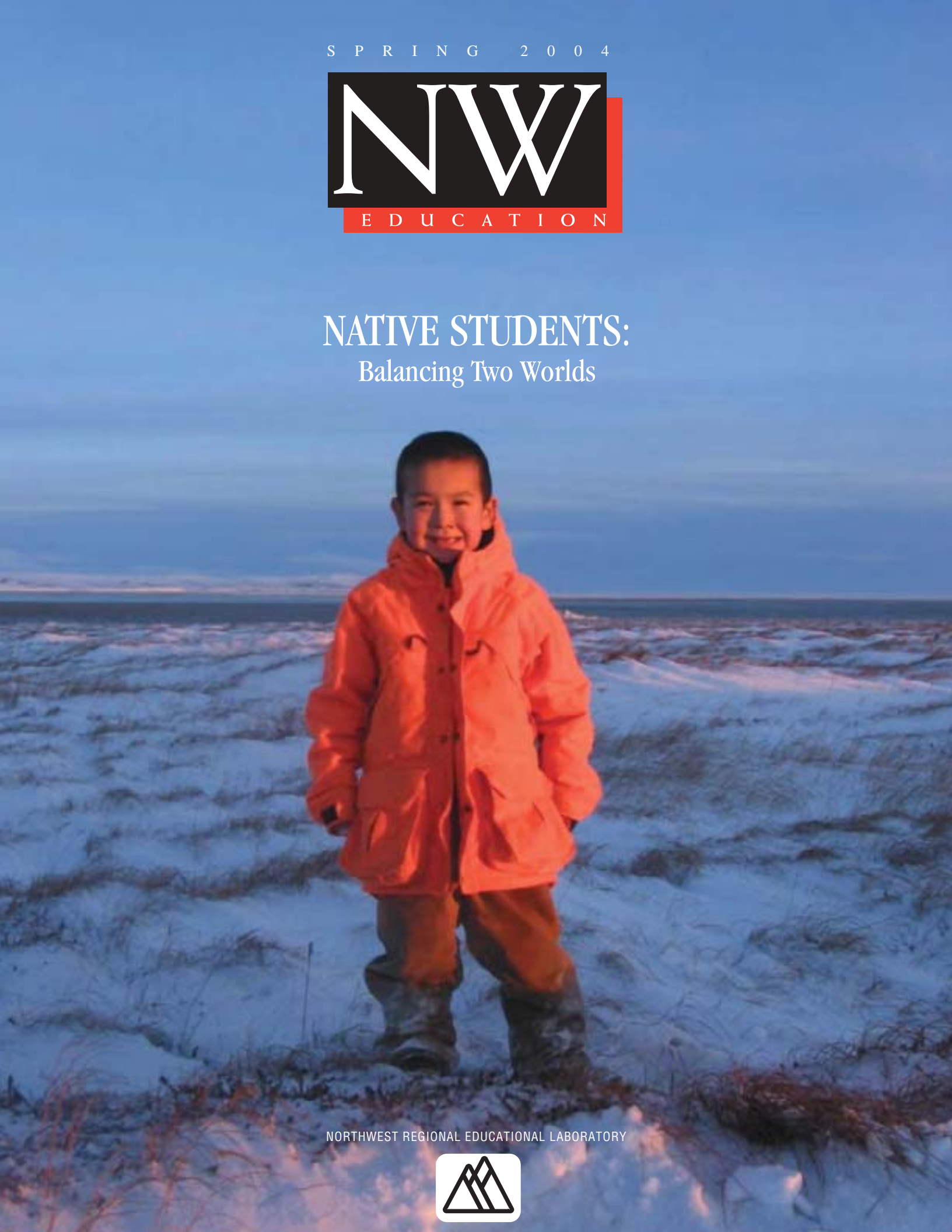
SPRING 2004

NW EDUCATION

NATIVE STUDENTS:
Balancing Two Worlds



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Native Students
Balancing Two Worlds

ARTICLES

DEPARTMENTS

ON THE COVER: Trevor Felix, a student at Nelson Island School, surveys the frozen landscape in Toksook Bay, Alaska. The image was captured by Donald Zanoff, speech and language pathologist for the Lower Kuskokwim School District. Photo credits this page (top to bottom): Oregon Historical Society, William M. Berg, Donald Zanoff, Diana Welch

The pungent smell of damp cedar enveloped us as we sat under cover of the carving shed. Glenn, a personable Inupiaq teenager who was my guide at the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage, had just finished demonstrating the "seal hop": a traditional game that involves propelling yourself forward in military push-up position while balancing on your knuckles.

As the lone tourist on this chilly and drizzly September morning, I was emboldened to ask Glenn to sit and chat about the subject that brought me to the far north—Native education.

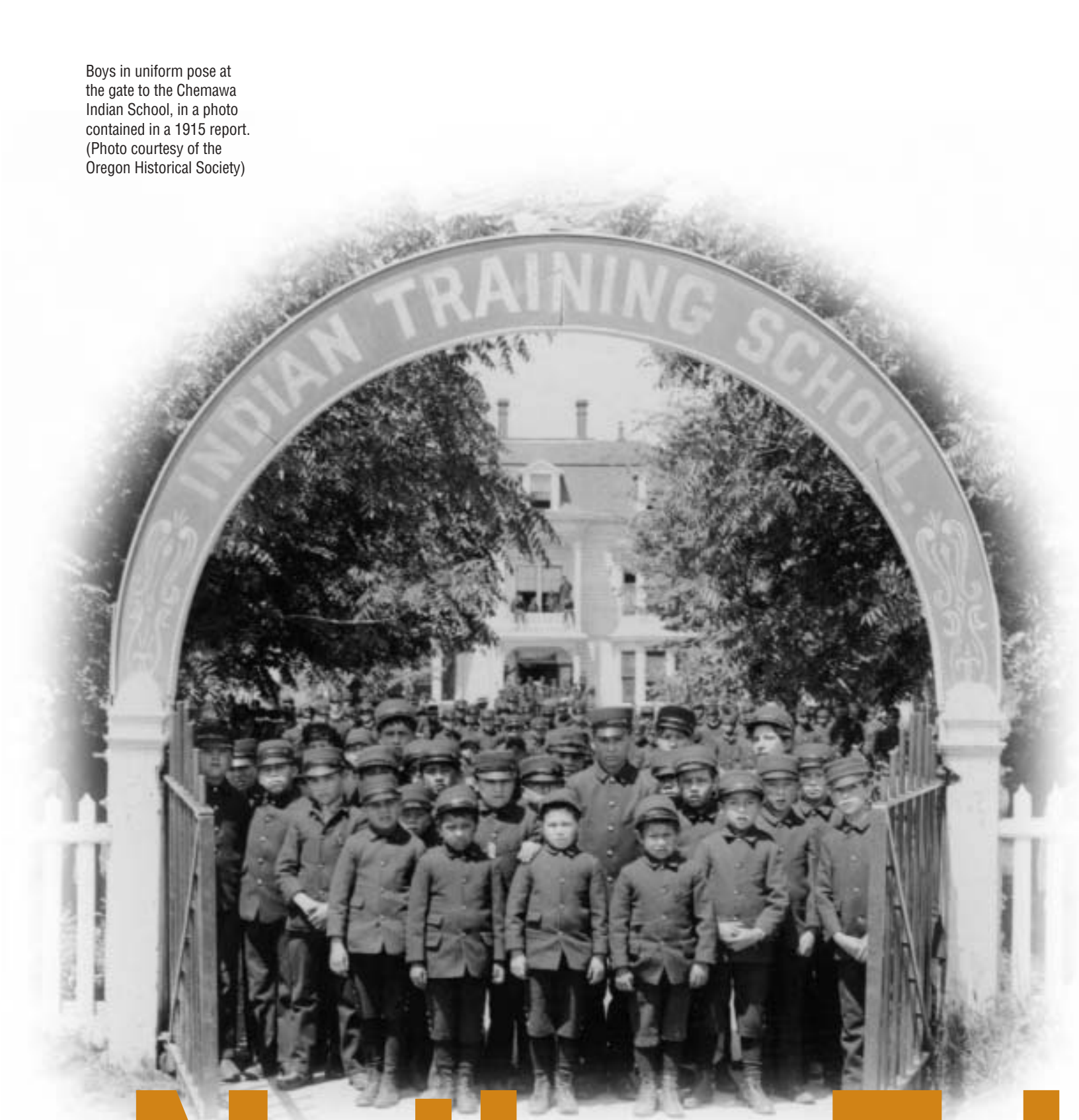
He told me his own educational journey began 33 miles above the Arctic Circle, in tiny Kotzebue, a place where residents can readily compare the tastes of bowhead, beluga, and grey whale. At the age of seven he left for Anchorage, where his village accent singled him out as an interloper. "By the second week of school, I realized that I didn't talk like everyone else," he remembers. "So, I didn't talk at all for the next three months."

His silence eventually broken, Glenn went on to finish school successfully. Some might attribute that to perseverance or luck, but Glenn credits his church and his family. In just a few days, when his summer guide job would end, he was heading to culinary school to learn a "back-up skill." He dreams of going to college someday and becoming a wildlife biologist.

Sadly, there's no such happy ending for too many Alaska Native and American Indian youth. Threaded through this issue are appalling statistics on school dropout rates and achievement scores: the kind of numbers that make you look again and shake your head in disbelief. But, there are also stories that shine bright with hope: preschoolers helping to keep alive an endangered tribal language; Native teachers and elders passing on the wisdom of a traditional lifestyle; school leaders fighting for educational self-determination; and caring individuals creating a safe haven in a sometimes harsh urban environment.

In 36 pages, we've just barely scratched the surface of a compelling and complex subject that has defied proven solutions. You'll find more information and resources at *NW Education Online,* www.nwrel.org/nwedu/09-03. In both the magazine's print and Web versions, we've undoubtedly left out people and programs that are worthy of consideration. But the story of Native education is still unfolding and will continue to demand our attention and our efforts. In the words of Sitting Bull, "Let us put our minds together and see what kind of life we can make for our children."

—Rhonda Barton
bartonr@nwrel.org



Boys in uniform pose at the gate to the Chemawa Indian School, in a photo contained in a 1915 report. (Photo courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society)

Native Ed

BITTER PAST, *Hopeful Future*

You see, we have given you our children, not our servants, or our slaves, but our own. We have given you our hearts—our children are our hearts—but bring them back again before they become white men. We wish to see them once more Indians, and after that you can make them white men if you like. But let them not get sick or die. If they get sick, we get sick; if they die, we shall die. Take them; they are yours.
—Chief Illim-Spokanee, 1825, quoted in the Oregon Historical Quarterly, *Fall 2000*

The legacy of Native education in America is tinged with suffering, bitterness, and trauma. In 2000, the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Kevin Gover, likened BIA's past treatment of western tribes to "ethnic cleansing." He offered a formal apology on behalf of his agency for pursuing an historic goal of "destroying all things Indian." "Worst of all," he remarked, "(the BIA) committed these acts against the children entrusted to its boarding schools, brutalizing them emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually." He promised it would never happen again.

ucation

At the close of the 19th century, thousands of Indian children were consigned to off-reservation boarding schools as part of the government's assimilation efforts. The youngsters were separated from their homes and families—often for years at a time—and forced to reject their traditional dress, language, and religion. The goal of these schools, as described by the founder of one such institution in Pennsylvania, was to "kill the Indian … and save the man."

One of the first of these boarding schools was the Forest Grove Indian Industrial and Training School, established in Oregon in 1880. Today, almost 125 years later, it is still operating on 400 wooded acres in Salem as the Chemawa Indian School. Home to 410 teenagers from 21 states, it has the distinction of being the oldest continuously operating boarding school in the United States.

A stroll around the campus, just off Interstate 5, reveals just how far Native education has come: Gone are the uniforms, the focus on "the white man's ways," and vocational courses like blacksmithing and dairying. State-of-the-art computer labs prepare students for the 21st century; regalia-making and drumming connect teens to their past; and vibrant murals line the hallways, a source of pride and a way for young artists to leave their mark.

Chemawa Superintendent Larry Byers, a member of the Cherokee Nation, has had a major hand in the transformation. "I came at a good time—1976—so I didn't experience a lot of what was happening to students before," he says. "We started valuing culture. My job was to move on, make sure students felt comfortable with being Native, and give them every opportunity to express who they were."

Byers speaks proudly of the 87 students in Chemawa's talented and gifted program, the 100 kids who made the honor roll last fall, and the monthly assemblies that celebrate student success. All, he believes, are the result of a system that's driven by students' needs and "doesn't penalize them for what they didn't know before they got here."

Still, some of the bleaker realities of American Indian/Alaska Native education stubbornly linger on: lower academic achievement, disciplinary issues, and alcohol and drug problems. Just this school year, Chemawa has struggled with the on-campus death of a popular 16-year-old girl by alcohol poisoning. "Whatever's happening on the reservation is happening here because those issues don't go away on a plane ride," Byers reflects. "We're going to work with whoever we get, and try to make the best of it."

The academic and social issues that continue to cast a shadow over boarding schools like Chemawa also present challenges to tribal schools and public schools that serve the overwhelming majority of Native students today.

A CLASH OF CULTURES

In recent years, a number of researchers and theorists have suggested that minority students (including American Indians and Alaska Natives) achieve a lower degree of academic success because of "discontinuities" between these students' traditional culture and language and those of mainstream American society. As a research report by Washington state's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction points out, "According to this theory, minority students come from backgrounds that equip them with linguistic, cognitive, and interactional styles that are not fully supported by typical public schools, which are instead usually structured to support those styles common to white, middle-class students. It is believed that these discontinuities often result in systematic and recurrent miscommunication in the classroom as well as a failure to acknowledge and build upon the knowledge and abilities that minority students bring with them to school."

Researchers such as John Ogbu believe that cultural difference theory alone doesn't explain why some minority groups succeed while others fail. Ogbu argues that a key factor is the difference between "immigrant minorities" and "involuntary minorities." Native Americans fit into the latter category of those "brought into their present society through slavery, conquest, or colonization." They tend to view the social, political, and economic barriers

"We're trying to give our students the opportunity to succeed from where they are when they come to us, and that's a different philosophy from most other schools that want students to fit their system."

—Larry Byers, Superintendent, Chemawa Indian School

they face in America as permanent and institutionalized discrimination. Involuntary minorities also may believe that education won't help them get ahead and may in fact be detrimental to maintaining their cultural identity.

PROVIDING CULTURAL CONTEXT

In an attempt to counter the effects of these discontinuities, Native tribal communities and educators have long advocated programs steeped in Native culture and language. The seminal 1995 report, *Indian Nations at Risk: An Educational Strategy for Action,* concludes that "cultural context is absolutely essential" for Native students to succeed academically and build meaningful lives as adults. That belief is supported by the work of Jerome Bruner, a pioneer in the fields of cognitive development and educational psychology. Bruner states that "culture shapes mind, . . . it provides us with the tool kit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conceptions of our selves and our powers." He goes on to say, "Learning, remembering, talking, imagining: All of them are made possible by participating in a culture."

A national coalition of experts, led by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, is looking for scientific evidence to tie theories like Bruner's to Native American education and to affirm the belief that students thrive when instruction is congruent with their culture, connected to their history, and consistent with their community's worldview. With funding from the U.S. Department of Education, NWREL's John Towner and William Demmert of Western Washington University have just completed an exhaustive review of the research literature on culturally based education (CBE). In searching the research base, Demmert and Towner defined CBE as having six critical elements:

- Recognition and use of Native American (American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian) languages
- Pedagogy that stresses traditional cultural characteristics and adult-child interactions
- Pedagogy in which teaching strategies are congruent

Native Voices

Dawn Smith on Student Success

The key to our success is that we have an extremely dedicated staff. The average number of years our teachers have been in the building is 12. We only have staff that really wants to be here and make a difference, because we've made that a hiring priority: Don't come here if you just want to be a teacher, come here if you want to make a difference for us and you're willing to give us the years. That's been the best thing to happen to this school.

It used to be that teachers came and left. There was no consistency for students, parents, or staff. Now, many of us at the school have been here for so long that a lot of the parents have grown up knowing us. Over the past several years that's made a tremendous difference. We're right here in the community, so they get to know us very well.

That consistency has also allowed us to move forward much more effectively with reform. Our staff has aligned the entire curriculum to the state standards—everyone knows what they're teaching and when it needs to be taught in order for the kids to hit the benchmarks. We've also developed a lot of in-building assessments. We're continually tracking the kids. We know where every kid is, in every subject, all of the time—who needs assistance, who needs supplemental programs, or who needs to be pushed because they're exceeding all of our expectations.

Our biggest problem is attendance, and we've addressed that by going directly to the parents. We enlist them as partners in what we're doing, rather than just getting information from them and not using it. And we're always open and honest with them. We surveyed them, then we sent out the results of the survey so they could see what the other parents were saying, and (finally) we implemented a lot of their ideas. That helps build trust and it gives them a sense of ownership in the school.

Dawn Smith, an enrolled member of the Klamath Tribes in Oregon, has been at Warm Springs Elementary since 1975, serving as principal since 1994. Located on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in central Oregon, the rural K–4 school serves more than 300 students, 98 percent of whom are Native American. In 2003, Smith was recognized as a National Distinguished Principal by the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

You can find more "Native Voices" at *NW Education Online*, www.nwrel.org/nwedu/09-03.

with the traditional culture and ways of knowing and learning

- Curriculum that is based on traditional culture and that recognizes the importance of Native spirituality
- Strong Native community participation in educating children and in the planning and operation of school activities
- Knowledge and use of the social and political mores of the community

Demmert and Towner found that, with few exceptions, CBE research has been descriptive or narrative rather than anchored by scientific practices. "However," says Demmert, "from my observations and experiences as an educator for more than 30 years, I clearly see a tie between academic performance and culturally based education. I think that when the research is done, whether it's experimental or high-quality quasi-experimental, there will be a connection."

Demmert and others involved in NWREL's work are now looking at existing CBE projects that might lend themselves to rigorous scientific study, as well as determining the feasibility of experimental studies. Meanwhile, their research review presents the position that "knowing, understanding, and appreciating one's cultural base are necessary starting points for initiating a young child's formal education."

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY

Understanding the child's cultural base is inextricably linked to involving the community in the child's formal education. A panel of American Indian and Alaska Native master educators, gathered by NWREL in 2001 to create a tool for improving schools for Native students, came to this conclusion: "All the scientifically rigorous research and well-validated tools will not improve school systems unless thoughtful and open dialogue is focused upon understanding, valuing, and committing to school improvement as a community." The resource that grew out of the panel's work—the *Learn-Ed Nations Inventory*—is a framework for gathering data and assessing how well a school is serving Native students. In presenting the inventory, the authors stress that every student, school, and community is unique, making local cultural context essential to school reform.

The role of community is also underscored in research on resilience, well-being, and school success for American Indian and Alaska Native students. In a review of studies, Joyce A. Strand and Thomas D. Peacock found that an adolescent's resilience—or "ability to bounce back from adversity"—is rooted in her connections to family and school and in personal characteristics. Strand and Peacock quote statistics from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health which indicate that:

- Healthy youth feel strongly connected with their families.
- Youngsters tend to do well when they feel teachers at their school treat students fairly; are close to people at school; get along with teachers and other students; and feel fellow students are not prejudiced.
- Adolescents' well-being is affected by whether they believe they have good qualities, like themselves, and feel loved.

Despite the differences among the 554 Native American tribes, Strand and Peacock point out that tribal families, schools, and communities all provide protective factors that "enable children to alter or reverse negative outcomes that might have been predicted for them." Though subjected to undue stress and adversity, youth who possess resiliency can withstand serious threats and do not give way to school failure, substance abuse, mental health problems, or juvenile delinquency.

HIGH ACHIEVERS

Back at Chemawa, there are plenty of examples of students who are soaring above expectations. Students like Pat Lane: a 17-year-old member of the Lummi Nation with an engaging smile. He's president of Chemawa's student council this year, manager of the campus store, a standout in three sports, and founder of the school's peer

"They help you get into the classes you need … it's all about education."

—Pat Lane, Chemawa student

Coming here lets you get away from family and friends and be different.

—Tasha Havacone, Chemawa student

mediation program. He modestly shrugs off the long list of accomplishments by saying, "It's good to stay busy" and talks about the importance of maintaining a positive attitude and taking advantage of any opportunity thrown your way. "Here they give you tests to see your capabilities, and place you where you need to be, even if it means sending you to Chemeketa (Community College) for courses not offered on campus," he observes. "Back home, if you were in eighth grade you were stuck in algebra and it didn't matter how good you were."

Tasha Havacone is another kid who's beating the odds, excelling at academics and leadership. She admits, "I didn't do so well before I came here (from the Hualapai Reservation in Arizona), but I got a 4.0 last semester." Fewer distractions, more structure have been the keys to Tasha's success. Vice president of the student council, manager of the boys' wrestling team, member of the volleyball squad … her list of responsibilities and achievements stretches on like Pat's. "On the reservation, you know everybody and everybody knows your business," she says. "Here you can be somebody different."

And valuing that difference is what Native education should be all about, in Larry Byers' opinion. "You have to find out what your students want for success," he advises, "and help them be successful with their values. That's the one thing we teach our teachers: Value these students for who they are, and where they're going. It may be going back home to the reservation—but they're going back as a giver, not a taker. If we can do that, we've contributed to the success of that person and their tribe. That's my goal."

FYI: A copy of Demmert and Towner's *A Review of the Research Literature on the Influence of Culturally Based Education on the Academic Performance of Native American Students* can be downloaded at www.nwrel.org/indianed/cbe/. *Learn-Ed Nations Inventory* is also available at nwrel.org/indianed/LENI/index.html.

Native Voices

William Demmert on Culturally Based Education

Many of us who have been successful academically, economically, and socially have been brought up in an environment that supports or has positive attitudes about being Native American. In our assessment of why schools fail, we generally see a school that does not take into account the influence of culture on one's view of the world, the learning preferences an individual might have developed, or the impact of environment on a person's cognitive development.

From the colonial period in America, educators told us that being Indian is not good, that knowing the language and participating in and or practicing the culture is not good. The long cycle of poverty that followed reinforced that idea. Now we have entered a period that says "wait a minute—learning more than one language is good, even if it is a Native language, and we might be smarter because of that second language." And there is a greater recognition outside the Native American community that the environment you grow up in and the experiences you have not only define who you are, but also significantly influence what you learn and how you learn.

In the southeast Alaska Tlingit community where he grew up, many of William Demmert's extended family members made their living as fisher-educators, fishing commercially in the summer and teaching school in the winter. The family's tradition of teaching dates back to 1926, when his aunt became one of the first Alaska Natives to earn a teaching certificate. Today, Demmert, who holds an Ed.D. from Harvard University, is a leading researcher on Native education. A professor at Western Washington University in Bellingham, he co-authored the 1995 report Indian Nations at Risk: An Educational Strategy for Action *and heads up the Native American Research Coalition.*

Slipping Through the Cracks

By Kara Briggs

I left high school with a whisper, not a bang. I was 15, and the year was 1981. I told my dad I was burned out, and needed a break from the world. He said kids don't get burn-out. But he'd learn.

For a couple of weeks I put on the charade of being sick. Then I simply caught up to the low expectations I found for myself, a half-Yakama girl in an all-white high school in Spokane, Washington.

In grade school, teachers encouraged my advanced writing and reading skills. But in a high school of more than 1,000 students, I hung close to the walls fearing the tidal wave of teens would sweep me under. The one time my French teacher noticed me was when I sneaked out of a pep rally—which bored me—to go to the library. He roared, "We expect you to go where we tell you to go."

I felt more isolated than the average bookish teen misfit. After years of my white classmates dissecting my features—a prominent nose, full lips, and coarse brown hair—I felt ugly. The kids at school called me whatever variety of brown was down. To them I was a "wetback" one week and an Iranian the next.

But I was never something so mythic as an Indian. Native Americans didn't exist in my formal education, except for world-weary men sitting on the sidewalk outside the Union Gospel Mission. Any time I

Kara Briggs is a reporter at The Oregonian *newspaper and past president of both the Native American Journalists Association and Unity: Journalists of Color. She can be contacted at kara_briggs@yahoo.com. (Photo by Patricia Cordell)*

asserted, "I am a Yakama," someone was sure to look at my pale skin and add, "Just a little bit," and in so doing take another bite out of who I was.

In this atmosphere, I could not explore my growing pride in being Yakama. Even when I did venture an idea, someone would correct it.

In eighth grade I won second place in a speech contest with a talk about Native American rights. But one judge, who was white, told me that he was friends with Native Americans, and that I wouldn't get any "brownie points" for criticizing the white man.

That puzzled me as a child because I reasoned I had been in the Campfire Girls, not the Brownies. But the white man's criticism ate away at my win. Would his impact have been different if he'd talked with me about tone and style, rather than presuming that he had the right to tell me how I should talk about my race?

Native American teenagers slip away every day. Many of us will check out of school mentally, if not physically. We retell the stories of how the government beat our languages out of our parents and grandparents.

Some of us will drink to escape the pain, only to wind up in car accidents, alcoholic, or dying from alcohol poisoning. Others will have babies, who run the risk of growing up as skeptical of schooling as their parents. Some will stand up to teachers, only to be kicked out of school. With those odds, we'd rather gamble on making a living fishing the Columbia like our cousins do, like we will do even if we graduate.

We wonder what the white man has to teach us, anyway. It's a fair question.

Indian educators in the Portland Public School District reported in 2002 that one-third of the district's 1,100 Native American students were at some time in their schooling labeled as having learning disabilities. When tested, though, they were found to be learning able. What did these students learn under the emptiness of low expectations?

Leaving high school was surprisingly easy for me. No one ever called from my high school to find out where I was. No matter how many times my dad told me that a truant officer would come after me, none appeared at our door.

My dad, who was white, had raised me since my Yakama mother died when I was four. My parents, Greg and Evelyn, had been high school teachers together in Seattle, Honolulu, and California's San Joaquin Valley in the 1960s. I was their only child.

Looking back, I realize my dad didn't know what was happening to me, and neither did I. I know now I was suffering from depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome. Native American health providers identify these as the leading mental health issues for Native Americans. Researchers say we may even sense in our bones the trauma endured by generations before us.

The loss that has defined my life occurred when my mother was killed by a runaway bus before my eyes. She was 31. My father and I lived with her ever-present absence. As a child, the memory of her accident replayed in my mind like film footage. We never grieved; in fact we didn't know how to, in either my mother's Yakama traditions or the mainstream culture's psychological treatment.

For many of us, school isn't nearly as compelling as our internal pain, which only grows as we come to realize the enormous personal loss resulting from 500 years of genocide. We need educators who are Native American to guide us through these realizations. We also need educators who will shake off their racial preconceptions. We all carry them. Students need you to face them one human being to another.

For me, it took only a few weeks to find something more resilient than my pain. It was my intellectual curiosity. The girl who was written off by teachers took to reading the classics.

Wandering the moors with Heathcliff and Catherine was an antidote to my depression. I voraciously moved on to Anna Karenina's suicide, and figured that's no way to go. I crossed the Atlantic with the suffragists. I traveled in time to the Civil Rights movement, the women's movement, and as far as the collection at the Spokane Public Library allowed. Only one topic, the Native American rights movement, was absent from the shelves.

Meanwhile, my dad—my first and greatest teacher—spent evenings teaching me the genres and styles of 20th century American music, and the finer points of newspaper reading. When he was diagnosed and died of cancer in 1984, I was 18. He was 47.

I looked to Jane Eyre for guidance. She made a life for herself, and I determined I would, too. I found Whitworth College and an English department that would take me. I moved on as if nothing unusual had ever happened. Until my 30s, I never breathed a word about having dropped out of high school.

Now I've been a journalist for 15 years. I can't help but wonder how the Yakama girl I was, with all her academic interests, could slip through education's cracks. And if it happened to me, how many more talented Native American students are falling through the holes in America's schools every day? ■

HEALING WOUNDS

Dropout Prevention Programs in Montana, Alaska, and Washington

By Joyce Riha Linik

The statistics are alarming: more than a third of all Native American students don't finish high school. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the high school completion rate in Northwest states ranges between 55 and 65 percent. In Oregon and Alaska, Native students are twice as likely to drop out as their white, non-Hispanic peers. In Montana, they're three times as likely.

As a result, efforts are under way across the region to stem the tide of youth leaving school without diplomas. Many of these programs seek to salve past injuries and engage the entire community in keeping students in school.

"We're looking at ways to foster trust and a relationship not only with the child, but with their family and their community," explains Julie Cajune, Indian education coordinator for the Ronan-Pablo School District in Montana. "Distrust is a community issue, not just a school issue. We need to recognize there are wounds in order for healing to take place."

STEMMING THE TIDE IN RONAN

The Ronan effort, funded by a $255,000 grant from the Kellogg Foundation, is directed by a steering committee representing the entire community: elders, school staff, business leaders, working people, and even middle and high school students. After conducting exit interviews with students who chose to leave school, the committee developed several strategies to address the most common causes.

Since teen pregnancy is one of the leading reasons, a child care facility now operates in a building donated by the tribe, enabling young parents to stay in school. To help failing students, computerized classes are offered after school so they can make up lost credits and still graduate with their peers. A mentoring program using community volunteers targets sixth-graders and high school freshmen because those are difficult transition years.

Because research shows that feeling connected to just one adult at school can increase a student's chances for academic success, faculty members meet daily with small groups of eight to 10 students and engage them in out-of-school activities throughout the year. These activities have included rafting, rock climbing, and camping trips, as well as community service projects such as tutoring elementary students or shoveling snow for elders.

"The idea," says Cajune, "is to build a community of belonging."

The approach seems to be working. A student Cajune describes as "never excited about school—let alone talking about a school activity" enthusiastically flags down Cajune in the library to show her photos of his school-sponsored rafting trip. Quantitative data are beginning to support the qualitative: During the program's first year, the dropout rate for American Indian students in the district fell below the rate for non-Native students for the first time in years, perhaps ever.

ELSEWHERE IN BIG SKY COUNTRY

A similar effort, the Montana American Indian Dropout Prevention Program, targets other Native communities in the state. Funded by a $300,000 federal grant, the program involves a two-tiered approach at the state and local levels.

At the state level, an advisory council is using existing data to develop a comprehensive plan for student retention. "Essentially, (it's) a research agenda to look at different practices that could help," explains Lori Falcon, the Indian education specialist with Montana's Office of Public Instruction who oversees the project. The council is studying the accreditation process for alternative programs and reexamining absenteeism policies to make them more culturally sensitive. For example, when an extended family member dies, a Native student may miss several days of school due to the cultural traditions of his tribe, potentially causing him to lose credits and fall behind.

Studying achievement data has been helpful in pinpointing trouble spots for Native youth, says Falcon. Though Indian students often enter kindergarten with lower English proficiency than their non-Indian classmates, early literacy activities can close the gap. However, "at eighth grade, we see a real drop in achievement," reports Falcon. "Somewhere between fourth and eighth grade, the whole phenomenon of oppositional identity comes up."

She explains that as young Native people begin forming their identity, they often find their traditional values—beliefs that come from family, home, and community—at odds with the values they are encouraged to adopt in school. "Middle school is a tough time for all kids, but especially for Indian kids. They start disengaging," she says. "It's in ninth and 10th grade when they start dropping out."

To combat that, six middle and high schools located primarily on Montana reservations—Browning, Heart Butte, Rocky Boy, Box Elder,

Lame Deer, and Poplar—have received approximately $40,000 each to develop local retention strategies.

As in Ronan, approaches here involve developing community partnerships, mentoring, adding classes in tribal culture, and building a day-care facility in at least one school. Efforts are also under way to improve the collection and use of data, including a survey of 12th-grade students to learn what has helped them stay in school.

While the program is currently looking at short-term strategies for students on the verge of dropping out, Falcon has her hopes set on some long-term solutions. She suggests policy changes like extending the age range for public education programs from two to 21 years old. That would allow for the establishment of preschool programs to boost school preparedness as well as alternative programs to help young adults return to school and obtain their diplomas into their early 20s.

AN ALASKA ALTERNATIVE

In Juneau, Alaska, alternative high school Yaakoosgé Daakahidi—Tlingit for "House of Knowledge"—offers students who have been unsuccessful in the mainstream a "last chance" to achieve their diploma before pursuing a GED or leaving school entirely. With a small staff and just 90 students, Principal Ronalda Cadiente reports the school has been successful in creating an atmosphere where kids who may feel lost or invisible in a large traditional high school are able to find a connection. According to Cadiente, it's a common problem for Tlingit students, who make up about half of Yaakoosgé Daakahidi's population.

The program offers both structured and independent classes to meet the needs of its students. That may mean allowing them to make up missed credits or arrange their schedules to accommodate working and caring for children. But, staff and program graduates say, the key is the personal attention and support students receive.

"What's working?" Cadiente asks. "Most obvious are a smaller learning environment and a less formal student/teacher relationship. Students connect with our staff and know that we care about their growth and progress." Cadiente says community involvement and cultural inclusion are also important in serving Native students.

Evidence of the program's success lies in the numbers: The school awards an average of 35 diplomas per year. "Kids are graduating," says Cadiente, "and these are kids who otherwise would not have."

A JUMP ON COLLEGE IN WASHINGTON

In Washington, a dropout prevention program goes a step further to help students not only complete high school, but get a jump on a college education. The Early College High School Initiative for Native Youth is part of a broader national effort for minority students, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and others. It helps secondary students obtain both a diploma and an Associate of Arts degree in their own high school—with an added 13th year—thus removing financial and other barriers to advancing their education. Antioch University Seattle coordinates the Washington effort.

Linda Campbell, an Antioch professor and project director, says she had initial concerns the program might be perceived by the Native community as "the white man trying to do more in less time" for their children, so she approached tribal leaders at the outset for their opinion of the early college concept. There was "unanimous excitement" about the potential, and tribal leaders have been instrumental in helping design what the program looks like in practice.

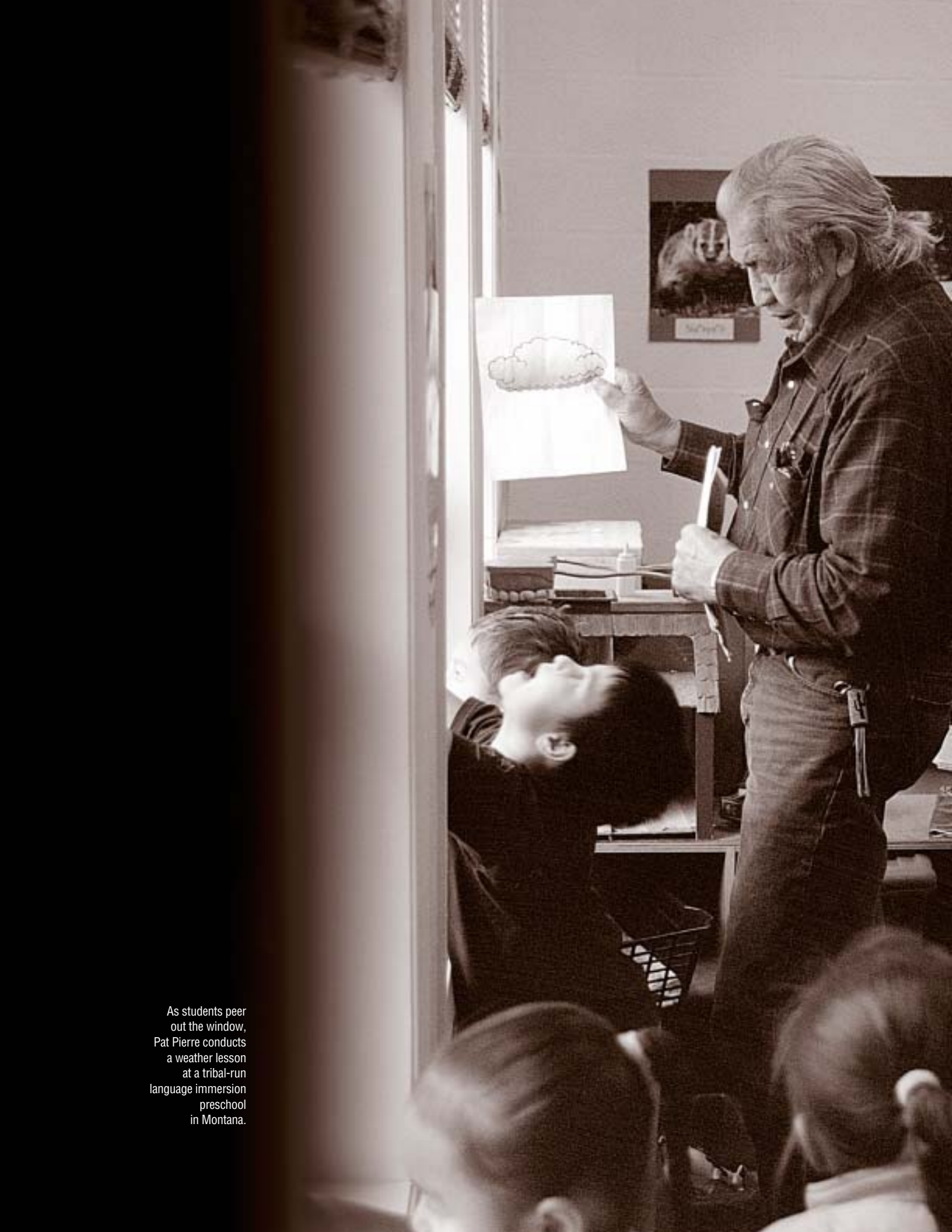
Last year, Medicine Wheel Academy in Spokane, Ferndale High School in Ferndale, and Tulalip Heritage School in Marysville were selected as the first participants. This year, two more organizations joined the program: the Wellpinit School District on the Spokane reservation and the Suquamish tribe, which plans to start an early college high school. Additional sites will be added next year.

Though each school and its college partner have a unique program, all must include local, culturally relevant curriculum; family and community engagement; and academic advising and support. "Often, there's a strong remedial/special education focus" to programs targeting minority students, says Campbell. "(Instead), we're setting high expectations."

Students are rising to the challenge. At Ferndale, math teachers were surprised by unusually high grades, says Campbell. "In talking, they realized kids were working so hard because of the motivation of early college."

Campbell cites statistics from the Manhattan Institute showing the high school dropout rate for Native students in Washington is 52 percent. She believes that number is an underestimate "because there's no tracking of kids from fifth to sixth grade or in middle school." Native students also have the lowest college completion rates of any ethnic group in the country.

"There appear to be 9,000 to 10,000 Native students in middle and high school in Washington. Our initiative will reach more than 1,000," Campbell observes. She adds hopefully, "We think this initiative may serve to transform college achievement in a single generation." ■



As students peer out the window, Pat Pierre conducts a weather lesson at a tribal-run language immersion preschool in Montana.

IN THE LANGUAGE OF OUR ANCESTORS

PROGRAMS IN MONTANA AND WASHINGTON GIVE VOICE TO DISAPPEARING WORDS

Story by Mindy Cameron / Photos by William M. Berg

RONAN and ARLEE, Montana—Students in Eva Boyd's class are typical teenagers. They fidget, wisecrack, talk to friends, and only occasionally pay attention.

But when asked why they are in this class, they speak with one voice: We are losing our language; we want to preserve our heritage. The presence of these Salish teens in this classroom, along with Eva Boyd, a tribal elder, is testimony to that singular desire to save a culture by saving the language.

Across Indian Country, many efforts to revive and revitalize Native American languages are under way. And none too soon. Estimates vary, but of the hundreds of languages that existed here before the arrival of white settlers, as many as two-thirds may have disappeared. Of those that remain, many could die along with the elders, the dwindling brain trust of tribal language.

Boyd's story shows why so many of these languages disappeared, why some survived, and how they might be saved.

THE TOLL OF ASSIMILATION

From the late 19th century until the mid-20th century, the national policy regarding American Indians and Alaska Natives was assimilation. After decades of removing indigenous people from their land to reservations, the federal government sought to mainstream them into American society.

Education was a critical aspect of the assimilation policy. It was believed that through education, Native Americans would learn the white man's language and culture and develop the skills to function effectively in white man's society. By 1887 the federal government had established more than 200 Indian schools to carry out this mission.

Like many of her tribal contemporaries, Boyd was sent to an Indian boarding school. At the typical boarding school, children were punished for speaking their traditional language. Some were made to stand in the corner, others had their knuckles rapped or rags tied around their mouths. Many children eventually forgot their tribal language, and those who remembered were often ashamed to use it.

Eva Boyd managed to escape that fate. She was a willful 10-year-old when she went to boarding school. Decades later, she explains simply, "I didn't like it, so I left." Three days after she arrived, Boyd walked out and hitchhiked back home to the Camas Prairie area of the Flathead Reservation in Western Montana. There, her grandmother raised her in the language of their ancestors.

Boyd, a former foreign language instructor at Salish Kootenai College, came out of retirement to teach three Salish language classes at Ronan High School. For her, it's a simple matter of tribal survival. "If we don't keep the language alive our tribe is going down. Without the language we won't be Indians any more."

Students in her class understand that and struggle to learn the language. A difficult task is made more difficult by a lack of resources. The sole text is a Salish storybook, *The Story of a Mean Little Old Lady,* with English translation.

"We have to do the best we can," says Boyd. Like her students, Boyd wishes Native language instruction could start earlier, at an age when learning a new language is not so difficult.

Julie Cajune agrees. She is Indian Education Coordinator for the Ronan-Pablo School District. She admires and values what Eva Boyd is doing. "A teacher such as Eva is one way to make the school more reflective of the community,"

LEFT: Holly Burland and her classmates have just one storybook that's been translated into Salish.
BELOW: Eva Boyd came out of retirement to teach three Salish language classes at Ronan High School.

she says, "but we are doing language at the wrong end."

"Go to Nkwusm," Cajune insists.

STARTING EARLY

Thirty miles down the road at Arlee, in a former bowling alley that also houses a casino, is Nkwusm. It's a tribal-run language immersion school for preschoolers.

Five little ones squirm on the floor at the feet of two elders, Pat Pierre and Stephen Small Salmon. Like Boyd, the adults are fluent in Salish and committed to keeping the language alive, even if it means coming out of retirement, as Pierre has done.

On this damp and chilly day, he is reviewing the Salish names for months, days of the week, and numbers. The children vigorously recite the words. They follow Pierre to the window where he points to the sky, the ground, and the distant hills. It is a short lesson in Salish about the weather.

Pierre explains, "The power and wisdom of language is what has kept our people together so that we can do meaningful things. If I can teach the little ones the language, then we keep our identity."

The research is clear about learning languages. A second language is more easily acquired early on as children develop their language skills, rather than at a later stage. That has great importance for indigenous people facing the extinction of their ancestral language. Language is more than words and rules of usage. It is the repository of culture and identity.

USING LANGUAGE NESTS

In Nkwusm, the Salish are replicating what has worked elsewhere to revive

indigenous languages; they are using what's called a "language nest." As the name implies, a language nest is more than just another language program. It is language immersion for the youngest members of a Native population.

When the Maoris of New Zealand faced the extinction of their language more than 20 years ago, they created language nests. Hawaiians soon adopted the Maori model and, in the mid-1990s, a similar program was established on the Blackfeet Reservation in Northwest Montana.

Language nests are seen by many as a key to reviving tribal languages. Last year Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye proposed an amendment to the Native American Languages Act of 1990. If passed, it would provide federal government support for Native American survival schools, including language nests. The 1990 act establishes as national policy the government's responsibility to "preserve, protect, and promote the rights of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop" their Native languages.

Last May, at a U.S. Senate hearing on the proposed amendment, a delegation representing the Blackfeet Nation stressed the difference between Native American language survival schools and public schools. "The academic outcomes of Native American language survival schools are as strong as, or stronger than, public education systems and students become speakers of their Native language," they said.

The Blackfeet Native language school in Browning, Montana—Nizipuhwasin—has become a model for Nkwusm and for other communities that hope to develop programs for young speakers of tribal languages.

Few tribes, however, can sustain such schools indefinitely. Founders of Nkwusm, which is now supported by grants and the Salish-Kootenai tribe, hope eventually to be self-sustaining. They also seek to have an endowment, run a K–12 school, and provide distance learning for the Flathead Reservation.

As important as tribal programs such as Nizipuhwasin and Nkwusm are, the current reality is that most Native youth are educated in public schools, not tribal-run classrooms. Native educators say if traditional languages are to be saved, public schools will have to play a key role.

INTEGRATING LANGUAGE

In Washington's Marysville School District, Tulalip Elementary offers one example of how to develop an integrated curriculum of language, literature, and culture with Lushootseed—the language of the Tulalip tribe—at the center.

The program began several years ago at the school, which is about 70 percent American Indian. Tribal members and district staff worked together to develop a Tulalip-based classroom in the fourth grade. A non-Native teacher teamed with a tribal language teacher to create a new curriculum, which has now evolved into Lushootseed language and culture instruction at every grade level.

Any curriculum introduced in schools today must meet state standards and the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The Tulalip-based curriculum in Marysville has managed to do that.

One of many challenges for schools that already have—or would like to start—Native language programs is finding qualified teachers. Some states have responded to that need by authorizing alternative certification for Native language teachers. In Montana, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, the authority for granting certification to these teachers has been delegated to tribal authorities. (In Alaska, this authority is reserved for each school board or regional educational attendance area.)

Once a tribe has determined an applicant is fluent enough to qualify, he or she is recommended for certification to the State Board of Education. Upon certification, Native language teachers, usually tribal elders, get the same pay and benefits and must meet the same requirements for continuing education as

Consider This

"Language nest" is defined in the proposed amendment to the Native American Languages Act of 1990 as a site-based educational program that:

- Enrolls families with children under age 7.
- Is conducted through a Native American language for at least 700 hours per year per student.
- Has the specific goal of strengthening, revitalizing, or re-establishing a Native American language and culture as a living language and culture of daily life.

The "Natural Approach"

According to language instruction experts, the best way to acquire a second language is the same way you acquire a first language—immersion in a language-rich environment. Here are four principles of language immersion or the "Natural Approach:"

- Comprehension precedes production. The teacher focuses on a topic that interests students, always uses the language she is teaching, and aids comprehension with gestures, visuals, and real objects.
- Students learn in stages, from a silent period of listening to trying a single word, several words, phrases, and—finally—sentences and more complex conversation. The goal is to carry out a conversation in the language. Focus on activity, not grammar.
- Create a warm, friendly, welcoming classroom; use activities that are interesting and relevant; encourage the expression of ideas, opinions, and emotions.
- Learning a language takes time. Expect to spend about 500 hours in language instruction to achieve a basic conversational proficiency.

—From Stephen D. Krashen and Terrell D. Tracy, *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*

Stephen Small Salmon listens to a Salish story with one of his young students.

other certified teachers.

There have been some issues involving classroom management. "(That's) no small matter in a room with more than a dozen teenagers," notes Julie Cajune. Even so, she thinks it's a good move. Without certification, Native language teachers, who were paid at the level of teacher aides, were devalued.

The Montana Board of Public Education adopted its policy for alternative certification, called Class 7 Specialist Certificate for Native American Languages, in 1995. At that time one tribe identified only five elders who were fluent in their Native language. Today, there are 112 Class 7 teachers in Montana.

Washington state adopted its alternative certification in 2003. It is a three-year pilot program with the purpose of contributing "to the recovery, revitalization, and promotion of First Peoples' languages." By the end of the first year, seven teachers had been certified under the program.

INDIAN ENGLISH

Teaching Native American children, whether the subject is reading, math, or their indigenous language, presents a unique set of circumstances. While very few Native youngsters speak the language of their ancestors, their first language is not necessarily the English of their white classmates, either. The first language of two-thirds of American Indian youth today is *Indian English,* according to a research report by Washington state's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Evergreen Center for Educational Improvement at Evergreen State College in Olympia.

Authors of the report, Magda Costantino and Joe St. Charles of Evergreen, and Denny Hurtado of OSPI, describe Indian English as English dialects used by American Indians that do not conform in certain ways to standard English. Despite the differences, however, the dialects "are nonetheless well-ordered and highly structured languages that reflect the linguistic competencies that must underlie all languages."

In *American Indian English,* W.L. Leap provides important context for the restoration of Native languages. He writes that distinctive characteristics of Indian English—what he calls "codes"—"derive, in large part, from their close association with their speakers' ancestral language traditions. In many cases, rules of grammar and discourse from that tradition provide the basis for grammar and discourse in these English codes—even in instances where the speakers are not fluent in their ancestral language."

It can be argued, then, that Indian English serves as a language bridge between the past and present. Understanding the role and importance of Indian English, however, may not be as big a hurdle as the larger issues and prevailing attitudes about language use and instruction. Many people believe that because English is the dominant language,

Native Voices

Joyce Silverthorne on Language

Language is an important vehicle of culture. Everything we know and say and do is learned through the symbol system of language. It only has meaning if we all understand the same thing.

All across the country, I have asked Native Americans of many tribes, 'Do you have a word for *I'm sorry*?' I have yet to find a word for it in any Native American language. We only invent words that we need. If your way of life doesn't allow you to wrong others, you don't need a word for that.

You can tell a lot about a culture by the words you do and do not invent.

Immersion programs and classroom instruction cannot be the only way of revitalizing a language. It depends on people throughout the community who recognize the need to keep the language alive. What should they do? *Use* the language. We have a writing system: Use it in signs, labels. I'm looking around my room right now. Why haven't I done that?

Joyce Silverthorne is a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes and a student of the language. She is education director for the tribe and has been a member of the Montana Board of Public Education for 10 years. She serves as a member of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's advisory committee on math and science.

You can find more "Native Voices" at *NW Education Online,* www.nwrel.org/nwedu/09-03.

instruction should be in English and all students should learn its proper usage. Disagreement about the role and importance of bilingual education is a fact of life in many school districts, tossing up one more barrier to public school efforts to become involved in Native language revival.

WHAT RESEARCH SHOWS

Advocates of Native language revival programs point to research that shows academic advantages for children who speak two languages. Gina Cantoni, a language pedagogy professor at Northern Arizona University, has written of "abundant evidence" that teaching the home language does not interfere with the development of English skills. To the contrary, she notes, instruction that "promotes proficiency in one's first language also promotes proficiency in the second language."

Cantoni contends that "mastery of more than one linguistic code results in a special kind of cognitive flexibility." Unfortunately, she notes, the "special" abilities related to mastery of more than one language are not covered by most tests used to measure academic achievement.

Research reinforces the argument for expanding Native language instruction. Even more compelling are the voices of Native American advocates, from the students in Eva Boyd's class to the elders teaching youngsters at Nkwusm and to longtime Montana educator Joyce Silverthorne.

Silverthorne, a member of the Salish tribe of the Flathead Reservation in Montana, has been a classroom teacher, college instructor, school board member, program administrator on the reservation, and member of the Montana Board of Public Education, where she worked for passage of the Montana Class 7 certificate.

While language and culture are linked in all societies, "what is unique to Native Americans is that this is our homeland," says Silverthorne. "There is no 'old country' to return to. When language dies here, it dies forever."

Nkwusm founder and teacher Melanie Sandoval is committed to seeing that doesn't happen. Now 28, she says she has been trying to learn the language of her tribe as long as she can remember. She now learns along with the children, thanks to the two elders who come into the classroom six hours a day, five days a week. After years of formal study, she is now learning useful, everyday phrases like "blow your nose" and "jump down off that."

What's happening at the school is more than preserving the language. Sandoval observes that preservation "is like having a bottle on the shelf. We want to breathe life into the language, to speak it, and pass it on to the next generation."

CHARTER SCHOOL KEEPS NATIVE LANGUAGE ALIVE

Determined teachers enhance students' cultural identity

By Rhonda Barton

BETHEL, Alaska—Though she stands barely five feet tall, Loddie Ayaprun Jones is a formidable force. More than 30 years ago, she pioneered a bilingual, Yup'ik kindergarten program in Bethel, a hub for the tundra villages that dot the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Today, the only Yup'ik immersion school in existence bears her name—an honor she wryly acknowledges by saying, "The parent who suggested it told me you don't have to be dead to have a building named after you."

In Jones's sunny corner classroom, the "ACEs" take the place of ABCs: There are no B's or D's in the 18-letter Yup'ik alphabet. Student names like Angilan, Utuan, and Eveggluar call out from self-portraits that adorn the walls. And, the Pledge of Allegiance is the "pelak." Looking around, Jones remarks, "Every day our students are reminded that they're Yup'ik. They say 'we have life.'"

Yup'ik, spoken by the Native people of Western Alaska, is the strongest indigenous language group in the state. The geographic isolation of the region helped keep English at bay longer than in other parts of Alaska, according to Walkie Charles of the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Yup'ik phrases remain at the heart of the subsistence culture—"yuungnaqsaraq"—and 51 percent of the children in the region are classified as Yup'ik-speaking.

Despite that, fluency becomes more tenuous every year as television and pop culture wash over the tundra. That fact fills Jones and her fellow immersion teachers (called "elitnauristet") with resolve and an almost religious fervor. They battled a skeptical local school board to establish their elementary program in 1995, after five years of study and lobbying. In 1999, they successfully applied for charter school status from the Alaska Board of Education in an effort to gain more autonomy and secure grants for the development of materials. Now they are gearing up for their charter renewal, ready to battle critics who question whether students are best served learning in their ancestral tongue or in the language that dominates the modern economic landscape.

"We do have ignorant community members who think we're trying to go back to the old way of life—to using kayaks and living in sod houses—rather than trying to integrate the Western and Yup'ik cultures," says co-principal Agatha Panigkaq John-Shields. "When we hear negative comments from our opponents, we use that as a critique and strengthen our program. We show them, rather than fight," she adds with steely determination.

While Ayaprun Elitnaurvik is the only Yup'ik immersion school in the

Loddie Ayaprun Jones is surrounded by students at the Yup'ik immersion school that bears her name. Photo by Joy Shantz.

Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD), 22 of the district's 27 schools have strong Yup'ik programs and one offers Cup'ig immersion. "What empowers people out here is the choices they have," notes Abby Qirvan Augustine, another one of the school's founding members. "The district doesn't direct villages to have certain kinds of programs." LKSD also produces a wealth of Yup'ik storybooks and instructional materials that find their way into classrooms throughout the state.

At the immersion school, 10 certified Native instructors use Yup'ik exclusively in kindergarten through second-grade classes, 75 percent of the time in third grade, and half the time in grades four through six. The school's 189 students have reading and language arts classes in English beginning in third grade and add English-language health and math a year later. All other subject matter is taught in Yup'ik.

Jones's voice rises with excitement as she explains the difference between teaching in a traditional classroom versus an immersion program. "Most of it is total physical response," says Jones, the winner of a Milken Family Foundation National Educator award. "You use your whole body to demonstrate concepts, from the simplest to the most complex." Her fellow teachers—Abby, Carol, Sally—chime in with their own descriptions: "heavy on hands-on, a lot of singing, repetition, chants." They stress a "natural approach" to language acquisition—using Yup'ik in everyday situations rather than emphasizing formal rules and grammar.

While the teachers maintain that their students achieve at higher levels than peers in English-only programs, the data aren't quite that cut-and-dried. Bev Williams, LKSD's director of academic programs, acknowledges that "English isn't the only factor," with attendance, parental support, and social issues contributing to test scores.

"Longitudinal research indicates that students who begin literacy and academic instruction in their indigenous language, as they learn English, and then transfer into English do much better academically on English tests in the upper grades," notes Williams. "Also, students in good immersion programs tend to do better academically in English in upper grades." However, Williams continues, "The research is unclear on what happens if students enter an immersion program as limited English speakers and their only instruction is in the target or second language."

Still, whatever the end result, it's undeniable that pride ripples out from these classrooms like a pebble thrown in the dusky Kuskokwim River. Parents who were never taught Yup'ik are beginning to pick up words from their schoolchildren. Elders beam at the students who perform traditional songs and converse in Yup'ik on visits to the nearby senior center.

"(For me) walking into the halls of Ayaprun is like coming home," says Charles, one of the recipients of a million-dollar grant for a career ladder program for Yup'ik paraprofessionals. "Ayaprun Elitnaurvik's success comes from the commitment of teachers like Loddie and Abby who are truly Yup'ik, who are academicians, and who (can) take ownership and orchestrate something as powerful and as humbling as a Yup'ik immersion program." ■

The Lower Kuskokwim School District has created colorfully illustrated books to increase Yup'ik language proficiency.

SEEKING NATIVE TEACHERS

NORTHWEST PROGRAMS RECRUIT AND TRAIN INDIGENOUS INSTRUCTORS

BY JOYCE RIHA LINIK

"As a child, I never had an American Indian teacher," reveals Az Carmen, descendant of the Chickasaw and Choctaw tribes and now coordinator of Native American enrollment services at the University of Oregon.

Unfortunately, Carmen's experience is not unique.

In the Northwest—where Native students represent anywhere from 1.3 percent to one-fourth of the elementary and secondary school population, depending on the state—Native instructors make up smaller fractions of the teaching force. Nationally, they account for less than 1 percent of all teachers. In Alaska, where Native educators are more prevalent, they still represent less than 5 percent of the total while Native students fill 25 percent of the seats in the state's classrooms. And even on Indian reservations and in remote Alaska villages, the majority of teachers come from outside the Native community.

Well-meaning as these outsiders may be, the situation is less than ideal for Native students who suffer from the lowest high school completion rates in the nation. The research suggests—and common sense tells us—these students might benefit significantly from having like role models to guide them, as well as access to more culturally sensitive and culturally relevant instruction.

As a result, efforts are under way across the Northwest to increase the numbers of American Indian and Alaska Native teachers serving in schools with high populations of Native youth.

Taking Steps in Oregon

At the University of Oregon, a program called Sapsik'wala—Sahaptian for "teacher"—was instituted in 2002 to recruit, train, and mentor American Indian teachers. The program, funded by U.S. Department of Education grants totaling approximately $1.7 million, was developed as a partnership between the College of Education and nine federally recognized tribes in the state: Coos, Coquille, Grand Ronde, Klamath, Siletz, Siuslaw, Umatilla, Umpqua, and Warm Springs. The program's goal: to increase the number of Native teachers with the cultural sensitivity and training necessary to help lower dropout rates and raise test scores for Native students.

Candidates selected for the program receive tuition and fees, a monthly stipend, and a book allowance, provided they commit to teaching in a school with a high concentration of Indian students after receiving their degree.

The stipend is designed to cover living expenses such as child care, explains Carmen, since many Native students are older and have family responsibilities to juggle with coursework. This provision was included on the advice of the tribal consortium, Carmen says, and is especially important because "Native people know that if you're thinking about their children, then you're concerned about their welfare."

Other important elements of the program include a weekly seminar on Native education issues, as well as the use of Native mentors and the implementation of a cohort model.

"We provide support," explains Sapsik'wala program director Pat Rounds, "because we know it's important to getting these trainees through the program and keeping them as teachers." She notes that 50 percent of all teachers entering the profession leave within three years.

Support mechanisms are especially important for these students, not simply because of the pressures every new teacher faces on the job, but because of the unique expectations placed on Native instructors. Often, as minorities on staff, Native teachers report that they are expected to serve as spokespeople and provide "the Native American perspective." This, they say, is an impossible role to fulfill, given the vast number of tribes and varying cultures. Additionally, some individuals may feel uncomfortable being forced into the spotlight in this way.

If students in the program need guidance, they can turn to Shadiin Garcia, a Laguna Pueblo and coordinator of student support services, who serves as a Native mentor for the program. They can also turn to their program cohorts. "We want to get them thinking as a community," Rounds says. "We want them to think of going to each other for problem solving."

Connections forged in the program can serve participants beyond graduation. As grads head separate ways for teaching positions, they can still connect with their former colleagues via a new online support program called "Tapped In."

Laurie Evans, a student in the program, says she and her colleagues have benefited from both the mentoring and cohort approach: "Natives work by community for the most part, so it's been very positive."

In the program's first year, one student earned a master's degree in education. This year, 16 more will join the ranks.

Opening Doors in Montana

Near Billings, Montana, where Crow and Northern Cheyenne students outnumber Native teachers by 54 to one, Montana State University's

Bighorn Teacher Projects are opening doors for American Indians who dream of teaching. Since 1999, more than $4 million in government grants has been funneled into four Native teacher education projects: Three target Crow and Northern Cheyenne students, while one program helps Bureau of Indian Affairs school employees who are seeking credentials in special education.

To date, the Bighorn Teachers Projects have helped 16 American Indian teachers obtain their degrees and find teaching positions. Another 33 are now in the program, thanks to the help of scholarships, stipends, and other support.

"We provide tutoring and mentoring by a master teacher—an Indian teacher, whenever possible," says Reno Charette, Bighorn project director. "And we send students to conferences sponsored by the National Indian Education Association, the Montana Indian Education Association, and the Montana Federation of Teachers. We try to get them professionally networked before they're out of the program."

The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development project also relies on a cohort model to provide extra support for students and offers monthly seminars on Native education issues. For example, an upcoming seminar focuses on multiculturalism. Specifically, Charette says, they'll discuss the cultural differences that often exist between Native teachers' home and community environments and those they'll encounter as educational professionals in the school and larger non-Native community.

Charette compares this transition to a "doorway"—a resonant symbol in Native culture—through which Indians must learn to consciously walk back and forth. For example, she says, a Native woman may defer to her father-in-law as head of household at home, avoiding excessive eye contact, and not being confrontational out of respect. At school, she may be forced to confront a male principal, using direct eye contact, being assertive, and stating her needs precisely. Charette says, "I try to get them to understand that they are not sacrificing their value system (by this change in behavior), it is just a necessity for contemporary living."

Reaching Out in Alaska

In Alaska, a program called Preparing Indigenous Teachers for Alaska Schools (PITAS) has grown out of the need to curb dropout rates and provide more culturally relevant instruction while addressing a shortage of qualified teachers and extremely high turnover rates in rural communities. Based at the University of Alaska Southeast in Juneau and funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the program seeks to develop Native teachers who not only have the training and experience necessary to help Native students succeed, but who are also more likely to stay long term in rural assignments.

"If you're from a rural area, that's your home—the mountains, hills, streams," says Rhonda Hickok, PITAS project manager. "Your sense of belonging is strong, you have a network that's supportive already, and it's more likely you'll want to stay there."

A teacher trainee in the PITAS program goes berry-picking with students at Auke Lake in Juneau.

The PITAS program, now in its third year, has helped two students obtain master's degrees with the aid of scholarships and other support. There are now 36 students in the program working toward bachelor's degrees.

Hickok explains that the program relies heavily on mentor teachers who recruit high school students interested in becoming teachers. These mentors meet with students throughout the year, provide them with information on joining the profession, and help them hone their study skills in preparation for college. A two-week summer institute at the university gives students a chance to experience campus life, become familiar with support services, and participate in bonding activities with faculty and other Native students on the same career path. This kind of induction and ongoing support is especially important, Hickok notes, because the transition to university life can be a shock for any student, especially those from tiny, remote villages in the far reaches of Alaska.

Other Factors at Play

Rising Native enrollment figures and graduation rates show these programs are making a difference. But there's a long road ahead and

the path is not without obstacles. One unanticipated challenge involves the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

In a recent study by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory on how the legislation affects small, rural, and isolated schools, administrators and teachers in the region listed among their top concerns quality teacher recruitment and training, as well as educational requirements for paraprofessionals.

Under NCLB, Title I school instructors must have state certification, a bachelor's degree, and demonstrate subject area competency. Paraprofessionals must have at least two years of postsecondary education or a high school diploma with proof of passing a formal state or local academic assessment.

The increased educational qualifications for teachers and paraprofessionals are proving to be difficult challenges for some districts, due to financial and logistical constraints. For example, in Alaska, 100 schools have three or fewer teachers; about a third of these employ just one instructor. To expect these teachers to be qualified experts in multiple content areas seems unrealistic.

Additionally, many longtime Native paraeducators don't have the formal credentials now required, though they provide critical links to the community and its culture. Expecting them to take the time and expense to meet the requirements may be unrealistic as well.

Administrators are working hard to find creative solutions to these problems. Some districts are offering seminars to help teachers prepare for subject area competency tests or providing signing bonuses in an attempt to prevent qualified teachers from taking positions elsewhere. To keep valued paraeducators, districts are looking for ways to bring college credit courses on-site and seeking funding for tuition reimbursement.

So hope lives on.

Carmen says she may have missed out on having an American Indian teacher as a child, "but it has to start somewhere. So we start with what is most elemental: our children. My hope is that in the next 10 to 15 years, we will see more Indian principals and vice principals and superintendents."

And perhaps Carmen's own daughter will help realize that vision. Now a master's candidate in the Sapsik'wala program, she's well on her way. ■

LETTERS

A MORALE BOOST

I am writing to thank you for your issue in support of licensed teacher-librarians ("Nexus of Knowledge," Fall 2003). It is not often that we see such strong support for our profession. Those of us who work in public schools in Oregon often feel misrepresented in the press or—at the very least—misunderstood. Your articles did much to improve our morale. Librarians who fight for their programs and their jobs every day in school districts throughout Oregon appreciate every bit of good publicity.

Martha Decherd
President-Elect
Oregon Educational Media Association
Portland, Oregon

SALMON RECOVERY

I am a 23-year-old Athabascan male who is going to school to be a fisheries biologist. I am familiar with the lifestyle of rural Alaskans as well as their concerns for the wild stocks of Pacific salmon (described in "Fin and Feather," Spring 2002).

I tend to look at myself as a mediator between local residents and the state or federal government or, in other words, the urban-rural divide. I understand the frustrations that come forth about outside enforcement (by government agencies). I also understand the position of the government, having spent the past two seasons working for U.S. Fish and Wildlife counting, monitoring, and sampling salmon that run up the Kwethluk River.

I am aware of the dismal runs that plagued both the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers over the past few years. However, this past summer, the runs of the chinook, chum, and coho salmon were counted in record proportions compared to previous years.

I just thought that I would share with you that I had the pleasure to be part of a year when salmon counts were so high that they definitely bring hope for future runs. Besides my normal duties as a fisheries technician, I took it upon myself—as a self-appointed advocate—to inform as many locals as I could on why we are really there: to save a valuable resource so that future generations can utilize what we have been blessed with—rivers full of salmon.

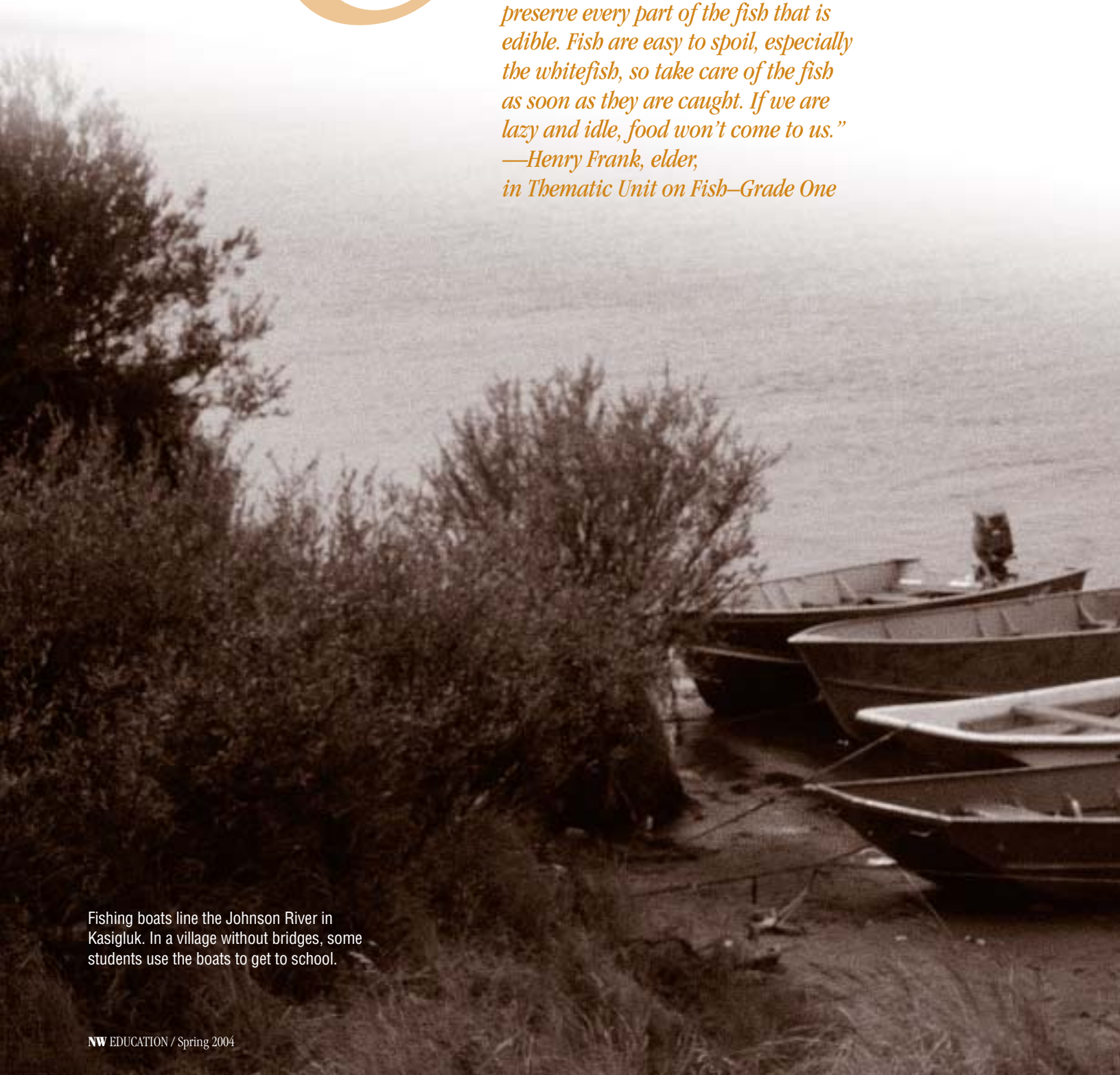
Derek Van Hatten
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, Alaska

Nets & Paddles

Fish and canoes carry meaningful lessons

Story and photos by Rhonda Barton

"Only catch enough fish to last you through the winter. Use and/or preserve every part of the fish that is edible. Fish are easy to spoil, especially the whitefish, so take care of the fish as soon as they are caught. If we are lazy and idle, food won't come to us."
—Henry Frank, elder,
in Thematic Unit on Fish–Grade One



Fishing boats line the Johnson River in Kasigluk. In a village without bridges, some students use the boats to get to school.

KASIGLUK, Alaska, and PUYALLUP, Washington— Flying into Kasigluk in a "puddle jumper," miles of red and yellow-flecked tundra unfold below you. A spidery network of lakes glistens in the autumn sun and the Johnson River cuts a wide swath, slicing the village into "old" and "new" sectors.

In this barren Southwest Alaska landscape, where temperatures dip to minus 40 degrees and permafrost dwarfs the growth of trees, water is a life-giver. Making up 10 percent of the village's 12-square-mile area, water is a primary source of food, an income generator, and a way to travel from one place to another. It's no wonder then that water—and the fish that live in it—make their way deep into the curriculum of Akula Elitnauvrik or "Tundra School."

The school, with its own warehouse stocked with a year's worth of cafeteria lunches barged in when the weather is good, has just under 100 pupils. All but one, a teacher's child, are Alaska Native. From kindergarten through 12th grade (or "phase" in this ungraded school), students study things that prepare them for life in a harsh environment and connect them to the subsistence culture. Uses of fish parts, where edible plants grow, traditional ways to prepare for winter, how animals move: They're all part of thematic units that blend modern state standards with Yup'ik traditions that stretch back thousands of years.

"We asked our elders what they wanted us to teach our students," says Levi Ap'alluk Hoover, who grew up in the village and has taught here for 25 years. "They came up with the topics and then we (teachers) came up with the units." Kasigluk was the first school to implement the Yup'ik cultural curriculum that's now found throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

"For our students to only learn about skyscrapers and cows would be dumb," admits Principal Felecia Griffith-Kleven. "This curriculum validates the traditional lifestyle, helps them appreciate it, and teaches them the skills they need to be successful in the community."

Griffith-Kleven, who grew up in Illinois but was inspired to move to Bush Alaska by her second-grade teacher's stories, says her school's goal is to produce students who can succeed in the local culture, as well as outside it. "They should be able to choose, and if our graduates leave to learn a trade or profession, we hope they will bring that knowledge back to the Delta and have the best of both worlds."

Indeed, a 2003 statewide study of Native perspectives concluded that "subsistence is overwhelmingly important to Alaska Natives in both rural and urban areas, and they believe it will continue to be important in the future." Of those surveyed by the Alaska Humanities Forum and the McDowell Group, 85 percent rated subsistence as important or very important to their households.

Dr. Oscar Angayuqaq Kawagley, a leading Native educator at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, believes "it is essential for Native students to receive an education that is clearly tied to their cultural worldview." He observes, "Although non-Native people tend to view the subsistence

NATIVE STUDENTS

CONSIDER THIS

Whether jigging for pike or casting a net from a skiff, the fisherman's experience is steeped in Yup'ik beliefs in the tundra villages of the Kuskokwim River Delta. Traditional practices hold that fishing will be unsuccessful:

- If you waste fish
- If a relative passes away and you fish before the anniversary of that person's death
- If a woman has a miscarriage and she fishes before one year has passed
- If a young girl fishes before the anniversary of her first menstrual period

Such beliefs are woven into the thematic unit on fish, developed by the Lower Kuskokwim School District. Nita Rearden, an LKSD education specialist, worked with teams of teachers to develop units on a dozen themes: Some are used, as is, by all the district's 27 schools while others are adapted to reflect local traditions. The subjects cover everything from family and community to celebrations, storytelling, plant and animal life, land, geography, and weather.

Bridging Western and Yup'ik culture, the material uses the child's background knowledge to explore social studies, science, literacy, and language arts. "It serves as an anchor and helps the learner become a powerful thinker in understanding other cultures—whether through books, videos, television, or radio," says Rearden. "If a child understands what a moose is, she can find out what an elk is, and even compare it to an elephant, even if she's never seen one." Rearden adds, "My hope is that we'll make children feel good about themselves and feel curious enough so they'll want to learn."

The thematic units—and an extensive line of bilingual and Yup'ik storybooks, CD-ROMs, posters, and literacy materials—are available for purchase from the Lower Kuskokwim School District. You can find their catalog at www.lksd.org.

way of life (as) being very simple, the Native practitioner sees it as highly complex. A subsistence-oriented worldview treats knowledge of the environment and each part's interdependence with all other parts as a matter of survival."

From Akakiik to Manignaq

In Levi Hoover's classroom—with its view of the river—phase 9/10 students sprawl on the carpeted floor, practicing how to attach mesh to the rim of the fish net. A chart on the wall, hanging just under a 10-foot-long dip net, advises that whitefish liver is an excellent source of vitamin A while herring and dried salmon contain vitamin B.

Down the hall, which is lined with photographs of elders, Caroline Ataugg'aq Hoover—Levi's wife—tests kindergartners on the parts of fish. They enthusiastically shout out the Yup'ik names, as she waves laminated flash cards in the air. The children then move on to the next activity, picking up strips of construction paper and weaving them into a "lake" where cut-out pictures of lush (manignaq) and pike ('luqruuyak) can swim.

Youngsters in phase 5/6 create illustrated books on boating safety and study the life cycle of whitefish (akakiik), one of four indigenous species. Levi comes in to lead a Yup'ik studies lesson, and plastic needles and skeins of mesh start tumbling out of kids' desks and backpacks. Soon everyone is industriously turning out chains of three-and-a-half-inch squares that grow into fish nets. Nicholson proudly holds up the results of three hours' work. What's the secret to his net-making prowess? "Being a boy," he shyly confides.

For Levi, there's a stark contrast between the cultural lessons he shares with pupils and his own formal education. Attending a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school, he painfully recalls that students were "severely punished" for speaking Yup'ik. "They washed our mouths out with soap, slapped our hands with a ruler, and made us stand in the corner." He vowed, if he became a teacher, to never treat his students that way. Not only did he earn a teaching certificate—after 13 summers of attending university—but he and Caroline have seen four of their six children go on to college so far. "We have to keep kids interested and motivated," he knows, "any way we can."

Left: Levi Hoover helps students make fishing nets as part of a Yup'ik studies class.
Below: William Gilstrap splits a cedar log as he describes how to build a canoe.

The Pull of Tradition

William Gilstrap also knows the value of doing whatever it takes to keep youngsters on course. Even the most languid student in his sixth-grade class at Chief Leschi Elementary in Puyallup, Washington, snaps to attention when Gilstrap grabs a chunk of cedar and forcefully splits it with an antler wedge in one hand and a stone maul in the other.

How did the First People fell mighty trees and build sturdy canoes without chain saws or axes, he asks? Students venture guesses—"fire, sharp sticks, rocks"—and then go on to pose their own questions about canoes. "Why don't they sink?" wonders Nicole. "How many people can they hold?" Paul adds. Dennis pipes up, "How long do they last?" Soon, there's a list of 15 guiding questions that will shape assignments for the weeks to come.

Students will research and record the answers in their individual tribal notebooks. They'll create miniature models of the river canoe found throughout the Northwest and compare this to the many canoe types that traveled along the inner and outer coastal waters. Using historical sleuth work, the class will investigate the types of canoes in turn-of-the-century photographs, increasing their perspective about their ancestors and the ways they built and honored the canoe.

To Gilstrap, a strapping man with a ponytail and carefully waxed mustache, studying canoes here in the Puget Sound is a "no-brainer." Although this tribal school sits among berry fields in the shadow of Mt. Rainier, the jagged coastline of the Sound is only about a dozen miles away. And, even villages in the region's high mountain valleys used canoes to transport goods to settlements on the Sound and the Pacific.

The starting point for Gilstrap's inquiry-based lessons is "Canoes on Puget Sound: A Curriculum Model for Culture-Based Academic Studies," developed by educator/author Nan McNutt and Washington MESA (Math, Engineering, Science Achievement) at the University of Washington. The curriculum blends language arts, history, health, and most particularly, math and science. It's designed to engage all learners but resonate especially with Native students.

"What this curriculum does is to center the study on a cultural object," says McNutt. "This presents a platform for academic studies from which students also examine their own questions about the canoe to formulate a total understanding."

Making It Personal

In preparation for teaching the canoe curriculum, Gilstrap attended a weeklong summer institute on the Olympic Peninsula. But the second-year educator and former law enforcement officer has put his own stamp on the material. Although he is not Native, Gilstrap's knowledge of American Indian lore is encyclopedic and he's able to tie his lessons to the 11 different tribes represented in his classroom of 21 students. He reminds Jonathan, fidgeting in the back row, that his Haida ancestors depended on canoes, and they certainly had to understand principles

like symmetry and buoyancy to be successful. While they may not have had rulers, they used another unit of measurement—body parts—to determine the circumference of a prospective cedar log and the proportions of a well-made craft.

Taking pride in such accomplishments is a theme that constantly resurfaces. From canoes to the handmade drums that poke out of students' cubbyholes and the "Salmon Society" regalia that Gilstrap uses to reward good attendance and completed homework, Native culture is embedded in the classroom and throughout the 643-student school.

Three times a week, the beat of the sacred drum reverberates through Chief Leschi's hallways as boys and girls start their day with a traditional circle. Kindergartners to sixth-graders all join in the songs and chants and dances. "We have to give our kids back their identity, because they've been stripped of it," says Principal Bill Lipe, who identifies himself as "Tsalagi," the Native translation of Cherokee. "For 150 years, Indians were told how to live their lives. Call it assimilation or call it genocide. We're trying to salvage what we can, which means going back and teaching the old ways while living in a contemporary world."

"I've had more families thank me for allowing their child to learn about canoes, make a drum, tell a story," Gilstrap remarks. "It's exciting when I can share these things and see a light come on."

FYI: For more information about the "Canoes on Puget Sound" curriculum, see *NW Education Online,* www.nwrel.org/nwedu/09-03.

Salmon Camp Spawns

PORTLAND, Oregon—It's early—very early—on a chilly Saturday morning and seven bleary-eyed teens pile into a van, clutching pillows and tossing sack lunches in the back. They're headed down the Willamette Valley, from Portland to Corvallis, on a road that could very well lead to their future.

The contingent of kids from Yakima, Eugene, Seaside, and Portland are members of Salmon Camp, a natural science and career training program for Native American youth run by the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI). During summer and spring vacations, campers can be found restoring streams in a Central Oregon watershed, collecting soil samples deep in Redwood National Park in Northern California, or tracking fish in Washington's San Juan Islands. On school-year weekends the activities tend to be more prosaic, though still geared toward introducing students to opportunities in fields like forestry, botany, archaeology, and fishery and wildlife management.

"The real key is getting kids out in the field, learning about science by actually doing science," says program director Joseph Jones. "We offer residential programs so kids are literally living with resource managers and scientists, and they get to know them not just as professionals but as friends."

"Today, reservations are in control of a lot of natural resources," adds Ben Muir, camp coordinator. "The Native Americans working there tend to be technicians while the managers, who make the decisions, are largely white. One of our goals is to interest kids in natural resources so they can get training and go back to the rez to make a difference."

That's where today's road trip comes in: Students will tour the Oregon State University campus on this busy homecoming weekend and get a sales pitch from faculty and students in the fisheries and wildlife program.

Tables heaped with elk antlers, beaver pelts, bonefish floating in jars of alcohol, and taxidermic porcupines await the group at the College of Agricultural Studies.

"We have one of the most extensive museum collections in the U.S.," faculty member Rebecca Googans points out. "The best part is you can handle it, touch it!"

Googans, who's in charge of internships, shows the high schoolers an enticing presentation on where she's placed OSU students: working for a cheetah conservation group in Namibia, monitoring otters in Monterey Bay, and studying grizzlies in Alaska's Katmai National Park.

By the end of the session, excitement is running high among the salmon campers. Aron, a sophomore, sees himself coming back here to study forestry after taking a fire science course at Clatsop Community College. It's a career path that grew directly out of his camp experience. "Last summer we worked with a couple of 'hot shot' firefighters at Olallie Lake," he explains. "I did my presentation (at the end of camp) on how fire lines are used for controlling fires and how things grow back after a burn. I didn't know anything about it before camp, but boy, it really turned me on!"

OMSI recruits middle and high school-aged tribal members from around the region for the free camps, which are underwritten by private donations, contributions from tribes and government agencies, and a National Science Foundation grant. Applicants are selected based on an application, personal essay, and recommendations.

"It's a diverse student population," notes Jones. "Some are excellent students, while others are on the edge. They need to be given a concrete reason for applying themselves academically."

Once in the program, OMSI helps the students find academic and professional mentors: university, tribal, and agency scientists; researchers; and natural resource managers. Much of the work focuses on salmon recovery efforts but the students learn to use sophisticated equipment and computer modeling to examine other complex ecological issues. At the conclusion of the one- to three-week residential sessions, students present their research findings at a public gathering. Often they're able to get school credit for their work, and sometimes the experience has a more lasting impact.

"At the end of one camp, about eight years ago, an elder sat with us around the fire and shared an oral history about the Warm Springs tribe," recalls Jones. The elder related his story to a site where campers were doing an archaeological dig that summer. When the land came up for sale soon after, Salmon Camp approached the tribe and jointly worked to get 35,000 acres protected through federal funding.

Jones observes, "It was the first title land ceded back to the tribe in the John Day Basin since the 1850s. We were there this spring with elders and our students collecting roots for the first time in 150 years that it's been back in Indian hands—all because of a story around a campfire."

FYI: For more information about the Salmon Camp program, contact salmon@omsi.edu or check out www.omsi.edu/education/camps/salmon.cfm. ■

Salmon campers tour OSU's fisheries and wildlife department.

CREATING a CULTURE of READERS

"She wasn't supposed to be in college
and she wasn't supposed to
be as smart as she was
and she wasn't supposed to
read the books she read
and she wasn't supposed to
say the things she said.
She was too young
and too female
and too Indian
to be that smart."
—Excerpted from
"Search Engine,"
Ten Little Indians,
a collection of short stories
by Sherman Alexie

FORT HALL, Idaho—Sherman Alexie's fictional character, Corliss, loves books, an obsession that sets her apart from family and friends on the Spokane Reservation where she grew up.

Throughout the Northwest, teachers of Native American children are looking for ways to cross cultural boundaries and help youngsters discover, as Corliss did, the thrill of reading books. In today's environment of testing and measuring, it is a must-do task.

Educators know that reading and language skills are essential building blocks to student success. For Native American children, however, language and reading too often are stumbling blocks. For example, figures from the National Center for Education Statistics show that reading proficiency rates for American Indian and Alaska Native fourth-graders in the Northwest last year were anywhere from one-fourth to one-half as high as their white classmates.

Reasons for this achievement gap are many and complex, but research on Native American learners points to one key strategy for changing the status quo: Bridge the cultural gap between Native American students and their learning environment.

Concrete examples of how to do that can be found in a classroom at Ft. Hall Elementary School near Blackfoot, Idaho, and in a new reading curriculum developed by Washington researchers.

Partnering for success

Ft. Hall Elementary is on the Shoshone-Bannock Indian Reservation in southeastern Idaho, near Pocatello. All but 3 percent of the 167 students in kindergarten through fifth grade are enrolled tribal members.

Faced with low test scores, Principal Ryan Wilson decided to try something different. In fact, Ft. Hall began doing a lot of different things. Four years ago, it became one of nine schools in the Partnership School Program of Idaho State University's College of Education.

The program involves a number of strategies: training existing school staff in local culture and Native language; emphasizing school as a "community of learners"; and infusing the system with ISU student teachers and interns. Also central to the partnership program is building and maintaining connections with students' families and other members of the local community.

It seems to be working. Attendance at Ft. Hall has grown from 68 percent to 97 percent. The parent-teacher organization has been revived; local residents are using the school for activities such as making fry bread, beading, and quilting. Parents are encouraged to attend an evening computer lab and some are

Miss Shoshone-Bannock, Michelle Ellsworth, pays a visit to Ft. Hall Elementary. First-graders proudly show off headbands which they made for the school's powwow. Teacher Polly Pearson (kneeling) and Aide Tilda Edmo integrated the activity with a math lesson. (Photos by Beverly Klug)

volunteering as teacher's aides. Last fall, so many families turned out for the annual school-sponsored powwow that it had to be moved outside.

"If teachers make the effort, the community responds," says Wilson. He beams with pride about the accomplishments, even though he now has a new assignment, principal of the middle school.

Wilson seems most proud of progress in reading. In the fall and spring, students in grades K–3 are assessed through the Idaho Reading Initiative to determine their reading level. Results are scored on a scale of 1 to 3, with 3 being at or above grade level.

At Ft. Hall, Wilson notes, most kids start at level 1. Before introducing an intensive reading program, "a good year was having 20 percent at level 3 by the end of the school year." In spring of 2003, all but a few of the 42 children were at levels 2 or 3. "It's just outstanding to move them that far," Wilson says.

Reading specialist Brenda Wolfe may be one reason for the progress. To the visitor, her classroom looks like organized chaos. Forty first-graders are divided into eight small groups and seated at small tables. A teacher or aide—sometimes an ISU student teacher, a foster grandparent, or a parent volunteer—works with each group. Some groups are reading, some are coloring, others are wearing headsets at the listening station. At Wolfe's table, children are working with large, colored letters changing "plate" to "plane." There's not a worksheet in sight.

Children rotate through the reading room throughout the week. First-graders spend two hours a day, others one hour. They work in small groups, receiving lots of interpersonal contact and focused attention on the words and language skills expected for their grade level.

Monday through Thursday, "we hit it hard," says Wolfe. "They are worn out." Fridays are fun days, taking the subject matter—always culturally relevant—and making an art project out of it.

Wolfe, who is non-Indian, has a passion for what she's doing. The reading room/coach idea grew out of the success she had with a summer school program. "If I were a millionaire, I'd still do this," she confides, "because it works." Thanks to Wolfe's gentle yet firm demeanor, organization wins out over chaos. "We have rules and we have consequences," she states. "There are no threats. I mean what I say and they know it."

The intensity spills out of the reading room in the form of homework. "Homework is a challenge for Indian culture," observes Wolfe. "We start it in kindergarten so kids and parents know they have certain things to do." Children take the assignment home in an envelope with a note explaining the task. On the outside, the envelope lists what the child is expected to know by the end of the year, and this advice for parents: "Say it. Spell it. Write it. Read it. Repeat it." Children are expected to return the homework in the envelope with the parents' signatures.

Wolfe focuses on K–3 students, but intensive work in reading is a schoolwide emphasis. So is the use of culturally relevant material and teaching styles.

Through the partnership with ISU, Ft. Hall teachers have deepened their understanding of how Native American children learn. Faculty receive training in classroom techniques that emphasize the use of visuals and plenty of activity. Dr. Beverly Klug, the ISU partnership liaison, assists teachers in the use of culturally based curricula and encourages them to fill hallways and classrooms with objects and posters representing American Indian life and culture.

In her book, *Widening the Circle,* Klug and coauthor Patricia T. Whitfield write that "teachers, not

WHY BLUEJAY HOPS

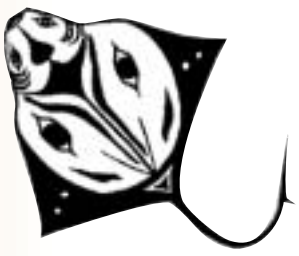
A Skokomish legend as told by Georgia Miller
Illustrations by Bruce Miller

Long ago at a big meeting, Raven boasted about his arrow shooting. He was the best shot in the world. This is what he told everyone.
He prepared for someone to challenge him.
Skatefish came along. He made himself as big as he could. Dancing, he teased Raven's marksmanship. He gave Raven three chances to hit him.
Whizz! Raven's arrow shot forth. Laughing, Skatefish turned sideways.
Teasing Raven, Skatefish spread himself out again. Whizz! Another miss, another laugh.
Once more again! Raven missed three times!
Then Bluejay stepped forth. "I can do that too," he said. "I'll give you three chances."
Bluejay planned to copy Skatefish. He spread himself out like Skatefish and teased Raven.
Whizz! Raven's arrow shot forth. Bluejay turned sideways. Ping! Right in the hip! "Ow!" screamed Bluejay. He forgot he wasn't skinny like Skatefish. And ever since, because of his vanity, Bluejay hops.

The charming tale of Bluejay and Raven is one of 140 culturally relevant stories comprising *The Indian Reading Series: Stories and Legends of the Northwest.* Guided by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Native authors and artists created the series cooperatively with a dozen Northwest Indian reservations.

This collection contains materials relevant to life in rural Native communities and is designed as a supplementary reading and language arts program. It's not intended to be used to teach Indian "culture," according to Robey Clark, a Blackfeet tribal member who works on Indian education issues at NWREL.

Long out of print, the popular series is now available online. Booklets and teacher's guides may be downloaded at www.nwrel.org/indianed/indianreading and used free of charge for educational purposes.



just students, need to become bicultural," so that they can operate effectively "within the cultures of their students." They assert that "if teachers are not sensitive to their American Indian students and do not attempt to integrate their cultures within the classroom, school, and curricula, they will have failed their Native students."

Integrating cultural traditions

In Washington, educators have developed a curriculum that does what Klug and Whitfield urge, integrating Native culture into the classroom. They've designed three units—*The Canoe, The Drum,* and *Hunters and Gatherers*—for Native American students from kindergarten through second grade. "A good teacher," notes Denny Hurtado, director of Indian Education at Washington state's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), "could use it pre-K–20."

Indeed, the material is rich in its cultural detail of Northwest tribes, including the role of myths and legends, an introduction to the intriguing "trickster tale," and hunting and gathering as a way of family and tribal life.

The curriculum grew out of a research report prepared by Magda Costantino, director of the Evergreen Center for Educational Improvement at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, and Joe St. Charles, a center researcher.

Their study, *Reading and the Native American Learner,* was published by OSPI in 2001. They conclude, much as Klug and Whitfield do, that mainstream teachers of American Indian children can help their students by learning more about the children's communities, culture, and language use and by adopting teaching practices best suited to the learning styles of their students.

Costantino and St. Charles emphasize the negative impact of what they call "discontinuities between cultures and languages" of mainstream classrooms compared to Native American students' homes and communities.

An example of a "discontinuity" occurs when a mainstream teacher confronts what seems to her "a confounding degree of silence" from a Native American student. Costantino and St. Charles explain that the silence is most likely a mixture of cultural norms, discomfort with expectations of classroom behavior and language, conformity to different standards of etiquette about speaking up, and general resistance to the school and teacher.

Another critically important discontinuity has to do with learning styles. St. Charles and Costantino cite research that shows American Indians tend to learn in cooperative environments and by watching and doing, "perhaps practicing in private." The typical classroom, however, is based on trial-and-error learning with a lot of direct instructional discourse.

Since Native American children are at a high risk of having reading difficulties, the challenge for mainstream teachers is to recognize the reality and pitfalls of discontinuities and develop strategies for overcoming them.

Hurtado, a member of the Skokomish tribe, says the key is to help Native students improve their English language skills, which are essential to future success in school and beyond, "while at the same time avoiding casting these students' home language in a negative light."

The new *Northwest Native American Reading Curriculum* is designed to link the language development process with subject matter of interest and relevance to Native American children. According to Hurtado, "We wanted to do five things: Develop a Native American reading curriculum; encourage the use of technology; motivate Indian students; develop trust between tribes and schools; and embed the curriculum with an emphasis on involvement of tribal communities and families."

The last two goals were central to the development of the curriculum. The project is successful, says Hurtado, because it was a true collaboration, not only between his office and Costantino, but also with Washington's tribes, Indian educators, and specialists in culture, reading, and curriculum. Collaboration, which is highly valued in Indian culture, helps to build trust and acceptance of the outcome. In this case, collaboration involved the production of 22 original stories by Native American authors and illustrators.

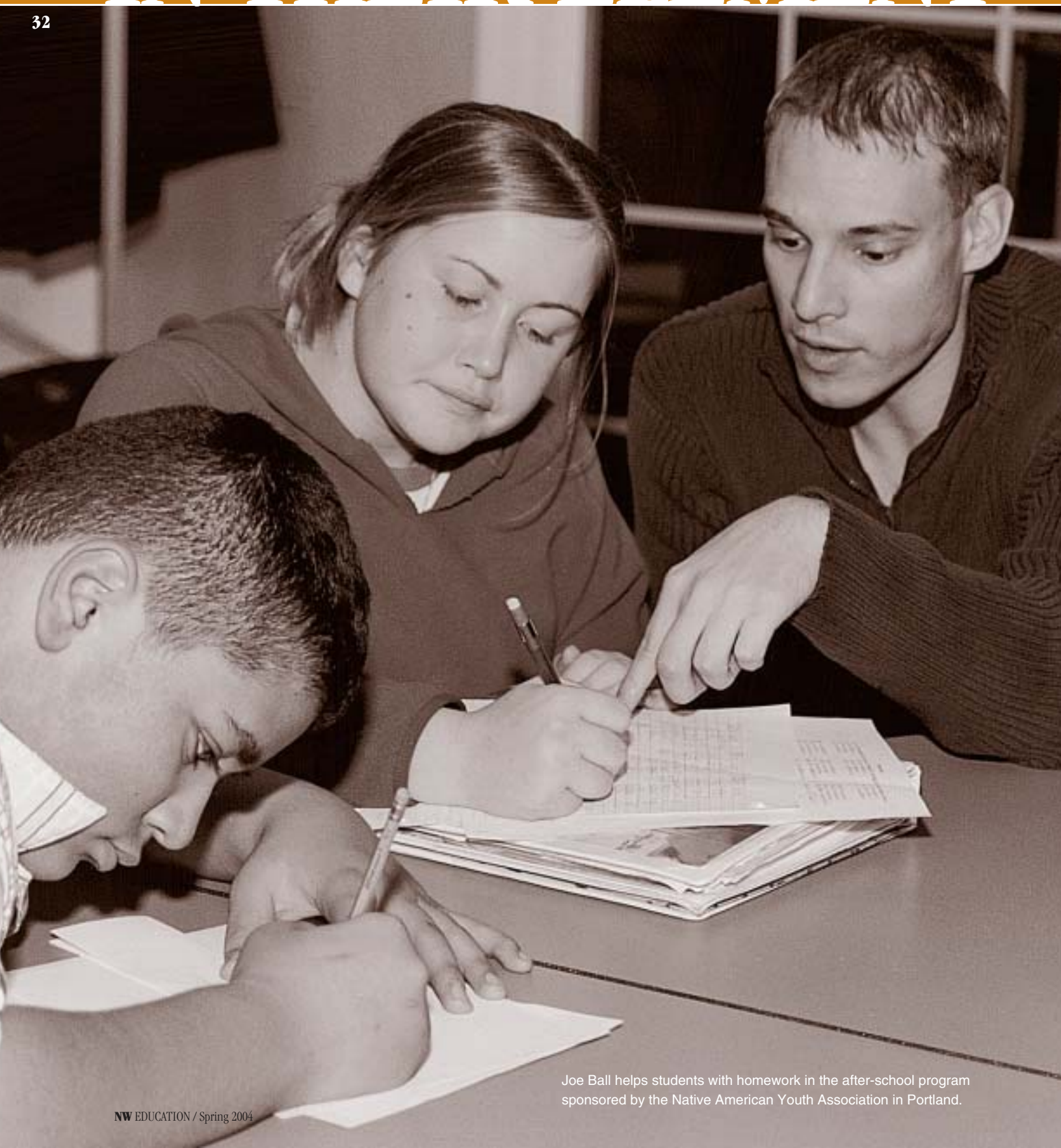
A new curriculum is fine, but aren't teachers today loaded down with too many new demands—testing, accountability, and state and federal standards?

"No Child Left Behind is no excuse for not using the new curriculum," answers Hurtado. The material is based on the latest research about learning to read and is aligned with the state standards—Washington Assessment of Student Learning or WASL.

Wouldn't it be something if book-crazy Corliss, the fictional character created by author Sherman Alexie, could be seen as a role model rather than an oddball? What if today's Indian children could break through the stereotype that is the basis of Alexie's story about Corliss—"too smart to be Indian?"

Researchers, teachers, and tribes in Idaho and Washington are showing how to make it happen. ■

IN THEIR ELEMENT



Joe Ball helps students with homework in the after-school program sponsored by the Native American Youth Association in Portland.

URBAN YOUTH FIND MORE THAN JUST TUTORING IN AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

Story by Ian McCluskey / Photos by Diana Welch

PORTLAND, Oregon—Policeman. Six letters. Copper.

Everything but the kitchen? Zinc.

Cerise Palmanteer cranes over a periodic table of the elements. Joe Ball leans in, just over her shoulder.

Next question: The ruler of Davy Jones's Locker.

"Huh?" says Cerise.

"Davy Jones's Locker," Ball repeats. "Tough one." He searches for a hint. "It's like when a ship sinks it goes to Davy Jones's Locker. So, who is the ruler of the sea?"

Cerise pauses. "Poseidon."

Ball nods. "What did the Romans call Poseidon?"

"Neptune," Cerise answers quickly.

And there it is. Nine letters across. Neptunium.

Every day after school, Ball helps Cerise with her homework. Cerise wears tennis shoes, jeans, and a baggy sweatshirt. She has a warm, round face. She likes to write poetry, and her teachers say she has real promise. She hopes to go to college after high school, but hasn't made up her mind. For now, she just wants to get through chemistry. A high school junior, she is as typical a teen as any other.

And Joe Ball, age 33—he's slender and soft-spoken. Short cropped hair, just starting to show flecks of silver. He sits quietly beside Cerise at a small circular table. Sometimes he offers hints, but mostly he listens. He is an unassuming and empathetic after-school tutor.

But Cerise and Joe share something more than homework; they also share a common heritage. They're both Native American—or more descriptively, they are both "urban Indians." And the place they meet after school—the Native American Youth Association—is not your average after-school program, either. It's an integrated social service provider for youth and families, run by and for urban Indians. And even the city—Portland, Oregon—the second-largest urban center of the Pacific Northwest, is more than just a city—it's a former endpoint for Indians following the government-sponsored Indian Relocation Act. It is the weave of these factors, more than any single thread, which makes the urban Indian experience at NAYA so unique, and so effective.

THE DROPOUT RATE

When it comes to Indian education, "effective" is often synonymous with a single word: "graduation." The dropout rate for Native American/Alaska Native students is not just high, it's the highest of any minority group in the school system. Nationally, more than three of every 10 Native students drop out. Here in Portland, a study of 408 Native high school students from 1998 to 2001 revealed that only 40 graduated.

This fall, NAYA received a $1.2 million, three-year federal grant to help Native teens meet benchmark standards in math and science, keep them in school through graduation, and point them toward college. Ball, now in his second week working at NAYA as one of four after-school tutors, has been hired to help.

Today's homework is a crossword puzzle where the answers are one of the elements on the periodic table. The hints, to say the least, are corny. Example: "What do you do if CPR fails?" The answer: barium.

The next hint: a six-letter word for Apache. Ball groans. Cerise rolls her eyes. Another Indian reference and they dread finding the answer. The stereotypes come easily to mind: chief, red man, squaw…

"We better get this one," says Ball. "Wouldn't it be embarrassing if the only Indian in class got the only Indian question wrong?"

LOST IN THE FRAY

Native students are a minority even among minorities. Statewide, they represent about 2 percent of public school students, but in the Portland metropolitan area, the 2,700 or so identified Native students are scattered among slightly less than a quarter of a million students in 28 different school districts and constitute, basically, about 1 percent.

"You know how a lot of high schoolers will say they *feel* alone?" says Ball. "Well, the Native kids really are."

By extension, so are their parents and guardians. Once, when Portland's Roosevelt High School held a parent-teacher night, they divided guests by race—Asian, Latino, black. In the designated room, a Native American grandmother, who had come on behalf of her granddaughter, sat alone.

"We are so often the invisible minority," says Nichole Maher, the executive director of NAYA. She's Tlingit, but you might not guess it. Though she has raven dark hair, her eyes are blue as a glacier. "So often we are mistaken for other minorities, thrown into the mix of the mainstream, or lost in the fray."

NAYA gathers them together. Modoc, Umatilla, Warm Springs, Siletz, Nez Perce, Yakama, Wasco, Colville, Klickitat, Klamath, and Tlingit: At least 300 other tribal backgrounds are represented in Portland, and they are all welcome here.

For the past few years, NAYA received county funds to serve 41 Native youth; the recent federal grant extends that to 200 students. The actual numbers in the door come closer to 450. "With enough funding, staff, and resources, we could be serving 2,000 kids, easily," says Maher.

Unlike the Indian education support offered at public schools under Title VII (which requires that either the student, parent, or grandparent be an enrolled member of a federally

At NAYA, traditional dancers sometimes follow hip-hop beats.

recognized tribe), NAYA serves any student, parent, or community member "self-identified" as Native. It's a particularly significant point in an urban center like Portland.

When asked how she self-identifies, Cerise will say with a soft chuckle, "I'm an urban Indian." She has never been to her tribe's reservation in northern Washington. And Ball, a Klamath, didn't even have a reservation when he was growing up.

"In order to understand what these kids are going through, you have to understand what their parents went through," says Nora Farwell, the high school program manager. She recounts that her mother, like so many of her generation, was taken from her reservation, away from family and cultural connections, and placed in a federal boarding school. For more than a century, the boarding schools assembled a medley of children from many nations, changed their clothes and hair to fit Euro-American styles, enforced a strict English-only policy, and offered vocational training. Chilling "before and after" photographs document the "success" of the boarding schools. The actual effects were harder to record. Many students drifted back to their reservations, but found they no longer fit in; many scattered to nearby cities, notably Portland.

In 1954, the Termination Act disbanded more than 100 tribes nationally, including several in the Northwest. Two years later, the Relocation Act began a federal program to ship hundreds of Natives from reservations to selected urban centers, like Portland, and provide them job training on the condition of a signed agreement that those Natives would remain in the cities and not return to the reservations. The result was a Native diaspora—a one-way bus ticket to the city, both metaphorically and literally. By the mid-1970s, more Natives lived in cities than on reservations.

As a result, a first generation of "urban Indians" was born in the cities. Like Joe Ball. His family moved to Portland after termination of the Klamath tribe in southern Oregon. Ball grew up in North Portland and learned what other urban Indians learn: If you don't stand out, you can get by. No one knew if he was Middle Eastern, Mexican, Italian, or Native. If he kept quiet, no one asked. "And that's what kids learn," he says. "If you're quiet, they leave you alone."

The racism runs deep, he explains, and often manifests subtly. He recalls his high school history textbook, a massive volume with the first 200 pages devoted to pre-European settlement. "And guess what page we started on?" asks Joe. "Page 201."

Another big obstacle for Native students is attendance. Many Native families move around and sometimes children are transferred between relatives. On rural reservations, there may be only one school and nearby relatives to help support the student. In the city, however, each move may mean a transfer of schools and even school districts. Credits can be lost. Assignments missed. And the student has to start over, both academically and socially, with new teachers and new peers. In addition, with parents often working one or more jobs in the city, child care that might have been picked up by a grandmother or aunt on a reservation, often falls to the older siblings, namely the middle and high schoolers. Families may also leave a city early in the spring, before school's out, or return late in the fall after it's in session, often for seasonal work, powwows, or return trips to reservations for funerals. "We're not just talking an afternoon service," says Shirod Younker, NAYA's event coordinator, who recently returned to the Warm Springs reservation in Central Oregon to attend a funeral with his wife. "We're talking a full week of ceremonies, all day, all night."

"Teachers only see the absences," he says, "not the reasons behind them. All they can do is hand over a stack of past-due homework, and hope the student can catch up."

This is where NAYA comes in.

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

After school, students arrive one at a time, or in twos and threes, but when the big white van pulls up, they pour out *en masse.* The middle schoolers skip upstairs to the computer lab; the high schoolers saunter downstairs to the mostly remodeled basement. Some shove into the kitchen and get fruit and snacks.

NAYA turns 30 this year, but has only recently come into its own. It started humbly, in a subbasement of Portland State University, with borrowed computers. Tawna Sanchez, who was with NAYA in the formative years, describes it mostly as a night school to help Natives get their GEDs. The first years were lean, and they bounced between locations, before landing grants to develop an after-school tutoring program and a domestic violence program, which Sanchez directs.

The domestic violence program is one way NAYA not only addresses academic symptoms, but also the social roots underlying them. The Girls' Talking Circle encourages Native teens to openly discuss dating, relationships, and domestic violence.

Cerise Palmanteer struggles with high school chemistry but sets her sights on going to college someday.

Native girls are twice as likely as their white or black classmates to experience some type of abuse. Studies also show that teaching girls to address these issues will greatly reduce the risk. NAYA also offers crisis intervention for families, assistance in getting into shelters and, in some cases, emergency food and clothing.

Upstairs Sarah Gellman, education retention coordinator, is on the phone, explaining to a student how to write her résumé. "Yes, put down taking care of your brothers and sisters," she says. "Put child care. That shows responsibility." There's Jayme Hamann, a high school advocate, organizing a coaches' meeting for the basketball program, and Dustin Harmon, a tutor, in the kitchen, getting food for the kids. Most have been here since 9 a.m., and most will stay until nine at night.

While addressing the ills of the urban Indian community, NAYA emphasizes the strengths. It offers culture classes, such as crafts and regalia making. "I made my first choker here at NAYA, I learned to bead," Cerise says proudly. "I hope to learn to dance here, too."

Rebecca Payne, NAYA's receptionist, teaches traditional dancing, but with a distinctly urban twist. When teaching jingle dress dance, she sometimes has her students bring in hip-hop music. Just imagine: A room full of Native youth, some in street clothes, some wrapped in elaborately beaded shawls, following footstep patterns old as human memory to the beat and lyrics of rappers like Eminem. That's urban Indian.

"The teachers who are able to adapt to change are the ones who reach our students," says Ball. He knows that his after-school hours at NAYA cannot solve the problem alone. He points out that teachers share a large responsibility in helping Native students succeed. "There's no way to sugarcoat this," he states. "Adjusting curriculum and creating a safe environment for students to succeed will take work."

The advice Ball offers teachers is simple and straightforward: "Always expect the same of a Native student as any other. Low expectations don't allow room for a student to rise. They're individuals and, after all, they're kids. Tell them you believe in them, and let them surprise you."

A NEWFOUND FAMILY

"Remember my math test I told you I was going to fail?" Cerise sighs. "Well, I must be psychic."

Ball is quiet for a while, then says gently, "How big of a dent did it put in your grade?"

"Not a big one."

"Can you bring the test in to work on?"

"Yeah. That'd be all right."

From her office, Nora Farwell overhears and joins the conversation. "I remember your grandma," she says, pulling up a chair beside Cerise and Ball. "She'd always tell stories about Chief Joseph, about Celilo." The talk around the table doesn't skip a beat.

"Oh yeah," says Cerise, "I'd come in, Grandma would be making coffee, I'd sit down, she'd start telling me a story. When her coffee was ready, she'd get up, fetch her coffee, come back, and tell me the same story from the beginning."

Everyone at the table laughs.

"Indian humor," Farwell describes. But it's hard to explain. The joke about a grandmother repeating a story is not about a senior's forgetfulness (or maybe it is a little), but more a form of repetition in itself. Telling the story with apparently no beginning, no end—just a moment—reaffirms a much older form of learning through oral tradition. But more, Cerise's grandmother passed away about a month ago, and telling stories is a form of dealing with loss, remembering, and honoring.

For all the problems on the reservation—and Farwell knows them well—at least, she says, you are all together, with family, united by clan and custom. In the city, you're adrift and you're alone. At NAYA, Farwell has found a sense of community in the city, and for today it is enough to be among other urban Indians, to share a story and a laugh, without having to explain a thing.

Attention returns to the periodic table crossword puzzle. A six-letter word for Apache.

Ball and Cerise scan the names of elements one by one . . . palladium, silver, cadmium . . . then they both pause and groan. "Oh, indium."

"Well," Ball says, half smiling, "at least we got our own element." ■

Urban Exposure

"Voyage to Excellence" takes students from the village to the city

By Rhonda Barton

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—The meticulous two-story house on a wooded cul-de-sac looks just like its well-heeled neighbors. But, you won't find a typical suburban family behind the mullioned windows and beige wood facade. More likely, the residents on any given day will be a dozen teenagers getting a taste of life outside the confines of their isolated villages.

Anchorage House is home to the Chugach School District's life skills program. The award-winning school district—headquartered in Anchorage but sprawled across 22,000 square miles of remote Southeast Alaska terrain—boasts an individually tailored, standards-based system that places heavy emphasis on real-life learning situations. For Chugach students—half of whom are Alaska Native—demonstrating skills in career development, technology, service learning, and personal development is as important as mastering traditional subjects like writing, math, and science.

But, learning how to read a bus schedule can be difficult in a roadless fishing village where snow machines, skiffs, and ATVs are the preferred ways to get around. Likewise, it's tough to investigate job opportunities in the midst of a subsistence culture. Recognizing that, Chugach purchased a residence in the state's largest city. Students from the district's three far-flung schools travel to Anchorage House for an education in urban survival.

Starting at the junior high level, kids come to the city four times for anywhere from three to 10 days. At the most advanced phase, the stay may stretch up to 10 months while an older student completes a job internship. Although the program isn't mandatory, 97 percent of the students make the trip, which the district has dubbed the "Voyage to Excellence."

"The kids can hardly wait to come," says Carol Wilson, life skills teacher. "It's like a carrot dangling in front of them." She points out, though, that it's no vacation. A typical day begins at 7 o'clock in the morning and goes nonstop until 9:30 p.m. The television that beckons in the cozy den hardly ever gets turned on, and students are as likely to pluck an SAT preparation book off the bookshelf as one of the board games that's alongside.

Wilson and other staff members serve as everything from den mothers to camp counselors, motivational trainers, and career advisers. They help the kids learn to balance checkbooks, purchase groceries, write résumés, and perfect their team-building and decisionmaking skills. The live-in advisers also keep a sharp eye on the masking tape "boundaries" that place the boys' and girls' sleeping quarters off-limits to the opposite sex.

During their visits, Anchorage House students complete job shadows, perform community service, and visit college campuses. Statistics show that the program, together with other Chugach innovations, is making a difference: Since 1994, 14 of Chugach's 17 graduates have gone on to postsecondary schooling, compared with only one student between 1975 and 1994.

Whether they enter college or return to the village, the experience leaves its mark. "You helped me find the right path," writes one Chugach student. "You showed me what I should have known about myself a long time ago. Now I know how to be a leader and a friend."

FYI: Anchorage House hosts students—and some adults—from about 65 other Alaska school districts during the year. More information about the program and Chugach's nationally acclaimed practices can be found online at www.chugachschools.com/. The winter 2003 issue of *Northwest Education,* "Compound Interest: Business and Philanthropy in Education Reform," also features information about the Chugach School District and its replication efforts, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. ■

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Dancers by students at Wa He Lut Indian School, Olympia, Washington—(Left to right:) Kalea Salvador, Christy Harp, Thomas BlueBack, Tenaya White Star, Sam LeClair, Skyla White Star, George White Star

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