

**Chief State School Officers and partner Educational Testing Service *Second Annual  
Strengthening Partnerships for Native American Student Education Conference*  
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**White Paper on Early Childhood Education**

**A. Introduction:**

The purpose of this paper is to explore some programs that support educational approaches that provide a strong foundation for the achievement of Native American learners. The focus of this paper is directed at the crucial role language, culture and environment shape the early learning experiences of American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians children, and ultimately their lifelong achievement.

Over the past thirty years emerging research conducted by native professionals and non-native researchers is building a body of literature substantiating the crucial role indigenous first languages and cultures and environment play in student learning, achievement, and future success.

The exemplary programs featured herein will identify strategies that begin in pre-school to revitalize, conserve and maintain native languages, identify avenues for the use of a child first language in public, and non-public school settings, and reinforce parents role with children by engaging, and sustaining their involvement in the education process. Also discussed is the impact the No Child Left Behind Legislation on Native early learning programs, particularly those in rural, isolated communities.

In his recent research review, William Demmert Jr. writes, “ *From a tribal and Native American professional perspective, the creation of lifelong learning environments and meaningful educational experiences for both the youth and adults of a tribal community requires a language and cultural context that supports the traditions, knowledge, and language(s) of the community as the starting place for learning new ideas and knowledge. There is a firm belief within many Native tribal communities and professional Native educators that this cultural context is absolutely essential if one is to succeed academically and to build a meaningful life as adults.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Demmert, William, 2003. *Final Report on A review of the research literature on the influences of culturally based education on the academic performance of Native American students*, p. 3. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, OR., p. 3. *And, Indian nations at risk: An educational strategy for action (1991). Final Report of the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force*, U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>2</sup> His work became a part of the theoretical foundation of Head Start, the first nationally funded comprehensive early childhood education program directed toward children from low-income families. *Head Start, Early Head Start*, and *Even Start* Programs became staple early childhood education programs in Native American communities.

## **Educating Early Learners.**

As far back as 1928, *The Meriam Report*, by Lewis Meriam, commissioner of Indian Affairs, Lewis Meriam, recognized the importance of early childhood education for American Indians. He realized that creating a healthy environment in the early life of a child was important to future well being. By the 1970's, the influence of environment on a young child's intellectual was better understood. Providing good prenatal care, giving children opportunities to explore and satisfy their curiosity, promoting language development, nurturing kinesthetic skill development, and building proper physical and social mother-child relationships were all considered important in promoting a child's general well-being. (Demmert, 1974). The study goes on to point out the critical need for parent-focused early childhood education programs as an avenue for developing the whole child, including improved cognition and academic performance.

Demmert suggests that while more recent studies examining the effects of early environment and educational programs on intellectual development of Native children are scarce (p.6) related results come from a national evaluation of tribal Even Start Family Literacy programs, which found that comparatively greater numbers of participating children performed at their expected developmental level, even into the primary grades (Levin, Moss, Swartz, Kahn, & Tarr, 1997) supported by mainstream studies, and that information on cognitive development in early learning experiences have a significant impact on the intelligence of a young child. (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns. Et al) cited in Demmert, p.7). Further, early experiences build synaptic connections in the brain, and the more connections created, the smarter the child. Other research suggests that physical activity of young children creates a glucose that feeds the brain and is a necessary requirement for cognitive development. (Begley, 96) in Demmert, 02).

Hunt (1961) found that learning through interactions of individuals with their physical, social and nurturing environments had the capability of altering IQ's. (Clay, 1988).<sup>2</sup> Socialization...shapes a child's behavior according to expectations of a child's family and community. A child's communicative competence (Hymes, 1966), is the ability to uses language in a socially appropriate manner (Goodenough, 1971) through culturally transmitted goals and meanings. Native American children grow up with cultural expectations of appropriate ways to communicate with are different from mainstream education. Supportive school settings foster communicative competence when teachers and students communicate clearly. (Bruner, 1983). American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawai'ian children come to school with a wealth of knowledge influenced and shaped by their environment, family and community expectations. It is learning that varies in contexts across all of Native communities, and regions. That knowledge, expressed through language and behavior, may not be what the mainstream teacher teaches in a standard textbook, and taught by a teacher from the outside.

## **What the research tells us:**

- The 10 year longitudinal study by Ramirez, confirms that children, whose language is other than English, succeed academically better if they are instructed in their first language, than children, whose language is other than English, who are immersed in an English language classroom. ( ).
- The area of the brain known as the speech center is where language is learned. When a young person learns more than one language simultaneously the second, or other languages, the same part of the brain is used. If another language is learned later in life, another part of the brain is used, and it takes more brain work to learn the second or other languages. (Ackerman, 2004 in Demmert, 2004).
- Language as the key to academic performance.<sup>3</sup> Traditional or indigenous languages, in whatever the community context, is a crucial part of the child's ability to achieve.
- Culture shapes how we observe the world and is closely combined with our experiences.
- Development of a strong language base by age 3.
- Pre-school programs are needed that support a close association with the school, children and the parents who have a strong role in the program.
- Pre-school programs and the whole link to literacy and cultural world-view support the concept of environment and context.<sup>4</sup>
- In the RAND study, a longitudinal study in early childhood education, funded by the U.S. government, of the children who start school in Head Start programs, Native American children generally lag behind Hispanics, and Blacks. After three years, Native American children do better than Hispanics, in Mathematics, but behind Whites.<sup>5</sup>

### **C. Significance of Native Language and Culture Programs on Achievement**

A growing body of research, literature, and programs on the influences of Native language and culture on strengthening achievement Native learners is evidenced by the following:

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<sup>3</sup> Disruptions of social relations of young children at home can contribute to lower communication skills of young children at school. Children's working models of attachment are associated with their self-esteem and self-concepts. Problems with attachments are characterized by an approach-avoidance conflict to the caregiver. When the social mediation of a significant adult is diminished, lacking, or interrupted, lower language and communication skills are a possible result. (Bowlby, 1982; Crittenden, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978). The need for strong parent-child, child-caregiver interaction is crucial to the development of a strong language base.

<sup>4</sup> A child's communicative competence (Hymes, 1966) is the ability to use language in a socially appropriate manner. (Goodenough, 1971). Native American and other ethnic groups grow up with cultural expectations of appropriate[culture-bound] ways to communicate which are different from mainstream education.

<sup>5</sup> While the RAND study, support that it takes about 3 years for NA children to catch up. What the study does not support is the influence of environment and context on education.(Demmert, 2004).

- (1) Mainstream research supports the congruency between the school environment and the language and culture of the community is critical to the success of formal learning. (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001).
- (2) The research of WestEd's Indigenous Education Collaborative, which studies the educational cultures of indigenous students in a variety of settings, validates the currency of traditions of education in indigenous communities that emphasize life experience, cooperation, and reflection in meaningful contexts in today's indigenous students. (See also Au & Kawakami, 1994); Lipka, 1994; Phillips, 1983; Swisher & Deyhle, 1987).
- (3) Educational research has clearly established that native culture and language are essential in native children's acquisition of knowledge (Lipka, Mohatt, & the Ciulistet Group, 1998; Skinner, 1999; Yazzie, 1999) and foster academic achievement (Dupuis & Walker, 1988; Hakes & others, 1980; McCarty, 1989; Mohatt & Sharp, 1998; p. 62).
- (4) Many studies have investigated how and when language and culture programs produce positive outcomes. More recent research (1970s through 1990s) has focused on *bilingual and immersion programs*, where the commitment to maintaining the use of the Native language is equated with survival of the culture. In other communities, *native language and culture revitalization* programs are integral parts of the curriculum. (Demmert, 2001).
- (5) Research conducted in Alaska with Yup'ik Eskimo students (Grigorenko et al., 2001) found that rural Yup'ik students outperformed students from and Alaskan regional center on a test of practical knowledge. (Lipka, 2002).

Building and translating the connection of local culture to present day schooling is a difficult task, as is the task of local school districts developing Native language immersion programs. Additional challenges lie in three primary areas:

- 1) Creating recognition of the relevance of supporting federal legislation promoting the continued development of Native language and culture-based programs.
- 2) Importance of supporting emergent research and native based research in schools serving Native children (American Indian, Native Alaskans, and Native Hawaiians).
- 3) Continued resistance to the implementation of such programs among state and federal policymakers. (Demmert, 2001).

## **F. Impact of the No Child Left Behind Legislation and challenges for states:**

### **STUDENT ASSESSMENT (SEC. 1111)**

No Child Left Behind requires students' meet state standards, which are measured by tests in English. NCLB allows states to develop tests to be given in another language but that such tests can only be given to students for two years and must then convert to English and can only be given to children of "limited English proficiency" until they reach English language proficiency. Indigenous language immersion programs develop their strengths in literacy by exclusive use of the indigenous language until late elementary. Thus elementary students can read the indigenous language much better than English through elementary school. Furthermore, immersion students do not fit the definition of "limited English proficiency" because most of them have English as their dominant spoken language. Testing through English in elementary school does not allow the academic skills of these children to be properly recorded. Even if children in indigenous language immersion were allowed to take tests through the indigenous language, in Part A. Sec. 111 (b) (3) (A) NCLB requires that these tests be the "same academic assessments used to measure the achievement of all children" which means that the tests must be translations. Testing specialists say that translations of tests always include features that make it impossible to scientifically compare their results to results from students who took the test in the original language. Furthermore, tests in Native American language that test core areas of reading fluency and math are not readily available and are not likely to be developed by any state due to the small number of children involved.

### **TEACHER AND STAFF QUALIFICATIONS (SEC. 1119)**

No Child Left Behind requires teachers to be "highly qualified" (See Title I Sec. 1119, page 1505) in order for schools to obtain Title I federal funds regardless of the subject taught. Each state must develop a plan to ensure that all teachers teaching in core academic subjects are "highly qualified". The "core areas" are math and reading. At the elementary level (where most immersion students are found) teachers teach everything including math and reading and thus must be "highly qualified."

National organizations such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education determine a "highly qualified" teacher..

### **CORE SUBJECTS**

In distinguishing "core subjects" from other areas, such as music and physical education, NCATE and most states do not distinguish any special area in elementary school -- the area that affects most Native American immersion students, so they are considered to be teaching "core subjects." For special Native American language and culture courses in English medium high schools, it is likely that these will not be considered core subjects, but NCLB requires two years of college to be considered a qualified paraprofessional/teacher aide ( Title I Sec. 1119 page 1505). Many of the elders who are working to teach Native American languages have not even completed high school.

NCLB restricts use of Native American languages in schools contrary to the Native American Languages Act, 1990. Not only is the approach in which students and teachers are assessed directly harmful to these programs, but the mismatch between NCLB and Native American Language Survival Schools and other means of teaching Native American languages is turning principals, local school boards and states against the implementation of current Native American language programs and the establishment of new programs in the schools.

## **G. Exemplary Programs**

There are a growing number of American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian education programs that use Native culture and language approaches to promoting Native student achievement. The revitalization, conservation of indigenous languages and cultures are paramount to the success of each program. Strong leadership characterizes each program, partnerships with their communities/and or government leadership, strong teacher professional development and engagement of teachers, strong parental involvement and supportive administrations.

### **The FACE and BABY FACE Program, Wingate Elementary School, Ft. Wingate, New Mexico.**

The program at Wingate Elementary School is one of 39 schools in 23 states nationally that have implemented the FACE Program. Each FACE site is coordinated within a federally funded Bureau of Indian Affairs elementary school.

Developed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs/Office of Indian Education Programs in 1990, the program began as a pilot project entitled “Early Childhood/Parental Involvement Pilot Program.” The model is based on three distinct and proven early childhood and family education models:

- Parents as Teachers (PAT), Home-based component.
- National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) Center based component, and
- High Scope, Elementary (K-3<sup>rd</sup>) . Implemented in 2002 the new program is titled Engage Learning, Inc.

In 1992 the model was renamed and became the Family and Child Education (FACE) Program.

#### **Goals of the FACE Program are to:**

- Establish family-school-community connections.
- Help adults gain motivation, knowledge and skills needed to become employed or to pursue further education.
- Increase parents’ participation in their child’s learning and expectations for their children’s achievement.
- To enhance the culture and language of the community.
- To promote life long learning.

In school year 2002-2003, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Indian Education Programs, recognizing the need for replication of the home based component and intervention, expanded the number of school sites, and implemented a new initiative. The BABY FACE Program, employs a brain-based infused curriculum entitled “Born to Learn” created by the *Parents as Teachers Program*. The goals of the BABY FACE model are similar to the FACE Model; however, the recognition of identifying young children early is emphasized.

**FACE data and information from Fiscal Year 1991 – Fiscal Year 2000** – 16,000 individuals were served through FACE representing:

- 5,500 families
- 8,100 adults
- 8,700 children (birth to age 5)

### **Characteristics of FACE children in PY 2000**

- Less than two-thirds reside with both parents
- Two-thirds have mothers who completed the equivalent of a high school education (an increase from one-half of children in early FACE years).
- Two-thirds have fathers who completed the equivalent of a high school education.

### **Characteristics of FACE Adults:**

- About two-thirds of FACE adults are female, most of whom are mothers of the child(ren) enrolled.
- Although males account for one-third of the FACE adults, less than one-fourth of adults are fathers of the child(ren) enrolled in the program.
- About 10% of FACE adults are other than parents of the child(ren) with whom they participate.
- The average age of FACE adults is 29, with 10% who are under the age of 20.

### **How Face Programs Helps Children:**

- 80 percent of the adults report that FACE helps their children in the following ways:
  - Helps prepare them for school
  - Increases their self confidence
  - Increases their verbal/communication skills
  - Increases their interest in learning
  - Increases their interest in reading
  - Helps them get along better with others.

### **FACE impacts on School Aged Children in Grades K-3:**

- Students who participate in FACE score significantly higher on standardized test of reading than do children who do not participate in FACE.
- Students who participate in FACE score significantly higher on standardized test of mathematics than do children who do not participate in FACE.
- The greatest impact on school-age achievement is for children who participate in both center and home based services. They score the highest in both reading and mathematics.

### **Integration of Tribal Language and Culture:**

All sites have tribal/community members involved with FACE activities.

More than three-fourths of sites frequently integrate tribal language in center and home-based activities.

Most sites use materials and activities that are culturally based.

**FACE sites have strong parental engagement, family literacy, parent and adult education and collaboration with the community, school, and family.**



Ten years of evaluations have shown that the children of families enrolled in FACE are more likely to arrive at school ready to learn, with--increased reading and math readiness. Also, FACE families are more likely to remain involved in their child's education through at least 3rd grade.

Baby FACE programs feature a team of two parent educators. They provide Parents as Teachers (PAT) *Born to Learn*™ Curriculum and support parents in their role as their child's first and most influential teacher.

**The effective components of Baby FACE include:**

- 1. Home visits.** Parent educators make home visits to implement the *Born to Learn*™ curriculum. These visits include information about child development and parenting. Visits usually take place in the home of the child's parent(s) and last 45 to 60 minutes. The frequency of home visits, usually weekly or Bi-weekly, depends upon the needs of each family. Each home visit requires about two and one-half hours for the parent educators. The time includes preparation, travel, the visit itself, and follow-up record keeping.
- 2. Group meetings.** Once a month a group meeting is held for Baby FACE families. These meetings provide an opportunity for families to meet, share, and dialogue around child development and/or parenting issues. Often, these meetings include a speaker from the community.
- 3. Screening.** Each child enrolled in Baby FACE is screened. The parent educators use the Parents as Teachers Health Questionnaire, hearing and vision functional assessments, and the PAT Milestones forms. They also use the Ages and Stages Questionnaire twice a year. Parents are taught to use this screening tool, too.
- 4. Resource network.** Parent educators help families to access appropriate tribal and/or community resources.
- 5. Transition and sustainability.** Children and families are helped with the transition to a preschool setting, or to kindergarten, according to their needs. The 32 existing FACE programs, BABY FACE will include a team of 2 parent educators per school, who will serve a minimum of 12 families, and a maximum of 24 families. Each family receives weekly or bi-weekly visits. Monthly group meetings are held for Baby FACE families, and all Baby FACE children are provided screening services.

**The Punana Leo Program,** - is a successful native Hawaiian language medium education program to revitalize the highly endangered Hawaiian language and build high academic achievement within a Hawaiian base. The movement started at the pre-school level, moved grade by grade through the k-12 public school system (first graduates in 1999), established a Hawaiian language college within the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. Centered around a Hawaiian language medium B.A. at the higher education level, added a Hawaiian medium teacher education program, a Hawaiian medium M.A. and is now initiating a Ph.D.

Throughout its 20 plus year history, the Punana Leo program has brought together the partnering of community, private, state, and federal resources to build the most successful indigenous language medium/immersion program in the United States. The Punana Leo program has demonstrated that full immersion is the most successful means for reversing indigenous language extinction and that full immersion provides additional academic benefits including:

- Strengthened literacy in both the indigenous language and English
- Increased family involvement
- High student retention
- Increased college attendance, and
- Increased native certified teachers and administration

## **Native Language Immersion In Early Childhood; A Hawaiian Model For Meeting The Challenge**

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"I ka 'olelo no ke ola; I ka 'olelo no ka make." 'In language rests life; In language rests death.' This traditional Hawaiian saying provides insight into the motivation for establishing the non-profit 'Aha Punana Leo, Inc. 20 years ago. This organization pioneered indigenous language immersion in the United States beginning at the preschool level. It then moved immersion through the entire K-12 system. The first students of the Punana Leo preschools and follow-up K-12 immersion programs are now attending universities, including Stanford and Loyola Marymount. As more and more Native American tribes are seeking ways to address the language extinction crisis affecting Native America, inquiries about the Punana Leo preschools are also increasing.

The Punana Leo early education programs typically run from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm, five days a week, eleven months a year. They are total Hawaiian medium schools-Hawaiian is the only language of instruction and administration. Children generally enter at age three and exit at age five.

The curriculum of the Punana Leo includes ideas from traditional Hawaiian home life, traditional Hawaiian hula schools, Hawaiian Sunday Schools, Montessori schools, and other traditions. Teachers include native speakers of Hawaiian who have had minimal Western education along with younger Hawaiians learning the language in college and community courses. Legislative lobbying by parents resulted in these teachers being exempted from state certification requirements.

Children are accepted into the schools based on ability to speak Hawaiian, but the vast majority of children enter without knowing any Hawaiian other than a smattering of vocabulary. All new children enter at the same time at the beginning of the school year where they join the big children who have already been in the Punana Leo from the previous year.

Children are not specifically taught to speak Hawaiian other than for those rote phrases that are considered part of the etiquette of the school, e.g., asking to receive learning in a traditional chant, formal introduction of self, songs, etc. Use of Hawaiian among new students is fostered not only by sole use of Hawaiian by teachers and administrators, but by the big children who already use only Hawaiian in school. Most children begin speaking Hawaiian within six months and constantly expand their knowledge of it. These preschool children also grow in their use of English through contact with English in the

media and in the surrounding non-Hawaiian speaking community.

Because English is so pervasive, the 'Aha Punana Leo has found it counterproductive to introduce English too early. Experience in the 'Aha Punana Leo's K-12 laboratory schools has shown that delaying introducing a English language arts class until late elementary grades and continuing Hawaiian as the medium of instruction in all other areas through grade 12 has a positive effect on the growth of the indigenous language and an association of indigenous identity with academics. Programs that introduce English late produce no difference in the English ability of students from programs that introduce English early or even programs run entirely in English. Indeed, research suggests delaying English instruction can foster high dual language abilities resulting in cognitive benefits associated with balanced biliteracy.

The Punana Leo programs, are not simply about language learning and academics. They are about reestablishing a philosophy of life and applying it to contemporary times. As such, and in accordance with Hawaiian tradition, parents practice and learn the language and culture with their children and are responsible for much in the preschool program. They provide in-kind service, attend weekly Hawaiian language classes and monthly management meetings.

Originally parents paid the full cost of the program in tuition, but success in obtaining grants has generally allowed parent tuition to be based on a sliding scale according to income. There is no income requirement to attend the schools, and they have a strong tradition of socio-economic integration of the more fortunate with the least fortunate. This socio-economic integration is important in making Hawaiian revitalization a full community effort, rather than one directed only at one externally defined segment of the population.

Developing a successful indigenous language immersion program involves a larger vision of providing for a community in which the indigenous language and culture is the living heart beat of the people with English and other languages used for interacting with those outside the indigenous community. This vision runs counter to historical forces that have worked to remove indigenous identities. Thus realizing the vision faces historically developed barriers both external to the community and within the community itself.

The first barrier is the lack of control over education by those who hold the vision, have the requisite fluency in the language, and have an understanding of how language revitalization can be incorporated into education. Since passage of the Native American Languages Act of 1990, avenues are developing for obtaining such control.

Another barrier is lack of materials, curriculum and teachers. The 'Aha Punana Leo began without these things and focused on raising children as they are in a Hawaiian extended 'ohana or family. Materials, curriculum and teachers were developed gradually as the program matured.

The biggest barriers of all are negative attitudes that are the results of generations of suppression of the indigenous language. Both indigenous and non-indigenous people find it is hard to believe that indigenous language immersion can work. Many assume that children educated in Punana Leo schools will not be able to speak English and will be academically deficient. But immersion actually does work. Hawaiian immersion children have won statewide English awards and done, as well or better, than their Native Hawaiian peers in the English language public schools.

The key to establishing a solid preschool base for language revitalization is believing in your language, taking action in expanding your learning of it and providing a secure place where it can be transmitted and grow. Nurturing the life of the language nurtures the life of the people.

"I ka 'olelo no ke ola; I ka 'olelo no ka make." 'Language is the source of life; Language is the source of death.'

## **Lower Kuskokwim School District – Bethel, Alaska**

### **The Lower Kuskokwim School District – Yup'ik Language and Culture Program:**

The program is a k-3 program in the Yukon-Kuskokwim school district that partners with 18 Yup'ik communities to maintain and strengthen their indigenous languages. The educational model focuses on development of literacy, through the use of the Yup'ik language.

**The Region.** The Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) is located in the Kuskokwim River Delta Region of Alaska, about 400 air miles west of Anchorage. Headquartered in the town of Bethel, the K-12 district includes 22 village schools spread over an area of 22,000 square miles, roughly the size of West Virginia and is home to over 15,000 Yupiit Eskimos. The villages range in population from approximately 40-800 residents. The city of Bethel has a population of about 7,000 with 5 schools. Excluding Bethel, 94% of the population of the district is Alaska Native. Yup'ik is the primary language spoken in these communities. Life in the Delta is unique with the geography and the climate of the Kuskokwim Delta region posing severe challenges and limitations. There are no roads linking the villages. Travel to the area is via air service to Bethel from Anchorage. Travel between Bethel and the surrounding villages is by small plane or by boat along the Kuskokwim River system in the summer and by snow machine after freeze-up. The isolation has allowed the villages to remain relatively intact culturally but has created challenges in finding a balance between traditional and school culture, and has created interesting challenges for the educational programs of the public school system.

**Primary Language Programs.** The LKSD supports communities in the region in their commitment to the survival of the Yup'ik culture and language. The indigenous language, Yup'ik, is the predominant language in at least 18 communities, although it is spoken at various levels of proficiency by adults and children alike. All village schools implement a Yup'ik/Cup'ig language and culture program, and all have an English language development program. The Native language program type varies based on local language characteristics, staffing and community choice.

In addition to Yup'ik being spoken with varying levels of proficiency by children and adults, 67% of the LKSD students are classified as limited English proficient (LEP) using current state and federal guidelines. Excluding the Bethel schools, approximately 90% of the students in the village schools qualify as LEP. Even those children who are not speakers of Yup'ik district wide tend to be classified as limited English speakers due to the non-Standard dialect of English that they speak. Traditionally many of our students have been at risk of not meeting high content and performance standards, due in part to the isolated nature of the region, which has impacted the development of English language proficiency and in turn, influenced academic success. Students are limited in their access to a variety of registers of English and

tend to be limited in their perception of need of academic or school English.

English language development is a strong component of all LKSD programs. Each site has an English Language Development teacher at the primary grades to work with students who are limited English proficient. In the Yup'ik Language Development and immersion sites the ELD teachers focus initially on the development of oral language skills with LEP students, as the children develop their literacy skills in the target language. Beginning with phase 1 or kindergarten, a prescribed period of time is allocated each day for oral language development. The time increases with each phase until students are in a predominantly English program by elementary or middle school with Yupik language and culture a part of each day. In the English structured immersion sites, oral language development is also a key component since children struggle with making meaning from reading until they have linguistic skills to do so (AERA, Winter 2004).

There are three language program choices available to our sites that are in alignment with the State of Alaska and NCLB requirements, Public Law 107-110, Sec. 3128, Programs for Native Americans and Puerto Rico. Based on the options available through this law and the State of Alaska our sites were offered the following choices, which are very similar to the choices they have traditionally had available to them; a Developmental Bilingual/Transitional (Yup'ik Language Development Program) for primary students, a Dual Immersion program, and a Structured English Immersion.

Two sites, where students speak English first with little Yup'ik or Cup'ig, one in Bethel and one of the villages, have chosen to continue a Yup'ik/ Cup'ig immersion program. The village immersion program has made Adequate Yearly Progress under NCLB requirements without safe harbor. Thirteen sites have selected to continue their primary Yup'ik Language Development Programs. Six of these sites made AYP this year, demonstrating significant academic progress, one without safe harbor and 5 others with safe harbor. One dual immersion site made AYP with safe harbor. These communities have worked with their schools to maintain and strengthen their academic programs as well as their language and cultural programs. Academic progress on local and state testing is occurring at other village and Bethel sites as well.

In the primary grades at each YLD and immersion sites, the Yup'ik/Cup'ig educational model has focused on the development of literacy and math skills through the Native language. The district has supported these programs by developing Yup'ik language literature and math materials, including the publication of over 200 books (written by local authors) for primary and early elementary classrooms and translated over 150 "trade" books. Sixteen villages use Yup'ik for mathematics, reading and writing instruction in the primary phases.

**Testing issues.** The language instructional program type remains the local option at the village level. Only one village, thus far, that continues to have strong Yup'ik speakers and has taught

Yup'ik in the primary grades for the past 20 years, has chosen to become an English instructional site at the K-3 level, and this appears to be due to grade 3 State testing in English. An issue that has been difficult to resolve has been that of mandatory English testing at grade 3 to meet state and federal requirements for NCLB. Currently, children coming out of a Yup'ik program in grade 3 are tested in English, with one to four months of full English instruction unlike their immigrant counterparts who three years of English instruction prior to mandatory English testing. Parents and teachers in the Yup'ik instructional programs have expressed dismay over the trauma suffered by 8-9 year olds being tested in English when the children have been instructed in Yup'ik and could better demonstrate their academic proficiency in Yup'ik. Schools' AYP scores are also calculated based on the students' scores who have been tested in a language in which they have not been instructed, leading the school toward the fateful designation of Level 4.

Even in those villages where the Yu'pik Language Program is strong, English language development classes occur at the primary level, but these are developmental and cannot provide an academic base like the Yup'ik program does and they do not prepare students to take the test in English by grade 3. After a transition phase from Yup'ik to English and phase 9 (Grade 4) English becomes the predominant language of instruction, students become capable of demonstrating academic proficiency in English. It should also be noted that with the Yup'ik instructional programs, students are taking the Terra Nova tests in Yup'ik for grades 1 and 2, so they are familiar with academic testing in Yup'ik prior to the grade 3 testing.

Many parents are now struggling with perceived choice between the continuation of their language and culture and the designation of a failing school as well as the distress of their child, all based on one day of testing in their child's life.

**Systemic Change.** Even though over the years the Yup'ik students in the primary Yup'ik language programs performed better over time academically than did those Yup'ik speaking children in primary English speaking programs, few of the children in either program were performing well enough by the time they graduated from high school to succeed in jobs or in the university setting. Even though attempts were made to implement ESL/ELD programs throughout the curriculum, factors such as high teacher turnover, limited preservice training for teachers of LEP students, and constant staff development requirements for new teachers, continually challenge the district in providing consistent high quality educational programs.

Prior to the advent of NCLB and federal requirements, district leaders, board members, community members and staff had decided that true systemic change had to occur, that our students must be taught in an environment in which they could learn and were expected to learn; that they must be provided the tools they needed to learn, and that teachers, administrators, parents, students, and board members needed be held accountable at all levels to ensure that learning occurred. Mandatory high stakes testing for graduation was coming into effect for



students in 2003, and the burden for adequately preparing students had become a reality.

In 2001-2002, based on parent and teacher input, the district implemented a K-12 standards based education, continuous progress model that over time has contributed to increased academic growth. At the primary levels, phases (1-8) in both the Yup'ik and English programs, all curriculum, materials and local assessments are aligned to the state performance standards/grade level expectations. The primary curriculum in both languages is developmental, and is based on grade 3 Alaska Performance Standards and Grade Level Expectations for Reading, Writing and Math. Students are assessed to determine levels of proficiency in reading, writing and math and are instructed at those levels in either Yup'ik or English. Students are advanced from one phase to the next when they demonstrate proficiency. Contrary to traditional thinking, a year in school may not demonstrate a grade or a phase. The student makes continuous progress and advances based on the progress made. This creates conflict with the state and federal definitions of "what/who is a third grader" since in a continuous progress model a third grader is not necessarily determined by size, age, seat time, or pages cover. This placement is determined by what the child has learned, and what the child can demonstrate having learned. The burden is shared by the teacher, the child and the parent or guardian. Parents are informed on a continual basis about what do know and should know, and what they can do to help with academic progress.

The district has completed three instructional years with this program, but only one year of full implementation. Test scores are finally beginning to indicate that growth is occurring. Much of the growth is occurring at the primary and early elementary levels. Much of the growth can be attributed to the SBE continuous progress model and the ability to focus and target on each child's academic needs. With the SBE/CPM instructional staff knows what to teach, how to teach and when to progress a child in reading, writing and math.

Factors that contribute to the academic achievement of the primary programs in the Lower Kuskokwim School District include:

- A strong primary Yup'ik instructional program that is aligned to standards (grade level expectations), has a strong comprehensive literacy development component, and staff development to support it.
- Beginning instruction with the context of the child's world and building on that knowledge, linking it to new information found in texts and the school curriculum. Yup'ik staff and strong staff development of non Native teachers help provide this link.
- Integrated thematic units for primary phases based on Yup'ik culture-aligned to state content standards in science, social studies, health, PE and the arts.
- A well defined English language development program at the primary level that focuses on oral language development skills for LEP students initially,

and is supported by a strong staff development component.

- District level support for Native educators pursuing teaching and administrative degrees.
- Paraprofessional training, providing Native language educators with the classroom training and materials needed for successful teaching.
- A standards based/continuous progress model of instruction, allowing teachers to target instruction, students to be taught at their instructional level, and parents to understand what their children need to know and be able to do to progress.
- After school and summer programs focusing on math, reading and language development in Yup'ik and/or English.
- Opportunities for elders' involvement in the schools to provide continuation of traditional values and cultural activities.
- Tumkanka home visitation early childhood program, birth to 5 years
- Migrant Education Parent Nights that focus on parent involvement in literacy development
- Migrant Education Kusko Book Express book delivery to fish camps during summer to preschool children through adults; talk with parents/grandparents about reading to all children; reading to children in fish camps.

Unlike previous years, 7 sites have met the NCLB definition of AYP and these have Native language programs. Other sites have demonstrated considerable growth. Growth comes from hard work from staff, teachers, students and parents, all who are tenacious in their belief in students, belief in the power of hard work, and the ability to stay with a directions once it's been established.

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