

Small business thrives in village school

Starting a small business is no easy task.

It takes a sense of mission, perseverance and a capacity for long hours of labor.

But entrepreneurship is usually not an available option for young students in Alaska — unless School-Based Enterprises and School-Based Enterprises are involved.

The intent of the school-based business is to give students business training, involve private business in rural schools and communities and promote economic development.

In New Stuyahok, a village near the Nushagak River in the Bristol Bay region, students at Chief Ivan Blunka High School have the chance to get

of many the students are involved with, the class has researched about half of the business needs for the cafe.

"If our restaurant opens, I think the prices will be a little expensive just to get on track in a short period of time and drop the prices to stay competitive as the years go on," he said.

The students have thoroughly considered just about every part of the venture.

"The restaurant will not be open during the summer months, because all the people move away to go fishing and the teachers and students will be having their vacation," Bergman said.

But not only has the program taught the students at the high school about responsibility, it has given them freedom.



Students at New Stuyahok's school may hire villagers for their small business.

New Stuyahok



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New Stuyahok, Alaska 99636

hands-on experience in small business development.

The seniors at the high school are in charge of the project. And if they succeed, future seniors at the school will continue with the program.

And some of the business ventures which they already have started may end up employing members of the community.

The business established in the village is called New Stuyahok Enterprises, a parent company which is a sort of "business incubator" trying to start small businesses there.

Todd Bergman, a teacher at the high school and the project coordinator, said the students in the program have done a community profile, completed a community needs assessment and marketing surveys.

"When the school has some kind of activity there are a lot of kids that want to go spend their money," he said, adding that it is important to give them a productive place to spend it so they

won't get into trouble.

But overall the success of the program has been tremendous, according to Bergman.

"The only money circulating in the village now is from our store and during school activities," he said.

And things are even looking better.

For example, the cafe, once the funding is received, will use the work of people inside the village to put up the building or use already existing property, he said.

"We haven't decided on location or exact structure yet," Bergman said.

The students have been considering attending a state business conference and possibly the National Entrepreneurship Conference to share their experiences.

School-Based Enterprise is currently evolving in various regions of the United States.

The program usually starts with the organizing efforts of educators and students who have a desire to venture into real business.

School-Based Enterprises are tailored to local community needs and are designed to provide goods or services needed in the local economy.

But at the same time, it reinforces academic skills and provides wages and employment opportunities.

"The Alaska Department of Education will be producing an educational video on school-based business in which we will be featured," Bergman said.

Bergman said the program has received a lot of attention already. But he hopes it will get even more from other schools and educators.

"We are going to continue to spread the word on School-Based Enterprises," he said.

The seniors at the high school are in charge of the project. And if they succeed, future seniors at the school will continue with the program.

The profile includes details about the economy, government, communication, education, recreational and natural resources of the village, he said.

The small business students did a large amount of research on where they would be able to get some funding sources, Bergman said.

"We received two sources of funding which were from our school district and from a state mini-grant," he said.

The students' next project is to find a way to fund a restaurant called the Nushagak Cafe.

And although the project is just one