

# Task force: Education is society's responsibility

The education of Alaska's youth is the responsibility of society as a whole, not just the public school system. That was an early decision of the Governor's Task Force on Effective Schooling, and it was a decision upon which much of the remainder of the task force findings and recommendations were based.

In defining the school's responsibility in the total education of our youth, the task force said many facets of society have the responsibility of educating our young. Parents and other family members have the responsibility for training children, for instilling values, for transferring good social skills, for encouraging learning and reinforcing what the schools teach.

Other parts of society also have a responsibility toward the education of our young, including community elders, the media, scouts, museums, libraries, social clubs, city and village councils and many others.

The public schools, as we all know, play a vital role, and it was this role that the Governor's Task Force on Effective Schooling attempted to define. While schools have a responsibility to contribute to the total education of young people, the task force said, schools' responsibilities are limited to formal schooling and supporting directly or indirectly those other entities that have other primary responsibilities of educating our young.

"Because so many diverse segments of society contribute to the education of the young," the task force said in its report to the governor, "there are many types of both formal and informal learning which are beyond the control of the school. Because the school does not and should not control all learning experiences, the responsibilities of the public school should be limited to aspects over which it has direct control." Because of that, the task force set out to define and outline the responsibilities of the public school:

After many weeks and months of deliberation, the task force defined the three types of responsibilities of public schools: primary, shared and supportive.

Primary responsibilities of education are those over which the school has assumed the major responsibility for teaching, according to the task force.

Shared responsibilities are those which schools share with groups, agencies and private industry to provide instruction to students in such areas as vocational and career education. A shared responsibility also includes providing a model to children to encourage the development of behaviors and attitudes exhibited by the community.

The supportive roles of schools require the schools to develop a supportive relationship with other entities in the community that have their own primary responsibilities for educating youth. An example could be that a school might develop support for a community's mental health agencies instead of expanding the school's staff to hire counseling psychologists.

With the help of a non-profit educational research agency—the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory—the task force examined a broad range of educational research in six major educational areas. These areas included:

- **Class size**—How does class size affect the learning process? Are small classes better than large classes?
- **Classroom organization and grouping**—Does it make a difference in learning to separate fast learners from slower learners, or is it better to keep them all together in one group?
- **Computer assisted instruction**—Given the large number of rural schools in Alaska, would it be better to use computers in the learning process? Would the results of using computers be the same in urban area schools?
- **Parent participation**—Does parent involve-

ment with the schools affect a child's performance in school?

- **The principal as instructional leader**—What leadership traits provide the best school learning environment possible?
- **Time factors**—How much time of the day, week or month does a student need to spend on a given task to learn that task thoroughly and be prepared to advance to the next level of difficulty?

The task force also spelled out several recommendations to the governor, including establishing a research arm of the Department of Education to examine other major areas of research and to keep current on research areas already examined.

**The task force also made recommendations to the State Board of Education in five other areas:**

1. To revise the minimum curriculum for elementary and junior high school students.
2. To revise the minimum state required high school graduation requirements.
3. To adopt twelve general goals toward which all schools should strive.
4. To adopt the practices that research indicates need to be present in a classroom for effective learning to take place. These recommendations include 18 direct and nine indirect general practices that the task force said were essential to all schools. Other research recommendations were based on the six major research areas.
5. To provide to the State Board of Education recommendations necessary to implement the task force recommendations in Alaska's public schools.

The remainder of this newspaper supplement deals with the specifics of those recommendations.

A brief history of education and some recent trends affecting education are also contained in this supplement.