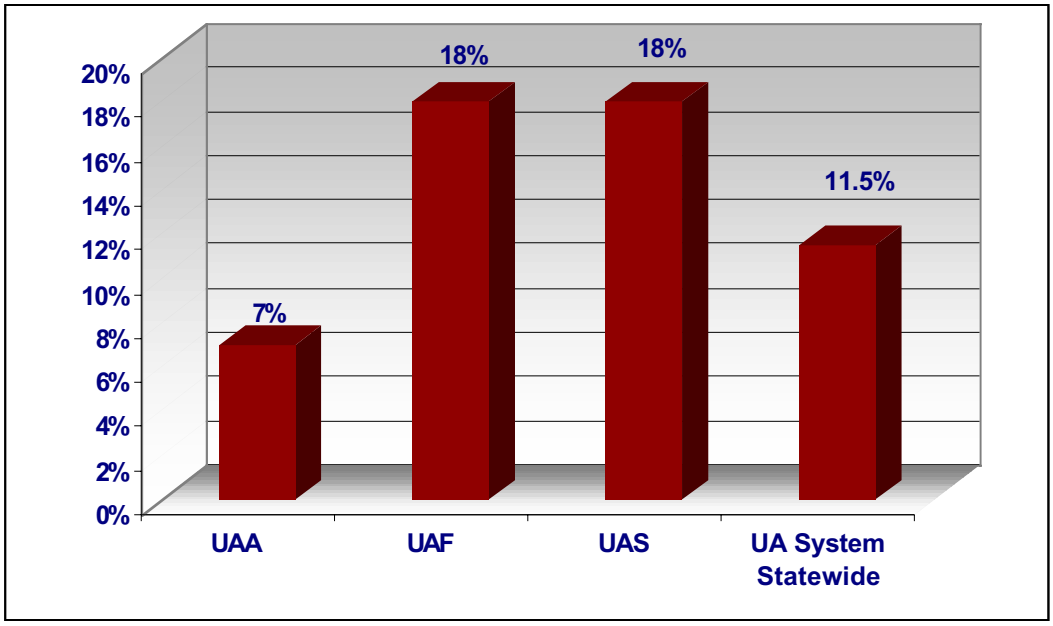
Native Enrollment in Alaska Universities

In higher education, Alaska Natives and American Indians represent 11.5 percent of the statewide University of Alaska student body, and 16 percent of students at Alaska Pacific University, a private college in Anchorage. Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka was founded as an Alaska Native institution. In the 1999 – 2000 academic year, Alaska Natives comprised about 27 percent of the SJ student body.

Within the University of Alaska system in 1999, American Indians and Alaska Natives accounted for 18 percent of the students at University of Alaska Southeast, 7 percent at University of Alaska Anchorage, and 18 percent at University of Alaska Fairbanks. American Indians and Alaska Natives accounted for 28 percent of the students at College of Rural Alaska campuses.[26]

[24] College Entrance Examination Board, *National Report Card on College-Bound Seniors 1998.*
[25] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "1998 High School Transcript Study."
[26] Data supplied by MAUs via UA Information Systems. Compiled by UA Statewide Office of Budget and Institutional Research.

Alaska Native Student Enrollment
University of Alaska Campuses, Fall 1999



Source: University of Alaska Statewide Office of Budget and Institutional Research

Women of all races comprise a higher percentage of students at the University of Alaska, which is a trend nationally. In 1998, 56 percent of all university students nationwide were women and 44 percent were men.[27] Also, most of the Native college students are women. A 1999 survey of Lower 48 tribal college graduates shows that the majority were women and nearly one-half were first-generation college students. Neither parent had gone beyond high school (AIHEC, 2000). Research indicates that parents' attitude toward education and their educational attainment plays an important role in their child's academic achievement.

Statewide, the typical UA student is female, 29-years old, working nearly full time, and the parent of at least one child.[28] In 2000, 224 Alaska Natives graduated from the UA system. Of that number, 73 percent were female and 27 percent were male. All but three had attended an Alaska high school. More Alaska Native students graduated from the rural colleges than the large Anchorage and Fairbanks campuses.

Of the Native undergraduates attending the Fairbanks campus, more than half are non-degree, part-time students, taking general education courses. Across the UA campuses in the fall of 1999, few Native students had declared a major. Of the full-time Alaska Native students who had declared a major, foreign languages, theater, education, and business administration were the most popular; however, Alaska Native students comprised fewer than one-quarter of each program's enrollment.

[27] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (AHEGIS), "Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities" and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Fall Enrollment" surveys. Prepared July 2000.
[28] UA President Mark Hamilton, 1999 State of the University address to University of Alaska Southeast, Juneau campus, May 1999.

Part-time students were most interested in foreign languages, education, community health, and rural development.[29]

Alaska Natives are a small minority of the total University of Alaska statewide faculty, about 3.6 percent (68 faculty members). By campus, the largest contingent of Alaska Native/American Indian faculty is found at UAA, 32.4 percent (22 faculty members). About 15 Alaska Native/American Indian professors teach at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (22 percent). Alaska Pacific University, a private college in Anchorage, has one Alaska Native faculty member. Nationwide, American Indian and Alaska Native faculty represented 0.3 percent of total faculty in higher education institutions.[30]

Summary

While this paper is not designed to address the success or failure of Natives in college or vocational education, every barrier has its roots in a student's personal background and experience in elementary and high school. Research shows that many Native students lack a "sense of ownership" of their education throughout their school career (McDowell Group, 1999).

[29] The foreign language program includes the study of Alaska Native languages.
[30] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Fall Staff" survey.

The McDowell Group study team has examined numerous articles, books, and Internet sites on Alaska Native and American Indian education. Several comprehensive journal articles cited in our report are especially valuable, including Lomawaima (1995), and Deyhle and Swisher (1997). These authors offer a thorough review and analysis of many historical studies of Native education. These sources can be found in the bibliography that accompanies this report.

While much of the literature on American Indian/Alaska Native education is comprehensive, it is also dated. It is apparent to the McDowell Group that current research is needed, at both the national and local level, especially in the following areas:

- Research on the effectiveness of Alaska Native organizations (e.g., tribal councils, Native corporations, nonprofits) in improving education. What is the best role for Native organizations in education? What more can these organizations do to improve education for their members?

- A study of teacher turnover in Alaska: the frequency of teacher turnover, the districts with the highest rates of turnover, and the impact it has on the education of students in those districts.

- Current research of the educational needs of Alaska Natives living in urban areas. Much of the literature addresses rural Alaska villages and reservations in the Lower 48, where the majority population is Alaska Native and American Indian. However, many Alaska Natives and American Indians are migrating to the city.

- The relationship between language, culture, and learning.

- Special education placement. Statistics indicate that Alaska Natives are disproportionately placed in special education programs. More research may be needed on special education placement, as well as parent advocacy for their children. Resources are limited for educating parents on advocating for their children.

- The effectiveness and appropriateness of technology-based programs in Native education.

- Longitudinal studies, from Head Start to college. Little research is available that tracks students over time.

- More studies on the effectiveness of pre-school programs in Native education, such as Head Start.

- A nationwide comprehensive study of Alaska Native and American Indian education. Fuchs and Havighurst completed the last national comprehensive research in 1970. A comprehensive study is also a recommendation of the American Indian and Alaska Native Education Executive Order study team.

* denotes Alaska researcher

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Educational Web Sites

Name of Web Site	Web Site Address	Description
Alaska Comprehensive Assistance Center (AKRAC)	http://www.akrac.k12.ak.us/	One of 15 national centers, known as the Comprehensive Centers Network, created by U.S. Dept. of Ed. in 1995 to provide comprehensive training and technical assistance to recipients of Title XIII ESEA funds. Includes section on Indian education.
Alaska Native Curriculum and Teacher Development Project	http://www.alaskool.org/	Very comprehensive, includes teacher materials, curriculum, information on Alaska Native languages, ANCSA, history of Alaska Native education.
Alaska Native Education Resource Directory	http://www.linkupalaska.com/aboriginal/education/	List of organizations/Web sites having information on Alaska Native education.
Alaska Native Knowledge Network (ANKN)	http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/	Many links to Native pathways to education, worldwide Native education, Alaska Native cultural resources, and Indigenous knowledge systems.
All Nations Alliance for Minority Participation	http://www.skc.edu/amp/	Works with NSF to increase number of American Indian/Alaska Natives graduating with science degrees.
American Indian and Alaska Native Education	http://www.ed.gov/nativeamericanresearch/	Focuses on Executive Order #13096.
American Indian Education	http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/AIE/index.html	Compiled by Jon Reyhner; extensive research on American Indian/Alaska Native education.
American Indian Higher Education Corp. (AIHEC)	http://www.aihec.org/	Post-secondary education for American Indian/Alaska Natives
American Indian Relief Council (AIRC)	http://www.airc.org/	Works to improve lives of American Indian/Alaska Natives by making positive changes to their communities. Includes information on education, health, economics, and housing.
American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES)	http://www.aises.org/	Post-secondary education on science and engineering for American Indian/Alaska Natives.
Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL): Immersion Program Directory	http://www.cal.org/ericcll/immersion/	The most comprehensive list of partial and total language immersion programs in the U.S., including contact names, enrollment, and general structure

Name of Web Site	Web Site Address	Description
Center for Indian Education (CIE)	http://www.asu.edu/educ/cie/	Located at Arizona State University; publishes Journal of American Indian Education and promotes studies in American Indian/Alaska Native policy and administration that contribute to effective practices in education.
Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE)	http://crede.ucsc.edu/	Assists the nation's diverse students at risk of educational failure to achieve academic excellence.
Comprehensive Centers Network (CCN)	http://www.ccnetwork.org/	Assists low-performing and high poverty schools.
Distance Learning Resource Network (DLRN)	http://www.dlrn.org/	Dissemination project for the US Dept. of Education Star Schools Program.
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)	http://www.accesseric.org/	Allows access to over 2,000 digests on different topics and abstracts of over 1 million articles on education.
ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools: Indian Education	http://www.ael.org/eric/ned.htm	Organizations and resources for educators of American Indian/Alaska Natives.
Indigenous Education Columns from the National Association of Bilingual Education News	http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/NABE.html	Studies on Indigenous language and learning.
Indigenous Education Worldwide	http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/ieww.html	Links to sites on indigenous education all over the world.
Journal of American Indian Education (JAIE)	http://jaie.asu.edu/vols.html	Published by the Center for Indian Education at Arizona State University; emphasis on applied research.
Kids Count	http://www.kidscount.edu	Reports with statistics on Alaska children and youth, including education, health, and others.
Lisa Mitten Includer	http://www.pitt.edu/~lmitten/indians.html	Links for all sorts of American Indian/Alaska Native Web sites.
National Indian Education Association (NIEA)	http://www.niea.org/	Legislative issues, government relationships regarding education.
National Indian School Board Association (NISBA)	http://www.skc.edu/NISBA/nisba.html	School boards for BIA schools.
American Indian/Alaska Native Rights Fund (NARF)	http://www.narf.org/	Provides legal representation and technical assistance to Indian tribes, organizations and individuals nationwide. Addresses education, especially Tribal Education Departments.

Name of Web Site	Web Site Address	Description
Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL)	http://www.nwrel.org/	Works to improve education in the Northwest; includes reports on best practices; offers free subscription magazine on education.
Office of Indian Education (OIE)	http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/oie/	Operated by the U.S. Department of Education; focuses on Indian education at all schools, not just BIA schools.
Office of Indian Education Programs (OIEP)	http://www.oiep.bia.edu/	Operated by the Bureau of Indian affairs; focuses on Indian education at BIA schools.
Regional Education Laboratory Network	http://www.relnetwork.org/	Includes all the RELs started by the US DOE; lots of research reports and information on best practices.
Star Schools (USDOE)	http://www.ed.gov/prog_info/StarSchools/	Programs to incorporate technology with learning.
Tribal College Journal of American Indian Education	http://www.tribalcollegejournal.org/	Periodical focussing on tribal colleges.
WestEd	http://www.wested.org/	Lots of initiatives and reports to improve education at all age levels in many areas, including rural and American Indian/Alaska Native
White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges	http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/TribalColleges/index.html	Executive Order 13021 and lots of information about tribal colleges.
World Indigenous People's Conference on Education 1999 (WIPCE)	http://www.wipcehawaii.org/papers/index.html	Many papers from around the world on indigenous education.
World Indigenous People's Conference on Education 2002 (WIPCE)	http://www.fnahec.org/wipce2002/	Information about upcoming conference and how to submit papers.

EXECUTIVE INTERVIEWS

PERCEPTIONS OF ALASKA NATIVE EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL EXPERTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Alaska Natives face many challenges in educational performance, attainment, and opportunities. Policy makers and Alaska Natives have struggled to improve the educational system, sometimes with limited success. An understanding of what issues lie behind these struggles – and successes – is essential. In an effort to gain this understanding, McDowell Group Inc., was asked by the First Alaskans Foundation, a nonprofit organization created by the Alaska Federation of Natives, to conduct several executive interviews with experts on Alaska Native education. The executive interviews are one component of a larger study of Native education that McDowell Group is conducting for the Foundation. The purpose of these executive interviews is to provide further insight into issues and methods that can enhance educational programs for Alaska Natives.

Based on interviewees' comments, McDowell Group offers the following summary of key issues.

Language development and Native culture in the classroom are essential.

Many informants viewed the greatest barrier to successful educational performance of Alaska Native students as the lack of balance between the "Western" approach to education and the need for Alaska Natives to participate in their culture. Informants believed when a school incorporates Native language or Native culture into the curriculum, students perform better. According to the comments made by those interviewed, the integration of Native culture and language in the school curriculum appears to be most critical at the pre-school and elementary school level. Language development – including both Native and English language skills, as well as reading and writing -- is also imperative at the lower grade levels.

Students will perform better if they understand the relationship between being in school and their future.

Several informants pointed out that during the high school years, students start to question the value of their education and what role education has in their future. Most of the interviewees suggested students need to have a better understanding of what career options are the most practical if they want to work in their local community. High school students need to be adequately prepared to make career and education choices, and recognize the performance expectations from post-secondary education and work environments.

The roles of parents and community are vital.

All informants commented that good parenting skills and community involvement are important at all levels of education — from pre-school to post-secondary. The school districts viewed most successful by those interviewed incorporated larger commitments of parental and community involvement. Informants agreed parents need to make sure students are well-fed, well-rested, and attend school regularly. They should work closely with teachers to make sure there is consistency and clear communication of expectations regarding the child's educational performance. Those interviewed also viewed the community's role as imperative, if schools are to become or stay committed to Alaska Native language and cultural curriculum development. The community should encourage children to stay in school. Experts concurred that when the student decides to pursue a post-secondary education, the community should play a considerable role in welcoming back that student and taking pride in their educational accomplishment.

Experts see an important role for the First Alaskans Foundation.

Informants thought that an appropriate role for First Alaskans Foundation centers around being the lead advocate for education policy that will improve Alaska Native benefits from the Alaska system. This role also includes a dialogue with communities about what effective education can do for their people. Other suggestions include funding training for local school boards, recommending programs for teacher preparation for service in rural areas, and building relationships with other foundations.

Purpose

Nationwide statistics indicate that Alaska Natives and American Indian students are the most at risk of all minority groups for failure in school.[1] When compared to non-Native students, they drop out of school more frequently, are less likely to graduate, and generally have lower educational attainment. For generations, various approaches have been taken to improve education outcomes. While there are some successes, statistics still show much room for improvement.

On behalf of the First Alaskans Foundation, McDowell Group, Inc. has conducted baseline research on Alaska Native attitudes and values toward education. The First Alaskans Foundation, a nonprofit organization created by the Alaska Federation of Natives, seeks to influence positive change in the lives of Alaska Native people. The Foundation sees education as a key to positive change.

The McDowell Group study for First Alaskans Foundation has four components:

- Executive interviews of educational and cultural experts regarding Alaska Native education was conducted in the spring of 2001. Results of these interviews are reported in this document.

- A secondary review of the national and Alaska research identified programs and techniques that could enhance Alaska Native education. This report was completed in June 2001.

- A random telephone survey of one-thousand Alaska Native households' opinions, attitudes, and values toward education was conducted in the spring of 2001. Completion of the survey findings report is scheduled for July 2001.

- Focus group discussions on issues affecting Alaska Native education will be conducted in the fall of 2001.

The executive interview component of this study is critical for providing further insight into the improvement of education services to Alaska Natives. While these interviews are opinions of individuals, many of the comments are substantiated in the other components of this baseline research, namely the secondary literature review and the household survey. Subjects explored with those interviewed include: barriers to educational success, possible solutions, issues surrounding Alaska Native teachers and cultural education, and suggested roles for First Alaskans Foundation and its education program.

[1] American Indian Relief Council, http://www.airc.org/living/education.html.

Methodology

Executive interviews, conducted using an interview protocol, took place in the spring of 2001. Experts were specifically selected to include a spectrum of experience in urban and rural Alaska schools, and for all levels of education, from pre-school to post-secondary education. Geographic and cultural representation within Alaska was considered, as was the expert's various roles in the education system, including parents, educators, superintendents, program administrators, academic researchers, and policy makers.

Key informants from Alaska and outside Alaska, as well as Native and non-Native informants, were interviewed. The appendix includes the names of experts interviewed for this study.

All informants were asked for their opinion about the barriers to education success facing Alaska Natives. All levels of education were examined, from pre-school to post-secondary education. While the responses varied, there were some general themes found throughout the interviews. Following are summaries of comments for each level of education.

Pre-School

When discussing pre-school, many of the comments surrounded the Head Start Program. Alaska's Head Start program is federally funded and is a comprehensive child and family development program designed to meet the needs of Alaska's low-income families with pre-school children. The comprehensive program includes: developmentally and culturally appropriate education, health, nutrition and social services, parent involvement, and career development. One informant felt the Head Start program in their community was a "very good program because it brought elders into the (pre-school) classroom." Another agreed, stating the program "helped children make the transition to grade school easier." They went on to say that the program "really teaches young children their culture." A national expert stated, "if the pre-school only focuses on school readiness and teaching the culture of school, then there's a problem. The child ends up being pulled away from their culture."

Inconsistency around the state to qualify for a Head Start program in each community was noted by a former school administrator. If there is not enough children at the right age within a community, then a community may not be able to support the program. However, "Some of the smaller communities need more help, but don't qualify." The level of parental involvement and commitment to participate in a Head Start program is widely supported and many felt it contributed to the program's success.

Good parenting, as envisioned by both Native and non-Native experts, and the training for how to parent well was a common theme when discussing pre-school education. Comments were noted, such as "Parents need to be responsible," "intervention with young parents!" "Getting parents involved," "Start with parenting skills at the pre-kindergarten level," "Parents need to be learn how to parent," and "parental training and understanding to raise a good healthy child." Parenting was not necessarily viewed as solely the mother's or father's role, but could include the extended family.

An academic informant felt the biggest problem with pre-school is the "residual affect of the boarding school." He went on to explain, "People left their homes and communities, and now they are parents, and they are unprepared to serve in that role because they weren't parented by their own parents. Personal experiences of parenting are at the root of this issue."

Elementary (Kindergarten through Grade Eight)

Several informants felt the third grade was a pivotal year in elementary education. One informant stated, "By the time kids get to third grade, we see a huge learning curve in kids, but after grade three the problems begin." Another commented, "by grade three they lose their creativity. There is no recess and school is no longer fun, so they drop off mentally at this stage." A top administrator agreed with this statement. A former superintendent believed there was a connection between the benchmark tests at third grade, and teachers' and children's performance.

Cultural awareness and responsiveness was considered very important at the elementary level. One scholar said the "greatest weakness is too few local teachers and administrators. Teachers have to understand the environment." A policy maker cited a "lack of recognition that (Alaska Native) children develop in different ways (than the 'Western' family profile)." One expert agreed, stating "there needs to be mutual accommodation between the student and his family, and the teachers and school." He proposed the questions, "Is the school experience subtractive, designed to replace the local culture with mainstream culture? Or is it additive, to teach the child about the wider world while still respecting the child's culture?" These issues affect a child's self-esteem, and by grades six, seven, and eight, these problems are magnified.

Lack of language development is a considerable barrier. One former teacher cited her own family experience to illustrate this barrier. Russian officers would spank her grandmother if she spoke Alutiiq, so her prominent language became Russian. Then her grandmother learned English from her daughter, and never learned to speak proper English. The family learned to speak and decipher broken English. This experience "has been going on for generations — raising kids not fluent in their indigenous language and now they have substandard English." The former teacher went on to say, "we all need to take responsibility (for this barrier), but teachers have the opportunity to be consistent and dependable." "Good language development makes good readers," says a top administrator. According to those interviewed, if we are going to have immersion programs, we need good quality programs that incorporate English at an appropriate time.

By middle school, the smaller gaps experienced at the lower levels become huge gaps. Interviewees agreed that teacher training for these grades needs to considered. "We can't expect a certified teacher to have the skills to teach all grades and too often we have teachers who are not prepared for those middle school years" states one informant. She went on to say, "the family has be to involved, and this is vitally important at the middle school stage."

High School

A retired education program director felt the barrier to high school education involves "having the student understand the value of school and why they should go. They need to know how to exist in an academic world that is not of their own people's making. It is hard to be of two minds and succeed."

According to an administrator, "Most Native parents want their kids to have a choice. They can't have a choice to do something without good academic skills, but they want them to participate in their culture. A balance is needed between preparing students to do well in the 'Western' academic world and be successful in their own language and culture. Kids need to be able to read, write, and compute, know who they are and have a sense of confidence in what they can do."

Parental involvement continues to be important at the high school level. One education director believed that "Teachers and parents need high expectations, but there needs to be consistency (in those expectations) or else the teacher's expectations start to waver."

A former superintendent believed high school dropouts "happen in large schools, but there are less dropouts in smaller schools." He felt this is largely explained by the fact that these smaller schools are found in rural settings. There are no malls to hang out in so school is their social gathering place. A national policy maker commented, "the dropout rate is not the other end of the achievement issue. A key reason why students drop out is that they do not see the relationship between being in school and their future."

The high school system needs to allow more vocational education and creative ways to make high school relevant for children, according to those interviewed. We have to stop thinking of "four-year colleges." Another informant added, "kids don't see themselves in that community." "They don't ask, whose job am I going to take? What are my opportunities in my community? And schools are training them to leave their homes, not to stay." With so much emphasis on college preparation, "kids have a skewed perspective. They get a lot of emphasis on college, but are not ready to go to work." One informant believes the rural communities "don't need so many hairdressers and travel agents. We need to steer kids to a reasonable career like health care or with the school district, and look at how many of these type of jobs are filled with 'outsiders.'" "(High school) curriculum needs to be appropriate so they can be close to home and there is a job for them." It involves "realizing the feasibility of putting skills to work in their community and seeing clear potential for their position in the future."

One informant stated high school needs a "great overhaul. Way too many kids get lost. Principals don't know all the kids' names." A top administrator felt rural schools have the greatest opportunity to break the traditional model of the system, because they have fewer kids and can more easily introduce a cultural element into their programs.

Post-Secondary

All informants felt the number one barrier at the post-secondary level was that Alaska Native students were not adequately prepared for the expectations of colleges and universities. A former teacher commented that kids "don't have a clear understanding of what they are getting into and don't have the skills to handle it." "Either they give up or wait until they are ready." The same informant provided her own daughter's experience as an example. "She went to university, but lacked direction. Once she got her focus, she was fine. She had to get the skills, focus, and drive. They need skill development and self-concept." There is belief that the new standards-based curriculum will help turn this around.

One former superintendent believed that male and females start post-secondary education at the same percentage, but by the time they graduate, the ratio is 4:1 women to men. He felt the higher dropout rate for males was do to "no shame in dropping out." "Males are the 'un-used warriors', but women see it as their way to get out of the village."

According to those interviewed, many of vocational/technical programs do not have the necessary resources – money, programs or facilities. States an education director, "there are a lack of resources close by (for rural students)." Another informant suggests, "Many villages should have training hubs or voc-tec centers."

Informants were asked to suggest solutions or offer examples of programs or approaches that are successful in avoiding the common pitfalls of the educational system as described in the preceding section. Solutions were suggested for each level of education, from pre-school to post-secondary institutions.

Pre-School

Several informants cited pre-immersion programs as a successful approach to a cultural program for pre-schoolers. Programs in Kotzebue, Bethel, and Barrow were considered valuable in providing a holistic approach to teaching and learning Native ways. One informant specified the Calista region's pre-school program as successful because it uses "local people who carry on traditional child-rearing practices in the pre-school."

Emphasis on language development was considered key by most interviewed. In particular, one former educator felt pre-school is a great "opportunity for language development in a focused atmosphere and incorporating elders in activities." Preschoolers need to learn how to verbalize what they are thinking, and we need to "teach kids how to ask questions."

Most informants felt Head Start was a successful program and would like to see more support for its expansion.

A top national policy maker believes "all Native communities should have early childhood education programs for reading, school readiness, and overall language development." These programs should include "education about Native language and culture since children at this age are particularly receptive; and also to mitigate the effects of alcohol and substance abuse. Children need safe places where parents, elders, and other adults can focus on child development."

Elementary

Language development was also key at the elementary level of education. The immersion language program in Bethel was cited as a model program by one scholar. "It's a content-based curriculum taught in the Yu'pik language. Because of this program, the most successful post-secondary students at University of Alaska are Yu'pik bilingual students."

When looking at models outside Alaska, a national expert thought the Hawaiian and Maori immersion schools have shown the greatest success. These immersion schools "use the language and culture, and they really are part of a grassroots movement that has spread from New Zealand to Hawaii, and on to the continental U.S. somewhat…Parents who apply to get into these schools must make a commitment to learn the language themselves and also volunteer in the school. It encourages parental involvement, but also selects parents who would be inclined to be involved in their children's education." He went on to say, "Immersion schools do not really

work in an urban setting, where there is a lot of mobility." In urban settings, "you end up seeing Pan-Indianism and more mainstream schooling."

A tutor who works in an urban setting believes "Alaska Natives are very overwhelmed with the transition from rural to urban. Language development is an issue. It is difficult for them to focus on what is happening in their community, let alone the 'real world.'" She went on to say that some administrators feel "since the Native students are from the U.S., they assume their needs are less (than immigrants)." While she had the opinion that immigrant parents have a vision and "push their kids for more opportunities," Native parents are "dealing with poverty and broken homes." "They don't have the unity (in the urban setting) that they did in their village."

Many expressed their support for integrating local ecology and environment into the curriculum as a technique to spark interest in the elementary students.

One informant felt that reading skills are an absolute requirement. However, "most of that reading is not useful, meaningful, or relevant. Kids don't have a concept about what they are reading and they don't have an output activity to make it pertinent."

The Chugach School District is considered successful by at least two informants because its elementary programs incorporate large amounts of parental and community involvement.

High School

A major concern about high school education is the lack of course options offered Alaska Natives in rural areas. One solution suggested was the use of "roving specialists" who were able to move around the state offering specialized courses. These specialists could be housed temporarily within the community.

"Teachers are the greatest strengths of the high school programs, particularly in math," stated an education director.

"Place-based" activities, "visual math," "hands-on" and practical applications were mentioned by a few of the informants as appropriate approaches so students can "apply what they learn." One informant believed high school was the "best place to start environmental studies."

A national expert felt that, at the high school level, "the issues revolve around preparing students for college, not to disconnect children from their roots, but to prepare them to be disconnected in the college environment and survive." The Alaska Native student faces the same issues as any student going off to college, such as handling freedom. "It's important to hone skills at this level, keep students motivated, and not make things so de-contextualized that students run out of energy. The issue of intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic motivation is particularly important at the high school level."

Post-Secondary

Some examples of post-secondary programs that have experienced success are the Tanana Chiefs paralegal program, the Home Health Aide training program, CIRI's Bridge Program, and some technical training programs run by the oil companies.

Leaving home and the community is difficult, so some felt having more on-site instruction in rural areas would be a good approach.

A top administrator and others stressed the need for Native student services on university campuses. These staff are dedicated to the success of the Native student, to help direct and be a liaison for the student. "They help make the world seem smaller, more comfortable, and easier to deal with," said an education program specialist. Establishing a tribal college also was mentioned by a few informants.

The informants were asked how educational needs of Alaska Natives differ from other students, and about other cultural issues. Teaching styles and the role of community in education were examined.

Differing Educational Needs

Alaska Native students come from a setting with a different background and history, which affects their performance and their relationship with teachers and schools. A top national administrator believes the educational needs of American Indian/Alaska Natives "differs in two key ways: the social setting, and the reality of the personal and social needs of students." We need, he said, "unique strategies to address these areas."

"Culture is an aspect of the differences between the educational needs of Native and non-Native students, but it's not the only difference." The national administrator recounted a conversation he had with a Navajo elder who asked him, "Do you know what's wrong with Indian education? Hollywood. Children spend so much time in front of the TV that that's where they're learning values. They're not learning about Native culture…Children are spending less time with elders and parents. A significant number of parents abuse alcohol and are not present for their children, and in many cases, those that are off earning money are also not there to the extent that they need to be for their children." He added, "Values are changing very fast, and the culture of youth may be very different from what adults see as the local culture."

"Education is more than just training for jobs. It's training for how to be a human being. This process needs to be brought forward and made new for every generation. The arts, writing, and other ways of expression provide a means for this kind of training, and communities need to do more of this. This enables children to have linkages with their local culture."

Native students are not necessarily compatible with the school, according to some informants. A "one size fits all" is not the best policy because it is not specific or too different for the Native students. One academic expert said, "there is plenty of evidence that shows if you adapt the curriculum to fit Native students, they do very well."

Language development issues are different for Alaska Native students. One former teacher states, "many times teachers that go into the village are saying the kids don't understand them. The kids pause, think, and process, and it is very difficult for them to speak smoothly. This is a cultural difference."

Inconsistency Between Native Culture and Classroom Education

Interviewees agreed that classroom education is often inconsistent with Native culture or the rural lifestyle. Teacher training is based on the Western model. As teachers graduate from these programs, a personal transition needs to take place to reconcile the two worlds. As a retired education director states, "the reality is that this most effectively takes place if the teachers come from the region in which they teach." In addition, "learning materials do not relate to their cultural experience," adds a professor. For example, pictures of father going off to work with a briefcase, and pictures of lawnmowers and tractors are not relevant to most Alaska Native children. While teaching American or world history is important, these lessons are presented from a perspective that Alaska Natives cannot identify with. Very little is taught about the history of their own people or their region.

Teacher Training and Style

While incorporating traditional knowledge in the classroom may be positive, one professor felt it was essential to assure teachers were not "teaching about culture," but rather "teaching through culture." Teachers should not teach "just bits and pieces, but incorporate all aspects of their culture."

In rural Alaska, 80 percent of the teachers come from a state other than Alaska. One program advisor felt that "not only are the teachers not Native, they are not even Alaskan. They have no idea of culture and environment in rural communities. They have no reference point for the type of environment in which they will be teaching. This causes a major barrier between the student and the teacher and it impedes learning." Adding to this dilemma is the high turnover rate of teachers.

"Alaska Natives need Alaska Native teachers from their own region," stated one informant. Some programs have been developed to encourage and support the hire of Alaska Native teachers. One notable example is the Alaska Native Teachers for Excellence Project.[2] According to the education director responsible for this program, during the course of the project, 52 Native teachers were placed in teaching positions within Anchorage and 74 Native teachers were placed elsewhere in the state.

[2] Cook Inlet Tribal Council received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education for the purpose of three-year program to increase the number of certified Native teachers and administrators in the Anchorage School District. The program provided mentoring for new American Indian and Alaska Native teacher applicants. Seminars and one-on-one sessions helped applicants sharpen their application and interview skills and improve their readiness to accept a teaching position. The program also provided up to 1,600 hours of in-class sessions on cross-cultural curriculum integration and improved educational opportunities for Alaska Native students through cultural diversity training of school staff, parents, and students.

The Role of Parents and Extended Family

The role of a parent is integral to the success of a student. When discussing this role, the informants did not necessarily only consider a mother or a father in this role. It was recognized that extended family, like aunts, uncles, and grandparents, may also serve a "parent's role," especially considering the influence of certain Alaska Native cultures. Regardless of the level of school, the role of the parent is to make sure children are "well-fed, well-rested," "disciplined," and "don't skip or drop out of school." Some informants felt it was important for parents to represent a "living example" and "to reinforce that education is valuable regardless of what form of education." One informant adds, "When parents understand this, the quicker we can help kids." A policy maker believes family is at the core of the community and central to removing barriers, stating "the family plays a strong role: teaching survival, subsistence, Native traditions, values and beliefs. If the local school was not just a building but a part of the community, there would be no barrier between school and community and the barriers to Native education would fade."

The Role of Community

The community's role is very important, and education needs to be pushed into being broader than just what happens in schools. Communities "foster education as a well-accepted norm," states an education director.

There are lots of good programs, but "effective programs require effective local leadership," states a national administrator. "We need to institutionalize changes so that they are not so dependent on leadership." Many effective programs fall apart once the initial leader leaves. The key may be investing in parent and governance structure rather than in the administrative end of these programs. A policy maker states, "the community should be telling the school what children should learn and how they should learn it. Native local advisory boards are not very strong, but they need to be empowered so that the local schools work with the community and on behalf of the Native students in that community."

One education director presented an example of how a community can support the education of its children. In a community in her region, the community cut BINGO and closed stores during school hours. They also established a tough curfew. In the schools, parents are required to come to parent/teacher conferences.

The community can also play an important role in supporting their children in pursuing post-secondary education without jealousy or rejection. One informant put it bluntly: "The community should support their students who go off to college in the same way that they rally to support young women when they get pregnant out of wedlock."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIRST ALASKANS FOUNDATION

All informants were asked for their suggestions on how the First Alaskans Foundation can improve the educational performance of Alaska Natives.

Most informants recommended that First Alaskans Foundation focus on policy as its foundation and help communities to have a clear vision of what education can do for its people. The organization should act as an advocate for education at a high level, and work to unite efforts of the many organizations dealing with Native issues involving education. In essence, the Foundation should become the "drum beater" for education from a statewide perspective.

One informant felt First Alaskans Foundation can be part of a paradigm shift "which started with the Alaska Native Commission—that is putting education into a Native context. This turns a lot of things on its head." Another informant commented, "The most effective role would be to make sure people are ready to address the broad spectrum of education with a Native voice."

One person suggested the Foundation "rally the for-profit Native corporations in addressing education for its own people" and "having them put their money where their mouth is." Another informant stated, "if FAF could send just one message to the Regional Corporation CEOs, it should be education is a priority." She added, "Get all the CEOs in one room and convince them. Tell them why education is important, how they can benefit, and get their commitment to support efforts using their resources."

An administrator felt an "action plan" for the Foundation should include: a partnership with the Center for School Excellence, a plan to divvy up responsibilities and accountability with other Alaska organizations, and a major role in the school improvement process.

A couple of informants believed First Alaskans Foundation should fund and support school board training for Alaska Natives. This lack of training and experience has led to some ineffective Alaska Native school boards that are not well prepared to tackle curriculum standards, make good hiring decisions, and advocate for community and parental involvement.

Other suggestions included supporting appropriate preparation of new teachers when they start out in rural Alaska, establish a mentoring program for teachers, and getting Native people teaching at all levels.

A national administrator suggested First Alaskans Foundation may want to structure itself as a community foundation. These are foundations that focus on community development (Alaska would be the Foundation's community) in a variety of areas and provide a forum to bring together government and business leaders. The informant cited an example of the St. Paul Foundation. St. Paul Foundation has the Two Feathers Fund for Native education and raises money from Natives, as well as other sources. Large foundations, such as The Ford Foundation, gives grants to community foundations to assist them as they start out.

APPENDIX

The following is a list of people interviewed for this study.

Dr. Ray Barnhardt, Director, Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, Alaska

Dr. David Beaulieu, Director of the Office of Indian Education, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

Michael Begaye, Program Coordinator of American Indian Student Services, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Sandy Calderian, Indian Studies Tutor, Klatt Elementary School, Anchorage, Alaska

Carol Daniels, Education Director, Metlakatla Indian Community, Metlakatla, Alaska

JoAnn Ducharme, Director, Rural Student Services, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, Alaska

Laurie Evans-Dinneen, Education Director, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Anchorage, Alaska

Gia Hanna, Education Director, NANA Regional Corporation, Kotzebue, Alaska

Frank Hill, Co-Director, Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, Anchorage, Alaska

Dr. Shirley Holloway, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, Anchorage, Alaska

Greg Maloney, Special Education, Division of Teaching and Learning Support, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, Juneau, Alaska

Dr. Michael Pavel, Associate Professor of Higher Education, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington

Olga Pestrikoff, Program Specialist, Native Village of Afognak Tribal Council, Kodiak, Alaska

Dr. Jon Reyhner, Associate Professor, Educational Specialties, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona

Sarah Scanlan, Workplace Development Consultant, Anchorage, Alaska

Dr. Bernice Tetpon, Program Coordinator, Rural Native Education Liaison, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, Juneau, Alaska

Beverly Williams, Coordinator, Bilingual Curriculum, Lower Kuskokwim School District, Bethel, Alaska

David Williams, Retired Director of Kuskokwim Community College, Anchorage, Alaska

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

ALASKA NATIVE HOUSEHOLD EDUCATION SURVEY

PREPARED FOR:

FIRST ALASKANS FOUNDATION
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PREPARED BY:

JUNEAU • ANCHORAGE

NOVEMBER 2001

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Throughout the years, Alaska Natives have faced a number of challenges within the education system. These challenges affect their educational performance, attainment, and opportunity. In order to find ways to reduce these challenges, it is necessary to gain an understanding of how Alaska Natives value and view their education.

In an effort to gain this understanding, McDowell Group, Inc. was asked by the First Alaskans Foundation, a non-profit organization created by the Alaska Federation of Natives, to conduct a random telephone survey of one-thousand Alaska Native households. The survey, conducted in the spring of 2001, asked respondents about their opinions, attitudes, and values regarding their education. The survey sample proportionally represented the 2000 Census geographic distribution of Alaska Native households and cultural group affiliation. The results of the survey will be used by First Alaskans Foundation to seek ways to influence positive change in the lives of Alaska Native people.

Based on the results of the survey, McDowell Group offers the following summary of key findings.

Importance and Value of Education

Virtually all Alaska Natives believe graduation from high school, college, and vocational/technical school is highly important. They value classroom education as well as traditional Native learning and feel both are relevant in their lives. Alaska Natives overwhelmingly support a curriculum that includes Alaska Native culture (91 percent) and language (82 percent).

Alaska Natives expect their education to give them the skills to be competitive and employable. They also expect their education to prepare them for continuing on to college. The majority of respondents would like to accomplish a higher level of education than they have currently.

Barriers to Educational Success

A significant portion of Alaska Natives question whether the educational system is fair and feel they do not get educational opportunities equal to those given non-Natives (42 percent).

When asked for reasons why Alaska Natives may drop out of high school, the number one response was "family doesn't encourage schooling" (19 percent). When the reasons were grouped by subject, personal situations (such as low self-esteem, lack of motivation, peer pressure, etc.) were the dominant issues. Family issues (family responsibilities, for example) and culturally-related issues (such as traditional lifestyle, ability to communicate with teachers, and racial prejudice) were also mentioned frequently by respondents. Only 19 percent of the reasons were academically-related.

Evaluating Alaska Schools

A large portion of Alaska Natives lack confidence that the Alaska educational system prepares their students well for high school, college, and the workplace (34 to 43 percent said children were not well-prepared). While respondents were largely satisfied with the quality of local teachers, there appears to be room for improvement. A positive finding was that Alaska Natives with school-aged children overwhelmingly report they feel welcome in local schools (85 percent). Although Alaska Natives' educational aspirations for their children were similar to their own personal goals (to gain skills to compete and be employable, most commonly), many wanted their children to also gain personal fulfillment and self-respect from their education. A significant portion of respondents did not feel confident that the educational system could help their children reach these aspirations (36 percent).

Improving Education of Alaska Native Children

"Parent involvement" and "better teachers" were the most popular suggestions for improving the quality of education for Alaska Native children. When the responses were grouped according to subject, suggestions related to teaching were most common. Asked who bears the responsibility for ensuring education, however, Alaska Natives answered "parents" a remarkable 85 percent of the time. While regional boarding schools was not seen as a primary solution to improving the quality of education, Alaska Natives tended to support the concept, with over one-half in favor of them.

Educational Experience and Family Attitudes

While most Alaska Natives who attend college or a technical school do so in Alaska, relatively few (13 percent) have completed a post-secondary education. However, most Alaska Natives said their family's attitude toward classroom education, as well as their traditional Native cultural education, was positive when they were growing up.

Differing Perspectives Among Sub-Groups

Urban vs. Rural

In rural Alaska, Alaska Native students usually represent the majority of the population. This appears to contribute to higher levels of confidence in the system on the part of rural residents. Rural respondents also reported a greater sense of welcome in their schools, and a greater feeling that there is equal treatment with non-Native students.

Age

The younger generation has more confidence in the system's ability to prepare students for high school, college and the workplace, and were less likely to believe there was inequality or lack of fairness in the system. The middle-aged respondents (those between the age of 35 and 54) were the most critical of the system.

Cultural Groups

For the most part, the differences between the Alaska Native cultural groups were not significant; however, there were certain variances that are worthy of discussion. For instance, Inupiats appear to have the most positive views on Alaska's educational system and were the most likely to say that the system favors all students equally (50 percent vs. 41 percent overall). Southeast Alaska Natives (primarily Tlingit) appeared to be the most dissatisfied with the system and gave the lowest ratings of teacher quality (42 percent vs. 53 percent overall). Aleuts tended to give slightly more negative ratings than the average respondent and were least likely to say that Alaska schools prepare Alaska Native students well for college (20 percent vs. 27 percent overall). Athabascans were similar in their views to Aleuts that the local education system favors non-Natives (53 percent vs. 42 percent overall). Yu'piks reported the most positive attitudes on the part of their families regarding learning about Alaska Native culture (81 percent vs. 71 percent overall).

Purpose

Nationwide statistics indicate that Alaska Natives and American Indian students are the most at risk of all minority groups for failure in school.[1] When compared to non-Native students, they drop out of school more frequently, are less likely to graduate, and generally have lower educational attainment. For generations, various approaches have been taken to improve education outcomes. While there are some successes, statistics still show much room for improvement. One of the key issues in improving education for Alaska Natives is to gain an understanding of their educational attitudes and values. This is the purpose of the *Alaska Native Household Education Survey*.

On behalf of the First Alaskans Foundation, McDowell Group, Inc. has conducted baseline research on Alaska Native attitudes and values toward education. The First Alaskans Foundation, a nonprofit organization created by the Alaska Federation of Natives, seeks to influence positive change in the lives of Alaska Native people. The Foundation sees education as a key to positive change.

The McDowell Group study for First Alaskans Foundation has four components:

- A random telephone survey of one thousand Alaska Native households' opinions, attitudes, and values regarding education was conducted in the spring of 2001. Results of the survey are reported in this document.

- A secondary review of national and Alaska research identified programs and techniques that could enhance Alaska Native education. The report was completed in June of 2001.

- Executive interviews of experts in the education field will provide further insight and suggestions for improving the delivery of education services to Alaska Natives. A report was completed in September of 2001.

- Focus group discussions on issues affecting Alaska Native education will be conducted in the fall of 2001.

The survey component of this study is critical for understanding how Alaska Natives feel about their education and the value it has in their lives. Subjects explored in this survey analysis include: importance of education to Alaska Natives, barriers to educational success, evaluation of the Alaska education system, suggestions for improvement of the system, and differences among generational, cultural, urban and rural groups.

[1] American Indian Relief Council, http://www.airc.org/living/education.html.

Methodology

Random telephone surveys were conducted with 1,000 Alaska Native households in Alaska in April and May of 2001. Interviews were conducted with individuals 18 years and older. The sample was selected based on a proportional representation of 2000 Census geographic distribution of Alaska Native households and cultural group affiliation.

A Technical Advisory Group, made up of representatives from First Alaskans Foundation and the ANCSA Education Consortium, was established to provide guidance for this study. In consultation with the Technical Advisory Group, McDowell Group designed a survey instrument. The survey contained 28 questions exploring the following subjects:

- Importance of education to Alaska Natives
- Barriers to academic achievement
- Solutions for improving academic achievement
- Role of culture and language in education
- Expectations of Alaska Native children's education
- Evaluations of Alaska school performance
- Evaluations of quality of education received
- Perception of fairness and prejudice within the educational system
- Opinions and satisfaction with Alaska educational experiences
- Demographic information, including cultural group affiliation, age, household income, and gender.

Findings of the survey have a maximum margin of error of $\pm$3.2 percent for the full 1,000 household sample. The maximum margin of error for the subgroup analyses may be higher.

Several survey questions were asked to explore Alaska Natives' views on the importance and value of education. This includes the importance of graduation, classroom versus traditional learning, the teaching of Alaska Native culture and language, and personal educational goals.

Importance of Graduation

Graduation – from high school, college and vocational/technical school – is seen as highly important by Alaska Natives.

Virtually all Alaska Natives (99 percent) believe graduating from high school is very important or important. Graduation from college is also seen as important, but somewhat less so. Only a few respondents said they considered graduation from any of these institutions unimportant.

Level of Importance to Graduate from Various Schools
Alaska Native Education Survey

	High School	College	Vocational/ Technical School
Very important	87%	46%	46%
Important	12	41	47
Neither	0	7	4
Unimportant	0	2	1
Very unimportant	0	0	0

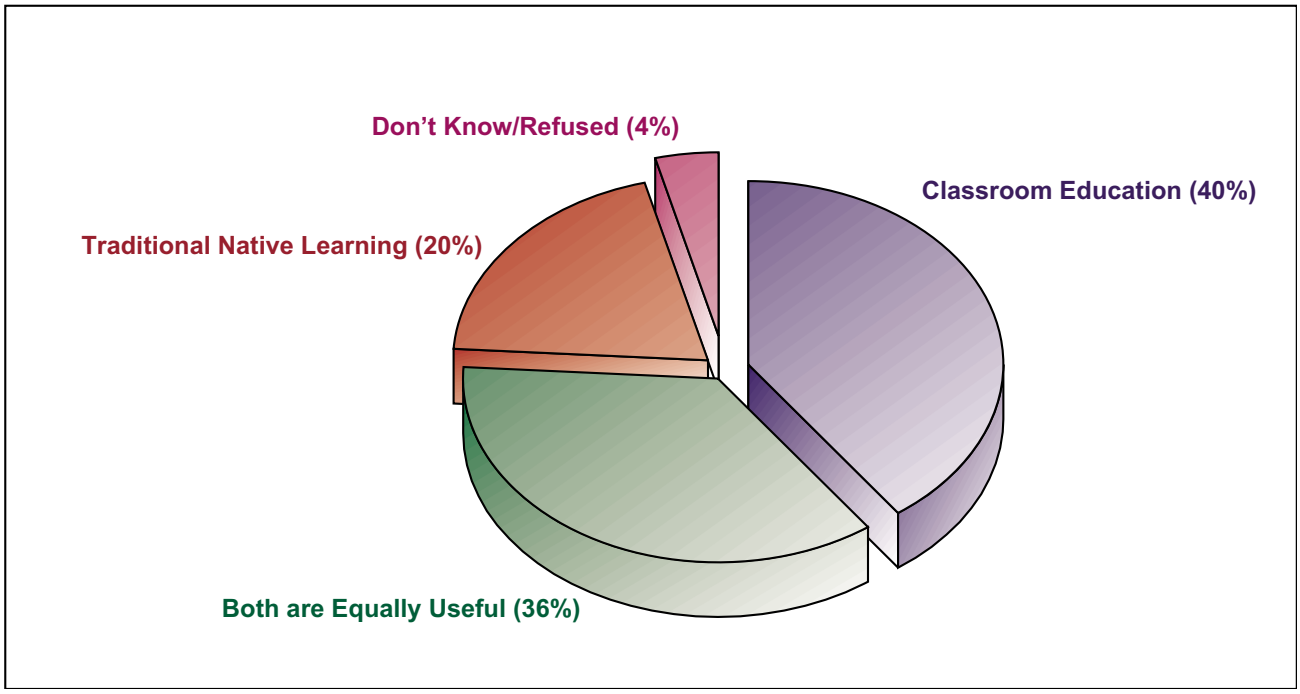
Classroom Education and Traditional Native Learning

Alaska Natives consider both traditional Native learning and classroom education as relevant to their lives. However, more Alaska Natives tend to rate their classroom education relevant on a day-to-day basis.

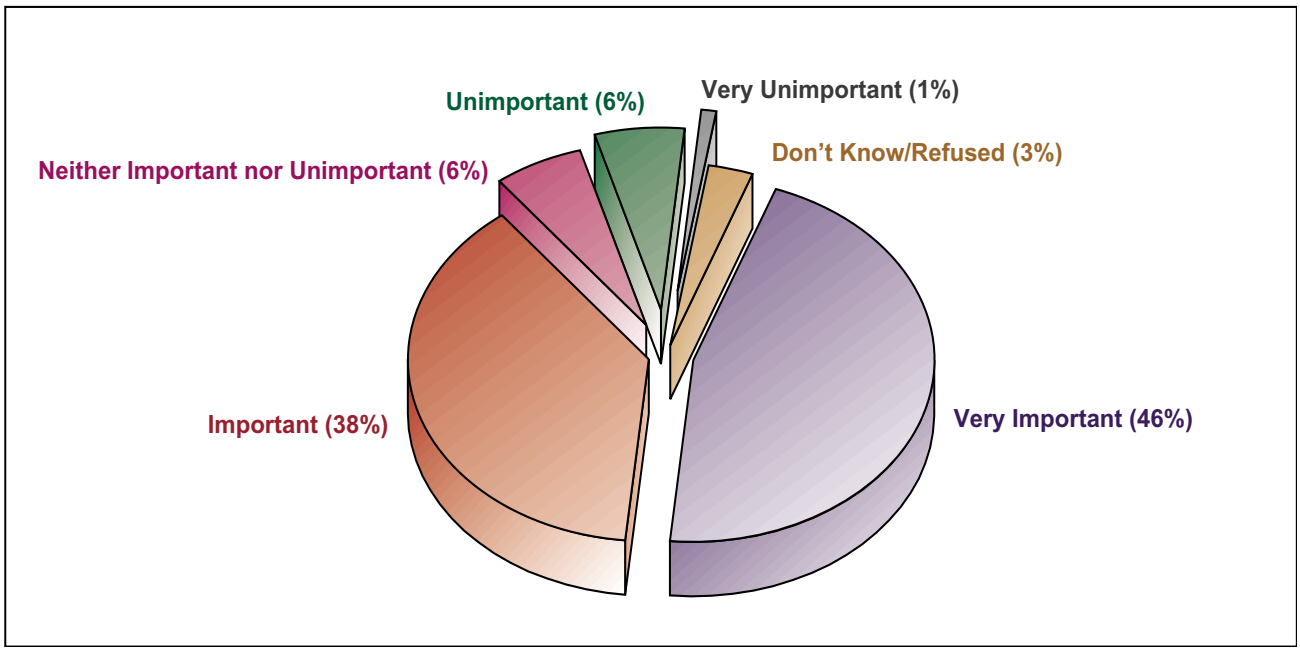
Twice as many respondents considered their classroom education more relevant to their daily life compared to those who considered their traditional Native education more relevant (40 percent vs. 20 percent). A significant portion (36 percent) considered both as relevant on a daily basis.

Alaska Natives acknowledge the importance of their educational background. An overwhelming majority of respondents (83 percent) state that classroom education has been "very important" or "important" in helping them meet their goals in life. Those with bachelor's or graduate degrees give even stronger ratings (87 percent and 97 percent, respectively).

Which is more relevant to your daily life: classroom education or traditional learning outside the classroom?
Alaska Native Education Survey



How important has classroom education been in helping you meet your goals in life?
Alaska Native Education Survey



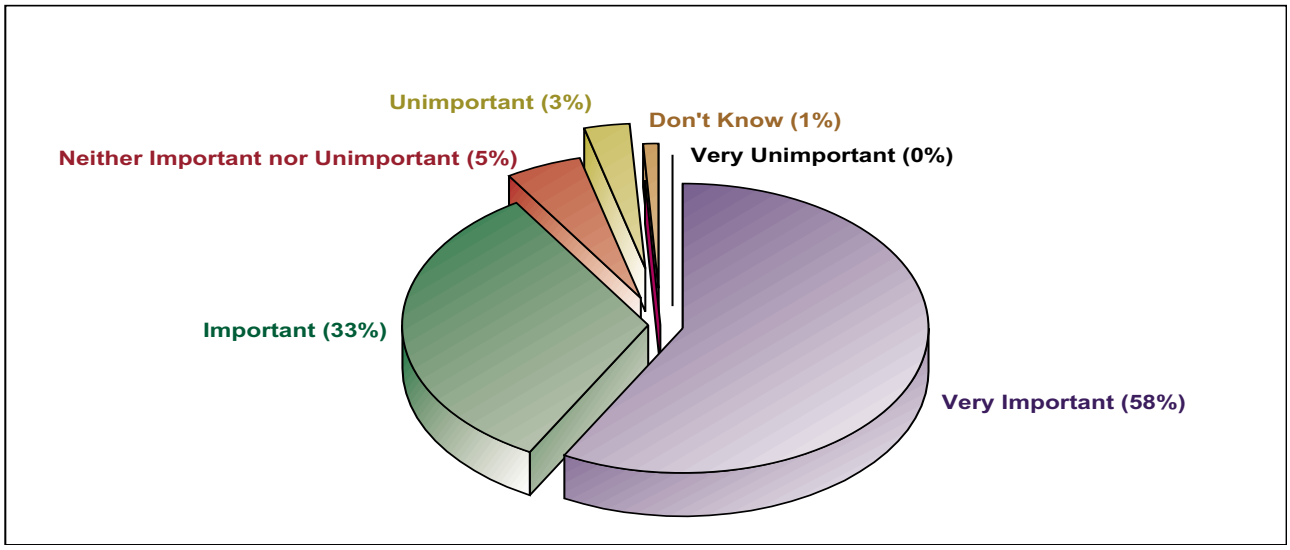
Alaska Native Culture and Language in Schools

Alaska Natives overwhelmingly feel Alaska Native culture and language should be taught in their schools.

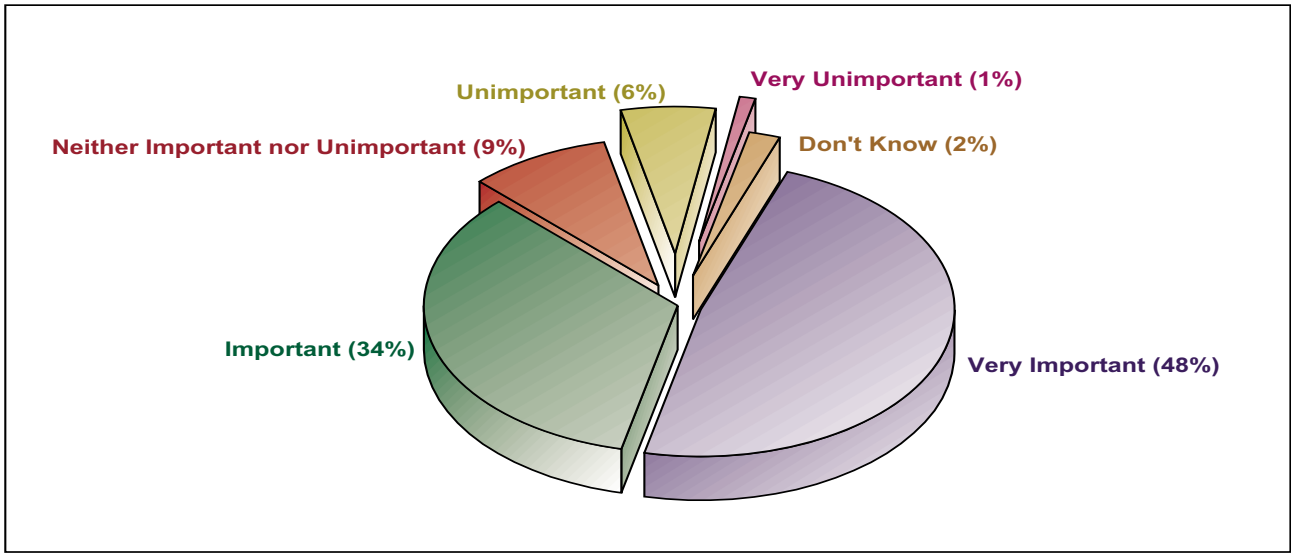
The importance of Alaska Native language and culture in Alaska school curriculum is a consistent theme throughout this research. Alaska Natives say it is very important and that it is a leading solution to better performance. Dominant percentages of all cultural groups, generations, and both urban and rural Alaska Natives hold this view.

Over nine in ten respondents said it was important to teach Alaska Native cultures in school, while eight in ten said it was important to teach Native languages in school.

How important is it to teach Alaska Native cultures in Alaska schools?
Alaska Native Education Survey



How important is it to teach Alaska Native languages in Alaska schools?
Alaska Native Education Survey



Personal Goals for Classroom Education

Alaska Natives expect to gain from their Alaska education the skills to be competitive and employable. This is followed by the skills necessary for college success.

The single most important thing Alaska Natives had hoped to accomplish through their own classroom education experience was "skills to get a job" (18 percent). The next most popular response was "continue to college" (12 percent). Similar in subject to the number one response, 11 percent said "skills to compete in the world.". One-sixth of respondents (14 percent) cite reasons that involve self-esteem, personal development, or personal benefit. The remaining reasons are related to educational achievement and building job skills.

Other survey findings in this report indicate these goals may not always be met through the Alaska system. A significant proportion of Alaska Natives are not confident the system adequately prepares Native students for high school, college, or the workplace.

What is the single most important thing you hoped to accomplish through your own classroom education?
(Most popular responses)
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents
Skills to get a job	18%
Continue to college	12
Skills to compete in the world	11
Ability to teach others/children	7
Graduate high school	6
Sense of accomplishment	5
Good education	3
Feel more well-rounded	3
Learn basics (3Rs)	2
Self-respect/self-esteem	2
Continue to voc./technical school	2
Make more money	2
Social reasons/make friends	1
Other	4
Don't know	21

Highest Level of Education Desired

The majority of Alaska Natives would like a higher level of educational attainment.

While three out of ten are satisfied with their current level of education, most would like more. One of four would like to complete their high school diploma, get vocational certification, or an associate's degree. Four out of ten respondents would like to attend college and get a bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate, medical or law degree.

Desired Level of Education to be Completed
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents
Satisfied with current level	29%
High school diploma	6
Voc. training/certificate	13
Associate's degree	4
Bachelor's degree	27
Master's degree	10
PhD/MD/law degree	4
Don't Know/Refused	7

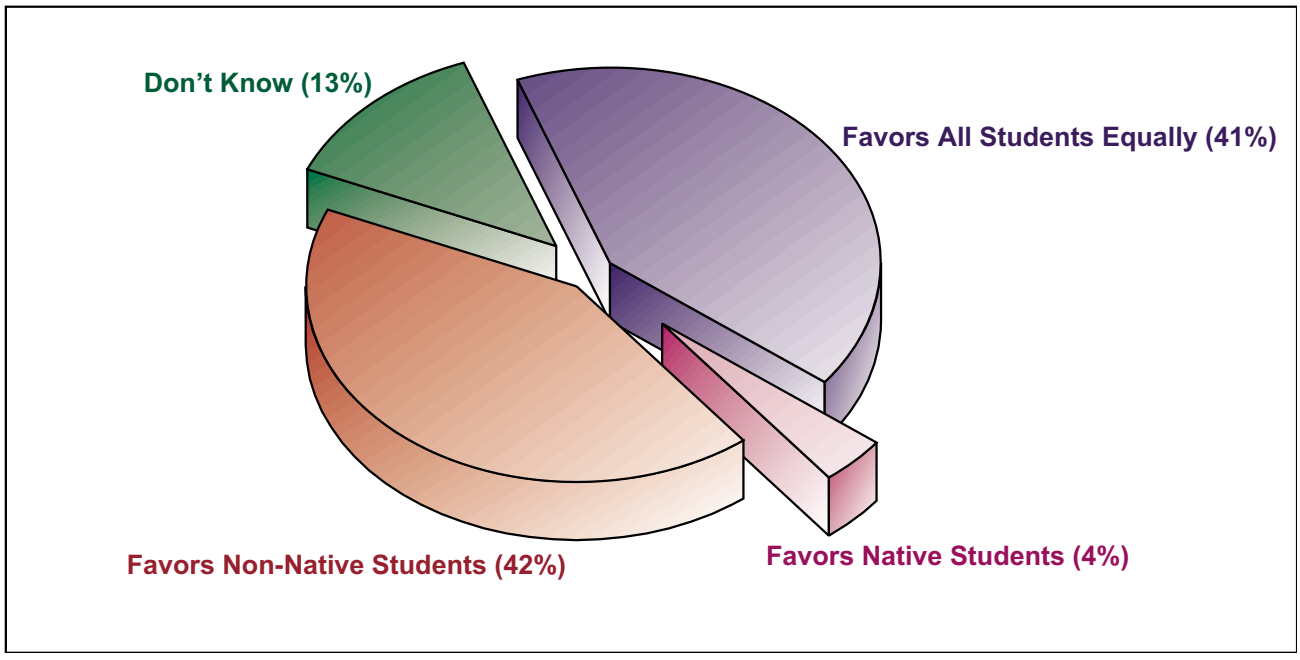
Respondents were asked several questions exploring educational barriers. The survey asked about the perception of the fairness of the system, treatment of Alaska Natives, and what they think is keeping Alaska Natives from finishing high school. It is critical to address these barriers for the long-run improvement of Alaska Native education.

Fairness and Equality Issues

A significant portion of Alaska Natives question the fairness of the system and believe that they do not get educational opportunities equal to those given other Alaskans.

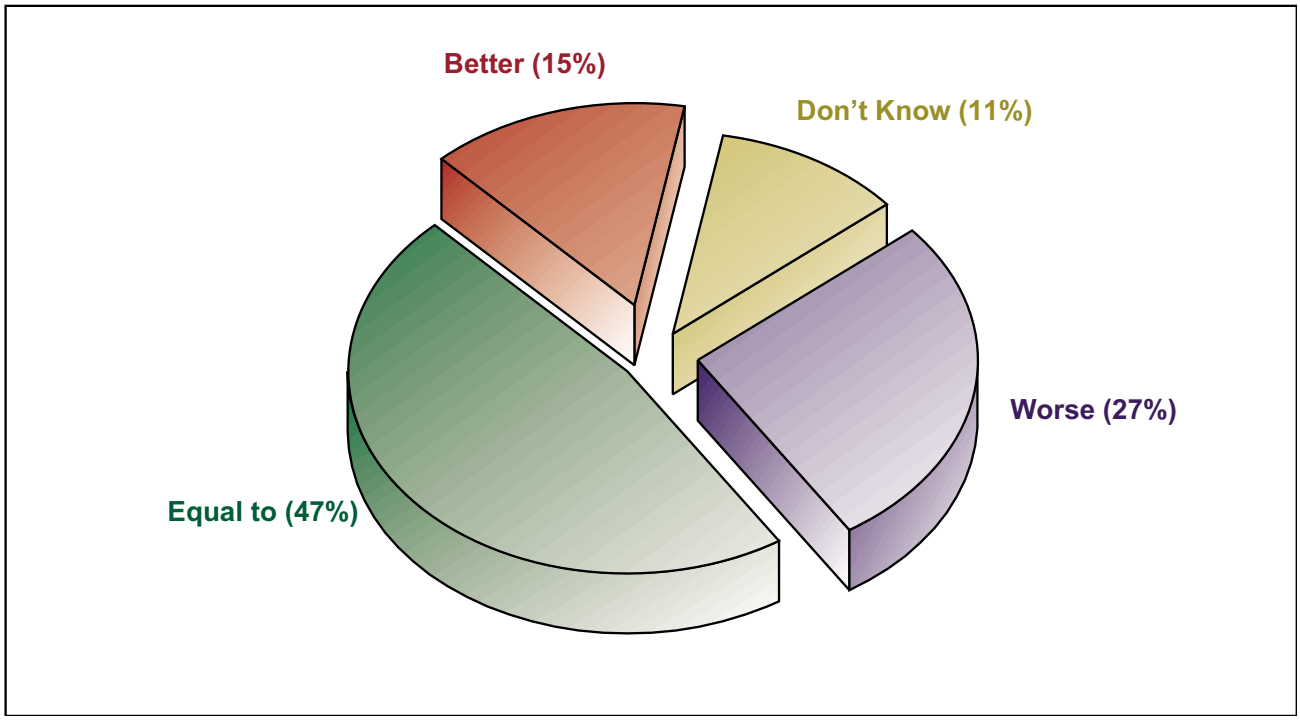
Over four in ten Alaska Natives felt the Alaska educational system favors non-Native students. Households with and without children held similar views. The inequality is felt more strongly by Alaska Natives living in urban areas (50 percent) and 35-54 year-olds (47 percent). Other data in this report also verifies the perception of prejudice is stronger in urban Alaska where Native students are more likely to be in the minority.

In your opinion, which statement best describes the educational system in Alaska?
Alaska Native Education Survey



On a slight variation of the subject – educational *opportunities* rather than the Alaska education *system* – one half of those surveyed considered the educational opportunities offered Alaska Natives equal to those offered other Alaskans, while over one quarter (27 percent) disagreed. Only 15 percent believed Alaska Natives were offered better educational opportunities than other Alaskans.

In your opinion, do you think Alaska Natives get educational opportunities that are worse, equal to, or better than those given to other Alaskans?
Alaska Native Education Survey



Reasons for Not Completing High School

The number one reason for Alaska Natives to drop out of high school, according to respondents, is "family doesn't encourage schooling."

The next most-common response for not completing high school was the abuse of alcohol and drugs.

When grouped according to subject (see second table below), a number responses relate to personal situations that hinder Alaska Natives from staying in school (61 percent). Personal reasons for dropping out included issues such as low self-esteem, lack of motivation, not wanting to leave home, pregnancy, peer pressure, and lack of discipline. Family issues (such as family responsibilities and violence/family problems) accounted for 38 percent of the reasons. A similar portion of responses (36 percent) were culturally-related such as traditional lifestyle, communication and teaching styles, and racial prejudice. Only 19 percent of the responses are academic-related.

Other survey results also support Alaska Native views on the importance of parental involvement. They place primary responsibility for educational success on parents and see parental involvement as an important solution for Native student success.

Why Alaska Natives Do Not Complete High School
Number One and Number Two Reasons Combined
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents*
Family doesn't encourage schooling	30%
Alcohol/drugs	16
Lack of interest/motivation	14
Don't see benefit of education	12
Teachers don't understand Natives	8
Prejudice/discrimination	8
Schools do not encourage Native students	8
Family responsibilities	6
Have difficulty with classes/learning	5
Students not prepared in lower grades for high school	5
Classes aren't geared to Natives	5
Lack of self-esteem/confidence	5
Other	35

*Responses do not add up to 100% because most respondents gave more than one answer.

Why Alaska Natives Do Not Complete High School
Number One and Number Two Reasons Combined
(Responses grouped according to subject)
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents*
Personal reasons	**61%**
Alcohol/drugs, lack of motivation, don't see benefit of education, lack of self-esteem, must leave home to attend school, having to work, pregnancy, peer pressure, lack of discipline	
Family reasons	**38**
Family doesn't encourage school, family responsibilities, violence/family problems	
Cultural reasons	**36**
Teachers don't understand Natives, prejudice/ discrimination, schools don't encourage Natives, classes aren't geared to Natives, subsistence, interferes with traditional lifestyle	
Academic reasons	**19**
Difficulty with classes/learning, students not prepared in lower grades, need access to better teachers, more tutors/counselors/mentors, lack of voc. ed. courses, low grades, poor attendance	

*Responses do not add up to 100% because most respondents gave more than one answer.

Several survey questions were asked to gather opinions on the quality of, satisfaction with, and benefits to Alaska Natives from the Alaska educational system.

Preparation of Alaska Native Students

A large proportion of Alaska Natives lack confidence that Alaska schools adequately prepare Alaska Native students for high school, the workplace, and college.

Less than 10 percent of respondents said that Alaska schools prepared Alaska Native students "very well" for high school, college, or the workplace. Confidence was particularly low in college preparation: 43 percent answered "not well" or "not at all well." Urban respondents were less likely than rural respondents to feel that schools prepared Alaska Native students adequately.

How Well Alaska Schools Prepare Alaska Native Students for High School, College and the Workplace
Alaska Native Education Survey

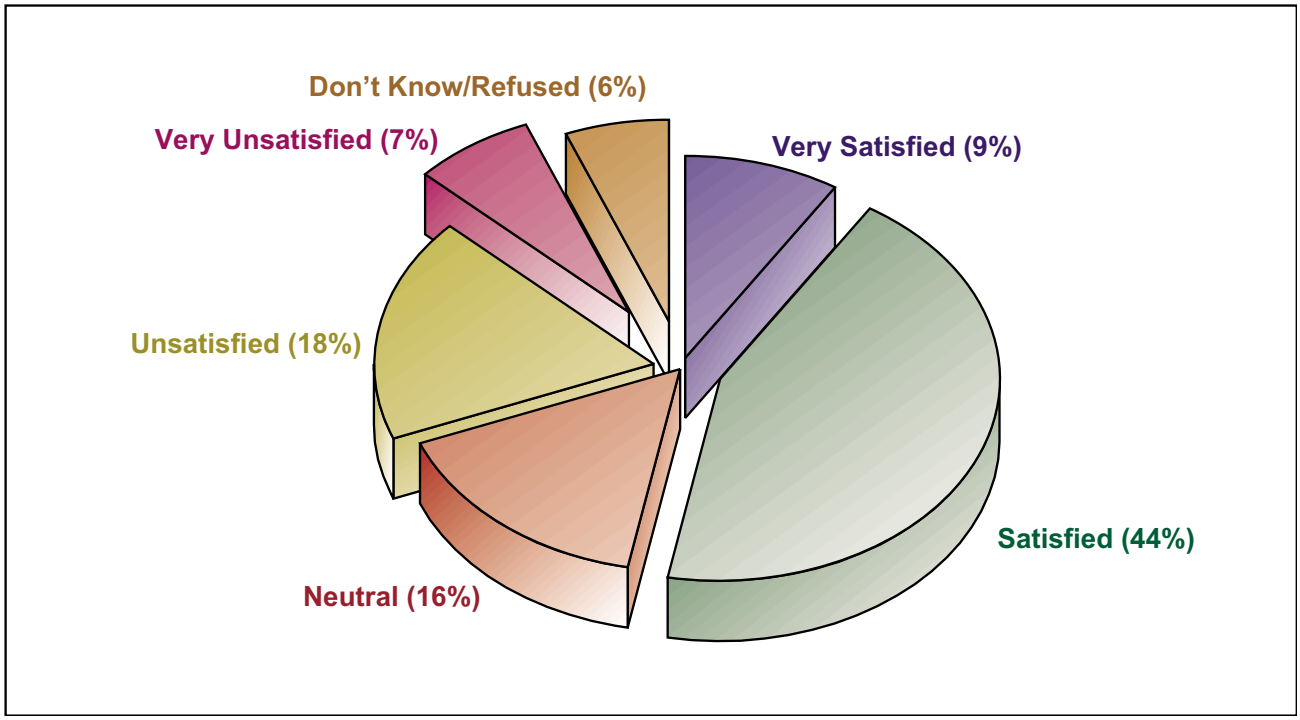
	High School	College	Workplace
Very well	9%	6%	6%
Well	24	21	27
Neutral	23	17	22
Not well	24	27	23
Not at all well	12	16	11
Don't know	8	13	10

Quality of Local Teachers

Satisfaction with the quality of schoolteachers among Alaska Natives is on the positive side, although there appears to be room for improvement.

While many noted satisfaction with the quality of their local teachers, one out of four respondents were either unsatisfied or very unsatisfied. It is interesting to note that the respondents appear to be more satisfied with the quality of teachers than they are with how well students are prepared for high school, college, and the workplace. Teachers are central to that preparation; however, it appears respondents feel there are other factors involved in the preparation. This is a common response in research where the people within a system receive a higher rating than the system itself. Teacher quality is rated lowest by those respondents who lack confidence in the system and those who do not feel welcome in the schools.

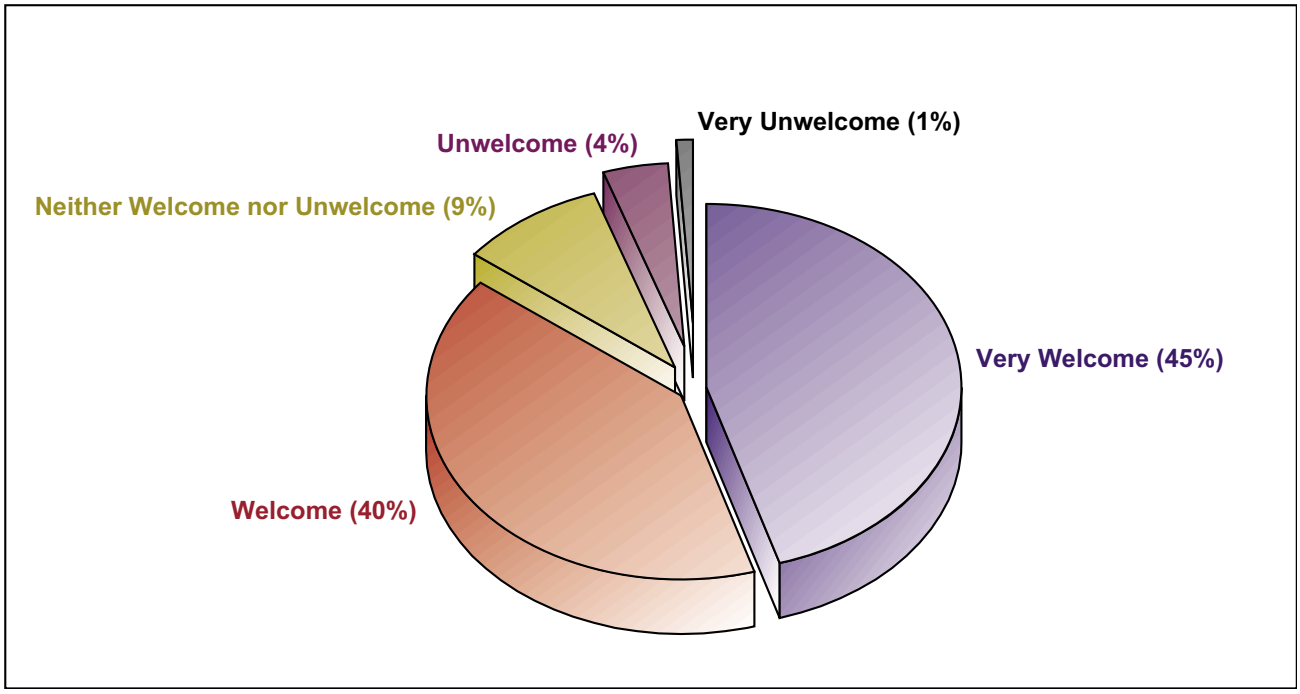
Satisfaction with the Quality of Schoolteachers
Alaska Native Education Survey



Feeling Welcome in Local Schools

While Alaska Natives see weaknesses in many aspects of the state's education system, respondents with school age children overwhelmingly report feeling welcome in their children's schools, with 85 percent feeling "welcome" or "very welcome."

How welcome or unwelcome do you feel in your children's schools?
Base: those with school-aged children in household
Alaska Native Education Survey



Desired Education Benefits for the Younger Generation

The number one benefit that Alaska Natives hope their children will gain from classroom education is "skills to compete in today's world." Alaska Natives also wanted similar results from their own education.

Aspirations for what Alaska Natives want for their children from the Alaska school system center on skills for success in today's world and include skills to compete and to be employable, and have competent preparation for college success. Alaska Native adults also want their children to have personal fulfillment and self-respect resulting from their education.

What do you hope children will gain from their classroom education experience?
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents*
Skills to compete in today's world	37%
Prepare for college	17
Skills to get a job	13
To learn/good education	12
Self-respect	12
Feel more well-rounded	9
Sense of accomplishment	9
Social reasons/make friends	8
Cultural education	7
Learn basics (3Rs)	3
Prepare for voc./technical training	2
Independence	2
Make more money	1
Other	3
Don't know	8

*Multiple responses allowed.

Confidence in the System

A significant portion of the respondents were not confident that Alaska's education system could provide the desired benefits listed above (such as skills to compete in today's world, prepare for college, etc.) for their children.

While just over one half felt confident or very confident, others were not confident or were at least uncertain. These results mirror a similar finding about the system's ability to adequately prepare Alaska Native students.

How confident are you that Alaska's education system can provide this for these children?
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents
Very confident	12%
Confident	40
Neither confident nor unconfident	13
Unconfident	17
Very unconfident	6
Don't know/refused	13

Respondents were asked about how education of Alaska Native children might be improved, and where the responsibility for education lies.

Best Ways to Improve the Quality of Education

"Parent involvement" and "better teachers" tied as the most popular suggestions for improving the quality of education for Alaska Native children.

Clearly, Alaska Natives are interested in providing solutions to improve their schools. When asked to suggest the best ways to improve the quality of education for Alaska Native children, respondents gave more than 30 different suggestions. Because the responses were so varied, it is useful to group them according to subject, as seen in the second table below. It is interesting to note that while in a previous question about teacher quality, teachers were rated relatively favorably; yet Alaska Natives felt better teaching practices would provide the best arena for solutions.

How to Improve the Quality of Education
(Most popular responses)
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents*
Parent involvement	12%
Better teachers	12
More Native teachers	10
Native culture classes	10
Increased academic challenges	8
Communication with teachers	7
More money	6
Cultural studies improved	6
More tutors/counselors/mentors	4
Teachers that understand Native culture	4
Encourage learning	4
More subjects offered	4
More teachers	4

*Multiple responses allowed.

How to Improve the Quality of Education
(Suggestions grouped according to subject)
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents*
Teachers	**49%**
Better teachers, Native teachers, communication with teachers, more tutors/counselors/mentors, teachers that understand Native culture, more teachers, one-on-one teaching, specialized teachers, teachers that stay	
Native Culture	**30**
Native teachers, Native culture classes, teachers that understand Native culture, cultural studies improved	
Curriculum	**25**
Increased academic challenges, more subjects offered, teach basics, offer vocational/skill classes, transition programs (rural to urban), college prep classes, more practical life skills	
Funding, Facilities, and Materials	**16**
More money, smaller class sizes, better classes/books, more activities/sports, better buildings, boarding schools	
Parent Involvement	**12**
Attitude	**9**
Encourage learning, eliminate prejudice, increase discipline	

*Multiple responses allowed.

Responsibility for Ensuring that Children Are Well-Educated

Alaska Natives place the responsibility for their children's education squarely on parents' shoulders.

When asked who is responsible, eighty-five percent of all respondents said it was the parents' responsibility to make sure their children are well-educated. More than one answer was allowed, and teachers came in a distant second at 32 percent. It is worthy of note that while Alaska Natives overwhelmingly believe parents are responsible for making sure their children are well-educated, only 12 percent suggested parental involvement as a way to improve the quality of education.

Responsibility for Making Sure Children are Well-Educated
Alaska Native Education Survey

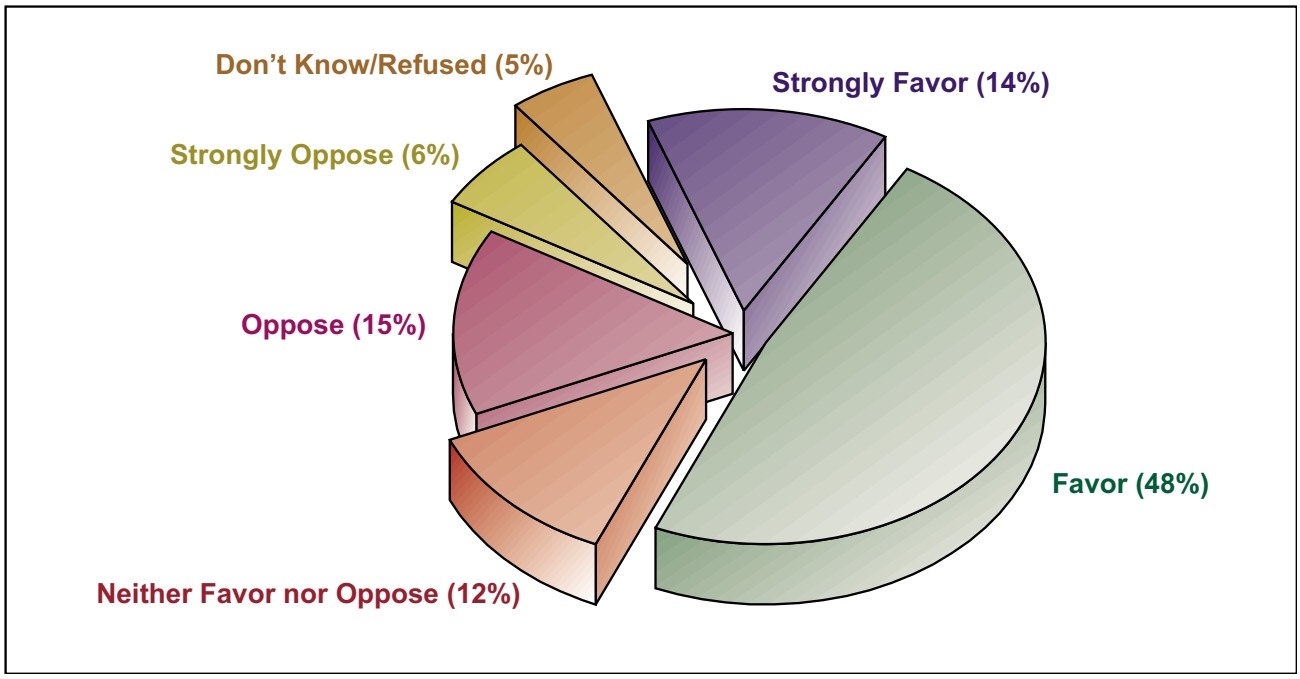
	% of respondents*
Parents	85%
Teachers	32
School	15
Community	6
State	6
Child/Student	5
Family	4

*Multiple responses allowed.

Regional Boarding Schools

Alaska Natives tend to support regional boarding schools with over one half in favor of them. One out of five oppose boarding schools. Those who attended boarding schools are considerably more likely to favor them than those who did not. Rural respondents were more likely to support regional boarding high schools (65 percent were in favor, compared to 57 percent of urban respondents). However supportive of the concept, boarding schools are not seen as a single solution to improve the quality of the educational system. This solution ranked 28th on the list of possible solutions with only 1 percent identifying boarding schools as a primary solution for improvement.

Do you favor or oppose regional boarding high schools in Alaska?
Alaska Native Education Survey



Respondents were asked to provide information on their educational experience: what degrees they attained, the kinds of schools they attended, and the attitude of their families when they were growing up.

Highest Level of Education Completed

Relatively few of the Alaska Natives surveyed have completed a post-secondary education.

Thirteen percent of adult Alaska Natives have completed a bachelor's degree, Master's degree or a doctorate.[2] Alaska Natives in households with annual incomes of over $100,000 are far more likely to have completed bachelor's degrees or graduate degrees. One-third of adult Alaska Natives have had some college or technical training without having completed a degree. For 27 percent of adult Alaska Natives, high school is the highest level of education completed. Fifteen percent of adult Alaska Natives have less than a high school education.

Level of Completed Education
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents
Elementary school	3%
Middle school	4
Some high school	9
High school diploma/GED	27
Vocational certificate	7
Some college/tech. training	33
Associate's degree	4
Bachelor's degree	9
Master's degree	2
PhD	<1
Medical or law degree	<1
Professional certificate (PE/EE/CE)	1

[2] According to 1990 Census data, 20 percent of all Alaskans over 18 had attained a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, or a doctorate.

Location of Schooling

Most of the Alaska Natives surveyed who attend college do so within Alaska.

One half of Alaska Natives have attended college at some point and 71 percent of those attended college in Alaska. One-third have attended a vocational or technical program, largely in Alaska (69 percent). A significant portion of Alaska Natives – more than one-third – have attended an in-state boarding high school.

Types of Schools Attended In and Out of Alaska
Alaska Native Education Survey

	In Alaska	Out of Alaska	Both
Elementary School	93%	5%	2%
Boarding High School	30	5	1
Local High School	63	6	2
College	36	10	5
Vocational/technical program	22	9	1

Family Attitudes

Most adult Alaska Natives identify their family's attitude toward classroom education and traditional Native cultural education while they were growing up as positive.

The survey attempted to identify generational attitudes toward education. For this reason, Alaska Natives were asked for their family experience regarding education. Respondents rated their family's attitudes towards classroom education (when they were growing up) as fairly positive, with four out of five giving a "positive" or "very positive" rating. Attitudes towards learning about Alaska Native culture were also rated as mostly positive by respondents. Only 4 percent disagreed. Rural respondents were more likely to report a positive family attitude towards learning about Alaska Native culture when they were growing up (78 percent, compared to 62 percent of urban respondents).

Family Attitudes Regarding Classroom Education and Learning About Native Culture (when they were growing up)

Alaska Native Education Survey

	Family Attitudes Towards Classroom Education	Family Attitudes Towards Learning about Native Culture
Very positive	36%	37%
Positive	44	34
Neither positive nor negative	12	20
Negative	5	5
Very negative	1	2
Don't know	2	2

Sub-group analysis reveals another level of interpretation of survey results. The survey samples chosen for sub-group analysis are urban vs. rural residents, age groups, and cultural groups.

Urban vs. Rural

In comparing the urban respondents with the rural respondents, it is important to remember that Alaska Natives in rural areas usually represent the majority of the population.[3] This appears to contribute to a greater sense of welcome in their children's schools, of confidence in the education system, of equal treatment with non-Natives, and involvement with their schools. It is understandable that urban respondents, in an environment of mostly non-Natives, might feel less welcome in their children's schools, and feel that Alaska Native students are not treated equally with non-Natives.

The results discussed below can be found in more detail on the following table.

- While the majority of Alaska Natives expressed doubt in the ability of Alaska schools to prepare Alaska Native students, urban respondents were significantly less confident than rural residents. Forty-one percent of rural respondents said Alaska schools prepared Alaska Native students well for high school, compared to 24 percent of urban respondents. The spread was similar in regards to preparation for the workplace. For college, the difference was less marked: 21 percent vs. 32 percent.

- Urban respondents were much more likely to say that the Alaska educational system favors non-Native students: 50 percent, compared to 35 percent of rural respondents.

- Rural respondents were more likely to support regional boarding high schools (65 percent were in favor, compared to 57 percent of urban respondents).

- Rural respondents were more likely to report a positive family attitude towards learning about Alaska Native culture when they were growing up (78 percent, compared to 62 percent of urban respondents). With regard to classroom education, the spread was slightly smaller: 83 percent of rural respondents reported a positive attitude, compared to 75 percent of urban respondents.

[3] For the purposes of this analysis, "urban" is considered all Alaska communities that have populations greater than 3,000 and are readily accessible by road or ferry. This includes the census districts for Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan, and Sitka, and the communities of Homer, Kalifonsky, Kenai, Knik-Fairview (Mat-Su Borough), Lakes (Mat-Su Borough), City of Kodiak, Meadow Lakes(Mat-Su Borough), Nikiski, Palmer, Petersburg, Soldotna, Sterling, Valdez, and Wasilla.

Subgroup Summary Table
Urban vs. Rural Residents
Alaska Native Education Survey*

	Urban Respondents	Rural Respondents
How well do Alaska schools prepare Alaska Native students for high school?		
Well or very well	24%	41%
Neutral	24	22
Not well or not at all well	42	31
How well do Alaska schools prepare Alaska Native students for college?		
Well or very well	21%	32%
Neutral	17	17
Not well or not at all well	46	40
How well do Alaska schools prepare Alaska Native students for the workplace?		
Well or very well	26%	40%
Neutral	25	20
Not well or not at all well	38	30
Which statement best describes the educational system in Alaska?		
It tends to favor non-Native students	50%	35%
It tends to favor Native students	2	5
It tends to favor all students equally	36	44
Do you favor or oppose regional boarding high schools?		
Favor or strongly favor	57%	65%
Neither favor nor oppose	13	11
Oppose or strongly oppose	23	18
Growing up in your household, was your family's attitude towards classroom education…?		
Positive or very positive	75%	83%
Neither positive nor negative	17	9
Negative or very negative	6	6
Growing up in your household, was your family's attitude towards learning about Alaska Native culture…?		
Positive or very positive	62%	78%
Neither positive nor negative	25	15
Negative or very negative	9	5

* When percentages do not add up to 100 percent, the remainder represents "don't know" responses and refusals.

Age Groups

This analysis reveals younger respondents (18-to-34 year-olds) to be the most optimistic about Alaska's educational system. They have the most confidence in its ability to prepare students, they were less likely to believe in a non-Native bias, and they report the most positive attitudes on the part of their families towards education. Mid-age range respondents (35-to-54 year-olds) tended to be on the other end of the spectrum.

The results discussed below can be found on the following table.

- Younger respondents reported the most positive attitude towards learning about Alaska Native culture on the part of their families: 80 percent, compared to 69 percent of 35-to-54 year-olds and 66 percent of over-55 year-olds. They also reported the most positive family attitudes towards classroom education.

- Younger respondents were the most likely to say that the educational system in Alaska favors all students equally (48 percent, compared to 38 percent of others).

- Younger respondents were twice as likely as others to cite alcohol/drugs as the number one reason Alaska Natives do not complete high school.

- Those in the middle age range (35-54 years) tended to have less confidence than other respondents in the ability of Alaska's schools to prepare Native students. Twenty-eight percent said that Alaska schools prepared Native students well for high school, compared to 38 percent of 18-to-34 year-olds and 36 percent of over-55 year-olds. The spreads were similar in regards to preparation for college and the workplace.

- Middle age range respondents (35-54 years) were more likely to say that Alaska Natives get worse educational opportunities than other Alaskans (31 percent, compared to 22 percent of younger respondents and 23 percent of older respondents).

- Support of boarding schools did not differ among the age groups – about 61 percent of all groups said they favored regional boarding high schools. This is an interesting finding, considering that different generations of Alaska Natives had very different boarding school experiences.

Subgroup Summary Table
Age Groups
Alaska Native Education Survey

	18 to 35 year-olds	35 to 54 year-olds	Over 55 year-olds
Growing up in your household, was your family's attitude towards classroom education…?			
Positive or very positive	84%	78%	77%
Neither positive nor negative	12	14	10
Negative or very negative	2	6	10
Growing up in your household, was your family's attitude towards learning about Alaska Native culture…?			
Positive or very positive	80%	69%	66%
Neither positive nor negative	18	22	17
Negative or very negative	3	6	14
Which statement best describes the educational system in Alaska?			
It tends to favor non-Native students	36%	47%	40%
It tends to favor Native students	6	2	4
It tends to favor all students equally	48	38	38
Do you think Alaska Natives get educational opportunities that are worse, equal to, or better than those given to other Alaskans?			
Worse	22%	31%	23%
Equal to	53	45	45
Better than	19	12	16
Why don't some Alaska Natives complete high school? (Top 3 responses)			
Family doesn't encourage schooling	27%	34%	25%
Alcohol/drugs	22	14	13
Lack of interest/drive/motivation	14	13	13
How well do Alaska schools prepare Alaska Native students for high school?			
Well or very well	38%	28%	36%
Neutral	25	24	17
Not well or not at all well	31	41	36
How well do Alaska schools prepare Alaska Native students for college?			
Well or very well	30%	23%	29%
Neutral	22	18	11
Not well or not at all well	37	46	43
How well do Alaska schools prepare Alaska Native students for the workplace?			
Well or very well	42%	30%	31%
Neutral	24	22	21
Not well or not at all well	24	40	33
Do you favor or oppose regional boarding high schools in Alaska?			
Favor or strongly favor	61%	61%	63%
Neither favor nor oppose	12	13	11
Oppose or strongly oppose	17	22	21

Cultural Groups

Respondents were asked to self-identify their cultural group. More than 15 cultural groups were identified. For analysis, the study team has grouped Alaska Native cultural groups into five categories: Southeast (primarily Tlingit), Aleut, Athabascan, Yu'pik, and Inupiat. This categorization was based on advice from the Alaska Native Cultural Center, and was largely determined by geographic location.

Alaska Native Cultural Group*
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents
Yu'pik	28%
Southeast (primarily Tlingit)	21
Inupiat	19
Athabascan	16
Aleut	15

* Respondent Self-Identification. Grouped by McDowell Group.

For the most part, the differences between the Native groups were not remarkable. However, certain small variances are apparent, and worthy of discussion. Most of the results discussed below can be found on the following table.

- Among the five cultural groups, Inupiats appear to have the most positive views on Alaska's educational system. They were more likely to say that the system prepared Alaska Native students well for high school (40 percent vs. 33 percent overall). They were more pleased with their local schoolteachers (59 percent vs. 53 percent). They expressed the most confidence that the system will provide what Native students need (58 percent vs. 51 percent). They also were the most likely to say that the system favors all students equally, Natives and non-Natives (50 percent vs. 41 percent).

- Among all the cultural groups, Southeast Alaska Natives appeared the most dissatisfied with the current school system, and how it serves Alaska Natives. They gave the lowest ratings of their local school teachers (42 percent vs. 53 percent overall), and they were the least likely to say they felt welcome in their children's schools (75 percent vs. 84 percent). They also expressed the least confidence that Alaska's educational system will provide what their children need (43 percent vs. 51 percent).

- Aleuts tended to give slightly more negative ratings than the average respondent. They were the least likely to say that Alaska schools prepare Alaska Native students well for college (20 percent vs. 27 percent overall). They appeared more likely to say that the educational system tends to favor non-Native students (54 percent vs. 42 percent). They were less likely to report a positive attitude towards learning about Alaska Native culture on the part of their families (61 percent vs. 71 percent).

- Athabascans appeared similar to Aleuts in their views on how the local education system favors non-Natives: 53 percent agreed with this statement, compared to 42 percent overall. Athabascans also tended to have more experience with vocational/technical school, and say that these programs are important (55 percent vs. 46 percent).

- Among all the cultural groups, Yu'piks reported the most positive attitudes on the part of their families towards learning about Alaska Native culture (81 percent vs. 71 percent overall). Yu'piks were the most likely to have attended an in-state boarding high school (41 percent vs. 30 percent).

Subgroup Summary Table
Cultural Groups
Alaska Native Education Survey

	Athabascan	Aleut	Yu'pik	Inupiat	Southeast
How well do Alaska schools prepare Alaska Native students for high school?					
Well or very well	29%	31%	30%	40%	30%
Neutral	18	21	27	24	22
Not well or not at all well	43	41	35	30	42
How well do Alaska schools prepare Alaska Native students for college?					
Well or very well	25%	20%	24%	32%	25%
Neutral	17	20	17	18	16
Not well or not at all well	43	48	45	39	46
How well do Alaska schools prepare Alaska Native students for the workplace?					
Well or very well	30%	31%	33%	38%	30%
Neutral	24	22	23	22	20
Not well or not at all well	38	36	34	30	39
How satisfied are you with the quality of school teachers in your community?					
Satisfied or very satisfied	50%	54%	55%	59%	42%
Neither	12	15	18	19	16
Unsatisfied or very unsatisfied	29	27	22	18	34
Which statement best describes the educational system in Alaska?					
It tends to favor non-Native students	53%	54%	36%	36%	48%
It tends to favor Native students	2	3	5	2	1
It tends to favor all students equally	34	35	44	50	36
How welcome do you feel in the schools your children attend? (Base: have school-aged children in household)					
Welcome or very welcome	79%	85%	88%	83%	75%
Neither	10	7	7	9	14
Unwelcome or very unwelcome	5	7	3	5	10
How confident are you that Alaska's education system can provide (what you hope children will gain)?					
Confident or very confident	48%	48%	54%	58%	43%
Neither	11	14	16	15	13
Unconfident or very unconfident	30	30	16	20	28
Growing up in your household, would you say your family's attitude toward learning about Alaska Native culture was…?					
Positive or very positive	67%	61%	81%	76%	65%
Neither positive nor negative	22	31	14	18	20
Negative or very negative	9	7	2	6	12

Demographic information for respondents was collected. This information included: which Alaska Native cultural group the respondents identified with, which Regional ANCSA Corporation they were a shareholder, where they live, their age and annual household income, and whether they had school-age children living in their household. This information is useful for sub-group analysis and make certain the survey sample is representative of the Alaska Native population.

Cultural Group

The table below shows how respondents self-identified their cultural group affiliation.

Respondent's Alaska Native Cultural Group, by Self-Identified Cultural Affiliation
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents
Yu'pik	26%
Tlingit	18
Inupiat	16
Athabascan	16
Aleut	14
Haida	3
Eskimo	3
Cu'pik	2
Tsimpshian	2
Ahtna	1
Alutiiq	1
Eyak	<1
Gwich'in	<1
Other	1
Refused	6

Regional ANCSA Corporation

Respondents were asked with which Regional ANCSA Corporation they were affiliated. The table below shows their responses.

Respondent's Regional ANCSA Corporation, By Self-Identified Corporate Affiliation
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents
Calista Corporation	23%
Sealaska Corporation	20
Cook Inlet Regional Corporation	9
Doyon Limited	9
Bering Straits Native Corporation	8
Bristol Bay Native Corporation	6
NANA Regional Corporation	6
Koniag, Inc.	4
Arctic Slope Regional Corporation	4
The Aleut Corporation	3
Ahtna, Inc.	2
Chugach Alaska Corporation	2
The 13th Region Corporation	1
None	3
Refused	4

Census Area

The following table shows in which census area respondents live. This breakout is proportional to where the Alaska Native population is found throughout Alaska.

Where Respondents Live in Alaska, by Census Area
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents
Anchorage Census	23%
Bethel Census	15
Juneau Area	7
Wade Hampton	6
Fairbanks Area	5
Nome	5
Kenai Peninsula Area	4
Northwest Arctic	4
North Slope	4
Yukon/Koyukuk	3
Dillingham Area	3
Ketchikan Gateway	3
Sitka	3
Kodiak	3
Matanuska-Susitna	3
Aleutian East and W. Census Areas	2
POW/Outer Ketchikan	2
Skagway/Hoonah/Angoon	2
Valdez/Cordova	2
Wrangell/Petersburg	1
Lake and Peninsula	1
Haines Census Area	1
Southeast Fairbanks	<1
Yakutat	<1
Bristol Bay Area	<1
Denali Borough Area	<1

Age

The following table shows the respondents' age.

Respondent's Age, by Age Category
Alaska Native Education Survey

Age Category	% of respondents
18 – 24 Years	9%
25 – 34 Years	16
35 – 44 Years	27
45 – 54 Years	21
55 – 64 Years	13
Over 65 Years	12
Refused	2
Average age	46 years

Household Income

Respondents were asked for their total household income before taxes in the year 2000. The table below shows how they responded.

Respondent's Household Income (Year 2000), by Income Category
Alaska Native Education Survey

Income Category	% of respondents
Under $10,000	12%
$10,000 to $20,000	15
$20,000 to $30,000	17
$30,000 to $40,000	12
$40,000 to $50,000	9
$50,000 to $60,000	5
$60,000 to $75,000	7
$75,000 to $100,000	7
$100,000 to $125,000	2
$125,000 to $150,000	1
Over $150,000	1
Refused	13
Average income	$38,900

Gender

The table below shows the gender of the respondents.

Respondent's Gender
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents
Male	41%
Female	59

Households with School-Age Children

Some of the survey questions were directed specifically to households with school-age children. The table below shows that just over half of the respondents had school-age children living in their household.

Respondent Households with School-Age Children
Alaska Native Education Survey

	% of respondents
With school-aged children	55%
Without school-aged children	44
Refused	1

FOCUS GROUPS

ISSUES IN ALASKA NATIVE EDUCATION: FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

PREPARED FOR:

FIRST ALASKANS FOUNDATION
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ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99501

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OPINION RESEARCH & STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

PORTLAND

IN ASSOCIATION WITH:

McDowell GROUP

JUNEAU • ANCHORAGE

November 2001

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Alaska Natives face many challenges in educational performance, attainment, and opportunities. In an effort to gain an understanding from Alaska Natives' perspective, McDowell Group Inc., was asked by the First Alaskans Foundation, a non-profit organization created by the Alaska Federation of Natives, to conduct a statewide study of Native education. The four-phase project includes a series of focus groups with students, parents, elders, and employers.

The purpose of the focus group research is to help validate and more fully explain underlying attitudes about issues affecting Alaska Native education. Specifically, the research identifies key attitudes regarding the quality of education including barriers to educational success in urban and rural areas, and readiness of Alaska Native graduates for the workplace. This report contains three major sections: executive summary, findings and details, and appendices which provide a record of written exercises performed in each of the groups.

Selection of Focus Groups

Three specialized focus groups were selected to follow up on major issues identified in the other components of this overall baseline research study.

- Rural residents of Aniak were gathered to address the specific issues of rural Alaska education. The focus group represented a cross-section of the community from high school students to elders.

- Urban residents of Anchorage were brought together to address the specific issues of urban Alaska education and the critical needs for early success in the education system. The focus group represented Alaska Native parents with children enrolled in pre-kindergarten and elementary schools.

- Alaska Native executives from around the state were drawn together to specifically address the role of education in preparing Alaska Natives for the workplace. The focus group represented executives from the oil, social services, healthcare, and job placement industries, and Native corporations.

The results of the focus group discussions are summarized below.

Teacher Quality

- Focus group participants believe more Alaska Native teachers are needed in Alaska's schools. They say Native teachers would serve as role models to Alaska Native students and relate better to Native students than non-Native teachers.

- They say ignorance in the school system of Native culture and village life often results in a culture gap. They wish non-Native teachers were better trained before moving to rural communities, so they understood and could embrace village life.

- They say students are not well prepared in basic education – reading, writing, and math.

Native Culture, Language and Curriculum Development

- Focus group participants suggest that schools incorporate Native language and culture especially in early grades.
- They say schools need to emphasize the basics such as math and science, and incorporate Native ways of knowing into these programs.
- They say schools should work to improve students' communication and basic work skills.
- They say schools should offer more vocational and other education options.
- Employers in focus groups say Alaska Native students are not adequately prepared for the realities of college life and the work place.

Resources

- Focus group participants say schools need better resources. In villages, this includes adequate counseling and education options. In cities, it means smaller class sizes and choices.
- They say students need better career counseling to help them make wise choices. They are concerned that students do not get good information about internship and scholarship programs available to them.
- They recommend that regional schools be considered as a way to expand village education, help students transition from the village, and help rural schools reach "critical mass" to compete with urban schools.
- They say more resources are needed to help children affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. They would like Head Start and other early education programs.

Role of Parents

- Focus group participants say parents need to set high expectations for their children and help them succeed in school by becoming more involved and getting them the nutrition, sleep, and routines they need.
- They say parents need to be aware of how exposure to alcohol and drug use in the home affects school performance.

Role of Community

- Focus group participants say Alaska businesses should continue to expand internship programs for Alaska Native students, and mentor those who are placed in internships.

- They say the village community should welcome and support Alaska Native teachers returning to their village, set high expectations for students, and encourage students to stay in school.

- They say Anchorage and other urban communities need to welcome and support Alaska Native students who are transitioning from village to urban areas.

Purpose

Nationwide statistics indicate that Alaska Natives and American Indian students are the most at risk of all minority groups for failure in school.[1] When compared to non-Native students, they drop out of school more frequently, are less likely to graduate, and generally have lower educational attainment. For generations, various approaches have been taken to improve education outcomes. While there are some successes, statistics still show much room for improvement.

On behalf of the First Alaskans Foundation, McDowell Group, Inc. has conducted baseline research on Alaska Native attitudes and values toward education. The First Alaskans Foundation, a nonprofit organization created by the Alaska Federation of Natives, seeks to influence positive change in the lives of Alaska Native people. The Foundation sees education as a key to positive change.

The McDowell Group study for First Alaskans Foundation has four components:

- A random telephone survey of 1,000 Alaska Native households' opinions, attitudes, and values regarding education was conducted in the spring of 2001.
- A secondary review of national and Alaska research identified programs and techniques that could enhance Alaska Native education. This report was completed in June of 2001.
- Executive interviews of experts in the education field provided further insight and suggestions for improving the delivery of education services to Alaska Natives. The results of the interviews were compiled in a report completed in July 2001.
- Focus group discussions on issues affecting Alaska Native education were held in September 2001. Results of the focus group research are reported in this document.

The focus group report presents noteworthy outcomes from the research, which involved three focus group discussions in both urban and rural settings. The information presented here describes, rather than quantifies, the variety of views among the focus group participants.

[1] American Indian Relief Council, http://www.airc.org/living/education.html.

Methodology

Davis, Hibbitts & McCaig, Inc. (DHM), in association with McDowell Group, Inc., conducted three focus groups in mid-September 2001 – one in Aniak in the Yukon/Kuskokwim region of Alaska, and two in Anchorage.

The research team designed the composition of the focus groups and the topics to be covered in each discussion. The design was developed to deepen the understanding of the most germane issues regarding the education of Alaska Natives – their perceptions of the barriers and their solutions to improve performance to enhance their lives.

After completion of the literature review, the household survey, and executive interviews, it was apparent that both the rural and urban experience needed to be further examined. Thus, one focus group (referred to as "Aniak") was designed to capture a cross-section of a rural community's experience with the educational system and a second delved into the urban experience (referred to as "Anchorage").

The study team chose the village of Aniak because it possesses characteristics representative of rural Alaska. While it was understood that Aniak is not representative of all rural Alaska, it was felt it contained many traits found throughout rural Alaska. The community is off the road system, the population is predominately Native, and the population was large enough to enable effective random recruitment for the group discussion. A demographic cross-section of the village was recruited so the study team could gather some insight into the role of the rural community in the education of its children.

The Anchorage focus group consisted of parents of Native children enrolled in pre-school through eighth grade in the Anchorage area. This level of schooling was selected because other components of the research showed that many experts believe these early years were critical in establishing good school habits and developing good communication, reading, writing, and math skills.

Several of the Anchorage parents had personal experience as youth transitioning from a village school to an Anchorage school. While all were randomly selected, these parents said they believed they represented a somewhat higher income and more educated group than the general Alaska Native population. All but one had a college degree.

In addition to the urban and rural experience, more information was needed on the preparedness of Alaska Native students when they enter the job market. A third focus group (referred to as "Business") was composed of Alaska Natives who are in the position to hire other Alaska Natives. While the group was held in Anchorage and comprised mainly of Anchorage executives, members of the business and non-profit sectors from Kotzebue and Fairbanks also attended the discussion group. The participants represented the oil, social services, and health care industries, and Native corporations.

A total of 21 people participated in the three focus groups. Appendix A contains information on participant demographics.

Responses during the group discussions were recorded both orally and in writing. Responses to all written exercises are in Appendixes B – G.

Statement of limitations

This study was designed to qualitatively explore the range of opinions of a designated population and to gain insight into what underlies these opinions. It was not in the scope of this study to quantitatively measure with statistical reliability the attitudes of the populations from which the samples were drawn, or to correlate any attitudes with demographic or behavioral variables. The role of the focus group research is to gather qualitative information to supplement and validate other primary and secondary research conducted for First Alaskans Foundation. The information reported below is the result of multiple discussions and group-to-group validation. This information helps establish quantitative boundaries for the attitudes expressed by the participants.

Report Format

Each of the following sections reviews a different major topic discussed in the focus groups. Quotations are set out first, followed by evaluative commentary based on oral and written comments from participants in each group. Similarities and differences among the groups are noted. The report in the last section relates focus group findings to results of earlier FAF research components.

The quotations were selected to represent the range of opinions regarding a topic, and not to quantitatively represent the expressed attitudes. Readers should refer to the appendices for specific wording of the written exercises.

What comes to mind…

Aniak and Anchorage participants were asked what came to mind when they thought about the quality of education of Alaska Native children who live in villages and in the Anchorage area. Business participants were asked a similar question about how well prepared Alaska Native children are for entering the workplace. (Appendix B)

"Choices are available. Excellent when taken advantage of." (Anchorage)

"Barely adequate. The normal response is not making the child proud to be Native." (Anchorage)

"Good thing is there are not as many students so you get more of a student-teacher relationship…but some teachers think because they are up here in rural we don't know things like students in other places." (Aniak)

"Quality is fair, but shouldn't have to sue for funding the basics of education – we are all citizens of Alaska." (Aniak)

"We are seeing students coming to the university…not prepared to start on a college level." (Business)

"What's always lacking are communication skills." (Business)

All groups gave education quality mixed reviews. They focused on concerns about teacher quality and inadequate incorporation of Native language and culture into the curriculum. All groups noted the lack of Native teachers, who could serve as role models and better relate to the students. In addition, all groups expressed concerns about school funding in the villages.

Aniak participants said the smaller student/teacher ratio in villages is an advantage, but that poor quality teaching negates this advantage. Several felt villages often get teachers who are "the bottom of the barrel," comments supported by several participants in the business group.

When speaking on behalf of all Alaska Natives, Anchorage participants were concerned about cultural insensitivity in the schools, large class sizes, and basics not taught consistently. However, because there are school choices available in Anchorage, some participants seemed to have found suitable schools for their own children, including one child who was in a private school. Some praised the schools for their cultural sensitivity and programs. Two had very different personal experiences with a "school within a (high) school" for Alaska Natives, one positive and one negative.

Anchorage business participants were especially concerned that most students lacked basic skills, particularly math, science, and communication skills, and good work habits (e.g. punctuality). On the other hand, they praised students' enthusiasm and cited numerous successes in their internship programs. Several participants felt that schools were focusing too much on getting students to go to college and neglecting vocational education and other options.

Asked how well prepared they thought Alaska Native children would be *in the future* to enter the workplace, nearly all were somewhat to very optimistic. (See Appendix E.) Their comments, however, indicated some serious reservations. As one participant wrote, "I have a heavy heart when I think about this because the challenge is SO huge – where do you start?" Additional concerns included school funding, teacher turnover, and readiness of universities and employers to receive students. The increasing awareness and involvement of businesses and communities gave hope to the most optimistic participants.

What do you see…

Aniak and Anchorage students and parents were asked what they see as barriers to the educational success of Native children who live in rural villages and in Anchorage. Anchorage business representatives were asked to identify barriers to education in general. (See Appendix C.) The answers often mirrored concerns heard in other components of the research: poor teacher quality; teachers' ignorance of Native culture and rural village life resulting in a culture gap; and curriculum that does not integrate Native knowledge, language and culture. Focus group participants felt that students are not as well prepared in basic education as they should be, and that schools do not provide enough vocational education and other options.

"The school system is only as good as what parents expect. A lot of times parents create problems they don't realize are being passed on to their children." (Business)

"What really bugs me is teachers in rural Alaska don't have a clue what rural Alaska is like." (Business)

"I see a high number of teachers with 'missionaryitis.'" (Business)

"Very rarely does an Anchorage Native student have the attention needed to give them confidence to succeed, and a rural student coming into Anchorage doesn't have a competitive edge because the schools they come from are too small. (Anchorage)

"From small village to town. Not understood by teachers because of cultural differences." (Anchorage)

"Drugs and alcohol, no will to succeed and move on afterward." (Aniak)

Issues related to teachers had several elements. As previously indicated, many participants said rural villages often do not get high-quality teachers. Several Aniak participants noted the high turnover among teachers as well as administrators and counselors. All groups were concerned that non-Native teachers have little preparation for Native culture and village life. They said many often seem unreceptive to it and put little effort into learning about local customs and history. Aniak participants cited several examples of teachers "talking down" to village students. One business participant called the problem one of "missionaryitis."

The lack of Native teachers in rural and city schools was seen as a major reason few education programs try to integrate Native language and culture into the curriculum. Some business group respondents faulted statewide curriculum deficiencies and the failure to properly train new village teachers.

Participants in all groups cited examples of Alaska Native teachers being unable to get teaching jobs when they returned to their villages. Business participants felt this was due in part to the social and political dynamics of some villages that did not welcome back their own students. They also said Native teachers were often more closely scrutinized, creating a difficult professional situation.

Participants also were concerned about making sure that basic skills -- like English, math, and science -- were adequately funded and taught in the schools. Business participants were especially focused on this, along with the need to include vocational and other options. However, they recognized that the small size of village schools was a barrier to offering more options.

Related to this, participants in all groups felt there were inadequate counseling resources for students, especially in districts where counselors were shared by several village schools. Because they traveled throughout the district, the counselors were not always available when students needed them. Some business participants felt counselors did not give students enough information about the many intern and scholarship opportunities available to them. They also said the school counselors did not adequately prepare students for the realities of college life and the workforce. They were concerned that counselors were not making appropriate career suggestions or helping students prepare for the competitiveness of the post-secondary institutional and workplace environment.

Other barriers identified by focus group participants included drugs and alcohol. The participants were particularly concerned about children's exposure to their parents' use of alcohol and drugs, the availability of alcohol and drugs in the home, and parents' lack of awareness of how exposure to the use of these substances could affect their children's school performance.

Focus group participants were asked to speak from the larger context of the Native community and not personal experience. Many noted their concerns about parents who did not have high enough expectations for their children, and failed to give them the support they needed to succeed in school, such as helping with homework, being involved in the school, and making sure their children got enough sleep and good nutrition. Some Anchorage participants felt parents were unaware of programs and options available to their children.

Interestingly, some Aniak parents said schools gave too much homework. They felt this indicated poor teaching during school time and a lack of awareness of other responsibilities that students had in village life. They were concerned that the amount of homework sometimes led to students falling behind and getting frustrated. Some Aniak students defended the importance of homework, and some cited examples of poor instruction.

Anchorage business participants noted the difficult transition from the village to the city as a barrier to educational success. Business participants talked about how they felt village students were set up for failure, citing village students who were at the top of their small high school graduating class only to find they were at the bottom when they moved on to a university.

Anchorage participants in particular felt that many urban Natives have lost their connection to rural Alaska. One believed that more villagers were moving to Anchorage because of fishing declines and other economic problems in the villages.

They talked about cultural differences that affect an individual's ability to succeed in an urban educational environment, specifically cultural barriers to speaking out, stigmatizing Native children in the urban environment, and prejudice among some teachers. One Anchorage participant said he should have had the choice to not participate in an Alaska Native program when in high school.

Anchorage parents and business participants identified the increasing problem of young single mothers who move to Anchorage or other urban areas without adequate financial resources, and then face housing and transportation problems.

All three groups had plenty of examples of the lack of adequate school funding, particularly in the villages. One Aniak respondent worried that smaller villages could not offer competitive teacher salaries to attract good teachers. There was concern that small schools did not have enough funds to feed students two meals a day, and were no longer able to take them to the urban and farm areas of Alaska, an important experience for rural children. An Anchorage participant said more Head Start programs and smaller classes were needed.

Aniak participants emphasized the importance of more "hands on" activities in the classroom. Several talked about local elders and businesses participating in school activities, although lack of student attention seemed to dilute the satisfaction of helping in schools.

What needs to be done…

Focus group participants were asked what needed to be done to improve the quality of education of Alaska Native children. (See Appendix D.) Many solutions -- ranging from more funding, encouragement of positive role models, more Head Start programs, raising the expectations of student and teacher performance to getting parents to buy in on their children's education -- were suggested.

"We need to have higher expectations of the students and the teachers." (Business)

"Hire more Native teachers who have the knowledge of basic teaching and Native lifestyle – it would make a huge difference." (Aniak)

"Get parents to buy in." (Business)

"Strong teacher base – local and long term. Curriculum back to basics with emphasis on math and English." (Business)

"I think there are classes and schools that could be combined [in the villages], giving a child a more well-rounded education." (Anchorage)

"Encourage children to stay in school." (Aniak)

Nearly all participants looked at the education of Alaska Native children as the combined responsibility of the school system, parents, and all parts of the community. When asked to choose whether the school system was failing Alaska Native children or other issues, most participants felt it really was a combination of the two. (See Appendix F.)

Suggestions for improving the quality of education were mostly related to reducing or eliminating barriers that participants had identified. (See Appendix D.) These suggestions were reinforced when participants recorded what they thought was the most important thing to do to improve the quality of education of Alaska Native children. (See Appendix G.) Participants' comments are categorized below.

School system

Teachers: Set high standards for teachers to improve overall teaching quality. Improvements include multi-disciplinary skills, recruit better teachers to villages, hire more Native teachers, and train village teachers so they understand and embrace village life.

Curriculum: Incorporate Native language and culture, especially in early grades, emphasize the basics such as math and science, offer more vocational and other educational options, and improve students' communication and basic work skills.

Regional schools: Consider regional schools as a way to expand offerings to village students, help them transition from the village, and provide a large number of students or "critical mass" so schools in rural Alaska can compete with urban schools.

Resources: Provide adequate resources in all schools. In villages, this includes adequate counseling and education options. In cities, it means smaller class sizes and choice.

Early childhood: Identify children affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and provide necessary support. Provide more Head Start and other early education programs.

Parents

Encourage and support students: Set high expectations for children, become involved in the school, encourage children to stay in school, and assure that children get the nutrition, sleep, and structure they need to succeed in school.

Awareness: Be aware of opportunities for children. Be aware of how exposure to alcohol and drug use in the home affects school performance.

Community

Business: Continue and expand intern programs and other business "partnering" with schools. Once students are placed in internships, they need to be mentored and managed, so they do not fail. Students who have a "blemish" on their work record should get a second chance. Businesses should value village experience in setting the qualifications for internships.

General community: Welcome and support Alaska Native teachers returning to the village, set high expectations for students, and encourage students to stay in school. Provide resources for single mothers and others needing transportation, housing, and financial support, and welcome and support Alaska Native students who are transitioning from village to urban areas.

General Observations on Focus Group Findings

There was remarkable commonality among all three groups on what participants thought were the most important issues related to educating Alaska Native children. Strong themes that emerged included setting higher expectations for both teachers and students, and the critical role that parents and the community play in educational success.

Specific to Alaska Natives were the emphasis on Native language and culture, and the critical importance of Native teachers. At a minimum, participants believed teachers should be sensitive and receptive to Native culture and village life.

Relationship to Other Baseline Research Components

The focus group research is consistent with, validates, and expands on the findings from the other three research components in the First Alaskans Foundation research, that is the Alaska Native household survey, literature review of Alaska Native education research, and summary of executive interviews with education and cultural experts.

Alaska Native culture and language: This issue was consistently raised in the focus groups. The survey research indicated that Alaska Natives overwhelmingly support a curriculum that includes Alaska Native culture (91 percent) and language (82 percent). Emphasis on Alaska Native language and culture was one of four elements identified in the literature review as enhancing Alaska Native educational performance. Further, executive interview respondents said these curriculum elements were "essential."

Teacher quality: Focus group participants felt strongly about the relationship between a good student and teachers, and educational success. "Better teachers" was one of the most popular suggestions in the household survey for improving the quality of education for Alaska Native children. The literature findings included the importance of learning and teaching styles that match Alaska Native children, and how progress is impeded when teachers are unaware of Alaska Native learning styles and culture.

Role of counseling: The executive interviews indicated the importance of students' understanding of the relationship between being in school and their future. Related to this was the important role that focus group participants felt counselors played in helping students make a connection with their future and the transition to that future.

Parent and community involvement: Focus group participants repeatedly emphasized how parents and the community need to be involved in their children's educational success. Likewise, the literature review and interviews emphasized the vital role of parents and the community. Eighty-five percent of Alaska Natives surveyed said parents bear the responsibility for ensuring education for their children.

Although focus group participants did not directly address a role for the First Alaskans Foundation, their comments can help inform possible roles for the Foundation. Many comments from focus group participants underscored the suggestions made by the education experts in the executive interviews. These are a good starting point for delineating the role of First Alaskans Foundation.

The experts recommended that the Foundation act as an "advocate for education at a high level and work to unite efforts of the many organizations dealing with Native issues involving education." Many of the key issues raised in the focus groups directly involve funding or state policy. These include competitive teacher salaries in the villages, program diversification, expansion of curriculum options in villages, consideration of regional schools, development of Alaska Native language and culture curriculum, more school counselors, expansion of early childhood programs, and more district and village school funding. These all could be positively influenced through an advocacy and coordinating role from a central statewide base.

The experts also saw this advocacy role as communicating with communities about what effective education can do for their people. That role is consistent with the results of all of the research components, including the focus groups, which emphasized the vital role of the community, schools, and parents in improving education for Alaska Native children. The focus groups indicated some possible priorities for communities – involvement in teacher recruitment, hiring and welcoming of Alaska Native teachers, and partnerships between businesses and the schools.

Other recommendations included involvement in local school board training to enhance board effectiveness in hiring decisions, meeting curriculum standards, and working to establish programs to mentor teachers, orient them to Alaska Native culture and needs, and recruit more Alaska Natives to become teachers. These roles are consistent with and highly supportive of the importance the focus group participants placed on setting higher standards for both students and teachers, especially in the villages.

Demographics

Gender

	Total	Aniak	Anchorage	Business
Male	9	4	1	4
Female	12	3	4	5

Age

	Aniak	Anchorage	Business
Mean Average	35.4	-	-
Range	16 - 69	-	-

Occupation

Aniak	Anchorage	Business
Student	High School Programs Coordinator - Alaska Native Heritage Center	Exec. Dir., Assoc. of Alaska Native Regional Corporation CEOs
Daycare Teacher Aide	Owner - Floral Shop	VP - Doyon (Regional Corp.)
P/T Substitute Teacher	VP/Executive & Tribal Services	Mgr., Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. - Alaska Native Hire
Student	Asst. Mgr. - Barrista Company	UAA School of Nursing
Elder Services	Support Services Clerk - SCF Early Head Start	Employment Training Program Dir., Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium
Aniak Traditional Council		Exec. Dir. - Maniilaq Assoc.; NANA's Social Services Arm
EPA Project Manager		Exec. Dir. - Employment Agency for Alaska Natives
		President - Koniag, Inc., Regional Native Corp. for Kodiak
		BP Exploration Alaska Native Hire

Aniak

When you think about the quality of education of Alaska Native children who live in villages, what comes to mind?

- Quality is fair, but shouldn't have to sue the Alaska legislature for funding for the basics of education - are all citizens of Alaska.
- I think it's pretty good but still needs some work; kids around in the villages I believe have just as good a chance as a student in Anchorage or Fairbanks because there isn't as much students so more student-teacher relationship.
- Native children and teenagers don't know how to talk Native; they learn a little bit if somebody teaches them.
- We need education for better jobs.
- Well, it's okay; here in Aniak it's good; other places, smaller places, need a little more.
- Basic education not advanced enough - evolving curriculum.
- No response.

Anchorage

When you think about the quality of education of Alaska Native children who live in the Anchorage area, what comes to mind?

- Choices are available; few people seem aware of the choices; excellent when taken advantage of.
- Barely adequate; the normal response is not making the child proud to be Native; the basics are not taught consistently throughout the school district.
- Mediocre, just not enough; fall through the cracks.
- That depends on the area that they live in and if that child is outgoing or shy; to get the best quality education in Anchorage you have to be outgoing.
- EWE, separation, group.

Business

When you think about how well prepared Alaska Native children are for entering the workplace, what comes to mind?

- First in mind is which work place, where and what skills? Alaska Native children are skilled for local but not as for distant.
- *Not well prepared; time management, educational preparation, lack of math and science.
- *Lack communication skills, enthusiasm; on time, respectful of job requirements.
- *High school exit exam; do they have all the necessary basic tools to survive?
- *Resources in rural Alaska; Alaska Native children - well prepared for entering workforce; need stronger math, science skills; consistency of curriculum statewide; access/use of latest technology mixed; village opportunities in work versus statewide (national) needs.
- Not readily prepared for higher level positions, but prepared for entry level positions.
- Unprepared (western philosophy versus village life); experiences of going elsewhere.
- Ill-prepared; insufficient training, little preparation.
- Rural Alaska Native children are less prepared than urban children for entering the workforce.

Aniak

What do you see as the barriers to the educational success of Alaska Native children who live in villages?

- Lack of adequate funding for rural schools; could be better; shouldn't be us versus them attitude when it comes to education; urban lawmakers need to start thinking of the good of Alaska as a whole.
- Peoples belief that Native students from the village not being able to leave or getting out and into the world; the tendency to believe that we're not as good or we only think in terms of living in the same place; I think it would be the people not believing enough that their children will make it out of Aniak or some other village.
- The children should try to stay in school so they could get a job easily; with no high school diploma you can't get jobs.
- Alcohol, drugs; listen to parents; work harder in their home work.
- We're remote; less technology; everything's expensive; not many people here with education; teachers come and go, other students.
- Drugs and alcohol, no will to succeed and move on afterward; the development in the technical area of the village also is a key factor; also, the type of economy is another; also, stressing education and more advertising a potential lifestyle.
- No response.

Anchorage

What do you see as the barriers to the educational success of Alaska Native children who live in this area?

- A lack of awareness in parents and students of options that are available on both ends; home structure - people don't have social, political skills to work through the structures that are in place for the kids to partake of (?) if they are aware of them.
- The urban students do not have an idea how a rural Alaskan Native student grows up or any ideas of sharing positively; very rarely does an Anchorage Native student have the attention needed to give them confidence to succeed; a rural student coming in to Anchorage School District does not have a competitive edge because the schools they come from are too small; the few rural students that have the chance to succeed would have succeeded anyway whether they lived in the bush or urban area; however the percentage is low.

- From small village to town; move around a lot; cultural differences; not understood by teachers because of cultural differences; because they may be quiet or may be they are not smart; written off by the teacher; too many changes too quick; extended family not available to assist.

- Language barriers; shyness; Native children are taught not to speak unless spoken to and the same parents are not totally involved with the school that their child is in; we need to teach and let parents and kids know that to get everything they need to survive we have to talk together as a team; transportation; low self-esteem; fear of living in the city instead of where considered safe back in the village; too many new cultures and people; drug and alcohol use by nervousness.

- None that I can think of right now; not enough counselors for future education; resources; discrimination.

Business

What do you see as the barriers to the educational success of Alaska Native children?

- "Economic Elders," communities' attempts to "hold on" to historic culture; it creates a reverse attitude; lack of mentors - high quality mentors with values; lack of knowledge of parents.

- *Teacher availability - local and long term; social disorganization - substance abuse; lack of class availability - especially math and science; family emphasis on importance of education.

- *Sometimes basic education; financial resources; family support; networking when challenged with problems; follow through; scheduling time and resources.

- School funding; adequate teachers; teachers that care; teachers willing to become part of a community.

- *DOE/teachers lack of creativeness and insight to think out of the box; lack of resources; lack of consistence; role models; career counseling; assessment services; school to work focus in schools; outside teachers imported to villages; stronger education curriculum in university system.

- Isolation; teaching expectations; inactive counselors; expectations of rural teachers (large, multi-grade classes); lack of support in college.

- *Parent involvement; revolving door of professional; expectations to succeed; lack of role models; sensitivity to village pace; western versus traditional philosophy; economic development.

- Poverty in many cases; substance abuse in the home; no schools or training centers geared as directed towards Native cultures; no motivators, role models; too many single (women) parent homes.

- Teacher turnover rate in villages; lack of emphasis on Alaska history and Native culture; lack of job opportunities in villages to show importance of education.

Aniak

What needs to be done to improve the quality of education of Alaska Native children who live in villages?

- More funding.
- Think of the student out here first before worrying about student in the rural communities; because it seems that everybody is more worried about rural students rather than bush students so bush students get the lower end of the stick.
- We need more people or teachers to teach the student about living ways and job.
- We don't need mean teachers.
- Make going to school fun; have good teachers; have exciting subjects; to me, it's all good.
- Role models, success stories and how they were achieved, and opportunities that are currently available.
- No response.

Anchorage

What needs to be done to improve the quality of education of Alaska Native children who live in this area?

- Publicizing a can-do attitude that shows Native homes they make the difference; more follow through facilitating the support systems that are in place that teach greater awareness of self and community; clarifying as a community the difference in making choices or placing blame; when people's choices don't work, they need to consider why as a tool for furthering their education so they can refine and advance.
- Teach urban children of the many ways of life lived in rural Alaska; teach all children respect whether rural or urban; have the urban child walk in the shoes of a Native Alaskan for a few weeks; all children have a basic need to be valued; make it positive; listen to what children have to say; their points are just as valid as ours, they have feelings as well; give them goals with real life results/consequences; know their limitations; take an interest in knowing their friends and likes as well as dislikes.

- More Head Start Programs - pre-school available for all Native kids regardless of income; smaller kindergarten classes; small (1-3) classes to make sure they have a good foundation; summer reading/math/activity program so kids don't lose what they have learned during the school year; incorporate cultural activities so acknowledge/recognize/value who they are as Alaskan Native children; after school programs to provide tutoring if needed, with fun activities; some snowboarding, swimming like other kids; sponsor music for them if they want to participate.

- Show an open door policy with school; take the first step in showing and helping that the school staff is willing to help these kids and parents to have that child succeed; if new to area, assist and set up home visits to get to know families; encourage parent involvement and Native pride so to speak; William Tyson has a wonderful attitude and shows many cultures and teaches pride and that makes parents more willing to help and make sure children stay focused with school.

- Resource center (library), more counselors, non-discriminatory class schedule; less segregation as far as special classes/study group, i.e., EWE, summer program.

Business

What needs to be done to improve the quality of education of Alaska Native children? (Please star the most important)

- *Get parents to buy in; educate Natives to be the teachers; screen new-Native teachers to prevent important mentors from looking down their noses; offer students the chance to visit off-site schools; state to pay for all college courses under the 101 level; educate parents; calm community fears of unknown.

- *Strong teacher base - local and long term; curriculum back to basics with emphasis on math and English; availability of college prep math and science.

- *Identify, understand and deal with fetal alcohol effects/syndrome and how it challenges the classroom - students, teachers; financial resources; demand a higher standard of performance; decrease teacher turnover in rural schools; increase Native teacher role models; include more interaction with positive Alaska Native role models; increase family interaction.

- *Get teachers that care about children learning; equal funding; quality of life in schools - improve buildings, etc.; get families engaged; get teachers not only there for a paycheck; make sure students are learning; make learning affordable; make Alaska history a requirement in all schools.

- *Invite school counselors to meet with employers and describe future needs; funding - equity for rural areas; teacher quality; to meet needs of employers - more work with teachers and parents meeting with major Alaska employers; art, math, science - expanded areas in education to encourage creative thinking and expanded goals for children; encouragement by communities to see a future in Alaska.

- *High expectations of student and teacher performance; individual attention - smaller classes in rural areas; continuous encouragement and support for school, all educational endeavors.

- *Education is synonymous with self-sufficiency; train multi-disciplinary personnel; target people to serve time; demonstrate/show other ways of life (field visit); change the view of a teacher by giving status; critical mass of Native pro's; incorporate the written history in classroom.

- *Emphasis on education and training directed towards Native children from birth; cultural sensitivity and understanding by the teachers; educating the parents on the necessity of a career or education; special "Career Training Centers" for Alaska Native students located in a central area with boarding facilities.

- *Parent involvement and support (urban and rural); possibly regional schools; reduce teacher turnover; include Alaska history and Native culture; rural-urban exchange programs.

Business (Only)

Thinking about how well prepared Alaska Native children will be in the future to enter the workplace, are you very pessimistic, somewhat pessimistic, somewhat optimistic, or very optimistic? Why?

Ratings Distribution

Very pessimistic	-
Somewhat pessimistic	2
Somewhat optimistic	6
Very optimistic	1

Rating	Comments
Somewhat pessimistic	Due to lack of federal/state funding for short term. I want to be somewhat optimistic and am working on programs to assist - School to Work, BEC, AHRIC, APPICC. The results will be delivered in 5-10 years.
Somewhat pessimistic	There is a cycle (revolving door) of teachers (experiences) that come and go leaving it up to chance that there is ever a continuous follow-through of people making a difference.
Somewhat optimistic	Because there are role models like those around the table and financial programs to assist. Somewhat pessimistic in that the universities/employers are not ready to receive the students.
Somewhat optimistic	We are identifying the barriers and will perhaps find ways to resolve those for the younger generations that will be faced with this issue.
Somewhat optimistic	Enough people concerned that changes will occur. Increase in awareness of youth of problems through communication.
Somewhat optimistic	I see it as a process - more people are being acculturated into education and the workforce. There is interest by Native groups.
Somewhat optimistic	If we start to address the issues NOW! I have a heavy heart when I think about this because the challenge is SO huge - where do you start?
Somewhat optimistic	There is emphasis on improving education. Programs being implemented by corporations and (?). Emphasis, renewed focus on culture and heritage will increase pride and confidence.
Very optimistic	No comment.

Aniak

Regarding the education of Alaska Native children who live in villages, which statement comes closest to how you feel? Record comments.

Statement		Comments
1. The school system itself is failing Alaska Native children.	-	-
2. It isn't the school system as much as it is other issues that are responsible for what difficulties Alaska Native children are having with their education.	5	Both. No comment. No comment. Other issues (both, combo). No comment.
Other.	2	One and two - same. One participant did not respond.

Anchorage

Regarding the education of Alaska Native children who live in the Anchorage area, which statement comes closest to how you feel? Record comments.

Statement		Comments
1. The school system itself is failing Alaska Native children.	3	The urban student hasn't an awareness of rural Alaska and its peoples. There are some wonderful teachers and there are some teachers that are only there for the money - and the report card for the school system is not as high as it could be. It's the system because I felt like I had to do a lot of things I really didn't want to do growing up.
2. It isn't the school system as much as it is other issues that are responsible for what difficulties Alaska Native children are having with their education.	2	Other issues. Because we are where we are as a result of the choices we make. We need as a group of people and as people in the greater city and world community, to be able to know we have made a choice. Dealing with the response, consequence is the next step. Sense of community? No - Responsibility: It's the only way for an individual to have growth within that supports growth and "success" or goal attainment in the outer concrete world - society. Chose this one because there are too many things going on in people's lives that make the school atmosphere the way it is.

Business

Regarding the education of Alaska Native children generally, which statement comes closest to how you feel? Record comments.

Statement		Comments
1. The school system itself is failing Alaska Native children.	4	▪ No comment. ▪ No comment. ▪ Urban and rural schools - over populated/under-funded. ▪ No comment.
2. It isn't the school system as much as it is other issues that are responsible for what difficulties Alaska Native children are having with their education.	5	▪ It's other issues. ▪ No comment. ▪ No comment. ▪ No comment. ▪ I actually feel both statements are correct.

Aniak

What is the most important thing to do to improve the quality of education of Alaska Native children who live in villages?

- Get involved, teamwork, show benefits afterwards.
- Reach out, give opportunities, know the lifestyle of that community, less homework.
- Teachers find out from both kids who did it first when they get in trouble, not blame.
- Stay in school and learn about what you want to be.
- I think the one most important thing to do to improve the quality of education for Alaskan Natives would be actually come out to a village and get to know the culture, community and the students. Getting to know where you're working is a big step so that they know what things are really like out here and the stuff we deal with. So I think getting to know the culture and community would be most important.
- Get teachers, especially from villages, who really care about their students doing well. More funding for better teachers and more time for counselors and tutors to help students. LESS HOMEWORK.
- Bring in or hire more Native teachers who have the knowledge of teaching and Native or village lifestyles. Less discrimination of Native children, treat all as one.

Anchorage

What is the most important thing to do to improve the quality of education of Alaska Native children who live in Anchorage?

- Teaching multi-levels of parental/family/friend involvement techniques. Supported by multi-community (school, business, cultural, social) involvement on a one-to-one basis - responsibility.
- Building a safe, positive surrounding for your child and enhancing it with educating about all cultures both statewide and internationally. The key is keeping all doors open to learning. If a child starts with basics, he can do anything.

- Start young - Early Head Start (0 - 3) and Head Start (3 - 5). These are low income programs. We need programs for all income levels. Intern programs for all income levels - encourage, give opportunity, open doors and visions of Alaska Native youth.

- Communication, for me, in my opinion we need to make people more aware of all that is out there for them and try to help them utilize all that is available to them.

- Not to restrict Native kids to one general group. Yeah, it's great to make the individual feel "important" as an individual and recognize their heritage. But, if a child does not want to be a part of a segregated class, don't make them feel bad about it.

Business

What is the most important thing to do to better prepare Alaska Native children for entering the workplace?

- Ask the Economic Elders to keep boardroom discussions/attitudes in the boardroom. To quit bad-mouthing "them," or those guys, and to encourage parents to help motivate the youth.

- Strong family values related to need for education.

- Prepare them for hitting forks in the road and how to make decisions - when bad decision is made how to move on to a positive without being discouraged.

- Make Alaska Native history a requirement in schools for both students and TEACHERS!

- Require state/national/county (parents/teachers) to look toward the future and develop a long term plan to invest in the development of their young people.

- Work readiness classes throughout K-12, including budgeting, goal setting, strategic planning, computers, customer relations and communication.

- Students are expected to succeed as well as anyone else and be given the feeling that anyone can be given the self-motivated conviction to be a success. Parents' involvement is a mark of expectation.

- Education and training so that the individual can learn a "marketable skill."

- Instill self-pride and confidence.