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**OVERVIEW:
GRADUA-
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WORKING
GROUP**

Tutors work to boost Native students

Dropout rates are higher, test scores are lower than for students overall

By MEGAN HOLLAND
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(04/09/09 21:13:18)

Shafts of sunlight stream through the windows and illuminate the four sixth-graders gathered around the table with Kerri Wood.

Wood is working to solve a vexing problem: Get these kids up to grade level.

Wood is the Indian-education tutor at Tyson Elementary in Mountain View. She is part of a multi-pronged effort involving the Anchorage School District, nonprofits and tribal groups to close the test-score gap between Anchorage's 4,200 Native students and the rest of the district's 48,000 kids.

It's not just poorer test results. Native students have also historically had the highest dropout rate in Anchorage.

Wood works for the school district but her salary is funded by federal Indian Education Act money. The district spends about \$2 million of federal money a year on tutors like her. And while administrators say modest gains have been made, the gap is still big.

Last year, scores took a dive. Results in math, reading and writing lagged behind all students by some 15 percentage points.

In December, with the district saying more Native kids are moving into the city from rural Alaska, the School Board tapped the district's own general fund for the first time to increase the number of tutors by a third.

"The needs of Alaska Native/American Indian students are profound," the district said.

STRADDLING TWO WORLDS

Among the grim statistics from last school year's data:

- By the end of ninth grade, only 58 percent of Native students had enough credits to be on track to graduate in four years, compared with 77 percent of all students.
- Only 1 percent of Natives took higher-level high school courses compared with 8 percent of all students.
- Two-thirds of Native students didn't get their diplomas after four years of high school.

The problem starts at a young age.

Many education experts, including former Alaska education commissioner Roger Sampson, say that if a student is not reading at grade level by the third grade, the student's chances of ever catching up are slim. It is an indicator of the future dropout rate, he has said.

Last year, 67 percent of Native third-grade students in Anchorage read at grade level compared with 81 percent of all students.

Educators don't know exactly what's wrong.

The problems are varied, they say. Teachers who reward the most animated students, when Native children are taught to be demure. Kids who show up at school without breakfast. Westernized curriculum that teaches young children unfamiliar words like teacup, cow and sailboat.

In a grant application to fund an upcoming program for Native boys, whom the district consider to be the most vulnerable, the district wrote that many Native homes are not highly verbal. Another problem may be how the students are being taught. Native boys, in particular, are not reached by many of the usual instructional methods, the grant application says.

"We are not understanding the home culture," said Doreen Brown, the district's Indian Education supervisor, who has the job of solving the puzzle. "We are so good at the academic culture we don't understand the home culture. We don't understand the home language. We, as educators, don't understand the experiences that these kids are coming to us with, and it's very different than white middle class. It's not bad, it's just very different."

Brown, who is Yup'ik, knows many of these kids are straddling two worlds, just as she did growing up in Anchorage and graduating from Service High in the 1980s. "My people have been educated for thousands of years, tens of thousands of years. We've been educated, we've survived in the harshest environments. And I can look at my own life and I'm technically only the third generation to go to school. That's not a large amount of time," she said.

Brown is in charge of 45 employees, including Wood. She runs summer enrichment programs and after-school tutoring. She works on dropout prevention. She does crisis-intervention. And she secures federal grant money, or any grants she can find, to make it all happen.

"What are we not doing right? I think one of the strongest components is that we're not making (education) culturally responsive," she said.

"A lot of Native students don't want to be the center of attention. They don't want to raise their hands, 'I know the answer! I know the answer!'"

Before she became supervisor, when she worked directly with Native students, she would have kids practice raising their hands, she said.

Brown says there's not enough money to reach every kid. She has to be selective. In the end, tutors are placed at the schools with the highest population of Natives, and within those schools, it's the kids who score the worst who are tutored.

Brown says there are about 9,000 Natives and part-Natives who are eligible for the Indian Education services. She says her staff is reaching about 30 percent of them.

Asked if she thinks the tutoring is making a difference, she paused. "It can be effective. I think that our students and our parents need a point of contact. ... I would say most of my staff are very overwhelmed."

Research shows that if tutoring is to make a difference, students need to see their tutors at least three times a week for 30 minutes, she said. That's the formula. But sometimes, Brown says, that isn't happening.

Wood, at Tyson, said Native fifth-graders at the school aren't being tutored because of scheduling conflicts, and some of her sixth-graders get tutoring only twice a week.

SAFE LEARNING

Back in her classroom, Wood, who is Athabascan, asks sixth-grader La-Vera Wise about the noun she is looking at on the textbook page. "Is it a person, place or thing?"

She moves from one child to the next, reviewing each of the children's work as they locate proper nouns and common nouns. The four sixth-graders are too big for the undersized plastic chairs and low-hung table.

Wood works with 45 of Tyson's 140 Native kids.

She points to a sentence. "Can you find one here? Can you show me?" she asks, goading La-Vera.

Later, Wood explains she circles the children and watches over their shoulders to catch mistakes as they happen. She also prefers to correct them one-on-one, not in a group setting. "You need to create a safe learning environment," she says.

Sometimes Wood re-teaches what the children's teachers have already covered. Other times, she pre-teaches so kids are ready with answers and concepts.

"Sometimes it's setting them up for success," Brown explained of the tactical ego boosts. "It feels good."

Every month, the children are tested and their scores combed over.

"Looking at the data and making adjustments to teaching style is something that we take very seriously here," Wood said. "If things aren't working, we have to change it. And if it's still not working, we need to change it again."

She said the goal is to get the kids up to grade level so they don't have to see her anymore.

La-Vera, who is 13, lives in Anchorage with her stepsister while the rest of her family lives in the Western Alaska village of Upper Kalskag. Her father, Andrew Wise, said he thinks the tutoring is making a difference -- it's one of the reasons he lets her live in the city.

It is important that his daughter graduate from high school, he said. "I put myself through school," he said of getting his diploma. "It made a difference."

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Editor's Note: *This is the first in an occasional series examining the education of Alaska Native students in Anchorage public schools. Native students have some of the lowest standardized test scores in the city, and the highest dropout rates.*

Helping Native students

Series at a glance

Today: Hands-on help -- In-classroom tutoring of Native students.

Thursday: A unique experiment -- A private nonprofit takes over some classrooms.

April 17: It starts at home -- Trying to get parents more involved.

Counting Native students

Test score results for ethnic groups are based on how students self-identify. In October, the number of Anchorage School District students who said they are Native on district forms was 4,200.

However, the number of students eligible for Native education services is 9,000. This larger number includes the students who are part Native. On school district forms, some of the additional students might self-identify as multiethnic.

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Anchorage Daily News

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Separate classes create comfort zone for Native students

Tribal nonprofit pays for Anchorage public school program

By MEGAN HOLLAND

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(04/23/09 21:28:26)

Walk into this Bartlett High School classroom and it may seem just like any other class in Anchorage. The teacher demonstrates math problems on the white board. The students look as if they need more sleep. The room is decorated in the chaos of inspirational quotes, posters and bric-a-brac.

But look more closely and you'll see that unlike the rest of the building where there's a rainbow of ethnicities, in here the students are all Native. And there's something else different about this classroom that's not easy to see: Unlike other teachers who work for the Anchorage School District, this teacher is privately employed.

This instructor and the ones in the adjacent rooms are from Cook Inlet Tribal Council Inc. and the students they teach at Bartlett are some of Anchorage's most at-risk of failing. The tribal nonprofit has taken on a unique role by persuading the school district to let it offer Native-only classes to tackle the problem of too many Native students falling behind or dropping out.

It is one of several efforts across the city by the district, nonprofits and tribal groups to raise the lagging test scores and high dropout rates of the district's 4,200 Native students. Last year, 64 percent of Native students were at grade level for reading and writing, compared with the district average of 81 percent of all students. In math, 58 percent were at grade level, while the district's average was 73 percent.

By the end of four years of high school, only a third of Natives graduate.

Those who work with the students say there's no clear answer why the statistics are so grim. Some of the reasons often cited are poverty, cultural differences, and parents who don't get involved because they are intimidated by the education system.

The Cook Inlet program, called Partners for Success, is at several middle and high schools. And it isn't alone in seeing the value of separating Native kids from other students. The district-run Elitnaurvik program at East High is doing the same.

The idea behind the separation is to create classrooms where lifestyle differences don't block Native kids' paths to success.

Anchorage school administrators acknowledged this cultural divide in a recent application for a grant to help Native boys. "Traditional values of modesty, cooperation, and sharing sometimes impede success in school," wrote administrators. "Calling attention to self and even eye contact with elders are bad manners. The rapid response expected in modern classrooms is unnatural."

Program administrators say they are creating environments where these traits are helpful, not harmful.

QUIET STUDENTS, LOUD STUDENTS

Bartlett has 320 Natives among its 1,700 students and most take at least one class in the Cook Inlet program, which is primarily funded by federal education grants.

Kids sign up for several reasons, administrators say. More of the staff are Native, which brings a level of comfort and familiarity in dealing with the adults. Classes are half the size of other classes in the high school, giving students more face-time with teachers. And the program emphasizes Native pride, boosting kids' self-esteem and making them feel more connected to the curriculum.

This means that in English class, poet and novelist Sherman Alexie is read.

In science class, tools and techniques of survival used by the first Alaskans are studied. And after school, traditional Native sports are practiced.

In one biology class, a moose heart was studied, then the teacher cooked it up for everyone to eat.

Another reason the kids sign up: Cook Inlet teachers have the reputation of being some of the best in the city.

On a recent visit to Mary Moran's algebra class, it seemed that reputation was earned on the basis of her ability to entertain her students while, perhaps slyly, teaching them something about math.

Bartlett principal Dan Gallego later explained that Moran uses humor to connect with the kids. She makes corny math jokes and exhibits an obsession with math that the students enjoy rolling their eyes at. One sign of the obsession: A 5-foot-long replica of a pencil with the engraving "Fractions are our friends" that hangs over her desk.

Moran began the class with an exercise on permutations and combinations. The students, mostly 10th and 11th graders, put their pencils to paper while she ambled around the class checking their progress.

Her classroom is adorned with evidence of another obsession: Elvis Presley. Photos of the King blanket the walls, and multiple life-size cutouts pose in the corners.

From the quiet boy slumped in his chair to the girl who sits straight up and asks lots of questions, each gets Moran's attention. She calls them "honey" and "babe" and often corrects their work by going to the dry-erase board to demonstrate. Then she says, "Are you with me?" and makes sure they are. She tells them to help each other.

What she's doing, program administrators say, is giving attention to each student regardless of how vocal or gregarious they are, creating an environment where quieter students can be right just as much as the louder students, and encouraging shared learning. It's a style of teaching that works well with these kids, administrators say.

"We see big growth, both socially and with their confidence," Moran later said. Kids come out of their shells, she said.

Tawni Whiting, an 18-year-old senior, said she started taking Cook Inlet classes after she struggled her freshman year. "It doesn't really make a difference if you're Native or not. You come in here and you get more help. Instead of one teacher for 30 kids, you have half that."

LOST AND FOUND

Program administrators say they are seeing results since Partners for Success started in the city schools in the early 2000s. The Cook Inlet students attend class more, drop out less, and have a better chance of graduating on time.

While about 11 percent of Anchorage Native students not participating in the program drop out each year, only 2 percent who take the Cook Inlet classes do. And while only a third of Native students are earning a high school diploma in four years, about 7 in 10 Natives who are in the program are.

Sheila Randazzo, a Cook Inlet family advocate at Bartlett, said some of the success may be because the program shrinks the size of the East Anchorage school, where a student can walk the crowded halls and see a sea of unknown faces day after day.

She believes that Natives, regardless of how long they've been in the city, do better in smaller schools that create an intimacy between students and teachers. Otherwise, she said, "Alaska Native people and students get lost."

The program is especially good for students who have recently moved into the city from the Bush, said principal Gallego. "When you come in from a village which has 90 kids in the school, then go to a school with 1,700 students, that is a huge deal," he said. "Some kids can cope with that. Some cannot."

A PEP TALK

On another recent school day, as Moran presided over a catch-up day in her algebra class, Cook Inlet counselor Gail Weinstein walked in with five minutes left before the bell.

Weinstein, who has an assertive but motherly tone, told the few seniors in the class that they needed to see her to review their after-graduation plans. To the others, she said, "It's time to really start to think about what you might want to do later on."

The students shuffled their papers, stretched their arms, and yawned, but listened. She had their attention.

In rapid-fire succession, she told them about summer opportunities with Native corporations and the Alaska Native Heritage Center. She reminded them of an upcoming Native arts summit.

Then she slowed down.

She talked about college. "Do not let the financial issues get in the way," she said, looking around the room. She reminded them of Native corporation scholarships and national funding sources for Natives.

Seconds before the bell rang, she made successive eye contact with as many kids as she could, and said: "You kids are our leaders."

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Raising a Graduate It's Everybody's Business

Everyone is a role model—be a good one.

Read with children.

Show you care. Smile at youths and say hi.

Help youths develop a vision for their future.

Get involved in your schools.

Catch youths being good and recognize them.

Help youths explore their pathways to graduation.

Provide positive challenges for youths.

Involve youths in decision-making.

Create opportunities for youths to volunteer.

Provide a safe and supportive home.

Graduation Opens the Doors to Future Opportunities

Alaska Department of Education & Early Development

Louie Flora

Subject: FW: student/teacher advisory programs

From: Henry_Mike [mailto:Henry_Mike@asdk12.org]
Sent: Friday, January 15, 2010 4:47 PM
To: Louie Flora
Cc: Graff_Ed; Olson_Robin; Comeau_Carol
Subject: RE: student/teacher advisory programs

Louie,
Below is listed some brief descriptions of advisory programs in the ASD.
Mike Henry

Service- The *Connections Program* within the Service High School Freshman Academy is a vital component of our smaller learning community. The purpose of this program is two-fold. One outcome of the program is to facilitate better connections among students and between students and staff while building an environment of mutual respect and community within the Freshmen Academy. The second outcome of the program is to devote time to assisting students in building success skills. Success skills are a broad range of skills students need in both their personal, academic, and eventually their professional lives and include communication skills, appreciating diversity, time management, problem solving, decision making and citizenship. The program was developed in partnership with district SEL personnel. We meet once a week for 50 minutes.

Chugiak-The student/teacher advisory program is set up for students identified by counselors and the Graduation coach. The focus is with 9th and 10th grade students with rare exception for 11th and 12th graders. All students are placed based on academic performance and not through behavioral issues. This is a program in which the advisor is able to work with classroom teachers and students to help with homework and study skills. The advisor spends part of the 52 minute period with the students working on study skills and personal choices they make for themselves. This component uses the Ripple Effects and "7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens" to help students understand the choices that they make and to create changes in their behaviors that will improve their academic performance.

Bartlett High School:

Our purpose is to insure that each student is known well by at least one adult in the building, an adult to whom the student can turn for help with both school related and personal issues. At BHS we are attempting to personalize school in order to better meet the needs of students. Statistically, reports indicate that ninth graders are failing at alarming rates. In general, comprehensive high schools are large and can be overwhelming for any student. An advisory program allows for a closer relationship to be made between a teacher and a student. The intent of advisory is to create a safety net to prevent our students from falling through the cracks or getting lost in the shuffle. For this school year, due to the structure of the 9th grade academy 9th graders do not have advisory. All other grade levels meet with an advisor every Tuesday. A curriculum addressing social emotional learning standards has been provided to each advisor as a guide.

At Dimond, we do not have a formal, dedicated advisory period; however, we have taken the typical advisory elements—unit on plagiarism, note-taking and other study skills, planners, good decision making, etc.—and woven them into the ninth grade house program. These units and policies are all outlined in the 9th grade handbook and taught across content areas throughout the year.

Louie Flora

Subject: FW: student/teacher advisory programs

Schools in Kenai Peninsula Borough School District with advisory programs:

Homer High School
Skyview High School
Soldotna High School
Kenai Central High School
Nikiski High School
Seward High School

Three of these schools have adopted a student driven advisory program where students meet with a faculty member a few times per week and the students discuss their interests with the teacher, both in school and career related and work on goals pertinent to the student's interests. Students are surveyed at the beginning of the year to determine their interests

Student Driven Advisory schools:

Homer High School
Skyview High School
Nikiski High School

Three of the schools have adopted a more formal curriculum driven program where a student and teacher get together for 15 minutes per day and do various activities focusing on postsecondary planning, and meeting high school curriculum goals.

Curriculum Driven Advisory schools:

Soldotna High School
Kenai Central High School
Seward High School

For the smaller schools in the district the thought is that the teachers are able to have relationships and do outreach with individual students more easily, and do not need the advisory program setting.

In some of the advisory program schools the faculty generates a list of all students to determine which are known and which are not known by teachers. Then a second list of students that are not well known by any of the teachers is formed and individual faculty members will do outreach with these individual students. This is known as the "Adopt a Star" program and the teachers hold themselves accountable for the success of the "adopted" not well known student.

These Advisory programs have been in place for the past five years. Before the implementation of the program KPBSD was sitting at about 65% graduation rate and has increased its graduation rate since then to about 73%.

This year KPBSD will be engaged in a focus group on why kids drop out and attempting to get some profiles of drop-outs by interviewing the former students.

Ideas for Eliminating Push outs

Push Out Category	Push-out	Possible Solutions
School-wide/District-wide	Condition of facility: School Building and classrooms aren't welcoming or are in disrepair; school grounds have trash around them	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Teachers and students can monitor their classrooms at the end of class period and pick up trash, arrange room so it is ready for next class period. 2) Individual classes could volunteer or be assigned to clean up around the building on a rotating basis 3) Hold a clean-up, fix-up, paint-it weekend where parents and students can work on making the building and classrooms a more inviting place to be
	Grading: No retakes, no make-up, no partial credit	Intervention Conference Define better Change grading policy Student understanding of evaluation How we use grades Use of Tools: Power School; Pinnacle Link with teacher evaluation
	Discipline	Consistency w/common sense and flexibility Fitting the "crime" Learning from sanction Better job orientation De-escalate bad behavior/training Sensitivity/awareness to cultural issues Involving the family

	Zero tolerance	Moving away from zero tolerance (except firearms) Using community service/service learning Done in steps – progressive
	Attendance: Why is this policy – where did it come from? Count period Need focused effort to keep in touch Fallen behind Loss of seat time Notify advisor	
	Retention	Analyze first/reasons for failure Use of current options (career tech) Teach in a different way Summer learning opportunities or after hours
	Transportation for extended hour activities/sports/alternative schools	Creative use of time & partnering Could use special education buses? Federal issue?
	Participation fees	Waivers Sharing methods of raising money

		Promoting scholarships
Statewide	ASAA Eligibility [drugs, alcohol, tobacco]	Could change statewide District policy Promote healthy life styles
	HSGQE [passing, not passing]	Change its name – remove the high stakes Continuous improvement model
	Carnegie Unit	Competency testing for placement by knowledge vs. grade level Be more flexible “get rid of the box” Competency based
Social/Emotional Issues	Staff Acceptance[non-judgmental]	Put personal issues aside Training staff cultural sensitivity behavior/health addressing suicide/depression
	Safety: Recognition that school is more than academics	Use counselors as counselors
	Pregnancy	

	Gay/Lesbian	
Teachers	Students lack personal connection	Advisory Making eye contact/kids & parents Name recognition
	Individual teaching consistency	Teacher absences detrimental Stay all year(s)