

GROWING OUR OWN: INDIGENOUS RESEARCH, SCHOLARS, AND EDUCATION
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Alaska Native-Focused Teacher Preparation Programs: What Have We Learned?

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There are too few indigenous teachers in Alaska, as fewer than 5% of Alaska's certified teachers are Alaska Native. However, Alaska's indigenous students make up 80% of student enrollment in the state's rural schools, and over 22% of the school population statewide. Moreover, 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, and high turnover rates in Alaska are strongly correlated with poorer student learning outcomes (Hill & Hirshberg, 2013). Many community and education leaders believe rural schools could benefit from having more indigenous 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.

Since the early 1970's, many initiatives have been put into place to prepare indigenous teachers in Alaska. From 1970 to 2014, 172 indigenous candidates, or about 4 indigenous students a year, earned teacher certification through rural and distance delivered programs specifically aimed at increasing the number of indigenous teachers in Alaska. Additional indigenous students graduated from regular University of Alaska teacher education programs, but not enough to grow the proportion of Alaska Native educators past the 5% rate. And now, the proportion of indigenous teachers is starting to decline, in part, because all of the indigenous teachers prepared through early efforts such as the Arctic Teacher Training Corps and the Cross-Cultural Education Development Program are of retirement age.

Nevertheless, efforts by Alaska universities to increase the number of indigenous educators continue. The university and state 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 applied in Alaska's current teacher certification programs. Publications from rural and indigenous teacher preparation programs in Alaska provide a lot of information about candidate recruitment and program delivery, but little on successful approaches to retaining teacher education students or sustaining programs. They focus mostly on how those programs such as face-to-face, distance, and hybrid were developed, but fail to connect current practice with past learnings. Our goal here is to describe how what was learned in past successes can be infused into current rural and indigenous teacher preparation programs, to help inform and improve efforts to retain students, sustain programs, and strengthen Alaska's schools.

Accordingly, this paper will discuss why indigenous teachers are important and also describe briefly the initiatives, of the last four decades, that were aimed at preparing Alaska Native teachers. We also review what worked in those initiatives as well as what challenges were faced by those programs. At that point, we provide recommendations for sustaining those efforts. We conclude by discussing implications for Alaska's indigenous communities and their institutions of higher learning.

Why Focus on Indigenous Teachers?

The majority of teachers in Alaska are white, primary English speakers and they are often from outside of the state. As a result, they are likely generally limited in their knowledge of or experience with diverse cultures and of Alaska Native cultures in particular (Jones and Salinas, 2013; Hill and Hirshberg, 2014). This cultural mismatch may make it difficult for teachers to connect with their students and make student learning relevant.

The presence of indigenous teachers in classrooms with high numbers of indigenous students can have a very positive impact on student success. Evidence shows that indigenous teachers can have the following positive impacts on indigenous students:

- Learning is enhanced when teacher and student share the same language and culture
- Indigenous teachers enhance the teacher-student relationship for indigenous youth and increase the desire of students to remain in school
- Indigenous teachers are important role models for indigenous youth
- Indigenous teachers provide connectivity to indigenous students' lives
- Indigenous teachers are likely to be aware of indigenous learning styles and utilize this information to improve teaching styles (Manuelito, 2003, p. 1).

Barnhardt (1977) argues that 1) an indigenous teacher will better assess and respond to the learning needs of an indigenous child, because similarities in cultural background

between teacher and child will improve communication and thus foster greater understanding and leaning; 2) an indigenous teacher will provide a model with which indigenous students can identify, thus motivating them to achieve greater educational success, because an indigenous teacher will acquire status in the eyes of the community; and, 3) an indigenous teacher will remain within the state of Alaska and acquire greater cumulative teaching experience which will result in a broader and deeper understanding of the local educational process.

Brayboy and Castango (2008) contend that through their life experiences, Indigenous people are able to synthesize both their cultural and Western ways and therefore are able to teach both the indigenous and Western values. In addition, indigenous teachers have the ability to engage in culturally responsive schooling because of their cultural competence. Their life experiences and the constant learning that require flexibility and adaptability on the part of the educator in combination with the particular students and contexts with which they are working provides them with cultural competency. Hampton (1995) describes this ability of the indigenous teacher as including the lives of indigenous students in a respectful manner and in a way that enhances consciousness of being an Indian and at the same time a fully participating citizen of the United States.

Indigenous students benefit from a school with indigenous teachers because their lives as members of the indigenous community are respected and instruction incorporates the students' prior knowledge (Assembly of Alaska Native Educators, 2001, p. 6). Villegas and Lucas (2002) point out that those teachers who are knowledgeable about their students' lives are better prepared to understand their students' classroom behavior

and are able to incorporate the funds of knowledge that indigenous families possess. Wexler (2014) in a study of Inupiaq Elders, Adults, and Youth found that adults and Elders had a clear and helpful way of sense-making around culture and young participants did not, underscoring the need for more communication between generations (p. 89). This cross-generation perspective highlights the importance of teaching young people about the impact of historical trauma, and, importantly, how culture can be a sustaining force in their lives. Youth can benefit from indigenous teachers or teachers who are able to carry out the needs of students through culturally responsive schooling.

The Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools describes the benefits to students when prior knowledge (skills and abilities) and experiences of students, multiple forms of intelligence, and experiential approaches are utilized while also recognizing there are a wide range of abilities in the classroom: The end result is that the students' culture is present in the classroom and learning is enhanced. Jones and Salinas (2013) cite the works of Foster (1995), Gay (2000), and Hollins (1996), which demonstrate that explicit knowledge about students' cultures (by the teacher) is "imperative" to meeting diverse students' learning needs and creating learning experiences that are relevant (p. 2). This body of research suggests that when academic learning is relevant for students, and when diverse students learn through their own cultural and experiential filters, they show higher interest and learn more easily.

Programs Aimed at Preparing Indigenous Teachers

Up until the 1970s, many of the schools in Alaska's rural villages were operated either by the Bureau of Indian Affairs or centrally

by the State of Alaska through the State Operated School System. In the early 1970s, the findings of a study on how the education system could better meet Native educational needs, combined with political pressure from Natives, resulted in legislation reorganizing the administrative structure of the state's education system. Rural schools were placed under Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAs), and rural Alaska was divided along regional ethnic and geographic lines into 21 autonomous school districts (now 23), each with its own locally elected school board of directors charged with making local policy.

Before 1976, high school-age students from many villages had to leave their communities in order to continue their education. Starting in the late 1960s, a succession of lawsuits was brought by Native communities to try to force the state to provide secondary schooling in villages. Eventually, in a court-approved settlement, the state agreed to create a high school in every community that had a grade school and at least 8 students of high school age (Hirshberg, 2001).

The context of the emerging local political control of education in rural Alaska combined with the on-going dependence of rural schools on non-indigenous teachers and administrators who provided an often less-than-satisfactory Western-oriented education to indigenous populations led to the first of many efforts to prepare local and indigenous educators for the Alaska's rural schools. The Alaska Rural Teacher Training Corps (ARTTC) was established in 1970 as an experimental program with a number of purposes, one of which was the training of indigenous elementary school teachers to teach in their own communities (Barnhardt, 1973).

The State decided to provide alternative teacher education through ARTTC because

there were so few certificated Native people teaching in Alaska – only seven in 1970 – and far too few indigenous people were pursuing higher education at an Alaskan campus. Only 70 Alaska Natives had graduated from the University of Alaska system over a period of 50 years, from 1917-1970. In addition, the state saw a need to involve Native communities in education and, as continues today, faced difficulty in finding and retaining qualified teachers who could adapt to living and working in a rural community. The first cohort of 21 students (10 Alaska Native) had already completed two years of college as of the program start, and they graduated in 1972. Two years later, 22 more Alaska Native students graduated.

In 1974, the Cross-Cultural Education Program (X-CED) was formed to replace ARTTC as the field-centered teacher education program serving rural Alaska. University of Alaska tenure track faculty members were placed in rural communities with the responsibility for program activities within their respective regions, each serving several village sites surrounding the regional centers. Six regional centers were organized and staffed by these field coordinators each living in their regional center and traveling to outlying villages to instruct and hold meetings with their students. During this time there were regional centers in Bethel, Dillingham, Fort Yukon, Kotzebue, Sitka and Tanana. By 1984 regional centers were based in Barrow, Kotzebue, Dillingham, Nome, Nulato, Fort Yukon, Holy Cross, and Bethel. (Tetpon, 1998, p. 7).

Thirty freshmen-level students were recruited from the local communities and another thirty junior-level students were recruited statewide. Due to a limited number of indigenous students with two years of college training available at that time, half of the junior-level students selected were non-indigenous.

Barnhardt (1977) notes that at that time few indigenous students were coming to the University for an education, fewer yet were enrolling in teacher training, fewer still were completing a four-year degree program, and of those who did complete a teacher training program, only a small number returned to the indigenous community to teach. Unfortunately, the situation hasn't improved much since then.

Between 1972 and 1991, via the ARTTC and X-CED initiatives, there were 101 graduates and 35 continuing students. X-CED graduates tended to be older, having entered the program at a median age of 24 years. The youngest graduate during this period was 23 years old while the oldest was 52 years old. Of the 96 graduates, 69 (72%) had a high school diploma when they entered, 2 (2%) had a GED, and 25 (26%) were admitted as special status students. A large number of graduates brought transfer credits into the X-CED program. Many graduates went on to complete graduate work. Twenty-eight years after the inception of ARTTC in 1970, the X-CED program was shut down due to fiscal and political issues, including changes in UAF leadership (Ray Barnhardt, personal communication, June 2014).

During the reorganization of the UA system in 1987, the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) was assigned the statewide responsibility to provide elementary teacher certification coursework and developed distance delivery options. Funding is provided through the state legislature in the UA system budget allocation. There is no external grant funding. This option provides students in rural Alaskan communities, as well as others who desire the flexibility of a distance program, initial teaching certification in grades K-8. Students can complete their degree while staying in their home communities. The senior year consists of a nine month intensive

internship, with students completing a 2.5 days per week practicum experience in schools with their mentor in the fall and a 5 days per week student teaching experience in schools with their mentor in the spring. Student supervision is collaborative and highly interactive. Methods classes are taken throughout the senior year.

Thirteen of the graduates supported through this initiative are Alaska Native, constituting approximately 23 percent of BA graduates in this option thus far. All are currently working in the education field; 7 are classroom teachers and the rest work in programs such as Head Start. Five of the 13 are either enrolled in or have graduated from a UAS master's degree program. As of 2013 there were 26 Alaska Native students seeking a teaching degree via this option; they make up about 24 percent of the total student enrollment in this effort.

The Rural Education Preparation Program (REPP) was a partnership between the University of Alaska Fairbanks, REAA school districts and the Alaska Department of Education with funding from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Indian Education, which began in 1995. Teacher candidates worked on-site with district mentor teachers and university faculty. REPP recruited Alaska Natives and, eventually, non-Natives living in rural Alaska who already had completed a bachelor's degree. It aimed to develop and deliver a competency based/standards driven teacher education incorporating components of Alaska Native culture literacy. REPP recruited Native classified staff employed in rural school districts as well as other citizens who wished to work towards teacher certification.

Agreements were developed between UAF and rural school districts for resources to support teacher mentors and REPP

candidates. REPPs purpose was to increase the number of Alaska Native educators in Alaska's elementary and secondary schools because of its belief that students learn best from teachers who reflect the students' cultural heritage and their family and community values. As of 2003, 32 teachers had completed the program, 79 percent whom were white and 76 percent of whom were female... Four—13.8 percent of those who responded to this question in the program evaluation—identified themselves as Alaska Natives (McDiarmid and Hill, 2003).

Alaska Pacific's (APU) Rural Alaska Native Adult Program (RANA) began in 1997. RANA assisted students in preparing for their K-8 Elementary certification. Assistance was provided through scholarships from APU's United States Department of Education grants to pay for textbooks, tuition and transportation to face-to-face meetings. APU also provided mentoring to support students preparing for the Praxis tests. To date 34 Alaska Natives have earned their teacher certification through the support of RANA. The last students enrolled through RANA in the spring of 2011, and, as of the writing of this article, the program is currently on hold due to a lack of external funding.

The Preparing Indigenous Teachers and Administrators for Alaska's Schools (PITAAS) program at the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) began in 2000. It has been largely funded by five consecutive grants through the U.S. Department of Education, Alaska Native Education Program (ANEP). The program's specific aims are to increase the number of qualified Alaska Native teachers and administrators graduating from the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS), improve on-campus support for Alaska Native students, collaborate with partners to build a support network for PITAA participants, and cultivate culturally

responsive and culturally supportive programs at UAS by modifying the existing Bachelor of Liberal Arts and Bachelor of Science programs. Thirty-three PITAAS scholarships were awarded in fall 2012 and 32 (16 undergraduates, and 16 graduates) in the spring 2013 semester. Eleven PITAAS students graduated from UAS in May 2013. By the end of August, there were an additional five graduates, including three who completed the cohort degree program in Educational Leadership, one who completed a Master of Arts in Teaching and one who completed a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education.

Funded through a 2007 grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the Alaska Transition to Teaching (AKT2) was an alternative teaching certification program for individuals who had already earned a bachelor's degree and were interested in becoming secondary teachers in rural Alaska. A partnership between the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development and participating rural districts, AKT2's unique design expedited the process through which candidates completed their teacher preparation and were ready to enter the classroom. The program offered candidates the opportunity to work on their pre-service preparation while holding their current jobs. Fifty-four participants used the AKT2 program to teach in rural Alaska with approximately forty-three continuing on to earn State Recommendations for Teacher Certification. However, only one Alaska Native was recruited and completed teacher certification through the Alaska Transition to Teaching program. The program ended in 2013.

The UAF School of Education's Alaska Native Teacher Preparation Program provided funding for a number of Alaska Natives to complete teaching degrees from 2008-2012.

Twenty-seven students enrolled and nineteen Alaska Natives completed certification through the program. Students took the regular on-campus teacher certification coursework and received academic and financial counseling from the program coordinator. Major challenges included the Praxis exam and Praxis workshop attendance and that student reflections/evaluations were additional responsibilities rather than integrated into the program. Students from a program called "Bridging the Gap," a grant awarded to UAF's Interior Aleutian's Campus (IAC), were initially targeted for this program. They came from within the eight school districts within IAC's service region. Students from other regions of the state were selected to fill open slots after slots for Interior-based students were filled. While this program sought out Alaska Native teacher candidates, non-Native students were accepted into the program as well.

A partnership between the UAA College of Education (COE) and the Kushunamiut School District was formed in 2010. This partnership, known as the Chevak Teacher Education Initiative, embraces the concepts of inclusivity and culturally relevant teaching. Course work reflects both Western and Cup'ik cultures and philosophies. As of May 2014, about half of the group will have earned their associates degrees. This initiative is providing important insights about the power of collaboration as an indigenous community, school, and university come together to create a space that supports cultural and language revitalization. Program graduates will be proficient in both Western and Cup'ik teaching and learning histories, philosophies, and practices and prepared to fully integrate both traditions in their school and classrooms. Further, it is hoped that this project will lead to the development of a model of a bi-cultural teacher education program that can be implemented in other communities

throughout Alaska.

The Village Teacher (VT) grant is a four-year pilot project of the University of Alaska Southeast funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Indian Education. The VT grant is a loan opportunity for upper level graduate Alaska Native Educators interested in expanding their excellence in teaching at the University of Alaska Southeast. Students who are accepted into the program receive funding that covers all tuition, fees, and books associated with the MEd program in which they enroll. Village Teacher students receive individualized support through the project director, VT and Native organizations partnerships, the VT mentorship program, and induction services upon graduation. Students must have a minimum of a 3.0 GPA upon entry and then are required to maintain this 3.0 GPA in order to continue receiving funding. Also, in order to receive VT funds students must be admitted to one of the following degree programs at UAS: Master of Arts in Education—Math & Reading Specialist or Principals Endorsement—Educational Leadership. In Spring 2014, 16 Alaska Native educators were preparing to earn a Reading Specialist Endorsement and 11 their Math Specialist Endorsement.

Bridging the Gap: Supporting Rural and Alaska Native Educators was a program at The University of Alaska Fairbanks, Interior Aleutians Campus, from 2009 to 2012. Alaska Native students in teacher preparation programs often encounter significant challenges in “gatekeeper” math and English coursework, which is required for degree attainment. As a result, many are unable to take and pass the respective Praxis exams in preparation for required higher-level math and English teacher preparation and methods courses. This project provided the additional support needed by future teachers to transform math and English “gatekeepers”

into “gateways” leading to successful Praxis exams and ultimately graduation, through providing “learning intensives” twice per semester in addition to assistance with math and English classes. Other services include distance learning, retention services, stipends and mentoring.

Table 1 below presents a brief overview of all of these efforts, including their current status.

In addition to university-based programs and the State of Alaska’s program, two school districts, Lower Kuskokwim (LKSD) and Kushunamiut have included career ladder programs for paraprofessionals to earn their teaching certificate. Since the 1980’s, LKSD has budgeted funds for Yup’ik language teachers, elementary and secondary teachers to either take distance delivered courses or move on-campus to earn teacher certification with all expenses paid. These programs are not included in the chart above because they are not stand-alone teacher preparation efforts, but rather they are funding mechanisms to support teachers taking advantage of existing programs.

How Did These Programs Work: Program Content and Delivery

All teacher preparation programs have to meet the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development’s requirements. However, the 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	Funding	All Initial Cert.	AK Natives Cert.	Years of Operation	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	1974 ARTTC replaced by X-CED 1978 X-CED replaced by Center for Cross-Cultural Studies
UAF: B.Ed. Distance Elem.	General Funds	70	16	2003-2013	Continuing
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
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

Table 1. Program Funding, Years of Operation and Current Status

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.

What Made Programs Work

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. To help with that, 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.

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.

Challenges Faced in these Programs

Recruitment and Retention of Indigenous Students in Teacher Preparation Programs

All of the rural and distance delivery programs we looked at targeted Alaska Native students in their recruitment and retention

efforts. Several programs were designed to prepare adults who already had a bachelor's degree. 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.

Sustainability Issues

Sustainability has been a challenge for all most of the programs described in this paper. They did not or have 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. The ARTTC/X-CED program survived for 19 years with state funding. Since the ARTTC/X-CED program ended, the State of Alaska has not funded other initiatives primarily focused upon indigenous teacher education. The UAS Bachelor's Distance Teacher Certification received state funding. The Chevak Initiative receives private funding. The REPP, RANA, AKT2, ANEP, and, Bridging the Gap, supported by federal funding, lasted only as long as federal funding was there to support them.

Almost all of the other programs described in this article were grant funded, and when grant

funding ended, so did the initiative. We have seen five grant funded programs discontinue due to the end of their original federal funding. 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 paper can 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 should 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 students finish their programs and become certified teachers.
- Improved student support would benefit all students.

Sustainability

- Creating programs that are not dependent on external funding is absolutely necessary if efforts to increase the number of Alaska Native educators are to result in ongoing and continued success and real progress toward growing the overall proportion of indigenous teachers in Alaska’s schools.

Implications for the Alaska Native Community

There are some implications regarding what we have learned that are especially relevant for the Alaska Native community. Boyer (2014) argues that tribes must become partners in the process of school reform and become more involved in the work of their schools. He notes that most education reform strategies offer Native communities prepackaged, one-size-fits-all solutions: a new curriculum, a new approach to classroom management, or expensive computer technology. In contrast, successful efforts like UAF’s Rural Systemic Initiative encourage communities to craft their own approaches to school reform, responding to local needs and taking advantage of local resources.

It is readily apparent that it is important to involve 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 (CRCDC) 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 (Caulfield et al., 2011). Their efforts include incorporating Native-based content and pedagogy into teacher education programs and providing student support services. We hope that as they move forward they build from what has been learned from past efforts, in order to create the best possible programs for growing Alaska’s Indigenous education workforce.

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