

# Bilingual program trains Yupik teachers

From the VANGUARD  
Alaska Community Colleges  
Federation of Teachers

A little over 15 years ago, Yupik Eskimo was a dying oral language. Over 95% of the Eskimo population in the Yukon Kuskokwim region spoke Yupik, but children were placed in schools where they were often punished for speaking their Native language. With the development of a standardized Yupik orthography (written language) and the efforts of enlightened educators, it was seen that the Yupik children would benefit from instruction by Yupik teachers. These Native bilingual/bicultural teachers would be able to teach in both languages and provide relevant education in both cultures.

The Yupik Teacher Training Project was established at Kuskokwim Community College in an effort to produce Native Alaska bilingual/bicultural teachers. The program delivers college courses in bilingual/bicultural education to Eskimo students working toward Associate Arts and Bachelor of education degrees. Kuskokwim Community College is located in Bethel, the hub of over 886,000 square miles of tundra delta country and serves 56 Yupik Eskimo communities. The population of the region is about 20,000, 95% Yupik and of which approximately 85% speak Yupik as their primary language.

The Yupik Teacher Training Project has stimulated and assisted the increased enrollment by facilitating the regular presence of college instructors in the villages. The Yupik Teacher Training Project has also increased in size over the past several years. At the beginning

of the program in 1976, the objectives of the program were to deliver college degree and career development training to 33 Eskimo students working as teacher aides in the Primary Eskimo Program, a bilingual elementary education program in eight local schools.

The population being served in the 1980-81 school year is over 100. These students are Yupik paraprofessionals: teacher aides, associate teachers, bilingual teachers, adult education teachers, early childhood aides and teachers, as well as parents of children in bilingual programs and other interested villagers. The majority of the students enrolled in Yupik Teacher Training Project work full time in local schools and take two courses each semester as well as attend summer school. This enables Native paraprofessionals to further their education and

careers and still remain in their communities in service to the children and village. The students receiving services directly from Yupik Teacher Training Project live in 21 villages in the Yukon Kuskokwim Region. Consultant services training is provided to the five school districts in the Yukon Kuskokwim region with Yupik language programs. The Yupik Teacher Training Project staff consists of three full time instructors, four field center coordinators, and six part-time instructors.

The bilingual education courses delivered in the villages through Yupik Teacher Training Project are designed to integrate into the curriculum programs existing in the village schools and to provide training in how to implement the local bilingual elementary and secondary education programs. All education

courses involve activity rooms with their own students. In addition, the college instructor is available as a resource person to the local school.

Nineteen students have graduated from the Yupik Teacher Training Project program with A.A. degrees in bilingual education and six more are expected to graduate this May. Of the nineteen graduates, one has left the program to continue his B. Ed. part time, two are enrolled in the Cross-Cultural Education Program working on their B. Ed. and nine have chosen to remain working in their local elementary bilingual programs available through Yupik Teacher Training and Alaska Pacific University. All of the Yupik students have expressed a desire to complete their teacher certificate training and two have stated their goal to be school administrators.

The Yupik Teacher Training Project has become an integral part of the college and the

focus point around which the village instruction is based. The village instruction division is the administrative department responsible for the delivery of courses in education, business, humanities, and other academic and vocational areas to the 6 villages in the region. The development and success of the Yupik Teacher Training Project has been a factor in the establishment and growth of the village instruction division and the institutionalization of village course delivery. The increase in village enrollment, especially in bilingual education and other education career areas, has been largely due to the regular presence of instructors in the villages. That presence is almost solely the result of the financial assistance of the Office of Bilingual Education ESEA Title VII which funds the Yupik Teacher Training Project.

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