

A History of Schooling for Alaska Native People

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This article documents significant historical events and trends that have helped to shape the policies and practices of education in Alaska, particularly those that have most directly impacted the schooling of Alaska Native people. The following information is provided: (1) an overview of the Alaska context; (2) a review of federal policies that have directly affected education in Alaska; and (3) an historical analysis of the evolution of schooling for Alaska Native people, including the development of a dual federal/territorial system of schools, and the initiation of a range of federal and state reform efforts. The current status of schooling in Alaska is briefly described.

Alaska is the home of the highest percentage and the sixth largest overall population of indigenous people in the United States, according to the 1999 U.S. Census. Alaska Natives constitute 16.4% of the state's population, and 23% of its school population (25% when including American Indians). In 2001 nearly 60% of Alaska Native students continue to attend school in rural and remote communities where K-12 school enrollments range from eight students with one teacher to 500 students with many teachers. The remaining 40% of Alaska Native students are in urban schools where the majority of the student enrollment is white. The geographic, historical and cultural context of Alaska has always provided challenges *and* afforded opportunities for schooling that are often unique.

Even though the educational context of Alaska has gone through many unusual twists and turns over the years, little attention has been given by policy makers and

practitioners to the history of education in Alaska. The lack of accurate information or awareness about the history of schooling in the state has contributed to a wide variety of ill-conceived and inappropriate educational policies and practices. Too often, educators and other policy makers at local, state and federal levels have initiated education reforms for Alaska and Alaska Native students solely on the basis of short-term localized considerations, or research conclusions drawn from conditions outside of Alaska. This has been a theme throughout the history of reforms in the state, and it continues today as the state looks to the “Lower 48” for quick-fix solutions to long-standing schooling challenges while, concurrently, newly-formed groups of Alaska Native educators attempt to forge alternative paths of educational reform by building on the past and the wisdom of their elders.

I teach education courses at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and in my attempts to locate reading materials each semester, I am always reminded of the scarcity of published information on the history of education in Alaska in general, and in particular, on the history of schooling for Alaska Native people. Even with the highest percentage and the sixth largest overall population of American Indians/Alaska Natives in the United States, most material written about American Indian education focus only on Indian people in the “Lower 48” states. Some national authors have given Alaska Natives a cursory nod, as Margaret Szasz (1974) did when she prefaced her historical account of Indian education by saying that “Alaskan Native children are mentioned only briefly; their school conditions are unique and should be the subject of a separate study” (p. vii).

Others have attempted to explain away the Alaska oversight in their analyses, as Francis Prucha (1984) did when he stated that:

Alaska Natives—Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts—offered unique problems [for the federal government], for they had never been fully encompassed in the federal policies and programs developed for the American Indians. Alaska for decades seemed remote and out of the way; no treaties were made with the natives there, few reservations were established for them, and only small appropriations were made for their benefit. Not until the mid-twentieth century did striking changes occur that demanded attention to the claims of the aboriginal peoples of Alaska. (p. 1128)

Even in the book, *Promises of the Past: A History of Indian Education* (DeJong, 1993), neither the word “Alaska” nor “Alaska Native” can be found in the index.

Although there is an increasing number of written materials being prepared by Alaska Native people that provide valuable information about individual, family, and community educational experiences and perspectives, many have yet to be compiled and published so that they can be used to identify common patterns and themes. At the present time, the most extensive published review of the history of Alaska Native education in general is in *Taken to Extremes: Education in the Far North* (Darnell and Hoem, 1996), though Alaska is examined as only one region among many in the circumpolar area.

Misunderstandings about Alaska have occurred most frequently in the following four areas:

1. Uniqueness of the Alaska contexts

The historical, political, cultural, economic and geographical contexts of Alaska are distinct enough from other states, that the “Alaskan variable” must be taken into account as an important factor in all decisions about education in Alaska.

2. Differences among Alaska Native groups

There are significant differences among the twenty different Alaska Native groups in Alaska, and these are often not recognized.

3. Legal rights of Indigenous People

Despite the unique constitutional status of indigenous people and the federal government's binding treaty obligations to American Indians (which have been extended in large part to Alaska Natives), many misunderstandings continue about the status and rights of Alaska Natives with regard to public education, health, social and economic services, and natural resources.

4. History of Alaska Native education versus history of American Indian education

The history of Alaska Native education is *not* the same as the history of American Indian education, and the differences are significant.

In this article, I document some of the most significant historical events and trends that have shaped the policies and practices of education in Alaska—especially those that have most directly impacted schooling for Alaska Native people. I provide information that is intended to explain the basis for some of the misunderstandings outlined above. This historical perspective will enhance our ability to build on what has occurred in the past to better formulate appropriate practices for the future.

I use the term “Alaska Native” or “Native” when I am referring to all of the indigenous groups in the state because these are the generic terms used by Alaska Native people themselves. When I refer to a specific cultural/linguistic group or subgroup, I use the term with which people most commonly identify themselves (e.g.

Alutiiq, Koyukon Athabascan, Inupiat, Tlingit, Yup'ik). I follow the conventional pattern (in Alaska) of using "American Indian" to describe indigenous people in the United States, but outside the state of Alaska (and Hawaii), and in some contexts I use "Native American" when I refer to *all* indigenous people of the United States.

The Alaskan Context

Alaska has many features with which it is readily identified by people throughout the world. Traveling Alaskans discover that people on nearly all continents have some familiarity with the midnight sun, weather extremes, rich oil fields, vast amounts of land, Mt. Denali, or the Yukon River. These geographical features are often the basis for perceptions of Alaska by "Outsiders," and they have prompted many to describe it as a "land of contrasts" or a "land of extremes."

The geographic and physical features *are* remarkable. With a land mass of 586,412 square miles, it is equal in size to one-third of the rest of the United States. Its far northern position isolates it from other states but places it within 47 miles of Russia, and its 33,000-mile coastline is longer than the east and west coastlines of the contiguous states combined. Alaska has the highest mountain on the North American continent, the second longest river in America, several active volcanoes, over half the glaciers in the world, and spectacular Northern Lights. Its extension through two climactic zones (Arctic and sub-Arctic) and its summer sunlight and winter darkness account for great differences in temperature between summer and winter. It has rich oil, timber, coal, and mineral resources, and its natural environment continues to support animals now absent in other locations. Alaska also has the most northern, the most

western, and the most eastern locations in the United States (some of the Aleutian Islands are on the other side of the International Date Line).

Alaska is indeed a land of contrasts and extremes, but not only because of its physical features. The diversity of its people and major changes in the state since 1970 have resulted in social, political, economic, and educational contrasts that are no less remarkable. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the building of the trans-Alaska pipeline, decentralization of the state school system, and the establishment of a network of small village high schools may not be as familiar as the geographical features of the state to non-Alaskans, but the impact of these events upon the everyday life of Alaskans is no less significant.

The population of Alaska in 2000 was 626,932 people, nearly 103,000 of aboriginal ancestry—Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts, who collectively refer to themselves as Alaska Natives. The large majority of non-Native people are migrants from the Lower 48 states, along with increasing numbers of Asian and Latin American immigrants. English is spoken by nearly everyone in the state. With twenty different Alaska Native languages, several Asian and European languages, and American dialects from all regions of the United States, there is an unusual linguistic diversity for such a small population.

With only 626,932 people spread over 586,402 square miles, Alaska has one of the lowest population densities in the world, with just a little over one person per square mile. There are three major urban areas (Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau) as well as 20 smaller towns and about 180 villages. The urban areas of Alaska (Anchorage 259,400, Fairbanks 84,000 and Juneau 30,2000) offer the same kinds of amenities found elsewhere in the United States. They have well-developed transportation systems, modern shopping complexes, fully-equipped homes, and extensive

educational facilities. Most villages in Alaska are accessible only by air and, in some cases, by water. Even Juneau, the state capital, can be reached only by airplane or ferry, and it is as far from communities in northern and western Alaska as Colorado is from New York.

The majority of the residents in rural Alaska are Alaska Natives who live in villages with populations ranging between 25 and 5,000. Although an increasing number of Native people live in urban areas of the state, the terms rural and Native are frequently used interchangeably. Alaska Native people who live in rural areas maintain a distinct and unique lifestyle. Even though in most rural communities today one will see trucks, cars, snowmachines, refrigerators, televisions, computers, telephones, and modern school buildings, these will be next to log cabins, dog teams, fish wheels, food caches, meat drying racks, and outhouses. Each village has at least one store, but many Native residents continue to practice a subsistence lifestyle and depend heavily on moose, caribou, seal, walrus, whale, fish and berries for their supply of food.

As the following map indicates, Native people in Alaska consist of distinct groups on the basis of language, culture and geographic location. The three primary groups are Eskimo, Indian and Aleut. Among these groups are four different Native language families (Eskimo-Aleut, Athabaskan-Eyak, Tsimshian, and Haida), and these language families include 20 distinct Alaska Native languages as is evident in the Alaska Native Language Center map (Krauss, 1980). Although some of the twenty languages are related, they are different enough from one another that speakers of one language usually cannot understand speakers of another language. All of the Alaska Native languages are linguistically very different from Indo-European languages, and few non-Natives, other than linguists, have become proficient speakers of an Alaska Native

language. Children still speak their Native language as a first language in four of the twenty languages. Alaska Native people often identify themselves with a tiered description: as Alaska Native, as belonging to a particular linguistic/cultural group (e.g. Aleut, Haida Indian or Siberian Yup'ik Eskimo) and as being a member of a particular region, village and/or family. In some areas, further clan distinctions are made.

The diverse geographic areas that Alaska Native people occupy dictate quite distinct life styles with a broad range of subsistence practices, modes of transportation, accessibility to others for economic and social functions, and political structures. Aleut people live on the Aleutian Islands and along the southern coast of the mainland (the name "Alaska" comes from the Aleut word for continent). Eskimo people live along the Northern and Western coastal areas of Alaska and include Yup'ik people who live in the Southwest—both inland and along the coasts of the Bering Sea; Inupiat people who live in the north primarily along the Arctic Ocean; and Siberian Yup'ik people who live on two islands very near the Russian border. Indian people include 11 different groups of Athabascans in the Interior, and Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian in the Southeast coastal area of Alaska. Although the actual population figures for Alaska Native people have changed since 1887 (a decrease beginning in 1867, and an increase in the past 20 years), the proportion of Alaska Native people across the three primary groups has remained fairly consistent: Eskimos at 56 percent, Indians at 34 percent, and Aleuts at 10 percent.

Although there are important differences among Alaska Native groups, most share with one another—and with other Native Americans and Indigenous peoples—a set of values and beliefs that includes: priority of communal and family considerations over individual considerations, a belief in sharing versus accumulating, and a respect for

spirituality and an interconnectedness with the natural world (Kawagley, 1995). These differences, which are often in contradiction with Western beliefs and practices, frequently serve as a central thesis in the writings of American Indians and Alaska Natives. In his 1991 set of essays on *Indian Education in America*, Vine Deloria states that:

Cultural differences should have been reasonably clear in 1492 and by the early 1700s when formal educational efforts for Indians began. Someone should have started to think about what cultural difference meant. Certainly after almost three centuries people ought to be getting a grip on the nature of this cultural difference. (p. 62)

Tippeconnic and Gipp (1982) describe both legal and cultural differences among American Indians and other minority groups in the United States:

American Indians differ from other minority groups in United States, both legally and culturally. The legal difference stems from the formal government-to-government relationship established through treaties, executive orders, congressional acts, and court decisions. Culturally, the American Indian has a deep sense of religion that is tied to the earth and based upon a relationship to all living things. (p. 126)

Gregory Cahete examines Indigenous educational philosophy in Look to the Mountain (1994) and identifies “the community of shared metaphors and understandings that are specific to Indian cultures.” His view that “Indians view life through a different cultural metaphor than mainstream America” is echoed by Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley (1995), Yup’ik Eskimo scholar who examines some of the marked differences that exist between Yupiaq and Western societies relative to values, lifestyles, and interrelationships among the human, natural and spiritual worlds, and elaborates on “prominent shared characteristics of the Alaska Native worldviews” (p. 8). Kawagley says “Alaska Native people have their own ways of looking at and relating to the world, the universe, and to each other. These ways have seldom been recognized by the expert educators of the Western world Recently, however, many Natives as

well as non-Natives are recognizing that the Western system does not always mesh well with the Native worldview, and new approaches are being devised (p. 37).

The writings and oral histories of many Alaska Native people confirm that a discernible and distinctive world view revolving around values related to family, community, spirituality and the environment is not only central to the lives of many of Alaska's indigenous people, but is often in marked contrast with Western beliefs and practices.

Federal Indian Policy and Schooling in Alaska

When the United States purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867, the policies, programs and relationships that had already developed between the government and American Indians began to directly influence Alaska Natives. Although most American Indian educational policies and programs were not designed for Alaska Natives, or with the Alaska context in mind, they all have directly or indirectly influenced decisions about schooling in Alaska. Moreover, the policies established in this early period set a precedent for federal *and* state schooling practices for Alaska Natives that continues even today.

In his book *Alaska Natives and American Laws*, David Case (1984) provides several examples of federal government ambiguity in determining its responsibilities to indigenous people of Alaska. He cites evidence that shows that following Alaska's purchase (and in some areas, for a long period after), the federal government "did not initially deal with Alaska Natives as dependent Indian communities." The ambiguity of the government regarding its responsibilities is evident in issues ranging from determination of basic human rights (based on whether one was identified as belonging to an "uncivilized tribe" versus an "other inhabitant of the ceded territory"), to federal

decisions regarding ownership of land (“the unspoken implication seems to have been that Alaska Natives, unlike other Native Americans, did not have claims of aboriginal title to vast tracts of tribal property”). And it was not until 1905 that a distinction was made between Native and non-Native residents of the territory for purposes of federal educational services” (Case, 1984, pp. 6-7). Over 40 years after the purchase of Alaska, the federal government determined that:

[I]t is clear that *no distinction* has been or can be made between the Indians and other Natives of Alaska *so far as the laws and relations of the United States are concerned* whether the Eskimos and other natives are of Indian origin or not, as *they are all wards of the Nation, and their status is in material* respects similar to that of the Indians of the United States (emphasis added.) (Case, 1984, pp. 197, 224)

Case points out that not until 1932, though, did it appear “obvious to the Department of the Interior Solicitor that congressional acts and appropriations for the benefit of Alaska Natives, as well as the court decisions relating to them, placed Alaska Natives in substantially the same position as other Native Americans” (Case, 1984, p. 197).

Even today, many misunderstandings about educational policies for Alaska Native people are the result of misinformation about early federal policies and practices that affected schooling in Alaska. Of particular consequence are the federal government’s early actions in the negotiation of treaties with American Indian tribes, the establishment of reservations, and the adoption of the Civilization Fund Act.

Since Alaska was not purchased until 1867, it was, of course, not involved with original treaty deliberations between the United States colonial government and Indian nations. The treaties provided the means of negotiating with Indians who controlled land, resources, and trade routes to which newcomers wanted access. The treaties negotiated during this time recognized the sovereignty and independent nation status of

Indian tribes, and when the United States Constitution was written, it specifically authorized Congress to enter into these treaties. Included in almost every treaty were contractual, presumably legally-binding agreements in which the federal government agreed to provide Indian people with education, health care, and social services in exchange for Indian-controlled resources. Between 1778 and 1871, almost 400 treaties were negotiated between the United States government and Indian nations, and through the process a precedent for federal control of Indian affairs, including education, was firmly established. Treaties were the first instance in which federal responsibility for American Indian schooling was identified, and since that time the government has legally extended its educational responsibility through other means including congressional acts, executive orders and court decisions (DeJong, 1993; Tippeconic & Gipp, 1982; Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, 1991).

While there continue to be many problems in following through on the *intent* of the treaties, of equal concern are some of the *unintended* consequences, for Alaska Natives as well as American Indians in other states. Many of the treaties were not honored by the United States government, and this betrayal inhibited further relationships. In addition, the treaties helped to initiate a pattern of dependency in which Native Americans were forced to rely on the federal government for essential services because their traditional, and historically effective, means of providing these services for themselves was lost through displacements resulting from the treaty arrangements (Prucha, 1984).

The 1819 Civilization Fund Act, enacted long before Alaska became a territory, also impacted Alaska. It appropriated an annual “civilizing” fund and initiated a program whereby the federal government contracted with religious groups to operate schools for

American Indian children—a policy that continued to influence education in Alaska long after it was discontinued (DeJong, 1993). With the passage of this act, the federal government established a *second legal basis* for federal responsibility for schooling for *all* American Indian/Alaska Native children (not just those covered under treaty arrangements). The assumption that people's needs are best served through schools that promote "civilization" and Christianity has continued to be a powerful theme throughout the history of Alaska Native education (Barnhardt, C. 1985, 1994; Darnell & Hoem, 1996; Dauenhauer, 1982; Ongtooguk, 1992, 2000; Shales, 1998).

Although Alaska, for the most part, was not directly affected by treaties or by the establishment of reservations, the beliefs that led the United States government to support the policies regarding treaties and the establishment of reservations were the same beliefs that shaped its future relationship with Alaska Native people. The federal belief system represented in the establishment of treaties, reservations, the Civilization Fund Act, the establishment of boarding schools and a myriad of other policies not directly related to education, was a belief system that endorsed and ensured restricted environments in which the government could control nearly all aspects of American Indian life, including education, religion, medicine, law, hunting and fishing, as well as land acquisition and use. The practice of sending American Indian and Alaska Native children to boarding schools also enhanced a philosophy of assimilation through segregation (e.g., one of the primary goals of boarding schools was to assimilate American Indian/Alaska Native students into mainstream society by separating them from their communities).

Treaties, reservations, the Civilization Fund Act, boarding schools and land policies represent the types of federal initiatives that historically contributed to a decrease in

opportunities for many Alaska Natives to build upon the strengths of their cultures, languages, communities, and traditions that would enable them to lead meaningful, contributing and satisfying lives. The net effect of some of these policies continues even today—including a distrust of government policies and practices. In a 1998 interview, Will Mayo, then the Athabascan head of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, responded to the frustration still felt about the myriad of ever-changing federal, state and tribal relationships with the following comments about the federal government's failure to enforce the 1980 Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (ANILCA), which included a subsistence preference for rural Alaskans:

This isn't something new to Natives. The laws that were supposed to protect customary and traditional subsistence rights are similar to broken treaties. It was a promise to Native people that you will have the right to continue to use the land you lost to hunt and fish on. There was a deal that was made, but certain interests are really against it. . . . You get a deal, but hey, it's not really. When non-Natives want more, they go back on their deals, and Native Americans are familiar with the pattern. That kind of stuff has gone on for 500 years. I'm convinced they won't be happy until they eventually eliminate all our fishing and hunting rights. (Holst, p. 50, 1999)

The Dual System of Schools in Alaska

The recorded history of the relationship of Alaska Native people to the United States government begins almost 200 years after the history of relationships with other Native Americans because Alaska did not become part of the United States until it was purchased from Russia in 1867. Because few government, church and education records are available for the period of time Russians were in Alaska, we have only a limited understanding of their relations with Native people from the time of initial contact.

We do know that Russian explorers, fur traders and missionaries had been in the country since the early 1700s, and we know that the territory was sparsely settled by groups of indigenous people whose languages and cultures varied significantly.

Before Alaska was purchased by the United States, formal education came primarily from the efforts of the Russian Orthodox church and the Russian-American Company. They provided schools for Alaska Native people in Kodiak, Southeast Alaska, and in the Aleutian area. Literacy programs flourished, especially in the Aleutians, and many Aleut people became sophisticated readers and writers in both the Russian and the Aleut languages (Dauenhauer, 1982, Getches, 1977).

Very little has been written about traditional approaches to teaching and learning among Alaska Native people prior to contact. Examples appear in the writing of Alaska Native people like Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley (1995) when he provides descriptions of traditional Yup'ik learning styles by weaving elder's stories into his book, *A Yupiaq Worldview* and in his discussion of traditional Yupiaq lifeways (1999). Fellow Yup'ik, Harold Napoleon (1991), provides examples of the discontinuities that exist between traditional and contemporary approaches to teaching and learning, through his insightful and powerful writing in *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being*. Edna Ahgeak MacLean (1986) has written about Inupiaq traditional community houses and describes these "*qargit*" as entities that "served as political, social, ceremonial and educational institutions [until] the coming of the missionaries marked the end of these *qargit*." However, the large majority of knowledge about traditional Alaska Native education continues to come from elder's memories, such as those described by Koyukon Athabascan, Eliza Jones, in a recent interview:

As a child in winter camp near the mouth of the Huslia River, Eliza Jones would fall asleep to the words of traditional Koyukon Athabascan stories. Night after night, while her

mother sewed by the light of a coal oil lamp, Eliza and her two brothers, snug in bed rolls atop mattresses stuffed with moose hair, would listen intently as their stepfather spun narratives of long ago when animals were people.

“The audience was expected to respond during pauses with ‘hmmm, hmmm’ . . . and when he didn’t hear the ‘hmmms’ anymore he stopped, and knew everybody was sleeping. The next night a new tale would not begin until the young listeners could repeat the story heard the night before. You had to be an active listener,” Eliza said.

The bedtime stories and the many more from her grandmother and others throughout her childhood growing up near Huslia are among Eliza’s earliest memories. The stories served not only as the foundation of Eliza’s education, but also cast her into the role of her culture’s chronicler and tradition bearer.

“Our Native beliefs are inside those stories,” Eliza explained. “It is like gospel to us. It is very much a part of my belief in living in harmony with nature, with the land, trees, water, animal and bird spirits.” (p. A-7)

It was not until 1884, 17 years after Alaska became a territory of the United States, that the first official federal legislation impacting Alaska, the Organic Act, was passed. This act established the first civil government in Alaska and provided the legal basis for federal provision of education. The Act delegated responsibility for providing schooling “for children of all races” to the Office of the United States Secretary of the Interior. Four years later the task of providing education was specifically delegated to the Bureau of Education, a unit within the Department of the Interior (Barnhardt, 1985; Case, 1984; Darnell, 1979). Federal involvement with Alaska Native education continues to the present day through a variety of government programs. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (“BIA”)—a unit in the Department of the Interior that assumed the responsibilities of the former Bureau of Education—operated schools in Alaska until 1986.

In the late 1800s, the federal government established day schools in Alaska villages and a limited number of state vocational boarding schools. Instruction was provided in the three “R’s,” in industrial skills, and in patriotic citizenship. A strict “English-Only” policy governed all language and curriculum decisions. Some schools

were operated directly by the federal government while others, referred to as “contract schools,” were contracted to missionary groups including Catholic, Congregational, Episcopal, Methodist, Moravian, Presbyterian, and Swedish-Evangelical (Barnhardt, 1985).

By the early 1900s, the number of non-Native people coming into the Territory of Alaska had increased steadily due to the discovery of gold and the development of commercial fishing and timber industries. Because the federal Bureau of Education was not able to provide adequate schooling for all of the newcomers, the United States Congress granted authority to individual communities in Alaska to incorporate and establish schools, and maintain them through taxation (Darnell, 1979). Many small, non-Native towns did this and opened schools immediately. However, several communities that were too small to incorporate still desired some degree of regional autonomy in the management of their schools. Consequently, in 1905, Congress passed the Nelson Act that provided for the establishment of schools outside incorporated towns. The governor of the Territory of Alaska was made the ex-officio superintendent, and new schools were established, but only “white children and children of mixed blood leading a civilized life” were entitled to attend (Case, 1984). Thus, *a dual system of education in Alaska* was inaugurated, with schools for Alaska Native students run by the federal Bureau of Education, and schools for white children and a small number of “civilized” Native children operated by the Territory of Alaska and incorporated towns (Case, 1984; Darnell, 1979; Dauenhauer, 1982).

The federal Bureau of Education, meanwhile, continued to extend its services to more remote sections of Alaska, and by 1931 it had assumed responsibility for the social welfare and education of most rural Native people. Its expanded services

included not only education, but medical services, the Reindeer Service (i.e. an effort to bolster the economy for Alaska Natives by introducing reindeer herding), cooperative stores, operation of a ship (the North Star) for supplying isolated coastal villages, and the maintenance of an orphanage and three industrial schools. Bureau of Education schools continued to operate with the belief that it was important to transform American Indians and Alaska Natives into civilized and Christian Americans, and the best mechanism for achieving assimilation into American society was education (Dauenhauer, 1982; Ongtooguk, 1992; Shales, 1998). There was little recognition by the Bureau of important differences between indigenous people in Alaska and those in the other states, and even less recognition of important differences among the 20 different Alaska Native groups (Collier, 1973; Fuchs & Havighurst, 1972; Krauss, 1980). In Alaska, as in other places in the United States, the autonomy and self-sufficiency of many Native Americans continued to erode as the federal government assumed greater responsibility and control over their lives and livelihood. Many of the elders in Alaska Native communities today have had personal and direct experience with these early federal Indian policies and practices.

The Meriam Report and Federal Legislation

In 1928 an extensive survey of Indian social and economic conditions in the United States was commissioned, and from it the Meriam Report was issued. It was the first major report to document and bring to the nation's attention the status of Indian conditions, and it was highly critical of American Indian education. The report's recommendations called for a major reformation of American Indian education with Indian involvement at all levels of the educational process and with specific

recommendations that education be tied to communities, day schools extended, boarding schools reformed, Indian language and culture included in the development of the curriculum, and field services decentralized (DeJong, 1993; Meriam, 1928, Szasz, 1974). Interestingly, several of these recommendations continue to be referenced, relevant, and unrealized over 70 years later.

At the time the report was prepared, approximately 40 percent of all American Indian/Alaska Native children attended federal BIA schools and about 80 percent of this group were in boarding schools (DeJong, 1993). Only a handful of government schools offered instruction above the eighth grade level, and the teacher turnover rate was significantly higher than in other schools. In Alaska, in the 1920s and 1930s, two-thirds of Alaska Native children who were in school were in federal BIA schools—the large majority in BIA day schools in villages. The teacher turnover rate was even higher than the national average, and very few students were able to attend the limited number of BIA or church-affiliated boarding high schools.

Using the Meriam Report as both a catalyst and a blueprint, John Collier, Sr., Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs from 1934 to 1945, initiated a major shift in Indian policy in the United States. During his administration, a wide variety of new programs were implemented—nearly all with the goal of providing Indian self-determination in economic development, social services and education. Two major pieces of legislation that supported these goals, the Indian Reorganization Act and the Johnson-O'Malley Act (commonly referred to today by their initials, IRA and JOM) were enacted in 1934. Both had long term effects on United States Indian policy and a direct impact on Alaska Native people that continues today.

The Indian Reorganization Act, still a significant piece of Indian legislation, provided for Indian political self-government and economic self-determination by allowing tribes to organize and incorporate. It was the first piece of legislation that addressed, and attempted to counter, the economic destruction that had resulted from treaty negotiations and land allotment policies. Alaska Natives, though, were once again slighted in the process due to an oversight in the law. To remedy the oversight, Congress passed the Alaska Reorganization Act in 1936 which authorized the creation of reservations on land occupied by Alaska Natives. However, since Alaska Natives were less “tribally oriented” than American Indians in the Lower 48 states, they were granted special permission to establish “village” governments and constitutions, and most groups chose this option (Case, 1984; Olson & Wilson, 1984).

Today, there are tribal councils in nearly every rural community in Alaska and these often serve as the vehicle for the on-going struggle to exercise self-determination and sovereignty. It was not until September of 2000, however, that the governor of Alaska signed an administrative order directing state agencies and officials to “recognize and respect” the 227 federally recognized tribal governments in Alaska. Although Alaska’s federal delegation voiced strong opposition to this move, the governor stated that “It is time to embrace tribal governments as partners in the future of this great state” (Hunter, 2000).

The Johnson-O’Malley (JOM) Act also initiated a new federal approach to American Indian/Alaska Native education. As a means of responding to the increasing number of Native American children enrolled in state-funded public schools (as well as providing an incentive for public schools to accept Indian students), this Act authorized the Secretary of the Interior (specifically the BIA) to negotiate contracts with state,

territorial or local agencies to provide federal funds to help defray expenses incurred for the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives (DeJong, 1993; Fuchs & Havighurst, 1972). It was not until 1952, however, that Alaska entered into its first Johnson-O'Malley contract (Case, 1984). The Act also "reaffirmed the continuing legal responsibility of both the federal government and the states to provide education for Indians. While the federal responsibility was based on treaty and statute, the states' responsibility lay in their obligation to educate all residents" (DeJong, 1993, p. 178).

In Alaska, the passage of the Johnson O'Malley Act led to the beginning of negotiations between the Alaska Territorial Department of Education and the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the transfer of federally-operated rural BIA elementary schools to the territory. Prior to statehood (between 1942 and 1954), 46 schools were transferred from federal to territorial control. Transfer policy was based on population shifts, the need for integration of Native children and antidiscrimination laws, as well as the territory's ability to assume the costs (Case, 1984, p. 202). Although there were several reasons for continuing the merger between the federal and territorial school systems, the momentum that began in the 1940s came to a halt, and by 1954 efforts to bring the two school systems together ceased—for a variety of political, economic, and social reasons, some at a national level and some within the state (Case, 1984; Darnell, 1979).

In 1950, 93 federal BIA day schools and three boarding schools remained in Alaska, but "30 to 40 communities and 1,800 children were still without any facilities at all" (Getches, 1977, p. 6). The majority of Alaska Native students attended elementary school in their own rural villages where there was only one school—run either by the Territory or by the BIA. In these settings most of the school population was Alaska

Native because it reflected the population of the village—not because of restrictive official or unofficial educational policies. The only options open to Alaska Natives in small rural communities who wished to attend high school were the distant BIA boarding high schools, with the exception of a small number of church-affiliated boarding high schools in some regions of the state.

In the years following World War II, the pendulum of federal Indian policy had begun to swing back to a more conservative political and economic agenda. As a result of the just-concluded war and as a response to the developing Cold War, an insistence on conformity to narrowly-defined national standards became prevalent. At the same time, the new postwar economy supported private economic growth and reduced government spending (Olson & Wilson, 1984; Szasz, 1974).

This reversal of public support for American Indian/Alaska Native self-determination and local control impacted Alaska where some of the educational reform efforts recommended by the Meriam Report and the Collier administration had just begun to be implemented. In the mid-1950s Alaska was placing a great deal of time, effort and money into its bid for statehood, and the motivation for federal and state education officials to work together to develop a unified system for rural Native education waned significantly. Therefore, when Alaska did achieve statehood in 1959, the state and federal school systems were still a dual presence in rural Alaska (Barnhardt, 1985). Although some of the most harmful consequences of the original dual system no longer existed (i.e. there were few communities in which students attended separate schools on the basis of race), many of the other negative consequences of the dual system continued (e.g. lack of coordination, competition for teachers and resources, high expenses, duplication of services). The lack of

documentation about schooling in Alaska's rural areas makes it difficult to really understand whether or not there were any significant differences in schools operated by the BIA as compared to those operated by the territory.

It is interesting to note that although there was a set-back in federal government support for local control initiatives after WW II, there was legislation passed in the 1950s that did provide additional financial assistance to public schools. The "federally impacted area" legislation, often referred to as the impact act laws was intended to provide federal funds to compensate school districts for financial burdens placed on them because they served students whose parents lived on tax-exempt land or students whose parents worked for agencies that did not pay taxes. Included in these categories were children on military installations and federal Indian lands (DeJong, 1993; Szasz, 1974). The legislation included a pair of laws. The first, Public Law 815, provided federal funds for the construction of schools in areas affected by federal activities (e.g., military bases or Indian reservations). The second law, Public Law 874, provided money for the operation and maintenance of schools affected by federal activities. This support is known as "Impact Aid" since it *aids* school districts whose tax support is reduced by the *impact* of federal government action" (Fuchs & Havighurst, p. 35, 1972).

This additional funding (along with the Johnson O'Malley funds to which it was linked), provided an option, but not a mandate, for schools in Alaska to provide services and support specific to the needs of Alaska Native students. It also provided significant new funding for schools because of the large military bases in Alaska and the high number of school children from military families. Although the intent of the legislation was to "promote equality among Indian children and non-Indian children in public schools . . . Amendments to the Impacted Aid legislation not only expanded the use of

federal funds in Indian education but allowed school districts to obtain Impacted Aid subsidies while retaining Johnson-O'Malley funding" (DeJong 178).

Federal Educational Reform Efforts

By the mid-1960s and early 1970s, a new awareness and unease was developing in the United States about the increasing economic and academic disparity between different groups of people, primarily on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, religion or social class. Public demonstrations, civil rights pressures, and independence movements were prevalent in countries all around the world. In the United States, the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement were two efforts that led to new legislation and to court decisions that directly or indirectly affected members of all ethnic and cultural minority groups.

American Indian and Alaska Native people capitalized on the vigorous and supportive atmosphere of this period and became sophisticated public advocates for indigenous causes by formally organizing into advocacy groups, and by using the established tools of other activist groups (e.g. lobbying, use of publicity, legal expertise, demonstrations, grass-roots efforts). Several new national groups (sometimes referred to as "pan-Indian groups" because members came from many different tribes) were formed. They ranged from broad interest groups like the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), to more special interest groups like the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), and the National Indian School Boards Association (NISBA), to the more activist groups like the American Indian Movement (AIM) (Josephy, 1982; Olson & Wilson, 1984; Tippeconnic, 1999). Best-selling books by

Indian authors Dee Brown, Vine Deloria and N. Scott Momaday, as well as movies like *Little Big Man* and *A Man Called Horse* helped to promote interest in American Indian issues. The seizure of Alcatraz by “Indians of All Tribes” in 1969, the occupation of BIA Headquarters by participants in the “Trail of Broken Treaties” in 1972, and the seizure of the community of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota in 1973 helped establish a public awareness that contributed to the development of federal initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s.

To describe the virtual flood of federal activity that occurred after 1965 in the area of American Indian and Alaska Native education, I have organized the major national-level educational initiatives into two categories: federal programs designed for all students, and federal programs designed for indigenous students.

Federal Programs For All Students

Government efforts aimed at providing equal opportunities proliferated during the “Great Society” period of the 1960s with its bold attempts to fight the “war on poverty,” and these continued well into the 1970s. Education was identified as both a cause and a cure of inequality, and efforts to equalize schooling opportunities assumed a position of prominence in many of the reform efforts during this time. Although funding for several federal programs decreased in the 1980s, the momentum generated by the earlier actions continued.

A number of “the Great Society” programs had a direct impact on American Indian and Alaska Native education programs and policies. The creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) in 1964 provided not only Headstart and Community Action Programs (e.g., RuralCAP) in which many Alaska Native people and village

governments participated; it also created a model for collaboration between the federal government and local communities. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 represented the first major involvement of the federal government in education for groups of children beyond American Indians and Alaska Natives. It was designed to meet the special needs of children in low-income families, and it included special appropriations to public school districts enrolling American Indian and Alaska Native children. This Act was “the first official recognition of the special needs of the children to whom it applied. For more than thirty years the federal government had refused to acknowledge that there was any need other than the financial aid it provided to the schools districts themselves” (Szasz, 1974). The Civil Rights Act of 1968 also included five titles dealing specifically with Native Americans. Several parts of Title VII Bilingual Education legislation had immediate implications for many American Indian and Alaska Native students, as well.

Federal Programs for American Indians and Alaska Natives

As Native Americans continued to make public demands for local control, they developed a broad base of support. In addition to the efforts already described, special congressional subcommittees, independent research associations, and grass roots organizations each used their own tools and their persuasive efforts to usher in a wide array of new programs. Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Ford all supported, at least verbally, efforts to increase Indian control of Indian affairs and each took a direct interest in the role of the BIA (Case, 1984, DeJong, 1993, Fuchs & Havighurst, 1972).

During this time period, one of the primary responses of the federal government to the “problems of Indian education” continued to be the establishment of task forces and

commissions. Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall, appointed a Task Force on Indian Affairs in 1961, a White House Task Force on the American Indian was appointed in 1966, and a special Senate subcommittee investigation in 1968 and 1969 was initiated to examine “the failure of the public schools to educate and assimilate Indian students” (DeJong, 1993, p. 195). The subcommittee work was begun under Senator Robert Kennedy and completed under Senator Edward Kennedy, and its final report, entitled *Indian Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge* (U.S. Senate, 1969) is often referred to as “the Kennedy Report.” It repeated “many of the stinging criticisms that had been made in the Meriam Report forty years earlier . . . and was “an indictment of both the public and federal schools’ failure to provide Indian children with an education equal to that provided for non-Indians” (DeJong, 1993, pp. 195-196).

From 1967 to 1971, the U.S. Office of Education funded a National Study of American Indian Education. Through contracts with eight university centers and fieldwork in 26 communities with 40 different schools from Alaska to North Carolina, the study provided a comprehensive examination of the status of Indian education at that time. The study, which was critical of government policies, led to the publication of the book, *To Live on This Earth* (Fuchs & Havighurst, 1972), and to reports specific to different regions, such as John Collier, Jr.’s book *Alaska Eskimo Education* (1973). Twenty years later, other reports were published that reinforced many of the national study’s recommendations, including *Indian Nations at Risk: An Educational Strategy for Action* (Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, 1991), and *The Final Report of the White House Conference on Indian Education* (1992). In addition to the important content of the reports, they are significant because they “are examples of comprehensive reports

that define research needs in Indian education based on the voices of Indian people” (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997, p. 181).

It is interesting to note that all of these reports echo most of the findings, as well as the recommendations, of the Meriam Report of 1928. It is hardly a surprise that in his 1991 book, *Indian Education in America*, Vine Deloria devotes a chapter to “The Perpetual Education Report” and suggests that the federal government continues to authorize reports because “it is better to talk about education than to educate. The ink will hardly be dry on [this] report before another organization, or another federal agency, has the urge to investigate and the cycle will begin again” (p. 62).

Despite problems inherent in the studies, the U.S. Congress responded to some of the areas of concern identified, and in 1972 passed the Indian Education Act which was directed at meeting the needs of American Indians and Alaska Native students in public schools where two-thirds of children were then enrolled. It “provided grants to Indian tribes, institutions, and organizations, or to state and local agencies, to develop and implement projects to improve educational opportunities for Indian children and to establish adult education programs.” Case (1984) notes that “many of the Indian Education Act programs “operate simultaneously with other federal programs, such as the Johnson-O’Malley Act and Title I . . . this allows for a more comprehensive system of specialized programs for Native students. Although there is some overlapping among the federal programs, each provides different services to different student populations” (p. 206). Although one of the most frequently touted components of the Act is that it includes the requirement for parental input, DeJong’s assessment (1993) reflects the experience of those Alaska Natives who feel that it “did little but shift the focus of Indian

involvement from non-participation to nominal involvement” (Barnhardt, 1999a; DeJong, 1993, p. 229; Kushman & Barnhardt, 1999).

Just three years later, in 1975, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act became law with the outward intent of providing increased opportunities for local control (i.e., authority for tribes to contract directly with the BIA to conduct or administer all or part of the Indian programs conducted by the federal Department of the Interior). The first schools to assert local Indian control through a BIA contract program known as “Project Tribe,” were the Blackwater Community School of the Gila River Indian Community and the Navajo Rough Rock Demonstration School (Fuchs & Havighurst, 1972). Efforts to provide more options for local control were then reinforced by the federal Education Amendments Act of 1978. This Act provided “major changes in the administration of education programs by giving controlling authority to local communities” (Olson & Wilson, 1984). In Alaska, these “amendments further increased federal incentives favoring community control of BIA day schools, including the hiring and firing of teachers and the design of curriculum” (Case, 1984, p. 203).

Although both Acts provided increased options for control, “by 1984, only 10 BIA operated schools were available for tribal contracting in Alaska. Of these, only five were contracted to Native governments in 1983” (Case, 1984, p. 207). Many of the ambiguities and conflicts of interest and interpretations between tribal groups and the BIA remained, and some in Alaska would agree with Guy Senese’s 1986 assessment of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act as one that provided only an “illusion of control.”

One of the arenas where American Indian and Alaska Native people clearly did begin to take control, and advance to prominent roles, was within the Bureau of Indian

Affairs. In addition to the increase in the number of Native Americans working within the agency, the National Advisory Council on Indian Education was established under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 in the U.S. Department of Education. The 15 member presidential-appointed advisory council was comprised of American Indians and Alaska Natives whose role was to advise the Secretary of Education in matters related to the Indian Education Act, provide technical assistance to educational agencies, submit nominees for the Director of Indian Education, and make recommendations regarding funding and improvement of federal education programs.

There were, indeed, a plethora of federal education programs initiated during this period, and it is interesting that many of the Native American reform efforts were initiated by Congress, the President's Office, and other government agencies, even though the Bureau of Indian Affairs had official responsibility for formulating and implementing American Indian and Alaska Native policy. Tippeconnic notes though, that "This congressional legislation did not happen because of the goodwill of Congress or presidential administrations. Rather, it was because of the political wisdom and persistence of Indian educators, Indian institutions, Indian organizations, tribes, and other driving forces behind legislative and executive branch actions" (1999, p. 37).

Although these federal programs did result in a number of changes in schools and educational programs in Alaska, the impact of the federal changes was far greater than the legislation itself. Unprecedented reforms in local control options and support for incorporation of Alaska Native language and culture in schools likely would not have received the same level of support in Alaska had the window of opportunity not been previously opened at the national level.

In addition to education changes at the federal level, there were also many other significant legislative, executive, and judicial decisions made in favor of American Indian/Alaska Native sovereignty, land, and resource rights during the 1960s and 1970s. Although several did not relate directly to education in Alaska, *all* clearly had an indirect effect. This becomes evident when considering the impact of land and resource decisions upon the programs and policies in Alaska education following the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971.

“ANCSA”—The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

The discovery of oil and the subsequent passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act provided the State of Alaska with a great deal of money, and provided Native people with power and economic status they had not previously held. When oil was discovered on the North Slope of Alaska in 1968, the major oil companies involved immediately applied to the federal government for a right-of-way permit to initiate the largest private construction project in recent United States history. They wanted to build an 800 mile oil pipeline that would extend from Prudoe Bay in the north to Valdez in the Gulf of Alaska. However, since the time of the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867, Alaska Native people had not been compensated for their aboriginal land or granted title to any more than small parcels. Therefore, when oil was found, it became clear that Native claims would have to be settled before a pipeline right-of-way permit could be issued to the large oil companies. Alaska Natives claimed ownership to land that the pipeline would cross, as well as the land on which the oil fields themselves were located.

After five years of negotiation between the oil industry, federal and state governments, Alaska Native leadership, and environmentalists, a permit for construction of the pipeline was issued, and construction finally began in 1973. Four years later this major technological feat was completed, and Alaska became an important supplier of United States oil. Thus, it was the discovery of the rich oil fields that finally provided the impetus for the state and federal governments to enter into serious negotiations on a comprehensive settlement of the long-standing land and compensation disputes with the Native people of Alaska. Through their collective efforts, they achieved what, at the time was “perhaps the most comprehensive and far-reaching legal settlement of aboriginal claims to land and its resources yet witnessed in the contemporary world—the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, “ANCSA” (Gaffney, 1977, p. 29). Through ANCSA, Alaska Natives received title to 40 million acres of land and \$962.5 million dollars in compensation for lands ceded to the federal government. To use this land and invest this money in ways that would collectively benefit the Native community, 12 regional Native profit-making corporations were established that coincided with the various cultural and linguistic regions of Alaska. These regional corporations became the largest landowners in Alaska, outside of the state and federal governments.

Today, these 12 Native corporations (along with “village corporations” in each community) function like business corporations anywhere in the world. They are governed by corporate laws, are directly responsible to their Native shareholders, and are free to engage in any production or investment profit-making activities, such as hotel construction, oil exploration and drilling, fish processing plant operations, and local business enterprises. Within each of the 12 regions, nonprofit organizations were also established to administer a wide range of social service and educational programs on a

contractual basis, many of which were formerly under the control of the BIA and other federal and state government agencies. The non-profit corporations now annually administer over one hundred million dollars for education, health, employment, and social programs in their respective regions.

Alaska Educational Reform Efforts After ANCSA

It was not until 1965 that the state began to pay attention to the unique educational needs and interests of Alaska Native people in rural areas. "For the first time in history, the state Department of Education, in its report for the 1965-66 biennium, declared the need for special provisions to accommodate extraordinary conditions in rural Alaska" (Darnell & Hoem, 1996, p. 74). The state established the Division of State-Operated Schools (SOS) with special responsibility for rural and on-base military schools, and it created a governor's committee to again explore the merger of BIA and state schools. Fifteen years later though, there were still 43 BIA schools in Alaska, and the final transfer of federal schools to the state school system did not occur until 1985 (Barnhardt, 1994).

An indication of the level of disorder that existed in the rural educational system in Alaska even in the 1970s can be found in the account of federal policies described by Margaret Szasz (1974). She indicates that in the late 1960s Alaska was viewed by the BIA as a major educational problem area, second only to the Navajo Reservation. Although more than half of Alaska Native children were enrolled in state public schools, a significant number were still in BIA elementary day schools. When these "overage" and "underachieving" children, as labeled by the BIA, completed the eighth grade they

presented “a real problem for the enrollment-conscious Branch of Education” of the BIA because of the lack of high school facilities in Alaska (pp. 127-128).

Szasz (1974) describes the situation one year in the late 1960s when there were 400 eighth-grade graduates from rural elementary schools for whom there was no space available in the BIA high school boarding facilities open to Alaska students (i.e. Mt. Edgecumbe and Wrangell in Alaska and Chemawa in Oregon). The BIA therefore enrolled 204 Alaska Native students in the Chilocco BIA Boarding High School in Oklahoma. Szasz surmises that:

Without question, the decision to use the space at Chilocco was attuned to Bureau goals rather than to the needs of the students. Restricted by budgetary limitations and anxious to increase the percentage of pupils in school, the Branch of Education juggled students to fit spaces, regardless of the effect on the students themselves. (pp. 127-128)

In 1971, the Alaska State legislature attempted to attend to the chaos in Alaska’s rural schools by making the Alaska State-Operated School System an independent agency with responsibility for rural schools. However, pressure for more local control from Alaska Native people brought legislative action again in 1975 that abolished this system and in its place set up a new form of “extraordinary units of government” (Darnell, 1979). Twenty-one separate rural school districts—Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAs)—were established. As a result of this massive decentralization effort, the REAs (similar to school districts in urban areas, but without a local government or tax base) have assumed responsibility for educating all children in their regional areas. Each REA established its own locally elected school board and selected its own superintendent, and although the actual responsibilities assumed by school boards and administrators vary from region to region, most of the boards today are directly involved in establishing policies for budgets, hiring, curriculum development and assessment. State regulations provide each REA with enough latitude to design

its schooling policies and practices in ways that are appropriate for the particular region and for the cultural and linguistic group of people that it serves. Because most rural communities have little tax base to draw upon, REAA's are funded directly by the legislature, rather than through a local government.

The establishment of regional "school districts" did not, however, address the need for high schools in rural areas. There was in fact no comprehensive effort to remedy this problem by the state or federal governments until a lawsuit was filed against the State of Alaska in 1974. The class-action suit, charging discriminatory practice on the part of the state, was filed by Alaska Legal Services, on behalf of rural secondary-aged students, for not providing local high school facilities for predominantly Native communities when it did for same-size, predominantly non-Native, communities. The Hootch family, whose daughter the suit was named after, lived in the Yup'ik Eskimo community of Emmonak, with a population of about 400 people. Like most other rural Alaska Native families, they faced the prospect of sending their high school-aged child away from home for the entire school year. Secondary students in nearly all rural and Native communities in Alaska had been attending the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools in southeast Alaska, Oregon, Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas, Oklahoma, or, for a short time in the 1970s, to state boarding schools and boarding home programs in larger Alaskan communities.

The case was argued on grounds of racial discrimination, and in 1976, the Governor of Alaska signed a consent decree as an out-of-court settlement of what had become the *Tobeluk v. Lind* case because Molly Hootch was no longer in school. In the settlement, the state of Alaska agreed that it would establish a high school program in every community in Alaska where there was an elementary school (which required a

minimum enrollment of eight students) and one or more secondary students, unless the community specifically declined such a program (Barnhardt et al, 1978).

Subsequent legislation and funding brought about sweeping and dramatic changes in the educational system in rural Alaska. During the year after settlement of the case nearly 30 new high schools were established with staffs of one to six teachers and student enrollments in the new high schools ranged from 5 to 100. During the next seven years, the state invested \$133 million in the development of approximately 90 more village high schools. Today there are over 120 small high schools in Alaska villages, nearly all operated by the REAA in which they are located.

Like most educational reforms, decentralization of the state educational system through the establishment of REAAs with power vested in the primarily Alaska Native regional and local school boards and the construction of 120 new small high schools did not occur simply because educational authorities determined these were the appropriate steps to pursue, or because federal policies had paved the way for new organizational structures that made self-determination a viable option. These events were, in fact, made possible by a combination of inter-related social, political and economic events outside the educational arena, in particular the ascendancy of Alaska Native political and economic initiative following passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971.

Alaska Native Education in the 1990s

A large majority of Alaska Native adults living today attended school during the period of time when schooling policies and practices reflected the ambiguity of state and national beliefs about the best way to educate American Indian/Alaska Native students.

Many were not able to complete the eighth grade, and a very large percent did not have the opportunity to enroll in, or to complete, high school in their home community. The policies of the BIA and territory schools attended by many Alaska Native adults forbade students to speak their Native languages and did not allow for a curriculum that reflected anything Alaskan, American Indian, or Alaska Native. Only rarely did any Alaska Native adults have the opportunity to be taught by an Alaska Native or American Indian teacher.

Although there have not been dual federal/state school systems in Alaska since the mid 1980s, the complexity of the shifting relationships among federal, state, regional, tribal, and municipal laws, decisions, and policies continues to directly impact Alaska Native people in areas encompassing education, land and water rights, subsistence, economic development, adoption rights, health care, and justice (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2001; Barnhardt 1999b; Kushman & Barnhardt, 1999). Continuing debates about boundaries between state and federal governments, laws, and judicial decisions relative to Alaska Native people were pivotal in the decision that led to the development of a joint federal-state commission in 1990 to help untangle the ambiguous relationships between Alaska Natives and the various layers of government.

The Alaska Natives Commission (officially, the Joint Federal-State Commission on Policies and Programs Affecting Alaska Natives) was created by Congress in 1990 at the urging of Alaska Native groups. The Commission's undertaking was jointly funded by the federal government and the State of Alaska.

When Congress created the Commission, it was directed to conduct a comprehensive study of the social and economic status of Alaska Natives and the effectiveness of the policies and programs of the United States and of the State of Alaska that affect Alaska Natives.

The commission also was directed to conduct public hearings and to recommend specific actions to Congress and the State of Alaska that might help assure that Alaska Natives have life opportunities comparable to other Americans. The Commission was to

accomplish its work while respecting Natives' unique traditions, cultures and special status as Alaska Natives . . . In addition, the Commission was to address the needs of Alaska Natives for self-determination, economic self-sufficiency, improved levels of educational achievement, improved health status and reduced incidence of social problems.

The first meeting of the Commission was held in February 1992. Within months, staff had been hired and five task forces had been named to gather information on economics, education, governance, health, social and cultural issues. (Alaska Natives Commission, 1994, Forward)

The Commission, comprised almost entirely of Alaska Native people, produced a four volume Final Report (1994) designed to serve as a blueprint for changes regarding the way in which the federal and state governments dealt with Alaska Native issues. The participatory *process* involved in gathering information for this comprehensive study, as well as the written *product* (including 17 recommendations on education) has provided the stimulus and the rationale for most subsequent policy initiatives that continue to be implemented at both state and federal levels. In addition, the Alaska Federation of Natives has sponsored numerous policy and program initiatives of its own to follow through on the Alaska Natives Commission recommendations.

However, despite the work of the Commission and other entities within the state to resolve conflicts between Natives and non-Natives (and rural and urban citizens), differences escalated in the 1990s. In 1998 and 1999, rifts widened in regard to issues of sovereignty, subsistence, and education for Alaska Native people. Bitter debates dominated the legislature, the media, and citizen forums in rural and urban communities across the state. The conflicts escalated as a result of actions ranging from the U.S. Supreme Court's 1998 decision to deny two Athabascan villages their request for Indian country status, to a significant legislative change in the state's funding formula that negatively impacted rural schools and communities where the population is primarily Alaska Native.

Today, nearly all Alaska students attend elementary and secondary school in one of three settings: (1) village schools; (2) rural regional centers and/or road system/marine highway schools; or (3) urban schools.

1. Village Schools: In rural village schools, the large majority of students are Alaska Native. Most schools have a K-12 organization and the number of teachers typically ranges from one to ten. Due to small enrollments, students are frequently in multi-graded settings, and instruction in the early years may be in a Native language (an option available in some Alutiiq, Cup'ik, Gwit'chin, Inupiat, Siberian Yup'ik, Tlingit, or Central Yup'ik communities). Several schools now incorporate Alaska Native issues, perspectives and traditional knowledge in the school or district curriculum. Community members serve as classroom and bilingual teacher aides in nearly all village schools, and the majority of the approximately 475 Alaska Native teachers (6% of the total number of Alaska teachers) teach in village schools. The high school graduation rate from Alaska's small high schools is far ahead of the urban schools.

2. Rural Regional Center and Road System/Marine Highway Schools: The elementary and secondary schools in the larger rural communities (Barrow, Bethel, Kotzebue, Nome, etc.) where the population is 30 to 50 percent non-Native, and in the road system or marine highway schools (accessible by car or ferry and primarily non-Native, such as Kenai, Ketchikan, Sitka or Tok) have characteristics of both the village schools and the urban schools. Many of these schools are administered by the same REAA district or borough that administers the village schools in that region. The range of special programs for Alaska Native and American Indian students, and curriculum

components, varies significantly within this group, depending primarily on the Alaska Native representation in the population.

3. Urban schools: The three largest cities in Alaska are Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau, and their schools now serve nearly 30% of the state's Native American student population. In 1999, there were approximately 8,480 Alaska Native students and 969 American Indian students in these three urban areas (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 1999). These communities have school systems that are typical of most in the United States. Student populations are diverse with the largest minority group being Alaska Native. Nearly all urban schools in Alaska include at least one program that is designed specifically for students who identify themselves as Alaska Native or American Indian. Such services are funded primarily through federal programs (e.g. Johnson-O'Malley, Indian Education Act), and are sometimes supported with additional state and/or district funds. Special programs often include in-school academic tutoring, community cultural events, provision of a "school-within-a-school," or Native-oriented cultural heritage activities. Some districts also have an Alaska Native component in their district-wide curriculum plans.

Alaska Native Education—Entering the 21st Century

Native American education, and Alaska Native education, have histories that are complex and tightly interwoven. A comprehensive knowledge of these histories is essential for understanding the educational institutions, programs and policies that have evolved to serve Alaska Native people. Alaska's educational history has essentially been one of a gradual movement toward self-determination and local control—in

education, tribal government, and social services. The passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the decentralization of the federal and state school systems, and the rapid development of an extensive network of village high schools have brought about major transitions in a very short period of time. These events have also brought to the surface many of the dilemmas and contradictions in American Indian and Alaska Native educational policy. The inherent paradox in a system that requires the government to provide education for Native Americans while at the same time promoting self-determination has not yet been resolved. And the fundamental question of whether or not it is possible for the federal government to maintain its legally-binding trust responsibility, as defined by constitutional, congressional and judicial actions, without maintaining some level of control has yet to be answered.

Alaska Native students today have a far more diverse set of educational experiences than have any group of students in the past—and perhaps more so than their counterparts in other states because of the unique historical context of Alaska’s rural Native communities. Students today are growing up in a political, social, economic and educational environment that is dramatically different from that of their parents and grandparents. On the other hand, today’s high school students are the first to be able to attend the same high school their parents likely attended in their home community.

Several major educational initiatives in the 1990s have been designed to build upon the diverse and unique set of conditions, experiences, and traditions in rural Alaska. Nearly all of these have been initiated by groups and organizations outside of the formal K-12 and university systems. These include major systemic reform efforts sponsored by the Alaska Federation of Natives, and guided by regional Associations of Alaska Native Educators, and

supported by the National Science Foundation and the Annenberg Rural Challenge. Due primarily to these system wide reform efforts under the banner of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, for the first time in the history of schooling in Alaska, Native people are defining education in their own terms. Included in these Native-sponsored educational initiatives are the following:

- A comprehensive set of Cultural Standards—all developed by Alaska Native educators who belong to newly-developed regional and statewide Alaska Native Educator Associations. Alaska Native educators and elders are responsible for preparing: *Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools*, *Guidelines for Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers for Alaska's Schools*, *Guidelines for Nurturing Culturally Healthy Youth*, *Guidelines for Strengthening Indigenous Languages* and *Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge*.
- A comprehensive set of relevant and tested curriculum resources that build upon Alaska Native ways of knowing, Alaska Native traditions, and the unique Alaska contexts represented by the five major cultural and linguistic groups in the State (see at www.ankn.uaf.edu);
- A cadre of Alaska Native educators who not only have typical university credentials, but who have actual experience with the administrative responsibilities of developing and implementing reform efforts that are directly tied to Alaska Native interests, needs and priorities;
- A cadre of Alaska Native elders who are directly involved in decision-making related to educational policy and practice from K-12 curriculum to the development of tribal colleges;

- A momentum for school reform that builds on, and meaningfully incorporates, the cultures, languages and traditions of all groups of Alaska Native peoples.

At the same time, along with Alaska's young history of bottom-up school reform, there is a parallel agenda set primarily by the State Legislature—and augmented by state and district educational agencies—that *could* lead to competition with the reform efforts cited above. Most of the State's reforms are based on national models related to issues of accountability, standards, and standardized testing for students and teachers. Distinctions between the two efforts are developing, *not* because there are inherent contradictions in the goals of the two reform efforts, but because of differences in cultural values, priorities, and perspectives. As a result of recent State actions, new conditions exist for students, teachers, administrators, school board members, and/or parents involved in our K-12 system. They include the following:

- All students must receive passing scores on a new state high school qualifying exam or they will be denied a diploma;
- All students must complete new Alaska benchmark tests at the 3rd, 6th and 8th grades, and these may serve as the basis for promotion in some districts;
- All rural communities and districts must do more in schools with less money and fewer resources;
- All schools will be placed into one of four performance categories by the year 2002 on the basis of student test scores and drop out rates;
- Schools in rural areas must provide quality educational experiences while facing a severe teacher shortage and decreasing numbers and percentages of Alaska Native teachers.

It is premature to predict what the outcome of schooling will be for Alaska Native students in the s twenty-first century. The *potential* for students to become academically successful in culturally relevant ways now exists in ways that were unimaginable just thirty years ago. Culturally appropriate and relevant curriculum is available, highly qualified Alaska Native educators live and work in every region of the state, and the legal requirement for local control and local school governance is in place.

The highly decentralized system of schools and districts in rural Alaska, however, is both “the good news and the bad news.” Because the state’s rural school system allows for significant variation in the goals and implementation plans of each region, some rural districts and their school boards will continue to work respectfully with parents, elders, Alaska Native educators, and other community members in their on-going collaborations to develop realistic approaches for assuring that their children reach high academic standards—in culturally appropriate and meaningful ways. Other districts will continue to respond with reform efforts that are temporary in nature and that only address issues at the tip of the cross-cultural iceberg (Kushman & Barnhardt, 1999).

Educators in the twenty-first century in Alaska need to have the patience to allow for, and the passion to advocate for, deep-seated and fundamental long-term systemic changes in our schools. Since many of the factors that currently inhibit success for Alaska Native students in our public schools come from the lingering effects of past schooling policies and practices, Alaskans must be diligent in their efforts to learn wisely from the past history of schooling in the State.

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