



UAA Center for Alaska Education Policy Research

UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE

ALASKA NATIVE-FOCUSED TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

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Introduction

In Alaska, 80% of rural students are Alaska Native. But fewer than 5% of Alaska's certified teachers are Alaska Native, and 74% of teachers hired by Alaska's public schools come from outside the state. Teachers new to rural Alaska typically remain on the job just one or two years.

Since 1970, there have been numerous teacher certification programs intended to bring more Alaska Natives and rural residents into classrooms. Many community and education leaders believe rural schools could benefit from having more such teachers, because they would likely stay on the job longer, be more familiar with their students' communities and cultures, and provide more powerful role models for Alaska Native students.

The share of rural teachers who are Alaska Natives or rural residents remains small, but efforts to increase their numbers continue. The programs offered in the past few decades have provided important lessons about how to successfully recruit and prepare Alaska Native and rural-resident teachers. But these lessons are not well documented or consistently used in Alaska's current teacher certification programs.

In this brief, we take a first step toward summarizing the contributions of these programs by describing them, their graduates, and key lessons learned. This brief does not discuss current efforts at the University of Alaska to increase the number of Alaska Native and rural-resident teachers graduating from regular

teacher preparation programs. But it's important to recognize that all three UA campuses enroll Alaska Native teacher candidates in their regular programs, and all include distance-delivered programs, in an effort to recruit and better meet the needs of teacher candidates from rural communities.

Alaska Native-Focused Programs

Table 1 lists the Alaska Native-focused teacher preparation programs initiated since 1970, their sources of funding, the number of graduates, and their current status. Several are continuing, but others have been discontinued; a number were supported by federal funding, and lasted only as long as the federal funding lasted.

In addition to those programs, the Lower Kuskokwim District has since the 1980s budgeted funds for both Yup'ik language teachers and other paraprofessionals to earn teacher certification with all expenses paid. Over 60 Alaska Native teachers have been certified with district support. Some graduated from the programs we have studied; others completed regular teacher education programs at the University of Alaska or elsewhere.

What have we learned?

We interviewed students, directors, and faculty of ten past and current rural and distance teacher preparation programs that targeted Alaska Natives from 1970 to the present. As of early 2014, 172 Alaska Native teachers had graduated from these programs. Themes emerged from our interviews in recruitment, program delivery, and program sustainability.

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Recruitment

All the rural and distance delivery programs we looked at focused on Alaska Native students, but some also included non-Native students. Several programs were designed to prepare adults who already had bachelor's degrees in some other field to become teachers. The requirement that participants already hold a bachelor's degree greatly limited the pool of potential candidates. Other programs allowed students to complete their degrees as part of the program—but in those programs, students often took a long time to earn their degrees. Those delays happened for many reasons, including the fact that many participants were adult students balancing family, employment, subsistence, and community obligations with school.

These challenges continue to hold true for ongoing programs. Not all rural Alaska adults who already have bachelor's degrees want to move into the teaching profession. And adults who are interested in obtaining a bachelor's degree in education often have other obligations—as noted above—that keep them from taking a full-time course load and completing their teacher preparation program in four years.

Program Content and Delivery

All teacher preparation programs have to meet the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development's requirements. But programs we studied had various approaches to preparing their students for teaching in rural and Alaska Native communities. The Alaska Rural Teacher Training Corps (ARTTC), the Cross-Cultural Education Program (X-CED), and the Chevak Teacher Education Initiative developed new curriculum related to local and cultural issues. The Alaska Native Teacher Preparation Program enrolled students in the existing teacher preparation program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The director of that program told us that incorporating Alaska Native perspectives and pedagogies into the core of UAF's elementary and secondary program coursework would have benefited all students.

Most programs we examined used a mix of distance and face-to-face delivery methods, periodically bringing teacher candidates together for short intensive courses and providing the remainder of instruction via teleconference or online. For example, in the now-discontinued ARTTC/X-CED and Rural Educator Preparation Partnership (REPP) programs, teacher candidates and faculty met face-to-face at the beginning of the year, and each candidate was assigned a faculty member to provide academic and financial advising throughout the program. In the REPP program, a faculty member was responsible for all the REPP participants in a given region and helped to prevent or address any difficulties that might affect candidates' academic progress or financial well-being. Regional meetings also helped maintain communications.

The ongoing Chevak Teacher Education Initiative brings faculty to the community during the academic year, and sends students to the University of Alaska Anchorage for summer intensives. By contrast, the now-discontinued Alaska Transition in Teaching (AKT2) program provided little face-to-face contact between students and advisors, but had team-developed distance-delivery courses that did not have to be delivered by a university-based program, thanks to changes in teacher certification regulations and statutes.

Our informants told us that intensive support for teacher candidates is critical for success. For example, the Praxis I test (a test of general knowledge, adopted by the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development in 1998) has been a barrier to teacher certification for many rural teacher candidates.

Past participants in the Rural Alaska Native Adult (RANA) and Chevak programs received extra support to prepare for the test; they took a Praxis I pre-test and received instruction in areas where they needed improvement. They also had the opportunity to retake the test several times if needed, with additional coaching.

Table 1. Program funding, years of operation and current status.					
Program	Funding	All Cert.	Natives Cert.	Years	Current Status
UAF: Alaska Rural Teacher Training Corps (ARTTC) UAF: Cross-Cultural Education (X-CED) Program	Both ARTTC & X-CED were funded by Fed. Teacher Corps, Career Op. Program, PL 874, Johnson O'Malley, State of AK	101	67	1970-1990	ARTTC became X-CED in 1974 X-CED became Center for Cross-Cultural Studies in 1978
UAF: Rural Educator Preparation Partnership (REPP)	US Department of Education, Office of Indian Ed	116	23	1995-2006	Discontinued
APU: Rural AK Native Adult (RANA)	US Department of Education		34	1999-2011	On Hold
UAS: Preparing Indigenous Teachers & Admin. for Alaska's Schools (PITAAS)	US Department of Education, Alaska Native Education Equity Program	32	12	2000-Present	Continuing
UAS: B.Ed. Distance Elementary	General Funds	70	16	2003-2013	Continuing
Ak EED: Alaska Transition to Teaching (AKT2)	US Department of Education	46	1	2007-2013	Discontinued
UAF: Alaska Native Teacher Preparation Program (ANTPP)	US Department of Education, Office of Indian Education	19	19	2008-2012	Discontinued
UAA: Chevak Teacher Education Initiative	Private Funding, Grants	12	12	2010-present	Continuing
UAS: Village Teacher Grant Program	US Department of Education, Office of Indian Education	27	27	2011-Present	Continuing

In many of the rural teacher preparation programs, directors acted as the liaison between faculty and students and worked to maintain communications that were sometimes difficult, given the distances. Teacher candidates in such programs told us that being able to stay in their home community, with their support system intact—rather than moving to Anchorage or Fairbanks while going to school—helped them complete their teacher certification program.

Program Sustainability

Sustainability has been a challenge for all the programs we reviewed. Most of these initia-

tives did not become permanent or self-sustaining, either because continuing funding was not available when the initial grants ended, or because of political decisions to close them.

But now, momentum toward developing more sustainable efforts is building in the University of Alaska system. A continuing issue is that providing sufficient levels of academic, social, and fiscal support to rural students is expensive. For programs targeting rural and Alaska Native students to be successful and sustainable, significant and ongoing investment of resources will be needed.

Conclusion

From 1970 to 2014 (44 years), 172 Alaska Natives—or about 4 per year—earned teacher certification through the programs we reviewed.

At that rate, the programs could never produce enough new rural-resident and Alaska Native teachers to increase their representation in Alaska’s rural schools. And several of those programs have now been discontinued.

But the programs described in this brief provide insight into ways of meeting the challenges of bringing more Alaska Native and rural-resident teachers into the state’s classrooms. Success will require several kinds of efforts.

Access

- Expanded and improved distance and hybrid delivery models would let teacher candidates stay in their home communities for at least part of their teacher preparation.
- Cost has been a barrier, especially for older students with families. The Alaska Performance Scholarship will help those straight out of high school, but older students may need other financial supports.

Academics

- University programs should use curricula that are place-based and infused with traditional Alaska Native knowledge, and support development of additional materials.
- University faculty should learn about, honor and incorporate Native ways of teaching and learning.

Student support

- The university should provide intensive advising in academics, finances, and negotiating the university system.
- Support to pass the Praxis (or other required tests) can be key to insuring that stu-

dents finish their programs and become certified teachers.

- Improved student support would benefit all students.

Involving a wide range of stakeholders—including not only K-12 administrators but also Elders, Alaska Native leaders, and rural community residents—could help improve the success of teacher preparation programs focused on rural and Alaska Native students. The programs with the most graduates—ARTTC and X-CED—involved Alaska Native communities as stakeholders. Community involvement can be key in both recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. Elders, parents, and community leaders can identify and support Alaska Natives interested in becoming teachers.

Some of these elements are already in place in the University of Alaska system. The College of Rural and Community Development (CRCD) at UAF includes rural campuses and several centers focused on cross-cultural and distance education. UAA and UAS also have community campuses in rural communities. With this support structure, rural students can begin their college experience in rural hubs and benefit from the growing number of courses and programs offered by distance.

All three campuses have ongoing efforts to recruit and prepare Alaska Native teachers, and the University of Alaska’s teacher education programs committed to advancing that work in the 2011 Teacher Education Plan. Their efforts include incorporating Native-based content and pedagogy into teacher education programs and providing student support services. As this work moves forward, we hope it builds on lessons from past efforts, to create the best possible programs for increasing the number of Alaska Native teachers.

The Center for Alaska Education Policy Research conducts non-partisan research on policy issues around educational access, equity and excellence in the Alaska context, across early childhood, primary and secondary, higher and adult education. More detailed information about each of the 10 programs included in this report is available on our website: <http://www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu/CAEPR>