

Elders convince schools to include Native studies

Beginning with the 1985 school year, Juneau public schools will be placing a stronger emphasis on Native studies in the Kindergarten-12 social studies curriculum.

Six Tlingit elders recently convinced the Juneau City-Borough School Board to adopt a set of courses containing an in-depth study program about Southeast Alaska's Native history and culture for all students in the Juneau public schools.

Officially titled Indian Education — Scope and Sequence, the curriculum's adoption marks a dramatic step in the Juneau school board's policy concerning Indian studies, says Judy Franklet, federal programs coordinator for the Juneau school district.

Franklet was instrumental

in obtaining funds to develop the program. She believes the study course is unique because it represents a pooling of resources from educators, administrators, elders, and concerned parents.

Franklet and the school board lauded the efforts of the elders in developing the extensive curriculum stating, "We really could not have done it without their help."

Tlingit elders Bessie Visaya, Jessie Dalton, Dr. Mildred Sparks, George Dalton, Dr. Alfred Widmark Sr., and Paul Henry together with a "scope and sequence committee" have been working on the curriculum's development for the past two years.

Summing up the feelings of the elders, Dr. Widmark stated,

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Rosie Peterson, Emma Widmark, Dr. Allen Barnes and Jessie Dalton discuss the elders' presentation to the Juneau-City Borough Board of Education. Ms. Widmark coordinated the presentation and provided moral support to the speaker. She is president of the Alaska Native Sisterhood Grand Camp and manager of the Tlingit and Haida Central Council Education Division.

Traditional stories, songs to teach culture

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"This curriculum should represent the best of Tlingit culture."

In 1974, the Juneau school board adopted a policy concerning Indian education, but, according to Franklet, "There was no direction to the policy. Most of the classes were work shop-oriented and dealt primarily with beadwork and carving."

"Native culture is not just beadwork and carving. Having the ability to work with the classroom teachers in developing grade-level studies for the curriculum insure its success. The program's goal is to impart a knowledge of the Tlingit culture's basic philosophy which teaches respect, spirituality, sense of identity, self-reliance, self-discipline, harmony with nature, and endurance," he said.

Franklet, and the rest of the scope and sequence developers, are hoping the curriculum will be used as a model for other school districts. "It may be the first of its kind," Franklet said about the curriculum.

"Research done by Southeast Regional Resource consultant, Glen Ray, showed that there may not be one single K-12 Indian education curriculum in the United States. He contacted educational administrators in almost every state and consistently trying to find one. So we've really had to start from scratch."

A glance at the curriculum reveals the extensive amount of research and planning that must have been done to develop such a comprehensive

program. It also looks like a lot of fun.

The kindergartners will start learning about Native culture by listening to traditional stories and songs. Study material progresses in relation to grade level. Language, dance, and design studies will begin in the primary grades and will continue through the 12th grade. Grade school classes will also include the study of fish and wildlife common to the Southeast area.

Classroom teachers will recruit resource people to help teach many of the subjects included in the curriculum. According to Franklet, out of the some 250 certified teachers in the Juneau school district, there is only one Native Alaskan.

Franklet, and the Indian-Scope & Sequence committee are hoping education, scope and curriculum will provide an impetus for Natives to become more involved in public education.



Royal De Asis, left, Judy Franklet (seated), Dr. Mildred Sparks and Dr. Alfred Widmark, exchange a few light-hearted comments about the evening's proceedings. Dr. Sparks recently was hospitalized for treatment of a stroke. Cards and letters from well-wishers can be mailed to her care of Emma Widmark, One Sealaska Plaza, Suite 200, Juneau, Alaska, 99801.



Jessie Dalton, seated left, and George Dalton of Hoonah engage Dr. Allen Barnes in friendly discussion on the school system. Barnes is chairman of the Juneau-City Borough School Board. Their talks followed a one-hour presentation by six elders.