



# Sharing Our Pathways

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A newsletter of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative  
Alaska Federation of Natives ♦ University of Alaska ♦ National Science Foundation ♦ Annenberg Rural Challenge

## Cultural Standards and Test Scores

by Ray Barnhardt, Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley and Frank Hill,  
Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative

With the release of the first Benchmark and High School Graduation Qualifying Exam scores this fall, educators throughout Alaska have been convening to address the many issues that are raised by these new checkpoints on the educational landscape.

Debates are already underway on ways to interpret the results and develop appropriate responses, given the predictable differences in perfor-

mance among various students and schools. At the heart of these debates are concerns over the use (or misuse) of the test results to make critical

judgements about students, teachers and schools in ways that attempt to reduce complex school performance issues down to a few simplistic variables.

We need look no further than the latest editions of *Education Week*, *Phi Delta Kappan* or *Educational Researcher* to see that these debates are occurring on a national scale and that Alaska is not alone in venturing out

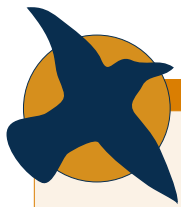
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Harriet Nungasak, Alicia Kanayurak, George Olanna (instructor), Kimberly Rychnovsky and Donald Tritt work on their science projects at the ANSES Science-Culture Camp held at Gaaleeya Spirit Camp July 11-25, 2000. Skills gained at science and cultural camps are brought into the classroom and utilized throughout the school year. See "AISES Corner", page 6.

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into uncharted waters in the name of school accountability. Hopefully we can learn from other peoples mistakes, and by doing a few things right, maybe others can learn from our successes. However, this will require taking a long-term perspective on the many issues involved and not expecting to find a silver bullet that will produce instant solutions to long-standing complex problems.

First of all, we must recognize the practical limits of the tests themselves. As diagnostic tools coupled with other related indicators of ability and performance, tests that are properly designed, flexibly administered and judiciously interpreted can provide valuable information to guide educational decision-making. However, there are two features of these legislatively mandated high-stakes tests that inhibit their educational value and thus make it necessary to exercise considerable caution in their use as accountability tools in the current standards-driven environment.

Since the tests are mandated for all students at four grade levels, the sheer number and frequency of the testing introduces a major time and cost factor. As a result, the design of the tests tends to rely on approaches that are simpler and cheaper to administer and score (i.e., multiple choice and short-answer questions) with only minimal use of the more costly, but flexible, culturally adaptable and educationally useful performance-based approaches to assessment. Unfortunately, this emphasis on ease of administration has also narrowed the selection of which content standards count and which ones don't, leaving the harder-to-measure aspects of the standards in the background.

As a result, teachers (and districts) are caught in the dilemma of aligning their teaching and curriculum with the full range of learning outcomes outlined in the standards or narrow-

ing their lessons down to that which is measured on the tests (see *Education Week*, July 7, 2000, p.1 at [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org) for a more detailed discussion of this issue). In this regard, the current testing system can be seen as working against the implementation of the standards-based school reform efforts with which it was originally associated. A true standards-based educational system requires a much broader approach to assessment than current resources allow.

The second feature that reduces the educational value of high-stakes testing is its intended use in making critical decisions that can adversely impact people's lives and careers (e.g., grade-level promotion, eligibility for graduation, teacher reward/punishment and school rating/ranking.) When used for such purposes, the tests themselves tend to revert to those measures that the test-makers (in Alaska's case, CBT/McGraw-Hill) can defend in court when challenged by those affected. Consequently, we see a heavy emphasis on standardization (in both content and administration), whereby many important aspects of the content standards that require local adaptation or are not easily measured are set aside in favor of those items and testing practices that meet the test of "legal defensibility." So we should not be surprised when we run into problems with a testing system that has been constructed around legal and political, rather than educational considerations.

## What are the Options?

For better or worse, the Alaska Benchmark and High School Graduation Qualifying Exams are a reality and it is our professional responsibility to do what we can to minimize their negative effects and to maximize

their potential benefits. Most critical in that regard is the need to examine the issues that emerge in the broadest context available to us and not to use the results to promote simplistic, short-term solutions to long-term, complex problems. Nor should we fall into the trap of “blaming the victim” (i.e., the student) when there are significant group variations in academic performance. This is especially true in a cross-cultural setting such as rural Alaska, where we have a long history of repetitious unsuccessful educational experimentation on students while ignoring the well-documented source of many of the problems—that is the persistent cultural gulf between teachers and students, school and community.

Based on the experiences in other states and the rife speculation underway here in Alaska, we can expect several things to happen over the next few months. The initial responses to the release of the test results are likely to point to two factors to explain differential performance between students and schools—low teacher expectations and lack of opportunity to learn—each of which will lead to predictable forms of remediation.

Under the banner of “all students can learn to high standards,” teachers will be admonished to teach harder and more of whatever it is that students are determined by the tests as lacking. While this may seem logical on the surface, it ignores the possibility that the real issue may not be low expectations at all (though certainly that does exist) and that “more of the same” may exacerbate the problem by producing higher dropout rates rather than addressing the more fundamental issue of lack-of-fit between what we teach, how we teach it and the context in which it is taught. Intensifying the current curriculum and extending schooling into the weekend or summer also ignores the inherent limitations to school improve-

ment in rural Alaska that result from having to import teachers and administrators from outside for whom the village setting is a foreign and inevitably temporary home.

The second issue of making sure students have had the opportunity to learn the subject matter on which they are being tested is more readily identifiable as a problem, but no less complicated (and expensive) in producing a solution. If a small rural school is not offering the level of mathematics instruction that students need to pass the exam, the solution is not to send the students elsewhere for schooling. To assume that a boarding school (as some legislators are suggesting) can make up for the limitations of a village high school ignores the fact that a well-rounded education consists of much more than just the subject matter that is taught in school. It also ignores the negative impact that taking students out of their home has on the family, the community and the student’s own future role as a parent and contributing member of society. There is nothing taught in a boarding school that can’t be taught cheaper and more effectively in a village school linked together with other village schools in a web of rich and extensive learning opportunities. Furthermore, there are many important things that are learned at home in a village setting that cannot be taught in a boarding school. Boarding schools may be justified as an optional alternative program for selected students, but not as a substitute for village schools.

When providing “opportunities to learn,” we need to consider all aspects of a child’s upbringing and prepare them in such a way that they can “become responsible, capable and whole human beings in the process” (see *Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools*). When we do so, the issues associated with benchmark and qualifying exams will take care of themselves. How then do we go about



The *Alaska Standards for Culturally-Responsive Schools* is available from:

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It can also be found on the ANKN website:

<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu>.

this with some degree of confidence that we will achieve the outcome we seek—graduates capable of functioning as responsible adults, including passing state exams?

## **Impact of Cultural Standards on Standardized Test Scores**

For the past five years, the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative has been working intensively with 20 of the 48 rural school districts in the state to implement a series of initiatives that are intended to “systematically document the indigenous knowledge systems of Alaska Native people and develop educational policies and practices that effectively integrate indigenous and western knowledge through a renewed educational system.” The assumption behind the AKRSI reform strategy is that if we coordinate our efforts and resources across all aspects of the education system and address the issues in a

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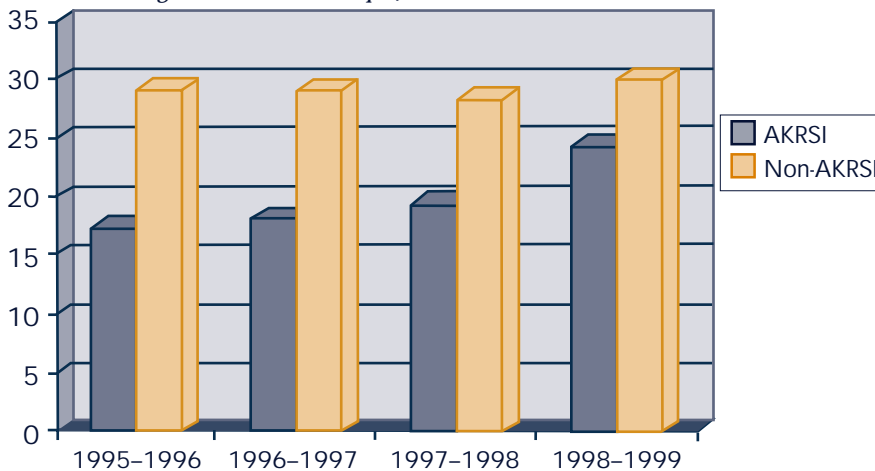
focused, statewide manner, perhaps better headway will be realized. Two outcomes of this work are worthy of consideration as schools review the results of the state tests and ponder their next steps.

First of all, building an education system with a strong foundation in the local culture appears to produce positive effects in all indicators of school success, including dropout

with a corresponding decrease in the lower quartile. With AKRSI districts now producing 24.3% of their students testing in the upper quartile, they are only 0.7% point below the national average. In other words, through strong place-based education initiatives, the AKRSI schools are closing the achievement gap with the non-AKRSI schools. The following graph illustrates the gains on a year-by-year basis:

### Eighth Grade Mathematics Performance

Percentage of Students on Top Quartile on CAT-5, 1996–1999



rates, college attendance, parent involvement, grade-point averages and standardized achievement test scores. With regard to student achievement, using the eighth-grade CAT-5 math test scores as an impact indicator for the first four years of implementation of the AKRSI school reform initiatives in the 20 participating school districts (which have historically had the lowest student achievement levels in the state), there has been a differential gain of 5.9% points in the number of students who are performing in the top quartile for AKRSI partner schools over non-AKRSI rural schools. AKRSI schools gained 6.9% points in the upper quartile compared to a 1.0% point gain for non-AKRSI schools,

In reviewing this data (drawn from the state summary of the school district report cards), it is clear that something has been going on in the 20 AKRSI school districts that is producing a slow but steady gain in the standardized test scores (along with all the other indicators we have been tracking.) So just what is it that is producing these results? Since the gains are widespread across all cultural regions and the scores show consistent improvement over each of the four years, they clearly are not a function of one particular curricular or pedagogical initiative, nor are they limited to AKRSI-sponsored activities. The best summary of what it is that has produced these results can be

found in the *Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools*.

These “cultural standards” were compiled by educators from throughout the state as an outgrowth of the work that was initiated through the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative and implemented in varying degrees by the participating schools. As such, when coupled with the impact data summarized here, they provide some concrete guidelines for schools and communities to consider as they construct school improvement plans aimed at producing more effective educational programs for the students in their care. We now have strong evidence that when we make a diligent and persistent effort to forge a strong cultural fit between what we teach, how we teach and the context in which we teach, we can produce successful, well-rounded graduates who are also capable of producing satisfactory test scores.

The AKRSI staff are currently working with the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development to provide assistance to schools for whom cultural considerations play an important part in the design of their educational programs. Alaska Native educators, including Elders, are an important resource that all schools need to draw upon to make sure that our responses to the results of the Alaska Benchmark and High School Graduation Qualifying Exams go beyond Band-Aid solutions and lead to long-term improvement of our education systems. The future of our state depends on it. Curricular resources and technical assistance for such efforts are available through the regional Native Educator Associations, as well as the Alaska Native Knowledge Network web site at [www.ankn.uaf.edu](http://www.ankn.uaf.edu). ✨

# Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative Moves Into Phase II

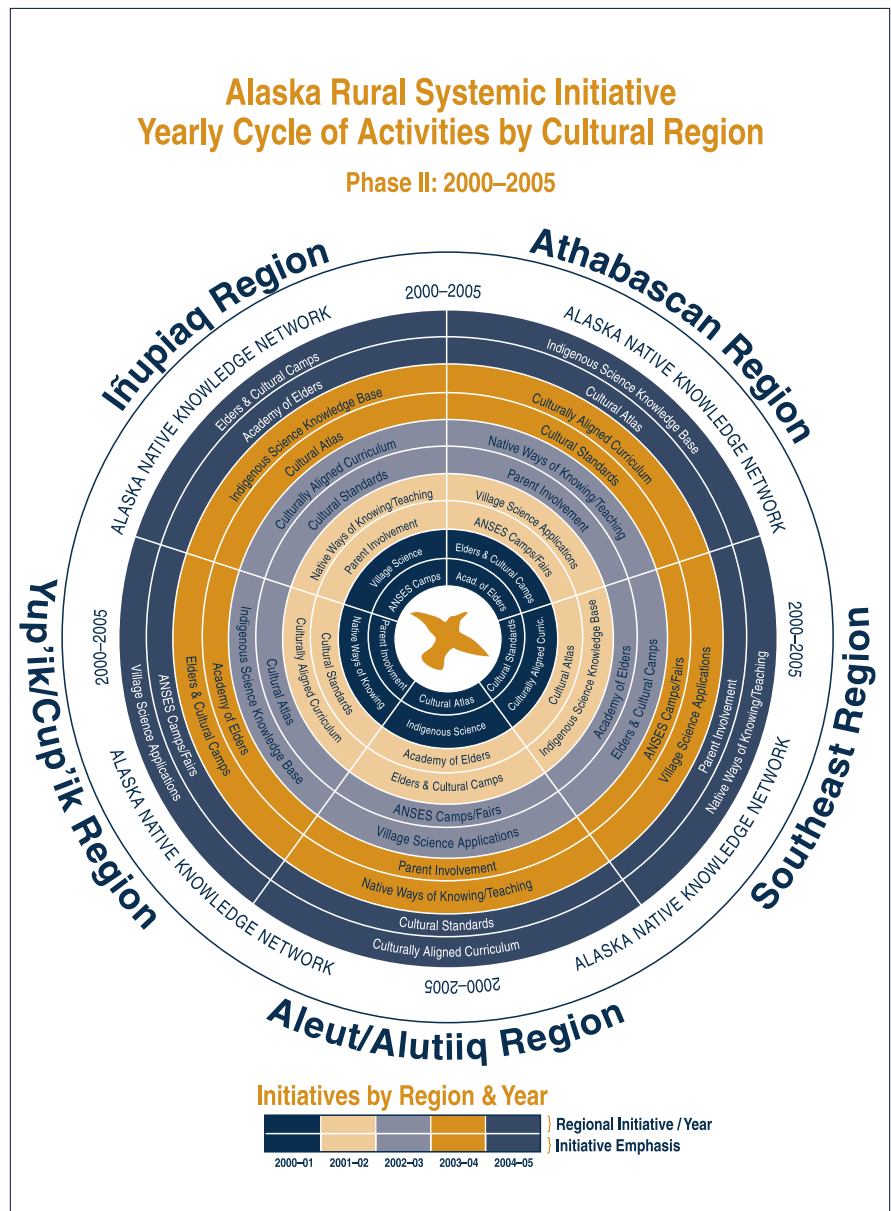
by Frank Hill, Angayukuk Oscar Kawagley and Ray Barnhardt

With the first five years of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative coming to a close this summer, we are now embarking on a second phase, starting this fall, that will take what we have learned from Phase I and seek to integrate it into the educational system on a sustainable basis. Given another five years of funding from the National Science Foundation, we will be working closely with the same 20 rural school districts and other organizations to implement a series of focused school reform initiatives that build on the work that was begun over the past five years. The chart to the right summarizes the Phase II initiatives by year and by cultural region, as they will be implemented between now and 2005.

We will be getting in touch with each of the partner organizations during the fall to work through the details as we develop a new round of MOAs for the spring, summer and fall terms of 2001. We wish to express our sincere appreciation for the high level of interest and commitment that everyone has shown over the past five years. This has truly been a cooperative undertaking in which the whole has become more than the sum of its parts. We look forward to continuing the close working relationships we have had with the Elders, educators and schools from throughout the state. We also wish to express our apprecia-

tion to the hard-working staff that has brought new possibilities to the forefront of rural education in Alaska.

*Quyana! Qagaasakung! Ana Baasee'! Gunalcheesh! Quyanaq! Mahsi!* Thank you to everyone! ✨





## AISES Corner (American Indian Science and Engineering Society)

by Claudette Bradley

The AISES Initiative concluded its fifth year with eight summer science-culture camps held on Afognak Island, Haines (vicinity of), St. Paul, Kwethluk, Kisaralik river, St. Mary's, Chevak and Fairbanks. Each camp had Elders teaching activities specific to the culture of the region and engaged students in science projects.

The Fairbanks, Alaska Native Science and Engineering Society (ANSES) Science Camp 2000 ran on a slim budget, which we hope to rectify next summer. Twelve middle-school students attended the camp held at the Gaaleeya Spirit Camp from July 11 to July 25. They were Britta Kallman of Anchorage; Roberta Allen, Amanda Tritt and Donald Tritt of Arctic Village; Qaqsu Bodfish, Alicia Kanayurak, Eunice Kippi, Ronald Kippi and Harriet Nungasak of Atqasuk; Mathew Shewfelt of Fort Yukon; and Kimberly Rychnovsky of Newhalen.

These students arose at 7:00 a.m. each morning to work with Elders and teachers. They cleaned and tanned caribou skins and made porcupine quill and beaded necklaces under the guidance of Margaret Tritt—an Elder from Arctic Village. They beaded pouches with Elizabeth Nictune Fleagle from Alatna. They learned Indian games and stories from Kenneth Frank of Arctic Village. Kenneth also helped students carve and polish caribou bone and wood to make an Athabaskan "toss and catch the hole" game piece.

Students picked medicinal plants and berries with Rita O'Brien, a certified teacher from Beaver. In Rita's class the students made cranberry leather, that was like candy

to eat. With Todd Kelsey, an IBM consultant, the students constructed a weather station with a rain gauge, wind socket, barometer and thermometer. Students checked the weather each day and kept data on spreadsheets. They were able to compare the Elders' way of predicting the weather with the information from the weather station. One evening we met with the Elders to discuss the traditional ways of knowing the weather.

In the afternoon class students developed a research project and did their experiments in the camp. Rita O'Brien, Todd Kelsey, George Olanna of Shismaref and Claudette Bradley of UAF assisted students. The computer lab had four ThinkPads and a color printer that were donated by IBM and powered by two solar panels and batteries. This enabled students to type up their information, make data sheets and construct graphs for their display boards.

Students attended field trips to the Fort Knox Gold Mine and to the World Eskimo Indian Olympics (WEIO). Bradley Weyiounna is a WEIO high kick champion; he can jump eight feet to kick the ball. Bradley and Josh Rutman visited our camp one evening with the high-kick stand and demonstrated the high kick for the students. The students enjoyed the experience and attempted to kick the ball. The ball

was lowered to four, five and six feet. The students enjoyed trying the high kick. Bradley showed the students how to wrestle with just arms or legs. This entertained the students and they loved trying to wrestle with each other.

The camp ended with a potlatch for parents and Fairbanks' education community members. After dinner, awards and gifts were given to students, staff and other support people. It was followed by a poster session of the student display boards on their science projects. Students explained their research to the guests. Following the poster session everyone participated in Athabaskan fiddle dancing.

Staff and students want to extend a heart felt thank you to Howard Luke for allowing us to be at his camp which is also his home. We deeply appreciate his facilities and the care he has given to the land that was left to him by his mother. We cherish his advice and knowledge of Alaska Native ways that he generously shares with camp participants. We look forward to future camps at Howard Luke's.

### Youth Science Festival

Claudette Bradley, the director of the Fairbanks ANSES Science Camp 2000, was one of six chaperones in the USA delegation of 20 teenage students attending the Singapore Youth Science Festival 2000, July 27 to August 2, 2000. The festival was attended by delegates from 21 countries of the Asian Pacific Economies Cooperation (APEC). The events included an

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# Fall Course Offerings for Educators in Rural Alaska

by Ray Barnhardt

Just as the new school year brings new learning opportunities to students, so too does it bring new learning opportunities for teachers and those seeking to become teachers. This fall, rural teachers and aspiring teachers will have a variety of distance education courses to choose from as they seek ways to upgrade their skills, renew their teaching license, pursue graduate studies or meet the state's Alaska Studies and Multicultural Education requirements. All Alaska teachers holding a provisional teaching license are required to complete a three-credit course in Alaska Studies and a three-credit course in Multicultural Education within the first two years of teaching to qualify for a standard Type A certificate. Following is a list of some of the courses available through the Center for Distance Education that may be of interest to rural educators.

**Alaska Studies:** ANTH 242, Native Cultures of Alaska; GEOG 302, Geography of Alaska; HIST 115, Alaska, Land and Its People; HIST 461, History of Alaska.

**Multicultural Education:** ANS 461, Native Ways of Knowing; ED 610, Education and Cultural Processes; CCS/ED 611, Culture, Cognition and

Knowledge Acquisition; ED 616, Education and Socio-Economic Change; ED 631, Small School Curriculum Design; ED 660, Educational Administration in Cultural Perspective.

**Cross-Cultural Studies:** CCS 601, Documenting Indigenous Knowledge Systems; CCS 608, Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

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international science fair and student summit science seminars on globalization, global warming, diseases, new endeavors, genetic engineering and clean environments. These are key issues for international science and technology research.

The festival had 600 students and 200 educators/chaperones. Educators and chaperones were asked to present papers on science education in their economy. Dr. Bradley reported on the

ANSES Initiative of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative which included science camps and fairs for rural students in Alaska. Participating educators/chaperones showed great interest in our culture-based science camps and fairs. They expressed interest in developing a student exchange program with the culture-based camps in Alaska and summer programs in their countries. ✘

Enrollment in the above courses may be arranged through the nearest UAF rural campus or by contacting the Center for Distance Education at 474-5353 or [racde@uaf.edu](mailto:racde@uaf.edu) or by going to the CDE web site at <http://www.dist-ed.uaf.edu/>. Those rural residents who are interested in pursuing a program to earn a teaching credential should contact the rural education faculty member at the nearest rural campus or the Rural Educator Preparation Partnership office at 543-4500. Teacher education programs and courses are available for students with or without a baccalaureate degree. Anyone interested in pursuing a graduate degree by distance education should contact the Center for Cross-Cultural Studies at 474-1902 or [ffrjb@uaf.edu](mailto:ffrjb@uaf.edu).

In addition to the above courses offered through the UAF campuses, the following distance education courses are available through the Alaska Staff Development Network under arrangements with Alaska Pacific University: "Alaska Alive" (which meets the state Alaska Studies requirement) and "Creating Culturally Responsive Schools: A Standards-based Approach" (which meets the state Multicultural Education requirement.) A new multicultural education course aimed at administrators is also available through ASDN. Information regarding enrollment in these courses may be obtained from the Alaska Staff Development Network at 364-3801 or [asdn@ptialaska.net](mailto:asdn@ptialaska.net) or at the ASDN web site at: <http://www.asdn.schoolzone.net/asdn/>.

Welcome to the first school year of the new millennium. ✘

# Aspects of Traditional Iñupiat Education

by Paul Ongtooguk

## Iñupiat Society: The Myth

Traditional Alaska Natives are often thought of as a common, nomadic culture that moved almost randomly with little more than hope to guide decisions about where to seek the next meal and where to set up the next shelter. The Hollywood image of Alaska and Alaska Natives reinforces this stereotype, as the film image is one of fur-clad people living in blinding blizzards of constant snow. Imagine the camera, as it pans up to a thin line of specks on the horizon. The camera slowly closes in and the specks become visible as people walking into the blizzard. (I don't know why we always walk into the blizzards, but in films we always seem to.) Then, the narrator, in a low, serious tone announces "In a ceaseless quest for survival, the hearty Eskimo are in search of the caribou." The image is an important one, as it represents most people's only visual encounter with the traditional life of the Eskimo. It is also false, as it portrays the Eskimo as playing survival roulette, wandering about hoping to chance upon some caribou.

## Iñupiat Society: Some Realities

It is true that most Alaska Native groups often moved, but it is also true that the locations and times of these moves were not in any way random. A culture would not long survive in the Arctic, much less develop over several thousand years, if it were dependent on such random luck. Rather the Iñupiat cycle of life developed through a careful consideration of the environment. Among traditional foods

were caribou, marmot, seal, walrus, several variety of whale, many kinds of fish, bear, rabbit, ptarmigan and a variety of roots, eggs, seeds and berries. The Iñupiat also gathered resources, such as ivory, jade in some regions, copper in others, slate, driftwood, baleen and bones. Sometimes the materials sought included grasses for insulation and baskets or animals and birds for clothing and shelter. Hunting and fishing were planned based on the knowledge of where animals and fish had been found in the past, knowledge about weather

conditions and the changing patterns of climate.

Camps were carefully chosen locations. The camp, or living area, was selected, because it was perceived as the most likely location of a concentration of food. Adequate fresh water and relative safety were, and are today, carefully considered. There were also settled communities. Over a thousand people lived in the traditional communities now commonly called Pt. Hope and Wales. These communities were established long before the Roman era of Western Europe.

Iñupiat societies developed unique equipment and tools that were relevant for the area in which that society lived. The invention and refinement over thousands of years of how to design and construct the right equipment was a crucial aspect of traditional life. As William Oquilluk, an Iñupiat author, pointed out in *People of Kauwerak*, the invention of tools and shelter for living in the Arctic was inspired through careful observation of the world: the spider web for the net, not only the fish net, but also nets for birds and seals; the leaf floating on the water for the first boats that were gradually refined into the *qayaq*—one of the more graceful and efficient boat designs. There are many others: the ulu, the harpoon, the reinforced bow, the throwing dart and the gutskin parka. The development of tools and equipment is one example that Iñupiat society was not static in traditional times and that change was not a consequence of contact with outsiders.

Thus it was not mere hope and persistence that allowed Iñupiat society to develop in the North. Traditional Iñupiat society was, and is, about knowing the right time to be in the right place, with the right tools to take advantage of a temporary abundance of resources. Such a cycle of life was, and is, based on a foundation of knowledge about and insight into the



natural world. Such a cycle of life was, and is, dependent upon a people's careful observations of the environment and their dynamic response to changes and circumstances. Developing this cycle of life was critical to the continuance of traditional Iñupiat society. Also critical was a system to share this knowledge and insight with the next generation.

## Traditional Education: a Myth

Many educators today stereotype the traditional educational system of Alaska Natives in a manner that is reminiscent of the Hollywood blizzard portrayal of traditional Iñupiat society. A prevalent belief, for example, of many educators is that American indigenous people “learn by doing.” In schools the application of this belief often results in activities where students are provided a minimum amount of information and a maximum amount of activities that allow for random experimentation and hands-on discovery. Such a simplified view of teaching and learning imposed on a diversified group of people is as foolish as the image of the northern Iñupiat randomly searching for food in the Arctic.

Two common sense observations should immediately lead educators to question this belief. First, the traditional life of the Iñupiat demanded knowledge and perceptiveness about the world. Consider hunting. The successful hunter had to have knowledge about the particular area, the species being hunted and the appropriate technology. Further, he had to be skilled in the application of that knowledge. The Iñupiat were not successful hunters because they threw themselves into “learning by doing” situations. To learn about sea ice conditions and safe travel “by doing” alone would be suicidal. In fact “doing” is the back end of the educational

experience in traditional life. Second, it is naive to think that any group of people can be categorized as preferring one learning style. Learning style inventories are popularly administered in schools today in order to determine student preferences and student patterns of insight. Teachers believe that the information revealed about individual students from learning style inventories is important. Teachers often intend to apply that information as they plan, deliver and evaluate lessons. Caucasian students are expected to exhibit a range of learning behavior. (By the way I often think this whole issue is confused in how much it ignores the demands of the subject being learned. Hands-on learning alone of chess? Ignoring the conceptual issues of small engines is partly to blame for all those so-called mechanics trading old parts for new ones without repairing vehicles.) Why would Alaska Natives be expected to perform any differently?

## Traditional Education: Some Realities

Then how were people prepared to live in traditional times? Probably no one alive today can answer that question completely. Decades of changes in society coupled with the demands of compulsory education mean that traditional learning and ways of learning have been obscured and many pieces have been lost. While there are some obvious elements still in place, they tend to be fragmented and are seldom recognized as portions of an entire way of learning. While these fragments can be gathered from a variety of sources, one of the most credible is the personal story. The examples that follow are personal and illustrate how the role of the male hunter was learned by some of the boys in a contemporary Iñupiat community.

## Observation

Observation is a critical element of the traditional educational system. The first knowledge about hunting comes from boys watching how hunters prepare their equipment, their clothing and themselves. Observation begins at a very early age and continues for years. At first the boy observes how relatively easy it seems to load a boat. Then, another year, the boy sees more than the work and starts to notice the balance of the load. He sees what will be readily needed, what must not be allowed to sit under the load, what knots should be used to properly tie things down in the various parts. What had appeared simple at the first observation gradually becomes extremely complicated as the issues are understood. The sophisticated observer finally extracts the principles that become the threads by which what has been “seen and done” is understood.

The young boy, through observation, also learns about the value system associated with hunting. As hunters return from a successful trip, goods are shared. In Iñupiat society, it is through participation that a person becomes a part of the community. In contrast to the Robinson Crusoe drama, in the Arctic, if a person is alone, the odds of survival are undermined. In fact, in Iñupiat society higher status is acquired through sharing. Boys learn to prove themselves through helping others.

## Immersion in the Stories and Customs

As the child is immersed in the stories and customs of the communities, he learns more about the traditions, values and beliefs associated with hunting in an Iñupiat community. Before his first hunt, he has listened to hunting stories for years.

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These were both entertaining and informative. As a result of these stories told by Elders and veteran hunters, the young child constructs a mental image of all that is required and some sense of the important aspects of preparing and engaging in the hunt.

Many of the stories he listens to as a child were stories that emphasized the disposition—the attitude—of the hunter. In these stories bragging and pride in personal accomplishment would be condemned. In the stories, animals can read the mind of the hunter and either give themselves or not, in part based on an appreciation of the giving of the physical body. Even after the animal gives up the body, respect should be shown in definite ways according to the stories and traditions. This is why some hunters who are deacons and respected members of churches still pour fresh water in the mouth of a seal after it has been shot. The belief is that the seal likes fresh water and that the undying nature of the seal will remember the gesture and bring another body for the hunters later.

The stories about animals giving themselves to hunters might not seem to make sense to outsiders, but it is difficult to imagine anything else if a person has hunted very long. There are times, when in spite of careful planning and preparation, cautious stalking and quiet approaches, no animal will allow a hunter to even remotely approach. At other times a person will be setting up camp and a caribou or moose will walk within a stone's throw and then patiently wait for the hunter to take advantage of their good fortune. How else to account for these turns of events that have so little to do with skill and more to do with the disposition of the animal? Today some Westerners might

deride such practices and beliefs. But perhaps the stories are actually about protecting and helping the hunter. Respect for the animal being hunted may prevent the hunter from becoming overly confident or prideful. Pride often produces carelessness and may prevent learning and observation from occurring. In fact, pride and arrogance can be fatal in the Arctic where the best lesson to keep in mind is how little we actually know and how easily we can be swept from the world.

Showing respect for the animals



also ensure that better care will be taken of the physical remains of the animal. The importance of such a disposition for the Iñupiat hunter is obvious. Often the stories children hear will emphasize how clever, thoughtful and ingenious a person has been in becoming successful as a hunter and a provider to the community.

## Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is another aspect of traditional education. Often a young hunter is guided in the apprenticeship by an uncle. The uncle's role may be familiar to some parents in urban life who face the task of teaching their children to drive. For while the young person may be capable of learning to drive, the parents are often so deeply

attached and concerned that it is difficult to keep the teaching role in mind. Parents can all too readily imagine that this future driver of over a ton of steel is the same child who broke objects and fumbled through life as a toddler. On the other hand an uncle is close enough in relationship to carry the burden of keeping a youngster alive, while at the same time distant enough to keep things in perspective. Hunting in the Arctic is difficult enough. Hunting while keeping an eye on a young person is just that much more so.

The apprenticeship begins on the day that the uncle chooses to take the future hunter out. In contrast to Western systems of education there is no predetermined beginning and ending schedule for the apprenticeship. The age at which this happens depends upon the maturity of the youngster. The uncle has been watching the young hunter and one day, with almost a casual air, the uncle and his hunting partner agree to take the youngster out.

The young hunter has been trying to show, in numerous ways, that he is ready for this. The youngster may have been hunting ptarmigan, usually with a bow and arrows that he and his friends have made. Why is this hunting so important to the young man? Observation has demonstrated to the boys that hunting is valued in many ways. As a child he has seen the appreciation and admiration shown to hunters returning to the community. As a child, when he got his first ptarmigan or rabbit, he was required to give it to his oldest female relative—grandmother, great-grandmother or an aunt. The female relative made a great deal of the event—praising the fine size of the catch and noting how long it had been since they had seen one as good as this. The boy was then instructed to

run to the homes of many relatives and friends inviting them over for a feast. The women prepared a great many foods, but the center of the feast was a stew in which the little bird or rabbit was transformed into a meal for many people. All would eat and praise the stew and note how clever and hard working the young hunter had been in acquiring this meal for the community. All the conversation praising the hunter would take place as though he were invisible and yet he would feel a mixture of pride and embarrassment at all the attention. The lesson of the importance of hard work and persistence in hunting would not be lost.

Apprentice hunters might not actually hunt the first time they go out to a hunting camp. The youngest person sets up the tent, hauls water, perhaps prepares sleeping bags, collects firewood, cooks and certainly cleans. But is this only dreary labor? First, keep in mind that these chores are being done out at camp and so everything is edged with excitement for the young apprentice. But, the real lesson, as a young person, is to learn to deal with the long and hard labor without giving in to fatigue.

While out at camp, the young boy learns about good locations for certain animals, fish or materials during certain seasons. The boy also learns about how to select the location for the hunting camp, what equipment to bring for certain areas and for different kinds of hunting, fishing or trapping. A person would certainly be expected to learn about terrain, travel routes and hazards. A young hunter would also learn something about local weather and about basic weather prediction. Sometimes the significant event is learning about the location of good water and, always, hunting is about maintaining hunting equipment. From these early experiences a person begins a lifetime of learning about animals, fish, various other

foods, habitats and animal behaviors.

If the hunt went well a boy would also begin to observe the techniques and skills used by hunters in locating and stalking an animal. The apprentice hears the male hunters discuss the nature of the hunt and anything learned, anything unusual or notable. Often the discussion revolves around how and why things turned out the way they did. They may even tease about the lack of success. But if there is success, the young apprentice helps in packing and hauling the catch.

He learns how to pack and store and how to move from one place to another, efficiently and intelligently. The room for error is very slim at times. The apprentice is taught to think about what he is going to do and to ask himself: What can go wrong? What are the dangers? Then he is taught to think again and not to take unnecessary risks, because the necessary ones are dangerous enough. The boy learns that taking risks is for people whose lives are very different than his. Caution and appreciation for life are the dispositions of the hunters who know that life cannot be taken for granted.

## The Community as a School

In contrast to the system of modern Western education, in traditional Iñupiat 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. Older men tell stories about everything and the stories are the lessons. When, where and what lessons occur are dependent upon the time, the place and the season. The lessons are tied to the traditional cycle of life.



The apprenticeship, while perhaps seemingly familiar as a model used in Western education, is best understood in traditional Iñupiat education, as one more piece of an educational system that is integral to the notion of the community as a school. Why a particular uncle steps forward to guide a young hunter is dependent upon complex family, social, psychological and community relationships. It is also within the context of a community of hunters that the apprenticeship occurs. Preservation of the communities and societies depends on the cooperation of its members and the apprenticeship occurs within this hunting community. While the apprentice might focus on a particular task, there is no separation of the task from the larger context. Traditional Iñupiat hunters must learn to do several things at the same time. For example, the hunters may discuss how exceptional circumstances in the hunt will be met while they are, at the same time, cleaning their equipment. For the apprentice there is no isolation from the realities of the hunting community.

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Within this context traditional education is a highly disciplined education. There is a need to pay attention to the stories that told about right and wrong attitudes and behavior. There is a need for the young hunter to develop both the physical and mental dispositions of a mature hunter, including understanding why something is being done in a particular way. When hunting in the Arctic, things often do not go as planned and skilled hunters must know how to solve problems. An educational goal of traditional Iñupiat society is a careful preparation of the young for the roles of adults. This goal is shared by the community and the children are both attended to and expected to be attentive. The values of traditional Iñupiat education include cooperation and intense effort. These values are rewarded in many ways, including the satisfaction that the hunter feels when people are fed and he knows that he has contributed to the effort that has provided some of the food.

## A Cautionary Tale

This description is only a fraction of the traditional educational system. Hunting skills and conditioning were, and are, learned through traditional games and competition such as wrestling, weight lifting and the one- and two-foot high kick. In addition to hunting, traditional education has provided and is continuing to provide a way for children to learn and accept other adult roles that are essential to survival. Further, Iñupiat society has developed many art forms including sculpture, music, dance and story. Celebrations and ceremonies were a part of Iñupiat communities as were people who were philosophers and historians. Despite the challenge of the environment, the Iñupiat survived and developed a complex society. The traditional Iñupiat system of

education worked well within the framework in which it developed.

There are many factors that have contributed to the erosion of the traditional educational system. The relocation of Native people and the establishment of boarding schools had devastating effects, as children were separated from the traditional educational system that taught them how to participate in the community. As Western culture collided with Alaska Native cultures, some practices associated with traditional education, such as the telling of stories by the hunters, were condemned by some as “Satanic.” As the Western educational system was imposed in Alaska Native communities, those arriving concluded that Native people were primitive and backward and thus no advice was sought in the kind and direction of the education system formed. When missions were established, the choice of location was often unfortunate. Bethel, Alaska was located at its present site simply because it was as far up the river as the boat could travel given the limited knowledge that the missionaries had about the river channels. If they had sought advice, they might have ended a bit farther up the river at the present day site of Aniak with a better source of water, some trees for construction and higher ground for a foundation. One story tells that when the missionaries arrived in Kivalina in the summer they set the school building on a sand spit, not considering that their school would be held primarily in the winter and that the winter locations for the Alaska Native people in that region would have been by fresh water, in the tree line across the lagoon.

Today, teachers and other educators often ask, “Why don’t Native parents care about the education of their kids?” This question demonstrates an ignorance that is pervasive in our educational system. Imagine an entire community of adults who do

not care about the ability of their children to meet the future. This is so unlikely that it is ludicrous. Also, it seems obvious that any culture that has survived thousands of years must have had a successful system of education. But many people remain ignorant and unconcerned with the complex and successful aspects of traditional Native education. Why does this estrangement between school and community continue? Some parents may have questions about the goals of the school. The parents may not care about the school or they don’t equate it with education. Many parents see lots of papers passed back and forth but do not see their children being prepared for anything that they value. Some parents believe that learning about traditional life is the most valuable knowledge that can be taught to their children. Many parents still participate in the more traditional Native educational system as they prepare their children to contribute to the community. Whatever the reasons for estrangement, the school does not have a monopoly on education in an Alaska Native community and is seen by some as a competing system of learning.

The stories told here are repeated all over Alaska. In a sense they might be considered as cautionary tales. Tales about how good intentions may produce mixed results when they are not combined with thoughtful discussions with local people. A little advice from the people who were thought “too primitive or backward” might have resulted in communities that were located in more desirable geographic locations. Knowledge about the traditional educational system of Alaska Natives might, even today, result in schools that are more completely integrated into our communities. This essay is an attempt to break some of the stereotypes about the Iñupiat that persist in American society and by doing so to promote better opportunities for Alaska Native students. ✨

# Village Science: The Pike Story

by Alan Dick

While it has been proven that using relevant materials and examples in teaching is far more successful and fulfilling for students and teachers alike, there is a phenomenon that still surprises most teachers as they try to make the shift from textbooks to curriculum based on the local community. As the teacher prepares the lesson that is filled with examples taken from village life and plans the trip into the village, perhaps to survey the pitch of the props on the boats or determine the surface area/weight ratio of local snow machines, images of students being excited and finally turned on to school dance through his/her head. Imagine the disappointment when the lesson crashes just like the ones drawn from a Texas textbook. I pondered this for some time. Why wouldn't students take off with maximum enthusiasm after being under the cloud of irrelevant education for so long?

Finally, I heard of an experiment done by a researcher. A pike was put in a large aquarium. Every day the researcher poured a container of small fish into the tank. The pike darted around until every one of feeder fish was nestled deeply in his digestive tract. Then the researcher put a piece of glass in the middle of the tank. The pike was on one side and the small fish were poured in on the other. The pike darted back and forth in his usual

manner, but was stunned as he repeatedly smashed his snout on the invisible barrier. Again and again he tried. Finally he hovered quietly in the corner.

A couple of days later the researcher removed the glass. The little fish swam around, but the pike remained motionless. The little fish cruised around his head. His eyes did not follow them. He didn't twitch. His

will had been broken. He had learned not to trust his instincts. Bewilderment had replaced survival skills. Apathy ruled over basic desires. Whatever it was that happened to the pike, it's not unlike what has happened over the years in Alaskan education. Our students natural curiosity has been numbed. When we place promising educational opportunities right before their eyes, they often refuse to strike.

This phenomenon can be overcome, though it takes time for students who have been turned off to learn to enjoy learning again, to respond to their natural curiosities, to find what interests them and pursue it. Very seldom does the first lesson based on hunting or gathering of local resources prove successful.

We must not give in to discouragement. We teachers too have rammed the invisible barrier until we are often numb to new possibilities. We must exhibit the maturity and persistence necessary to get past the initial stages of discouragement and believe that relevant education is the only way our villages are going to regain their enthusiasm for learning—the true test of standards. ✨



# Yup'ik Region

## AKRSI Evolves into Phase II

by Barbara Liu

The Alaska RSI project is ending its first five-year cycle. My part, as regional coordinator since December 1996 under the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), provided a great job opportunity to meet and work with many people regionally and statewide. It was the Elders who brought their understanding and perspective to the work that is the most memorable experience for me. I've developed a sympathetic attitude towards indigenous knowledge and its place in pedagogy.

I would like to thank the K-12 school districts, community college, tribal community and Elder representatives from the Yup'ik/Cup'ik region who diligently attended the AKRSI-sponsored consortium meetings, workshops and conferences to discuss and contribute to the development of educational standards and

culturally-responsive curriculum. The Cultural Standards are one of the major products of this work.

If I tried to list everyone's name it wouldn't be fair because I would leave some out. Yet, so many of you stand out in my memory as wonderful, sincere advocates. From December, 1996 to August 2000, we met in various

remote sites in Alaska and beyond: Chena Hot Springs, Sitka, St. Mary's, Bethel, Dillingham, Kotzebue, Kodiak, Anchorage, New Mexico, New Zealand and Hawaii.

All the entities that came together, especially in statewide and regional consortium meetings, shared educational standards and curricular ideas in one large room, much like the way the Elders describe the *qasgi* (community house) when it was used to host educational gatherings in the past.

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***"It was the Elders who brought their understanding and perspective to the work that is the most memorable experience for me."***

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Today, conference gatherings are set up so everyone is dispersed and attends when and what they want. But having participated in eight or so consortium meetings hosted each year in a different region, there was excellent attendance by all participants with time and dollars well spent in my opinion. I am proud of the work we accomplished as a team throughout the past five years.

After August 31, 2000 the regional coordinators role with AFN is ending and the regional organizations sponsoring the Tribal College initiatives will take on the responsibility to carry out the regional coordination of AKRSI initiatives. As for now, I am content and happy to have served in this capacity and through the transition period this fall; regional coordination will continue under AFN.

Finally, thank you, *quyana* NSF, AFN and U of A for this great effort that I had a chance to be a part of.

Sincerely,

Barbara Liu ✨



*Elder Henry Alakayak of Manokotak (second from right) shares how they work on curriculum through Ciulistet in the Dillingham area. Charles Kashatok (third from right), LKSD representative and currently a principal at Nunapitchuk School, listens closely. Photo taken by Dorothy Larson at a 1998 statewide consortium.*

# Aleut/Alutiiq Region

## Camp Qungaayuġ 2000

by Moses L. Dirks

Culture camps are the place to be this time of the year. It is exciting to see the children and Elders interacting and learning about what their ancestors did long before they got discovered by outsiders.

This will be the third year that we have had this type of activity for school-aged children. This year Camp Qungaayuġ 2000 had over 50 students registered for the camp. Thirty-eight mentor Elders were hired to teach the topics.

A lot of the credit goes to the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative and the Alaska Rural Challenge for making this possible. Partial funding from these organizations have reawakened or revitalized the cultural practices

the Unangan People had in the past. The local entities have been very generous in contributing not only labor force, but help sponsor the culture camp. Without their support, the event would not have been a success. Special thanks to the Qawalangin Tribe for all the extra hours that they put into the camp planning.

The topics that are presented by the Elders and mentors include the following:

1. Sea mammal butchering (Algaġ)

2. Unangan dance (Aġaġ)
3. Unangan baskets (Aygagasiġ)
4. Asxuġ
5. Bentwood hats (Chagudaġ)
6. Boat safety and Iqyaġ
7. Ulaġ
8. Qalimaġiġ fish preparation
9. Food preparation (Qaqaġ)
10. Intertidal studies (Aguġ)
11. Beach Seining (Kudmachġ)
12. Plantlore I & II (Tanachngangin)
13. Storytelling

The Elders spearheaded the classes, which taught exclusively in traditional Unangan ways of doing things. Unangan language was used by the Elders and mentors to perpetuate the relearning of the Unangan cultural activities.

Camp Qungaayuġ commenced August 14, 2000 and continued through August 19, 2000. The last day was celebrated with a potluck. Unangan food and dances were performed to cap off the festivities. Each Elder/mentor and student received a sweatshirt with a Camp Qungaayuġ logo on it and a certificate of participation. This year we invited Unangan students from Adak, Atka, Nikolski and Akutan. Students from other villages have a lot to share with the larger communities.

We had a great time learning and meeting new people.

For more information about Camp Qungaayuġ call Harriet Berikoff, Qawalangin Tribe (907) 581-2920 or Moses L. Dirks at (907) 581-5837 ✖



*Song and dance were enjoyed by all during the beautiful evenings on the beach at the science/culture camp at Katenai on Afognak Island.*



*Julie Knagin, Heidi Christiansen, Ole Mahle and Marsha Parker worked together to bend the steamed spruce rim around a form at the science-culture camp at Katenai on Afognak Island. This rim was later used in a drum that was made for Sally Ash, a visitor from the village of Nanwalek. The drum was made by the students who attended the camp with help from Jim and Bonnie Dillard.*



*Nasquluk (kelp) was laid on top of the prepared spruce rims which were laid on top of layer of nasquluk, rocks and fire. This combination created the steam necessary to bend the wood for drum rims. Jim Dillard worked with students and adults to make this a highlighted event during both camps.*

# Southeast Region

by *Andy Hope*

The Southeast Alaska Native Education Forum (SEANEF) took place in Juneau, June 22–24, 2000. The general purpose of the forum was to develop regional Native education action plans, modeled on the action plans produced by the participants in the statewide Native Education Summit that took place in Juneau, March 1–4, 2000 and reported in the last SOP newsletter.

Following are summaries of the respective action plans/recommendations of the SEANEF working groups:

The Southeast Alaska Native Language Consortium working group reviewed accomplishments and activities since the last meeting in October 1998. The working group outlined a list of 20 concerns that should be addressed in specific action plans by consortium members.

The Southeast Alaska Native Educators Association working group started a list of Native educators in southeast Alaska and recommended that SEANEA reorganize.

SEANEA will meet in the fall in conjunction with the Alaska Native Brotherhood/Sisterhood convention.

The Native education-working group expressed serious concern and made several recommendations about

the high school qualifying examination that is scheduled to be implemented in 2002.

The Southeast Alaska Tribal College (SEATC) working group recommended that its interim trustees meet in Juneau in August, 2000 to formally adopt bylaws and to appoint trustees.

The curriculum working group adopted a two-month action plan focusing on the “I Am Salmon” curriculum project. Participants from respective school districts will work over the summer to develop resources for presentation on the web. An “I Am Salmon” website workshop will be sponsored by One Reel of Seattle and will take place at Evergreen School August 30–31.

For more detailed information and reports on the Southeast Alaska Native Education Forum, visit the ANKN website at [www.ankn.uaf.edu](http://www.ankn.uaf.edu). ✨

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