

Native Children Score Above Average On Tests

Native children aged three to five years, attending the preschool program run by the Cook Inlet Native Association in Anchorage scored above average on a battery of intelligence tests administered in mid-May.

Twenty-seven children completed two or more of the following nationally recognized intelligence tests: the Wechsler, the Slosson, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, the Draw-a-Man Test and the Beery Test of Visual-Motor Integration. On every test, the majority of the children showed scores in the above average or superior ranges.

The tests were administered through private contracts with three school psychologists regularly employed by the Anchorage School District.

The preschool is part of the Saakaaya Child Care Center,

which provides full-time day care for sixty youngsters aged six weeks to six years. It is funded by grants from the Office of Indian Education in Washington D.C. and the Johnson O'Malley Act, administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and by parent fees.

Saakaaya is under the direction of Native child care leader Pauline Halkett. Staff is Alaska Native. Teaching methods and discipline are in the Native tradition. Subject matter is the standard preschool fare supplemented by a developing Alaska Native Heritage Curriculum.

"These test scores are extraordinary and very exciting," says Vivian Senungetuk, Curriculum Developer for the program. "We tested the children for general knowledge, vocabulary, math concepts, artistic

ability and eye-hand coordination, and on every test the majority of our children scored above average. The highest scores came in on the Slosson, the most verbal of the tests."

"These results fly in the face of conventional wisdom about Native children," Senungetuk states. "They challenge the stereotypes that Native children are non-verbal underachievers, that Native children will not do very well in school."

"We may interpret the scores as indications of innate intelligence. Or we may see the influence of home and school environment upon the children's intellectual development. Either way, these excellent scores are good news for Native parents. They provide evidence that Native children have the capability to excel in school."

The children tested at Saakaaya were not selected in any particular way. The psychologists simply tested those children who were attending when they came by on several afternoons in May. Children have been in the program from three months to two and a half years. Family income for children ranges from very low to moderate, with an equal number of families falling at each extreme. There do not appear to be any correlations between test scores and economic factors or length of time in the Saakaaya program.

According to Senungetuk, "The key to understanding these scores may lie with the security and confidence that the children feel as they move back and forth daily between a Native home and a Native pre-

school. They are respected and allowed a fair amount of freedom to develop in both places."

"I'm really satisfied," says Lead Teacher Fran Williams, who has taught in the program for three years. "I didn't think the kids were paying attention. I guess they can be wiggling and jumping around but they are still listening."