

NSB expands school district computer wide-area network

by David Totten

Tundra Times staff

The North Slope Borough School District has launched a computer network allowing schools to communicate with government and medical services as well as the Internet.

"Project AuroraNet" connects the existing school district network to the computers of the North Slope Borough, Ilisagvik College, and the Arctic Slope Native Association.

The expansion is funded by a \$350,000 grant from U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunication and Information Administration. The borough applied for the grant from last year to complete the project.

"We were told by the NTIA that one of the things that made the proposal interesting was that the North Slope was creating an infrastructure that the borough will use," said David Porte who administers the network for the Division of Net-

work Support Services, a part of the NSB.

The NTIA grant pays for expanding the communication infrastructure to community health clinics and the hospital in Barrow. The rest of the project is paid for by the school district and the borough government.

"In all our villages, we have e-mail and Internet," said Morgan Toal. "We can mail messages to the Internet and World Wide Web. We have a file server where kids can share files and applications."

Morgan Toal is the Wide Area Network Manager for the school district. He is in charge of the computers in the network and said his job ends with the socket in the wall.

The school district has over 800 computers—enough for a couple of computers in every classroom, according to Toal.

The schools' computers are now connected to other institutions, allowing the children to communicate with more people. He also said children have ac-

cess to advanced software, such as Microsoft Office and Netscape.

The children can even use compressed video to hold video conferences with each other. The network will also make the borough's offices more efficient.

"A lot of work gets done on e-mail, so we're one step closer to the paperless office," Toal said.

In the next phase of the project, the network will expand to the villages in the borough.

Porte expects all of the villages to be on line by the beginning of February.

The entire project should be completed by October 1997.

This week, the school district holds a four day training session. One person from each of the 10 schools in the district will learn how to navigate the network and integrate it into their lesson plans.

The network to the villages will use the same wires as the local telephone service. Porte does not expect any problems with installing a new network to remote villages in the middle of winter.

"We helped the school district build their network six years ago," Porte said. "So working in the winter is no problem."