

# Job sharing solves Chiniak school problem

*Editor's Note: The Chiniak School has been selected as the 1987 National Rural and Small School Consortium national exemplary program winner in the innovative and creative programs category. The awards ceremony will be Oct. 16 in Arlington, Va. The following summary of the school's program was submitted by Chiniak School.*

How can a remote two-room school in an Alaskan fishing village provide a stable program if there is complete faculty turnover every year or two?

On the other hand, how can rural students get a well-rounded education if they are exposed to the teaching strengths of only two adults during their entire nine years of elementary school?

This curious dilemma is a common problem in Alaska's one- and two-teacher schools. They need a stable staff to provide a cohesive, well planned program, yet they also need staff turnover to bring a variety of teaching skills into the school.

Since 1982, the Kodiak Island Borough School District has experimented with one possible answer to this stability vs. variety dilemma: shared staffing. This job-sharing arrangement allows a two-teacher school to be staffed by four half-year teachers. One teaching couple is responsible for the first semester of each year, while the other couple arrives each January to teach the second semester.

The same four people return each year on a one-semester basis, with each teacher having a half-year contract and a half-year salary.

Consideration of this staffing pattern began when Supt. Noreen Thompson met with the local Chiniak Advisory School Board to discuss whether shared staffing would be effective at that site. Chiniak, a fishing community of about 150 people, spreads out along northeast edge of Kodiak Island.

The two-room school, serving 20 students in kindergarten through eighth grade, seemed both small enough and isolated enough to benefit from shared staffing. The advisory board and Chiniak parents took an active interest and developed a plan for implementing the program on a two-year trial basis.

The experiment was a success; now in its sixth year with no staff turnover, this job-sharing arrangement provides a stable base for long-term planning in Chiniak and yet exposes the students to four teachers rather than the two they would otherwise have.

Ned and Elaine Griffin teach the first semester each year; Chuck and Karen Tennesen take the second. In 1984, Chiniak's growing school population led to the addition of a half-day, full year, staff member, Margaret Roberts.

The school now has the expertise of five experienced village teachers to draw on, at a cost to the school district of two and a half teachers.

Gradually, as shared staff has evolved, we have developed certain routines to guide us through the year. June is the month for organizing the wide variety of teaching talents now available in the school. We chart all of the following year's projects on a master calendar with responsibilities shared out on the basis of who's best at what. By the time we are done, we generally find we have been able to cover everything from medieval banquets to waterfowl workshops.

When school starts in September, the emphasis switches from planning to maintaining communication, since only three of the five teachers are



*The Chiniak School serves 20 students up to eighth grade.*

physically present in Chiniak during any one semester. Student-produced newsletters, school board minutes and copies of the budget are mailed to the absent set of teachers.

January is shared staffing's busiest month. Anticipation of the Tennesens' arrival perks up winter spirits; students look forward to this chance for a fresh beginning in mid-

year. Once the Tennesens are in Chiniak, all efforts are devoted to ensuring a smooth transition from one set of teachers to the next.

Each teaching couple volunteers a week of extra time, with the Tennesens arriving a week before their contract begins, and the Griffins staying a week after their contract ends. This creates a two-week overlap with

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all four job-sharing teachers present, allowing us critical time for jointly reviewing everything from student records to budget requests.

By the time the community "welcome and farewell" potluck is over, the Tennesens and the students are smoothly settled into their second semester routine. When the Griffins leave, long-distance communication between the job-sharers resumes. At the end of the school year, in June, all five teachers are present, and it's time for the cycle to begin again with planning for the next year's program.

This innovative staffing pattern, when backed by enthusiastic teachers, involved parents and a supportive administration, can produce exciting results for a small rural school.

Since all of these opportunities for growth reoccur on an annual basis, there is a constant flow of new ideas into the school.

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