

Correspondence study growing educational program in Alaska

By TIM SHELTON

Two years ago, elementary and secondary correspondence study in Alaska was a low-profile program with minimum funding and isolated students.

Today, however, as the result of new funding and innovative planning, correspondence study in Alaska has become a growing educational program in which the students communicate, participate together in activities and actually function as a student body.

Prior to July 1, 1975, the correspondence program was available only to those Alaskans who lived in remote, unincorporated areas of the state. To be eligible, they had to live more than two miles from a school or bus route.

Now, however, as the result of 1975 legislation, all Alaskans are eligible to enroll with the State's Centralized Correspondence Study program, administered by the State Department of Education out of Juneau.

Wanda Cooksey, in charge of the Centralized Correspondence program, emphasized that several local school districts around the state offer their own correspondence programs, and in such cases it may be preferable for the students to choose the local program. Students may enroll in the Centralized program, however, if they so desire.

Despite its interesting aspects, correspondence study is not an easy alternative to regular school attendance. The district and Centralized programs are set up to help students who would otherwise be left completely out of the educational mainstream, such as those who live on boats or at logging camps.

"Correspondence study is more difficult than a regular school program," said Marilou Madden, director of Educational Program Support from the Alaska Department of Education. "It's more time-consuming for the students and more demanding on parents. If regular schooling is available, correspondence study should not be considered an easier alternative."

Correspondence students who have daily access to regular schools are bound by compulsory attendance laws and are expected to complete one

year of course work in a year's time in order to continue in the program.

The Centralized Correspondence program now receives funding similar to that received by the school districts. As a result, funding has increased, allowing for the development of many new activities.

There are currently 345 students throughout Alaska enrolled in Centralized Correspondence Study. Of these, 80 are studying at the secondary level.

Under the Centralized Study system, a home teacher, who is usually a parent, oversees the student's daily study program, while a certified advisory teacher maintains correspondence with the students and grades papers in Juneau.

The Centralized program provides a correspondence library. Students receive a catalog and may choose as many books as they wish, with no definite return date. Other materials supplied by the library include games, puzzles, maps, reference books, film clips, cassettes and special art materials.

The high school program is becoming more and more localized, both in content and implementation, notes Secondary Specialist Paul Hilburn.

A history of Alaska course has been written and will be administered out of Juneau, to be followed by 9th grade courses in math, English and general science.

Until recently the high school courses have been purchased outside the state and have all been sent to the University of Nebraska and other outside agencies for grading. The state will continue to use some out-of-state materials, but basic courses will be graded in Juneau with direct correspondence between the Juneau teacher and the correspondence student.

Of key importance is the fact that the lessons will be mailed from Juneau and the teachers will also be in Juneau. The teachers also will have the capability of making visits. Eventually all basic course work will come out of Juneau, rather than from out of state, and the

teachers will work directly with the students.

New programs at the high school level have helped revolutionize Alaska's correspondence program. The students recently elected four representatives by mail ballot.

The elected students then came to Juneau, set up a student body organization and wrote a constitution. Students wanting to be representatives nominated themselves by mail and included a statement and biographical sketch.

These were included in newsletters to the students and then ballots were sent out. The constitution is awaiting student ratification by mail.

The newly-formed student body can now become a member of the Alaska Association of Student Governments, which will make it eligible for various kinds of funding and activities. The students now legally will be able to participate in such competitive activities as debate and cross-country skiing.

Educational sessions known as "Peer Group Meetings" have been added to the list of opportunities available to Centralized Correspondence students. Under the plan, selected students will travel, with expenses paid, to a central location where they receive instruction in subjects that can't be covered by mail.

The first Peer Group Meeting was held recently at Anchorage and covered a wide range of special courses, including swimming, driver's education and art, metal and wood shop. The students saw veterinary medicine at work and visited offices of the Department of Fish and Game, Division of Lands and the Department of Environmental Conservation. Tutoring in literature and archery was also offered. In

the future, however, Peer Group Meetings probably will concentrate on just one subject at a time.

Also on the drawing board is a course in aviation that will lead to actual flight training.

Already arranged for this summer is a 23-day Yukon River trip. Under this pilot program, selected students will start their journey at Skagway, hike over the historical Chilkoot pass and then travel down the Yukon River to Whitehorse and Dawson City. The trip will end at Eagle, Alaska.

During the trip, the students will travel for a half a day by foot or boat, then spend the remainder of the day studying historical sites, plants and wildlife and doing rock climbing and photography.

The trip will be part of the correspondence curriculum, with credit offered. The students will be expected to prepare in advance by reading about Skagway and the Gold Rush era and about plants and animals of the region. At the end of the expedition, the students will be expected to prepare and submit a report covering what they did and what they learned. Those who successfully complete the course will earn credit in Gold Rush history and outdoor science.

Options for such field experiences as the Yukon River trip will be offered primarily to students who are geographically isolated and who have little other opportunity to associate with their peers.

For the first time, state correspondence students will have representatives at Boys' State at Fairbanks and Girls' State at Anchorage, thanks to the efforts of the Juneau American Legion post. Next year, state and district correspondence students may be

eligible to attend from their local areas.

Parents of the correspondence students are also getting the opportunity to communicate. A select "Parents' Advisory Group" came to Juneau recently and produced an eight-page document containing recommendations for the Department of Education. The parents nominated themselves for the duty by mail, then were chosen by the Centralized Correspondence staff. The Department of Education is responding to the recommendations.

Hilburn and advisory teacher Linda Schultz recently were able to visit some of their correspondence students and their parents at several locations in Southeastern Alaska. They visited Biorka Island near Sitka, Tokeon on Prince of Wales Island and Security Bay and sat down with the students and parents, looked over the various study situations, reviewed the supply of materials and checked for shipping problems.

Some students live on boats, and storing education materials on board can be a difficult problem.

Several of the Home Teachers (parents) also had the opportunity to meet at Anchorage to discuss their unique teaching requirements.

In just two years the Centralized Correspondence Study program has proven to be a valuable addition to the Alaska Department of Education's overall learning programs.

For further information on the program, contact the Correspondence Study Coordinator, Pouch GA, Juneau, Alaska 99811.

Young campaigns in rural areas . . .

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problems there too and Young thinks the biggest one is the federal government. "There's a lack of a logical approach to problems in the bush, a lack of understanding." When asked if people complain to him, Young says that people in the rural areas are not grippers or complainers. "They say they have a problem and they want it solved," like medical care, housing, a solid waste burning area in Noorvik and sewer and water in Kotzebue. Because his philosophy is "always respect your elders," Young starts his visits with the regional corporations, the village corporations and the village councils and ends up drinking tea and eating agutak with the villagers.

Don Young says he views his job in Washington not so much as what he does for Alaskans but what he keeps from being done to them. He firmly calls the recently passed omnibus bill for Native Claims improvements his bill. His efforts in Washington are meant to assure that the bush is allowed to live as in the past although he also admits that change will take place and that he has no desire to limit the right to change. "The question is how you evolve, whether you destroy or adjust." Currently, he's concerned about what he calls the battle for subsistence hunting and bills that will do away with trapping and hunting. He wants the taking of fur-bearing, marine and other animals to be allowed without restriction and harassment brought on by "misguided

individuals who believe that nature is so kind, and how could anyone kill a poor little moosie or baby seal."

Young reports the next big thing coming up for Alaska this session is the Indian Health bill which will affect approximately 21 areas in the state and will provide clinics, hospitals, housing, equipment and training to the tune of around five million dollars. But the biggest of the big issues remains land. It won't come up until next session but when it does "that's going to be a battle," says Young. The issue rests on the Alaskan lands that are to be set aside for possible parks and refuge areas, a move, he says, which locks up native lands and nullifies the Claims Act. "Man is here also and should not be separated from the environment."

Changes in the attitudes of Alaskans are apparent to Young as he travels the state. He says there used to be a lot of bitterness between whites and Natives but now everyone seems to be viewing Alaska as Alaskans and recognizes that they are all in the same boat together. He credits much of the change to the great deal that has been accomplished through the Native Claims Act especially in giving the rural areas goals to be achieved.

This week, Don Young is on to the Yukon area and after the primary on August 24 he will be at his home in Ft. Yukon for awhile where he says he and his wife Lula, a Native Alaskan, like it best. Living in Washington, D.C., where "you get too

wrapped up in your golf or the high-flying life" he calls the worst part of his job.

Convinced that he is the hardest working congressman and the best man for the rural areas because he relates well to the people, Young also admits that his best training has been the two elections he lost when he learned that "the world turns without you." But that doesn't stop him from fulfilling a promise he made to himself in 1966 to visit every habited area in the state before he dies. He counts a total of 490, and this week he proudly says, he has hit 200.

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