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IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Proceedings from the Alaska Native Studies Conference

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Century

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Indigenous Self-Determination in Education in Alaska: How Can Communities Get There?

Diane Hirshberg and Alexandra Hill

Background

Public education in the US has long been based on local control. Education is a state rather than a federal responsibility, with almost all states delegating control to local school boards. And 90 percent of those local boards oversee small districts with fewer than a dozen schools and enrollments under 5,000 (NCES 2011). Despite this nominal local control, members of diverse communities have often felt they lacked control of their children's schools and were disconnected from what their children were being taught. Indigenous students in particular were often forced to attend boarding schools far from their homes—schools that had the explicit goal of assimilating them into the majority culture and where they were sometimes abused (Hirshberg 2008).

Today the vast majority of Alaska Native students attend schools in their home communities. However, many of the schools are failing to educate these students. Alaska Native students today drop out at rates triple the national average, and most who attend college need remedial work (Martin and Hill 2009, McDiarmid and Hill 2010). While non-Native student achievement mirrors or even exceeds national averages, Alaska Native student achievement is generally poor, particularly in small villages. In 2011 Alaska Natives made up 22.5 percent of students in grades 7–12 but 41.2 percent of the dropouts from those grades. They had a dropout rate of 8.5 percent, compared

with 4.7 percent for all students in those grades (EED 2012). The high school graduation rate for all Alaska students in 2011–2012 was 69.6 percent but just 53.9 percent among Alaska Native students—the lowest among all racial and ethnic groups in the state (EED 2012). In 2011 Alaska Natives had a dropout rate of 8.5 percent for students in grades 7–12, compared with 4.7 percent for all students in those grades (EED 2012).

There have been numerous efforts to improve schooling for Alaska Native children, including innovations in curricula, teacher professional development, education summits, systemic reforms, and programs aimed at getting students more interested in learning. But none of these efforts have had broad, sustained effects on students or communities. Successes have been intermittent, or only for relatively small groups of students.

Purpose of Paper

As non-Native education researchers who study issues of education policy in Alaska broadly, including challenges in and outcomes of formal schooling for Alaska Native students, we are interested in identifying what might lead to schools better meeting the needs of Alaska's Indigenous students. Recently, we looked at promising models of formal schooling for Indigenous students around the globe and found that self-determination and local control over education appear to be very important in helping improve education outcomes (Authors 2011, 2012). But in Alaska, many communities have not succeeded in exercising local control to create schools that reflect their aspirations for their children's education. In this paper we examine the historical, social, legal, and political factors that

challenge efforts by Alaska Native communities to control their children's schools. We then discuss potential ways they could have more say in their children's education—as American communities typically do—and provide some examples where this is happening in Alaska.

The debate around self-determination in education in Alaska is not new; Indigenous peoples have been struggling to gain control over schools for years. Major shifts toward more local control of education in Alaska, from the building of rural high schools as a result of the *Tobeluk v. Lind* consent decree to the development of Regional Education Attendance Areas to creation of the Yupiit School District were the result of enormous and sustained efforts by Indigenous activists, educators, and policy makers (for more on these changes see Cotton 1984; Kawagley 1995; Ongtooguk 2003). However, there remain many barriers to Indigenous peoples in Alaska having genuine full control of their own schools; it is these that we address in this paper.

It is important to emphasize at the start that we are not making recommendations to Alaska Native people about the best courses of action around education. While we do research on and in Indigenous communities and schools therein, and collaborate with Alaska Native researchers, our roles remain those of allies and of outsiders who provide a different perspective. We bring both a Western academic perspective and strong advocacy for the rights of Indigenous communities. Thus, we hope the discussion in this paper provides a lens that is useful for Indigenous communities, policy makers, and education

reformers as they make decisions about how best to provide formal schooling for their children.

Context for Self-Determination in Education

The United Nations has recognized self-determination in education as a human-rights issue. Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2007 and endorsed by the US in December 2010, says:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language. (Article 14 of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)

The Indigenous people of the Americas traditionally educated their children through family- and community-based practices, passing their knowledge, skills, and traditions forward to the next generation. But after European settlers arrived, Indigenous children began to attend formal schools. In the early 18th century, many tribes in the southeast (including

Cherokee, Choctaw, and others) had schools and high literacy rates. Those schools disappeared as tribes were forced from their lands, and no similar schools were restored for over a century and a half. In the 1960s the Navajo tribe worked with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the US Office of Economic Opportunity, and a nonprofit group, Demonstration in Navajo Education, to establish a community-controlled school. They eventually established the Rough Rock Demonstration School in Rough Rock, Arizona, the first contemporary school with an all-Indigenous, locally elected governing board (Roessel Jr. 1968). Shortly after that, the first tribally controlled community college, Navajo Community College (now Diné College), was established in Many Farms, Arizona (Manuelito 2005).

In 1975 Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, (Public Law 93-638, 25 U.S.C. 450 et seq.), which formalized mechanisms for tribes to take responsibility for federally funded programs. This law gave tribes the option of applying to BIA-operated schools and amended the Johnson-O'Malley Act to create parent advisory boards in schools receiving federal funds for Indian education programs (1). The self-determination act has been amended a number of times. The first major amendments were in 1978, and the changes in some ways diminished the ability of tribes to fully control education, for example, by not allowing the inclusion of tribal-school funding in annual funding agreements but instead calling for annual appropriations approved by the secretary of the interior (1978 amendments to the code).

There are now more than 125 tribal schools serving over 28,000 students across the United States (Bordeaux 2011),

but none are in Alaska. Recognition of the right to self-determination in education continues to be debated at the national level; for example, President Clinton recognized this right in 1998 (American Indian and Alaska Native Education Executive Order 13096), but President Bush overturned it in order to require tribes to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (American Indian and Alaska Native Education Executive Order 13336).

Current Situation in Alaska

The potential for more local control exists within Alaska statute and regulation. Both Regional Education Attendance Areas (REAs) and school districts are governed by local school boards who make curriculum decisions and set graduation requirements within broad guidelines established by the state. In some places that potential is exercised, with charter schools, language-immersion programs, place-based education, and whole district reforms, as are described later in this paper. In other places, local communities are not as actively engaged in controlling their schools (Dinero 2004).

Almost all Alaska Native children, both in remote villages and in Anchorage and other urban areas, are educated in public schools that depend largely on state funding. There is one tribally operated charter home school with fewer than 20 students, one small K-12 private Inupiat immersion school, and a handful of private schools. The Bureau of Indian Education doesn't operate any schools in Alaska, but there are BIA-funded programs within public school districts—such as those operated under the Johnson-O'Malley Act, to provide

support to Indian students in public schools. Rural (and urban) students also have the option of attending boarding schools. Mt. Edgecumbe in Sitka is the only state-operated regional high school. Three school districts also operate boarding schools, and a handful of students choose each year to leave Alaska and attend Chemawa Indian School in Oregon or to enroll in non-Native boarding schools.

Alaska's state government delegates responsibility for the daily operation of schools to either local or Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) school boards, which make policy affecting programs of local schools, within the confines of general state laws and regulations. The state currently supports schools in any community with at least ten students.

All organized boroughs and first-class cities outside boroughs are required to operate school districts. In areas without boroughs or first-class cities, Regional Educational Attendance Areas operate schools. Those REAAs vary considerably in size—one village/one school sites such as Kashunamiut in Chevak; small districts with a handful of schools, such as Yupiit; and large districts like the Lower Kuskokwim School District, which has 27 schools in 23 villages spread out over 22,000 square miles. No public schools are tribally operated.

As noted earlier, many Alaska schools, particularly small schools in remote villages, do not serve their Alaska Native students well. In the 30 rural districts enrolling predominantly Indigenous students, the 2012 graduation rates ranged from a low of 12.5 percent to 100 percent, with two-thirds graduating fewer than 70 percent of their students, including eight districts

where fewer than 50 percent of students graduated (EED 2012 district report cards).

Rural and remote Alaska schools face many challenges, ranging from high teacher turnover to ever-increasing fuel costs that strain budgets. In many places there is also a disconnect between the community and the educators, who are overwhelmingly non-Native—only about 5 percent of certificated teachers are Indigenous people, and fewer yet are administrators. Most are also from outside Alaska; the University of Alaska system prepares about 20 percent of the teachers hired by districts each year (Hill, Hirshberg, et. al. 2013).

Across the state there have been concerted efforts to improve the education of Alaska Native students. In 2010 the Alaska State Board of Education adopted the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools, which were developed by Alaska Native educators in collaboration with Indigenous elders and community members in the 1990s (Alaska Comprehensive Center 2012). The Alaska Federation of Natives in partnership with the University of Alaska Fairbanks operated the federally funded Rural Systemic Initiative for over a decade, in recognition of the need for Native communities to create their own approaches to improving school outcomes (Barnhardt 2012). And as noted before, in some districts and individual schools, parents and community members have created a different relationship with the schools—and the curriculum and pedagogy reflect the culture of the local people (2).

But overall, the public schools in rural areas are not culturally responsive. There is little parent and community involvement in many places, and indeed the lack of parental

engagement is often cited by teachers and administrators as a cause of poor student achievement. At the same time, non-Native educators don't necessarily see Indigenous parents as partners in educating children, with valuable information to share, but rather as adults who need to support teachers by helping with classroom tasks (Dinero 2004 and Jester 2002). Schools operate on the traditional school calendar, which allows students easy participation in summer subsistence activities but not in spring and fall hunting and whaling. In the classroom, educators generally use Western ways of teaching. The curriculum is driven by state content standards and relies on curriculum packages developed outside Alaska.

National as well as state forces contribute to the current situation, from accountability requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and how the state chooses to implement them, to the state's curriculum standards and grade-level expectations. This is not to say these standards are not in some ways helpful. The accountability mandates of NCLB revealed the big achievement gap between Native and non-Native students and allowed educators to track whether new initiatives were helping improve student learning. Still, accountability measures may also be having unintended consequences; when the state first opened secondary schools in villages in the late 1970s, attendance and graduation rates increased dramatically, but since the late 1990s dropout rates have risen (Goldsmith et. al. 2004; Martin and Hill 2009).

Self-determination alone won't remedy the situation described above. In an earlier paper (Hill, Hirshberg, and Argetsinger 2012), we describe how places such as Greenland

that have achieved more self-determination still face challenges in improving student achievement—in part because of the legacy of the colonial school system. For example, Inuk teachers in Greenland who attended school under the Danish system struggle with adopting new ways of teaching and interacting with students—because of their background in the Danish system. They often have to go through what one Greenlandic scholar describes as “mental decolonization” (Lynge 2011). But Greenlanders now have control as they try to transform their education system, rather than having to simultaneously work for that control. In Alaska, the barriers to Indigenous control over education span multiple areas: legal, institutional, political, and internal.

Barriers to Local Control

The path toward Indigenous self-determination in education in Alaska is complex and multifaceted. We address the broad areas where there are individual types of barriers but do not intend this to suggest that the path toward change is somehow linear, or that all these areas have to be addressed before meaningful change can be achieved.

Legal and Institutional Issues

US Law. US law has mixed and complex mechanisms for Indigenous communities to run their own schools. The 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (Public Law 93–638) authorized funding for tribes to operate elementary and secondary schools as part of self-determination contracts, under the formula developed pursuant to section 1128 of the Education Amendments of 1978 (25 U.S.C. 2008)

and the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978 (25 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.). But that changed just three years later, when Congress passed the Education Amendments of 1978 (25 U.S.C. 2008) and the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act of 1978 (25 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.), which statutorily prohibited funding for elementary and secondary schools from being included in annual funding agreements (per 25 U.S.C. 458cc(b)(4)). This change meant that tribes do not have the same self-determination and self-governance rights in education as they do in health or other broad areas. (Congressional Research Service, personal communication via Office of Senator Mark Begich 2012).

Still, tribes have the authority to operate their own schools via annual appropriations from the secretary of the interior, and as noted earlier, there are over 125 tribally operated schools elsewhere in the United States, both on and off reservations. But there are no BIA-funded, tribally operated schools in Alaska. Alaska only had a few BIA-operated schools at the time the self-determination act was passed, and those were closed within a few years of when the law was implemented.

Moreover, in Alaska there is little “Indian country,” as it is defined in other states—and where tribes have broad self-government powers on reservations—due to both the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and subsequent US Supreme Court rulings on this subject, such as *Alaska v. Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government* (US Supreme Court, No. 96-1577, decided Feb. 25, 1998) (3). It’s difficult to interpret how this difference affects the ability of Alaska Native tribes to operate BIA-funded, tribally operated schools. Recently there

was a proposal to increase the tribal authority in education by allowing tribes to operate Elementary and Secondary Education Act title programs within schools that are located on tribal lands. The proposal included a definition of tribal lands for Alaska that would potentially extend this authority to tribal governments within the state. However, neither this proposal nor ESEA authorization have moved forward (4).

Law in Alaska. The Alaska Constitution says, “The legislature shall by general law establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the state . . .” (Article VII Section I Alaska Constitution). The state did not initially provide schooling to all Alaska Native students, but since the mid-1970s it has operated schools across the state; only communities with fewer than ten students don’t have local schools. The legislature and governor determine school funding, and the state Board of Education sets broad policy, such as accountability and curriculum standards.

Governance of local schools is nominally in the hands of district or REAA school boards, though in practice many boards defer on key decisions to the superintendents they hire. Curriculum and hiring decisions are made at the district or school level. Communities within REAAs have local advisory school boards, but as their name indicates, their power is only advisory except as otherwise specified by the REAA regional school boards. This means that in many—but not all—villages there is no real local decision-making on key educational issues, including what is taught, how it is taught, and when it is taught. In some cases school districts or REAAs draw from single tribal areas, but in other cases they encompass

multiple tribes, with multiple cultures and languages, and that complexity makes exercising tribal control through REAA school boards problematic.

Accountability Issues. Another institutional barrier is that of accountability requirements from the federal government, in the form of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. That act requires state education agencies to implement accountability measures, including standardized testing every year for students in grades 3–10; to report by school on standardized test results in predetermined disaggregated ways, as well as dropout and graduation rates; to define adequate yearly progress (AYP) on those measures; and to undertake remedies if schools do not make adequate progress.

The NCLB act is overdue for reauthorization or revision, but little has changed other than adding a process for states to apply for waivers from some of the act's provisions. Publicly funded tribal schools are still subject to NCLB mandates, and generally the AYP requirements are those of the state where the schools are located—although the school boards or tribal governing bodies may seek approval for a different measure (NCLB 2001). This means that while tribally controlled schools may have their own definitions of success for their students and their schools, they are also required to report on measures determined by their state education agency—no matter how different the definitions of achievement and measures of success may be.

Lack of Indigenous Educators. Only about 5 percent of certified teachers in Alaska are Alaska Native. This is a serious impediment to creating schools that are not only tribally controlled, but also based in local cultures, worldviews, and

ways of teaching and learning. Non-Native teachers can, of course, successfully teach in Indigenous communities—and they can learn new pedagogy and content—but they need time to do this. They must make an intentional effort to develop the knowledge and expertise to connect with students from another culture and effectively implement materials and methods that are culturally relevant. Many non-Native educators are not in Alaska long enough to do this effectively.

Political and Social Barriers. There is broad political opposition to tribal sovereignty in Alaska. In 2001, for example, two leaders of the Alaska state legislature wrote the secretary of the interior asking the secretary to review the status of tribes in Alaska and potentially end recognition of Alaska Native villages as political entities with governmental authority (Cornell and Kalt 2003). Other issues involving sovereignty—in particular subsistence rights but also land access, tribal courts, and resource development—are all areas of significant political contention between the state government and tribal governments in Alaska.

The issue of tribal control of education has not been discussed broadly in Alaska (5). But there is consistent pressure to improve rural education by establishing regional secondary boarding schools that would once again force older children to leave their home communities to get high school diplomas. Cornell and Kalt (2003) note that advocates for regionalizing services for rural Alaska argue that it would increase the efficiency of service delivery and save money—arguments also made for regional boarding schools. But they found that for many residents of Alaska Native villages, regionalization under ANCSA via regional nonprofit corporations has not led to

more effective delivery of services, and more important, that it may set back tribal self-determination and undermine federal recognition of tribes (Cornell and Kalt 2003).

Internal Barriers. All the barriers addressed above address issues external to Indigenous communities—federal and state laws, political issues involving policy makers or non-Natives, and issues of gaining fiscal control from external authorities.

But one barrier to self-determination may be internal, based in the mind-set of some Alaska Native people and communities, as Smith (2004) and Lynge (2011) found in their own national contexts of Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Greenland. As noted earlier, Indigenous communities do have ways of exercising more power over education under Alaska's current political and legal structures. If they acted on the legal powers they already have, Indigenous communities could create change—by having school boards that demand change, hiring superintendents who respond to their wishes and implement programs that meet their visions, and encouraging parents to be more active in parent councils. But the colonial legacy, including abuse, has left many Alaska Native parents simultaneously deferential to teachers and administrators and fundamentally distrustful of schools (Cottrell 2010).

Options for Moving Toward Self-Determination

Alaska Natives have a number of options for developing local control and self-determination in education. Some of these are steps they can take without changes in current legal, institutional, fiscal, or political structures; others would require changing the barriers identified above. But any actions require

changes in the sense individuals and communities have about their power to effect change, and their confidence that they best know their children's educational needs.

Immediate Options. Communities have a number of options for creating locally driven schools—and some have already taken actions toward that goal. Those include developing charter schools, strengthening school boards, using home-schooling options, and creating private schools.

Charter Schools. Charter schools are publicly funded schools developed by educators, parents, and community members to provide an alternative to existing local schools. They operate subject to the approval of local school boards. There are three Alaska Native-focused charter schools in the state: Ayaprun Elitnaurvik Yupik Immersion School in Bethel, the Alaska Native Cultural Charter School in Anchorage, and the Effie Kokrine Early College Charter School in Fairbanks. These schools vary considerably from the focus on Yupik immersion in early grades at Ayaprun to the integration of traditional and contemporary knowledge at Effie Kokrine. But there are limits to what charter schools can do. Alaska has a "strong" charter school law, which means they don't have as much autonomy as in some other states. For example, decisions on standardized assessments are made by both the state and the district where charter schools are located, and professional-development offerings can be mandated by districts and in some cases the state; content standards are set at the state level. Still, charter schools are able to offer innovative programs that can reflect local cultures, knowledge, and Indigenous ways of teaching and learning.

Strengthening School Boards. Another option is to strengthen rural district school boards so that board members—who are generally Alaska Native—and the parents they represent can truly exercise the control of the districts that they nominally have. School boards are a potential source of real power if communities elect strong members who represent their interests, and if the board members exercise all their powers not only in hiring but directing superintendents to develop and implement policies and practices relevant for their communities.

A powerful example of such power is in the North Slope Borough School District, where the district has developed the Inupiaq Learning Framework and is now developing curriculum and pedagogical approaches to create an Inupiaq education system based fully in the Inupiaq culture but also preparing students to succeed in the Western education system. The school board has driven this reform and hired a superintendent who is implementing its vision. The reform effort is based on extensive work with elders, educators, and community members across all borough villages, to determine what children should know when they graduate.

Home Schooling and Private Schools. Another option is one Maori school reformers in New Zealand used in the 1980s: they walked away from the state-funded schools and created a parallel system without public funding, using only local resources (Smith 2003). In Alaska it is relatively easy to open private schools, with limited bureaucratic procedures. Private schools operate under few regulations other than basic safety requirements and minimal standardized-testing mandates (a national test must be given in grades 4, 6, and 8). Home

schooling is also allowed and quite common. One community, Chickaloon, has developed the Ya Ne Dah Ah tribal school as a tribally supported entity, using a charter correspondence school model for the mainstream curriculum offerings and also offering Ahtna Athabascan history, language, music, and arts classes taught by community members.

Long-Term Options. To fully take control over their children's schooling, Alaska's Indigenous peoples need legal, structural, and fiscal changes that could take years to enact—as well as significant political will. We do not know all the changes that would be required, but here we discuss a few.

One step, which would be difficult to achieve but would be far-reaching, would be to make a major change in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act—to put into code a different definition of “Indian country” in Alaska to allow for tribally controlled schools under current Bureau of Indian Education rules. But it is also possible that such a complex change in the law would not be necessary. We are not sure whether under current law Alaska Native tribal governments could simply choose not to send their children to state-funded public schools and instead apply to have tribally operated schools, funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, in their communities. It is one possibility they could explore, though it would take congressional and presidential support to ensure sufficient funding within the BIE system to fully fund all the costs of such an effort.

Another broad change would be modifying P.L. 93-638 to allow compacting in education. Health care is the one area where Alaska Natives have attained broad sovereignty, via 1994

revisions to the self-determination act that allowed Alaska Native organizations to compact with the Indian Health Service to provide services. Could tribal health care be a model for a large-scale system of Indigenous control of social services? A potential barrier is that individual villages cannot contract to provide health-care services if they are within an area already served by an Alaska Native regional health entity. Would this restriction translate to education, meaning that individual villages wanting to run their own schools might not be allowed to do so if there was a regional Alaska Native education entity?

Discussion

In this brief, we have laid out some ideas for sovereignty in education for Indigenous communities and tribes to consider. There is, as we noted, significant change already happening in isolated parts of Alaska. But there isn't broad movement toward changing the structure of schooling for Indigenous students statewide. If changing Alaska's schools is a goal for Alaska Native parents, policy makers, and communities, wider and deeper reforms are needed.

Only the Alaska Native communities themselves can define the best way forward. But true Indigenous community control will require an attitude shift among individuals and communities. Whether this requires the sort of "mental decolonization" work being done in Greenland (Lyng 2011), or whether people simply need reminding that they have this power and can use it, is something we can't determine. Tribal governments have legal powers to negotiate as sovereign nations

with the state and federal governments, despite the refusal of Alaska's state government to recognize these rights.

The issue of fiscal resources will be important, because state and federal funding for public schools comes with requirements, such as curricular and accountability mandates. Consideration of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper. Many communities in rural Alaska do not contribute funds to schooling but depend entirely on state and federal government resources. But some people have asked: what should the role of ANCSA corporations be? Some of the corporations are successful financially, and others are less so. Could the wealthier corporations, or their affiliated not-for-profit foundations, provide sufficient support to create independent schooling options? Would these schools be sustainable? The privately funded Kamehameha Schools in Hawaii, free from the fiscal constraints of either the state or the Bureau of Indian Affairs, have a significant ability to set their own agenda. Can Alaska communities marshal sufficient resources to do something similar without relying on the BIA, the state, or even the corporations? Should they have to? That is something we cannot answer at present.

It is important to point out that the examples of educational change we have presented are only from rural and remote Indigenous parts of Alaska and do not address the urban communities of Anchorage, Fairbanks, or Juneau. Different questions have to be addressed in diverse, multicultural communities: should Indigenous people in urban Alaska create their own schools within the boundaries of urban districts, or perhaps consider the way the Aboriginal Enhancement

Agreements work in British Columbia? Those agreements provide extra support to aboriginal students attending schools that may be majority non-Native. Can self-determination be achieved when the population in urban areas includes Indigenous peoples from many different tribes and different cultural and linguistic heritages? This is an important issue that needs more exploration.

That said, we believe the barriers to change described in this paper are not insurmountable. Creating Indigenous schools will not be easy, but it is possible so long as people believe they can do it. Indeed, as the Maori in New Zealand have shown, it may be that people need to “just do it,” regardless of resources, and once they start, the way forward will become increasingly clear.

Endnotes

- i. The Bureau of Indian Education, formerly the Office of Indian Education Programs, sits within the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It was renamed in 2006. Prior to 2006, federally funded schools in Alaska were commonly called “BIA Schools.”
- ii. Some examples include the Effie Kokrine Charter School in Fairbanks, the Ayaprun Elitnaurvik Yup’ik Immersion School in Bethel, the Alaska Native Cultural Charter School in Anchorage, as well as the Math in a Cultural Context curriculum-development initiative and teacher-preparation programs for rural and Indigenous schools, such as Cross Cultural Educator Development program known as XCED and PITAAS (Preparing Indigenous Teachers and Administrators for Alaska’s Schools).

- iii. Alaska does have one reservation, Metlakatla, but the education there is provided through state-funded public schools.
- iv. Tribal Education Departments National Assembly. “Tribal Education Departments National Assembly Proposed Statutory Language for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.” May 6, 2011. Boulder, CO: Author. Retrieved from http://www.tedna.org/proposed_esea_language_5-6-11.pdf Along side this proposal, there was a discussion of using the Definition of Indian land from the Impact Aid code (20 U.S.C. Title 20 Education Chapter 70 Strengthening and Improvement of Elementary and Secondary Schools Subchapter VIII-Impact Aid Sec 7713-Definitions) to define how tribes could operate their own schools even in Alaska. That tribal land definition is as follows: (I) held in trust by the United States for individual Indians or Indian tribes; (II) held by individual Indians or Indian tribes subject to restrictions on alienation imposed by the United States; (III) conveyed at any time under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act [43 U.S.C. 1601 et seq.] to a Native individual, Native group, or village or regional corporation; (IV) public land owned by the United States that is designated for the sole use and benefit of individual Indians or Indian tribes.
- v. A group of Indigenous and non-Native educators and advocates, including the first author of this paper, have engaged in work around this topic supported by a Harvard University Nation Building project.

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Cup'ik Dreams: Chevak Teacher Education Initiative

Nancy Boxler

The College of Education at the University of Alaska Anchorage is working in partnership with the Kashunamiut School District, which is the school for the Cup'ik village and community of Chevak, Alaska. Chevak is located on the Bering Sea coast of Alaska and, like most villages in this region, is a traditional Indigenous community.

This unique partnership involves the local school, university, and community in supporting 12 paraprofessionals in becoming certified teachers in elementary education. The 12 community members are from Chevak and speak the local language, which is Cup'ik. They have been teachers' aides, and the partnership, known as Cup'ik Dreams, embraces the concepts of inclusivity and culturally relevant teaching. The university courses reflect both Western and Cup'ik cultures and philosophies.

By December 2013 it is expected that about half of the group will have earned their associate's degrees. This initiative is providing important insights about the power of collaboration as an Indigenous community, school, and university come together to create a space that supports cultural and language revitalization.

During the April 2013 Alaska Native Studies Conference, a panel consisting of myself, John Atchak (chairman of the Kashunamiut School District), Larry Parker (superintendent of the Kashunamiut School District), and members of the Chevak cohort (Laura Atcharian, Elsie Ayuluk, Cora Charles, Twila Chayalkun, Susie Friday-Tall, Catherine Joe, Jacquelyn Kashatok, Priscilla Matchian, Mary Matchian, Neva Mathias,