

Record number of Native Ed. Graduates reported

When the College of Human and Rural Development at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks was established in 1982, one of its primary missions was to train Native Teachers for schools in rural Alaska. Four years later, CHRD has produced a record number of Native education graduates from both its on-campus and off-campus programs, and university officials say more and more Native Alaskans are interested in becoming teachers.

"We know the Native community would like to see their own people trained for teaching positions in the rural areas," said Dr. Gerald Mohatt, dean of the college. "Now we're beginning to see that wish come to fruition."

From 1982 to 1985, CHRD graduated 51 Native teachers. Of these, 23 came from its on-campus program, while 28 came from the off-campus program Mohatt says that's more than double the number of Native teachers who graduated from UAF in the previous four years.

According to the Alaska Department of Education, there were 119 Native Teachers teaching in the state in 1984-85. Most of these were concentrated in the Rural Educational Attendance Areas.

Clara Johnson, director of Rural Student Services at UAF, says the number of Alaska Natives who are interested in becoming teachers is also on the rise. "This past semester we had 55 students who said they were interested in pursuing education degrees. That represents one-third of all the new students we serve," she said.

Johnson attributes interest in teacher training among Alaska Natives to market conditions, and a desire on the

part of rural students to return to village life after graduation.

"There aren't too many job opportunities in the villages," she said. "but with teaching, students know they can go back home and get a job. Every

village has a school."

Dr. Judith Kleinfeld, a professor of psychology at UAF, conducts educational research in rural Alaska. She says Native teachers are important because they provide good role models

for rural students, and because they help establish partnerships between the school and the community. "Native teachers create professional, not only political control of schools," Kleinfeld said.



Fifth grade teacher Thelma Saunders of Kaltag spends some time after class with two of her students. Saunders received her teaching degree through UAF's X-CED Program, an off-campus teacher education program. UAF officials say a record number of Alaska Natives are graduating and entering the teaching profession. UAF photo by Sam Winch