



A block print by 9th grader Tony Wright illustrates one of the products of the bicultural programs in the Northwest Arctic School District's programs.

## Bicultural program gaining

By J.C. CREED  
From Tusraayugaat

Together with vocational-technical education and teaching basic skills, cross-cultural education is a major focus of the Northwest Arctic School District. The proposed Inupiat Materials Development Center in Kotzebue will better facilitate the Inupiat language and culture. Funds for the center are currently being sought from the Legislature.

From modest beginnings, the district's bilingual/bicultural program has seen great progress. However, it has always been hindered by limited funding and lack of texts and teaching aids.

At the current rate of funding, an effective Inupiat curriculum will take 25 years to implement. Realizing that a full quarter-century will be too late, School Superintendent George White is seeking additional funds during the current legislative session. These funds would launch the proposed Inupiat Materials Development Center.

"Full implementation," said White, "will still take five years. Parents must continue to speak Inupiat at home, and our education system must more fully involve our Inupiat instructors who speak the language, or it will not survive."

Willie Hensley of Kotzebue, president of NANA Development Corporation and nationally recognized Native American leader, identified these same concerns at the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention in Anchorage last October.

"What I mean by survival is not just political survival or economic survival," explained Hensley. "I'm talking about survival of our tribal spirit, of our languages, or our culture, or our self-respect."

Hensley explained that Native people have been sold education as the great "cure-all" for many problems.

"But it (education) has also been used by government, in conjunction with religious groups, as a means of deculturizing our people. I'm not saying we should not be educated. Education is essential... But we cannot continue to educate our children at the expense of their identity as Inupiat or Yupik or Indian people."

Since the Native Claims Settlement Act was passed in 1971 and the rural school districts and village high schools were established in 1976, rural Alaska has experienced a tremendous social and economic transition.

Many of the resulting Native corporations (like NANA) seem to have since secured economic and political security. Students can now attend high school at home through high school. However, an historically solid Native population has not yet redefined its cultural spirit and identity in the modern world.

At the AFN Convention,  
(Continued on Page Thirteen)

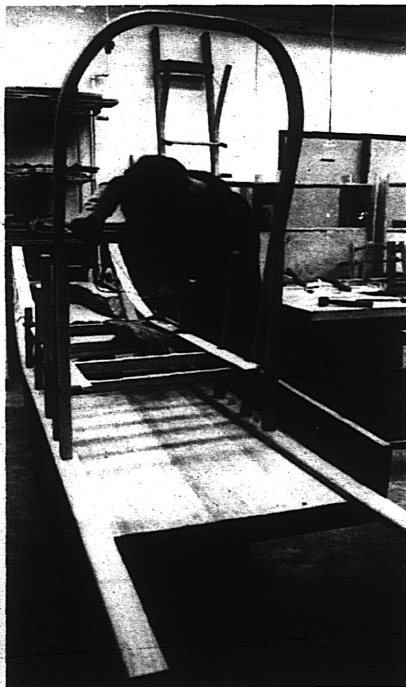
Photos by J.C. Sneed



Kotzebue elder Walter Kowanna, shows students the moves to a traditional Inupiat dance.



Lucy Allen judges the sewing competition at the school district's recent student fair in Kotzebue.



Kenny Wells, a senior at Noorvik, puts the finishing touches on a sled he's building in school.

# ● Bicultural

(Continued from Page Eleven)

Hensley advised that each Native group develop regional programs to revive the language and spirit of the people.

The Native language and culture must more fully be incorporated into our community schools, if rural education is to seriously address Hensley's concerns.

The Northwest Arctic School District's proposed Inupiaq Materials Development Center is a result of a commitment to cross-cultural education since 1976. It is the first of its kind in rural Alaska. The materials developed will be for language instruction, rather than simple "storybooks" about Eskimos, written or recorded by outsiders, as has been the case so often in the past.

Instructional television will provide certain sequences.

It has a unique team-teaching approach involving certified staff.

Originally designed by Assistant Superintendent Martin Zelonky, with the continual input of Inupiaq instructors, local residents, principals and teachers throughout the region, the Materials Development Center was developed and refined in a team effort by Ceasar McDowell, Niki McCurry, and Zelonky.

"Critical to the materials development is the pilot edition process," said Superintendent White. "Each edition will be field-tested and revised during the process. This is the key to developing relevant Inupiaq materials."