# Computer ratio highest here

Alaska leads the nation in the number of computers per student in public schools, according to a recent survey conducted by the State Department of Education.

The annual survey, conducted by the Office of Instructional Services, shows that the number of computers in Alaska public schools has grown from 526 in 1982 to 4,585 in 1984--an 871 percent increase in two years.

Alaska boasts one computer for every 21.8 students, giving the state the most favorable computer to student ratio in the nation. South Dakota was reported to have the most favorable ratio in the Lower 48 with one computer for every 42.9 students.

School districts reported that computers are most often used to supplement existing curriculum. Students use drill and practice exercises, tutorial instruction, simulation and educational games.

Word processing emerged as the second most popular use of computers in schools. Some 250 schools reported using word processing in the classroom, a 53.4 percent increase since April 1983. Students use word processing as early as primary grades to create and revise class assignments.

The majority of computers--2,822--are located in classrooms Others are found in computer labs, school libraries and various other locations. Printers are attached to 1,061 computer and telecommunication modems to 336 computers.

Many Alaska school districts received their first computers through the state-sponsored Educational Telecommunications for Alaska Project (ETA) from 1977 to 1981.

The most common computer language taught is BASIC, which is taught in 142 schools. The second most common language is Logo, which is taught in 110 schools.

Equal access to computer technology, a major concern in other states, is not a major issue in Alaska schools. Unlike the Lower 48, rural and urban school districts have roughly the same computer to student ratios. The eleven largest population centers in Alaska have a computer to student ratio of 1 to 22.5 Rural Alaska school districts have a ratio of 1 to 20.6.

A recent study of 27 small rural Alaska high schools by Judith Kleinfeld, psychology professor from the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, found that computers were heavily used by students and staff members said they thought computers were making a significant contribution to student achievement.

School districts reported that 2,929 secondary students are currently taking one or more Individualized Study by Technology (IST) courses. IST courses, developed by the state Department of Education, offer multi-media instruction using books, workbooks, audiotapes, videotapes and computer software. IST courses in subjects ranging from math, reading and Alaska history to science and health are being used in 124 Alaska schools. The courses are especially popular in small schools where teachers must teach several grades and subjects at a time.

In the survey, school district

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# Computers aren't regional

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personnel indicated a need for continued support of computer education by both the Department of Education and local school districts.

Several factors are responsible for the success of educational computing in Alaska in this early phase, according to Paul Berg, educational computing specialist with the Department of Education Office of Instructional Services. One is the versatility of computers as a means of instruction. They can be used to drill or tutor students who need extra practice, to depict or demonstrate ideas or concepts, and for students to write and rewrite assignments or to communicate electronically over great distances.

Unlike schools in the Lower 48, most Alaska schools have been fortunate to have sufficient financial resources to purchase computer hardware. In addition, the Department of Education has offered workshops that have trained more than 2,000 educators over the past three years. And the self-contained Alaska Computer Training Series is now available to all school districts requesting further training.

To help Alaska schools acquire quality educational software, the Department has contracted since 1981 to make materials from the Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium available to Alaska school districts at reduced prices.

One other factor has been instrumental in Alaska's success with educational computing in this early phase, Berg said: a high level of cooperation and sharing among educational computer specialists in Alaska school districts.

"Whereas many other states mandated educational computing requirements, Alaska has worked through leadership by common consensus," Berg said. The Alaska Association for Computers in Education and informal networks among educators have become strong forums for the exchange of ideas, Berg said.

"It is ironic," he noted, that one of the most cooperative and cohesive approaches to educational computing has evolved here in a state noted for the high value residents place on regional identity and local control.