

Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council: News and Views. May 2020



Background:

In April 2012, the Alaska Legislature passed Senate Bill 130 authorizing the formation of the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council. In May, the Governor signed the bill into law and the first Council members were appointed in October that year.

Program Highlight:

***Ayaprun Elitnaurvik* Yup'ik Immersion School**



Created by concerned parents who worked for years with the Lower Kuskokwim School District, Bethel's Yup'ik language immersion program opened in 1995 with two kindergarten classes. One of the first kindergartners was Bethel High School valedictorian 13 years later, giving his commencement address in Yup'ik and in English. A.E. has the oldest, Alaska Native language program still operating

Senator Lisa Murkowski visits Ayaprun Elitnaurvik; to her left is former A.E. Principal, Panigkaq Agatha John Shields, ca. 2005, Bethel, Alaska

Best Practices:

Best practices refers to the most effective ways of successfully doing a certain thing. In revitalizing indigenous languages which have suffered declines due to colonialism, *one* of the best practices can be ***early total immersion programs***. These programs teach predominantly English-speaking students, all through another language, usually starting at kindergarten. Teachers are fluent speakers of the language, they also understand and respond to student's English but respond in the classroom language.

All subjects are taught in the immersion language: science, math, social studies, art, music, and reading and writing. Typically by third grade, formal instruction in English language reading and writing is added. An additional subject is added each year so that students are doing half their classes in the immersion language and half in English by sixth grade.

Fifty years of educational research continues supports the original research findings from the late 1960s: English-speaking students who go through programs of early, total language immersion through elementary grades finish grade six with stronger English language skills, and stronger academic skills overall, than English-speaking students (matched for socioeconomic status and IQ) who are taught through English-only. And graduates of language immersion are conversationally and academically proficient in two languages.

Some communities cannot locate and train enough fluent-speaking, experienced, certified immersion teachers and opt for *partial immersion*. The academic results are almost as strong with early partial immersion as with early total immersion, though students' fluency in the immersion language is not quite as strong.

Most early immersion programs run only through sixth grade, although the best school programs continue to offer academic course work in both languages through middle school and high school.

Make sure that your school district's Alaska Native language programs—along with the language programs that your tribe, local college, non-profit, or other community group operate—are included in the **Council's listing of Alaska Native language programs!** Check the link below and let us know if there are more programs that should be added.

<https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/dcra/AKNativeLanguagePreservationAdvisoryCouncil/LanguagePrograms.aspx>



Edna Deacon teaching Deg Xinag to Children in Holy Cross, Alaska

For more information on the Council and its work, contact Roy Mitchell, roy.mitchell@alaska.gov (907) 269-3646 or anlpac@alaska.gov

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