

Inupiaq elementary education in transition

For the past several years, the Alaska State Department of Education has been reviewing programs in a variety of curricular areas throughout the state in an attempt to provide a means for Alaskan educators to share successful programs.

The program is called the Alaska Promising Practice Symposium. The Department of Education validates those pro-

grams they feel can serve as models of educational excellence within the state. A Criteria for Excellence has been established to form the basis for the validation process, and is judged by a team of professional educators to determine the stage of program development.

This past February, the Kotzebue Elementary School, Northwest Arctic School Dis-

trict, Kotzebue, Alaska, underwent a program review by the Department of Education, and was validated as an Alaska Promising Practice in Reading and Skills Bank programs.

Kotzebue's validation as a Promising Practice has been accomplished in just four years following the transition from Bureau of Indian Affairs control to local control in the form

of a Regional Education Attendance Area School District.

According to Kotzebue Elementary School principal Walt Day, "the validation is a result of the dedicated efforts of a relatively stable staff (both instructional and administrative) which provided the continuity so vital to instructional program development, and the commitment and support of the com-

munity, Northwest Arctic School Board of Education, and Superintendent, George H. White."

Kotzebue is a community of approximately 2,500 residents, 85 percent of which are Inupiaq Eskimo. The Kotzebue Elementary School services some 360 student. At the core of the Kotzebue basic skills programs,

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as well as all other Northwest Arctic Schools, is the emphasis on maximizing instruction for each child through the assessment of the student's needs, and the subsequent development of an Individual Academic Plan to meet those identified needs.

Other key components of the Kotzebue Reading program include:

1) Total staff involvement and commitment through staff meetings, extensive in-service training each year, participation in professional activities at both the state and national levels, and involvement in the program decision making process.

2) Resource staff to monitor, train, diagnose, and resolve curricular and programming difficulties on a daily basis (Basic Skills Resource Teacher).

3) The majority of instructional materials have been centralized and housed in a Skills Bank Resource Center to insure availability, appropriate utilization within the parameters of program delivery systems, and cost-effectiveness.

4) Weekly monitoring of student progress as well as yearly program followup and evaluation are conducted to assess program effectiveness for each child and for the entire student population.

5) Direct Instruction programs in Reading and Language (Distar and Corrective Reading), and Skill Based Reading/Language instruction focusing on content curricular areas are the core of Reading and Language Arts programs.

6) Also important is the affective component directed at enhancing student self-concept and awareness through early identification of potential learning difficulties, student extra-curricular activities, and the de-

velopment of Inupiaq language and bi-cultural programs which have been integrated into all areas of curriculum.

7) Finally, parent involvement is encouraged through volunteer activities within the school, parent conferences on a regular basis, and materials sent home to involve the entire family in the students learning process.

The bottom line in the value of any program model, however, is student performance. During the past three years, Kotzebue Elementary School students have made significant gains in the area of basic skills acquisition determined by standardized achievement and criterion refer-

enced test scores.

This year has also seen two members of the Kotzebue Elementary School staff receive individual statewide honors as professional educators. Mr. Al Peacock, 4th Grade Teacher, was selected as the Alaska Teacher of the Year by the Alaska Education Association, and Marcia Baker, also a 4th Grade Teacher, received an "Award for Excellence in Economics Education" from the Alaska Council for Economics Education for her student store project which came in third in statewide competition.

For Kotzebue Elementary School, this will surely be a year to remember.